



THE

TINY PLANET TIMES

MUSINGS ABOUT NOTHING IN PARTICULAR

AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA

Recently, Terry and I motored over to Aiken, South Carolina to camp for a few days. Admittedly, we know very little about our adopted state but Aiken was a bit of a surprise for us. I was expecting to see a small, lazy town that was on the backside of its heyday. I had visions of whipping out the drone and flying over a sleepy downtown to give aerial viewpoints of a small, but yet charming town moving in a southern slow gear.

Brother, were we wrong! Aiken is one of the fastest growing towns in SC! But the recent growth isn't the story. The history of this town evolves around horses and is known as the "Horse Capital of the South." But I get ahead of myself. In the 1800's, northern residents fled the bitter winters as Charlestonians moved away from the coast to escape malaria and yellow fever. Large cottages, located in the historic district, were defined as homes with twenty or more rooms. What elite, you ask? Well, how about the Vanderbilts, Astors, Whitneys, Rutherfords, Liz Arden, Chrysler, etc. and when they came south, they brought their horses with them. There have been many national champions that are alumni of Aiken. To celebrate their "horsiness"

Aiken has placed several (nine, I think) horse statues around town. What's fun about Aiken is that many of the homes in town have acreage with horses



in the paddocks. It was not unusual to see residents out riding their horses in and around town. Pictured here is "Monty." He and his rider

were just returning from a ride in the city's 2,100 acre city park – Hitchcock Woods.

But, lets get back to the wealthy class for a moment. We came across this story that is as comical as it is incredulous. Evalyn Walsh McLean had acquired the Hope Diamond (yes, that Hope Diamond) in 1910. Evalyn was a daughter of an Irish immigrant who became a multijillionaire in Colorado silver mines. As a winter "colonist" in Aiken, she wore the Hope on gowns and swimsuits and even adorning her doggo's collar. She was always misplacing the thing and recruited friends and neighbors on several occasions to help relocate it. As a reminder, the Hope Diamond is deep blue and 45.52 carats and in today's money, worth around \$350 million. The Hope now resides in the National Smithsonian in Washington, DC.

Some other facts about Aiken. William "Refridgerator" Perry was born in Aiken along with his eleven other brothers and sisters. If you don't know who the Refridgerator is, he played for the Chicago Bears as a 350 pound lineman who doubled as an occasional receiver. As a rookie, he helped win Superbowl XX.

We had a couple of pretty delicious meals while playing tourist in Aiken. We ate at Malia's for a soup and salad combo that was not only delicious but our server was just a joy. Their website is: [Malia's Restaurant - Downtown Aiken, SC \(maliasrestaurant.com\)](http://Malia's Restaurant - Downtown Aiken, SC (maliasrestaurant.com)).

We also had lunch at Taj Aiken, an extremely tasty Indian Restaurant. We are STILL talking about our very good and very flavorful food. Their link is: Taj Aiken - The Indian Cuisine.

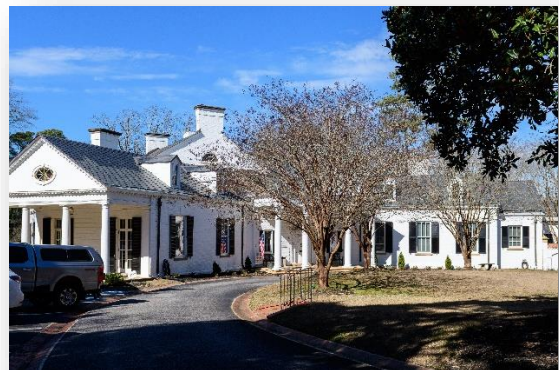
As I mentioned earlier, Aiken is a horse town. They Steeple Chase, they race, they Polo, they put on duds and do the dressage thing, and they fox hunt. Don't worry about the fox, they use something dipped in fox smell and drag it for the dogs to follow so no actual foxes are used in the hunts. I'm not sure how many race tracks are in town but I think they're at least four. Here is a picture of the Clocker tower on one of the practice tracks:



Let's talk about Minnie Pearl for a moment. Minnie's first stage gig was in Aiken. Her trademark hat was purchased at Surasky Brothers located on main street. Apparently, she had forgotten to remove the price tag during her performance and the rest.... Is history. This is the location of the original Surasky Brother's store front:



During our stay in Aiken, we also visited the Aiken County museum, which is housed in one of the old "colony" homes. I can't say that I'm always a fan of museums. I'm not sure why other than my ongoing issues with a short attention span but I did manage to walk around most of the rooms and found it to be pretty entertaining.



One other thing about this area for you railroad fans. In 1833, the 136-mile Charleston to Hamburg Railroad was the longest railroad in the WORLD when it was completed. It was also the first railroad to be powered entirely by steam, the first to carry mail under contract and the first to provide regularly scheduled passenger service. Hamberg is about 20 miles to the west of Aiken (North Augusta) and I believe all that is left is Hamberg is maybe a historical marker.

The video we made for Aiken highlighted the tree covered streets, the horse statues, Hope Gardens, and downtown Aiken.