

Organization Overview

The Belton Area Museum Association (BAMA) was founded in 1975 by concerned citizens of Belton. The organization's purpose is to collect, exhibit, preserve, and interpret the artifacts, sites, antiquities, and genealogical, archival, cultural, and natural history of Belton, SC, Anderson County, SC, and The State of South Carolina. BAMA also provides cultural enrichment, intellectual stimulation, learning opportunities, and activities to increase the appreciation of the traditional, visual, and performing arts.

To achieve this mission, BAMA manages several museums, and a community space, all housed in the historic Belton Train Depot, and offers activities and events, free to the public. The Ruth Drake Museum (RDM) houses a collection of pioneer artifacts, train relics, 19th Century domestic items and agricultural implements. We also have an extensive genealogy collection for researchers trying to locate family roots. The SC Tennis Hall of Fame (SCTHF) celebrates the achievements of SC's famous tennis stars. The North End Gallery promotes traveling collections of interesting artifacts. Quarterly exhibits are curated in this space. Temporary exhibits in 2021-2022 included *Expedition: A Natural History Adventure Around the World, Unexpected!*, *Natives and Immigrants*, and *Willkommen: Germany*. The Center Section Performance Hall is open for meeting and event rentals.

BAMA is a 501c3 non-profit, with an annual budget of \$95,000. This money is raised through a combination of membership dues, business sponsorships, grants, revenue generated from the rental venue and fundraising events. Before the pandemic, annual visitor numbers were close to 11,000. Numbers are starting to rebound, with attendance in 2021 over 7,000.

The entire museum, including the Genealogy Room are open to the public Wednesday through Friday from 9am to 2pm, and Saturday from 10am to 12noon. Appointments can be

made for other times, based on staff or volunteer availability. The entire museum, including the genealogy room, is climate controlled and has an alarm system that includes fire monitoring.

This historic building does not have a sprinkler system but is located only three-tenths of a mile from the fire department. There are fire extinguishers, which are inspected each year, throughout the museum, including the genealogy room. The museum has a part-time executive director and a part-time curator/archivist. There is also a board of directors, consisting of twelve members, who also volunteer hours at the museum on Saturdays and during special events. The executive director has been creating a collections policy and disaster preparedness plan. Both should be finalized and approved by the board of directors by September.

Our Genealogy Room includes much more than just traditional genealogical records like obituaries, birth announcements, etc. It also houses historic photographs, letters, family histories, business ledgers, school yearbooks, and more, detailing the rich history of Belton. The room has approximately 427 cubic feet of storage space for archives. This includes four file cabinets, and two sets of custom-built floor-to-ceiling shelving cabinets. Only about two-thirds of the shelving units are currently in use. The Genealogy Room has a table for people to sit and do research.

Project Description and Plan of Work

BAMA has the only historical archive in Belton. The newspaper has even recently given the museum its collection of original photographs of town events and important people that it held. Not all these pictures were ever published in the paper. The Genealogy Room currently has stacks of boxes full of these photographs and other historic photographs and documents, relating to the history of Belton. For the most part, there is no organization to these boxes and no complete inventory of what is even in them. None are being stored properly for long term

preservation. In their current state, they are not useful to anyone. Most of these photographs and documents are from the late 1800's to mid-1900's. The ones from the newspaper go into the 1990's. The older items especially, need to be preserved soon, before they deteriorate.

There are photographs and documents relating to the founding and success of the mills in Belton. The mills are a large part of the history of Belton. With their closures and the demolition of the largest, Belton Mill, it is important that their history is preserved. There are archives relating to other businesses that were founded on the square. The buildings are still there, but the original businesses are long gone. The railroad helped put Belton on the map and the museum has many of the original deeds for the warehouses along the tracks that the railroad sold to local businesses as well as many other papers pertaining to the railroad.

With the grant money from SHRAB, the museum will focus on four of these boxes. Two of the boxes have old, framed photographs of the family that owned the largest textile mill in Belton. Each of these boxes has only between ten and fifteen items. These have already been examined and the subjects identified. The other two boxes include photographs and documents from businesses, the railroad, and important events in the town of Belton. The documents include railroad deeds, business ledgers, and some personal correspondence.

Archival storage supplies for the collection will be ordered. For the photographs, the museum will purchase archival photograph boxes with archival storage sleeves from Gaylord Archival. The museum has used Gaylord Archival products in the past and has an account with them. One box will fit 100 8x10 photographs and the other 100 5x7 photographs. The museum already has archival storage sleeves and boxes for the larger items. If additional supplies are required, beyond those included in the grant, the museum is prepared to cover those costs.

Once deemed safe to digitize, each item will be given an id number and scanned, using equipment the museum already owns. They will be scanned using the guidelines provided by the South Carolina Digital Library for resolution, master files, access files, etc. The scans will be saved on the hard drive and will be backed up on an external hard drive. They will be entered into PastPerfect with a description of the photograph/document and pertinent search terms. The museum already has plans to include PastPerfect Online on our website in the fall of 2022. Once these new photographs and documents have complete entries in PastPerfect, they will also be added to the online database. Once scanned and entered into the database, the photographs/documents will be put in archival sleeves and boxes, organized by id number, to be stored in the shelving cabinets in the Genealogy room for anyone that wants to look at the originals in person.

Most of the photographs that can be easily observed in the boxes do have some identifying label. Those that cannot be easily identified will be marked for further research. Hopefully, there will be additional photographs or documents to help with identification. If not, additional research will be required to be able to identify them in PastPerfect.

The executive director will manage this project, outside of her twenty hours a week as executive director. She will work on it between five and ten hours most weeks for \$15/hour. She was initially hired by the museum to inventory their collection of artifacts, before being promoted to executive director. She has attended workshops and online webinars relating to the care and digitization of archives. A museum volunteer will help with work, under the supervision of the director. This volunteer has extensive knowledge of the history of Belton and is technically literate, to be able to help with all aspects of the project.

This project will be successful if:

1. The photographs and documents have been scanned and archived.
2. The PastPerfect records for these items are uploaded to the museum website.
3. The museum provides opportunities to educate the public about the online database.

Once the archives are uploaded to the website, the museum will host an event open to the public, in which the new online database will be explained. The rental venue will be used, as it has a projector to connect to a laptop. People will be able to see how to access the collection, as well as how to use it for research. There will also be articles in the quarterly museum newsletter and updates on Facebook to let the public know about the online database. Articles will also be published in the local newspaper.

Once this SHRAB funded project is completed, the museum will be ready to tackle the job of finding funding to work on digitizing and uploading the rest of the boxes of materials, as well as the extensive genealogical records already housed in alphabetical vertical files. The vertical files collections are currently accessible for anyone wanting to come to do research in-person. With no catalog or online database, there is no way of knowing exactly what information the museum does or does not have without looking through each file. A searchable online database will make research much easier for the public.