

Saxe Gotha Dispatch

Museum To Host Annual Christmas Open House

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The staff of the Lexington County Museum and the Friends of the Lexington County Museum invite you to come experience Christmas traditions of the past at the Museum as it hosts its Annual Christmas Open House on December 8th from 1 pm to 4 pm.

Many of the thirty historic structures on the Museum complex will be open and will feature period Christmas decorations. The event is free to the public! Light refreshments that would have been eaten by Lexington residents in the 19th century, including hot apple cider and gingerbread, will be served. Friends of the Museum member Constance Caractor



Flemming will be singing and playing live music in the Fox House. A blacksmith will be on site practicing his craft and educating visitors about smithing and a cooking demonstration will be taking place in our 19th century Ridgell kitchen as well.

The Christmas Open House is a great way to explore the museum's structures and

collections on your own time, learn about the rich history of the county, and get into the holiday spirit.

This event is family-friendly and fun. For more information, find us on Facebook, call the museum at 803-359-8369, or visit our webpage at lexingtoncountymuseum.org. Come join us for this great event!

Museum Past and Upcoming Outreach Efforts

Museum staff members continue to speak to community groups about the museum and county history. Over the past few months, museum employees have spoken to Laurel Crest Retirement Home, the Lexington Main Library, Lexington School District 1, Gilbert-Summit Library, the

South Lake Village, the East Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District members and others.

In the future, museum staff will speak to the Lexington County Main Library and the South Lake Village.

If you'd like to have a museum staff member speak to your

group either virtually or in-person, don't hesitate to give us a call. We can speak on a variety of topics related to the museum, the county, and its history. Some of the most popular topics include the quilts and other artifacts from the Dutch Fork, Lexington County-made rifles, and the history of alcohol in Lexington County.

Willie Leaphart's Extended Family

By Paul Stoetzel

In October of 2023, I was asked to repeat a presentation I had given a couple times at River Bluff High School here in Lexington. The presentation itself was standard genealogical fare, done on a large auditorium stage in Ted-Talk fashion, and I like to think I deliver these talks with a little more energy and enthusiasm than most people working in a discipline where the average speaker is old enough to have voted for Harding. The High School Social Studies teacher, Michael Burgess, was very gracious to have me back again and entrust me to speak to his students for about half an hour, which is just about the only break time many teachers get. I arrived that morning with my laptop in hand, intending to connect it to the school's projector (no small task for someone whose tech savviness topped out with Windows 98). Michael was good enough to help me get set up, and in opening my laptop he noticed a file folder just above my presentation for the day: one labeled "Willie Leaphart."

"You know," he said, "I've been doing all the research on Willie." I already knew of his research, having read about it in the news. Willie Leaphart's case is well known among Lexington-area history buffs, but among few others. He had been lynched in the Spring of 1890 following his conviction for a crime he almost certainly didn't commit, and Michael had been working for the last few years on achieving a posthumous pardon from the State of South Carolina. The problem, Michael now explained, is that in order to get that pardon, he needed to get the involvement of Willie's family. Willie himself was too young to have children, and after doing some genealogical detective work, it turned out that all of Willie's siblings represented dead-ends on the family tree.

"What about Willie's father's family?" I naively asked, and I have to say that Michael's response caught me off guard.

"His father was named Doll Leaphart, and we don't know anything about his family."

"Oh, but I do!" I exclaimed. I knew all about Doll's family, and knew that he came from a large family very likely to have living descendants in the area today. Being a professional genealogist, I spend my days excitedly gushing over old documents that would bore most people to tears. Staff members at the Lexington County Museum, where I have done most of my work for the past couple years, have come to expect me to literally jump out of my chair when I suddenly realize a connection between a person in a document I just read with someone I jotted down in my notes six months ago.

How is it that I knew all about Doll's family and Michael Burgess did not? The answer was simple: he doesn't work at the Lexington County Museum. As noted in an earlier Museum newsletter, I have been working on creating a genealogical reference tool for descendants of people enslaved in this county, poring through tens of thousands of both pre- and post-Emancipation documents. Twenty three of those documents reference Willie's father directly, with many more involving his family. However, out of perhaps a hundred records we could use to tie Doll to other members of his family, we can illustrate his immediate family using just half a dozen (plus a couple extra because they're just neat).

Newspaper articles at the time, all across North America, mentioned the Leaphart lynching. A search for "Willie Leaphart" on *Newspapers.com* in 1890 returns 371 results stretching as far as Ontario, Canada.¹ In an admittedly cursory glance, not one of them, however, mentions Doll or the rest of Willie's family. The information that Willie's father was named "Doll" comes to us from the 1880 Census, where we find seven year old Willie living with his father Doll, his grandparents Solomon and Eliza, and his brothers Henry, Jesse, Miller, and Edward.² This is all well and good, and it gives the names of Willie's siblings which were found to have been genealogical dead-ends. However, looking for other descendants of Solomon is a little tricky, and while it could be done using publicly available records, we at the Lexington County Museum made the connection before realizing that those were available.

Here is how it's done: We have at the Museum a record which mentions Doll in the same year as the Census. On 10 July 1880, John Jesse Fox wrote his father, well known Lexingtonian John Fox, a letter asking about the well on his property.³ Specifically, he asked his father for three things: to send Doll out with a well bucket, for a man named Merriman to clean out the well, and for his father to pay Doll \$1 for some corn. This record does not mention Doll's last name, but it is such an uncommon name that, going forward, we would identify this link to the Fox family as a good place to start.

¹ "They Lynched Him Anyhow," *The Pickens Sentinel*, 15 May 1890, p.1, Col. 7; digital image, *Newspapers.com* (<https://www.newspapers.com>) : accessed 2024).

² 1880 US Census, Lexington County South Carolina, Lexington population schedule, p. 445D, dwelling 23, family 23, Solomon Leaphart and family; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com) : accessed 2023); citing NARA microfilm publication T9, roll 1234.

³ John J. Fox to John Fox, 10 Jul 1880; file A-7-106, John Fox Papers, Lexington County Museum, Lexington South Carolina.

As it happens, John Fox's papers survive in at least three repositories. The Caroliniana Library at USC has one of Fox's account books from the 1870s, and in it we find that between May and the end of July 1876, Fox had paid Doll Leaphart eight times for work he had done at Fox's plantation.⁴ In the years after Emancipation, Fox paid a number of people for work done which, prior to Emancipation, had been done by those people enslaved in his household. In fact, a solid majority of those named in his account book for this type of work had, in fact, been enslaved by Fox.

Importantly, we know the names of just about everyone enslaved by John Fox from his tax records. Every year, Fox wrote out the names (and sometimes ages) of his enslaved people. One example of this, from his 1858 taxes, comes to us from the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University.⁵ In it, we find all the enslaved people in the Fox household in irregularly numbered groups: far more research has gone into this topic than can be explained here, but suffice to say that most of these groups are families. One of those families contained the following names: Eliza, Jim, Walter, Alfred, Jess, Edd, Merriman (or Doll), and Dorcas. This group of names is almost always kept together, almost always in the same order. In fact, when Fox had acquired the family as part of what I refer to as the Harmon Purchase of 1849, we find them even at that point explicitly named as a family.⁶ We see them together over and over again, and from those records we can make a couple important statements. First, it confirms what the 1880 Census told us: that Doll's mother was Eliza. Second, and far more important, is this: that 1880 letter from John Jesse Fox to his father did not mention Doll *and* Merriman. Doll *is* Merriman, and we find he had a number of siblings.

Just for good measure, we can also show that Solomon was indeed their father, and not a later husband Eliza took after Emancipation. In 1884, Solomon Leaphart died. He did not leave a will in the way we would normally think of it, but the local deed book has a record which splits up property that Solomon had purchased years before from Simeon Corley (in whose house Willie supposedly assaulted Rosa Cannon, i.e. the crime of which he was accused but likely was not guilty).⁷ That record gives property to a number of Solomon's descendants, and specifies that the land is not to pass out of the hands of his descendants.

But of course, that's well after Emancipation. The most interesting document we have concerning the relationship between Eliza and Solomon is found in the records of the Lexington County Museum. Solomon had not been enslaved by John Fox; rather, he had been enslaved by a man named George Leaphart. But in 1851 Solomon had become ill, and Leaphart's estate had to pay a doctor to come out and treat him. We still have that doctor's bill, and what do you know? In order to see Solomon, Dr. Caughman had to come all the way out to the Fox Plantation.⁸

I have mentioned that document before in both print and in presentations because it is such a wonderful peek into what should have been a minor event. As it happens, all the records can be used to create a starter family tree for Willie on his father's side, and thanks to a little perusing through Ancestry, we can be sure that a fair number of Willie's relatives are with us today. If that is all that is needed for justice to finally be done, there ought to be no further delay.

⁴ "Memorandum Book 1874;" John Fox Papers, Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Box 3, folder 44, image 37.

⁵ "Taxable Property for 1858," John Fox Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁶ "Undated Slave List 1," John Fox Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁷ Lexington County, South Carolina, RMC KK:532, Will of Solomon Leaphart, 17 Jun 1884; digital image, *Family Search* (<https://www.familysearch.org> : accessed 2024), FHL film no. 1827188, image 276 of 657.

⁸ Caughman Receipt, 30 Jan 1852; file D-3-4, John Fox Papers, Lexington County Museum, Lexington, South Carolina.

Museum Visitation in September and October 2024

Visitation from tourists and locals dipped somewhat as school began.

In September, 502 visitors came to the museum, including visitors from nine states other than SC as well as the Netherlands. In

October, the museum saw 1245 visitors, including tourists from eleven states other than SC and four foreign countries.

The number of school groups visiting the museum increased as

more public schools returned. We had various public and private groups from Barnwell, Richland, and Lexington Counties come out for field trips.

Museum to Host Irmo Murders and Mysteries Tour

Learn all about the murders, mysteries, duels, and lynchings that occurred in Irmo and the Dutch Fork on Friday January 10th as we take a leisurely walk through downtown Irmo. The tour begins at 8 pm at the Irmo Town Park (7330 Carlisle Street Irmo, SC). This is a free event and reservations are not needed. Because of the mature subject matter, we ask that attendees be 18 or over or have parental permission. For more information or questions, please call the museum at 803-359-8369 or email us at museum@lex-co.com.

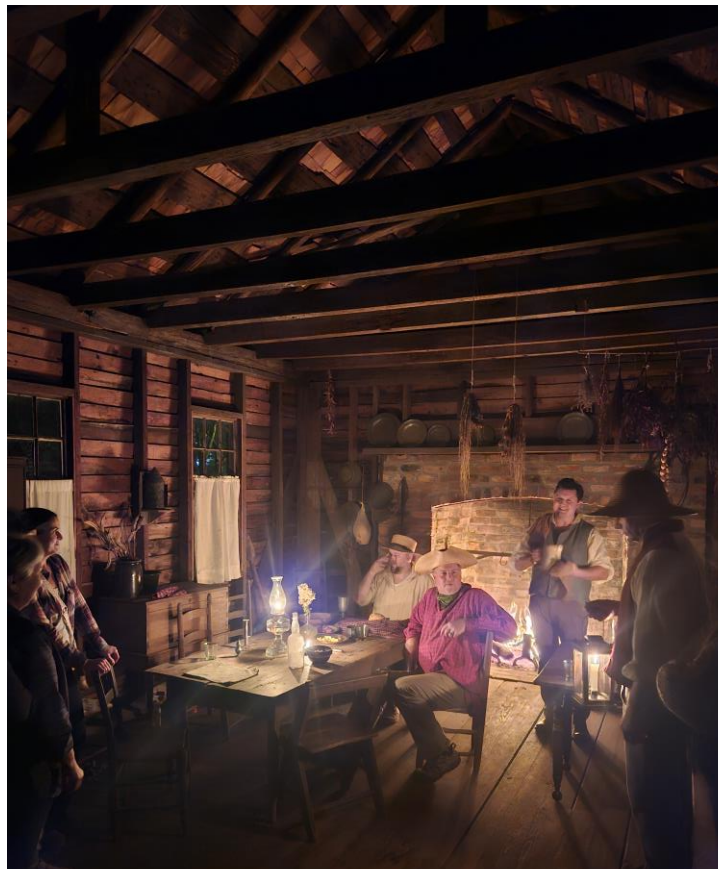


Corley House Porch Repaired by County of Lexington Building Services

The museum would like to give a big thanks to Lexington County's Building Services for recently rebuilding the rear porch of the museum's 1771 Laurance Corley House. Several of the beams needed to be replaced due to rot. They did a great job!



Haunted History Photos





Museum Calendar of Events

- Nov. 28-
Dec. 1 Thanksgiving Holiday
 Museum will be closed
- Dec. 8 Lexington County Museum Christmas Open House
 Christmas Open House
 1 pm to 4 pm
 Free to the Public
 Lexington County Museum Complex
 Many of the museum's historic structures will be decorated in
 period fashion. A cooking demonstration will also take place.
- Dec. 24-26 Christmas Holidays
 Museum will be closed
- January 10 "Murders and Mysteries" Irmo Walking Tour
 8 pm
 Tour begins at the Irmo Town Park
 7330 Carlisle Street Irmo, SC
 Free to the public
 Attendees will learn about some of the spookier and more
 gruesome aspects of Irmo's history as we will discuss
 murders, crimes, and mysteries that occurred in Irmo and the
 Dutch Fork. Because of the mature subject matter, we ask
 that attendees be 18 or over or have parental permission.

Call the museum at 803-359-8369 or email museum@lex-co.com to find out more about these events.

Lexington County Museum

231 Fox Street
Lexington, SC 29072

Phone 803-359-8369
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A Story Behind Every Door



The Lexington County Museum was started in 1970 to collect, preserve and present the history of Lexington County. After initially having only one historic house, the museum expanded and now has thirty historic structures over seven acres in downtown Lexington. Through exhibits in historic houses, the museum interprets everyday life in the town of Lexington and throughout Lexington County from the eighteenth century to the start of the Civil War. The museum offers guided tours to visitors for a small fee and has thirteen different hands-on programs for school groups free of charge by appointment. These programs attract schools from around the state and educate students about the history of Lexington County and about the everyday life of Lexington County residents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Friends of the Lexington County Museum is a non-profit group founded in 1997 with an advisory board, officers, and a board of trustees representing all municipalities in Lexington County. Its mission is to enhance the Lexington County Museum through its duly appointed commission and to support, aid, and assist in the improvement and expansion of the Museum. The Friends group sponsors fund-raising projects to help further the Museum's valuable contribution to the county. The Friends group has raised over \$290,000 for the museum so far. To learn more about the Friends or to join, visit the museum's webpage (<https://lex-co.sc.gov/lexington-county-museum/friends-museum>).

Highlighted Artifact from the Museum's Collections

This issue's highlighted artifact is a split oak fish trap made in Laurens County, South Carolina in the 1940s. Although made in the twentieth century, South Carolina residents were making similar traps for generations.



We're on the Web!

<https://lex-co.sc.gov/lexington-county-museum> and
www.lexingtoncountymuseum.org