

Summerville, SC Area - From Tea to Tee

Summerville has long been recognized for its' healing climate. The town was founded in the 1790's as a summer retreat for plantation owners escaping the sweltering heat and the killer disease of the time, malaria. The site was both high enough to catch sea breezes, and abundantly endowed with a forest thick enough to provide a heat buffer from the Charleston coast some 20 miles away.

In the late 1880's, the first International Tuberculosis Congress in Paris named Summerville, S.C. as one of the two best places on the face of the earth to offer relief or cure to consumptives. This information spurred what we know as the Golden Age of Tourism. The vast influx of visitors also encouraged more permanent residents. This led to the introduction of classic residential architecture and establishment of public and private gardens, especially those featuring azaleas.

In 1891, The Pine Forest Inn was opened. The Inn was the one of the first health spas in the United States. "In addition to the treatment of pulmonary problems, it was advertised that asthma, insomnia and nervousness all yielded quickly to the beneficial influence of pine-laden atmosphere (Hill, 1998- P.106). During its heyday, the Pine Forest Inn was renown all over the world and was visited by many celebrities including Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Howard Taft. This Grande Dame of Inns thrived until the depression era.

The Pine Forest Inn also featured outdoor activities that included golf, tennis, hunting, riding and fishing. There were 130 acres of golf links (today's Corey Woods). The 18-hole course was laid out by a "professional from the north who had played on the celebrated links of St. Andrews in Scotland." The golf course was built in 1891 and was one of the earliest golf courses in the United States. It predates the formation of the USGA by four years. It was also the second oldest golf course in South Carolina after the Country Club of Charleston, which is recognized as the oldest golf course in the United States.

One of the other main attractions of Summerville at the time was the Pinehurst Tea Farm. After getting plants from India, China, Ceylon and Japan, Dr. Charles Shepard cultivated 100 acres in tea, building a tea factory and marketing the first tea in 1892. Until the 1940's Summerville was the only place in the United States cultivating tea for commercial purposes. Visitors to the Pine Forest Inn, including President Theodore Roosevelt, came to see the tea experiments, but also to glory in the beauty of the surroundings. The surroundings included hundreds of varieties of camellias, azaleas, roses, hydrangeas and tea olives. In 1904 Pinehurst's oolong tea claimed first prize at the World's Fair in St. Louis. After, Dr. Shepard's death in 1915, Lipton Tea bought the tea producing acreage and began the process of replanting them on their property on Wadmalaw Island in Charleston. Today, this is the home of the Charleston Tea Plantation, which produces American Classic Tea, the only tea grown in the USA. More than 90 percent of this tea blend comes from varieties of tea originally developed in Summerville.

Legend has it that Dr. Shepard introduced bermuda grass on the grounds of tea farm. Upon his death, the property was sold and a portion of it became The Country Club of Summerville. The Country Club of Summerville featured 36 holes with bermuda greens as early as 1925. These were said to be some of the first grass-covered greens in the world.