

Abbeville County Historical Society

P.O. Box 12

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January - February 2021

Dear ACHS Members:

I hope this letter finds you all well and off to a much better start in 2021. As you all know, 2020 was a trying year for us all and there have certainly been more downs than ups. We here at the Abbeville County Historical Society started 2020 off with many great and wonderful plans. We were to take over the operations, tours and upkeep of the Abbeville County Museum, restore the Creswell Cabin and the Harpers Ferry Cable Building and begin Phase III of the Franklin and Ann Persley Railroad Museum. As we moved into March, we were all taken back with the explosion of COVID-19 and seeing the entire county basically go into lockdown. Everything seemed to have stopped on a dime. We closed the McGowan House, Railroad Museum and locked up the Caboose under SC State order. Needless to say, our great plans for 2020 were soon only a memory and we all longed for better news of a vaccine and news that everything would return to normal, sooner than later.

After many months of being closed down, the economy started growing, companies began hiring as businesses reopened and we set our eyes on better days ahead. We started meeting again and trying to figure out where we go after this turbulent year. One thing we discovered is that our roof had begun to leak in several areas especially over the grand staircase just as you get to the third landing and onto the top steps. We called several roofing companies and had them come out to access this situation. After nearly two months of accessing the roofing problems, we were told the entire roof was in great need of replacing. Another assessment we had not considered, was all four chimneys were discovered to have significant to major structural issues from over 130 years of weather and storm damage. Many bricks have become dislodged and have fallen on the roof, causing significant roof damage in many areas. In order to get a grant, the chimneys have to be restored to their original look in 1888. This will cost \$17,100. The chimney work will start the second week of June. The roof will follow with an asphalt shingle 50 year warranty. The roof will cost about \$52,000. We are currently working to raise funds for the roof. It is very important that we get this roof replaced in 2021 as we have a number of leaks on the second floor.

This year we took over the Walking Tour that the Chamber has promoted for years. It turns out it was under the umbrella of ACHS from its inception years ago. We have teamed up with Story/My Tours in upstate NY to develop an app that can guide visitors through Abbeville's Historic District. This app will give each person a detailed history of each stop. The Walking Tour will include about 50 total stops when complete of all our historic buildings, churches, monuments, parks and homes. We will offer visitors a virtual tour within the Abbeville area using a range of multimedia and support of GPS functionality to guide them. The resulting app allows users to explore the heritage and rich tapestry of Abbeville on their own mobile device. This is a downloadable app and full color tri fold brochure with instructions. All of the current green round signs you see in front of buildings and houses will all be replaced with new aluminum numbered signs. When using the app, each visitor can either read the history of each stop or select the audio version. We are so excited about this endeavor for many reasons. One, this will allow visitors something to do on their own time while delivering our rich history. It's also completely safe since it's outdoors and visitors can travel without being in large groups. We plan to launch this app by spring. We did a lot of research to find this app that is used by many historic cities and towns in the US, Europe, Australia and New

Zealand. Our launch date is scheduled by Easter weekend.

We are in the process of moving what is left of the badly neglected Harpers Ferry Cable Building located behind the Abbeville County Law Enforcement Center. It was moved many years ago from Lowndesville after the Savannah River was flooded to make Lake Russell. It was first moved to the Abbeville County Museum, then later moved to the Law Enforcement Center in the late 80's. Over time it was out of site, out of mind as the brush and trees grew up and covered it. Over the years, the rear wall collapsed and the roof collapsed. The county cleared out all the trees and brush in December and we plan to move the building behind the McGowan House and place it next to the Harpers Ferry Bell before spring. The building will have to be completely restored with a new floor, new roof and new framing. 2020 marked the 100th Anniversary of the Harpers Ferry Accident that took ten young people's life. Harper's Ferry crossed the Savannah River at Lowndesville. On Easter Sunday, April 4, 1920, a cable on the Georgia side of the river broke and ten young people perished. The bodies of nine were recovered and are buried under a single headstone at Providence Presbyterian Church. The body of Charlie Meschine was never found.

One big thing we did in the spring of 2020 was finish cabin #3 and that was major. It took significant preservation work. We tore the sheetrock ceiling out and went back to the original whitewashed board ceiling, replaced decayed sills, replaced rafters and exterior clapboard and replaced the windows destroyed by vandals with antique windows and re-opened the blocked up fireplace. The cement steps were removed and wooden ones added and replaced the original wooden shutters back. As our property that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, we follow the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Best Practices in Historic Preservation.

We are trying to find a way to restore the Creswell Cabin that belongs to the Abbeville County Museum. It is over 200 years old and was moved to the Abbeville County Museum in the early 1970's. During the years of the museum being closed, it fell into grave decay. The back left corner has collapsed and the roof is about 1/3 collapsed. About 5 years ago we offered to help secure a grant to restore the cabin but the museum did not have an active board of directors at the time and nothing ever happened. In 2020 we had someone who stepped up and offered to restore the cabin. He would supply all the materials and knowledge but then COVID hit and everything stalled out. We approached him again recently but he is now too busy with his lumber business with the recent boom in lumber to help anytime soon. We then looked into getting a grant to restore the cabin with the City of Abbeville's help. Unfortunately, we were told it is not eligible for grant assistance because it is included as a non-contributing property in the Abbeville Historic District (National Register of Historic Places district). The non-contributing status results from its having been moved to its current location in the 1970s. Relocated properties are, generally, not eligible for the National Register. Therefore this property does not qualify.

We have completed Phase I and Phase II of the Franklin and Ann Pursley Railroad Museum and we had the official Grand Opening in the fall of 2019. We started off with great responses and many visitors. Nevertheless, COVID hit us just at the start of 2020 and the museum and house was closed under state order. We did however secure another donation of \$20,000 to begin Phase III of the Railroad Museum that will include a new Entryway, Exhibition Room and 2 Restrooms. Plans to start Phase III will begin this year.

Our new website is up and running thanks to Jason Walker of Website Ministries, LLC right here in Abbeville. Jason completely redeveloped our website in 2020. He is also adding a Membership Renewal/Donate button on our website and Facebook page. Moving forward, members can renew their memberships online via our website:

www.abbevillecountyhistoricalsociety.org or our Facebook page. Please note, I have attached our annual membership form to this newsletter.

I really hope that all of you will seriously consider renewing your membership. It is very important to the operations of ACHS, especially after coming out of 2020. Basically we are most in need of funding for the McGowan House roof, as well as the Creswell Cabin. COVID hit the Historical Society hard last year as we had to close the house and Railroad Museum being closed. Revenues are down from lack of tourists and membership renewals but the number of projects and expenses still exists.

On behalf of myself and the board of directors, we are very grateful for everyone's generosity.

Best Regards,

Andrew E Hartsfield
President