

# From the Beginning: The South Carolina Silver Society

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*By Judy Anderson, Kay Durham, and Frank White*

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In 1992, Kay Durham, an antiques dealer specializing in silver in Columbia, South Carolina, attended the New York University Summer Intensive Course for appraising. During her studies, she learned about the New York Silver Society (NYSS) and joined the organization. Four years later, she attended a follow-up seminar on silver at the New York University. The NYSS was having a dinner that coincided with the seminar and she had made plans to attend.

Another Columbian who collected silver, Sam Crews, was in New York on vacation with his family and was able to attend several of the lectures at the seminar. When Kay saw him at a lecture, she invited him to join her for the New York Silver Society's dinner and program. He was unable to attend but during their conversation about the dinner, Sam remarked that they should start a silver society in South Carolina.

Several weeks after the seminar, Sam contacted Kay and invited her and

another friend and silver collector, Frank White, to have lunch at his law office so they could discuss the possibility of forming a silver society. The bylaws were written, the organization was recorded with the Secretary of State, and the South Carolina Silver Society was founded. The officers of the newly formed Society were the following: Kay Durham, President; Frank White, Vice President; and Sam Crews, Treasurer/Secretary. The purpose of the society was and continues to be "the study and

appreciation of fine silver with a focus on education."

The first meeting was held in November 1996 at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Columbia. Several members of the cathedral's Daughters of the Holy Cross presented a program on the church's silver. A number of people attended the meeting and joined the new society.

In February of the next year, 1997, the society held its first dinner, which is now an annual "show and tell." A good



Fig. 1. February 9, 2018. Left to right: Henry Brown, Frank White, Catherine Hollan, John LeHeup, and James Brannock.

time was had by all! The following year, the society began a newsletter officially named *The Gadroom — Newsletter of the South Carolina Silver Society*.

### Programs

Programs have been varied throughout the years. Speakers at the annual dinner have included such dignitaries as D. Albert Soeffing, author of *American Medallion Flatware* and more than fifty important articles on American silver flatware; Dr. William

Hood, author of *Tiffany Flatware: When Dining Was an Art* and numerous articles on silver; Lark Mason, expert on Asian silver and a regular appraiser on *Antiques Roadshow*; Janine Skerry, Metal Curator at Colonial Williamsburg; Catherine Hollan, author of *Hidden Treasures: Re-Assessing South Carolina Silversmiths* and other books on American silver (Figure 1); and Gary Albert, Chief Curator and Director of Collections, Research at The Museum of Early America Decorative Arts

(MESDA).

A highlight program was presented in 2020 by Hampton Smith, the society's first scholar in the Museum of Early American Decorative Arts Summer Seminar (Figure 2). The society raised \$5,000 through donations and a silent auction to provide a full scholarship for a student in this program. A second fully funded scholarship was awarded this year.

Other programs have been held in various locations to highlight "treasures"



*Fig. 2. February 9, 2020. Left to right: Kay Durham, James Brannock, Judy Anderson, Henry Brown, Jane Barnhill, John LeHeup, and Frank White.*

of the state. Programs have been held in Charleston, Columbia, Camden, Fort Mill, St. Matthews, Cheraw, Belton (Figure 3), Georgetown and Murrells Inlet (Figure 4), to name a few. Demonstrations from silversmiths and hand-engravers have been included (Figure 5).

### **Service Projects**

In November 2006, the society, with the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, co-sponsored the first South Carolina Silver Symposium. This was held in part to raise funds to purchase silver that belonged to the

Wade Hampton family. The silver was purchased and is presently displayed at Historic Columbia and the South Carolina State Museum.

The Society also provides assistance to requesting museums throughout the state. Identification of trophies was a project with the Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and Museum in Aiken. The Society also assisted the Elliott Springs House in Fort Mill in cataloging its collection of silver, and in another instance, was able to help a museum purchase silver-related reference books for its research library.



*Fig. 3. May 22, 2021. Group photo of attending members and guests given a tour by the owner of Chicora Plantation near Belton, SC.*

*Fig. 4. October 29, 2022. VP John LeHeup is donating a boxed top hat once belonging to Joshua John Ward to Ms. Robin Salmon, Curator of Brookgreen Gardens, Murrells Inlet, SC.*



### Community Service

The society has sponsored programs, *Silver* and *How to Care for Your Silver*, for the general public held at local businesses. These programs have been very successful in education and have resulted in new members for the society.

The society has advertised in *Silver*

*Magazine* for several years and has new members in various location/states as a result. Presently there are members in Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, and New Jersey as well as South Carolina. Membership applications are available at [southcarolinasilversociety.org](http://southcarolinasilversociety.org). You

are welcome to join the organization, or here's a thought: Consider starting a silver society in your state. If you read this article, it's not that hard to start one with just a couple of members and a vision.



*Fig. 5. April 1, 2023. Members attending a guided tour at the Aiken Center for the Arts; the exhibit was "Interwoven: Indigo and Silver" given by silversmith Kaminer Haislip.*

Judy Anderson is a longtime member and past president of the SCSS, currently serving as treasurer. Kay Durham is a founding member and a past president of the SCSS, currently serving as a director. Frank White is a founding member and is a past president of the SCSS, currently serving as a director and publisher of the *Gadroon* newsletter.