

A Town whose time has come... *Again*



Photo by Becky Hyatt Rickenbaker

“You can’t move more than a foot in any direction (in Cayce) without stepping where something significant happened.”

– Cayce native Leo Redmond

If you think a straight path doesn’t circle back, look at Cayce’s. Major changes dead ahead are bringing this midlands community full circle to its past as the most important inland commercial town east of the Mississippi River.

Called Granby in the 18th century, it was the farthest inland that large boats could navigate the Congaree. At that spot, the river begins to live up to its Native American name, which means “scraping the rocks.” Imports were unloaded in Granby and exports left from there, some bound for Europe.

With so much else going on east of the Mississippi these days it won’t be quite that dramatic. But what’s happening now does mean renewed growth and prosperity for Cayce after decades of watching both spread from the state capital in nearly every direction but its own.

Within recent years the current has shifted with a regional focus on the potential of rivers and the land lining them. It has brought new attention to Cayce because it’s different from any other place along those banks. Archaeologists have found evidence of a long thread of humanity that never broke in more than 12,000 years. And Cayce may be the only place in North America with sites of Indian, Revolutionary and Civil war importance.

Cayce Mayor **Elise Partin**

may be the first contemporary female town leader, but in the mid-1500s, a tribe of Native Americans living by the Congaree River was led by a woman.



Photo by Becky Hyatt Rickenbaker

Hernando De Soto was here in 1540, as was George Washington in 1791. And before the new state capital across the river had an executive office, Gov. Charles Pinckney established one on his plantation at the mouth of Congaree Creek.

Cayce native Leo Redmond likes to say that his hometown measures history with a short tape: “You can’t move more than a foot in any direction without stepping where something significant happened.”

Redmond is director of the Cayce Historical Museum, where the registry lists visitors from all 50 states and 60 foreign countries. So he is among those who have wondered why Cayce’s other assets are just getting re-discovered.

The shift is spurred mainly by the relocation of SCANA, South Carolina’s only Fortune 500 company. The utility giant is expected to be a magnet for restaurants, motels, and other businesses hoping to profit when SCANA’s full operations and work force are in town.

It’s not the only magnet. A \$60 million State Farmer’s Market opens this spring and Lexington County is building a \$4.7 million world-class tennis center. And while neither is within its city limits, Cayce will derive

significant revenue by providing water and sewer services to them and other developments they inspire. The city is building a new plant capable of pumping 25 million gallons of water a day.

And so Twelfth Street has become Cayce’s field of dreams: “If you build it they will come.” An extension is under construction.

Cayce’s challenge is to embrace change without losing its small-town feel and character — ancient trees along quiet streets called simply “The Avenues” and a sense of home that extends beyond the 60 percent of Cayce’s 12,000-plus residents who’ve lived here more than 20 years.

Elise Partin fell in love with Cayce 15 years ago, when she rented a house during graduate school. When she married, the Partins bought that house on “L Avenue” and now have two children to play in the yard. (Like the other avenues with alphabetized names in order, Lafayette is “L” to locals.)

Today, they’d have to stand in line for a house on The Avenues, where they sometimes sell within days of going on the market. Only because she needed one bigger, Lisa Breese sold hers on Karlaney Avenue in three days with no haggling over the price. At

The remaining kilns of Guignard Brickworks, one of Cayce's distinguishing landmarks.



Photo by Becky Hyatt Rickenbaker

summer's end she was seeking another house, also on The Avenues. She is one in a generation who grew up in Cayce and consider it now the best place to live if they can.

Another generation lines up to live at Still Hopes, the 39-acre Episcopal Retirement Community off Knox Abbott Drive.

And lots of people routinely bowl at Park Lanes after having a pimiento cheeseburger at The Kingsman Restaurant, listed in *The 100 Southern Foods You Absolutely, Positively Must Try Before You Die*.



Partin understands people who arrive in Cayce, by birth or happenstance, and choose to stay. She is one.

Last year she ran for mayor on a progressive platform that included positive change with respect for “who we are and what we are.” The November election surprised those who didn’t expect the dark horse filly in the race to win. When Partin trounced two male opponents, she was described as the first female to lead government in Cayce.

That’s not entirely true. The 2009 election is another full circle to the local past, points out Redmond, the museum director. In the mid-1500s, a tribe of Native

Americans living by the river was led by a woman. Kidnapped by DeSoto to guide him to other Indian villages, she escaped and went home like neo-natives often do now. Redmond told the new mayor that the Indian queen was so popular that tribesmen carried her aloft to be honored.

“I’m still waiting on that,” Partin said. “Nobody’s carried me anywhere yet.”

What she has not waited on is finding out what residents want in a comprehensive plan to market Cayce without selling it out. Last May the city set aside three days for charrettes to hear citizens’ voices. The comprehensive plan must be re-evaluated every 10 years anyway, and it was time.

The mayor said many voices resonated with hers: People want jobs, a larger tax base, a mix of upscale and older housing that doesn’t clash, and a blend of the new and old that doesn’t either. Otherwise, lots of people wouldn’t mind driving across the city line for anything they need if Cayce doesn’t have it. They did that for decades to buy Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

That craving can be satisfied now at the intersection of Knox Abbott and Twelfth Street, but Krispy Kreme is just one Cayce business often misidentified as being in West Columbia. Boundaries blur on State and Twelfth Streets, where the transition appears so seamless that it’s easy to miss the markers.

The boundary between Cayce and Columbia has always been more obvious. It was the river until Cayce annexed some property on the other side in 2007. A river is hard to miss. So are eye-catching landmarks on both sides of Knox Abbott Drive that have long defined the gateway to Cayce from the Blossom Street Bridge. To the right, on a bluff, are distinctive kilns that resemble beehives, all that remains of Guignard Brickworks, which began producing brick in 1801. When the business was sold in the mid-1970s, it was the oldest continuously operating brickworks in the nation. Most of early Columbia was built with Guignard bricks, and what Sherman destroyed was replaced by them. On the other side of the street is seven acres of shaded serenity the Guignards donated in 1961 for a natural park.

In 2002 the Guignard family donated 38 acres on the west side of the Congaree for bike and walking trails in the Three Rivers Greenway. Cayce's section of the greenway is 2.5 miles long now and eventually will connect to the brickworks site, where those historic kilns will remain amid retail, office, residential and hotel development.

In the other direction, the greenway will stretch to the Congaree Creek Preserve, site of a last-ditch resistance against Union troops. Confederate breastworks remain today. Nearby are the Cayce Locks, built in 1893 to ease passage of large boats. This extension will include a history park celebrating those 12,000 years of continuous human life. The River Alliance is working toward a partnership with the National Park Service to fund an ongoing archaeological dig there, said Mike Dawson, who heads the regional organization.

The rivers are just one component of the new interest in living in Cayce or setting up shop here, says City Manager John Sharpe. Taxes are lower than

surrounding municipalities' and the economy, including gas prices, has caused many who work in Columbia to seek housing closer in.

Corporate scouts see that Cayce must be a good place to do business. The granite quarry, opened in 1893, is still in operation, now a subsidiary of Martin

Cayce's sense of community is not a closed circle of the exclusive kind — it expands to welcome folks in.

Marietta Aggregates. And Cayce's long been home to the U.S. Postal Service's regional headquarters. Charlton Hall Galleries, a premier

auction house doing business worldwide, relocated to Cayce in 2008 after 79 years on Columbia's Gervais Street. Home Depot is planning a regional distribution center in Cayce.

And while nobody expects older homes to lose their appeal, the development spurt includes Concorde Park, backing up to SCANA headquarters. It will have more than 200 upscale homes built on land that Cayce annexed in 2007 in anticipation of the boom, Sharpe said.

There may be mixed development, including homes, on more controversial annexed land across the river. That property has been mired for years in environmental and legal disputes because it is prone to flooding, and the Burroughs & Chapin Corporation gave up on its "Green Diamond" project.

When Greenville developer Larry McNair bought 1,400 acres of the tract with a scaled-back project he called Vista Farms, Columbia Venture LLC asked Cayce to annex it. The city's incentive was to be the entity to administer new flood maps yet to be drawn by the Federal Emergency Management Administration. Cayce could then require developers to take extra steps to control flooding. But opponents questioned whether the annexation was fiscal foresight or fiscal folly, and some Cayce residents feared the developer's initial plan for new levees. They said a river diverted to protect land on one side could cause flood damage on the other.

Depending on what happens with the proposed development, Cayce could collect a lot of taxes and water/sewer revenues from what's developed there. It could be huge. It might be nothing at all. It's probably not quite another full circle, however. Granby was the seat of Lexington County from 1785 to 1818, but the county seat was moved farther from the river because of periodic floods at Granby, which dwindled and died.

With or without Vista Farms, Cayce expects to survive and with lots of change. And, many residents hope, a lot of no change too.

One is Lois Floyd Shirley, who can remember who lived where and what businesses lined State Street, Holland Avenue and Frink Street throughout her lifetime, including years when Cayce had a thriving downtown. What's happening now "just boggles my mind," she allows.

You don't need to know her exact age to understand. Just know she was born in Cayce when people knew their neighbors, doctors made house calls, and few 3-pound babies like her survived. She grew up above the grocery store her daddy built. "Old Cayce" is dotted with houses Thomas Memory Floyd built too. "Miz Lois" lives today in a house he built amid furniture he made ("Miz" is how people talk around here, but don't you dare spell it "Ms."). She remembers the day Jim Shirley admired her suede jacket, autographed by high school friends. He was a handsome football player who'd just moved to Cayce when his father was made yardmaster at the railroad. That's where Jim also went to work when he married Lois instead of going to college.

For decades, if you lived around Cayce and wanted to learn to play the piano (or you were made to try), you took lessons from Lois Shirley. And if you were a young boy, you might be too distracted by her face to get past "Ten Little Indians." She looked like Dinah Shore on the "Tennessee Waltz" sheet music.

She got her first piano when she was about six, and has played ever since. "I've married a couple of thousand and buried about six," she estimates, plus Lord knows how many offertories and such as organist at State Street Baptist Church since it was built in 1941. Then there were all the beauty pageants and talent shows at Brookland-Cayce High and other venues. She still plays piano wherever she's asked and won't quit "as long as I can sit on the stool." She's a docent at the museum's Christmas events, and a plaque there honors her son Jimmy for years of community service.

Her beloved Jim is gone now. So are the two sons who grew up in Cayce. The rest of the family that lived above the store is gone. The store remains and Mrs. Shirley was



Photo by Teilah Shirley



Photo courtesy Lois Shirley

Above: Lois Shirley in front of the building where she was born.

Right: "Miz Lois" at the organ at State Street Baptist Church, where she was the organist for more than 30 years.

recently photographed in front. It was freshly painted and thoroughly renovated, gussied up in a way that some other old structures in Cayce still need.

All to say her best memories fall within a few blocks, and reminders are treasures. To lose them too would hurt.

But drive around Cayce with someone else who knows it well, and you see it's bigger than you thought with much land that could be developed without that kind of hurt.

Mary Sharpe is younger than Lois Shirley but has roots as deep. Her grandfather, Paul W. Ellisor, was a founder of the town in 1914 and raised his family next door to the Cayce House. That house was, from 1817 to 1914, home to the Cayce family, for whom the town is named.

Built as a trading post in 1765, the two-story frame building became a Revolutionary War fort in 1781. It's where the Tories brought Emily Geiger, arrested while carrying a message between generals. Left alone while a female was found to search her, the legendary heroine memorized the note and ate it.

Ellisor's son John built a scale model of the historic house for the 150th anniversary of Columbia in 1936. Fifty years later for the bicentennial he built another model that's still used in Cayce parades. The Cayce House was torn down in 1956, and John Ellisor's plans were used to create the replica that houses the museum he helped establish.

He was Mary Sharpe's uncle, and her service on the Museum Commission continues his. She's in charge of rounding up volunteers and organizing special events. One, Christmas Traditions, takes a slew of decorators, docents, actors for living history exhibits, entertainers, and food folks. Her children and grandchildren make five generations of community volunteers.

She doesn't expect the surge of growth to overwhelm Cayce's identity or sense of community. Its closed circles are not the exclusive kind and can expand to welcome folks in.

After all, when you grow, there's more to love. And more to love you back. ●



Photo by Becky Hyatt Pickenbaker

Mary Sharpe, in front of a historical marker commemorating her grandfather and Cayce founding father, Paul W. Ellisor.

Margaret Niceley O'Shea graduated from Brookland-Cayce High in 1964. She was editor of the school newspaper and literary magazine.

Learn more about Cayce at caycesc.net. This article is sponsored in part by:

