

Power & Beauty

By Edwin Eugene Ott

20180705

Located in the northwestern part of Laurens County is a wonderful place of natural beauty and history, the great shoals of the Saluda River at Ware Shoals. On the Laurens County side, one can see hydroelectric generating facilities and visit the Irvin Pitts Memorial Park. On the Greenwood County side there are many historic buildings in the Town of Ware Shoals. The park is great place for a picnicking, relaxing, and wildlife viewing. Many visitors wade or swim, but one should be very careful on the rocks and never venture out during high water.

Following is a short history of the hydroelectric facilities and images of the facilities, park, and wildlife:

During the colonial period, most settlement by the Europeans was around large rivers that could be used for navigation. In South Carolina, this limited major settlements to what is now called the Low Country, that is the area from the Coast to the Fall Line, excluding the Sandhills. Early settlement in the Piedmont and Mountains was sparse and primitive.

Following the Revolution and the invention of efficient cotton gins, settlement in the Up Country boomed. To sale cotton, it had to be transported to Fall Line towns like Augusta, GA/Hamburg, SC and Columbia. A period of canal construction in the 1820s was launched in South Carolina. Canals were constructed in Columbia that allowed passage over the Fall Line. It was claimed that the Saluda River was made navigable all the way up river to the great shoals at Ware Shoals, SC. However, cotton farmers in the western Piedmont continued to prefer shipping their cotton overland to the Fall Line ports. The invention of railways doomed the canals to idleness and history. In the 1850s, towns grew up around rail stops throughout the western Piedmont.

One resource of which the western Piedmont had a wealth was waterpower. Small water-powered grist mills sprouted along just about every large creek and river. One such mill was built by William Ware on the Saluda River at its great shoals which became thereafter known as Ware's Shoals. When industrialization came to the Piedmont at the end of the 19th Century, hydroelectricity generation was a much-prized asset.

Nathaniel B. Dial, president of the National Bank of Laurens, had a vision of building a large textile mill at Ware Shoals that would be powered by hydroelectricity. He formed the Ware Shoals Manufacturing Company and raised investment to begin the project. The first major construction was the dam, aqueduct, and power plant. These facilities were constructed on the Laurens County side of the river. Financial difficulties arose, and further investment was needed from Benjamin Riegel, a New York businessman. Mr. Riegel moved to South Carolina and took over the project. The mill was completed along with a model mill village, known today as the Town of Ware Shoals. The mill later became known as Riegel Mill. With the national decline in the textile industry, the mill was closed and now has been demolished.

See images on following pages:



Figure 1. The Great Falls of the Saluda River at Ware Shoals, SC.



Figure 2. The dam and aqueduct at Ware Shoals, SC.



Figure 3. The aqueduct that transports water diverted to the powerhouse over a half-mile away.



Figure 4. Powerhouse on Saluda River at Ware Shoals, SC.



Figure 5. Entrance sign to Irvin Pitts Memorial Park on Saluda River at Ware Shoals, SC.

Irvin Pitts Park

Saluda River Natural Resources



South Carolina
NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Heritage Corridor

Visit our Heritage Corridor landscapes - from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Charleston Lowcountry - and discover South Carolina's history, people, and places.

Birds
All of the birds native to the upstate inhabit the area, including cranes, herons, ducks, geese, jays, crows, redwings, sparrows and heron chicks. Wild ducks are sometimes seen drifting with the current over the rapids; they seem to enjoy the experience as much as humans on lower water levels.

Trees
Trees that are most commonly found in the park area and along the river are spruce, several species of oak, sweet gum, persimmons, sycamores, and many more birches that typically are leaning longwardly over the flowing waters.

Creeper
Virginia creeper, a harmless five-leaved vine, grows in the area. Wild grape vines dangle from the upper limbs of some trees. Stands of wild cornel appear along the river below the park.

Irvin Pitts Park is a corridor of land sandwiched between the Saluda River and a canal, which conducts water from the dam to the hydroelectric powerhouse that supplied electricity for Riegel textile mills and the village of Ware Shoals for most of the twentieth century.

In fact, the Saluda River was the natural resource that spawned the town of Ware Shoals. The dam, the mill and the town were born in the same year—1902—and the Ware Shoals Manufacturing Company (later renamed Riegel Textile Corporation) shaped the community and its citizens for more than 80 years until it closed in 1985.

Lizards

Lizards seen by the watchful observer are the five-toed skink or skink from the royal blue tail spotted by the males), the grey fence lizard, and the Carolina green anole, which is sometimes mislabeled the Carolina chameleon. While the anole usually appears in its lime green coloration and is capable of changing to shades of grey or brown, it is not a true chameleon.

Fish

Many different types of fish have been caught in the river, which has been a popular fishing locale since residents tramped there in covered wagons 100 years ago. These include small-mouthed, large-mouthed, striped and white bass. There are also white perch, brook, blue gill, channel catfish and, rarely, jacks. Since 1981, the town of Ware Shoals has had the Carlini "Reservoir" during the last weekend of May; one draws thousands of visitors to its town square. There was one report of a 40-pound catfish being caught.

Snakes

There are several varieties of snakes, which inhabit the "hoop" area. Various water snakes inhabit the river, but none are venomous. The copperhead or highly venomous is the only poisonous snake in the area, but it tries to avoid humans, if possible. Black rat snakes, water snakes, green snakes, and garter snakes are infrequently sighted but can be found by someone seeking them out.

Mammals

Mammals living alongside the river include white-tailed deer, raccoon, grey fox, opossum, grey squirrel and flying squirrel.

Turtles

Many species of turtles such as the river coon, or soft shell are commonly seen sunning themselves along the rocky shoals of the river. If you look closely you may also see snapping or musk "snipe nose" turtles in the water.

Ware Shoals

The Town and the River

A favorite spot for taking in the beauty of the area, picnicking, wading and fishing, the banks of the Saluda River have drawn folks from the surrounding countryside for more than 200 years. The name of the owner of the nearby gristmill, Nicholas Ware, combined with the river's shoals to create the name of Ware's Shoals, later shortened to Ware Shoals.

The town sprang to life because of its proximity to the Saluda River where Abbeville, Laurens and Greenwood Counties meet along South Carolina's Heritage Corridor.

The Mill's Role in the Town

The economic and social life of Ware Shoals revolved around the mill for more than 80 years. Generations of Ware Shoals' families worked in the textile mill, and for many of them, this was the only job and way of life they would ever know. Once out of the largest textile manufacturing centers in the southeastern United States, Riegel Textile Corporation employed 5,000 people at its peak in 1960.

The mill closing in 1985 had a major impact on the town's 2,000 citizens and its economy. But Ware Shoals fought back and continues to prosper. The mill site has been the beneficiary of a \$2,700,000 investment in cleanup efforts and redevelopment through the Brownfields Project. Ware Shoals was presented with the 2001 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 4 Rising Star Award.

The Town's Origins

This town of Ware Shoals and Ware Shoals Manufacturing Company (later renamed Riegel Textile Corporation) were born in the same year—1902. Nat Dial of Laurens County started the river dam construction at the turn of the 20th century as a means of powering his cotton plant. When Dial ran out of money, he turned to New Jersey businessman Benjamin Riegel who bought the mill and completed the dam. At the same time, Riegel fashioned a town.

Riegel Stadium

Riegel Stadium was built in 1931 utilizing laborers from President Roosevelt's nation-wide job programs. The stadium is most renowned for baseball. Through the decades, Riegel Stadium has hosted high school teams, textile leagues, Negro leagues, American Legion ball and even the big leagues. A 1954 exhibition game here showcased the Cincinnati Red Legs and The Washington Senators.

Memorial Fountain

The Memorial Fountain in front of Katherine Hall was created in 1968 through the dedication of a number of local clubs to raise the needed funding and gifts donated as memorials to war veterans who worked at the mill.

Katherine Hall/ The YMCA

Dedicated as the "Peoples' Amusement Hall," Katherine Hall was named for the Riegel's only child when it was built in 1913. Katherine Hall, the center for mill workers to relax, has housed a wide spectrum of community activities ranging from a movie theater to the Senior Citizens Center.

The "Big Friendly"

Ware Shoals Town Hall is located in the former "Big Friendly," as the Riegel Textile Corporation's company store was known. Started as a one-room shanty in 1906, the "Big Friendly" became one of the finest and most modern department stores in the state after its new location was completed in 1920. Its motto, "You can buy in one store anything from a paper and pen to a Ford automobile, from a baby girl's rattle to her wedding dress" reflected the extent of the store's role in the community. The store closed in 1963.

Figure 6. Kiosk at Irvin Pitts Memorial Park.

5



Figure 7. Irvin Pitts Memorial Park has three shelters.



Figure 8. The textile mill was constructed on west side of Saluda River at Ware Shoals, SC. The mill has been removed.



Figure 9. Toilet facilities at Irvin Pitts Memorial Park.



Figure 10. Bridge across shoals to Town of Ware Shoals, SC.



Figure 11. Rocky Shoals Tiger Lilies in bloom at shoals.



Figure 12. A boulder showing the power of moving water.



Figure 13. Great Blue Heron at shoals.



Figure 14. Baby Gulf-coast Spiny Softshell Turtle at shoals.



Figure 15. Domestic geese live at park and are well-fed by visitors.



Figure 16. Wild Canada Geese also live at the park year around.