

History

Newberry wears its past like a colorful vestment — one that has been altered and restyled for the present.

College graduation robes, textiles from 19th century mills and lace curtains hanging at the windows of Antebellum homes are some of the textures that give dimension to this proud community. The town is trimmed with architectural elements that detail its development, beginning with its early settlement in 1745 by Adam Summer. Within the downtown business district, there are several blocks in which every building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

This part of the South Carolina Upcountry was settled largely by Scotch-Irish, English and German immigrants in the mid-18th century. Large scale cotton farming replaced small farms in the 19th century, and the coming of the railroad made Newberry a leading cotton market.

Changing, expanding civic needs have always inspired new uses for old buildings in Newberry. Today, visitors can see the city's Old Court House, built in 1852, now serving as a community hall. The Gothic-style Opera House, exemplifying Victorian civic architecture, was the center of cultural and civic activity from 1882 until 1930. The Ritz Theater was built in 1936 in the Art Deco style for use as a movie theater. Now, the Newberry Community Players have breathed new life into the facility, gradually restoring the 800-seat building.

Newberry College has been one of the town's most popular points of interest since it was first chartered in 1856. Although the campus' original structure was so badly damaged a few years later by Federal troops that its remains were eventually torn down, Smeltzer Hall was later constructed on that original foundation. Its strategic location as a railroad depot not only connected turn-of-the-century Newberry with commerce and passenger centers such as Augusta, Charlotte, Greenville and Columbia, but it was also the link between local mills and their market. Today, several mill villages remain as reminders of that early era.