

History of Greer

Welcome to historic Greer, South Carolina. Part of the great Cherokee Nation, the area first became significant when the British proclaimed a boundary in 1763 to settle tensions between Native Americans and the settlers who were attracted by good land and plentiful water. The official survey in 1767 marked the North-South Indian Boundary Line that is the Greenville-Spartanburg County line today. A historical marker is located in Greer City Park.

The site of Greer itself was once part of Hugh Bailey's estate. Less than 50 years later, James Manning Greer purchased a parcel of the land near the Boundary Line. Approached by the Atlanta-Richmond Airline Railroad (later the Southern) in 1871, he agreed to sell right-of-way and a few acres for a train depot.

The first post office was in the station and the postmark read "Greer's Depot." The town was officially incorporated as "Greers" on March 25, 1876, but it later became known simply as "Greer." Hugh Bailey's son, William, was elected as the first mayor.

A second railroad, the Piedmont and Northern (P&N), laid tracks through Greer in 1913. With two active train lines, Greer became an attractive site of commerce. Textile mills including Victor, Apalache, Franklin, and Greer Mill, were important in the town's development. Agricultural products, especially cotton and peaches, were grown and shipped out of state.

Many businesses replaced older wood frame buildings with brick commercial structures — some two or three stories tall. Greer's downtown commercial architecture reflects the prosperity of the early 1900s when textiles and related industries flourished.

Just as the railroads brought progress to Greer, the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport and I-85 have been important to modern development.

Greer prides itself for its friendly, small-town atmosphere and big-city amenities.

Historic photographs provided courtesy of the Greer Heritage Museum

Discover More at the Greer Heritage Museum:

This building at 106 South Main Street was originally the location for the Greer Post Office. It was constructed in 1935 by the Public Works Administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Plan.

In 1964, a larger Post Office facility was built in another location, and the Treasury Department deeded ownership to the City of Greer. The building was renovated and opened as Greer City Hall in 1968.

In 2008 the City of Greer formed a partnership with the Greer Heritage Museum, which relocated from Trade Street to the former Post Office and City Hall building.

Visit the Greer Heritage Museum and look for the hidden observation platform where postal inspectors could secretly watch the coming and going of post office guests and employees.

Admission to the museum is free.



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GREER STATION

A Walking Tour of Downtown Greer



The Greer Downtown Historic District has a significant collection of buildings associated with the commercial growth and development of Greer from 1900-1940. J.C. Cunningham, born near Greer in 1876, constructed over half of the downtown buildings. Thomas Keating, who was once mayor, was the architect for many of the buildings. In 1997, downtown was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Trade Street

Unlike many cities, Greer did business on Trade Street, not Main Street. Trade Street is the hub for commerce in downtown and is especially charming in the evenings with string lights lining the brick-paved street.



1. 101 Trade Street: Originally part of the Marchant house yard, this unusual building was designed for the corner of Trade and Hill St., now E. Poinsett St., by architects Beacham & LeGrand. The Planters Savings Bank opened here in 1921. Check out the 1920's bank vault on display.



2. 104-106 Trade Street: Socialite Alta Cunningham was a professional milliner that frequently traveled to New York and other northern markets to stay up to date on the latest fashions. The hats Cunningham made were so popular that she opened up her own store, Alta Cunningham's, in 1940.



3. 111 Trade Street: Built in 1915 by Dr. Robert Lee Marchant, the building was once a furniture store owned by Samuel Hutchings. In 1931, the Commission of Public Works purchased the building, offering business on the first floor and the “House of Charm” upstairs to showcase the latest appliances. A home economist provided the cooking and sewing classes. After the Commission left in 1960, the building served as Greer City Hall for eight years.



4. 112 Trade Street: Miss Elsie Fleming's store was known for fine women's clothing. Fleming dressed brides and Peach Festival Queens. Visit the Greer Heritage Museum to view the exhibit on Elsie Fleming.



5. 116 Trade Street: In 1905, the original building at this location housed The Bank of Greers. In 1923, the Bank of Greers and Farmers Bank and Trust agreed to merge creating a new corporation, Greer Bank & Trust. The 1920's Neo-Classical style building replaced the original structure. The bank collapsed during the Great Depression in 1931.



6. 200 Trade Street: Dr. Marchant commissioned local architect Thomas Keating to build this three-story building in 1910 for the cost of \$8,500. The Greer Drug Company, a Rexall Drug Store, occupied the first floor. The second floor was used as a dentist office and at least one doctor's office. The third floor was used by the Bailey Masonic Lodge.



7. 201 Trade Street: The T. E. Smith Department Store building was built around 1915 by T. E. Smith, the eleventh Mayor of Greer, and named for his wife Fannie Bailey. She was the daughter of Greer founders William Clark Bailey and Victoria Elizabeth Cunningham Bailey, whose home previously sat at this location. Many Greer residents remember the later store at this site called “The Leader.”



8. 208-210 Trade Street: George Bailes and Roy E. Collins opened the Bailes-Collins Store in 1928. Around 1938, Collins became sole owner. Three generations of Collins worked in the store. The name of the store can still be seen on the tile out front and the top, right side of the building.



9. 215 Trade Street: Built around 1915, the Wood-Mendenhall Co. was one of the first hardware stores in Greer. This building originally had open lots on each side. Today, the original murals are visible in the buildings on either side. One is an advertisement for “Buggies, Farm Implements, Studebaker Wagons”.



10. 222 Trade Street: Smith & James is the oldest retail store in downtown Greer. In 1916, Smith & Vaughn opened on Trade Street advertising “exclusive up-to-date Gent's furnishings store.” In 1919, the name of the store changed to Smith & James when Mr. Vaughn's share of the store was sold to Don James.



11. 225 Trade Street: On this site, tombstones were once sold, and in the rear, a blacksmith shoed horses. Around 1935, the barber shop was built. The building also had showers in the rear, allowing gentlemen to have the full works—shave, haircut, and shower.



12. 228-230 Trade Street: Constructed sometime around 1898 by David D. Davenport, this building is one of the oldest in Greer. The first floor housed a general merchandise store and the second floor, known as Davenport Hall, was a large hall for public performances. A filmstrip movie projection showing, known as an “Electric Theatre,” took place in Davenport Hall on October 26, 1901. This was actually one year before the first movie theatre opened in the USA! It was presented by Edison's Electrical Theatre and Specialty Company. Admission was ten cents and twenty-five cents.



13. 300-302 Trade Street: This is one of the oldest commercial buildings in Greer. Peoples Bank occupied 300 Trade St. originally. Next door, the Dixie Theatre, owned by C.W. Drace, later became known as the The Rialto Theatre. It had a single screen and 200 seats.

Randall Street

At the intersection of Trade and Randall sat the original town square. People came from all over to trade supplies, earning the name Trade Street. On the block from Depot Street to Trade Street, now the site of the CBL State Savings Bank, there was a row of businesses including Wood & Wood Store and the Wood Mortuary upstairs. On the corner was a hotel for travelers arriving at the two depots. Across the street the city constructed a building for fire, police, and city hall (current site of the Greer Depot parking lot).



14. 100 Randall Street: The Davenport home, designed by Beacham and Douthit, was started in 1918 for Clara Davenport and completed in 1922. The English Tudor private residence is listed on the National Historic Register. The 6,000 sq. ft home is not open to the public.



15. 221-223 Randall Street: Greer's first newspaper, The Greer Observer (later named The Greer Citizen), began at this location around 1905. The Greer Citizen stopped production in 2024.



16. 300 Randall Street: Constructed in 1913, architect Charles Christian Hook of North Carolina, designed the Greer Depot as a combination passenger station and freight warehouse for the Piedmont & Northern Railway. The P&N carried both passengers and freight, hauling coal, cotton, and other agricultural products. At its peak in the 1920s, the railroad served approximately 135 cotton mills. This is the last surviving railroad depot of the five original two-story depots built for the P&N Railway. In 2021, it was restored to its original grandeur.

School Street

School Street was the site of Greers Graded School, built in 1905 and later called Central. The fine brick building replaced an old wooden building. Today, the First Presbyterian Church gym covers the site.



17. 113 School Street: In 1925, the first library of Greer sat at this location in a simple wooden structure. The current building was constructed in 1938 with the help of the Works Progress Administration, the Davenport family, the people of Greer, and cost \$10,000. Named the Davenport Memorial Library, it also doubled as a meeting space for local clubs, including the USO during World War II.



18. 100 School Street: Originally built in 1840 at Bailey's Crossroads, Mt. Tabor Presbyterian Church was a wooden structure located about two miles south of Greer. It was relocated in 1880 to its current location. The church was pulled by 40 mules and rolling logs. The church was renamed to Greers Presbyterian Church in the early 1900s and later became the First Presbyterian Church of Greer. The present building was constructed between 1922 and 1923.

Victoria Street

Victoria Cunningham Bailey was married to Greer's first Mayor, William C. Bailey. After William C. Bailey's passing in 1882, Victoria was left with five children to raise. Defying cultural norms, she went on to invest in real estate all over what is now Greenville and Spartanburg Counties. By the time of her passing, she owned most of the east side of Trade Street, purchased more than 100 acres on the Tyger River, as well as the area that would later become Victor Mill. By 1898, residents started referring to the unnamed road that crosses Trade Street as Victoria Street in honor of the business woman, “Miss. Vic” of Greer.



19. 118 Victoria Street: This building is known as the Walker Building and was completed in 1927. The downstairs was intended to be available office space to rent and the second floor housed the Southern Bell Telephone Company. It was designed with the most up to date equipment at the time and switched from the magneto to the battery system. Cables were wired directly to this location which removed many of the unsightly wires that ran up and down Trade Street. To make a call, you would first remove the phone from the receiver. This would notify the operator that you needed to make a call. The operator would then connect you to your preferred contact.

Poinsett Street

In the 1920s, the roads originally used for wagons and horses were being converted for automobile use and were known as the National Auto Trails. Poinsett Street was once part of the Bankhead Highway, a transcontinental highway intended to connect the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., to San Diego, CA. The community transformed and saw an increase in hotels, service stations, and restaurants as travel became easier in Greer.



20. 110 E. Poinsett Street: Take a peek in the windows and you will see a display of antique cameras and production tools in the window. If you went back 125 years, you would see a similar cinematic window display. The building was originally the location of photographer Charles Drace. Born in Ohio, Drace moved to Greer in the late 1890s. His first store was a wooden one that was quickly replaced with the brick building standing today.



21. 121 E. Poinsett Street: The Grand Theatre was once located in this empty lot. It was owned and operated by Charles Drace. The front of the building was home to “Mister Charlie's" store, which sold musical instruments and Victrolas. The theater itself was located behind the store, and the seats faced a three-story stage. There was a second floor, which was Drace's photo studio. By October 1922, a large extension annex had been added behind the building. A sign printing company, owned and operated by Drace's son, occupied the new addition. On April 30, 1928, the theatre burned down, along with the sign shop.



22. 125 E. Poinsett Street: Built in 1929, this location housed two separate businesses at the same time. On the north side was a laundry service. To the south was Western Union Telegraph. The invention of the telegraph changed the way people communicated. A letter that would take a month to deliver could now be delivered in a day. A telegram messenger would ride his bike to hand deliver messages.



23. 127 E. Poinsett Street: Carl Ponder lived in Greer at the dawn of the 20th century. Ponders Ice Cream had multiple locations in the Upstate, but they first occupied 107 Trade Street, then moved to this larger location. Here, they made high-quality ice cream and also ran a bottling company that made a range of sodas, including their famous ginger ale. The Ponders sign was recently revealed during a renovation project and is now on display.



24. 133 E. Poinsett Street: Ford originally sold automobiles through hardware stores. In Greer, that was Thompson Hardware. W.M. Thompson began his business in 1907. People from all over the Upstate came to Greer to purchase their first Ford.

This Historic Walking Tour is made possible by the City of Greer, Greer Heritage Museum, Joada Hiatt, Dr. Rose Marie Cooper Jordan, with the assistance of Mr. Brad Sauls with the SC Department of Archives and History. Updated May 2025.