

## The Midway Museum, Midway, Georgia, Liberty County



I love Georgia's Hwy 17. Almost every inch of Hwy 17, the Coastal Highway between Savannah and St Marys, is loaded with some kind of story, some part of Georgia's history. Needless to say, for me a day spent on GA Hwy 17 is like a day at an amusement park for an energetic kid. When I see something interesting (gee, I wonder how often THAT happens!?) I have to stop and check it out. I meet the most intriguing people and places that way.

So when I saw the friendly little structure in Liberty County with a sign out front announcing it was The Midway Museum, well of course I had to stop. Seriously – if you saw a sweet cottage like this with a sign that said you could go inside and see it, you'd stop too.

The small structure beckons with its wide and welcoming staircase, broad porch, and heavy doors. Built specifically as a museum and to represent a typical Georgia coastal home, the building houses treasures, heirlooms and artifacts from a community that travelled hundreds of miles to find a place where it could set roots, grow, flourish, and stay.

Thus began my obsession with Midway. There is so much hidden history there! I did not know until I found the Midway Museum that this tiny community produced families and men who would shape not only the history of Georgia but that of the entire United States! Settled in 1752 by a group of English Puritans from Dorchester, South Carolina, did these strongly religious people have any inkling of what their determination would do for the state of Georgia and for the United States as a country?

At Georgia's Second Provincial Congress in 1775, (held at Peter Tondee's tavern in Savannah on July 4) eleven of the attendees were residents of Midway. Another Midway resident, Dr Lyman Hall, was one of two delegates elected to the Continental Congress which would meet in September of that year.

Now, this tidbit of information may seem a little ho-hum but when you actually visit Midway and see how small it is and realize how few families actually lived there in 1775, the impact of just how significant this little town is really hits. For all that it is not much more than a blink in the road, this community has produced men who served their country and their fellow men, and helped shape a world.

For instance, did you know that these men were from Midway?...

- General James Screven, Revolutionary War general. He slowed the British troops by arranging for a leak that provided false information.
- Brigadier General Daniel Stewart, recognized for his outstanding efforts in both the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Great-grandfather of President Theodore Roosevelt.
- Nathan Brownson, a physician and governor of Georgia. His was the task of rebuilding a weary and wounded colony after the Revolutionary War.
- John Stevens, one of the trustees commissioned to lay out the town of nearby Sunbury and distribute land grants accordingly.
- Abiel Holmes, grandfather of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.
- Jedediah Morse, father of Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph.
- Lyman Hall, signer of the Declaration of Independence.
- John Bacon, Lyman Hall, James Screven, Daniel Stewart – all men of such noteworthiness that four Georgia counties were named for them?

And probably one of the most fascinating personalities to be associated with the Midway community:

- Button Gwinnett. Originally from England, Gwinnett enjoyed a colorful history in Georgia politics and military efforts, and was one of only eight signers of the Declaration of Independence who had originally come from England. Talk about a traitor! The man captivates me. Oh, and if you are from Georgia and were wondering... yes, the name is Gwinnett, as in Gwinnett County.



Sadly, most of these families are represented almost exclusively by the Midway Museum, the cemetery across the street, and the Midway Congregational Church building next door to the museum. Little of the physical evidence of the Midway families remains. But inside the museum are heirlooms, artifacts, and family treasures donated to the museum by the descendants of the original community, many of whom still live in the area today.

The Midway Museum exists because of a strong-minded group of people who understand the significance of the area and have worked for over fifty years to preserve it. Some of them are descendants, some are historians, and some, like me, are just wandering souls who stumble upon this little pearl and want to help hang on to this little bit of Georgia's heritage.

The Midway Museum needs you! Please visit on your next road trip or vacation. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am – 4 pm, Sunday 2-4 pm. Closed on Mondays and all major holidays. Admission prices are \$3 for children ages 6-18, \$6 for adults, \$3 for seniors and military. (Wouldn't this be a great outing for your Sunday School class?) You can tour the museum itself, and marvel at the collection of priceless artifacts donated by descendants of the original settlers, and you can take a key as large as your hand to unlock and enter the old church building and see inside.



Annual activities at the Museum include

- Tales & Legends, a guided tour of the Midway cemetery given by expert storytellers in period costume. (Last part of October)
- Annual Christmas Tea. Visit the museum as it is decked out for the holiday season, and enjoy tea and cookies and stories told by guides in period costume. (Second weekend in December)

The Museum is also available for weddings, receptions, teas, and other social functions. For more information on these or any events, please call (912) 884-5837.