



News Release

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Artifacts Show Richness
of Fall Line Life

Columbia, S.C. --- To today's observer, life in the 18th and 19th centuries along South Carolina's fall line may seem Spartan and tough. But a review of the objects in the State Museum's exhibit *From the Pee Dee to the Savannah: Art and Material Culture of South Carolina's Fall Line Region* shows many residents' lives to be rich for the times.

This exquisite exhibition is ending soon, so visitors have only until March 22 to take in the many treasures of fall line residents of the past.

The fall line is the geographic region where rivers become shallow and rocky and are no longer navigable from the coast. This "break" in the river interrupted transportation of crops from the Upcountry to the coast, and often canals (such in Columbia and Augusta) were built to get around the shallow stretches of the river. Many people settled at the fall lines because the waterfalls and rapids there enabled them to build water powered mills and other enterprises that took advantage of the power of the rivers. Examples of these towns include Cheraw on the Pee Dee River, North Augusta on the Savannah and Columbia on the Congaree.

"The whole idea of material culture is to show what these people actually had, made or used, and what this tells us about how they lived," said Curator of Art Paul Matheny.

Even when they had no access to the large markets and industries of the "big cities," the manufacture of goods from weapons to furniture to textiles became cottage industries, said Matheny. "The things these local makers produced, while very utilitarian, still were often very beautiful, even without the mass production capabilities of northern factories."

Some fall line South Carolinians, however, did develop a taste for decorative and fine arts made in the North or in Europe. Examples include the ca. 1845 dressing case given by John Smith Preston as a wedding anniversary gift to his wife, Caroline Hampton Preston. The beautiful case features silver inlay in delicate wood, filled with brushes and bottles for powder and perfume.

“The 1849 Butler presentation sword is another example of elegance in the 19th century,” said Matheny. “Made in Chicopee, Mass. of gold and silver, and encrusted with precious stones, it’s not what one thinks of people possessing in antebellum and post-Civil War South Carolina.

“Back to South Carolina-made artifacts, the exhibit also contains a c. 1850 coverlet, probably from Saluda County, that is so intricate, it’s hard to believe that it’s not modern.”

History curator Fritz Hamer, who co-curated the show with Matheny, points out that while the craftsmanship of fall line artisans is as impressive as many imported items, it was still the upper crust of society that owned and used most of the artifacts the exhibit displays, with certain exceptions such as the stoneware pottery that was common throughout society in centuries past.

“For example, hunting and target rifles usually had to be commissioned, and the massive 1840 corner cupboard from Cheraw would only have been found in a prosperous home, though it may have been made by a slave craftsman.

“By contrast, some articles were made by skilled commoners to use themselves, such as the 1935 baseball uniform of James W. Oxner from Delmar, S.C. which was made by his mother of seed and flour sacks.”

Regardless of where, by whom or for whom an object was made, it is obvious that life in the Palmetto State was often more sophisticated than many would think, say the curators.

The exhibit is a cooperative effort of the Fall Line Consortium, which includes the South Carolina State Museum, the Historic Columbia Foundation, McKissick Museum, the South Caroliniana Library, the Columbia Museum of Art, the S.C. Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum, the Lexington County Museum, the S.C. Dept. of Archives and History, the University of South Carolina Public History Program and the S.C. Digital Library.

From the Pee Dee to the Savannah: Art and Material Culture from South Carolina’s Fall Line Region is sponsored in part by Brunk Auctions, Charlton Hall Auctions and a generous grant from Target.

For more information on the exhibit contact Paul Matheny at (803) 898-4921 or visit the museum's Web site at www.southcarolinastatemuseum.org.

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CUTLINE FOR FALL LINE EXHIBIT #1

Eugene Dovollier's ca. 1855 oil on canvas painting "View of Columbia" shows the South Carolina capital from the west bank of the Congaree River. It is the earliest known view of Columbia, and is one of the many treasures to be seen through March 22 in the South Carolina State Museum's exhibit *From the Pee Dee to the Savannah: Art and Material Culture from South Carolina's Fall Line Region*.

[Click here to view/download hi-res photo](#)

Photo courtesy S.C. State Museum

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CUTLINE FOR FALL LINE EXHIBIT #2

This elegant silver-inlaid dressing case was given by John Smith Preston as a wedding anniversary gift to his wife, Caroline Hampton Preston, around 1845. The beautiful case features silver inlay in delicate wood, filled with brushes and bottles for powder and perfume. It is one of the many treasures to be seen through March 22 in the South Carolina State Museum's exhibit *From the Pee Dee to the Savannah: Art and Material Culture from South Carolina's Fall Line Region*.

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Photo courtesy Historic Columbia Foundation/S.C. State Museum

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