

# Charlotte History is Alive and Kicking!

Museums are solemn, hollowed halls of antiquity ... right? Not so! Charlotte has a rich history and The Charlotte Museum of History helps bring that history to life. Much to the delight of its visitors, this museum is quite the opposite of the stodgy stereotype. Upon visiting the Charlotte Museum of History and Hezekiah Alexander Homesite, you enter a space that is bright and quite alive! None of the expected dusty artifacts, but rather flat screen computer monitors and plexi-glass cubes showcasing information on china from the site.

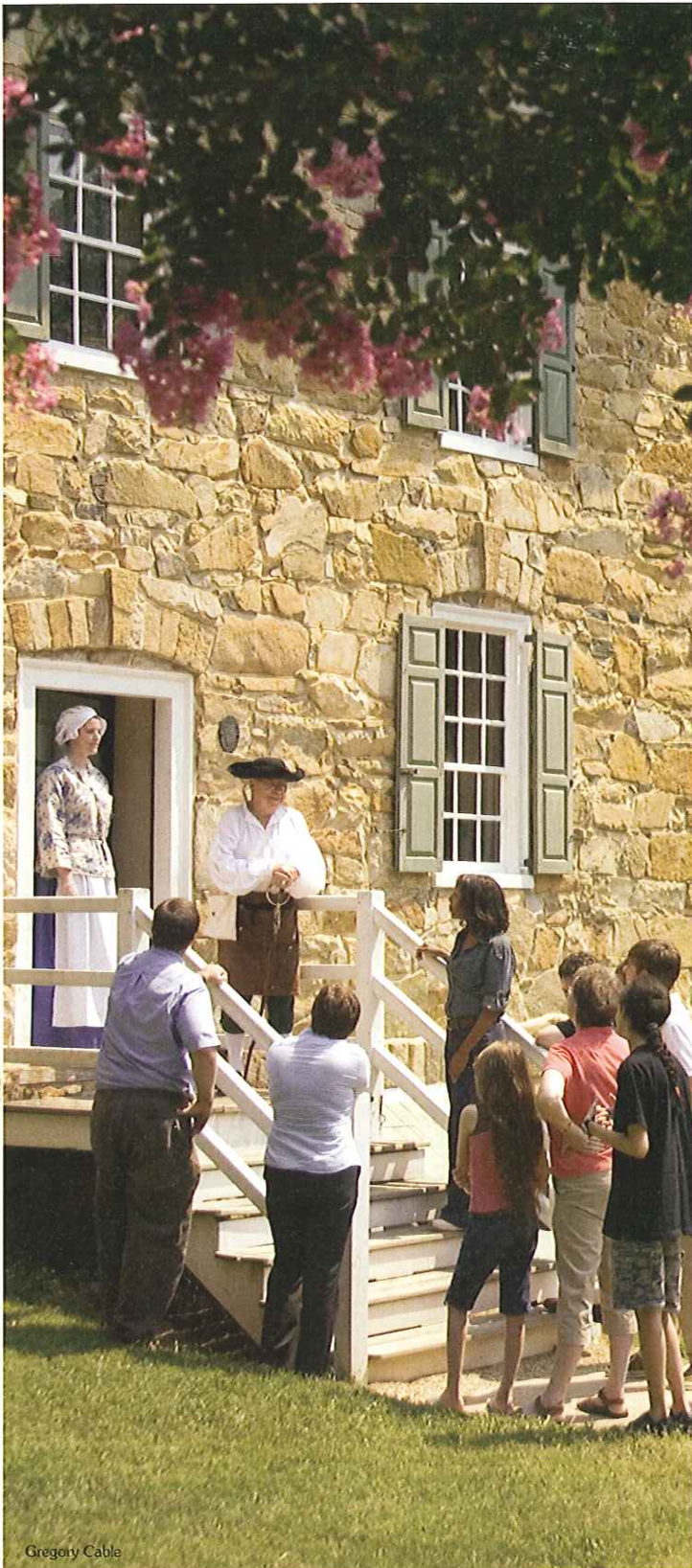
Chances are you have never heard of the Rock House, Hezekiah Alexander's home. Built in 1774, it is the oldest surviving structure in Charlotte-Mecklenburg where Alexander, his wife and their ten children lived. You also may not know that Alexander helped draft North Carolina's first Constitution and Bill of Rights. This is just a small glimpse of the depth of history that is to be found at this jewel of the city nestled on the northeast side of Charlotte. Just beyond a tree-lined drive on Shamrock Road, Charlotte-Mecklenburg history is being made and preserved. In the Rock House Mysteries exhibit, you can become a "history detective" and explore the secrets of this house you have likely driven past many times.

At the Alexander Homesite, you can visit an exhibit that reconstructs the front porch of a home in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area during the Great Depression. Walk down memory lane with

the survivors of this era, suspended above you in portraits. Those of us who do not know the meaning of rations and lack can look in their eyes and see the faces of strength and courage, and glean from their words of wisdom. You will discover how Charlotteans not only survived, but thrived, during this time. Take a moment to imagine what it would have been like to play paper dolls on an old dusty area rug while listening to the family radio ... not listening to your iPod while playing the family X-box on a 72-inch plasma television.

Visit the new Charlotte Neighborhoods exhibit and follow the journey of residents of the Brooklyn / Biddleville neighborhood where the Bank of America Stadium now stands. You can explore this area by learning about its history, architecture and culture. Pause to consider the impact Charlotte's urban renewal has had on one of its oldest neighborhoods. See the art of the children of this area, feel the pain they felt having to leave their beloved homes. And find out how Charlotte is working to preserve and resurrect the memories that many still have of this area.

Indeed, there is nothing stodgy about this museum. There is a palpable energy that you find in the staff and its participants. As Pam Meister, president of the museum says, "the museum is so welcoming and inclusive, a real learning environment! There are so many reasons to come visit us." The museum specializes in bringing history to life with family-friendly programs such as



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the Haunted Homesite, Twelfth Night and Military Encampments. You are welcomed to touch and explore, unlike the customary “whisper and don’t touch” behavior. Beginning May 19, there will be a living performance depicting the Alexander family’s role in the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Also, a summer camp is being planned that will incorporate the learning of history, theater and art to introduce youth to the joys of learning about their communities and cultures.

Charlotte is fortunate to have this museum that has painstakingly preserved the history of our beloved city. Where else could you retrace the expeditions that carried the Charlotte flag to the North and South poles, making it the only United States city flag to have been flown over both poles? It has often been said that in order to know where you are going, you must know where you have been. In order for us to help establish the direction of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, it is most important for Charlotteans to look to the past. We must capture the present and visualize the future as it is unfolding – and consider how it will be archived as the history of our children. On weekends, we take our families on trips to the mall or the movies; think of what a wonderful learning experience it would be for your children to actually know something of the area where they go to school, play and shop. Introduce them to 18<sup>th</sup> century Charlotte as they view historic stone architecture and period furnishings and learn of the colonial way of life. Take the kids to visit the Hands-on History Room and participate in fun and interactive activities.

The Museum invites families, church groups, seniors and, of course, schools to come enjoy the museum and get to know a bit more about Charlotte. Regular admission for adults is \$6; students and senior citizens, \$5; children ages 6 to 12, \$3; children under 6, free. Sunday admission is free!

This not-for-profit organization is supported by the Arts and Science Council, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Inc. and by the generous support of members. Corporate and private contributions enable the continued maintenance of the grounds and facilities. Visit The Charlotte Museum of History at 3500 Shamrock Drive. For business hours or to get information on how to make contributions, contact the museum at 704.568.1774 or go to [charlottemuseum.org](http://charlottemuseum.org). ■

By Dana Chambers of Charlotte Museum of History