

The Charleston Museum Debuts a Special Exhibition to Honor Its 250th Anniversary

The Charleston Museum, located on Meeting Street in downtown Charleston, SC, is pleased to announce its 250th anniversary exhibit, *America's First Museum: 250 Years of Collecting, Preserving, and Educating*, on view in two parts through Jan. 7, 2024.

The Museum's collection celebrates the natural and cultural history of the South Carolina Lowcountry. Today, the Museum's collections, which include over 2.4 million objects, are unmatched in their interpretive value to South Carolina history and the nation.

Part one of *America's First Museum: 250 Years of Collecting, Preserving, and Educating* began on Dec. 17, 2022, and displays objects that span its impressive history. As a key seaport in the American South, the Museum's collections came in from every corner of the globe before they took on a more Lowcountry South Carolina focus in the 20th century.

Accordingly, the exhibit reflects diverse collections. Highlights include objects from ancient Rome, Sumerian cuneiforms, a chief's helmet from the Sandwich Islands acquired in 1798, Japanese Samurai armor, the earliest known Charleston sampler, the suit worn at the Court of St. James by Thomas Pinckney when minister to Great Britain, and exquisite fans made by African American craftsman Tobias Scott.

Opening mid-2023, part two of the exhibit will showcase a church pew made by enslaved hands measuring 20 feet in length, centuries-old Archaic carved bone pins, a skull from the largest known flying bird, and a couture Fortuny gown.

"It is an incredible privilege for all of us at the Charleston Museum to curate and offer an exhibit as special as this," said Carl Borick, Director, The Charleston Museum, and primary author of *The Charleston Museum: America's First Museum*. "Bringing in objects from our five major collections and a tremendous group effort



Outside the current Charleston Museum

by our curatorial and exhibits team, this engaging exhibit not only highlights the history of the Museum but also documents the history of our area, both the positive and the difficult, through these wonderful collection pieces."

The Charleston Museum, founded in 1773 and considered America's first museum, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located at 360 Meeting Street in downtown Charleston. The Museum is home to the most extensive collection of South Carolina-related natural and cultural history materials known, two National Historic Landmark Houses and the Dill Sanctuary, a 580-acre wildlife preserve. The Museum's mission is to educate Charleston area residents and visitors about the natural and cultural history of the South Carolina Lowcountry through collections, exhibitions, preservation, conservation, research, and related programming. Museum exhibits provide a comprehensive overview of the South Carolina Lowcountry, while its historic houses offer insight into the families that owned the properties, the people they enslaved, and historic Charleston architecture. The Dill Sanctuary is only available for special scheduled programs.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 843/722-2996 or visit (<https://www.charlestonmuseum.org/>).

History of The Charleston Museum

On Jan. 12, 2022, The Charleston Museum marked the 250th anniversary of the founding of a "museum," that would eventually become the wonderful institution we know today. Comprised of some of the leading learned men of the colony of South Carolina, the Charlestown Library Society was responsible for the creation of this museum. Some of the Society's members who helped found it, such as Thomas Heyward, Jr., and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, had studied law at Middle Temple in London, and were surely influenced in this new endeavor by their exposure to the British Museum, the two being just over a mile apart.



Pages from the 1798 accessions book, the earliest surviving record of the Museum collections, listing donated objects. Courtesy of the Charleston Library Society, Charleston, SC.

At their Jan. 12, 1773 meeting, Lt. Governor William Bull, president of the Charlestown Library Society, proposed that a committee be appointed "for collecting materials for promoting a natural History of this Province," the genesis of the Museum. The Society's prospectus announced that "taking into their consideration, the many advantages and great credit that would result to this province, from a full and accurate natural history of the same," they "have appointed a committee of their number to collect and prepare materials for that purpose." They asked gentlemen, especially those residing "in the country," to procure and send them "all the natural productions, either animal,

vegetable or mineral...with accounts of the various soils, rivers, waters, springs, & c., and the most remarkable appearances of the different parts of the country."

Accordingly, the Society "fitted up a Museum for the reception and preservation of specimens of these several natural productions," and appointed Thomas Heyward, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Alexander Baron, and Peter Fayssoux to receive them, who we can consider the Museum's first curators.

What was the Society trying to accomplish in this endeavor? The answer is obtained by looking closely at its prospectus. With regard to plants and trees, they

asked that the best accounts be given of their uses and virtues, either in agriculture, commerce or medicine. Of the fossils, minerals, ores, soils, clays, marls, sands, and shells, they sought "the best accounts of their several natures, qualities, situation and uses." They wished to collect and learn more about these resources to further enrich the agricultural and economic success of South Carolina. Simply stated, their purpose was to educate themselves and others, the common thread between the reason for the original museum's founding and the modern Museum's mission. Today, the Museum's collections, exhibits, and programs have a different

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Stand with Ukraine

If you are able here is a list of the Top-Rated Charities to help the Ukrainian Relief Effort.

From MSNBC Special: [UkraineAnsweringTheCall.com](https://www.msnbc.com/news/ukraine-answering-the-call)

[Click Here to See CNBC for Individual Links Below](#)

Medical Services

UNICEF USA
International Medical Corps
Heart to Heart International
Mercy Corps
World Vision

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Heart to Heart International
Catholic Relief Services
GlobalGiving
World Hope International
Convoy of Hope
UNICEF USA
ActionAid USA
World Help
Operation Blessing International
International Relief Teams
Water Mission
World Vision

Medical Supplies

Americares
Project C.U.R.E. World Vision
MAP International
Heart to Heart International
UNICEF USA
MedShare
Direct Relief
Project HOPE
Operation USA

Emergency Housing

World Vision
UNICEF USA
A Chance In Life
World Help
Islamic Relief USA
GlobalGiving
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Catholic Relief Services

Non-Medical Supplies

Operation USA
Mercy Corps
Americares
Matthew 25: Ministries
MedShare
International Relief Teams
World Help
Project HOPE
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Operation Blessing International
GlobalGiving
ActionAid USA
UNICEF USA
Save the Children
Episcopal Relief & Development
Catholic Relief Services
World Hope International
Good360

Long-Term Assistance

Center for Disaster Philanthropy
Catholic Relief Services
World Help
Operation Blessing International

Other (cash/cash vouchers, logistic supply)

World Vision
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Islamic Relief USA
Heart to Heart International
Church World Service
ActionAid USA
Americares
Samaritan's Purse
UNICEF USA



Randolph Hall at the College of Charleston, where the Museum was housed from 1852 to 1907. Courtesy of the Charleston Library Society, Charleston, SC.

endgame but the same rationale – so that people can learn.

We will never know what the "gentleman in the country" contributed to those early collections since the Fire of 1778 destroyed them and associated records. We do know that collecting resumed by the 1790s and the Museum was located on the third floor of the State House, now the Charleston County Courthouse. The institution had strayed from its initial South Carolina focus, however, as evidenced by the earliest known collections records, an accession book in the holdings of the Charleston Library Society. Although acquisitions included a "beautiful species of spider" caught by Thomas Branford Smith on his piazza, most of the remaining objects came from other parts of the world. Since Charleston was one of the key ports in the southeast, with goods coming in from every corner of the globe, this collecting trend continued throughout the nineteenth century.

The Library Society transferred the

Museum collections to the Literary and Philosophical Society of South Carolina in 1815. Under its guidance, the collections continued to grow, and were enhanced by contributions from prominent naturalists such as Joel Poinsett, Stephen Elliott, John Edwards Holbrook, and the Reverend John Bachman. Despite a compelling exhibition of its materials in the 1820s, the Museum still lacked permanency, however, and it moved around the City, including locations on Chalmers Street, Broad and Church Streets, and even a "low wooden building" on the grounds of the Medical College (now MUSC). The College of Charleston eventually acquired the collection and combined it with those of Francis Holmes and Bachman to open the Museum on the third floor of Randolph Hall in 1852, which initiated greater stability. The College's Trustees appointed Holmes as curator.

According to Charleston's Daily Courier, this new version of the Museum was

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