

HISTORY OF THE GEORGIA CAPITOL MUSEUM

by

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(Under the Direction of Akela Reason)

ABSTRACT

Originating in the late nineteenth century, the Georgia Capitol Museum consists of several exhibits inside the legislative building in Atlanta, Georgia. Over the years, control of the museum has changed hands many times, yet neither legislators nor museum professionals have ever properly maintained and managed the museum. Today, the museum is struggling to maintain credibility. Because of poor collection management practices and a lack of clear authority, the Georgia Capitol Museum would not meet the Core Standards set today by the American Alliance of Museums to achieve accreditation.

INDEX WORDS: Museum studies, Georgia history, Public history, The University of Georgia, Georgia Capitol Museum, American Alliance of Museums

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Introduction

Originating in the late nineteenth century, the Georgia Capitol Museum houses an expansive collection with exhibit spaces on the fourth floor and other smaller displays throughout the first floor. Although visitors may remember seeing exhibits in the Capitol building, such as the famous two-headed cow, they may not realize it is in fact a museum. The museum collection has always been treated as a catch-all for history related to the state. Exhibits rarely rotate or have a clear focus; for the first eighty years, the museum simply displayed every artifact in its possession. The museum has become a collection of oddities to display in a legislative building, with no purpose and few records to explain its history or purpose.

Over the years, control of the museum has changed hands several times, yet neither legislators nor museum professionals have ever properly maintained and managed the museum. In the last thirty years, the museum has moved under the care of professionals who have degrees in museum studies or who have worked extensively in the field. Today, however, the museum is struggling to maintain credibility. Because of poor collection management practices and a lack of clear authority, the Georgia Capitol Museum would not meet the Core Standards set today by the American Alliance of Museums to achieve accreditation.

To truly understand why the museum has struggled for nearly 125 years, it is important to look at its full history. Doing so will help us better understand where the problems began, where there have been opportunities for improvement, and what can be done to move forward. Due to inconsistent recordkeeping, this history is pieced together from historical newspaper articles, interviews with previous managers, legislative records, and some limited published catalogs from the museum.

The Capitol Museum has faced numerous challenges that prevent it from meeting accreditation standards set forth by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). The largest issue is a lack of clear authority. Currently, legislators, university officials, and museum staff are all trying to guide the future of the museum, with little to no success. This lack of clear governance is a direct violation of AAM standards. Another challenge concerns the collection itself. There are currently over 11,000 items in the museum collection; however, none of these items have been processed or made available to the public, another clear violation of standards. Most surprising, the museum does not have a mission or collection management policy, two basic requirements for any museum. By lacking these basic components, the museum would not achieve accreditation.

The Capitol Museum is in a unique situation: it is a museum in a legislative building run by an academic institution. While this poses problems for management, other institutions have successfully navigated similar challenges. A close comparison is the former Agrirama, now the Georgia Museum of Agriculture, at the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton. The agriculture museum, now run by an academic institution under the University System of Georgia (USG), has faced similar challenges to those of the Capitol Museum and has overcome them all, to the benefit of both museum and college. The museum at the Virginia State Capitol also has striking similarities to Georgia's own Capitol Museum. In the last fifteen years, the Virginia museum has overcome numerous obstacles, largely due to proper planning and proper collaboration with the Virginia legislature.

Included are recommendations that can be used to help the Georgia Capitol Museum acquire accreditation. Ultimately, though, it is up to the current administration, the Richard B.

Russell Library for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia, to work with legislators to address these failings and to bring the museum up to the standards set forth by the American Alliance of Museums.

Chapter 1: History of the Georgia Capitol Museum

The Early Days

While some sources date the Georgia Capitol Museum to 1896, it may actually have a slightly earlier origin.¹ On August 12, 1870, David W. Lewis of the State Agricultural Society wrote a letter to the *Griffin Semi-Weekly Star*.² The letter begins by stating that the office of the State Agricultural Society moved to the capitol basement in Atlanta and that the new space also consists of a library, reading room, and museum.³ Lewis requests that papers be sent to the society, implying that they are attempting to establish an archive.⁴ Most important, though, is Lewis' request for additions to the collection:

“Delegates and members, and visitors to the convention are urged to consider if they cannot bring with them a few precious stones or other valuable contributions to the museum. If each delegate should bring with him the most curious and interesting specimens, whether mineral, fossil, earth, plant or other object in natural history, it would present at once a most interesting spectacle in itself and perhaps the highest evidence of the great variety of soil, vegetation, climate, and the varied productive capacity of the State.”⁵

¹ Geoffrey W. Crickmay, *The Georgia State Museum*, 2.

² David W. Lewis, *Griffin Semi-Weekly Star* (Griffin, GA), Aug. 12, 1870.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

This article proves that as early as 1870, there was a natural history museum collection at the Capitol building. In 1895, State Geologist, W.S. Yeates, created “an extensive display of minerals” at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia.⁶ Yeates had previously curated mineral exhibits at the United States National Museum from 1881 to 1883.⁷ Representing about twelve Georgia counties, Yeates’ Cotton States exhibit consisted of a selection of minerals, such as amethyst and corundum, which was one of the most important minerals in the state.⁸ After the exposition, Yeates needed a place to store the materials, and Georgia Governor William Yates Atkinson (1894-1899) offered the fourth floor of the Capitol building.⁹

The 1870 letter to the *Griffin Semi-Weekly Star* may explain Governor Atkinson’s decision to display Yeates’ mineral exhibit in the Capitol building: there were already mineral exhibits on display and Yeates’ objects would have been a welcome addition to the exhibits. Yeates’ work would have added even more appeal as an exhibit that was featured at such an important exposition in Atlanta history.

With a proud display of minerals in the Capitol building, the exhibits officially became known as the Georgia State Museum in 1896.¹⁰ The decision to form the museum inside the Capitol building would have lasting ramifications. Yeates, himself, was aware of the need for a museum to grow and establish itself in a separate environment; he had previously worked at the National Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1881, the first year it opened in the new Arts and

⁶ U.S. Geological Survey, “The Gem Exhibit at Atlanta,” 920.

⁷ Walter Gerald Cooper, *Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 203.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Geoffrey W. Crickmay, *The Georgia State Museum*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Industries building, which was built specifically to house and display the museum's rapidly growing collection.¹¹ However, keeping the museum in the Georgia Capitol building ensured not only the support of the governor but also a central location for the many tourists that would visit. If Yeates did have any reservations, the short-term benefits greatly outweighed any possible long-term problems.

Yeates took on an active role in curating exhibits for the museum and went on to curate another selection of Georgia rocks and minerals at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, or St. Louis World's Fair, in Missouri in 1904, specifically representing the holdings of the Georgia State Museum.¹² Yeates served on the Board of Commissioners for this exposition and played a role in the decision-making for the Georgia State Building, which was made of granite.¹³ This would be Yeates' last exposition before his death in 1908.¹⁴ Due to poor record-keeping, it is unclear who took charge of the museum at this time. Based on newspaper articles, it does seem that state geologist S.W. McCallie, who succeeded Yeates, may have taken over running the museum. In 1927, McCallie was presented with a mastodon tooth found in South Georgia and added it to the museum collection.¹⁵

So much is unknown about these early years of the museum specifically because there was little record-keeping. Recordkeeping is essential to museum work. Whether it is records regarding the collection, curation, or administration, museums need records to document the

¹¹ "Arts and Industries Building," Smithsonian Institution Archives website, <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/arts-and-industries-building>

¹² Universal Exposition, St. Louis, *Official Catalogue of Exhibitors*, 38.

¹³ Colin Selph, *World's Fair Bulletin*, 27.

¹⁴ "W.S. Yeates State Geologist of Georgia Passes Away At his Home in Atlanta Yesterday," *Athens Banner* (Athens, GA), Feb. 20, 1908.

¹⁵ "Mastodon's Tooth Found in Georgia," *The Banner-Herald* (Athens, GA), June 9, 1927.

history and progress they have made. At the turn of the century, the administrators of the Georgia State Museum may not have seen it as such a necessity, but even minor recordkeeping could have made a huge difference for the museum in later years.

Curators through the Years

The 1930s was a period of significant change within the museum. Annette McLean originated the position of curator of the museum and served in this role for an extended period of time.¹⁶ She was the first woman to run the museum and the first person not trained in the field of geology or natural history. After four years in this role, she left and was replaced by Dr. Wightman F. Melton.¹⁷ Melton, addressed as “State Curator,” had been the head of the English department at Emory University for eighteen years and the poet laureate of Georgia.¹⁸ Much like McLean, he had neither a background in natural history nor museums. Melton passed away on November 13, 1944.¹⁹ McLean returned to serve her second tenure as curator, which began on December 1, 1944.²⁰ She opened the museum to school groups for guided tours and also prepared the Georgia exhibit for the New York World's Fair in 1939.²¹ At this World’s Fair, the museum moved beyond rock and mineral displays. The state commissioned ten dioramas for the World’s Fair in 1939, all designed by engineer Roy Judson Duer and constructed by Works Progress Administration artists.²² Following the Fair, two of the dioramas, depicting peach

¹⁶ “Georgia Museum Of Natural Resources Rates High In Nation,” *Forsyth County News* (Cumming, GA), Nov. 30, 1944.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Dr. W.F. Melton, 77, Georgia Poet, Dies,” *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 1944.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “Georgia Museum Of Natural Resources Rates High In Nation” *Forsyth County News*, (Cumming, GA), Nov 30, 1944.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Diorama object label, Georgia Capitol Museum.

packing and turpentine production, were donated to the museum.^{23 24} During McLean's tenure, the museum became known as the Georgia Museum of Natural Resources and was ranked second best in the country, behind California.^{25 26} On March 3, 1955, the museum was renamed once again, becoming the Georgia State Museum of Science and Industry when Governor Fortson established the museum as a new department under the Secretary of State.²⁷ This move had a significant impact on the museum, which would remain under the guidance of the Secretary of State for the next fifty-six years.

The name changes show that the museum was embracing its established collection, full of natural history artifacts. By this point the museum had expanded the collection from simply mineralogy and geology to include agriculture, game, and fish, with the addition of numerous taxidermy animal models on display in the 1940s and 1950s.²⁸ Some of these models came from organizations like the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, while others were donated by individuals.²⁹ At this time, museum staff seem to have had little interest in record-keeping. McLean developed the "Guide of Georgia State Museum of Science & Industry." Although it is undated, the title of the guide includes the museum's name change, meaning McLean must have written it after 1955. Notable items include a killer whale and taxidermy squirrels arranged around a tiny table, in the midst of a heated poker game.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ These dioramas are still on display on the fourth floor of the Capitol building.

²⁵ *Forsyth County News*, November 30, 1944.

²⁶ It is unclear how or by whom this ranking was established.

²⁷ Fleming, *Guide to the Georgia State Museum of Science and Industry*, 5.

²⁸ McLean, *Guide of Georgia State Museum of Science & Industry*, 2.

²⁹ Fleming, 5.

Charles Fleming became the director of the museum sometime after McLean's death in 1962.³⁰ The earliest mention of his tenure is in the *Houston Home Journal* on July 12, 1973, where it is stated that "Charlie Fleming's museum" is a huge tourist attraction in Atlanta. Fleming wanted to focus the museum on the flora and fauna of the state and worked closely with several state departments to acquire specimens, including the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.³¹ Fleming's largest accomplishment was creating a guide to the museum that identified the various specimens of minerals and taxidermy models. Fleming does not appear to have kept records of accessions and deaccessions. As seen in Fleming's seventy-two-page guide, the museum collection was already beginning to become overwhelming with "constant additions."³²

At this time, the museum still struggled to establish a clear focus or vision. Although it seems that Fleming wanted to have a natural history approach, the museum also had other items on display that did not fit with the supposed vision. For example, Ben W. Fortson, Jr., Georgia's longest serving Secretary of State (1946-1979), added his own personal gun collection to the museum.³³ This informal addition would cause recordkeeping and deaccessioning problems in later years.

The museum officials' failure to maintain adequate records became more confusing and unjustifiable as time went on. In 1971, the AAM established the "Characteristics of Excellence" for museums, now called the "Core Standards for Museums."³⁴ The standards are set forth as

³⁰ "Annette Esther McLean, Douglas City Cemetery, 1899-1962," www.FindAGrave.com

³¹ Fleming, 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁴ AAM, "Core Standards"

guidelines for museums to follow to achieve accreditation through the AAM. When Fleming was in charge of the Capitol Museum in the 1970s, museum professionals were in fact thinking about how to meet these core standards, which include developing mission statements and collection management policies. It is unclear why neither Fleming nor the Secretary of State were working to abide by these guidelines and adopt better practices for the museum.

Restoration

After Fleming's departure, Dorothy Olson became the director of the museum in 1991.³⁵ Olson led the museum staff through multiple transitions during the restoration of the building in the 1990s. Beginning in 1992, a committee was formed to plan the restoration of both the Capitol building and museum. Timothy Crimmins and Anne Farrisee were the head historians on the project.³⁶ Crimmins held a Ph.D. in American Studies from Emory University and was a professor in Sociology at Georgia State University while serving as Capitol Historian.³⁷ Farrisee earned her M.A. in Heritage Preservation from Georgia State University and served as Executive Director of the Atlanta Preservation Center.³⁸ She served as State Capitol Historian for Georgia from 1993-2006.³⁹ Kathryn Dixson was hired as the lead of content development. Dixson had an established career in museums prior to working at the Capitol Museum, working as the Curator of Collections for the Missouri Historical Society, the Director of Museums Services for the Atlanta Historical Society, and running her own curatorial consulting company during her time at the Capitol Museum.⁴⁰ Lord Aeck Sargent, a design firm out of Atlanta, worked on the

³⁵ "Class Notes," *LaGrange College Columns Magazine*, Winter 2007, 23.

³⁶ Timothy Crimmins and Anne Farrisee, *Democracy Restored*, 3.

³⁷ Timothy Crimmins, Curriculum Vitae, <https://sociology.gsu.edu/profile/timothy-crimmins/>

³⁸ Farrisee, personal interview, March 3, 2020.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dixson, personal interview, March 9, 2020.

renovations for both the building and museum.⁴¹ Restoration lasted from 1993 until the early 2000s. The museum officially became known as the Georgia Capitol Museum in 1997.⁴² The Capitol Preservation Commission meeting notes from 1999 show funds allocated to the renovation of the Georgia Capitol Museum as follows:⁴³

Table 1.1

Museum Related Work	Cost
Museum Interpretive Plan	\$50,000.00
Portrait Care	\$76,500.00
Historic Flag Care	\$72,000.00
Museum Displays	\$1,635,000.00
Tour Desk	\$120,000.00
Flag Display and Conservation Space	\$1,145,000.00
Total	\$3,098,500.00

During this period of restoration, museum officials once again wanted to give the museum a new focus and reorient how exhibits were curated, with less attention given to natural history and more on Georgia history and the legislative process.⁴⁴ This would also be an opportunity to retire some of the artifacts, such as the historic battle flags, that had been on display for decades and potentially work on preserving them. Museum officials also removed

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "History of the Georgia Capitol Museum," Georgia Capitol Museum website, <https://www.libs.uga.edu/capitolmuseum/museum/index.html>

⁴³ Georgia Archives, Secretary of State Subject Files, Cathy Cox 1999-2000, RCB: 54389, C 8157: Capitol Renovations.

⁴⁴ Dixon interview, March 2020.

items from display that no longer fit with the museum’s updated narrative. For example, during restoration, many of Governor Fortson’s guns were removed and returned to his family. Many of the minerals and rocks from the early days were removed; some were sent to the Tellus Science Museum in Cartersville, Georgia and some were placed in storage.⁴⁵ In addition, many of the taxidermy models were removed, including the poker-playing squirrels, although a picture of the scene remains on display today, much to visitor amusement.

Two notable changes to the museum came out of this restoration period. First, was the Hall of Valor, a small room on the first floor created to display three historic flags from the collection. Until the recent past (approx. 2012), this included the public display of Confederate battle flags. Second, a portrait policy was established for preservation purposes, which led to the creation of the Capitol Arts Standards Commission.⁴⁶ The commission’s main responsibility is to “develop policies and procedures for and to oversee the acquisition, installation, preservation, maintenance, display, and storage of all capitol artwork.”⁴⁷ The commission is made up of sixteen members:⁴⁸

Table 1.2

# of Appointees	Appointed by
3	Georgia Governor
3	Senate Committee on Assignments
3	Speaker of the House of Representatives
1	Georgia Historical Society

⁴⁵ Kayla Adams, personal interview, 2019.

⁴⁶ Dixson interview, March 2020.

⁴⁷ GA Code § 45-13-71 (2018)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

1	Georgia Council for the Humanities
1	Georgia Council for the Arts
1	Board of Regents of the USG
1	Georgia Foundation for Independent Colleges
1	Georgia Capitol Museum
1	Secretary of State

Every appointed member can serve a two-year term and is eligible to succeed themselves.⁴⁹

Creating the commission was not an easy process. In 2005, the Joint Commission on the Recognition of Public Servants “reviewed legislation from other states studying policies addressing the display of arts and statuary on capitol grounds.”⁵⁰ The joint commission determined that a Capitol Arts Standards Commission should be established and that legislation should be passed by the General Assembly that year.⁵¹ However, the Capitol Arts Standards Commission was not established by law until 2015.⁵² Although it is unclear why this delay occurred, the looming recession and accompanying budget cuts may have played a part.

Many issues with the museum's management came to light during this period of restoration, including the beginnings of a contentious relationship with the legislature. The museum was only given funds for renovation when the entire Capitol building was restored. Previously, the legislature did little to fund the museum, even when artifacts were in need of

⁴⁹ GA Code § 45-13-70 (2015)

⁵⁰ Senate Research Office, “Report of the Joint Commission on the Recognition of Public Servants,” 2.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² GA Code § 45-13-70 (2015)

preservation work. Although it appears to be an afterthought to the legislators with whom they share a building, the museum was fully reliant on the legislature. No changes to the museum could be made without proper legislative approval. This tension between the museum and legislators caused issues with governance and establishing clear authority.

Another issue at this time was the inability to focus on one narrative. After the decision to focus on science and industry in the 1960s and 1970s, the museum's focus was reoriented again by the 1990s. One reason this problem occurred is because the museum lacked a mission statement, which would give the museum guidance on how to focus exhibits and overall narrative. Since the museum was missing this key component, it is no surprise that it struggled for so long.

Museum in the 2000s

In 2007, Karen Handel became the new Georgia Secretary of State, and Dorothy Olson retired from the Capitol Museum.⁵³ Because of the recession in 2007-2008, the Secretary of State made drastic cuts to the Georgia Capitol Museum, meaning education efforts, programming, and curation saw substantial budget cuts. During this time, minimal changes were made to the exhibits, aside from updating statistics and adding a case on religion in Georgia.⁵⁴ Since there was no money to make exhibit changes, tours became a priority.

Since 1955, the museum had been a separate department under the Secretary of State's office. However, Handel made the decision to place the Georgia Capitol Museum under the guidance of the already struggling Georgia State Archives, which was also a part of the Secretary of State's Office. While this consolidation seemed logical, the union of these two institutions

⁵³ "Class Notes," 23.

⁵⁴ Tim Frilingos, personal interview, January 14, 2020.

caused more problems than it solved. There was simply not enough space, staff, or money to properly merge these two institutions. Partly this issue was caused by Handel's attempt to further cut funding to the museum. When the Secretary of State's office was preparing their budget following the transfer, they simply marked out the line for the museum.⁵⁵ No one at the State Archives or the Capitol Museum was made aware of the cut until the last minute, at which time museum officials had to explain that they had moved under another state institution and should not be cut-off altogether. Luckily, the issue was resolved but not until the night the legislation passed.⁵⁶

Moving the museum under the Georgia State Archives did offer a home for the collection, significantly decreasing budget spending on storage space in Atlanta. At this time, the museum staff consisted of four employees, but as people left, the positions were not filled.⁵⁷ The museum and archives faced severe financial problems. The director of the archives, David Carmichael, made the difficult decision to initiate the transfer of the museum to the USG. The legislation to complete this transfer passed on July 1, 2011.⁵⁸ A few months after the transfer, newly elected Secretary of State Brian Kemp cut the budget to the Georgia State Archives, a decision that would close the facility on November 1, 2012 and force layoffs for the majority of the staff.⁵⁹ However, Governor Deal intervened, keeping the archives open to the public through

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Georgia Senate Bill 190, 2011-2012 Regular Session

⁵⁹ "Georgia Threatens Closure of State Archives," Society of American Archivists (blog), September 17, 2012,

<https://www2.archivists.org/news/2012/georgia-threatens-closure-of-state-archives>

June 2013.⁶⁰ After this date, the Georgia State Archives, much like the Capitol Museum, found a new home within the USG, where it remains today.

These actions once again prove that mismanagement by authority and confusion over governance have caused problems for the Capitol Museum. Handel's decision to consolidate the two institutions was not properly thought out and put both the Georgia Archives and the Capitol Museum at risk, almost sinking both in the process. There was no discussion of increasing funding during this transfer and no real thought given to the future of the institution or its employees. In this case, the governing bodies jeopardized the future of two significant historical institutions and their collections.

Georgia Capitol Museum and University of Georgia Libraries

In 2011, the Georgia Capitol Museum was placed under the direction of the University of Georgia Libraries. University Librarian Dr. William G. Potter then placed the Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies in charge of the Capitol Museum. Because of this move to the USG, all funding for the Capitol Museum now comes from the Russell Library's budget.

Today, only two full-time employees staff the museum: Karin Johnston Dalton, Deputy Director, and Kayla Adams, Tour and Education Manager. Since the Russell Library took over the museum, education is a priority again. Dalton and Adams consider themselves both educational and historical interpreters. They work to make history accessible to visitors and have been working to create a teacher resource programming series, revolving around education for

⁶⁰ Kristina Torres, "Deal Pledges to Keep Georgia Archives Open," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, September 19, 2012.

students and civic engagement.⁶¹ Most of their efforts are put toward leading tours for the 25,000+ students who visit the museum annually. Currently, Kayla Adams is the only employee giving tours and does not have assistance from volunteers or docents, a great deal of responsibility for one employee. The tours focus on the building itself and the legislative process, rather than solely focusing on the exhibit spaces. As such, Adams is mostly being asked to serve as a guide to the building, rather than the actual museum.

Moving the Capitol Museum under the guidance of the Russell Library has been far from a perfect solution. First, there are issues with logistics. Both Dalton and Adams work onsite at the museum in Atlanta, seventy miles away from the rest of the Russell Library staff at the Special Collections Building in Athens, Georgia. Communication and decision-making can be difficult, as the Director of the Russell Library, Sheryl Vogt, who formally directs the museum, works in Athens, too. The Russell Library has also struggled to be a good steward of the museum and collection, showing little to no progress in processing the collection, communicating with the legislature to establish clear governance, or creating a mission and focus for the museum.

The Collection Today

Over the last 125 years, the museum has amassed a large collection, consisting of 11,112 artifacts.⁶² Materials that are not on display are housed in the high-density storage vault at the University of Georgia Special Collections Libraries in Athens. The museum has a substantial art collection, consisting of 347 items, and some of it is held at the Georgia Archives in Morrow.⁶³ Since the transfer to Russell Library in 2011, many of the artworks have not been returned.

⁶¹ Adams interview, 2019.

⁶² PastPerfect Report, May 19, 2019.

⁶³ Ibid.

While the Capitol Museum is in charge of the Capitol's artwork, it is not in charge of the furniture or fixtures in the building; this responsibility falls to the Georgia Building Authority.

The collection as it stands today is incoherent. There are many items with little to no historical significance. While the collection contains many important artifacts, like historic flags and art, it also contains irrelevant objects, like a Chick-fil-A french fry box. Items that might contain some historical significance lack any record of identity or provenance. A cause for this disjointed state is the fact that the museum has never had a clear collection management policy.

The Russell Library also has not processed the museum collection at the UGA Special Collections vault. Since the collection is unprocessed, it is inaccessible to researchers or university students and faculty, impeding the public's physical and intellectual access to the collection.

Chapter 2: Challenges of Achieving Accreditation

In 1971, the AAM established what is now known as the Core Standards for Museums that are applicable to “museums of all types and sizes” to achieve excellence and better serve their patrons.⁶⁴ The standards are in place to help museums achieve a certain level of credibility among their peer institutions and eventually accreditation through the AAM. The core standards are broken into sets: Public Trust and Accountability, Mission & Planning, Leadership and Organizational Structure, Collections Stewardship, Education and Interpretation, Financial Stability, and Facilities and Risk Management.⁶⁵ By failing to establish clear authority, mismanaging the collection and records, and declining to create a mission statement or collection management policy, the Georgia Capitol Museum has failed for decades to meet many of the AAM Core Standards, and as such, would not qualify for accreditation now.

Challenges with Authority: Role of Legislators

One AAM Core Standard states that there should be “a clear and formal division of responsibilities between the governing authority and any group that supports the museum, whether separately incorporated or operating within the museum or its parent organization.”⁶⁶ This clear distinction with authority is missing today at the Georgia Capitol Museum. Although the Russell Library is in control of the museum, no decisions or changes can be made to the exhibits without passing legislation. In 2014, two state senators, Senator Valencia Seay (D-District 34) and Senator Emanuel Jones (D-District 10), authored legislation to develop two

⁶⁴ AAM, “Core Standards for Museums”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

new exhibits on the fourth floor. Senator Seay proposed an exhibit focusing on agriculture in the state, and Senator Jones proposed an exhibit on the Civil Rights movement in Georgia. Both ideas were approved and passed in the Senate.⁶⁷

Despite the efforts of the two senators, it has not been a smooth or easy process. The Russell Library did not know about Senator Jones' proposal for a Civil Rights exhibit until after the legislation had passed. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Advisory Council, of which Senator Jones is chairman, initiated the project. Working in collaboration with the Center for Civil and Human Rights, the council received \$50,000 to create the interactive display.⁶⁸ On January 17, 2020, the Civil Rights exhibit was unveiled. Senator Jones did not consult the museum staff during the process of developing the exhibit, and Karin Dalton was only notified that the exhibit existed a few weeks before installation. The exhibit is an entirely digital experience, consisting of three large 65" flat screen monitors standing on their sides in a wooden case.⁶⁹ There are issues regarding sound and physical accessibility. There are only two small speakers located at the top corners of the exhibit. Since the exhibit is approximately eight feet tall and ten feet wide, these tiny speakers do not carry sound well to the visitor, especially given that the acoustics of the fourth floor already make hearing difficult. These issues would have been avoided if museum professionals, who know more about designing exhibits specifically for the Capitol building, had been consulted.

Senator Seay is working closely with the Russell Library to design the new agriculture exhibit. The museum is working with HealyKohler, a design firm out of Washington, D.C. The

⁶⁷ Senate Bill 274, 2013-2014 Regular Session.

⁶⁸ Senate Resolution 686, 2017-2018 Regular Session.

⁶⁹ "Annual Tribute Illustrates Global Impact of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 's Message, Legacy," Georgia Department of Community Affairs (blog), January 29, 2020.

agriculture component is set to open in summer 2020. However, there are challenges with this exhibit. It will be entirely interactive and feature games, but museum technology can become quickly outdated and is costly to maintain. Also, no current plans for the new exhibit feature any artifacts from the Capitol Museum collection, a significant oversight since there are thousands of artifacts that can tell the history of the state.

The issues seen with exhibit design, especially with Senator Jones' digital exhibit, speak to a much larger problem, namely that legislators do not seem to recognize or validate the fields of museum studies and public history. Thinking that curation and design are an easy and straightforward process that anyone can handle, Senator Jones did not communicate any of his intentions or plans with the museum staff and outsourced creation and design of the exhibit.

The Georgia Capitol Museum has historically been governed by the whims of legislators. The disconnect between the legislators and the Russell Library has led to multiple issues with the new exhibits. The unclear power structure has repeatedly encumbered efforts to create quality exhibits utilizing both museum staff expertise and the museum collection. Tensions between these two parties mean that museum staff have little autonomy over the space they supposedly manage.

Challenges of Collection: Native American Artifacts

Another AAM Core Standard states that the museum must “comply with local, state, and federal laws, codes, and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations, and administration.”⁷⁰ The Capitol Museum collection is an eclectic assortment of artifacts and ephemera related to the history of Georgia, including a number of Native American artifacts. While there are several

⁷⁰ AAM, “Core Standards”

problems with the Capitol Museum collection as a whole, the handling of the Native American artifacts is particularly troubling and potentially a legal issue.

At this time, it is hard to positively identify exactly how many Native American artifacts there are in the collection. Currently, no items in the collection have a definitive tribal affiliation, but two items do have an associated geographic region. First is a Kolomoki bird effigy (FAE Box 21). Kolomoki was a settlement from around A.D. 350 to 600 located in what is today southwest Georgia near the Alabama state line.⁷¹ The second is the clothing of a Mississippi chief. The clothing is currently on display on a mannequin at the Capitol building with a descriptive text panel beside it. All other artifacts have the generic description “Native American.”

Below is a brief overview of Native American artifacts in the Capitol Museum collection:

Table 2.1

Artifact	# of Items
Arrow Flake	38
Ax	3
Ax, Slaughtering	1
Blade, Knife	8
Blank	7
Bottle	13
Bowl	28
Chisel	6
Coral	1
Drill	9
Effigy	17

⁷¹ Thomas J. Pluckhahn, “Kolomoki Mounds,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Sept. 3, 2016.

Effigy Vessel	12
Graver, Flint	1
Hammerstone	10
Jar	3
Kolomoki bird effigy	1
Maul	1
Mississippi Chief clothing	1
Paddle	1
Pipe	2
Pitcher	1
Point, Projectile	42
Pottery	14
Spear	1
Sphere	3
Stone, Chunky	3
Tooth	1
Tremolite	1
Trowel	1
Vessel	1
Vessel, Water	10
Weight	2
Total	243

This is not a comprehensive list of Native American items in the collection. This list is simply pulled from the boxes labeled by the fine arts company that boxed up the collection and

moved it to storage; these boxes are designated as “FAE” in the PastPerfect report. There are many other items in the collection that appear to be of Native American origin, including pottery, projectiles, and bowls that are not included in the list above.

All of these items, except the Mississippi chief’s clothing, are now housed in the vault at the University of Georgia Special Collections Libraries. There are no dates, names, or markings that make the artifacts easily identifiable. Some items contain a sticker (affixed directly onto the artifacts with adhesive, which could possibly cause long term damage) that state the year “1992.” This is an accession number and does not date the artifact. An accession number usually includes the year in which the object was acquired.⁷² However, if an archive or museum does not keep accession records or does not process the collection in a timely manner, then an accession number may not be assigned to an object until a later date. This is the case with the Capitol Museum because the Native American artifacts were in the collection long before 1992; Charles Fleming’s 1974 guide to the museum not only mentions the Native American artifacts but also includes two photographs of them on display.⁷³ In 1992, the museum was about to undergo significant renovations, and as such, museum employees were cataloging materials and creating records that should have been created decades previously.

In 1990, NAGPRA, or the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, was passed. NAGPRA “mandates that all repositories [including museums] receiving federal funds notify tribes of holdings of remains, funerary objects, or other important cultural artifacts and repatriate the objects to the tribe if members formally request their return.”⁷⁴ It affords tribes the

⁷² Society of American Archivists Dictionary, “Accession Number,”

<https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/accession-number.html>

⁷³ Fleming, *Guide to the Georgia State Museum of Science and Industry*, 54-55.

⁷⁴ Crouch, “Digitization as Repatriation” 47.

right to repatriate five types of Native American cultural items: human remains, associated and unassociated funerary objects, cultural patrimony, and sacred items when certain criteria are met.”⁷⁵ NAGPRA also requires museums to “invite authorized tribal representatives to consult about collections and to request information that would identify traditional religious leaders and lineal descendants. Traditional religious leaders can assist museums in recognizing those items that may be subject to repatriation.”⁷⁶ Looking at the inventory, it does not appear that any human remains have been found in the collection. There is a “tooth,” but it is unclear if this is of human origin. Fleming’s guide states that sometimes effigies, of which there are almost thirty, were meant to portray “gods” or “corpses”⁷⁷ As such, some of the items may be funerary or sacred.

In 1992, when staff were cataloging the Native American artifacts, museum professionals were aware of NAGPRA. The fact that they did not move forward with consultation and instead boxed up the artifacts for storage is alarming, especially since the museum was run by the Secretary of State's Office and was legally part of a state government that receives federal funding. So far, no effort has been made to determine if NAGPRA guidelines are being violated. Ruling out NAGPRA and moving forward with consultation should be a priority when handling and correcting errors associated with the collection.

Georgia state law passed in 2007 states that “The Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns works with museums in Georgia to ensure their compliance with state and federal laws regarding American Indian materials. The Council will assist museums in preparing inventories

⁷⁵ Graham & Murphy, “NAGPRA at 20,” 106.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Fleming, 56.

of their holdings of human remains and burial objects as required by law.⁷⁸ The Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns was formed in 1992 in response to NAGPRA.⁷⁹ In 2002, the Council also added the responsibility to “advise state and local governments on issues relating to Georgia's American Indians.”⁸⁰ Currently, the group is still active and taking requests for studies. The council’s role in advising would fit well within the scope of consulting on the Georgia Capitol Museum collection and is an easily accessible resource within the state.

In regards to any possibilities of repatriation, there are even more problems at hand. Currently there is no documentation on how the Native American artifacts came to the museum. Dalton has stated that museum records do “not contain any real information for the Native American artifacts.”⁸¹ It is especially important when working with Native American artifacts to maintain proper documentation to prove legitimacy, ownership, or transfer. As such, it calls into question the legality and origins of the items within the collection. The absence of documentation would cause problems if repatriation was pursued.

If the Georgia Capitol Museum is found to be violating NAGPRA guidelines, one consequence could be a loss of funding. Currently, this is not a significant problem because as part of the USG, the museum relies on state funding as opposed to federal. However, the Russell Library has received federal grants in the past for collection and curation work. Neglecting the situation would also make it impossible for the Capitol Museum to achieve accreditation through the AAM.

⁷⁸ “Laws and Policies,” Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns website, <https://www.georgiaindiancouncil.com/>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Karin Dalton, email correspondence, April 8, 2020.

Challenges of Finances: The Hall of Valor

Consisting of 463 flags, the historic flag collection is the largest at the museum.⁸² Most of these are Confederate battle flags. In 1905, Governor Joseph Terrell received twenty-six Confederate flags from the United States War Department.⁸³ Governor Terrell also decided to frame the flags and display them in the lobby of the Capitol building.⁸⁴ Legislation passed in years to follow stated that the state must both preserve the historic battle flags and also accept all similar flags offered to the state.⁸⁵ The flags were then prominently displayed throughout the first floor, exposed to direct sunlight and other elements. The Capitol Museum struggled to provide adequate preservation because no additional funding was given to protect the flags. By 1949, the flags were in terrible shape and in need of preservation.⁸⁶ Curator Annette McLean posted a newspaper advertisement asking for "some philanthropist with appropriately sentimental feelings about the Stars and Bars as well as enough money to back up emotion with action" to fund preservation efforts.⁸⁷ However, it was not until May 1956 that Governor Marvin Griffin finally provided funding to preserve "the old silk banners which . . . [were] literally falling apart."⁸⁸ Despite this preservation effort, the flags were not removed from display on the first floor. After ninety years on display, efforts were made to bring down most of the flags for preservation during the Capitol's restoration in the 1990s.⁸⁹ A specific space, the Hall of Valor, was created to

⁸² PastPerfect, 2019.

⁸³ "Flags are Returned by War Department," *The Weekly Banner* (Athens, GA), March 31, 1905.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Georgia Archives Virtual Vault, Flag Collection (Capitol Museum), <https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/flag>

⁸⁶ John Walker Davis, "An Air of Defiance: Georgia's State Flag Change of 1956," 310.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Georgia Archives Virtual Vault, Flag Collection (Capitol Museum).

display the newly preserved flags and was funded by the Georgia General Assembly in 2000.⁹⁰ Located on the first floor of the Capitol building, the Hall of Valor is a small room designed to display only three historic battle flags from Georgia history. Currently there are three flags on display: WWI 82nd Division 325th Infantry Regiment flag, Spanish-American War 1st Georgia Infantry, U.S. Volunteers flag, and Operation Iraqi Freedom 48th Brigade Combat Team Battle flag. In 2005, not long after the Hall of Valor was created, the Office of the Secretary of State, which at the time was still in control of the Georgia Capitol Museum, published a book called *Hallowed Banners*, which tells the history of many of the flags in the collection. The Secretary of State wrote that the book was published to “promote awareness and appreciation for our state’s historic battle flags and to honor their significance as patriotic symbols.”⁹¹ Until the recent past (approx. 2012), the Hall of Valor included the public display of Confederate battle flags.⁹² Currently there is no legislation or museum policy concerning the display of Confederate flags in the Capitol building.

The Capitol Preservation Commission’s meeting notes on November 2, 1999 state that the amount allocated for museum related expenses totaled \$3,098,500.00. Of that amount, \$72,000.00 was allocated for “Historic Flag Care” and \$1,145,000.00 for “Flag Display and Conservation Space.” A total of \$1.88 million of a \$3 million budget went towards the historic flags and specifically the design of a room to display them. The room was designed only to display three flags at once. Since the Capitol Museum collection has almost 500 battle flags, funds arguably should have been put more towards either preservation or designing a larger

⁹⁰ Office of the Secretary of State, *Hallowed Banners*, 12.

⁹¹ *Hallowed Banners*, 10.

⁹² Frilingos, 2020.

space to display more flags from the collection. AAM Core Standards state that an accredited museum should “operate in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes its long-term sustainability.”⁹³ The choices made to create the Hall of Valor, which only displays three flags, and not spend more on preservation of significantly damaged flags exemplifies the museum's struggle with financial responsibility.

Challenges of Mission and Access

The AAM Core Standards state that a museum must be “committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.”⁹⁴ Currently the Capitol Museum does not have a mission statement. While the Russell Library has a mission statement, it does not mention the Capitol Museum.⁹⁵ A mission statement is a central part of any museum and its absence can create challenges with purpose and narrative. Having a mission statement could have helped navigate plans during restoration in the 1990s.

Another issue with the Georgia Capitol Museum collection is that of access. The AAM Core Standards state that, “guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation.”⁹⁶ The collection is currently unavailable to the public. There is no online finding aid, and there is no mention on either the library or museum websites that materials from the Georgia Capitol Museum collection are available at the University of Georgia Special Collections Libraries. There is currently no timeline for processing the collection and making it available to researchers in the future. This creates a vicious circle:

⁹³ AAM, “Core Standards”

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “University of Georgia Richard B. Russell Building Special Collections Libraries Mission Statement,” <http://www5.galib.uga.edu/scl/about/mission.html>

⁹⁶ AAM, “Core Standards”

since no one knows what is in the collection, no researchers are asking for access, and as such, the library has no incentive to process the collection and address issues. The AAM also states that an accredited museum must “demonstrate a commitment to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.”⁹⁷ By continuing to ignore the collection that sits in the Special Collections vault, the Russell Library is ensuring that the museum will not meet accreditation standards.

Opportunities for Change

Dixson stated that there was no interest in accreditation during the 1990s because it would have taken too long, would have been “a stretch” given the state of the museum, and probably would have been “impossible.”⁹⁸ Although maybe not impossible, it would have been difficult at that time and remains challenging today. Over the last few decades, there have been opportunities to work towards accreditation. The first opportunity came during the restoration of the 1990s. A great deal of work was put into the Capitol Museum and collection at this time, and professionals, such as Dixson, were specifically hired to create a better museum, install newer exhibits, and solve issues related to storage. This would have been a critical time to handle the problems. It is surprising that historians and museum professionals working on the museum at the time did not advocate for accreditation.

The biggest opportunity to make progress towards achieving accreditation occurred once the Russell Library was placed in charge of the museum and collection. Multiple library and museum employees, who had educational backgrounds and work experience in museums and archives, were involved in managing the museum and collection. Museum professionals were on

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Dixson interview, March 2020.

staff at the Russell Library, and they knew how to work towards accreditation. Yet, the Russell Library still did not work to meet Core Standards after acquiring the museum, and these issues still have not been addressed today.

Chapter 3: Comparison to Similar Institutions

The Georgia Museum of Agriculture

The Georgia Capitol Museum's struggles are not unique, and many of them are comparable to challenges faced by the Agrirama in Tifton, Georgia. The Agrirama opened in 1976, and was designated as the official State Museum of Agriculture by 1980.⁹⁹ It was a 95-acre complex that housed somewhere between 16,000-20,000 artifacts.¹⁰⁰ Despite undergoing multiple renovations over the years, including adding a building for conferences and exhibits, the Agrirama was drastically failing by the time a state audit was conducted in 2006. That same year, the museum exceeded its revenues by \$230,000.¹⁰¹ Not only was the audit performed to determine if business and administrative goals were being met, but it was also performed to see if the museum was "adequately caring and preserving artifacts in the collection."¹⁰² The 2006 audit found that the collection was poorly managed, with over 50% of the collection stored in an open-air shed since 1982.¹⁰³ The audit also found that the museum was not "presenting" its collection like a "first class museum."¹⁰⁴ ¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Georgia Department of Audits Accounts, *Agrirama*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ It is unclear what museum standards the auditor was considering.

The auditor suggested that the Agrirama be transferred from under the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Economic Development.¹⁰⁶ Although this transfer was made in 2006, by 2010, the Agrirama changed hands once again, moving under the guidance of the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC), a USG institution in Tifton. The museum was then renamed the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village. Since the move, the museum has completely changed focus and become a living history museum. Approximately 60,000 people visit each year, about half of which are schoolchildren.¹⁰⁷ The Agrirama shares interesting similarities with the Georgia Capitol Museum. Not only do they both have a focus on agriculture, but they also both see thousands of school children yearly. Most interesting, though, is that they are both previously state-run museums that were then moved under the management of USG institutions.

In the last eight years, the Georgia Museum of Agriculture has undergone a complete makeover and is thriving. Today, the museum consists of 12-15 full time staff and 20-25 part-time costumed interpreters in the historic village; they also have approximately 100 volunteers.¹⁰⁸ Also, as part of a college, they utilize many student interns.¹⁰⁹ The museum is a mixture of permanent and rotating exhibits. The art gallery rotates about every three months, while the village consists of “dozens” of permanent exhibits that are “refurbished and refreshed on a regular basis.”¹¹⁰ All of the exhibits utilize materials from their large collection, which now

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁷ Kim Littleton, “Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, December 12, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Polly Huff, personal interview, May 21, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

consists of over 100,000 artifacts, ranging in size from “a nail to a two story home.”¹¹¹ A small library on site houses the collections and papers. The collection is processed and open to the public for research. Curator Polly Huff notes that most of this work was accomplished after the transfer:

“We use PastPerfect as our museum software, and all [of] our artifacts go through a 3-layer inventory/accession system. We double-tag most items, and we rely heavily on permanent and metal tags (as upon transition we discovered that this had been a very neglected part of the collections/registrar side of things). We do a rolling collection inventory, and once a year we attempt a full site inventory of each one of our 35 structures and the items inside them. Various items have been deaccessioned over the last years before the museum transitioned, and after, for the sake of clarifying the collection scope.”¹¹²

Huff also notes that most of this work was made possible by the transition to USG. Now, that the museum has the support of both the college and the state, they are able to have more employees, and utilize campus resources, like the public relations office and student interns.¹¹³ Huff calls the museum a “living/learning lab,” where students can come to engage in hands-on learning.¹¹⁴ Although the museum is currently not accredited, they will seek accreditation in the near future since so much work has been accomplished to bring the museum up to standards .¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Huff, May 2020.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

One of the main reasons the Museum of Agriculture has succeeded is because of overwhelming support from ABAC. The college has become not only a great repository for the collection but also a place where the museum can grow and evolve. Both the college and museum benefit from this setup, as seen by the interns that process the collection and work on exhibits and the classes that learn from the museum resources.

There are key differences between the management of the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and the Georgia Capitol Museum. The Museum of Agriculture charges admission to visit the museum, a distinction from the Georgia Capitol Museum and one that proves state funding may not be enough to support a museum. The Capitol Museum could benefit from additional funds acquired in other ways, including grant writing. Also, legislators are not involved with exhibit planning at the Museum of Agriculture; it is entirely governed by the college. Financial stability and clear governance have helped the Museum of Agriculture achieve a level of credibility that the Georgia Capitol Museum has not yet reached.

Virginia State Capitol

Another museum that has strong similarities to the Georgia Capitol Museum is at the Virginia State Capitol. Much like the Georgia Capitol Museum, the Virginia State Capitol museum only operates with a staff of two individuals, a curator and content coordinator, but the amount of work they have been able to put into their museum, bringing it up to AAM standards, is truly inspirational.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Craig Reynolds, personal interview, May 21, 2020.

The Virginia State Capitol is a famous building designed by Thomas Jefferson and Charles-Louis Clérisseau.¹¹⁷ When the building was completed in 1788, the design specifically included a public element, meaning the building was always meant to be more than a space for the legislature.¹¹⁸ The public space is seen in the rotunda of the building, which is among the oldest public portrait spaces in the United States; it is also where a statue of George Washington stands.¹¹⁹

The museum has grown well beyond its original space. In 2005, the Virginia General Assembly decided that the Capitol was desperately in need of repair, renovation, and expansion.¹²⁰ This renovation included an underground addition, which includes a visitors' center and museum exhibit spaces modeled after that of the U.S. Capitol. In order to make it to the "temple," or the main legislative building, visitors must enter at the foot of a hill and then walk through exhibit spaces. This addition allowed for a specific space for the museum to grow. The museum now features both permanent exhibitions, on Thomas Jefferson and the building itself, as well rotating exhibits, which tend to commemorate historical events and tell the story of Virginia democracy.¹²¹ Also, under the museum's care are three period rooms, which are still used by the legislature today, including the antique furniture.¹²²

The museum also has a capitol collection composed of any objects that belong to the Capitol building or general assembly. Objects in this collection were either paid for by the

¹¹⁷ National Park Service, "Virginia State Capitol," <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/richmond/virginiastatecapitol.html>

¹¹⁸ Reynolds, May 2020.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

general assembly, paid for by donations or gifted, or have lived in the Capitol building or have been connected to the Capitol building in some way.¹²³ The collection is held at the Library of Virginia and is processed, inventoried, and open to the public.

The museum is governed by the Capitol Square Preservation Council.¹²⁴ The council, established in 2007, is mandated by Virginia code and is a legislative agency. When the legislature created this council, they also determined that staff would be needed for the museum and provided funding. The council is made up of volunteers, with representatives from the governor's office, the house, and the senate.¹²⁵ The non-legislative citizen members on the council are all from the larger museum community in Virginia.¹²⁶ The code that established the council specifically gives power and authority to the curator to enter into agreements and contracts on their own and facilitate exhibits.¹²⁷ Because the Virginia legislature has trust in the experts, this part of the code eliminated the need to pass legislation to install new exhibits. This trust also speaks to a much larger and important issue. Curator Craig Reynolds puts it best:

“There is a strong belief, that [the museum] is not partisan at all and that Virginia has a special role to play in telling the story of Virginia democracy and history... There is a heightened awareness to give money... There is a consensus and understanding for the need to fund the collection and the museum experience.”¹²⁸

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Code of Virginia, § 30-193. Capitol Square Preservation Council.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Reynolds, May 2020.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

There are still limits and legal checks and balances, though. The council cannot deaccession any items in the collection or take portraits or monuments down unless approved by the general assembly.¹²⁹

Currently, the museum at the Virginia State Capitol is not yet accredited through AAM, but their goals reach far beyond that. The Virginia State Capitol has received preliminary approval to be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.¹³⁰ They are now moving forward with this process, and in order to be listed, they must seek accreditation. Those in charge recognize that this process may look different for a museum that is in a working legislative building and are consulting colleagues, such as those at the Maryland State House.¹³¹

The museum has not always been this successful. Much of the work to organize the collection and redesign exhibit spaces has occurred in the last fifteen years when the legislature put forth both the money and effort to correct mistakes. At that time, the goal was to fill in voids in the collection. Researchers were hired to investigate items in the collection that did not have records associated with them. The legislature also provided proper funding for conservation work.

Improvements to the museum were only made possible by full support from the legislature and by the establishment of clear authority. The legislature trusts the museum professionals to do great work and have legally protected their ability to do so. While the council is a legislative agency, the museum professionals are in charge and are not hindered in their

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

work. The Georgia Capitol Museum is lacking this type of structure and support from the legislature in Georgia. However, as seen by the actions in Virginia, change is possible.

Chapter 4: Recommendations for Accreditation

While the Russell Library is an excellent storage repository for the collection, there is still significant room for improvement when it comes to managing the museum and achieving accreditation. There are currently 4,836 accredited museums in the United States, and the Georgia Capitol Museum could join these ranks with appropriate adherence to the Core Standards.¹³² The museum's newfound stability under the USG makes this a perfect time to take the necessary action.

Mission and Collection Management Policy

The first step the Russell Library must make is creating a mission statement for the Georgia Capitol Museum. As the AAM states:

“[A Mission Statement] defines the museum's unique identity and purpose, and provides a distinct focus for the institution. A mission statement articulates the museum's understanding of its role and responsibility to the public and its collections, and reflects the environment in which it exists.”¹³³

It is insufficient to say that the museum now falls under the university's mission statement. The Georgia Museum of Agriculture, also under a USG institution, has its own separate mission statement. The primary goal of the Museum of Agriculture is to “develop a museum presence that befits a college with nationally-renowned agricultural and rural studies programs.”¹³⁴ While

¹³² AAM, “Accredited Museums”

¹³³ AAM, “Mission Statement”

¹³⁴ Georgia Museum of Agriculture, “Mission Statement”

the GMA has a distinct mission that identifies its purpose as a museum specifically, it still furthers the mission of the academic institution it serves. As such, it is possible for the Russell Library to develop a mission statement for the Capitol Museum that works in connection with the goals of the University of Georgia.

Another challenge that the museum must deal with is a lack of documentation. There is little information on how the museum acquired certain artifacts. This not only leads to questions about ownership and ethics, but also causes a dilemma for researchers hoping to use the collection and gain more historical information on the items within. While it is not possible to retroactively fix this problem, it is possible to correct the issue going forward by creating a collections management policy. As stated by the AAM:

“Museums should create a collections management policy that outlines the scope of a museum’s collection, explains how the museum cares for and makes collections available to the public, and clearly defines the roles of the parties responsible for managing the museum’s collections.”¹³⁵

A required element of a collections management policy is “acquisitions and accessioning,” in which the museum would keep records for all new income materials. A collection management policy would help resolve many future problems for the museum, including those concerning access, scope of collection, loans, conservation, and deaccessioning.¹³⁶

Deaccessioning and Processing the Collection

In order to begin the process of accreditation, the Russell Library must work to make significant changes to the physical collection. By doing so, they will show that the museum,

¹³⁵ AAM, “Collections Management Policy”

¹³⁶ Ibid.

“legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections.”¹³⁷

The first step is to deaccession certain items in the collection that either no longer fit with the focus of the museum or that cannot be properly stored and preserved by the museum. This is one area where the legislature is not involved, and the museum has previously taken these steps.

During the restoration period of the 1990s, the Capitol Museum, then under the Secretary of State’s office, deaccessioned two models, an orca and a great white shark, and sent them to the Georgia Museum of Natural History.¹³⁸ These models are now on the wall of the Natural History Building at the University of Georgia.¹³⁹ The Museum of Natural History has also received an ivory bill woodpecker, two right whale mandibles, and a few bird specimens, none of which had any data or records.¹⁴⁰ Other models went to Valdosta State University, although it is unclear what models these were, another instance of poor recordkeeping.¹⁴¹ Deaccessioning artifacts will not only get the collection down to a manageable size but also align the collection with the mission of the museum.

The AAM Core Standards also state that a museum must “provide the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources.”¹⁴² A challenge that the museum currently faces is that the collection remains unprocessed and unavailable to the public. So far, no finding aid has been created or published online. The collection information is stored in the PastPerfect museum software, which can only be accessed by the deputy director. The

¹³⁷ AAM, “Core Standards”

¹³⁸ Byron Freeman, Director of the Georgia Museum of Natural History, email correspondence, May 20, 2020.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² AAM, “Core Standards”

PastPerfect report includes an image of each item, a 1-2-word object name, a box number with associated barcode, an accession number, and an object status. Currently all object statuses are listed as “OK.”

The Russell Library employs multiple archivists who can manage this undertaking. Most notably, though, the Russell Library hires student workers, many of whom are hired specifically to process the backlog of collections within the library. A Ph.D. candidate with a focus in history, anthropology, historic preservation, or museum studies would be a great candidate for the position, and the library offers graduate student assistantships yearly. Going through every box and providing logical arrangement and description should be the first step to creating a finding aid that will then become available online. This will make not only the library's but also the researcher's job much easier when moving forward. It also will allow for outside researchers to have a better awareness and understanding of what lies within the Capitol Museum collection. Granting researchers both physical and intellectual access to the collection will help the museum move one step closer to achieving accreditation.

Address Issues with Legislature and Establish Governance

The Russell Library must address issues with authority and the relationship between the museum and the legislature. AAM Core Standards state that there must be “a clear and formal division of responsibilities between the governing authority and any group that supports the museum, whether separately incorporated or operating within the museum or its parent organization.”¹⁴³ Currently, both the University of Georgia and the legislature are vying for

¹⁴³ AAM, “Core Standards”

authority of the museum. The disconnect between the two parties continues to cause serious problems and prolong the entire process of redesigning the exhibit spaces.

For decades, the museum has been run by the whims of legislators, impeding improvement repeatedly. As such, museum staff seem to have adopted the idea that inaction is the best policy. Much of this stems from a lack of empowerment to actually make improvements to the museum. The obscure power structure has created an environment in which museum professionals are unable to make necessary changes to better the museum. This is not only a disservice to the professionals running the museum but also to those who visit to learn more about the history of the state.

As seen with the Virginia State Capitol, it is possible for both parties to work together and run a museum inside a government building. The key here is that the Georgia legislature must give a more active role to museum professionals when it comes to exhibit design. This model should be considered in determining how to coordinate with the legislature on future exhibits.

Conclusion

In 1936, forty years after the establishment of the museum, Geoffrey W. Crickmay, a geologist for the state and professor at the University of Georgia, wrote an informational circular for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources concerning the Georgia Capitol Museum. In it, he states:

“A state museum... advertises and educates in a way that cannot be duplicated by the written report, and it affords a safe depository for historic records. The poorly lighted corridors of the Capitol do not constitute a good museum, and it is high time efforts were made toward the erection of a permanent museum. A museum is one of those things whose value cannot be expressed in dollars and cents... For forty years the Georgia exhibits have been resting in a temporary posting waiting for appropriate action from the State Legislature. Is it to remain this way? Or is Georgia to demonstrate that she is equally or more progressive than her neighbors?”¹⁴⁴

Although the space proved to be more than temporary, Crickmay’s words reverberate eighty-four years later, when problems still abound. While it seems unlikely that the museum will ever live somewhere outside the Capitol building, it is truly disheartening that the museum has gone through so many transformations and still has so little to show in terms of improvement.

While it is hard to understand exactly why museum professionals have not advocated for proper accreditation over the years, now is the time to tackle these issues and work to meet the

¹⁴⁴ Crickmay, *The Georgia State Museum*, 2.

Core Standards. Addressing these failings will give the Georgia Capitol Museum the validation of being a truly credible museum. In order to be taken seriously by researchers or other museum professionals, the Russell Library should begin problem solving to achieve accreditation soon.

Fortunately, the Capitol Museum is not alone in this endeavor and has peer institutions, such as the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and the Virginia State Capitol, to consult with and look to as examples of what could be. By taking the time to address these issues, the Georgia Capitol Museum has the opportunity to succeed and stand out among museums across the country.

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