SOUTH CAROLINA STATE MUSEUM

Meeting of the State Museum Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 28th, 2025

Commissioners Present: Chairman John F. McCabe, Lori Arledge, Sharon Bryant, Gray Culbreath, Dr. Alexander Patrick, Jed Suddeth

Commissioners Absent: Robin McNair

Staff Present: Amy Bartow-Melia, Doug Beermann, Sonja Bradford, Hunter Brazell, Jeff Brodie, Clayton Evans, Tom Falvey, Emily Gallo, Dorothy Hall, Paul Matheny, Greyson Smith, Timia Thompson, Jennifer Thrailkill

Others Present: Tony Denny and Annie Wilson

I. **Call to Order:** The May meeting of the South Carolina State Museum Commission was called to order at 11:32am by Chairman John F. McCabe.

II. **Approval of minutes:** The minutes from the March 27th 2025 Commission meeting, joined with the Museum Foundation Board, were approved unanimously.

III. **Welcome New Staff:** Museum Executive Director Amy Bartow-Melia introduced Dr. Jeffrey Brodie, Chief Engagement and Content Officer, to the Commission. Dr. Brodie will oversee the Audience Engagement, Collections Management, and Curatorial Affairs departments.

IV. **Legislative Update:** Emily Gallo presented an update that the State was supportive of each of the Museum's budget requests, including funding towards the Reimagine the Experience campaign. Included in the budget request is recurring funding for rent which will permit the Museum to expand into the 1st and 4th floors of the "West Wing" of Columbia Mills.

V. **Executive Director's Report:** Ms. Gallo shared that the final draft of the museum's Strategic Plan is in its design phase and will be presented to the Commission at the July meeting.

Ms. Bartow-Melia gave an overview of the Museum's finances, including anticipated carryover and fund balances.

Doug Beermann, Chief Revenue & Operations Officer, gave an update on the Museum's FY25 revenue projection as well as attendance overview. Mr. Beermann presented a graph displaying the success of blockbuster exhibition *Heroes and Villains: The Art of the Disney Costume*. Mr. Beermann credited the Heroes and Villains staff who are experts on the exhibition for creating an excellent guest experience. Additionally, images of the Museum's new security camera system were shown.

Sonja Bradford, Chief Human Resources and Administrative Officer, updated the Commission on recently onboarded full time staff, including those positions that are new to the Museum team. Ms. Bradford also gave an overview of the museum's vacancies and onboarding in the new fiscal year.

Dorothy Hall, Director of Visitor Services, presented the effects of tariffs to the Museum Store. Ms. Hall shared examples of updated pricing that will be phased in within the next several months to maintain the Store's margins.

Ms. Bartow-Melia presented data from a survey measuring the value of history museum experiences conducted by the Institute for Learning Innovation, of which the State Museum was a part. The Museum was one of 12 institutions to participate in this national survey.

Paul Matheny, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Chief Curator, gave several Curatorial department updates. These include:

- An update on cancelled grant funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The Museum received this funding to digitize the State's collection. Total grant funding lost includes $13,434 for SciTech inventory digitization, and $243,352 for Natural History digitization. Both terminations have been appealed.
- An overview of the purpose of the Abandoned Cultural Property board and state code of law.
- An overview of the current and upcoming exhibitions through 2026.
- A look at objects that will be included in the upcoming art exhibition From the Vault which will highlight art in the Museum's collection and mark the reopening of the Lipscomb Gallery following extensive renovation.
- An update on the Native Communities gallery closure and upcoming exhibit which will highlight these communities.
- A preview of design concepts for the upcoming exhibition 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.
- An announcement that the SCSM and the South Carolina Athletic Hall of Fame have signed an MOU. Several cases will be placed in the Museum Lobby this summer highlighting this year's inductees.

Timia Thompson, Collections Outreach Manager, presented an updated MOU between the Museum and the South Carolina Federation of Museums. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the updated draft MOU for presentation to the South Carolina Federation of Museums.

Tom Falvey, Director of Innovation Experiences, announced the next traveling exhibition that will come to the Museum called Bird Photographers of the Year, which highlights international bird photography award winners. The Museum will supplement this exhibition with art and natural history objects from the collection that highlight South Carolina's birds. The show will be in the Blockbuster Gallery.

Mr. Matheny presented a list of 18 objects to be deaccessioned from the collection, and a list of reasons for the Museum to deaccession objects. The Museum Commission unanimously voted to move forward with deaccessioning the objects that were presented.

Ms. Bartow-Melia shared upcoming public programs at the Museum as well as programs related to the Heroes and Villains exhibition. Further details regarding the 5k and Gala will be presented at the July meeting.

VI. **Foundation Updates:** Ms. Bartow-Melia provided a financial update for the SCSM Foundation. Ms. Bartow-Melia also provided an overview of each fund balance for the Foundation accounts, including funds raised for the Reimagine the Experience capital campaign.

Ms. Bartow-Melia informed the Commission that the Foundation Board hired an executive search firm to identify a new Foundation Director. Their work will begin early June.

Hunter Brazell, Donor Relations Specialist, shared that funds raised YTD via donations and annual fund gifts in FY25.

Clayton Evans, Membership Manager, provided an overview of membership and revenue. Total membership funds raised YTD will exceed the five-year record by the end of this FY.

Mr. Evans also provided an update on the Foundation and Museum collaborating to identify a CRM (customer relationship management system) that will benefit all departments and allow for ease of data analysis and gathering. Two systems are identified as potential options that will meet all needs, and the Foundation has pledged financial support.

VII. **Old & New Business:** None to report.

VIII. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 12:35pm by the Chairman. The next Museum Commission meeting will take place on Wednesday, July 30th at 11:30am.