

GEORGIA'S OLD CAPITAL MUSEUM – MAKING TRAVELING THROUGH TIME POSSIBLE

Visitors to the Old Capital Museum (OCM) find themselves experiencing the impossible-time travel. Located on the bottom floor of the Antebellum Capital, on the campus of Georgia Military College (GMC), the museum seeks to preserve and interpret the historical heritage of Middle Georgia with emphasis on Milledgeville and Baldwin County. The museum is owned and managed by Georgia's Old Capital Society, Inc. (GOCS), a private, nonprofit organization that strives to educate the public in the cultural history of the area.

For over 2,000 years, men and women have lived along the Oconee River on the site where Milledgeville now exists. Dr. Amy Wright, OCM Executive Director, suggests visiting the museum to experience a unique perspective on the lives of those who contributed to local history. "Nearly 10,000 visitors, both local and from all parts of the world, tour the museum each year to learn the fascinating story told through the thousands of artifacts on display."

ENGAGING YOUNG LEARNERS

The museum is a vital educational site for young visitors and it employs a special helper to create an entertaining learning environment for children. "Most young children love animals, and even a mascot such as our Ollie, the Old Capital Chipmunk, can put children at ease in a new situation," noted Wright.

According to Wright, Ollie welcomes the children at the museum's front door, leads them to the gallery, and sits with them as they listen to stories, play games, and learn about artifacts. Wright added, "By the end of the tour, our young visitors are disappointed to leave the museum and want to know if Ollie can come visit them at home!"

Tours have been specifically crafted for each age group-elementary, secondary, and college-to engage students and spark interests in the historical and cultural past. The docents are familiar with the Georgia Standards for high school students and incorporate them into the tour, pointing out artifacts and pictures that reinforce classroom studies.

Permanent Galleries

The permanent galleries begin with Pre-historic Georgia and include Frontier Georgia, Colonial Georgia, the Antebellum Capital period, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction period leading up to modern day. Visitors will enjoy life-like mannequins styled with period dress, original and reproductions of tools, hunting bows, war ammunition, and domestic equipment-many items have been donated by private collectors from the Middle Georgia area.

Well-known citizens, such as Captain George P. Doles, are represented through the permanent galleries and their stories told through pictures, clothing, and text. One must stop and contemplate the historical importance of where they are while walking through the Civil War section of the museum. The very ground is where the Georgia Legislature voted to take their leave from the Union in 1861.

The permanent galleries conclude with the founding of iconic Milledgeville institutions-Middle Georgia Military and Agricultural College (GMC), Georgia Normal and Industrial College for Women (Georgia College-GC), and Central State Hospital (CSH).

GMC was established in 1879 by act of the Georgia General Assembly and today allows both men and women to receive an outstanding education. Georgia College, the Liberal Arts College of Georgia, has been co-educational since the 1967 and has many esteemed alumni including the world-renowned author Flannery O'Connor.

CSH, once the largest mental health asylum in the world, has a rich history that spans over 100 years. Thousands of patients were treated within its walls during periods when not much was known about mental illness and treatment. The hospital was the largest employer in the county until its recent closure in the last decade.

Rotating Gallery

The current exhibit in the rotating gallery is “Broom to Musket: Women of the South 1861-1865.” According to Wright, this exhibit examines eight women who lived during the Civil War (CW) and how they survived the challenges of those years. The women represented in the exhibit include The Diarist, The Sharecropper’s Wife, The Soldier, The Nurse, The Slave, and The Plantation Mistress.

When studying the history of the CW, many focus on the plight of men during wartime, but the women often suffered alone and with their children during these horrible years. “Thousands of women were left to cope on their own when their fathers, husbands, and sons left to fight in the Confederate army,” added Wright. “Many of these women were illiterate and never wrote diaries or letters. Only recently have scholars begun to focus on their stories.”

Brown-Stetson-Sanford House

Also managed by the GOCMS, the Brown-Stetson-Sanford House (BSSH) is a Federal-style home built in 1825, on North Wilkinson Street for George T. Brown by architect John Marlor. Known as the “Milledgeville Federal” style, the home has the characteristic columned double porch and spiral staircase. It was operated as a hotel to serve visitors and legislators during the city’s years as capital of Georgia.

The house was purchased by merchant Daniel B. Stetson in 1857. Stetson’s daughter Elizabeth married Judge Daniel B. Sanford, Clerk of the Secession Convention, in 1868. The home was known as the Sanford House Tea Room from 1951-1966; the family donated the house to the OCHS in 1966.

Today, the home, filled with period antiques and beautiful furnishings, is a fine example of how the Stetson-Sanford families resided. The GOCMS hold events open to the public throughout the year and tours are available on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday by way of the Milledgeville Trolley Tours given by the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau.

Traveling back in time while visiting the OCM is not only possible but makes for a fascinating journey filled with amazement, intrigue, and admiration-all for those who went before us on this land. As a 501c3 nonprofit, the museum is dependent solely on membership, donations, and grants to operate both the OCM and the BSSH. For more information visit www.oldcapitalmuseum.org.