

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE MUSEUM

Roger Stroup

The South Carolina State Museum opened in Columbia in 1988 with four large floors of exhibits covering the disciplines of art, history, natural history and science technology. An extensive education program interprets these disciplines in lessons for visiting groups of school students as well as for adult groups. The museum is located at 301 Gervais Street in Columbia, beside the historic Columbia Canal on the Congaree River.

The museum is housed in the historic Columbia Mills Building, which opened in 1894 as the world's first totally electric textile mill. Other firsts are located within the museum, including replicas of the Best Friend of Charleston, the first American-built locomotive to offer passenger and freight service in the United States, and the *C.S.S. Hunley*, the first submarine in history to sink an enemy ship in combat.

The museum contains a total of 202,663 square feet, making it one of the largest museums in the South. It opened with approximately 79,000 square feet of exhibit space. When Phase II expansion is complete, the museum will offer 101,000 square feet of exhibits. The South Carolina State Museum is open seven days a week, every day of the year except Christmas, with hours from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; 1 p.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$3.00 for adults, \$2.00 for senior citizens, military personnel and college students with ID, and \$1.25 for children 6-17 years old. Children under six admitted free, as are S.C. school groups with advance reservations.

The South Carolina State Museum has many interesting artifacts from the Piedmont section of the state in its collection. Many of the exhibits in the museum are representative of all areas of the state. Exhibits such as the country store and the upcountry slave cabin reflect phenomena found throughout the state. However, several of the exhibits in the State Museum highlight the Piedmont.

On the science and technology floor, one of the prominent exhibits relates the story of the development and uses of the laser beam. Dr. Charles H. Townes, a native of Greenville and graduate of Furman University, received the first patent for a functional laser. A movie about Dr. Townes, produced for the museum by Spectrum South of Greenville, is featured as well as the Nobel Prize given to Dr. Townes for his work on the laser.

During the nineteenth century, two significant producers of weapons were located in Greenville. In 1818 Adam Carruth received a contract from the U.S. Government to produce flintlock muskets for the army. While the original contract called for 10,000 muskets, Carruth apparently only completed about 500 model 1816 muskets for delivery to the army. One of these rare muskets is featured in the State Museum's exhibit on the state militia.

In 1863 George Morse received a contract from the state to produce weapons for the confederacy. Because of the shortage of raw material, Morse's State Military Works only produced about 2,000 Morse Carbines and less than 100 Inside Lock Morse Muskets. Both of the important weapons are featured in the museum's Civil War exhibits.

A featured part of the dueling exhibit relates the story of the Perry-Bynum duel of 1832. Benjamin F. Perry, later Governor of South Carolina (1865), was editor of the *Greenville Mountaineer*, a leading newspaper in the upstate. In 1832 Turner Bynum, Jr., editor of the *Southern Sentinel*, criticized Perry's stand against nullification in a blistering editorial. On August 16th the men met on an island in the Tugaloo River.

Bynum fired first, his bullet ripping harmlessly through the lapel of Perry's coat. Perry's lethal bullet passed through Bynum's body just above the hip. Some 72 hours later, Bynum died in agony. Perry's regret over the death is expressed in his autobiography where he described Bynum as "a young man of talents, wrote well, high-spirited and of unquestioned courage." The exhibit features the set of flintlock dueling pistols used in the duel.

During its first year of operation, approximately 320,000 people visited the State Museum. Visitors came from all 50 states and 39 foreign countries ranging from Canada to the Soviet Union. The State Museum's education department booked 84,000 school children for study visit programs during the first year of operation. School children came in groups from each of the state's 46 counties and from adjacent counties in North Carolina and Georgia.

In October 1989 the State Museum was honored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation for the adaptive use of the former textile mill building. The prestigious award was one of only fifteen given throughout the country. The S.C. Chamber of Commerce selected the State Museum as the Outstanding Tourism Attraction in South Carolina for 1989.

The State Museum is one of only two museums in the Southeast which has been given permission by NASA to display a moon rock. Ours was collected from the moon by native Charles Duke. South Carolina has had five native sons become astronauts in the space program. That's more than any other state in the country! A special section of the science/technology floor highlights their contributions to America's space program.

With approximately 80,000 square feet of exhibit space, the State Museum is one of the largest museums in the Southeast. Plans are to expand exhibit space during the coming years to 101,000 square feet. There are approximately 370,000 square feet in the Columbia Mills Building, which houses the museum. Of that total, the State Museum takes up 202,663 square feet. On the average, exhibits in the art gallery, Carolina Gallery and Palmetto Gallery change every 6 to 8 weeks, assuring visitors of new and exciting exhibits throughout the year.

The State Museum has well over 30,000 objects in its collections, although not all of them are on exhibit. Objects not exhibited are stored within the museum or in a large warehouse off the premises. The museum gift shop, the Cotton Mill Exchange, contains approximately 3,000 square feet. That's almost three times larger than the average size of museum gift shops nationally. The Cotton Mill Exchange carries a unique selection of merchandise related to the museum exhibits or to the Palmetto State. The first Sunday of each month is recognized as "Free Sunday" at the State Museum, when visitors are admitted free. Membership in the Friends of the State Museum is open to anyone interested in joining. Privileges include free admission to the museum as long as membership is current, a subscription to "Images," the State Museum's quarterly newsletter, and a 20 percent discount in the museum store, the Cotton Mill Exchange.