

# **Minutes of South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum Commission**

(May 15, 2025)

The South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum Commission met on May 15, 2025, at 10:30 am in the Conference Room located in the Columbia Mills Building at 301 Gervais Street. A notice was put on the website May 13, 2025 and sent out to the news media. The meeting was conducted in person.

Commission Members present: Voight Shealy, Walter Curry and Leland Summers

Commission Members attending remotely: Sam Howell, Martha Van Schaick

Staff Members present: Rachel Cockrell

A copy of the Agenda and Summary Notes of the March 20, 2025 meeting, as well as all other handouts, were emailed to each Commissioner prior to the meeting.

## **I. Greetings to the Commission, Members of the Media, and Visitors**

Chairperson Voight Shealy called the meeting to order at 10:35. A quorum was present. Members were thanked for their attendance, and Mr. Roberson's absence was noted.

## **II. Review of March 20 Meeting Summary Notes**

The Notes were approved for information. Minutes of last official meeting on August 15, 2024 were reviewed. Mr. Summers moved and Mrs. Van Schaick seconded. They were unanimously approved.

## **III. Old Business**

- A.** Mrs. Cockrell reported in Mr. Roberson's place. There has not been any progress on getting new appointees for the three empty slots on the Commission. There is a backlog in all three appointing bodies (House, Senate, Governor's Office) for Commission appointees all over the state, and Allen's health issues have not allowed him time to pursue the issue. Mr. Shealy is aware of Mr. Roberson's illness. Mr. Summers asked if standing Commissioners could do anything to move the process along. Discussion of which appointing body needs to be approached concluded that if Commissioners had reason to be in contact with the heads of the House or Senate, they could ask about appointees. Mrs. Cockrell agreed to distribute to the Commission a list of our Commission vacancies sorted by appointing body.<sup>1</sup> After the Summer would be best to bring up the topic.
- B.** Columbia Mills Construction project has been completed. The last issue for our Museum, the Ripcord Diorama base damaged by construction equipment, was repaired by the State Museum's exhibits department staff. The Main Gallery carpet that was damaged by a flood unrelated to the Atrium construction will

hopefully be replaced later in the summer.

- C. The Collection Storage Project is in the “moving back in” stage. The Education Room was used for temporary storage when the Collection was moved off of the shelves and into the crates. That was a faster process than moving back in, because the boxes have to be opened and the objects examined before they are placed on the trays in the cabinets. The Commissioners attending the meeting in person will be taking a tour of the Storage space after the conclusion of the meeting. We still do not have a definite completion date for the project.

#### **IV. Ongoing Museum Operation - FY 25 Budget & FY26 Budget Request**

- A. FY26 Budget Request - The Budget requests were reviewed. All are non-recurring expenses, which may be viewed more favorably by the funding bodies. The Budget is still under consideration and has not yet gone to the Governor.

1. \$150,000 to buy two Conrad Wise Chapman paintings of Civil War Charleston.
2. \$750,000 for an exhibit on the international aspects of the American Civil War that will combine the McRae Papers Collection with the Corky Huey Collection.
3. \$500,000 for upgrades and updates to the Main Gallery to refresh the Permanent exhibit space.
4. \$30,000 to make the SC Vietnam veterans’ oral interviews readily available to the public through transcription, digitization, and publishing on the website.

Total appropriation under consideration by the House and Senate is \$1,763,194.

- B. FY25 Plans and Projects – major items happening during the remainder of the fiscal year.

1. Administrative Assistant Hilary Brannock, the Museum’s Revolutionary War specialist, is taking a research trip next week to Philadelphia to the Museum of the American Revolution to speak to their staff and view their exhibits. We hope to be able to borrow some artifacts from them for our own Rev War exhibit that was suggested strongly by the Governor’s office. Mr. Shealy emphasized that there is a lot of money available through grants for Rev War 250<sup>th</sup> events. This exhibit will be mounted in the Cistern Gallery after Vietnam closes, and will precede the Civil War exhibit.
2. Moving the Collection back into the new storage space.

- C. Concerns for the last quarter of FY25 –

1. School tours have a couple of weeks left. The State Museum sends us a list of schools that have booked with them, and how many students are expected. Some, but not all, filter back through the Atrium to us. James Bryan, one of our Front Desk staffers, retired from the state Department of Education, is developing maps showing the coverage of

counties and school districts that have visited us. Some days there are over 600 students in the building. This has helped our visitation, which was zero from June to December.

2. Spending the remaining funding which exceeds our allowed carryforward. We have unexpended funds from the Chief Curator salary, as well as funding for exhibits and educational programs. We are buying a Civil War uniform and some new office furniture, and installing a new security camera system. Another possibility is to advance more funds to Facilities Management for the renovation of the Gist Gallery.

D. Accountability Report for FY 24 was offered for review, having been sent out prior to the last meeting.

E. Programs

1. Noon Debrief schedule for the early summer was handed out. While the Ed Room is unavailable, we have partnered with the Richland County Main Library and the Lexington County Library – Cayce branch to host our lectures.
2. Joe Long, Curator of Education, is a sword specialist. Swordfest is continuing to increase attendance, and more groups want to be presenters. Joe has interest from many fencing clubs and sword tournaments where he is giving presentations and expanding our outreach. He also gives talks on a variety of other subjects to clubs and groups, and the outreach numbers add to our visitation stats. Mrs. Cockrell will be sending updated visitation figures out with the Minutes of this meeting, once Mr. Roberson has compiled them.<sup>ii</sup> Mr. Summers shared that he had heard many positive comments on Swordfest.

F. Staffing issues –

1. Chief Curator still hasn't been hired. Mr. Roberson has been unable to make contact with the references for our prime candidate. The candidate is still available and interested, and Mr. Roberson is staying in touch with them.
2. Chelsea Sigourney, Curator of Exhibits and Collections, has reduced her hours to part-time since the birth of her daughter and will be leaving the Museum sometime this summer. The Collections Department will be restructured, hopefully by elevating current staff to supervisory positions and by promoting a part-timer to full-time. The work load requires two full-time and one part-time staff to handle the processing of incoming artifacts.

V. **Palmetto State Military History Foundation Status and Report**

The Treasurer's report shows two new large donations to the Foundation. Total in the account is now \$29,066.05.

- VI. **Nomination of new Commission Officers** – Mr. Shealy read the portion of the Bylaws dealing with regulations on nominating officers. He opened the floor for nominations for Chairman and Vice Chairman. Walter Curry nominated Leland Summers for Chairman. There were no other nominations for Chairman. Sam Howell nominated Walter Curry

for Vice Chairman. There were no other nominations for Vice Chairman. The official vote will occur at the next meeting of the Commission. Mr. Shealy stated that it has been a huge honor to serve as Chairman, and all the other members thanked him for his excellent service.

**VII. Next Commission Meeting Date Thursday, July 17, 2025 at 10:30**

Mr. Shealy emphasized the vital importance of everyone attending the next meeting so that elections can be held.

Mrs. Van Schaick related the story of her granddaughter's school visit to the Museum with her daughter-in-law as a chaperone. The comments of many of the other parents, particularly the fathers, regarding Joe Long's sword presentation and storytelling were highly complimentary. Other Commissioners concurred with the opinion that Joe is a treasure. Dr. Curry related the positive feedback he has received from those to whom he has given free passes. Other Commissioners can be given free passes to distribute, as well. They will be mailed to Mr. Howell and Mrs. Van Schaick.

Mr. Summers updated the Commission on this year's celebration of Confederate Memorial Day, which was held on May 3 in Abbeville at Secession Hill. It included the dedication of a new monument to the Women of the South. There was a very large attendance.

The meeting was adjourned by acclamation at 11:25.

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<sup>i</sup> Governor's appointees: 3 vacant; House appointees: Martha Van Schaick, Samuel Howell, Walter Curry; Senate appointees: Voight Shealy, Leland Summers, William Blanton.

<sup>ii</sup> Visitation figures from July 2024 through April 2025 come to 19,170. This is dramatically lower than usual because the Museum was closed to the public during the Atrium Construction Project from June 1-December 6, 2024.