

## Bishopville

Pop. 3,600 (Food/Lodging)

Begun at the intersection of two Indian trading paths in the late 1700s, Bishopville's economy has always centered on cotton. The town's architecture reflects periods of "high cotton" when cotton prices were high and crops were good. Note the neoclassical 1908 Lee County Court House, the 1890s Opera House, and a number of 19th and early 20th century homes on Main Street (US 15) and surrounding streets. In the fall, cotton fields are evident all around you. Watch for the Lee County Cotton Festival in October.

### Don't Miss

**Fryar's Topiary Garden.** Pearl Fryar has created a living fantasy on three acres of former farm land. His enchanting garden has been featured on major television networks. See more of his work along the Cotton Trail at I-20, in Bishopville and at the Hartsville Museum (145 Broad Acres Road, just off US 15, donations accepted).

**The South Carolina Cotton Museum.** A major interpretive site, the museum preserves the legacy of cotton and rural life. Displays and farm and manufacturing equipment spanning two centuries allow visitors to experience the cotton culture way of life from field to factory. The 1902 James House is adjacent. Unique cotton items are available at the gift shop (121 West Cedar Lane, M-F 10-5, Sat. 10-4, 803 484-4497, admission). South Carolina Cotton Trail and local information available. ★

### Exploring the Countryside:

Northeast of Bishopville, scenic Lynch's River flows through Lee State Park, and a historic marker denotes the site of the famous Cash-Shannon Duel. Woodham Gin on Ashland-Stokes Bridge Road operates in the fall, preparing picked cotton for manufacturing. Just west of Hartsville on Kelletown Road, the Jacob Kelley House, c. 1820, is a reminder of the earliest days of cotton farming.

### Side Trip:

McLeod Farms Roadside Market has a bakery, peach ice cream, pottery and, in season, great peaches. A farming and car museum is adjacent (SC 151, south of McBee).

## Hartsville

Pop. 8,000 (Food/Lodging)

Hartsville grew up around the Hart cotton plantation. Cotton was already a major crop by the mid-19th century, but plant breeder David R. Coker made it even more profitable. Coker Experimental Farms is now a National Historic Landmark with planted fields and displays on crop cultivation. The family's other venture was Sonoco. Now an international corporation, Sonoco was founded to make cones for use in cotton spinning. See the 1848 John Hart Cottage, and check for events at Coker College founded in 1908. Hartsville's historic downtown is worth exploring for clothing, antiques and local cuisine. Watch for the RenoFest bluegrass festival in March and Pim's Farm corn maze on Dovesville Hwy., northeast of Hartsville.

### Don't Miss

**Kalmia Gardens of Coker College.** Developed by "Miss May" Coker on an old cotton plantation on the banks of Black Creek, Kalmia showcases native plants, azaleas, camellias and the c.1817 Thomas E. Hart House. Canoes are available. The charming gift shop has a natural, horticultural theme. (1624 West Carolina Avenue; open year round dawn to dusk. 843 383-8145, free).

**The Hartsville Museum.** Exhibits and changing displays tell the story of the area from Indians to industrial innovations. The museum also features local art, traveling exhibits and a gift shop with unique area products. (222 N. 5th Street, M-F 10-5, Sat. 10-2, 843 383-3005, free). South Carolina Cotton Trail and local information available. ★



A 19th century high wheel is used to make thread from cotton fiber at the Hartsville Museum.

## Darlington

Pop. 6,720 (Food/Lodging)

As you approach town, you'll pass internationally known Darlington Raceway and the Raceway Museum. (Daily, 9-5 admission) On the second Saturday in May, The Dodge Challenger 500 caps a week of race festivities.

Surrounded by large plantations, Darlington developed around the county court house established in 1785. The town escaped wholesale damage during the Civil War, and some antebellum homes remain, particularly in the Pearl Street area. Cotton was King here until after WW I when flue-cured tobacco became the most profitable crop.

Darlington has several other historic areas. Cashua Street and the West Broad Street area feature Victorian homes. The St. John's district has early dwellings and a school complex.

Once home to an open air cotton market, the Public Square retains many of its early commercial buildings. The Chamber of Commerce is housed in one of these, the 1902 Cotton and Tobacco Exchange Building. A free walking tour brochure is available here. "Our Pat," a 19th century fire engine, is on display just off the Square.

An old cotton gin, warehouses and tobacco auction barns scattered along Broad and Main are testament to past agricultural commerce. Near the bypass, the Hartsville Oil Mill still processes cotton seeds into oil. While tobacco has waned, cotton is still a major crop here. Darlington celebrates its agricultural heritage at the Sweet Potato Festival in October.



Public Square mural in Darlington

## Society Hill

Pop. 700 (Food Only)

In 1736, a group of Welch Baptists settled in the "Welch Neck." They eventually moved up to the hill above the river where the St. David's Society had established an academy in 1777. The Society's Hill flourished, and cotton profits built most of the early 19th century dwellings on Main Street. A guide to Society Hill's historic district and more information are available at the Town Hall on Main Street. Watch for the Catfish Festival in November.

### Don't Miss

#### The Society Hill Historic District

View the Old Library, c.1822, on Main Street, and two rare 19th century stores, Coker-Rogers Store, c. 1860, and the Sompayrac Store, c. 1813. Trinity Church, c.1834, and Welsh Neck Baptist Church Graveyard are also fascinating glimpses into the past.



The old Society Hill Library, c.1822.

## Cheraw

Pop. 5,500 (Food/Lodging)

Named for the Indians whose main village was here, Cheraw was founded at the head of navigation on the Great Pee Dee River around 1740. The tree-lined streets, laid out in 1768, are home to more than 50 antebellum buildings, despite the town's occupation by both the Union Army in 1865 and the British in 1780. With the coming of steamboats in 1819, Cheraw became an important commercial center and the home of bankers and cotton brokers. By 1850, the largest bank outside of Charleston and the area's largest cotton market were located here. Be sure to pick up a free self guide to the Cheraw Historic District and the "Cheraw Cotton Tale." The downtown has antiques, gift shops and charming local restaurants. Watch for the Cheraw Spring Festival the first of April and the SC Jazz Festival the third week-end in October.

### Don't Miss

**Old St. David's Church.** Begun in 1770, its walls have sheltered British, American, Union and Confederate soldiers. The country's oldest Confederate Monument is located in the graveyard. Keys to the church can be picked up at the Cheraw Chamber of Commerce at 221 Market St. Riverside Park, where cotton was shipped by steamboat until 1926, is nearby. (1 Church St. 843 537-8425, free).

**The Cheraw Town Green.** The Green is home to the 1858 Town Hall, the 1837 Market Hall, the c.1830 Inglis-McIver Law Office and the c.1825 Cheraw Lyceum Museum, which houses exhibits on Cheraw. There's also a statue to Cheraw native Dizzy Gillespie (the Gillespie Home Site Park is a couple of blocks away). Nearby, the Pee Dee River Artifacts Room showcases diving finds. (Free. Market Street. Lyceum keys may be picked up at the Chamber of Commerce). South Carolina Cotton Trail and local information is available at the Chamber of Commerce just off the Green at 221 Market St. M-F 9-5 843 537-8425, free. ★

## Bennettville

Pop. 9,500 (Food/Lodging)

Established in 1819, Bennettville is the county seat of Marlboro County, one of the state's great cotton producers, where it was said the rich farm land once sold by the pound, not the acre. Antebellum and Victorian homes here which reflect the high points of cotton profits. A cotton gin, which runs from the fall into the winter allows visitors to watch the ginning process from a careful distance. You'll also want to note the D.D. McColl House, c.1824-26, and Shiness, c.1903. Watch for special events at the c. 1917 Marlboro County Civic Center and for the Jubilee Arts Festival in May.

### Don't Miss

**The Marlboro County Museum Complex.** This fascinating collection of buildings includes the 1826 Jennings-Brown House with its unique painted ceiling, the 1833 Bennettville Female Academy and a museum housing exhibits on agriculture, medicine, printing and rural life. A private owner displays some of his classic cars across the street. (121 S. Marlboro St. M-F 843 479-5624, free) South Carolina Cotton Trail and local information available. ★

### The Courthouse Square.

The historic commercial area is a showcase of Victorian commercial buildings with elaborate facades in polychrome color schemes. All of these were built at the time of a cotton boom. (Main Street and vicinity)

### Side Trip:

**Blenheim.** Blenheim Ginger Ale was invented here. It's available at many places along the Cotton Trail. Watch out, it's really hot! The springs and old bottling plant are just off of SC 381.

## Clio

Pop. 1,050 (Food/B&B)

Clio's (Cly-O) golden age came at the turn of the 20th century when fortunes were made from cotton.

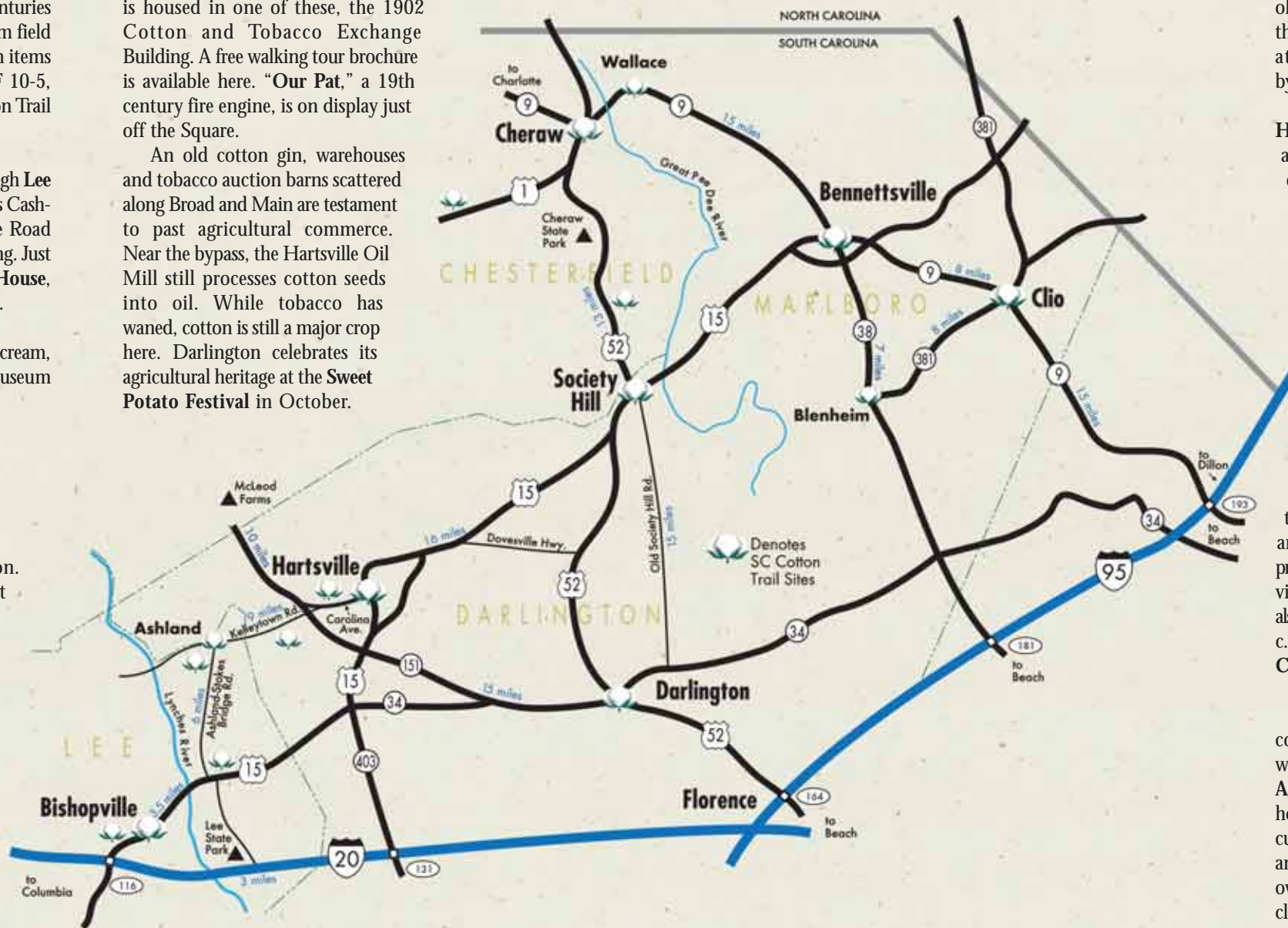
### Don't Miss

**The People's Cotton Gin.** Cotton is cleaned and processed here. Just across the way is an ancient Cotton Oil Mill.

**Clio Historic District.** A self guide to Clio's historic district is available at the old train depot on Society Street, just off Main (SC 9). South Carolina Cotton Trail and local information available. ★



Old St. David's Church, c.1770, has survived use by 4 armies.



### Don't miss

The Darlington County Historical Commission's collection of photographs and relics located in the old jail behind the Square. (Hewitt St. M-F from 9-5; 843 398-4710)

Blue Sky's famous Bicentennial Mural depicts the Square as it was before 1939. It is fun to note the buildings still on the Square.

Williamson Park on Spring Street is a great place to picnic and explore a swamp ecosystem.

You can proceed from Darlington on US 52 North (N. Main St.) for 15 miles to Society Hill or you can take a more scenic route by following Cashua Street east and turning left at the bottom of the hill onto the Old Society Hill Road.

### Exploring the Countryside:

In the early 1920's the boll weevil, worn out fields and low cotton prices brought ruin to many. The New Deal in the 1930's brought Federal conservation projects to these worn out lands. Just south of Cheraw, Cheraw State Park became South Carolina's first state park. The more than 7,000 acres are now home to an award winning golf course, lakes, hiking trails, cabins and campsites. US 52 south of Cheraw. 843 537-9656.

### Side Trip:

Other New Deal projects on former cotton lands are located on US 1 south of Cheraw. Sandhills State Forest offers hiking, camping, ponds, a major field trial center for sporting dogs and Sugar Loaf Mountain. Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge near McBee features an interpretive center, bird watching blinds and hiking trails.

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★ Visit [www.scottontrail.org](http://www.scottontrail.org) or contact one of the SC Cotton Trail Visitor Information Centers.

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# The South Carolina Cotton Trail