

# Saxe Gotha Dispatch

## Museum To Host Annual Christmas Open House

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Christmas Traditions of Past	2
Xmas Children's Program	3
Museum Visitation	3
Fall Events Photos	4
A Wider Community	5
Friends Fundraiser	6
Calendar of Events	7
Highlighted Artifact	8

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 10th 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 president 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 <https://lex-co.sc.gov/lexington-county-museum>. Come join us for this great event!

## Museum Past and Upcoming Outreach Efforts

Museum staff members continue to speak to various groups about the museum and the history of the county. Over the past few months, museum employees have spoken to Laurel Crest Retirement Home, the Lexington, CWC, and Gilbert-Summit Libraries, the Newberry SAR, the Sox

Family Reunion, and Lexington Extended Care. In the future, museum staff will speak to the Lexington County Main Library and Laurel Crest Retirement Home.

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.

## Antebellum Christmas Traditions in Lexington County

Christmas traditions in pre-1860 Lexington were a little different than what they are today. For farming families, late December was a time for cleaning up after the harvest and preparing for the rest of the season. They had an abundance of food supplies on hand and the smokehouses were stocked with freshly smoked ham, sausage, and other pork products. The livestock was well-fed and ready to be butchered. They would most likely have had some extra money in hand from selling their marketable crops and livestock. They would have bought luxuries such as sugar, coffee, spices, oranges, and coconuts for use in the holiday feast.

December days were also good for clearing new fields and for cleaning up brush along fence rows. This provided kindling and wood for fires and also trimmings of greenery such as holly. Bonfires were common at Christmas time as the days were short and farmers burned excess brush. Europeans also celebrated Christmas with bonfires as a way of dispelling the darkness and welcoming the Christ Child. Also common on Christmas Eve was the firing of shotguns. This tradition is mentioned in Edwin Scott's "Random Recollections of a Long Life" originally published in 1884 but reflecting on memories from the 1820s-30s. This tradition was later continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with shooting off fireworks or firecrackers.

Families would visit each other during the season and since traveling even short distances was very difficult, the visits would often last several days. These days and nights would be filled with feasting, gathering around the fire, and general merriment in each other's' company.

Trees were common decorations in homes as they were the European symbol of life. Cedar trees were popular as were red-berried holly trees. They would have been brought into the house on Christmas Eve and decorated with small candles, strings of beads or popcorn, and gingerbread men. Often thorny bushes or sparkleberry branches were cut and decorated by affixing candied fruit onto their points. This practice has evolved into creating gumdrop trees. Gingerbread cookies in all kinds of meaningful shapes were often given as gifts to family, friends and acquaintances. The pinnacle of the celebration of Christmas for most Christians would have been attending Midnight Christmas Eve services at their church. That night, the children would have hung their stockings (socks) from the mantle of the fireplace. They would awaken the next morning to gifts. These gifts mostly consisted of fruit, cookies, homemade gifts or small toys that could fit into the stockings. Other small gifts may have been placed in and around the tree branches.

At the Lexington County Museum we enjoy interpreting many of these old Christmas traditions. The Friends of the Museum will be decorating some of the houses in the traditional manner and visitors will be able to see the houses in their Christmas splendor at the Museum's Christmas Open House on December 10<sup>th</sup> from 1 pm to 4 pm and during regular tours from the 12<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup>.

## Museum to Host Hand-on History Christmas Crafts Program

Join Lexington County Museum staff members and members of the Granby Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution for a children's class on Christmas crafts in the 19th century. The ca. 1832 John Fox House will be decorated with period decorations which the children are shown as they look through the house. After the tour, the children will make these same early decorations such as popcorn strings, pomanders, and gum drop trees which they are allowed to take home with them. It's a great way to get into the Christmas spirit and learn more about Christmas traditions of the past. Visit: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/764067184517?aff=oddtcreator> to register.



## Museum Visitation in September and October 2023

Visitation remained somewhat high although we still do not see the same number of school groups as before the pandemic.

In September, 674 visitors came to the museum, including visitors from ten states other than SC as

well as Canada and Nigeria. In October, the museum saw 973 visitors, including tourists from ten states other than SC and Bolivia and the Netherlands.

The number of school groups visiting the museum stayed

somewhat low in September but increased in October. We had various public and private groups from Richland and Lexington Counties come out.

# Fall 2023 Event Photos



## A Wider Community by Paul Stoetzel

Throughout 2023, staff at the Lexington County Museum have conducted a great deal of research into the lives of the people enslaved at the Fox plantation. Identifying individual people by name and learning about their past, their roles within the Fox household, and their lives after Emancipation has opened up countless avenues of new research. One particularly interesting result of this study has been the identification of at least a dozen individual and cohesive family groups among those held in bondage here.

By organizing enslaved people into family groups (as indeed Fox's own tax records often did), we are able to better identify them in later records when many of them assumed surnames not previously known to us. Using this information, we have also been able to identify a fascinating nuance of this community: that people held in slavery on one plantation not only interacted with the enslaved men and women on other plantations, but that they occasionally *intermarried*.

For example, one of the people held in slavery by the Fox family was a woman named Jane. She first appears in John Fox's tax lists in 1850,<sup>1</sup> and by 1853 (when Fox's tax records begin organizing people into family groups when applicable), we find her grouped with two people who turned out to be her children: Jemima (sometimes called "Mina") and Aaron.<sup>2</sup> Though Fox's Antebellum tax lists were the first records to suggest to us that Jane, Jemima, and Aaron were all related, it was a record written just after the Civil War which piqued our interest.

On 23 January 1866, Several of John Fox's former slaves signed a sharecropper agreement with their former enslaver. The agreement itself is fairly common for the time and not entirely distinct from actual slavery. However, the contract plainly identifies Jane as Aaron's mother (genealogists *love* matter of fact statements that tie two people together), and there is another relationship which we find in the contract as well. On 13 March, almost two months after the initial agreement was signed, another man, also named Aaron, added his name to the contract and identified himself as "I the undersigned being the husband of the above named Jane and father of the above named Aaron..."<sup>3</sup>

So who was this older Aaron? He was never mentioned in any of John Fox's many papers and does not appear to have been enslaved on Fox's plantation. However, using Census records from both 1870 and 1880 as well as Fox's personal correspondence, we can identify him as Aaron "Abe" Holmes, a freedman living with Jane alongside a great many of Fox's former slaves, still residing at the old plantation for decades after 1865. Further, we can learn even more about his past thanks to the actions of the Union Army at the conclusion of the War.

The punitive raiding of local homes and plantations was certainly not the US Army's finest hour, but their raid of one of John Fox's neighbors and close associates, a Unionist named Lemuel Boozer, proved to be helpful to our research. In 1871, shortly after Boozer passed away, his family filed a claim with the Southern Claims Commission (a Federal bureau designed to compensate loyal citizens who had suffered losses during the War).

<sup>1</sup> "John Fox Taxable Property 1850," John Fox Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>2</sup> "John Fox Taxable Property for 1853," John Fox Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>3</sup> 23 Jan 1866. "Walter's Agreement," John Fox Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

## A Wider Community (Continued)

The Boozer family's claim included an affidavit by none other than Aaron Holmes.<sup>4</sup> He self-identified as a former slave of Boozer and a blacksmith (which matches his occupation in the 1870 Census). He had lived with the Boozer family for nineteen years, just about as long as his son Aaron had been alive.

This relationship between the enslaved peoples on two neighboring plantations is not a simple footnote in the history of the county. Two people held in slavery by different slave owners on different properties managed to form a lifelong relationship and raise children together. For Jane and Aaron, the strongest bonds were between themselves.

---

<sup>4</sup> Deposition of Aaron Holmes, 17 Aug 1871; Boozer, Estate of Lemuel (Lexington, South Carolina), claim no. 3205, Allowed Case Files, Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880; digital image, *National Archives* (<https://catalog.archives.gov> : accessed 2023).

---

## Friends of the Lexington County Museum to Hold Fundraiser on April 20 at Museum

The Friends of the Lexington County Museum has decided to hold the 2024 annual fundraiser on the evening of Saturday April 20<sup>th</sup> on the grounds of the Lexington County Museum. This fundraiser will be a great opportunity for sponsors and guests to learn more about the museum and its future plans as well as help raise funds to help support the goals outlined by the museum's strategic and master plans. More details will be released as we get closer to April but go ahead and mark the evening of April 20<sup>th</sup> on your calendar.

---

## Museum Calendar of Events



- Dec. 10      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. 20      "Hands-on History" Christmas Crafts Program  
10:30 am to 12:00 pm  
Free  
[Purchase tickets here](#)  
Lexington County Museum Complex  
Children will learn about Christmas traditions of the past and get to make a gumdrop tree and other 19<sup>th</sup> century Christmas decorations.
- Dec. 22-26   Christmas Holiday  
Museum will be closed

Call the museum at 803-359-8369 or email [museum@lex-co.com](mailto:museum@lex-co.com) to find out more about these events.

## Lexington County Museum

231 Fox Street  
Lexington, SC 29072

**Phone** 803-359-8369  
**Fax** 803-808-2160  
**E-mail** [museum@lex-co.com](mailto:museum@lex-co.com)

### *A Story Behind Every Door*



#### **We're on the Web!**

<https://lex-co.sc.gov/lexington-county-museum> and  
[www.lexingtoncountymuseum.org](http://www.lexingtoncountymuseum.org)

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

Our highlighted artifact for this issue is one of our outbuildings, the Joel Ridgell smokehouse. This structure came from Batesburg, SC and was owned by the brother-in-law of John Fox, whose house was the first building acquired by the museum. Smokehouses were used for smoking pork. Pigs would have been slaughtered starting in November when temperatures dropped. Much of the meat was then salted and smoked. Learn more about the food traditions of the past at our Christmas Open House on December 10!

