



Schwartz Prize Nominating Statement

“South Carolina: The Food We Celebrate” is a traveling exhibit that celebrates iconic foods from communities around South Carolina. South Carolina Humanities and the SC State Museum collaborated with 20 organizations across the Palmetto State to develop the content for the exhibit, highlighting 20 different iconic foodways such as BBQ, chicken bog, peaches, and more.

The project began as a way to encourage pride and revitalization in small towns and communities. Inspired by the popularity of the Smithsonian traveling exhibits sponsored by SC Humanities, one board member suggested that SC Humanities develop its own traveling exhibit to broaden interest in South Carolina history at the local level. However, rather than one entity unilaterally developing the exhibit, SC Humanities could use its connections to engage local museums, scholars, and other cultural organizations to develop a sustainable resource. This collaborative effort would motivate small town museums to innovate and modernize and connect with other institutions around the state.

Our first step was to form a partnership with the South Carolina State Museum. The State Museum is the only entity in the state with a statewide traveling exhibit program and a staff of professional exhibit fabricators. Luckily, the State Museum was eager to join forces with SC Humanities.

As the project began to take shape, it became clear that *food* is a topic that unites, inspires, and motivates. The project’s initial research found that there are more than 200 annual community food festivals in South Carolina. The partners determined that each panel in the new exhibit would highlight communities through food iconic within their areas. It was hoped that the topic, popular and relatable, would inspire local institutions to provide accompanying programming. The food would be looked at as not just a delicious treat, but as an identifying symbol of the community in which it is celebrated and enjoyed through festivals, community cookbooks, and established local restaurant institutions.

The SC Federation of Museums was asked to join in the project by helping identify potential communities that had unique foodway traditions. A list of possible communities was compiled and invitations extended to develop an exhibit panel. A review committee selected twenty communities to be included. Each chosen community was represented by a non-profit historical or heritage organization.

The community organization’s representative worked closely with the State Museum to develop their exhibit panel, submitting textual and pictorial content to be displayed. The State Museum compiled the information and pictures into the overall design that was carried through all the panels, creating a cohesive appearance to the exhibit. The exhibit totaled 22 panels, representing 20 communities with food traditions, an introductory panel and a panel devoted to the sponsors. The design allows the exhibit to be easily expanded in the future or for panels to be rotated out to add additional interested communities’ foodways and traditions. It is low-security and easy to install. Ultimately, the exhibit

explores the history of the food, regional and state impact of the food, and looks at how it exists today for the people of the community and all of South Carolina.

“South Carolina: The Food We Celebrate” launched in October 2019 at the South Carolina State Fair, one of the state’s largest attractions with an audience size of close to 500,000 annually. The Fair began with an agricultural focus, and fair officials wanted to highlight that history during the 150th celebration in 2019. Consequently, this exhibit was chosen to be a part of the fair’s programs with a prominent exhibition space. Members from SC Humanities and the SC State Museum staffed the exhibit, interacting with thousands of visitors. The State Fair director had nothing but praise afterwards for the exhibit and the reactions it received.

After opening at the SC State Fair, the exhibit started traveling for one-month stops in the communities represented in the exhibit, and it will eventually become available for any community to host through the SC State Museum’s Traveling Exhibit Program. The arrival of COVID-19 put a damper on a packed 2020 exhibit schedule and on initial plans for an additional partnership with the SC State Library and their “Read, Eat, Grow” initiative and mobile kitchen program. However, SC Humanities hopes to resume this opportunity when conditions safely allow it. Communities that had to postpone in 2020 have started booking the exhibit for 2021 and beyond, including a recent contract with the Colleton Museum, Farmers Market, Commercial Kitchen & Colleton Civic Center for April 2022 to synergize with their annual Rice Festival featured in the panel. One cultural group that did host the exhibit in late 2019, the Penn Center on St. Helena Island, gave the exhibit an “excellent” rating for all aspects, including content and usefulness.

The cost for this public exhibit that will be seen by thousands of South Carolinians was minimal. SC Humanities paid \$5,700 for the fabrication, and the SC State Museum provided in-kind support for the design and for facilitating the traveling logistics of the exhibit through their Traveling Exhibit Program.

The outcomes have been beneficial to every group involved. Thousands of South Carolinians became more familiar with foodways, festivals, and local cultural organizations. Small local museums experienced capacity building and additional programming opportunities that might appeal to new audiences and funders. The interest in the subject matter led SC Humanities to develop a Request for Proposals on South Carolina food topics that have inspired several interesting projects with schools, a library, and a rural farmer’s market, so the ripple effects of the exhibit are far-reaching.

The “South Carolina: The Food We Celebrate” exhibit gives local institutions and community centers the opportunity to serve up this exhibit banquet of South Carolina community cuisine to as broad an audience as possible. The strong partnerships between SC Humanities, the SC State Museum, the SC Federation of Museums, the SC State Library and local cultural organizations across the state allowed for the success of the project, which will reach South Carolinians for years to come. Looking towards the future, the SC Humanities Board has begun to discuss seizing the momentum of these strong partnerships to develop a second traveling exhibit designed to address the role of the humanities during public health crises. SC Humanities has developed a strong relationship with the Office of Humanities at the Medical University of South Carolina during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we look forward to proposing a partnership in the near future.

Brief Program Description

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Links to Program Information Online

South Carolina Humanities

<https://schumanities.org/projects/the-food-we-celebrate/>

South Carolina State Museum

<http://scmuseum.org/explore/exhibits/tep/traveling-exhibits-history/traveling-exhibit-south-carolina-the-food-we-celebrate/>

Dropbox Folder with Photos

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/a0xjgvip3c9hk0v/AACwKXy06imnNKocje8JlbS3a?dl=0>

List of Exhibit Panels

- Apples
- Boiled Peanuts
- Chicken Bog
- Chitlins
- Grits
- Gullah Cuisine – Hopp’ John
- Gullah Influence in South Carolina and the Daufuskie/Lowcountry
- Okra
- Oysters
- Peaches
- Pecans
- Pumpkins & Squash
- Rice
- South Carolina BBQ
- Shrimp & Grits
- State Fair Food
- Strawberries
- Sweet Potatoes
- Watermelons
- Whole Hog BBQ

Comments on the Exhibit

The Gaffney Visitors Center & Art Gallery would like to express our sincere appreciation for affording us the opportunity to host the South Carolina traveling exhibit, "The Food We Celebrate" from June – August, 2020. For this show, the city was able to collaborate with a local non-profit organization, Cherokee County Alliance of Visual Artists (CAVA), to display food – themed art pieces produced by local artists.

The exhibit was advertised in our two local newspapers (attached), our two local radio stations and on numerous social media pages. On social media we highlighted 2-3 panels each week and would give a sneak peek of the interesting facts.

With all the restrictions due to COVID-19, the Gaffney Visitors Center was able to incorporate the exhibit into a virtual activity. We partnered with two other local organizations to provide a 5-week virtual reading program, "Pickin' Peaches". Each Thursday a community leader was scheduled to stop by the Gaffney Visitors Center to "Pick" a Peaches book to share via live stream on the Gaffney Visitors Center Facebook page. Peaches the cat is an adventurous cat that gets his name from Gaffney's rich peach farm heritage. He is featured in a series of coloring books that tell true local history. Since Gaffney was featured in the exhibit for peaches, we used the panel as a back drop for the virtual reading of "Peaches on Parade" which shares the stories of our peach farm heritage.

The exhibit received positive feedback from everyone who visited. Below we have listed a few of the comments that were left in reference to the SC traveling exhibit, "The Food We Celebrate".

"The Food We Celebrate exhibit at the Gaffney Visitor's Center was a creative and informative trip around the state of South Carolina informing me of some popular foods that we celebrate in the form of festivals and events. An exhibit that makes one long for a tasting of each of the foods showcased from Gaffney's peaches to boiled peanuts, watermelon, okra, and shrimp to name a few. A wonderful traveling exhibit that truly enlightened me with a plethora of information about our own state's variety of iconic foods."

Karla Lavender Gaffney, SC

"My daughter and I went to the Gaffney Visitors' Center and Art Gallery primarily to view CAVA's art work displayed as part of the foods of SC exhibit; however, it turned out that we were most impressed with the SC State Museum's traveling exhibit illustrating the diversity of our foods from the coast to the midlands to the Piedmont regions of South Carolina. The well-designed panels told the story of our state as revealed through its foods: its history and its presence, its work and its people. After viewing the exhibit, I was so impressed that I went home and made a big pot of chicken bog, typically a food cooked in a large kettle served at the end of a harvest to all the workers!"

Dawn Wells Bridges & Susan Bridges-Smith Spartanburg, SC



The Gaffney Visitors Center and Art Gallery



The South Carolina State Fair

South Carolina BBQ: The Food We Celebrate

No matter how you choose to spell it, barbecue or barbeque, South Carolinians love their "BBQ." Opinions on barbecue's birthplace are endless. The roots of this sacred slow cooked Southern dish are buried deep – five centuries deep – right here in South Carolina.



Courtesy of the Lewis Ansbacher Map Collection, permanently housed in the Morris Ansbacher Map Room, Jacksonville (Fla.) Public Library



Courtesy of South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism

The Spanish were the first Europeans to arrive on Santa Elena, which is modern-day Parris Island, and brought pigs with them. The Native Americans who inhabited the islands traditionally cooked meat on wooden platforms using indirect heat. These cuisines combined creating the blueprint for what is now considered traditional American barbecue.

When South Carolinians speak of "barbecue," it is a noun and they are always talking about pork, and only pork. Of course, other things such as beef and chicken, can be grilled with sauce, but only pork is referred to as barbecue in the Palmetto State.



Courtesy of South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism



Courtesy of South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism

South Carolina is home to four unique types of barbecue sauces. Each sauce has its roots in a different region. For a long time, you could predict exactly what type of barbecue you would be served just by knowing the part of the state in which you were currently located. But now, the lines have been blurred, and it is not uncommon to be able to find all four sauces on the same menu.

Along the coast, you'll find a spicy vinegar-and-pepper sauce. This sauce recipe is perhaps the oldest in the nation. In the Midlands, you'll get mustard sauce. German immigrants settled the midlands area during the 1700s and brought with them their love of mustard. This distinctive sauce is unique to South Carolina. Light tomato sauce, which is a vinegar and pepper base with ketchup or tomato added, is found in the Pee Dee and in the upper middle parts of the state. Heavy tomato sauce is the choice in the western and northwestern part of the state, as well as most of the nation.



Courtesy of South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Visit SCBBQTRAIL.COM for more information, amazing slow cooked stories, and tips on where to find great BBQ in the Palmetto State.

