

## A visit through the historic seaport of Georgetown

The port city of Georgetown, South Carolina rests at the top of Winyah Bay, steeped in history. Travelers on coastal U.S. Highway 17 might pass through Georgetown with their minds set on visiting the famed southern city of Charleston, located about 60 miles farther south. They would be passing through and passing up some of the most fascinating history the Lowcountry of South Carolina has to offer.

Pirate lore? War history? Ghosts and ghouls? Grand old rice plantations? African American Gullah culture? Ancient live oak trees dripping with Spanish moss? Marshlands and forests unchanged for hundreds of years? Whatever your interest, all of these and more are found in Georgetown County. Pause a while and explore.

Planned and drawn up by Englishman Elisha Screven in 1729, George Town, as it was known then, became a port of entry by 1732. It is the third oldest city in the state, following Charleston and Beaufort. A major agricultural site, Georgetown was home to numerous indigo and rice plantations in the 18th and 19th centuries. Over 30 places in the county are on the National Register of Historic Sites. Tours of many of the old plantations as well as tours of Georgetown's historic district are offered year-round. These tours showcase a variety of architectural styles stretching back over 250 years - including homes and cemeteries that pre-date the founding of the United States - and a ghost tale or two thrown in for good measure. Famed pirate Black Beard is known to have plied the Atlantic waters off Georgetown, preying upon merchant ships.

Four rivers – the Waccamaw, Black, Pee Dee (consisting of the Little Pee Dee and the “Great” or Big Pee Dee) and the Sampit empty into Winyah Bay, the third largest estuarine watershed on the eastern seaboard. Georgetown has long been an important port, figuring prominently in the Revolutionary and Civil wars. General Francis Marion, “The Swamp Fox,” and ally French nobleman the Marquis de Lafayette were among the war heroes who drove the British to release control of Georgetown in 1781.

In later years, the port of Georgetown was blockaded by Union troops during the War Between the States. Remnants of the war are still visible all around. In Winyah Bay, the boiler of the Union warship *Harvest Moon* can be seen in the waters of Muddy Bay, a shallow water pocket off the northeast side of Winyah Bay. The ship sank after reportedly being struck by a torpedo made in the Kaminski Hardware Store – the present-day site of the Georgetown Rice Museum's Prevost Gallery.

Across from the site of the *Harvest Moon*, situated off the southwest side of the bay, is Battery White. A Confederate embattlement, its cannons still rest atop the shady banks that face the bay. A conservation easement on Battery White is held by the S.C. Battleground Preservation Trust. The battery is enclosed within The Yacht Club at Belle Isle ([www.theyachtclubatbelleisle.com](http://www.theyachtclubatbelleisle.com)), a secluded natural waterfront community and marina, located just above the entrance to the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW).

As a result of the Civil War, plantation life was changed. The cultivation of indigo and rice was replaced by cotton and a burgeoning timber industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Industry arrived with the construction, in 1936, of a paper mill, followed in the 1970s by a steel mill. Jetties were built at the mouth of Winyah Bay, making it accessible to large commercial marine traffic.

Georgetown still holds the charm of past centuries and visitors today are delighted to discover its rich and bountiful history along the streets laced with ancient trees and the balmy breezes flowing in from the bay. Stand quietly, close your eyes and listen carefully - history can be heard.

*Text © Elizabeth Moses ([embigblue@yahoo.com](mailto:embigblue@yahoo.com)) 2007, Georgetown, SC.*