

In January of 1986, the Elders of the Calvary Baptist Church signed a contract with a local construction company for an addition to the building. Mr. Odell Williams and crew began work and on February 7, 1986, while clearing dirt and digging the footers for the new construction, they unearthed something unusual. Construction was halted when Odell came upon a large, metallic mass. It was only 18" below the ground. He and the crew began carefully to clear the dirt away, fearing they had unearthed some type of underground utility pipe.

Soon enough it was revealed that four, very old cannon barrels were buried side by side and only a few feet away from the existing structure. Word soon traveled to members of the Chester County Historical Society. As members of the Society arrive at the site, it discovered that the barrels appeared to be loaded! The work to remove them is stopped until the conservators from the SC State Museum and personnel from the University of South Carolina, are able to come to the site to determine how to remove the obstructions. Three guns were purchased by the Chester County Historical Society and one by the South Carolina State Museum from the Calvary Baptist Church.

The guns were reburied, for a time, in the yard of Mr. Odell Williams home where they remained until tanks could be constructed by the State to treat the guns in a special chemical solution to remove the rust and stabilize the metal. The guns were then moved to Columbia, South Carolina where they found that each one contained shells, debris, and black powder, which made them somewhat dangerous to handle. The guns remained in the solution for over two years.

Four years later, Scott Coleman, on behalf of the Chester County Historical Society, began to push the preservation of the guns. For the next five years, through a series of contracts, dead ends, and hard work, Mr. Coleman managed to find just the right combination of people to complete the mission.

In 1994, on behalf of the Chester County Historical Society, volunteer and South Carolina Artillery Historian, Mr. Jack Malar of Fountain Inn, South Carolina, made the necessary contacts for the guns to be transported from Columbia to Laurens, SC to be x-rayed at B.F. Shaw, Inc. This was the only facility with a machine powerful enough to penetrate the thick iron. Only two of the tubes were x-rayed.

Deputy State Archaeologist, Dr. Jonathon Leader with the South Carolina Institute of Archaeologist and Anthropology, accompanied the guns on their trip from Columbia to Laurens. They were transported by the 1052nd Transport Company, of the South Carolina National Guard. Upon their return to Columbia, disarmament began in earnest. A special apparatus was made by a machinist in Hickory Tavern, S.C. Using the apparatus, Coleman, Leader, Malar, along with father and son team James (son) and Wade Noland were instrumental in disarming the guns with the assistance of numerous compatriots of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Mr. Robert "Bobby" Lee of Chester also provided the necessary transportation of the gun tubes which weigh approximately 1150 pounds each.

Once all four tubes were disarmed the Chester County Historical Society set about obtaining reproduction metal display carriages for outdoor, static display. With the assistance of Senator Strom Thurmond, one used metal carriage was obtained from the National Park Service. Noland Machinery

of Great Falls, South Carolina, restored this carriage using replacement parts. A second display carriage was purchased by the Society. The guns were repaired so that new machined trunnions and cascabels could be machine-bored, tapped and screwed into place so that they would appear to be part of the original casting. This work was completed on the three guns owned by the Chester County Historical Society by Bayne Machinery of Simpsonville, South Carolina. The State Museum chose to leave their gun just as it was found that gun is on display at the South Carolina State Museum, located in Columbia. <http://www.museum.state.sc.us/>

The Chester County Historical Society restored their three guns and placed two of the 10lb, Confederate-made, Parrott Rifles in downtown Chester. One is on the “top of the hill,” and the other is in front of the Chester County Courthouse. The Historical Society placed these for public display and access to these rare and significant Chester County artifacts.

The third gun, which came to be known as the Chester Gun, was re-bored and sleeved as to make it safe to fire! The CCHS then purchased a reproduction wooden carriage along with a wheeled limber. The Chester Gun was used exclusively by the Chester County Historical Society from 1995 until 2008. In 2008 The Chester Gun was placed on temporary year-long, renewable loan to the 6th South Carolina Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The regiment took good care of the gun and used it in a number of “local” and National re-enactments and living history events. It was ALWAYS the star attraction. It is, after all, the ONLY firing, 10lb, Confederate-Made, cast iron gun in the world!

The Chester Gun has traveled back to Fort Sumter and was showcased at the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Shiloh. It was also traveled up to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania where it “pleased reenactors and spectators alike.” The Historical Society took control and possession of the Chester Gun in January of 2014.

The Chester County Historical Society is pleased to own and present the Chester Gun at living history events and reenactments throughout the State of South Carolina and Nationally when possible. This Gun is a source of pride for the people of Chester County, South Carolina and the Historical Society is dedicated to presenting the gun, in county, as often as possible.

For more information on having the Chester Gun at your event, please contact the CCHS at (803) 385-2332 or by email at ccmuseum@truvista.net