



Journal

September 2026

Dear Aiken County Historical Society Member:

Thank you to USCA History Professor Alexia Helsley for her wonderful presentation this past May when she spoke about how the Revolutionary War was won in South Carolina. We had a full house. Thanks also to Professor Helsley for her August 30th presentation on her latest book entitled "Rebecca Brewton Motte and the American Revolution in South Carolina." We normally do not meet in the summer, but Professor Helsley's book was coming out and I wanted to help her get her book sales off to a good start. Professor Helsley is so dedicated to SC History and she has been nice enough to speak to the ACHS several times.

The Friends of the Aiken County Museum are now in a fundraising campaign for the Museum. They have a generous donor who will be matching each dollar raised up to \$250,000. Please don't confuse this campaign with the Aiken County Historical Society yearly dues. We hope you will join us again as a member. There is a letter in this Journal from the Friends of the A.C. Museum and a donation form. I personally plan to donate to the Museum's cause, but the ACHS Board has not met and has not decided on any type of donation to the Museum. If you have any questions, please contact me at 649-6050.

I know some of you recently paid your 2026 ACHS dues. We thank you very much. We operate from January 1 to December 31. So, we will be asking for 2027 dues in January, but if you want to go ahead and send them in now, we will start processing them. Your dues mean everything to us. Without your support we could not document and promote the rich history of Aiken County.

The ACHS has two new Board Members. Susan Steinbis will be handling all membership duties. She does the same for another local organization and really will help us tremendously. Milledge Murray is a direct descendant of George Galphin in the Silver Bluff area. His trading post was right beside the Savannah River and was an important spot during the Revolutionary War.

The Vaucluse Mill is in the process of being converted into apartments. The old mill is really shaping up to be something special, just like the Warrenton Mill that was also converted to loft apartments.

The Living History Park in North Augusta has finally been cleared of fallen trees and damage from Helene two years ago. It is a beautiful park with many 1770s style buildings. They have two important special event each year. The next big event is called, "Colonial Times- A Day to Remember" and will be held on October 17th and 18th.

We have finally ordered a new historical marker for the Aiken Training Track. I was hoping the original marker that was hit by a car and then taken would be returned by now. I hope to have a dedication for that marker next spring.

Hopefully you will be able to attend the Aiken County Historical Society's Fall Meeting on September 20th at 3:00 pm at the Aiken County Museum. Linda Johnson will be speaking on the history of The Alley. She always does a great job. There will be a reception following her talk.

Finally, on September 21st and 22nd we will have a clean-up day at the historic Williams' Cemetery. The Williams' Cemetery is located near the intersection of Grace Ave. and Magnolia Street. Please bring rakes and hand clippers.

History Matters,
Allen Riddick, Aiken County Historical Society President

2027 ACHS MEMBERSHIP FORM

DUES ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED.

Anyone wishing to join the Aiken County Historical Society is cordially invited to do so. Please complete the application below and mail it with your dues to:

Aiken County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1775
Aiken, SC 29802

Patron:	\$25	Benefactor:	\$500
Corporate:	\$50	Life:	\$1000
Donor:	\$100		

Name: _____ Membership Type: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

One Time Donation: \$ _____

The one time donation is for those members who have already paid their dues, but would like to contribute directly toward our Historical Marker Fund. We also encourage others who may not want to become an ACHS member, but would like to make a contribution to our organization.

Right: USCA History Professor Alexia Helsley signs a copy of her book, "Rebecca Brewton Motte and the American Revolution in South Carolina" after her presentation on August 30th. The wonderful book is available at the Aiken County Museum Gift Shop.



That Was Then...Boneyard Alley

By Linda Johnston

Shouting and stomping echo in the alley, and the crowd threatens to spill onto Laurens Street. Another Thursday night at Amp the Alley? No, it's Monday morning horse trading in Boneyard Alley.

Long before music and fine dining and boutique shops filled The Alley and Bee Lane, the area east of Laurens Hosted weekly gatherings of local liverymen and rural farmers buying and selling horses, mules, and the occasional wagon. Maps from the Civil War era until the turn of the century show a handful of wooden buildings straddling the two lanes. There were several horse sheds plus blacksmiths, a wagon factory, carpenters, tin shops, a harness shop, and a wheelwright. Aiken's market and town hall were moved there about 1885, and cafes and a billiards hall provided entertainment.

Locals called the area Boneyard alley. Why? We don't know. A boneyard is a cemetery or a place to collect obsolete objects, a definition that hardly described the lively activity there. A clue appears in a 1910 new article, which announced "raw bone day" in the alley. Raw bone day?? And is the name Bee Lane, sometimes denoted "B Lane" in early city directories, derived from the word "Boneyard?" A mystery.

Recalling those days, Elizabeth Teague pitied Mr. C.K. Henderson, purveyor of shoes and clothing

at his fine brick store on the east side of Laurens. A camp for out-of-town farmers was erected behind his store, and Henderson was forced to block the alley entrance on trading Mondays to protect customers strolling on Laurens from "over-zealous owners" who raced horses and mules in the alley. An 1890s sketch from Collier's "Once a Week" magazine titled "Scene at a Horse Exchange, Aiken, South Carolina" depicts a horse hitched to a two-wheeled runabout charging through a crowd of onlookers.

It wasn't until 1931 that Aiken officially banned horse trading in the city limits, but Boneyard Alley had already changed by then. Gone were the smithies and wagon works and horse sheds. Gone, too, were the wooden buildings, victims of frequent fires. About 1909, the Aiken Police Department built their barracks and jail on the alley, and old-timers tell of prisoners banging tin cups and calling out to passersby from the barred windows. At the far end of the alley, Mr. P. W. Townsend built a long brick warehouse for his wholesale grocery. Barbers, cafes, and pool halls., many Black-owned, created a secondary commercial district adjacent to the main shopping area of Laurens Street. Charlie Alvanos cleaned fish in a narrow passageway behind his restaurant on the alley. At night, men staggered about waving pint bottles, and fights were frequent. Proper women avoided the place, and parents sternly warned their children away.

The Alley was transformed again in 1981, when 21-year-old Sam Erb took a daring leap and opened the Westside Bowery restaurant in a former juke joint on Bee Lane. An instant hit, the Bowery set the stage for the success of the Up Your Alley restaurant a year later and Marilyn Riviere's conversion of the Townsend warehouse into a mini mall of six stores. The Alley became a place that respectable citizens patronized rather than avoided.

But the Alley we see today required yet another makeover. In 2015, The Alley was still open to

vehicular traffic. Cars and narrow sidewalks constrained outdoor dining, and feeble lighting and asphalt were a poor magnet for pedestrians. A new vision was born- close The Alley to vehicular traffic, remove above-ground utilities, and add a handsome brick streetscape, quaint lights and more trees. It was the final step. The former horse-trading center, the shabby backstreet, became Aiken's celebration of pedestrian activity and the heart of our vibrant downtown.



Top: This is a view of what The Alley looked like in the 1890s. Photo provided by William Whaley.



Left: A photo taken showing a car being driven through The Alley. Driving through The Alley was accepted/ legal at one time.



Top: The Newberry Street entrance to The Alley in the 1970s.

Middle: The Aiken Police Station when it was in The Alley. The City of Aiken built a new public safety building that included police and fire personnel in 1975 on Laurens Street. The doorway of the old police station is all that remains today. Chief Hanna is 5th from the left in the photo.

Right: Westside Bowery owner Sam Erb serves a cup of soup during an event called A Taste of Downtown Aiken in 2011.



AIKEN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FALL GENERAL MEETING
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 3:00 P.M.

AIKEN COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM



LINDA JOHNSTON

THE MEETING WILL FEATURE HISTORIC AIKEN FOUNDATION PRESIDENT LINDA JOHNSON SPEAKING ON THE HISTORY OF THE ALLEY IN DOWNTOWN AIKEN. MOST PEOPLE THINK OF RESTAURANTS AND AMP THE ALLEY MUSICAL EVENTS WHEN THEY THINK OF THE ALLEY TODAY, BUT THE HISTORY OF THE ALLEY GOES BACK TO THE 1890s AND HAS BEEN EVOLVING EVER SINCE. THERE WILL BE A RECEPTION FOLLOWING LINDA'S PRESENTATION.

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO THE MEETING.

SPRING ACHS MEETING



Left: Professor Alexia Helsley speaking at the ACHS May General Meeting.

Bottom: The crowd at the May ACHS General Meeting.



Aiken County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1775
Aiken, South Carolina 29802-1775

Visit <http://www.aikencountyhistory.org>



This old building along Bee Lane is being renovated into what would become The Westside Bowery in 1980-81. The Westside Bowery really started the upgrading of The Alley to what it is today. This building houses the Mellow Mushroom restaurant today.