

## Museum Around the Corner

### The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

#### Ferries ©

In the early days of inhabitation of Georgetown County, before bridges and ferries, rivers were a formidable boundary that separated settlements and prevented travelers from proceeding. Communities were founded on the banks of rivers, sometimes because further progress was near impossible. For many years, north-south travel was best achieved by using the Atlantic Ocean for transportation and commerce. Settlers, however, wanted to see what lay beyond their riverbanks, so the best way was to construct flatboats and barge type vessels to carry them and their goods across. There was a living to be made in ferrying travelers across, although there were no regulations, schedules or rates in the early times.

Certain points on the rivers were more easily accessible. Reputations grew and these ferries became important to the welfare of the colony. The government stepped in and set rules, fees and schedules for them. Others remained independent with limited traffic or disappeared altogether.

The Mouzon Map of 1775 shows four ferries on the Santee, one over the Black River by the name of Potato Bed Ferry, two over the PeeDee and one over the Waccamaw. At the mouth of the Santee, Mazyck's Ferry was located near where today's Highway 17 crosses between McClellanville and Georgetown. This is near the great stage line that passed this point. Mazyck's Ferry was the first public ferry on the Santee, authorized by Act No. 273.

By 1775, the important ferries used large, flat-bottomed boats capable of carrying a coach or wagon with two, four, or six horses. Various means of propulsion were used, but usually some cable device was used where there was a current. Some had grooved wheels at each end on the upstream side, and the cable, which was stretched taut from shore to shore, worked in the grooves of these wheels.

In deep streams, movement was gained by the cable working around a hand-powered winch or by a grooved handle temporarily fastened to the cable and pushed by a ferryman who pushed against cleats on the deck. Some used a loop cable with a winch on each shore. In shallow streams, the boat could be poled. The boat was moored as level with the roadway as possible, and simple gangplanks were used for boarding and debarking.

Weather affected a ferry's business considerably. If the river was in flood stage, and the current dangerously swift, traffic had to be halted. Travellers had to turn back to the nearest camp or tavern until conditions improved. This could be a matter of hours, days, or weeks. Conversely, if a dry spell made the river low, a horse and rider may have been able to wade or ride across unaided. The ferryman was out of luck.

In 1754, ferry charges were " a foot-passenger, twopence, man and horse, fourpence, cattle, threepence, Coach drawn by four, two shillings and sixpence.

Fifty years later, the charges were "Man or horse, 12 and a half cents. Each head of cattle, 6 and one-fourth cents. Wagon or carriage and team, \$1. Each rolling hogshead, 25 cents. (A hogshead was large barrel with an axle running through the center and pulled along behind a horse or mule.)

The ferryman was granted a monopoly in his area for a period of from 1 to 14 years and he could set his own rates. Exemptions from paying were made for people on public service, ministers of the gospel, all persons going to or from divine service on the Sabbath, all persons attending patrol or militia duty, and all free Indians. Later, post riders were added. If the ferryman was neglectful, there could be a stiff fine. In 1801, ferrymen were forbidden to transport enslaved people without written authorization.

By 1825, ferries were in their heyday. There were 107 in the state, up from the two dozen in 1775. This era coincided with the steamboat, so passage could be had across rivers as well as up and down them. Stagecoach service had expanded with improved roads. By the 1880s both the riverboats and ferries became outmoded soon after the introduction of the locomotive which could link more towns across a wider range.

Today, we still hear those ancient names used often in Georgetown. Brown's Ferry is a good example of a community that sprang up at a crossing, and South Island Ferry is still in operation to take passengers to the Yawkey Wildlife Refuge. Ferries that are long gone are Lynch's Ferry near Hopsewee on the North Santee, Potato Bed Ferry on the Black River, Pringle Ferry, Yauhannah Ferry, Mazcyk's Ferry, Wragg's Ferry and many small, nameless operations that came and went, all providing a necessary service that helped Georgetown grow.

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