



Foundation Forum

FOUNDATION FORUM AND HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

The Historic Huntsville Foundation is committed to building a vibrant future for Huntsville-Madison County by preserving our past. Since 1974, we have promoted the protection and preservation of Huntsville-Madison County's historically, architecturally and culturally significant structures and sites through education, advocacy and public policy.



Historic Huntsville Foundation receives Grant from Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville

A Gift that Keeps on Giving

Donna Castellano

Historic Huntsville Foundation receives Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville Grant

The Huntsville community owes another debt to Ruth and Lyle Taylor, a loving couple whose commitment to bettering their community led them to support a variety of causes, one of which was historic preservation. Ruth and Lyle were members of the Historic Huntsville Foundation; they attended membership teas and potluck suppers and those of us who knew them will never forget Lyle's penchant for piercing questions and his eagerness to explore an idea through all its possible permutations, always with a smile and a twinkle in his eye.

Ruth and Lyle Taylors's commitment to their community did not end with their death. They continue to make Huntsville-Madison

County a better place to live through the Taylor Endowment, a fund they established through the Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville to provide funds for historic preservation, environmental conservation and civic engagement project. The 2018 grant cycle focused on historic preservation. We are pleased that the Community Foundation awarded the Historic Huntsville Foundation \$5,431.37 to support two of our Alabama Bicentennial projects.

The process of planning HHF's Bicentennial programs underscores the fragility of Alabama's historic buildings and houses. Huntsville-Madison County has a significant number of buildings dating from the territorial period that are still standing, which this grant will help us identify

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A WHIRLWIND OF A WEEKEND

The Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation is hosting their Spring Ramble the first weekend in May to celebrate National Historic Preservation month. This year the Trust returns to the site of Alabama's 1819 Constitutional Convention.

The weekend focuses on Huntsville's earliest history and our contribution to the national dialogue on "Nifty from the Last 50," with some of our landmark Space Age era structures. Buildings toured will range from the oldest documented building in the state, the 1810 Joel Eddins House at Burritt, to Harvie P. Jones designed buildings at Constitution Village, and from Temple B'nai Sholom, the oldest continuously used synagogue in Alabama, to the iconic First Baptist Church with its soaring bell tower and colorful mural.

Friday's opening reception is co-sponsored by Huntsville West, Huntsville's award winning co-working space that adaptively reused a post-WWII era school. Saturday's closing reception is sponsored by the Preservation Company, and will be held at their stunning architectural salvage store, the site of the former Lincoln Commissary. For more information and to register for the event, visit www.alabamatrust.info.



The mural and soaring bell tower of the First Baptist Church of Huntsville.

Don't Forget! RSVP for
RANCH HOUSES IN THE ROCKET CITY
donna@historichuntsville.org



A Gift that Keeps on Giving continued from cover

and document. Our goal as preservationists, however, is not just to celebrate their existence for today, but ensure that they have a place in our city, county and state for tomorrow and the next hundred years. It is our obligation to help instill in the next generation a deep respect and kinship for the historic buildings of Huntsville and Madison County, so this generation passes this affection down to their children, who will pass it down to their children, who will pass it down to their children, and so on and so on.

Our two Bicentennial programs, *Footsteps to Statehood* and *Finding Huntsville: A Kid-Friendly Guide to Huntsville's Historic*

Architecture, combine the lessons we have learned over the past decades at the Historic Huntsville Foundation, so we can use our state's 200 birthday celebration to reinforce the significance of our historical legacy and begin the work of preserving it forward. Our Bicentennial programs are educational, inclusive, family friendly, fun and free--attributes that have proven to be a winning combination for HHF projects. We need your help to make this happen. The newsletter gives information about our Bicentennial projects in greater detail; we welcome your support in any that interest you. We have lot of work to do, and 2019 is just around the corner!

FROM THE CHAIRMAN MAKING MOMENTS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

Let me share with you my introduction to the Historic Huntsville Foundation.

It happened in Big Spring Park, July of 2014. My daughter Olivia, like every other child in America, was crazy about the movie *Frozen*. A friend invited my family to Big Spring Park to see *Frozen*, which was the featured film for Movies in the Park that Friday night. My husband, Matthew, son Owen, Olivia and I got our coolers and blankets and lawn chairs and found our way to the park, so we could all, once again, watch this movie.

The park was full--there were probably 5,000 people there. There were kids, there were families, there were church groups, there were teens hanging out, there were older people without kids, there were people of all races—all making their way through the park to find a spot to see a movie they had seen dozens of times before. The sun went down, the lights came on the screen, and we all watched the movie as intently as if it we all were seeing it for the very first time. The score of this movie alone is impressive but hearing 5,000 people in Big Spring Park sing along with the movie sent chills through me. It was amazing how this shared experience created a feeling of togetherness unlike any I had felt at a community event. I wanted to know more about the organization that made that moment happen in Big Spring Park.

So, fast forward a few years, and now I am the Chairman of the Board of the Historic Huntsville Foundation. I accepted this position because of the things I learned about Historic Huntsville Foundation, and all the moments they make happen in our community.

There are the moments that happen in our board meetings when Donna gives us an update on a HHF new preservation initiative, such as supporting the listing of Edmonton Heights, an African American neighborhood near Alabama A&M, to the National Register of Historic Places. Or the moments

spent chatting with UAH history intern, Arik Daly, who is cataloguing the business records of Harrison Brothers Hardware for their safe transfer to the UAH Library Special Collection and Archives. Or the moments spent in Harrison Brothers Hardware, which deepen my appreciation for the authenticity

of the store and how HHF keeps this tradition alive for our community.

There are the moments that happen in our educational programs, such as October's event at the Temple B'nai Sholom. Watching the unfolding of the Torah for the first time, hearing the blessings offered in Hebrew, and seeing the pleasure on the faces of

all in attendance is a memory I cherish in my heart.

And there are the moments yet to come. On Thursday, May 3, HHF will host a program about the history and design significance of Huntsville's ranch houses. We have arranged for Dr. Richard Cloues, an architectural historian formerly with the Georgia Historical Commission, to discuss the relationship between Huntsville's ranch houses and the space program. We believe some of you may have a moment when you see ranch houses in a new way!

But our biggest moments are reserved for our Bicentennial programs. We have an opportunity with Alabama's 200 birthday celebration to take all that we've learned about inclusiveness, community and education and fold them into a series of free programs that teach people why Huntsville's history and historic buildings are important. We want these programs to become part of the Huntsville tradition, an entry point that introduces our children and grandchildren to the legacy of our built environment. Moments like these will draw us together and deepen our appreciation for the contributions of those who have lived here before us.



The Hunt for Alabama's Bicentennial Houses

More often than not, the response to the Historic Huntsville Foundation's Bicentennial program Footsteps to Statehood is skepticism that Alabama's oldest structures are located in Huntsville and Madison County. Most folks guess that Mobile has Alabama's oldest structures, with Selma and Mobile taking a close second. So, this is a great opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with the early history of the Mississippi and Alabama territories (I sense your excitement!!), relate this to Huntsville-Madison County's built environment and develop even MORE pride in our community's history.

Alabama's earliest homes are located in Huntsville-Madison County not by luck or happenstance, but due to the settlement pattern of the Mississippi and Alabama territory. We all know that John Hunt was the first white settler who made his home around the Big Spring, but what we forget is the number of people who followed John and the impact they had upon the political and social landscape of their new home.

Numbers always tell a story; it is perfectly reasonable that the most populous area in the Mississippi and Alabama Territory would have the most buildings and houses at the time of statehood. In the 1810 census, Madison County was the most populated county in the state with 4,699 residents; by 1820 the population had grown to 17,481. The population of St. Stephens, Alabama's first territorial capital, stood at 2,920 in 1810; in 1820 the population had grown to 4,118. The 1809 land sales sparked settlement in the Black Belt region, but only 6003 people lived in Dallas County in 1820--roughly a third of Madison County. Mobile County recorded a population of 2,672 in 1820. Structures built during the period of French and Spanish colonization are no longer extant; In fact, Mobile officials dismantled Fort Conde in 1820 to create more space for the town's growth.

But the story doesn't really end there, does it? We must also explain why structures built in Madison County before 1820 endured to 2019. There are distinctive factors at play here, too.

North Alabama's plentiful natural resources of limestone and clay soil offered a durable foundation for Huntsville and Madison County's built environment. Property owners and builders had access to brick and stone as a building material, which made Huntsville's pre-statehood buildings more likely to survive over time.



Further, there were skilled craftsmen in Huntsville who could use those raw materials and lay the foundation for the young settlement. Huntsville began to take shape when

The Moore-Jackson-Kelly House, built circa 1815

Hiding in



The Phelps-Jones House, built circa 1818

brick masons Thomas and William Brandon moved to Huntsville in 1810 and established a brickyard. The arrival of designer-builder George Steele in 1818 accelerated the construction of brick buildings and houses in Huntsville.

But brick masons and designers don't work for free; they need clients—preferably ones with deep pockets. In 1809, after the federal land members of the wealthy and politically influential Broad to the area of the Broad and Savannah River in northern County. These settlers include Leroy Pope, John W. W

Plain Sight



the Broad River Group's contributions to Huntsville was the construction of substantial houses that reflected their wealth, taste and status.

Huntsville was also fortunate with its enemies. Union soldiers left swaths of damage in their marches across Alabama, leaving burning buildings where houses and businesses once stood. Union troops seized control of Huntsville on April 11, 1862, and occupied the city throughout the war. Union officers used private houses as their headquarters, leaving these structures unscathed.

Over the next century, as the population wax and waned and the economy shifted, many of Madison County's early houses deteriorated or were demolished. But many of these houses remained occupied, as there were people with the resources to readapt their houses with modern plumbing and electricity, so these structures remained inhabited, which furthered their lifespan.

Urban renewal, the creation of the U. S. Space Program, and the historic preservation movement all made their mark on Huntsville-Madison County in the post World War II era. Urban renewal swept away streets of historic homes; Huntsville-Madison County's rapid growth during the early decades of the space program led to the demolition of historic buildings and construction of modern buildings in our downtown core. But these forces were quickly met with the historic preservation movement, which focused people's

attention on the significance of Huntsville's historic sites and their increasing scarcity. By 1972, residents formed the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association and voted to establish the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission, which created protections for the historic houses in this neighborhood.

Further, the prosperity generated by the space program created an economic environment where individuals who valued historic houses had the financial resources to invest in the restoration and rehabilitation of Alabama's oldest houses and buildings.

So, if it ever comes up in casual conversation, these are just a few of the reasons Madison County is home to Alabama's oldest houses.



Jude-Crutch House, built circa 1812

and sale in Nashville, Madison County received a second wave of settlers: the Broad River Group. This band of settlers originated in Virginia, relocated to eastern Georgia, and then purchased large swaths of land in Madison County. Among the early settlers were Thomas Walker, Thomas Bibb, Robert Thompson and Robert Manning. One of

The McCrary Farm dates from 1809



Join Our Celebration

ALABAMA'S BICENTENNIAL WITH A FUN, FREE, FAMILY FRIENDLY TWIST!



ALABAMA 200 - BICENTENNIAL

It all started innocently enough. With a question, posed by Julian Butler, Chairman of the Madison Bicentennial Committee, asking if the Historic Huntsville Foundation could identify all the houses and buildings—those extant and those since demolished -- standing in Huntsville-Madison County at the time of the Constitutional Convention in 1819.

Julian's query was met by another question, this one posed by Donna Castellano, Executive Director of the Historic Huntsville Foundation. What if the Historic Huntsville Foundation identified the houses and buildings standing at the time of the Constitutional Convention and still standing today? Through this, we could identify a collection of Alabama's oldest buildings, bring much-needed attention to their relevance, and heighten the need to support their continued preservation. All agreed this would be a fruitful undertaking, and the quest began.

The results of this exercise are two educational programs HHF will present in spring of 2019 for Alabama's Bicentennial celebration. These programs, *Footsteps to Statehood* and *Finding Huntsville: A Kid-Friendly Field Guide to Huntsville's Historic Architecture* follow the great tradition of HHF events: Both programs will be free, inclusive, family friendly, and fun. Our Bicentennial programs also fulfill HHF's stated preservation mission, which is to increase knowledge of and foster sites, buildings, residence and other structures of historical and architectural significance in

Huntsville and Madison County, Alabama.

Our first program, *Footsteps to Statehood* is based on a resource unique to Huntsville and Madison County: sixteen historic homes and buildings built between 1809 and 1819 that are still standing today. These structures are the oldest, most accessible and best preserved in the state. Our findings are based on a survey of the Historic American Building Survey, the National Register of Historic Places, the Harvie Jones Collection and secondary source materials. Each structure will be photographed and documented as a Bicentennial structure; HHF will present these structures through programs and printed materials.

Further, since ten of these structures are within three blocks of the courthouse square, they will be featured on an interpretative walking tour that explores Huntsville's political, social and cultural history and how these dynamics shaped Alabama's statehood and our first constitution. The tour will also discuss the role of small farmers, wealthy planters and African American slaves in Huntsville and Alabama history and how our built environment is a reflection of their life's work.

Footsteps to Statehood offers a history

lesson unlike any other in the state.

Our second Bicentennial educational project *Finding Huntsville: A Kid-Friendly Field Guide to Huntsville's Historic Architecture* is an educational workbook and

scavenger hunt that introduces children to Huntsville's historic architecture. Within a few blocks of the courthouse square is every major American architectural style dating from 1814 to 1967, encompassing some of Alabama's oldest and most architecturally significant structures. We will use these structures as teaching tools and lead children on a scavenger to give them a solid understanding of Huntsville's architecture and how our buildings fit within the broader framework of national design trends.

The major component of this project is an 8-page workbook, which will be available free of charge in both printed and digital form. The workbook will be distributed to elementary schools, after school programs and available at Harrison Brothers Hardware.

We are honored that the Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville, the Doris Burwell Foundation and the Alabama Historical Commission provided grant funds for our Bicentennial programs. Their support allows us to broaden our reach and touch more people in our community. We want to use the Bicentennial to educate as many people as possible about the history of our city, county and state. With the *Footsteps to Statehood* and *Finding Huntsville* programs, HHF is off to a great start.

A Party to Remember

CAROLS, COCKTAILS & HOLIDAY CHEER



Katie Stamps & Patrice Bishop



Lynne Berry Vallely, Jean Berry & J. R. Brooks



Beth Hamilton & Beverly Alm

In December, the halls of the historic Thomas Bibb house came alive with music and festive merriment. The Historic Huntsville Foundation Board of Directors is grateful to Dana and Scott Averbuch and the heirs of Eleanor Newman for the opportunity to host our *Carols, Cocktails & Holiday Cheer* party at this iconic Huntsville landmark and give our members an evening they will never forget.

Luminary-lined sidewalks guided partygoers as they approached the grand portico decorated with native greenery and wreaths arranged by members of the Twickenham Garden Club. Guests were welcomed into the house with a sparkling glass of prosecco garnished with crimson pomegranate seeds.

Throughout the planning for this holiday soiree, there was no way to comprehend the impact this extraordinary venue would have on its guests. First-time visitors were in awe of the exquisitely decorated mantels and soaring ceilings. Those familiar with the estate reminisced about fond memories made during previous visits. Many guests found their way to the enclosed rear porch and gazed into the open landscape where the tennis courts once stood.

Event chairmen Patrice Bishop and Katie Stamps enjoyed a special moment with Mrs. Sybil Wilkinson, one of Historic Huntsville Foundation's most dedicated members. Sybil joined them in the kitchen, eager to thank the volunteers staffing the reception and share stories of past HHF parties she had organized, planned, and chaired during her years of service with the Foundation. Sybil's efforts were carried out with a passion Bishop and Stamps now understood.

Each room of the house was full of holiday charm: From the front parlor, where guests enjoyed warm conversations over cocktails; to the dining room, which boasted an elegant table set with heirloom silver pieces and a wide assortment of hors d'oeuvres; and to the library, sweetened with desserts and ringing with festive music from a flute trio.

Carols, Cocktails & Holiday Cheer made it possible for HHF members and honored guests to celebrate together in one of Huntsville's most significant historic dwellings. It was an event to remember and one the Foundation was honored to be a part of.



124 Southside Square
Huntsville, AL 35801

2018 Membership Levels & Benefits

Individual/Family Membership \$50

- Guests at holiday membership reception
- Receive invitations to HHF special events and programs
- Receive Foundation newsletter
- Recognition in HHF newsletter

Patron \$125 *All of the above, plus:*

- Recognized as Patron Member in HHF newsletter

Benefactor \$250 *All of the above, plus:*

- Recognized as Benefactor Member in HHF newsletter
- 10% shopping discount at Harrison Brothers Hardware, excluding consignment and sale merchandise
- Individual or corporate recognition as Benefactor on Community Sponsors and Donor Board displayed in Harrison Brothers Hardware
- Benefactor recognition at HHF's Movies in the Park film series.

Preservation Society \$1,000 *All of the above, plus:*

- Recognized as Preservation Society member in HHF newsletter
- Individual or corporate recognition as Preservation Society on Community Sponsors and Donor Board displayed in Harrison Brothers Hardware
- Individual or corporate recognition as Sponsor at HHF's Movies in the Park film series

Preservation Partner \$2,500 *All of the above, plus:*

- Recognized as Preservation Partner in HHF Newsletter
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Membership Levels

- Yes, Please renew my membership in the Historic Huntsville Foundation.
- Individual & Family \$50
- Patron \$125 to \$249
- Benefactor \$250
- Preservation Society \$1,000
- Preservation Partner \$2,500

Name _____

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Please send your membership dues to: The Historic Huntsville Foundation
124 Southside Square, Huntsville, AL 35801

or join online at www.historichuntsville.org

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