

Museum on Main Street, Smithsonian Institution  
Stories: Yes | Student Digital Storytelling Project  
A Glimpse of the Past in Historical Latta, South Carolina

**Speaker 1:** Latta sprang from the coming of the railroad. The nucleus of the town was created in 1888 when the railroad officials decided that a loading station was essential seven miles South of Dillon. Choosing a name for new station posed a problem as there were several prominent families in the area deserving the honor, and the railroad officials did not want to show favoritism. Finally, the name of Latta was selected out of respect of Robert J Latta, a native of New York, who surveyed the right of way for the railroad and made plans for the future expansion of the loading point. Latta grew steadily. W. W. George erected the first store building in the town and later a dwelling, and soon others followed.

**Speaker 2:** [0:43] Small towns in South Carolina are the backbone of its rich culture. Life in rural America offers many unique opportunities that a person will not find in city life. Its history is rich with authentic stories about its impressionable citizens and historical events surrounding the town. Latta, South Carolina, is such a place. From the first school originating in Latta, the first official free standing post office, to the first public library constructed there with a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. Its history is spellbinding and essential to its very existence.

**Speaker 3:** [1:18] The Vidalia Academy was founded in 1877 and housed, in a one room building, originally located Mr. H. C. Allen's farm near the site of Latta. In 1879, the structure was moved a short distance North of Latta nearer to a road crossing Buck Swamp. In 1883 a music room was added and the Academy continued to operate until 1898 when it was merged into a large new school in Latta. The original Vidalia building, now located on Main Street in Latta, was at one time under the ownership of A. LaFon LeGette Jr. who foresaw its historical significance and ensured its preservation.

**Speaker 4:** [1:59] In May 1888, a United States post office was authorized for Latta. Frank M. Monroe supervised the mail services, until Robert Rose Bethea was officially appointed postmaster in July 1890. Mr. Bethea was a respected African-American merchant, who distributed the mail from a latticed corner on his store on Main Street. The original Post Office building is a one-room weatherboard structure and the first stand-alone post office. Latta was one of 13 communities in South Carolina to receive funds from the Carnegie Corporation for new libraries which were built between 1905 and 1920. The movement to create the library in Latta began in 1911, and was lead by W. C. Allen, a local businessman. A \$5,000 grant was secured from the Carnegie Foundation, and C. F. Bass donated the land. One condition of the grant was that the town furnished a lot in the center of town so the site would be easily accessible from all sections of the community. The lot where the library was constructed is on the north-west end of Main Street. The Latta Public Library opened in 1914 and is only one of five remaining Carnegie libraries in the state, and is still operated as a public library.

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**Speaker 5:** [3:20] The Dillon County Museum is located in the restored office of the late Dr. Henry Edwards. The building was constructed in 1915. His son, Luther, a dentist, operated his practice from the office. The building was deeded to the Dillon County Historical Society by Dr. Luther's daughter, Dr. Carolyn Edwards. In 1996, The Society began the restoration of the office building. The office building and the family residence next door, which was the first two story house in Latta, are on the National Register of Historic Places.