



SOUTH CAROLINA FEDERATION OF MUSEUMS ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

Witness to History: Place, Storytelling & Collective Memory
SEPTEMBER 9-11, 2026 | Aiken, SC

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

8:30am – 12:30pm

Registration & Check-In

Attendees participating in pre-conference activities should register and check in at their respective activity locations.

9:00am – 4:00pm

Pre-conference Activities: Attendees will meet at activity locations. Transportation not provided.

- **9am – 12pm** White Gloves Gang
 - Group A: Wagener Museum, 187 Park Street NE, Wagener, SC 29164
 - Group B: Horse Creek – Midland Valley Historical Museum, 3181 Augusta Rd, Burnetown, SC 29851
- **10am – 12pm** History Hop Trolley Tour, 406 Park Avenue SE, Aiken, SC 29801 (Cost: \$15)
- **1:30 pm – 4:30 pm** Caring for Historic Textiles: Part II – Storage & Display Mounting w/ The Conservation Labs, ACHM Preservation Work Room, Aiken County Library, 314 Chesterfield St S, Aiken, SC 29801

5:30pm – 7:00pm

Registration & Check-In, Savannah River Site Museum, 224 Laurens St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

6:00pm-7:30pm

Welcome Reception

Savannah River Site Museum, 224 Laurens St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

7:30pm- 9:00pm

SCFM Member Meet-Up: Good Girl Brewing Company, 880 Banks Bill Rd SE, Aiken, SC 29801

8:00pm- 9:00pm

Haunted Aiken Walking Tour, Milton Shealy Funeral Home, 277 Park Ave SW, Aiken, SC (Cost: \$15)

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2026

8:30am – 12:00pm

Registration & Check-in, Aiken County Historical Museum, 433 Newberry St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

9:30am – 10:30am – Concurrent Morning Sessions

- **Rebuilding with Purpose: Revitalizing a Museum Volunteer Program in a Post-COVID World**
 - Jessica Olin, South Carolina State Museum
- **From Governance to Greatness: Activating Museum Boards for Strategic Impact**
 - Robin Waites, Robin Waites Consulting
- **The PastPort Program: Marketing History as Adventure**
 - Lauren Virgo, Aiken County Historical Museum

10:45am – 11:45am – Concurrent Late-Morning Sessions

- **The Community is the Museum: Moving Beyond Traditional Museum Walls**
 - Laura Jowdy, Congressional Medal of Honor Society
 - Bob Heussner, American Battlefield Trust
- **Using Informed Imagination to Connect the Past to the Present**
 - Brittney Evans, Revolutionary War Visitor Center
- **A Place for Memory: How South Carolina's First Civil Rights Museum Is Transforming Orangeburg**
 - Cecil Williams, South Carolina Civil Rights History Museum

12:00pm – 1:30pm

Lunch

Café Scientifique – Aiken, 203 Laurens St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

1:30pm – 4:00pm

Registration & Check-in, Center for African American History, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC), 120 York St NE, Aiken, SC 29801

1:45pm – 2:45pm – Concurrent Afternoon Sessions

- **Memory, Meaning & Narratives of Memorialization: Acts of Commemoration and Concepts of Social Transformation**
 - Dr. Frank Martin, South Carolina State University
 - Dr. Alison McLetchie, South Carolina State University
 - George Wingard, Savannah River Site
- **ROOTED: The Power of Place & Story in Executive Leadership**
 - Dr. La Ruchala Murphy, Sumter County Gallery of Art
- **When the Plan Fails: Creative Problem Solving in Art Installation**
 - Joseph Kendrick, Carolina Art Services

3:00pm – 4:00pm – Concurrent Late-Afternoon Sessions

- **Historic Brattonsville: Exploring the Benefits and Challenges of Working with African American and White Descendents**
 - Dr. Lisa Bratton, Tuskegee University
- **Unbuilding CCI: The Afterlife of the South Carolina State Penitentiary and the Limits of Preservation and Public Memory**
 - Justine Truc, University of South Carolina, Department of History
- **Bankruptcy to Best-in-Class: The Greer Heritage Museum Turnaround**
 - David Lovegrove, Greer Heritage Museum

4:00pm – 6:00pm

Explore Aiken (on your own)

6:30pm – 8:30pm

Awards Dinner and Silent Auction

Aiken County Historical Museum, 433 Newberry St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

9:00pm – until

SCFM Members Meet-Up: SCFM Members Meet-Up: The Aiken Alley, The Alley SW, Aiken, SC

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2026

8:00am – 9:00am

Registration, Center for African American Heritage, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC), 120 York St NE, Aiken, SC 29801

9:00am – 10:30am

Keynote Breakfast w/ George Wingard, Savannah River Site

Center for African American Heritage, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC)

10:30am -11:00am

Annual Business Meeting

Center for African American Heritage, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC)

12:00pm

(Optional) – Explore Aiken's Makin' Festival, Downtown Aiken

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2026

8:30am – 12:30pm -Registration & Check-In

Attendees participating in pre-conference activities should register and check in at their respective activity locations.

9:00am – 4:00pm -Pre-conference Activities *Transportation not provided.

9am – 12pm White Gloves Gang

White Glove Gang: Behind-the-Scenes Museum Work at the Wagener Museum

Maximum Capacity: 20 participants.

Meet at Wagener Museum, 287 Park St NE, Wagener, SC 29164

Roll up your sleeves and experience museum work firsthand with this special White Glove Gang volunteer opportunity at the Wagener Museum. Participants will assist with a variety of meaningful collections care projects, including exhibit cleaning, artifact photography, and creating custom mounts for museum objects. Working alongside museum staff, you'll help preserve and document local history while gaining practical, hands-on experience in collections management. No prior museum experience is required, all skill levels are welcome, and training will be provided. Lunch will be provided by the Wagener Museum as a thank-you for your support. Whether you're a seasoned museum professional or simply curious about behind-the-scenes museum work, this is a fun and rewarding way to contribute while learning new skills.

White Glove Gang: Collections Care at the Horse Creek–Midland Valley Historical Museum

Maximum Capacity: 20 participants

Meet at Horse Creek-Midland Valley Museum, 3181 Augusta Rd, Burnetown, SC 29829

Step behind the scenes at the Horse Creek–Midland Valley Historical Museum and help preserve local history through a variety of hands-on collections projects. White Glove Gang volunteers will assist with scanning historic photographs, photographing artifacts, basic cataloging, and creating archival mounts and enclosures for items such as newspapers, booklets, prints, and other paper-based materials. Working alongside museum staff and volunteers, participants will gain practical experience in collections care while making a meaningful contribution to the museum's preservation efforts. No prior experience is necessary—all skill levels are welcome, and training will be provided. Lunch will be generously provided by the Horse Creek–Midland Valley Historical Museum volunteer team.

10am – 12pm History Hop Trolley Tour (\$15)

Maximum Capacity: 15 participants (Pre-registration required.)

Climb aboard for a fun and informative ride through Aiken's rich history! This guided trolley tour offers a unique introduction to the city's museums, historic neighborhoods, and iconic landmarks while learning about the people and stories that have shaped Aiken over the years.

Volunteer guides will share historical tidbits and local insights as you travel between museum sites. Along the way, you'll enjoy two 30-minute stops to explore the **Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame & Museum** and the **Aiken Visitors Center & Train Museum**. The trolley will also pass by the **Savannah River Site Museum**, **Aiken County Historical Museum**, and the **Center for African American History, Art and Culture**, giving you a preview of sites you'll have the opportunity to explore during the conference.

The tour begins and ends at the **Aiken Visitors Center & Train Museum** (406 Park Avenue SE, Aiken, SC 29801). The trolley is fully accessible.

Tour Stops:

- Aiken Visitors Center & Train Museum
- Savannah River Site Museum (drive-by)
- Aiken County Historical Museum (drive-by)
- Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame & Museum (30-minute stop)
- Center for African American History, Art and Culture (drive-by)

1:30pm – 4:30pm Caring for Historic Textiles: Part II – Storage & Display Mounting w/ The Conservation Labs

Building on last year's session, this hands-on workshop explores safe and effective mounting systems for the storage and display of historic textiles. Participants will learn conservation-approved techniques designed to minimize stress and prevent damage to textiles while improving accessibility for exhibition and storage. Whether your collection includes clothing, quilts, samplers, or flags, this session will provide practical solutions for your institution.

Please note: attending last year's workshop is not a prerequisite for this session.

5:30pm – 7:00pm

Registration & Check-in, Savannah River Site Museum, 224 Laurens St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

6:00pm-7:30pm – Welcome Reception, Savannah River Site Museum, 224 Laurens St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

Mix and mingle with colleagues old and new during this evening welcome reception hosted by the Savannah River Site Museum.

7:30pm- 9:00pm – SCFM Meet-Up

Good Girl Brewing Company, 880 Banks Bill Rd SE, Aiken, SC 29801

Unwind after a long day of traveling, touring, and networking. All are welcome! Just show up!

8:00pm- 9:00pm - Haunted Aiken Walking Tour, Milton Shealy Funeral Home, 277 Park Ave SW, Aiken, SC (\$15)

Maximum Capacity: 20 participants **(Pre-registration required.)**

This spook-tacular walking tour offers chilling tidbits combined with touches of Aiken's history. Join us on this nighttime tour as we share stories of spirits that still walk among us and search for the stubborn souls with ghost hunting tools to aid in the fun. You're sure to be delighted by this family-friendly ghoul tour. Please, for your safety and comfort, wear your favorite walking shoes.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2026

8:30am – 12:00pm

Registration & Check-in, Aiken County Historical Museum, 433 Newberry St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

Morning sessions will take place at the Aiken County Historical Museum.

9:30am – 10:30am – Concurrent Morning Sessions

Parlor

Rebuilding with Purpose: Revitalizing a Museum Volunteer Program in a Post-COVID World

Jessica Olin, South Carolina State Museum

This session explores rebuilding a museum volunteer program through intentional reengagement, clear expectations, and meaningful recognition. The presenter will share strategies including reconnecting long-term volunteers, creating a handbook, implementing role-based training, and leveraging volunteer management software. Attendees will participate in guided reflection and discussion to identify actionable improvements. Emphasizing relationship-building and strategic recruitment, the session highlights measurable outcomes like increased retention and satisfaction. Grounded in program evaluation, it offers practical tools and innovative approaches to strengthen volunteer programs. Participants will leave equipped to foster resilient, people-centered programs that elevate both volunteer experience and institutional impact.

Conference Room

From Governance to Greatness: Activating Museum Boards for Strategic Impact

Robin Waites, Robin Waites Consulting

Museum boards are often composed of accomplished, well-connected individuals—yet many institutions struggle to fully activate their boards as strategic partners. This session is designed for museum directors and board members who want to move beyond passive governance toward purposeful engagement and measurable impact.

We will begin with a brief framing of the current challenges in board engagement. Participants will then work through real-world scenarios (e.g., disengaged board members, unclear expectations, ineffective meetings, fundraising hesitancy) in small groups, identifying barriers and testing practical solutions. We will end with attendees having 1-2 actionable strategies tailored to their museum.

Participants will leave not only with new ideas, but with a clear sense of how to activate their boards as strategic assets—advancing both institutional effectiveness and the broader museum field.

Ballroom

The PastPort Program: Marketing History as Adventure

Lauren Virgo, Aiken County Historical Museum

In 2023, the Aiken County Historical Museum launched the PastPort Program, a collaborative marketing initiative designed to encourage residents and visitors to explore museums, historic sites, and cultural attractions throughout Aiken County.

Participants receive a free passport-style booklet and collect unique stamps as they visit each participating location. Those who complete the challenge by visiting all sites earn a certificate and prize from the museum.

What began as a local tourism and engagement effort has grown into a highly successful countywide partnership. Since its launch, the museum has produced three editions of the PastPort, distributing more than 25,000 copies and helping drive visitation across seventeen participating sites.

In this session, Aiken County Historical Museum staff will share the practical steps behind the program's development and success, including partnership building, program design, funding, printing, distribution, and promotion. Attendees will leave with ideas and strategies for creating collaborative visitation programs that increase engagement, strengthen community partnerships, and encourage audiences to view local cultural resources as part of a larger shared experience.

10:45am – 11:45am – Concurrent Late-Morning Sessions

Parlor

The Community is the Museum: Moving Beyond Traditional Museum Walls

Laura Jowdy, Congressional Medal of Honor Society

Bob Heussner, American Battlefield Trust

How important are the physical places where history happens? How do we identify and spread awareness of historic locations? How do we make the case for the physical in a digital world? Modern communities are built on history that is being lost in modern mindsets – that history exists everywhere, not just within physical museum walls. The Medal of Honor Valor Trail is an initiative developed by Congressional Medal of Honor Society and the American Battlefield Trust to identify and mark the physical places where America's military heroes lived, fought, and died, supported by an online presence. While it is a nationwide initiative, for local communities, it provides pride of place and a celebration of local history. This presentation will discuss development and marketing of such initiatives, showcase research for two case studies, and describe the process of marrying the physical with the development of an online presence.

Conference Room

Using Informed Imagination to Connect the Past to the Present

Brittney Evans, Revolutionary War Visitor Center

This session explores how museum professionals can use informed imagination—the blending of historical evidence with responsible interpretation—to bring the past to life through real and reconstructed voices. Grounded in primary sources, this approach creates engaging, human-centered narratives while thoughtfully filling gaps in the historical record. Participants will learn a clear, repeatable process for analyzing evidence, making supported inferences, and crafting authentic stories rooted in historical context. Emphasizing ethical interpretation to ensure imaginative elements remain accurate and transparent. By focusing on individual experiences, this method helps make history more accessible, inclusive, and relevant for modern audiences.

Ballroom

A Place for Memory: How South Carolina's First Civil Rights Museum Is Transforming Orangeburg

Cecil Williams, South Carolina Civil Rights History Museum

Discover the inspiring story behind the Cecil Williams Civil Rights Museum and its mission to honor South Carolina's vital contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. This session will provide an inside look at the journey to establish a permanent 11,000-square-foot museum at Railroad Corner in downtown Orangeburg, SC. Attendees will gain insight into the challenges faced in preserving this important history and learn how the museum is poised to become a cultural and educational cornerstone in the region. Join us for a compelling discussion on the intersection of history, place-making, and community impact.

12:00pm – 1:30pm - Lunch

Café Scientifique – Aiken, 203 Laurens St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

Pick up your boxed lunch at Café Scientifique, then enjoy lunch your way. Grab a table inside the café or take advantage of Aiken's beautiful September weather by relaxing along the museum parkways and green spaces. Before heading to your afternoon session, make the most of "Exhibit Hall Power Hour" by visiting our exhibitors, discovering new products and services, connecting with colleagues, and supporting the organizations that help make the SCFM Annual Conference possible.

1:30pm – 4:30pm

Registration & Check-in, Center for African American History, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC), 120 York St NE, Aiken, SC 29801.

Afternoon sessions will take place at the Center for African American History, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC).

1:45pm – 2:45pm – Concurrent Afternoon Sessions

Great Room

Memory, Meaning & Narratives of Memorialization: Acts of Commemoration and Concepts of Social Transformation

Dr. Frank Martin, South Carolina State University

Dr. Alison McLetchie, South Carolina State University

George Wingard, Savannah River Site

How do museums and cultural organizations thoughtfully interpret difficult histories, honor community experiences, and create meaningful spaces for reflection? This panel explores three case studies in public memory and memorialization: the documentary *We Came a Long Way By Faith*: Catholic Hill and St. James the Greater Catholic Church; the development of the Truth & Reconciliation Meditation Garden at Mepkin Abbey; and *REVELATIONS: The Art of Leo Twiggs* at the Gibbes Museum of Art, which includes a tribute to the victims of the Mother Emanuel church massacre.

Presenters will share practical lessons learned from each project, including community collaboration, oral history and research methods, memorial design, exhibition interpretation, and public engagement strategies. Through these examples, attendees will explore approaches for creating inclusive narratives, navigating sensitive topics, and developing programs and experiences that connect diverse audiences to place, history, and collective memory.

American Room 1

ROOTED: The Power of Place & Story in Executive Leadership

Dr. La Ruchala Murphy, Sumter County Gallery of Art

In an era of rapid change and shifting cultural expectations, executive leaders in museums are called not only to manage institutions—but to anchor them in meaning. *ROOTED* explores how place-based storytelling serves as a powerful leadership tool to deepen relevance, strengthen community trust, and guide strategic vision. This session invites museum executives and senior leaders to reimagine their role as chief storytellers, connecting institutional mission with the lived experiences, histories, and identities of the communities they serve.

Participants will gain practical frameworks for embedding storytelling into leadership practices, from board engagement and fundraising to programming and public positioning. Through real-world examples and an interactive activity, attendees will leave with actionable strategies to lead with authenticity, clarity, and cultural responsiveness.

American Room 2

When the Plan Fails: Creative Problem Solving in Art Installation

Joseph Kendrick, Carolina Art Services

Most installation plans assume things will go smoothly. They don't. What happens when the plan doesn't work? This session focuses on what happens when reality intervenes – when walls fail, objects resist, and standard methods fall short. Drawing on real-world examples from residential and institutional settings, Joseph Kendrick, an experienced art handler, reveals how complex problems are assessed, reframed, and solved under pressure.

Participants will learn how to recognize when best practices aren't enough, adapt in the moment, and communicate solutions with authority. Installation isn't just about placing objects – it's about them, preserving their meaning, and ensuring the story holds.

3:00pm – 4:00pm – Concurrent Late-Afternoon Sessions

Great Room

Historic Brattonsville: Exploring the Benefits and Challenges of Working with African American and White Descendents

Dr. Lisa Bratton, Tuskegee University

African American and white descendants of Brattonsville have confirmed a DNA familial connection which has strengthened their bond as family and members of descendant community.

This roundtable, consisting of members of both descendent groups, will present on their shared history and paths to reconciliation and discuss with participants what can be learned by engaging descendant groups. The roundtable will address, in part, how descendants can best be utilized in interpretation and other aspects of museum/plantation operations. The descendants have much to share from their six years of working together and much to learn from others. Brattonsville descendants will candidly share successes and challenges of their unique experience.

American Room 1

Unbuilding CCI: The Afterlife of the South Carolina State Penitentiary and the Limits of Preservation and Public Memory

Justine Truc, University of South Carolina, Department of History

This session examines the closure and afterlife of the Central Correctional Institution in Columbia, SC, to explore the challenges of interpreting sites of difficult history. Following its closure in the 1990s, debates emerged over transforming the grounds into a site of public history (NRHP eligible). Short-lived tours briefly opened the space, but no sustained public interpretation followed, and the site was ultimately demolished and redeveloped as condominiums. The session highlights the challenges of interpreting places that are not fully preserved and considers how museums and public history institutions might engage incomplete or contested histories.

American Room 2

Bankruptcy to Best-in-Class: The Greer Heritage Museum Turnaround

David Lovegrove, Greer Heritage Museum

In 2019, the Greer Heritage Museum was weeks from permanent closure. Today, the museum has \$100,000 in reserves, a boom in annual visitors and is celebrated as one of the city's crown jewels. This session details the strategic transformation: revitalization planning, community engagement through compelling events, partnership development, fundraising, and leveraging the city's sesquicentennial to demonstrate value. Attendees will learn practical strategies for achieving world-class results that exceed expectations, transforming relationships from adversarial to collaborative, and making rapid progress without resources. This is a roadmap for struggling small museums to move from crisis to excellence.

4:00pm – 6:00pm - Explore Aiken (on your own)

6:30pm – 8:30pm -Awards Dinner and Silent Auction, Aiken Area Historical Museum, 433 Newberry St SW, Aiken, SC 29801

Join us for an evening of celebration, camaraderie, and friendly competition at the SCFM Awards Dinner & Silent Auction, hosted by the Aiken County Historical Museum. Enjoy a seated dinner as we recognize outstanding achievements within South Carolina's museum community and celebrate the individuals and institutions making a difference across the state. Throughout the evening, browse and bid on unique silent auction items, with all proceeds supporting the Christopher T. Loblein Scholarship Fund, helping provide professional development opportunities for museum professionals and students.

9:00pm – until - SCFM Members Meet-Up

The Aiken Alley, The Alley SW, Aiken, SC

Meet at the downtown fountain to explore Aiken's Amp the Alley Fest. Unwind and network following at Downtown Alley Taproom, 214 The Alley SW, Aiken, SC 29801.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2026

8:00am – 9:00am

Registration & Check-in, Center for African American History, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC), 120 York St NE, Aiken, SC 29801.

9:00am – 10:30am -Keynote Breakfast w/ George Wingard

Center for African American History, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC)

10:30am -11:00am -Annual Business Meeting

Center for African American History, Art, and Culture (CAAHAC)

12:00pm – 2:30pm -(Optional) -Explore Aiken's Makin' Festival

Downtown Aiken, 406 Park Avenue SE, Aiken, SC 29801

Celebrate 50 years of one of South Carolina's most beloved traditions at Aiken's Makin' Arts & Crafts Show! Each September, historic downtown Aiken transforms into a vibrant outdoor marketplace featuring more than 250 juried artists and makers from across the Southeast, offering everything from fine art and handcrafted home décor to specialty foods and unique gifts. With free admission, delicious festival favorites, and the charm of Aiken's beautiful Park Avenue, it's the perfect place to shop, explore, and experience the creativity that has made this event a regional favorite for half a century