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Article and Photos
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Day Trip Destinations



Rails & Mills, Mining & Moonshining

You'll probably embark on a lot of day trips before you find another museum with the subject diversity of the Cherokee County History and Arts Museum. Under one roof, you can learn about American Indian hunting and technology methods; the frontier era in the upstate; Revolutionary War and Civil War history; and the importance of railroads, limestone mines, cotton mills and fruit farms to the county's progress.

tandem bicycle suspended above it. Vintage hats and costumes are displayed in different rooms. You'll peek in on a humble Depression-era kitchen, a small town doctor's office from the mid-1900s and a house of worship from our great-grandparents' day. The works of area artists, potters and crafters are showcased. The county's proud legacies in football, lacrosse and other high school and college sports are memorialized.

Then there are the facets of Cherokee County's legacy that might surprise you, like moonshining and horse racing.

Remarkably, the museum has been open only since last May. What's really exciting to Cherokee County historians is that the exhibits—some of them sponsored by area families and already impressive in scope—occupy only a fraction of the available space. Enthusiastic supporters are contributing additional artifacts, and officials plan to make increasing use of the building's size.

The museum is housed in a former school on three-and-a-half acres in the heart of Gaffney, within walking distance of Limestone College. "Compared to most museums, we have a lot of space available—about 23,000 square feet," says Billy Pennington, director. "We have about 5,000 square feet developed for exhibit space already."

Pennington, a Gaffney native, was a school history teacher for eight years before assuming his new post in June 2007. "I

wanted to use my teaching and curriculum background to help develop another

educational resource for the county," he says. Results of his vision include hands-on children's displays (the museum at this early stage has become a popular destination for school classes and day-care groups), "Did You Know?" and "Legend Has It... " teasers, and glossaries explaining antiquated terms used in some of the exhibit descriptions. "We want it to be a place where visitors can

featuring a suitcase-size meteorite ploved up by a local farmer. Here's a tribute to Gaffney's bicycle repair shop, "The Motorcycle Hospital," with an antique

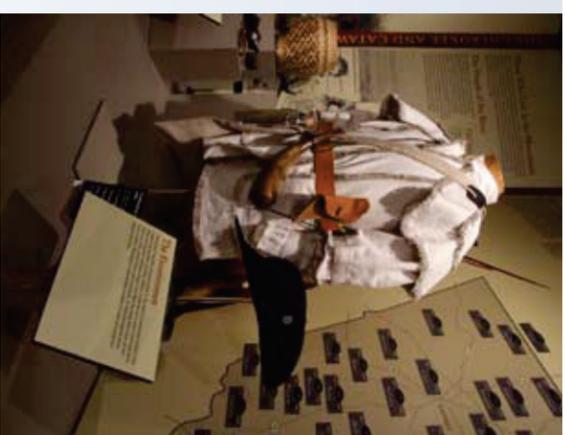


be involved with what they're learning."

While displays are professionally designed and presented with meticulous attention to accuracy, the museum is anything but artificial. "We wanted to retain the 'grandma's attic' feel, with lots and lots of artifacts," Pennington points out. "It triggers memories for people when they can see the actual item, not just a replica of it or a panel about it."

As its name implies, the museum blends history with the arts. A 90-foot, wrap-around mural in 13 connected panels by artist Bill Briggs is based on accounts of the Battle of Cowpens, fought nearby during the Revolution. "Since we have Kings Mountain and Cowpens so close, one of our focuses is on life in the back country during that period," Pennington says.

"What drew area people into the Revolutionary War? They had few connections with the wealthy plantation patriots of the Low Country, but the brutalities of Banastre Tarleton and other British commanders



drove them into it."

American Indian history here is not limited to that of the Cherokee people, from whom the county gets its name. The region also was a bountiful hunting ground for the Catawba, Creek and others. Key facets of their culture are depicted. So is the daily lifestyle of white settlers, beginning during perilous frontier times. Inside a scale replica of Fort Thicketty (the original was built by the French during the mid-1700s), children can deck themselves in colonial-style clothes.

Area geology is another major focal topic. Exhibits illustrate the mining of limestone and iron ore and their uses. "Mining is still important in Cherokee County,"



Pennington notes. Other thematic areas inside the museum are devoted to mill workers, farm families, the Depression years (two Civilian Conservation Corps camps were located here), the history of Limestone College (founded in 1845) and the evolution of local energy projects (celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Gaston Shoals/Dravo hydroelectric plant on the Broad River).

The City of Gaffney, of course, is a destination for history buffs from far and near. Irish immigrant Michael Gaffney, its namesake, settled on 815 acres here in 1803 and became a successful merchant and tavern keeper as well as a militia commander during the War of 1812. The museum houses a detailed model of the Michael Gaffney log home and a special section remembering the Gaffney family; it includes a large Bible with a deer skin cover, dating to 1788.

The museum site was the mustering ground for the area regiment of the South Carolina Militia for many years, beginning during the War of 1812. In all, Cherokee County—incorporated in 1897 from portions of Spartanburg, Union and York counties—has 755 designated historic sites.

A video documenting the founding of Gaffney plays in the orientation theatre at the museum's entrance. Irish ballads and black gospel recordings add to the ambience in special areas of the museum. A research room is available for genealogists and historians; other research rooms house local Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) materials.

The museum is a function of the Cherokee Historical and Preservation Society (CHAPS). Annual CHAPS events include a holiday home tour, quilt show, antique car show, pottery show and Historic Hayride and Ghost Walk.

The museum is at 301 College



Drive (corner of College Drive and South Johnson Street). Drive time from the Spartanburg area is about 30 minutes. Hours are 10-4, Wednesday-Friday; 2-5, Saturday-Sunday. It is open by appointment at other times. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children under 12. Visit the Web site at www.cherokeecountyhistory.org or phone (864) 489-3988 for more information about the museum and related events.



Here are furnace bellows, an ore car in a primitive mine shaft, and other remnants from the state's Old Iron District. Here is a wall hung with century-old farm implements. Here is a geology exhibit

