

Museum Around the Corner

Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Georgetown boasts of at least 66 buildings in the Historic District that predate the War Between the States including 28 that predate the Revolutionary War. The building with the oldest date could be the Red Store Warehouse near the foot of Cannon Street. The International Port of Entry was built there on the Sampit River in 1732. We would have needed a warehouse near the port to store incoming goods, and although this one fits the need, we have no way of knowing its true building date.

The Thomas Bolem House at 719 Prince is shown to be built in 1734. We cannot tell whether this house was actually a tavern, but Captain Bolem was known as a tavern keeper and vintner.

The next oldest building is thought to be the Old Colonial Banking House located at 632 Prince Street. The date is around 1735 and may be the first building in the colonies built for the purpose of being a banking house. In the basement was found a vault and a seal of the British crown along with a few English coins.

Several houses share the date of 1737; the Anthony White House at 1032 Front Street, the Crafton-Kerwon House at 222 Broad Street, the Mary Gilbert House at 212 St. James Street and the Perry-Cleland House at 405 Front Street. By that date, all of the 224 lots of the town were sold. In the contract signed at purchase, the owner was required to build a building a minimum of 16 by 22 square feet with a brick chimney or forfeit the lot in 15 months. A map of unknown date hangs in the Museum that shows the owners of each of the lots. The dating is accurate to sometime after 1737 because two new streets shown on the map were added that year, St. James Street on the east and Cleland Street on the west.

One of the reasons Georgetown has so many incredibly old buildings lies in the building materials and sound building practices. Most of these houses have inner beams of heart pine. Measuring 8 x 8 inches in some houses, these beams have become almost petrified wood today. They seem to be uninviting to insects and have stood bravely against all that nature can hurl against them. The "single house" or "double house" plan was used often. Each plan had a wide central hall. In the single houses, the hall was flanked by one room on each side, each the full depth of the house. Double houses had two rooms on each side.

Cypress siding is usually found on the exterior, another impermeable material that stands strong over time. Two of the main reasons that account for loss of early buildings are fire and neglect. Fire is quick but neglect is agonizingly slow and can be avoided by intervention before it is too late. Georgetown has lost too many of our relics over time, and today preservation prevails where it can be applied. To see photographs of buildings long gone, the Georgetown Digital Collection has a wealth of images depicting street scenes and buildings gone before a lot of us were even born.