

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.

Foundation Forum

Foundation Forum and Historic Huntsville Foundation Newsletter



Celebrating the Season TIM HIGGINS, JASON-VANDIVER AND KATHY VANDIVER GREET GUESTS

Donna Castellano

On a clear, cool December night, members of the Historic Huntsville Foundation gathered at the Weeden House Museum to enjoy an evening of festive fellowship and holiday cheer.

Adorned with natural decorations, the Weeden House Museum provided the perfect setting for the yearly party. Guests mingled and enjoyed hors d'oeuvres and a fine selection of beverages, as music from a trio of flutists playing in the parlor floated from room to room.

Built in the year of Alabama's statehood, the Weeden House in the Twickenham Historic District is a Federal style home whose lead glass fanlight and cantilevered staircase is featured in many books on Alabama's historic architecture. The house contains an impressive collection of period antiques and artwork by artist Maria Howard Weeden, the home's most

prominent resident. Also gracing the walls are portraits by noted antebellum artist William Frye.

While a good time was had by all, the HHF membership reception is more than just another pretty party. Jason Vandiver, HHF Vice Chair explains: "We see the impact our preservation mission has in our community – from spurring reinvestment in older neighborhoods to revitalizing Huntsville's historic downtown. Our membership reception is an opportunity to draw together and thank the friends and family whose contributions make HHF's work possible."

The new year offers an opportunity to reflect upon past success and anticipate new preservation challenges. The months ahead are made easier knowing that awaiting us at the end of this year's journey is a gathering with friends who share a common purpose.

Talking Mid Century Modern with Jessica White

Jessica White is the historic preservation consultant for the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission. She received a B.S. degree in Interior Design in 2010 from Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). In 2013, she received a M.A. degree in Public History with an emphasis in Historic Preservation from MTSU. Jessica works with the HHPC to inform on preservation matters, bolster community outreach and education, and maintain Huntsville's heritage assets.



Why do you think it is hard to convince people that mid century modern deserves recognition and preservation?

I see two primary areas of doubt. First, for many mid-century architecture is too recent. It's difficult for people to look past the "old brick rancher" that they grew up in to see a building's connection to the broader patterns of history. Second, some find very little aesthetic merit in the clean lines, simplistic details, and appeal to functionality found in most mid-century modern structures. It is important to keep in mind, however, that preservation isn't ruled

by aesthetics alone, it's ruled by significance as well.

Why is it important to recognize Huntsville's mid century and space age historic resources?

The 1940s through the 1960s marked the dawn of the Space Age in Huntsville, arguably one of the most significant time periods in the history of the City. The advent of the aerospace program in Huntsville ushered in a period of major change. The population quadrupled, the boundaries of the city expanded, and the economy changed its focus. All of this came together to convert this once sleepy milling town into a bustling metropolitan city driven by technological innovation and "brain power." Huntsville's midcentury buildings, structures, and resources are the remaining artifacts that help us to connect to this important time period in a tangible way. We shouldn't just preserve resources because they are 'really old,' we should preserve them because they are historically significant.

How do you hope McThornmor Acres changes this perception?

The National Register nomination will help to identify and tease out the historic significance of this neighborhood, helping to place it within the broader context of state and national history. Beyond that, one of the most important aspects of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is that it identifies the value of our nation's historic resources. McThornmor Acres is no different, it is valuable because it is an intact physical link to the people and events that helped shape the City of Huntsville and the State of Alabama, and is therefore worthy of the title National Register Historic District. I think that once people see the historic significance and value that the NRHP highlights in the McThornmor Acres nomination their perceptions will start to shift.



We shouldn't just preserve resources because they are 'really old,' we should preserve them because they are historically significant."

Jessica White

From the Chairman

Fred Coffey

It is with a bit of fanfare that we announce the Historic Huntsville Foundation's first space age preservation project: the listing of McThornmor Acres to the National Register of Historic Places, in what we anticipate will be Alabama's first space age historic district.

Serendipity and a collaborative, grassroots preservation mission conspired to create this history-making initiative. One evening, Executive Director Donna Castellano happened to see a Facebook post about a beautification project in McThornmor Acres, led by residents who hoped the project would spark neighborhood revitalization. The 1960s neighborhood is located between Holmes Avenue and Jordan Lane and is immediately adjacent to the UAH campus.

Intrigued, Donna reached out to Diane Walls, McThornmor Acres neighborhood coordinator. Soon, Diane and Donna scheduled a meeting, and Donna included Katie Stamps (ex officio HHF Board member and HHPC member) and Jessica White (Preservation Consultant to the HHPC). They discussed whether this neighborhood might be a potential candidate for a National Register nomination. After introductions, Diane took them on a walking tour of the neighborhood. They noted the mid-century modern houses retained their original architectural features, a necessary requirement for National Register eligibility.

A few days later, Katie, Jessica, and HHF board members Becky Carstens and Charles Vaughn joined Donna at her house to unpack the first boxes of the Heinz Hilten collection (see Donna's article about the Hilten collection). They opened the first box, unfurled a set of blueprints, and saw the first master plan of the University of Alabama-Huntsville created by Huntsville planning consultants Hannes Luerhsen and Heinz Hilten in 1963. The campus plan included a map of McThornmor Acres, reinforcing the historic connection between the neighborhood, UAH, and Huntsville's growth as an academic and research center in the 1960s.

This began a flurry of activities, which concluded with the February 25th meeting of the Huntsville City Council, who unanimously voted to proceed forward with McThornmor Acres National Register project.

In early February, the Historic Huntsville Foundation hosted a meeting with McThornmor Acres property owners to present the National Register project. Diane Walls called the meeting to order, and stated: "When Donna first emailed me, I thought HHF might offer us a small donation for the beautification project; I had no idea the possibility existed that McThornmor Acres could be a National Register Historic District. I must be honest, this is so much better!" Diane, we couldn't agree more.





IT'S ABOUT TIME

McThornmor Acres and Alabama's First Space Age National Register Project

During the 1950s and 1960s, Huntsville and Madison County became the center of our nation's new space program. As the city's population grew from 16,000 in 1950 to 124,000 in 1970, Huntsville faced severe housing shortages. Huntsville planning officials rapidly created new residential neighborhoods for space workers and their families. Soon, space age subdivisions with modern, efficient ranch houses sprang up around the city's borders, and the families of engineers and

scientists settled in and made Huntsville their new home.

Huntsville's mid-century neighborhoods have aged into National Register significance, and it is time to recognize these places for their association with a period in American history that changed the course of human

kind. The Historic Huntsville Foundation is proud to announce that we are working to list Huntsville's first mid-century neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places.

Built in the late 1950s, McThornmor Acres is an ideal candidate for the National Register of Historic Places. The subdivision's design reflects the goals of city planning to create a modern neighborhood for the workforce of the rocket and space program. Further, the houses of McThornmor Acres represent the architecture of their time, including post war ranches, split-level ranches, and mid-century contemporary. The neighborhood is remarkably intact and most homes retain their original appearance. In fact, if not for the late model cars in driveways or satellite dishes peeking over roofs, the neighborhood looks much as it did in the sixties.

Aside from documenting and recognizing the neighborhood's past, listing to the National Register offers a boost to a neighborhood's



listing of McThornmor Acres to the National Register, property owners enthusiastically endorsed the project. Diane Walls, McThornmor Acres neighborhood coordinator, states: "We have an eclectic neighborhood with a great mix of people; this project is a way to build community pride and attract investment into our neighborhood."

This project grew from a series of conversations about between Diane, Donna Castellano, HHF Executive Director and Jessica White, Preservation Consultant for the City of Huntsville about neighborhood revitalization. Led by Councilman Bill Kling and supported by Jessica White, the City of Huntsville applied for a Certified Local Government Grant from the Alabama Historical

Commission to fund the National Register Survey. The Historic Huntsville Foundation and the City of Huntsville pledged matching funds for the project.

An investment in a National Register nomination for McThornmor Acres will pay multiple dividends for neighborhood residents and the greater Huntsville community. McThornmor Acres enjoys a prime location, immediately adjacent to UAH and equidistant between downtown Huntsville and Cummings Research Park. Bike paths along the Holmes Avenue Corridor, as proposed by the City, will create more connectivity for McThornmor Acres and raise its appeal as an attractive housing option. Listing to the National Register as Alabama's first Space Age Historic District will draw positive recognition to McThornmor Acres, enhancing neighborhood pride and generating investment for the neighborhood and nearby retail shops.

This isn't rocket science. This is an idea whose time has arrived.

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From Out in the Middle of Nowhere to Right in the Thick of Things

THE VIEW FROM STEADMAN'S CORNER

Back before there was McThornmor Acres or UAH, back when Holmes Avenue was known as Athens Pike and peaches grew in fields that are now a busy commercial district, there was Clark Steadman's Bar B Q. When Clark Steadman opened his third restaurant in 1945 at what is now the southwest corner of Jordan Lane

and Holmes Avenue, the property was two miles outside the Huntsville city limits. Family members questioned why Steadman would buy land in such a remote location, scoffing "there will never be anything out that far."

Oh, but there would be. Redstone's selection as the Army's Ordnance Rocket Center in 1949 brought an abrupt reversal of fortune for the Arsenal, the city of Huntsville, and Steadman's Bar B Q. Huntsville transitioned from the "Watercress Capital of the World" to Rocket City. Strategically located between the downtown core and Redstone Arsenal, all roads ran past Steadman's Bar B Q, making the decision to purchase land out in the middle of nowhere seem prescient.

Steadman's Bar B Q – or Steadman's, as it was popularly called – was Clark Steadman's third restaurant. He built his success on a tradition of "just good food since 1934." Steadman's became a Huntsville institution, and was a favorite spot for large civic club meetings, Sunday dinners and family celebrations.

Stan Steadman, Martha and Clark's son, grew up in the family restaurant and had a first-row seat to the changes the area experienced in the early years of the space boom. He recalls that there was a farmhouse and barn on one side of the family restaurant and peach orchards on the other side. Stan recalls riding horses up and down Jordan Lane back when it was a gravel road.

When change came to Huntsville, it came quickly. Stan states it seemed like there was suddenly "an explosion of houses in the area, and it seemed like lots of folks became contractors to build for the influx of people coming to the Arsenal. Some of the contractors even used ammunition crates and other salvage materials from the Arsenal for building materials."



A 1950s view of Steadman's Restaurant when peach orchards grew along Jordan Lane.

Huntsville's growth brought opportunities to Steadman's Corner, and Steadman developed the property for new business ventures.

In 1955, he moved a garage from the Twickenham area to the property.

This building became The Coffee Shop, which he operated after he retired and ceased operation of the Bar B Q restaurant in 1964. In

1962, he added the retail space that is now home to Liberty Tax, Boost Mobile and Sugar Belle Bakery. The original restaurant building had a new life as the Cotton Club, a favorite Huntsville nightspot, until a fire destroyed the building in 1975. Stan Steadman rebuilt, and this new building became the longstanding home of Booklegger Books. The old Coffee Shop, the readapted Twickenham garage, will soon have a new life as the Toy Box Bistro. Jeanne Steadman, Stan's wife, points out that a restaurant has been in continuous operation on this corner for 70 years, which, she declares, "must be a record for Huntsville!"

Jeanne and Stan Steadman enthusiastically support the McThornmor Acres National Register project. The cities of Huntsville and Madison have long benefitted from Jeanne and Stan's commitment to historic preservation – both in terms of their investment in the restoration of historic homes and commercial buildings and Jeanne's tireless work on behalf of multiple preservation initiatives. Jeanne states, "The McThornmor Acres project is not just an honor for those who live in that neighborhood, but for all of us who share its history and have a stake in the future of



A Life's Work: The Heinz Hilten Collection

HHF'S DONATES GERMAN ARCHITECT'S PAPERS TO UAH ARCHIVES

Huntsville's evolution from a cotton town to a space age city can now better be understood through the Historic Huntsville Foundation's donation of the Heinz Hilten Collection to the University of Alabama-Huntsville Archives and Special Collections. Hilten is a German architect who joined the Werner von Braun team in Huntsville in 1954. He passed away in May 2013.

The compelling feature of the Hilten collection is its documentation of a life lived during extraordinary times. Hilten's career spanned from Peenemunde, Germany to Huntsville, Alabama. He designed the buildings and test facilities that housed the Saturn V rocket and Apollo Space programs during his tenure as Architect and Planner at Redstone Arsenal and Marshall Space Flight Center. Hilten's influence extended beyond the bound-

aries of Marshall Space Flight Center, as city and community leaders tapped him to help design the spaces needed for the city Huntsville would become.

Hilten family members contacted Donna Castellano, HHF Executive Director, in late 2015 and inquired whether HHF would be interested in Hilten's blueprints, plans and papers. Castellano states, "The HHF Board readily agreed

to accept the donation with little idea of what would follow. After opening the first cartons, we realized this work needed to be in a place where it could be preserved and made available to scholars with an interest in German and American history in the postwar era."

Castellano reached out to David Moore, Director of the UAH Library, who immediately expressed interest in the Hilten papers. Moore believed the documents would be a great addition to the UAH Space Collection, which documents the history and development of the space program.

HHF received seven cartons in total, packed with drawings, blueprints, photographs, and space-era memorabilia. The Hilten papers reflect the full scope of his professional life: his time at Peenemunde, his work in post-war Germany, his move to Huntsville and career with the rocket and space program, and his collaborative projects with fellow architects which resulted in the education and civic projects that laid the foundation for Huntsville's future.

Born in Berlin in 1909, Heinz received a Master's Degree in Architecture and City Planning from the Technical University of Berlin. After

graduating, he worked in the architectural firm of Paul Freidrich Niess.

With the advent of war, Hilten was assigned to Peenemunde, Germany in 1939. Peenemunde was the research and test site where V-2 rockets were developed and tested under the direction of Werner von Braun. The German army drafted Hilten in 1942, but he returned to Peenemunde in 1944. HHF received three copies of illustrations of Peenemunde buildings provided to Hilten by the Art Institute of Chicago, along with a letter asking Hilten to confirm site specifics.

When von Braun and members of his rocket team were relocated to Ft. Bliss, Texas and then Huntsville, Alabama, Hilten remained in Germany and contributed to the postwar reconstruction of his country. He held the position of Architect and Planner for the City of Augsburg until

1954. His children state Hilten believed that the Rosenaustadion, an Augsburg sports stadium, is his greatest design achievement. The stadium was built using debris from the aerial bombings in the war. Construction began in 1949 and completed in 1951.

A crowd of 51,000 gathered for the Rosenaustadion's inaugural event, a

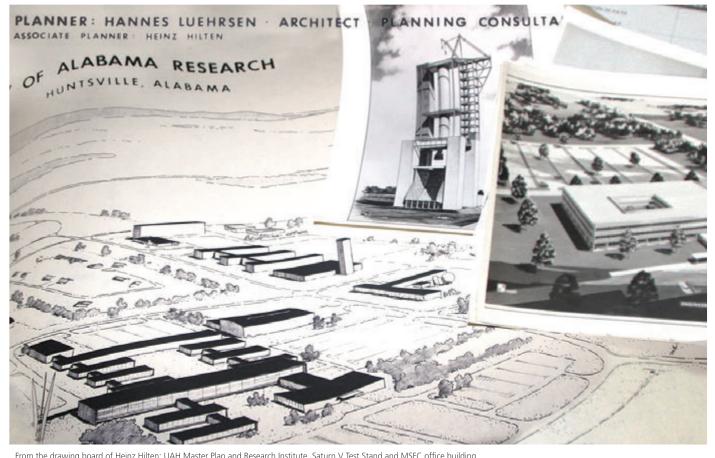
soccer match between Germany and Austria. HHF received the full set of Hilten's hand drawn plans of the stadium, neatly folded and beautifully preserved in the original embossed case. Hilten kept the Augsburg newspaper reporting the opening-day festivities with photographs of the stadium, which was included with the blueprints.

The rebuilding of Augsburg continued with another Hilten project, the Frauenfachschule, a trade school for women. Hilten designed the building and all furnishings that were to be built by carpenters. Hilten family members shared this was a necessity in post-war Germany, as there were no stores to purchase these items. HHF received the full set of plans for the Frauenfaschule, hand drawn and beautifully bound in a hardcover notebook.

With the expansion of the U. S. ballistic missile development program, Hilten rejoined his German colleagues in Huntsville in 1954. He served as Architect and Master Planner at Redstone Arsenal until 1960, and then served in the same capacity at Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC) until his retirement in 1978.



Current map of UAH shows the school's growth while students hurry to their next class



During his tenure at MSFC, Hilten designed or contributed to the design of structures that served the needs of the early space program. Hilten is credited with the design of the Propulsion and Structural Test Facility, where engineers tested single-state rockets with multiple engines. He also worked on the Saturn V Dynamic Test Stand, used to conduct mechanical and vibrational tests on the fully assembled Saturn V rocket. Both structures were designated as National Landmarks in 1985 for their historical significance. A National Landmark designation is the highest honor awarded by the National Park Service.

HHF received multiple documents and drawings from the Redstone Arsenal-MSFC period of Hilten's career, including three original drawings of the Criteria R&D Engineering Building from 1954 and blueprints from a NRSD Proposed Control Center from 1968. We also received photographs of MSFC with the Saturn V Test Stand in the background.

The greatest challenge confronting the future of the space program in Huntsville was whether the area could create the academic and research environment necessary to attract, train and retain a technical and scientific workforce. In his address before a Joint Session of the Alabama Legislature in 1960 requesting a three million dollar appropriation to fund a research facility, Werner von Braun challenged legislators to make this educational investment so Alabama could expand its activities into

science and technology and diversity the state's economy. He stated:

Although a substantial number of our present technical people are product of Alabama's educational system, most of them, frankly, have come from else where. . . I am sure there are very few problems in Alabama that could not be solved with more money; the proper capital investment at this time can produce that money for this state.

... What investment am I speaking of? ... an investment in people strong, capable, educated people. Opportunity goes where the best people go, and the best people go where good education goes. To make Huntsville more attractive to technical and scientific people across the country, and to further develop the people we have, the academic and research environment of Huntsville and Alabama must be improved immediately.

Von Braun urged funding for a research institute, to encourage large corporations to establish research organizations and form an industrial research park as part of the University of Alabama in Huntsville complex. He argued this would give birth to new industries throughout Alabama.

It's not water, or real estate or labor, or power or cheap taxes that brings industry to a state or city. It's brainpower. Nowadays, brainpower dumped in a desert will make it right. Right now you could run a profitable electronics firm on the moon, if the company liked the climate. Educational climate, that is.

Werner von Braun persuaded the Alabama Legislature to approve his request for funding for the Research Institute at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Shortly after, Hilten and Hannes Luerhsen, a fellow German who was also an architect and Master Planner at MSFC, completed a design for the new Research Institute and a Master Plan for UAH. HHF received copies of the Research Institute and UAH Master Plan blueprints.

Along with their contributions to the space program and Alabama's

economic diversification, the Germans scientists and architects also made their mark on the cultural landscape of Huntsville. Hilten

played the piano and violin and was an accomplished musician, as were many of his German colleagues and their family members. Their informal music performances led to the founding of the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra.

The performing arts found an appreciative audience in Huntsville. By 1965 community arts leaders and civic officials planned for the building of a civic center that included a symphony hall. Heinz Hilten was called upon to lend his expertise to this project. HHF received Hilten's sketches of the proposed concert hall and dressing rooms, and exterior site plans.

A small Lutheran congregation existed in Huntsville prior to 1950, but the arrival of the German rocket team and their families directly led to the founding of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran church. When church leaders decided to build a church building for their congregation, they reached out to Hilten for design guidance. HHF received Hilten's sketches and letters offering suggestions and advice to the project architect.

Germans loved the lush greenness of Huntsville, and many of them made their homes on the peaks of Monte Sano Mountain. Mr. Hilten was the architect of choice for his German colleagues, who tapped him to design their personal homes or additions. HHF received full sets of plans drawn for his numerous clients, including those of Werner von Braun,

Ernest Stuhlinger and Eric Neubert.

Hilten appreciated his role in the history of the space program and kept and preserved documents and memorabilia associated with those events. HHF received folders that contained Hilten's copy of the speech given by von Braun to the Alabama Legislature, a brochure for the Groundbreaking Ceremony at UAH for the Research Institute, and a copy of the memorandum detailing the Apollo 11 Lunar Landing timeline.

David Moore, Director of the UAH Library states: "Von Braun's and subsequently UAH's connection to the early space research here

contributes to Huntsville's space race legacy, and should be remembered and celebrated today as we work and plan for new goals in space travel. The Hilten collection with its unique items brings all of this together and speaks to this legacy, this celebration and these goals. Having the Hilten collection at the UAH Library will allow access to be provided to people with varied backgrounds and research interests, from engineering to history to architecture. It will also allow the library to index the collection and digitize selected materials for future access and preservation."

When Heinz Hilten discussed his role with the space program, he stated: "I was

not a space scientist that designed the rockets, but I designed the spaces those scientists worked in." Hilten took great pride that he provided the offices and conference rooms in which the Apollo program became reality.

As Huntsville's population grew to meet the demands of the space program, Hilten used architectural skills learned, developed and practiced in his native Germany to help design a city with the educational, cultural, and residential structures that met the needs and expectations of a city reinventing itself. HHF is pleased that we secured the Hilten papers, so that this collection can have a permanent home in Huntsville. It is most fitting that the Hilten Collection will reside in a building on the campus planned and designed by Heinz Hilten.



"I was not a space scientist that designed the rockets, but I designed the spaces those scientists worked in."



There are times when a historic house or building cannot be saved from demolition. We at the Historic Huntsville Foundation were saddened when our community recently lost the Manning-Goddard House, a two-story home built by James Manning in 1835. The house was continuously occupied until the Army purchased the land in 1942 for Redstone Arsenal. In 1955, the Army relocated the house to serve as guest quarters for VIP visitors to the Arsenal.

The house had been modified so greatly over the years that little of its original defining features remained. Only one of the four original chimneys was rebuilt after the move. The original weatherboard was covered in stucco and later in yellow brick. The original one story porch was replaced with a two-story neoclassical porch, and the fenestration was altered. For these reasons, the house was determined ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Because the Manning-Goddard house was located on federally owned lands, and it was one of two pre-Redstone arsenal structures still standing, every avenue was exhausted before the final decision was made to demolish the house. A Historic American Buildings Survey Level II documentation was conducted on the structure, which included a complete historical narrative, photographic documentation, architectural drawings and a final evaluation of NRHP eligibility. The reports were sent to the Alabama Historic Commission (AHC) for review. The AHC agreed that the structure was not National Register eligible and that demolition could proceed.

Redstone Arsenal's Cultural Resources office was adamant that the historical elements of the Manning-Goddard House would be salvaged. Katie Stamps, Architectural Historian for Redstone Arsenal and HHF volunteer, secured the donation of these items to the HHF Architectural Warehouse. The Historic Huntsville Foundation received the home's pine framing timbers, which were cut on site in the 1830s. HHF also received the original 1835 fireplace mantel, and wood trim and baseboards from a 1950s renovation.

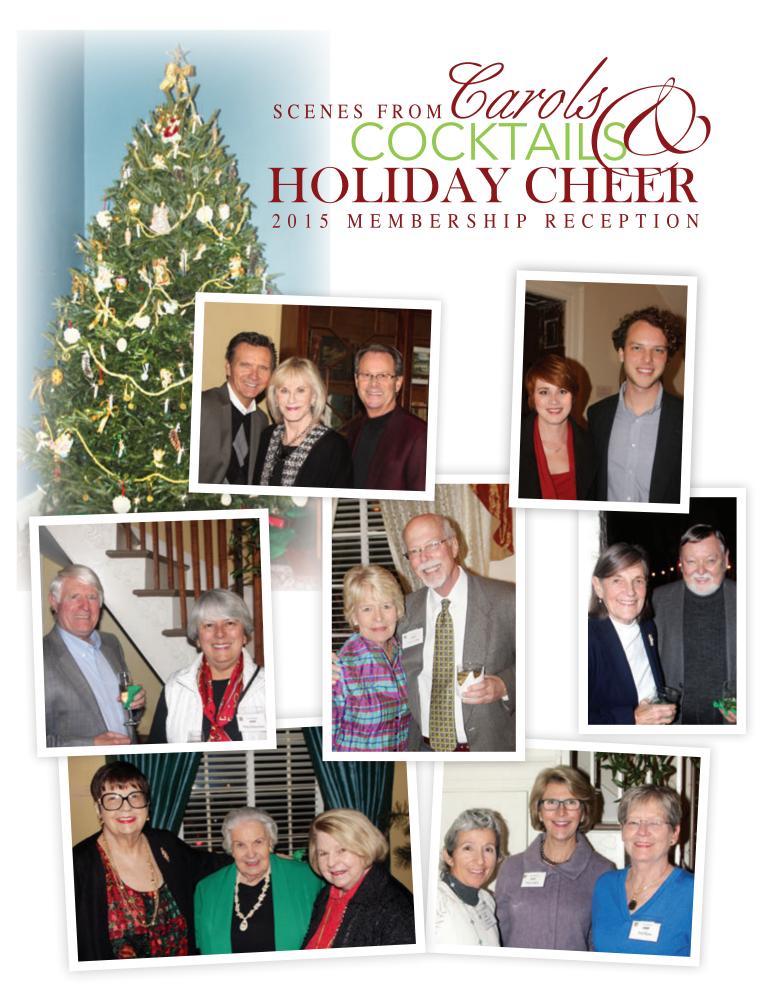
These historical artifacts of Madison County were not dumped in a landfill, but have been preserved so they can have a new life with a

new purpose. Katie states: "I was very disappointed that we were unable to save the Manning-Goddard House, but the salvage of these items to HHF means something good and useful will come from this."

The architectural warehouse is open in the basement of Harrison Brothers Hardware from 10 am to 11:30 am the first and third Saturdays of the month or by appointment. Contact Judy Carden at 256.603.6076 for more information.



The original 1835 Manning mantel and wood trim, salvaged and available at HHF architectural warehouse.







124 Southside Square Huntsville, AL 35801

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- Receive invitations to HHF special events and programs
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- Recognition on signage at Historic Huntsville Foundation events

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- Individual or Corporate recognition as Preservation Society on Community Sponsors and Donor Board displayed in Harrison Brothers Hardware
- Recognition as Individual or Corporate sponsor of HHF's Movies in the Park

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- Individual or Corporate recognition as Preservation Partner on Community Sponsors and Donor Board displayed in Harrison Brothers Hardware
- Recognition as Partnership Sponsor of HHF's Movies in the Park

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