

Temporary Exhibits

The courthouse hallways house a number of temporary exhibits available to museum visitors. These changing exhibits highlight various aspects of Chatham County History. Currently on display:

Crossing Racial Lines: Tod R. Edwards 1875-1951



The exhibit on display in the Chatham Historical Museum for the months of Jan-Mar 2019, celebrates the story of the Tod R. Edwards family of Siler City. This African-American family ran a very successful jewelry store in the otherwise all-white business district of Siler City from 1905 until 1961. As Wade Hadley noted in his history, *The Town of Siler City: 1887-1987*, this was a “notable achievement for a Negro family during that period in this area.”

Indeed, such a success story would be remarkable for any family, but Tod Edwards’ story is full of interesting details and a bold crossing of racial lines. A native of Chatham, Edwards moved from Bynum to Siler City, where he opened a barber shop and dabbled in repairing watches, clocks and bicycles—being largely self-taught and making his own tools. In 1905 he had accumulated enough cash—he didn’t hold with borrowing—to construct a brick building on South Chatham Avenue, where he and his family operated the leading and largest jewelry store in Chatham County for over 50 years. He operated a photographic studio in the rear of his store which also did a large volume of business.

Patrons of the Edwards Jewelry Store were mostly white—at a time when segregation was unquestioned and race relations governed by Jim Crow laws and entrenched attitudes of White Supremacy. Edwards’ own gentility appeared to engender a large measure of civility, and some degree of respect among much of the white community.



Friends and members of the Edwards family have loaned the Museum artifacts to help tell the family’s story. Admission to the Museum is free and the Museum is open every Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 11:00am until 4:00pm, weather permitting.

[Read more](#) about the Tod R. Edwards family.

Chatham County Mills



Mills played a vital role in the commercial and social life of Chatham County, and in the quality of life for the many families for whom they ground corn, wheat, oats, and other grains for cash, credit, or shares.

This exhibit shows the locations of fifty Chatham County mills on the Haw, Rocky and Deep Rivers, along with several historical photographs. Research by Louise Hobbs, Charles Thomas, and Clinton Walker.

CCHA's Current Events

If you're in the Historic Courthouse and wonder what the Chatham County Historical Association is up to, check out the Current Events display.



Chatham Cemetery Map Exhibit



The Chatham Cemetery Map in the courthouse hallway shows the locations and names of all known cemeteries in Chatham County. If you know of a cemetery that doesn't appear to be on the map, please let us know! Our goal is to document every gravesite in the county. To learn more about our Chatham Cemetery Survey, [click here](#).

cemeteries have been added.

The cemetery map was updated in January 2018. Several "new" old

Please share your knowledge about cemeteries in Chatham! Help us document those identified and find those not previously reported.

Contact us at CemeterySurvey@chathamhistory.org

Chatham Preservation Successes



This display highlights some of Chatham County's recent preservation success stories. Currently, the three Pittsboro houses moved to Small Street when the county's new justice center was built are displayed—the Patrick St. Lawrence house, The Taylor house, and the McClenahan house. CCHA championed the preservation of all three of these houses, which had been vacant and neglected for years. Now, all three have been purchased by individuals committed to their renovation.

Also part of the display are two ongoing preservation projects: Reconstruction of the mid-1800s smokehouse found on the property now occupied by the Chatham County Agriculture and Conference Center is nearing completion by CCHA volunteers. CCHA continues to work toward a preservation solution for the Griffin-White house on US 64 East, which must be moved from Chatham Park property.

Learn more about these preservation projects and the history of the houses:

[St. Lawrence house](#)

[Taylor house](#)

[McClenahan house](#)

[Smokehouse](#)

[Griffin-White house](#)

Chatham Courthouse Fire 2010

In recent years, one of the most significant historical events in Chatham County was the 2010 courthouse fire. This exhibit tells the story of the fire and the subsequent reconstruction of the courthouse in pictures.



The fire began in the attic on March 25, 2010 due to a construction accident during a renovation of the structure. Firefighters battled the blaze for several days. The interior of the building was extensively damaged, but the heavy masonry walls were found to be structurally sound.

The building's significance to the community was evident in the strong desire that residents expressed to have the building restored rather

than replaced. County officials acted on that wish and the courthouse was reconstructed over the next two years. It reopened in April of 2013, housing CCHA's office and museum on the first floor and a courtroom on the upper floor.

Mobile Display Cabinet

The museum's mobile display cabinet is made from mahogany from the historic courthouse that survived the fire in 2010. It was designed and built by CCHA volunteer Rouse Wilson III and contains items from the Museum's Collection. The display changes as the archivist accepts new artifacts into the collection.

