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THE HUNTSVILLE HISTORICAL REVIEW

Summer-Fall 1995

Volume 22

No. 2

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The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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of the
HUNTSVILLE-MADISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1995-96

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THE HUNTSVILLE HISTORICAL REVIEW

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HISTORICAL MARKER PROGRAM MOVES FORWARD WITH
DEDICATION OF TWO NEW MARKERS

F. Alex Luttrell, III

The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society is continuing its program to erect markers at sites of historical significance throughout the county. Begun by the Alabama Historical Association in 1951, the highway marker program quickly spread to Madison County. The local society erected its first marker in 1953, and since that time has been the driving force in ensuring that Madison County residents and visitors alike are made aware of the many interesting and historically significant sites in the area. During the more than 40-year history of the marker program, the local society has received financial assistance from the Madison County Commission, local municipalities, civic organizations, and private citizens. Recent funding from the City of Huntsville has enabled the society to erect several new markers during the past year. One is located at the site of the William Hooper Councill School on St. Clair Avenue, while a second marker was placed in the Old Town Historic District.

The two newest markers were recently erected on Oakwood Avenue to commemorate the sites of Dallas/Optimist Park and Dallas Mills & Village/Rison School. These markers were officially unveiled and dedicated in ceremonies held on July 30, 1995. Led by Mr. Douglas J. Parker of the Northeast Huntsville Civic Association, the marker dedication ceremonies highlighted the significance of the Dallas Mill area and its residents to the entire City of Huntsville. Members of the community assembled at 2:00 p.m. in Optimist Park to witness the dedication of the first marker. A brief history of Dallas/Optimist Park was recalled by Mr. Parker prior to introducing the special guests, members of the Huntsville Dr. Peppers, a women's softball team, who played at the park from 1937 through 1943. The park, built in 1928, initially served as the baseball field for the semi-pro Dallas Mill teams coached by H.E. "Hub" Myhand, Huntsville's "Mr. Baseball." During its heyday, semi-pro baseball featuring local mill teams drew loyal crowds of up to 6,000 fans. In 1949 the Optimist Club purchased and lighted the park, where Leroy McCollum's Huntsville Boosters played from 1950 until 1953. Optimist Park, one of the few early ballparks to open to all races, was used during the 1950s and 1960s for exhibition games by the Birmingham Black Barons and other Negro League teams. In 1994, the City of Huntsville renovated and re-opened Optimist Park, where Huntsville youth can once again be seen enjoying their favorite pastime.

Following the Dallas/Optimist Park dedication ceremony, the crowd walked the short distance along Oakwood Avenue to the Dallas Mills & Village/Rison School marker located in front of the city fire station. Dallas Mills, chartered by T. B. Dallas, began operation in 1892 as Alabama's largest cotton mill. The



Dallas (Optimist) Park Marker --West Side View
Photograph courtesy of Jeanne Smith



Alex Luttrell, Joyce Smith, and Winston Walker at the Rison School Marker
Photograph courtesy of Jeanne Smith

mill village extended from Oakwood Avenue south to O'Shaughnessy Avenue, and from Coleman Street west to Dallas Street. The mill village included homes, churches, a medical facility, a library, a lodge building, a YMCA, and schools. The mill continued to operate until 1949. During the ceremony, Mr. Woodrow W. Chisam spoke of the grand times and influential leaders of Rison School. Built in 1921 and named for mill general manager Archie L. Rison, the school soon became the hub of village social life. Mr. Cecil Fain served as principal for 31 years prior to the closing of the school in 1964.

At each dedication ceremony, Mr. Alex Luttrell, Chairman of the Marker Committee, accepted the marker on behalf of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society. He then presented the markers to Mrs. Joyce Smith, a member of the Executive Committee of the Alabama Historical Association and also a member of the local society. Each ceremony closed with a benediction given by Brother Herman E. Schrimsher, deacon of the Jackson Way Baptist Church.

Several new markers will be erected and dedicated in the coming months. A marker noting the existence of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company & Village/Bradley School will soon be installed on Triana Boulevard in front of Phase IV Systems. Another marker will be placed at the Weeden House Museum on Gates Avenue. A third marker is scheduled to be re-erected near the site of the Monte Sano Female Seminary at the intersection of Lookout Drive and Fearn Street.

With work on these markers nearly complete, the Marker Committee has now turned its attention to researching the history and writing the text for other historical sites within the county. The committee recently compiled and prioritized a list of some 40 proposed markers. The five sites chosen for work during the coming year include: Oakwood College, Echols Hill, Glenwood Cemetery, Temple B'nai Sholom, and Monte Sano Hotel. The committee is also working with governmental agencies and local civic organizations to securing funding for the erection of these future markers.

A publication containing information on each of the more than 50 historical markers in Madison County is scheduled for publication in early 1996. This booklet will include a brief history of the county, maps to locate each marker, current and historical photographs of the sites, references to additional published information on the sites, as well as the complete text that appears on each marker. The book should be a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in local history.



Plate No. 1. Circa 1790 Mexican silver coins photocopied from *Illustrated Encyclopedia of World Coins*, Hobson, Burton, and Obojski, (Doubleday, 1970) p. 285



Plate No. 2. Change tickets from R. J. Manning, 1838. Photocopied from *Alabama Obsolete Paper Money and Scrip*, Rosene, Walter Jr. (Society of Paper Money Collectors, Inc. 1984), p. 54

MEDIUMS OF EXCHANGE IN EARLY HUNTSVILLE

Emily Burwell

The currency that Huntsvillians used in the early 1800s included both paper money and coins, but both looked very different from the money used today. Coins in circulation probably included both American and foreign-made pieces, most frequently the latter. Congress had established in Philadelphia in 1792 a mint which produced US. coins including \$10 gold coins called "eagles," silver dollars,¹ and copper coins in both one cent and half cent denominations. Some of them could very well have been brought into Alabama, but most authorities on the subject assert that foreign coins were much more likely to be found on the frontier than American coins.² A law passed in 1793 made foreign coins part of the US. monetary system,³ and it was not until 1857 that Congress voted to remove them from circulation.⁴

Even foreign coins were not abundant, however. When Alabama entered the Union in 1819, the country was in a period of financial disorder due to a nationwide panic, and people were hoarding precious metals, especially gold coins.⁵ As evidence that silver coins were used in Huntsville, an early newspaper advertisement gave notice that a Mr. Estill would give silver for a few shares in Huntsville's Planters and Merchants Bank.⁶ Thus, it would seem that most coins used in Huntsville in 1819 were probably Spanish or Mexican silver coins.⁷ Plate No. 1 shows some examples of these.

Since there were not nearly enough small coins in circulation, people had to devise some other medium to serve the ordinary needs of trade. Certain businesses and municipalities issued "change tickets," which were bits of paper purporting to be worth twenty-five, fifty, or seventy-five cents.⁸ Plate No. 2 shows one of these change tickets that substituted for coins.

Paper money used in early Huntsville was based on a system entirely different from that in use today. There was no Federal Reserve system producing paper bills used uniformly all over the country. Instead, each bank issued its own paper money or "bank notes" in denominations of \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, etc., and each looked different from any other bank's notes.⁹ On the face of these paper bills was the bank's promise to give the bearer, upon demand, the value of the note in gold or silver coins, i.e. "specie." The banks issuing this paper money were chartered by individual states or territories. In Huntsville the Planters and Mechanics Bank (the name later changed to Planters and Merchants Bank) was chartered in 1816 by the General Assembly of the Mississippi Territory.¹⁰ Its founders included LeRoy Pope, president, David Moore, Clement Comer Clay, and John W. Walker, plus several other prominent early Huntsvillians.¹¹ The

bank started operations on October 17, 1817, near the location of the present First Alabama Bank building on the west side of the square in downtown Huntsville.¹² Plate No. 3 shows a picture of the only known surviving bank note from this bank and a picture of one of the bank's "proof notes" (an unsigned sample of what the note would look like, sent by the company manufacturing the notes to LeRoy Pope for his approval).

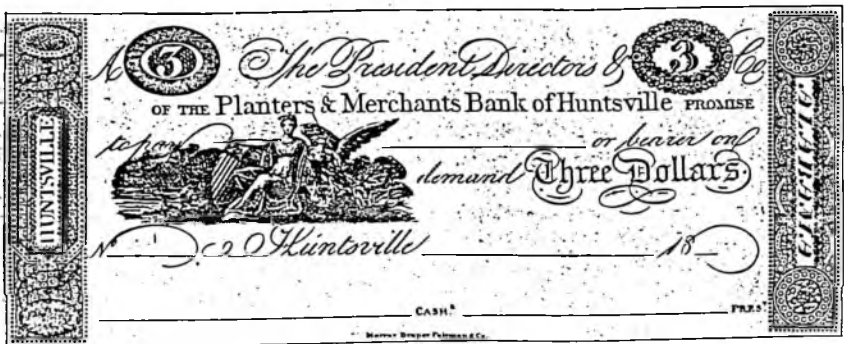


Plate No. 3. Photocopy of the only Planters & Merchants Bank Note in existence (1824). Copy provided by Alabama Archives, Montgomery, Alabama
One of the Planters & Merchants Bank's proof notes, a photocopy sent by Mr. Bob Cochran of St. Louis, MO, Secretary of the Society of Paper Money Collectors.

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Money or "notes" produced by many other banks also would have been used in Huntsville in the early 1800s. As people moved into Alabama, they would bring with them money issued by banks in the east. As mentioned earlier, these bank notes were essentially promises by the issuing banks to pay the face amount in gold or silver, called "specie."¹³ It would be highly inconvenient for someone in Huntsville to have to go to Charleston, for example, to receive the full face value of the note. Therefore, the farther away the money got from its issuing bank, the less its value. Many scholars refer to this as the Wildcat Period of banking, because so many of these state-chartered banks were not regulated sufficiently.¹⁴ As a result, a high percentage of them had insufficient capital and made risky loans, leading to a high rate of bank failures.¹⁵ This was another reason why a person in Huntsville would prefer to use money (or notes) of a bank convenient to Alabama. To illustrate, one Mr. Veitch advertised in a Huntsville newspaper in 1820 offering Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Virginia bank notes in exchange for current notes of the Bank of Tennessee.¹⁶ In Huntsville, the bulk of currency consisted of notes of the new banks of Tennessee, Kentucky, and LeRoy Pope's bank,¹⁷ although there is also evidence of widespread use of the notes of New Orleans¹⁸ and Georgia¹⁹ banks. Probably the soundest paper money was issued by the Second Bank of the United States, chartered by the U.S. government from 1816 to 1836.²⁰ But these U.S. bank notes were very hard to come by in the new Southwest of which Alabama was a part. Plate No. 4 shows examples of bank notes from other states that could very well have been used in early Huntsville.

LeRoy Pope's Planters & Merchants Bank was permitted by its charter to issue paper money up to three times its paid in capital, and the bank actually exceeded even this liberal limit.²¹ Although the bank appeared to prosper from the time of its opening in 1817 until 1819, evidenced by its declaring dividends to stockholders,²² 1819 actually started a time of financial panic in the country.²³ After the Napoleonic Wars had ended in Europe, there was a strong European demand for southern staples, but this "flurry of postwar buying" had ended by 1819,²⁴ and the prices of southern crops fell. Many planters had borrowed large sums to buy land and labor in the first place, when times were good;²⁵ and now they were unable to weather the storm of falling prices for their crops. In addition, the Bank of the United States in 1819 began to call on its branches and banks in which it had made deposits for repayment of loans that would normally have been carried longer.²⁶ Many of the state banks, having limited specie to begin with, were unable to meet the demands of the Bank of the United States and to redeem their own notes that were presented.²⁷ Thus, they had to suspend specie payments, meaning they would no longer pay gold and silver on demand when someone tried to redeem the bank's notes. Instead they would give out only paper. When this happened, the bank's notes began to circulate "below par," or for less than their face value, and would often be referred to as "paper rags."²⁸



Plate No. 4. Photocopies of Kentucky bank notes, dated 1818 and 1819, owned by Emily and Jack Burwell.

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In early 1819, all the banks in Kentucky had suspended specie payments, and their notes were circulating at a discount from 20 to 30 percent.²⁹ By July 1819, no bank in Tennessee was paying specie.³⁰ This resulted in a run on Huntsville's Planters and Merchants Bank for specie, because it had not yet suspended payment. At the same time, the Bank of the United States had been demanding that Pope's bank pay the amount it held for the U.S. Bank (for land purchased at the public land sales) in specie.³¹ On June 16, 1820, Huntsville's Planters and Merchants Bank also found it necessary to suspend specie payments.³² The bank's notes steadily declined in value after this suspension,³³ and were said to be circulating at 25 percent below par in June of 1821.³⁴ Finally, in February of 1825 the Governor of Alabama voided the charter of the first bank in Huntsville for failing to pay specie.³⁵ The bank was allowed several more years to liquidate.³⁶ The building that had housed the bank was destroyed by fire in 1829.³⁷

Huntsville's second bank was the Huntsville Branch of the Bank of the State of Alabama. The 1819 Alabama Constitution had authorized a state bank,³⁸ and the bank was chartered in December of 1823.³⁹ This bank was entirely owned by the state, with no individual stockholders,⁴⁰ thus giving rise to the hope that it would be a bank for all the people instead of giving preference to a group of insiders. But the bank had a basic flaw in that its directors were to be elected annually by the State Assembly (or legislature), thus opening the door for undue political influence in its management.⁴¹ The Bank of the State of Alabama was to be located in the "Seat of Government," according to law.⁴² The bank opened in March of 1825 at the then "seat of government," Cahawba.⁴³ When the state capital was changed from Cahawba to Tuscaloosa, the bank was moved to that town.⁴⁴ The first branch of the Bank of the State of Alabama was chartered by the Assembly in 1832 to be located in Montgomery,⁴⁵ and the second branch was chartered in the same year to be located in Decatur.⁴⁶ The third branch was also chartered in 1832 to be located in Mobile.⁴⁷ In 1835 the Huntsville branch of the Bank of the State of Alabama was chartered.⁴⁸ The Assembly voted to make Bartlett M. Lowe president of the bank,⁴⁹ and the bank opened for business in July of 1835.⁵⁰ Shortly thereafter, the Greek revival building that was to be the bank's first home was erected. The same building survives today on the square in downtown Huntsville as the main Huntsville office of the First Alabama Bank. Plate No. 5 shows examples of bank notes from the Huntsville branch of the Bank of the State of Alabama.

The Bank of the State of Alabama and its branches were liquidated beginning in the mid-1840s due to "mismanagement and fraud."⁵¹ But to the Huntsville Branch's credit, a prominent Alabama banking historian referred to it as the "best bank in the system."⁵²

A study of early mediums of exchange and of banking in Huntsville prior to 1845 reveal the difficulties and risks faced by all segments of the economic spectrum because of the lack of a stable currency. It is little wonder that people with money invested it in land and other items the value of which were not as subject to the vagaries of economic cycles.



Plate No. 5. Proof notes of the Branch of the Bank of the State of Alabama at Huntsville, from the collection of Mr. Bob Cochran of St. Louis, MO.

ENDNOTES

¹*The World Book Encyclopedia*, (1990 edition) Vol. 13, "Money," pp. 708-709

²Moore, Albert Burton, *History of Alabama and Her People*, (1927) Vol. I, p. 282.

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³*The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13, p. 709.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Moore, p. 282.

⁶Brantley, William H., *Banking in Alabama 1816-1860*, (1961) Vol. I,
p. 6.

⁷Moore, p. 282.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Brantley, p. 3.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 426,

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³*The World Book Encyclopedia*, (1990 edition) Vol. 2, "Bank", p. 93.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Haagen, Victor B., *The Pictorial History of Huntsville, 1805-1865*.
(1963) p. 38, showing a page of the *Alabama Republican* newspaper, April 29,
1820.

¹⁷Moore, p. 283.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Brantley, p. 22

²⁰*The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13, p. 709.

²¹Brantley, p. 15.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 13 and 15.

²³Sydnor, Charles S., *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848*. (1948), p. 104.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁸Brantley, p. 19. He quotes an Alabama senator speaking of the "evils of paper rags."

²⁹Sydnor, p. 111.

³⁰Brantley, p. 17.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 22.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 25, 27.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 145.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 446.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 147.

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⁴⁴Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 242.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 256.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 257.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 301, 469.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 304.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 305.

⁵¹Rosene, Walter Jr., *Alabama Obsolete Paper Money and Scrip*.
(1984), p. 5.

⁵²Brantley, Vol. II, (1967) p. 196



Site of the first library in Huntsville in the law office of J.N. Jones,
reconstructed in Alabama's Constitution Village

Books Contained in Huntsville's First Library

Annals of Scotland, by David Dalrymple Lord Hailes, Vol. 3, Edinburgh, 1797.

Apocalypse or Book of Revelations by Emanuel Swedenburg, Vols. 4 and 5,
London, 1814.

Guy Mannering or the Astrologer, vol. 2, New York, 1818.

History of Rome by George Baker, vols. 2, 4, 5, London, 1814.

Quarterly Review, August and November, vol. 2, 1809, April and July, Vol. 17,
1817.

Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes, vols. 7, 8, 9, London, 1812.

Arcana Celestia; or Heavenly Mysteries, by a Society of Gentlemen, vol. 5,
1808; vol. 7, 1812; vol. 8, 1812.

Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern by John Lawrence Moshelm,
Charleston, 1811.

History of Rome, by Titus Livina, Vols. 1 and 6.

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS OF HUNTSVILLE'S LIBRARY

Only eight years after Huntsville became the county seat of Madison County on July 5, 1810, a group of civic-minded citizens met on June 27, 1818, to explore the possibility of establishing a public library for the town. At this time it was decided to form the Huntsville Library Company and sell shares to interested subscribers at \$20 each. On November 20, 1818, a constitution was adopted for the company which was then incorporated in 1823 by an act of the Alabama Legislature¹

One of the original shares, numbered 59, reads as follows: "This is to certify that William Atwood, having this date paid to the treasurer the sum of \$20, agreeable to the provisions of the constitution, is entitled to one share of the Huntsville Library Company. Dated the tenth day of December 1818. /s/ Thomas George Percy, President. /s/ Robert Fearn, Treasurer." The library was housed in the office of John N.S. Jones, located next to John Boardman's building which housed *The Alabama Republican*, the newspaper which published the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention in Huntsville in 1819.² (A reconstruction of this office together with nearly 100 of the original library books is found in Alabama Constitution Village.)

This library was moved shortly thereafter to the first courthouse where it remained until the late 1830s when a second courthouse was built on the original site on the public square. Apparently at this time the original library company was dissolved and the Hermathenian Library Company took its place. Although members of the company paid an annual subscription fee, books could be checked out by other members of the community for a small fee. Eventually this library company was dissolved and the books were absorbed in the private libraries of some of Huntsville's families.³

The occupation of Huntsville by federal troops during the civil war brought an end to most of the city's cultural activity, including the library. Not until 1870 was the library re-activated by the Huntsville Literary Debating Association, which was organized March 1, 1870. This library contained some of the same books that had belonged to the Huntsville Company Library and the Hermathenian Library.⁴

As Huntsville's cultural activities revived after the civil war, the Young Men's Christian Association which was established in the 1890s provided its members with a library which was located at the time on Eustis Street. In 1891 a group of interested citizens organized the Huntsville Circulating Library which was located in Murray and Smith's Bookstore on the west side of the square. In August of that year they moved their collection to the Y.M.C.A. building on Eustis Street, and apparently at this time both men and women were allowed to use the library for a small fee.⁵

In order to increase the holdings of the library, the ladies of the community provided a benefit ball in 1895 which was highly successful even though some religious groups objected to making money in this way. Activities such as this became a regular part of the method by which holdings of the library were increased and needed equipment purchased.⁶

Around 1900 the library was transferred from the Y.M.C.A. building to a room over the fire hall which was located in the City Hall and Market House building on the corner of Washington and Clinton Streets.⁷ The women of the community continued their control and supervision of the library until the formation of the Carnegie Library Board late in 1913 to make an application for a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. The Carnegie Foundation granted Huntsville \$12,500 to erect a public library on May 8, 1914.⁸

At this time the city commissioners (the commission form of government was in effect) came forward to provide funds to secure a site for the library and appropriated \$1500 annually for its operation. When the new library building, designed by E. L. Love, was completed on the corner of Madison and Gates, it was formally opened on February 29, 1916. This marked the beginning of city government's responsibility for library services⁹

In 1939 when the Guntersville Dam was being built, the Tennessee Valley Authority asked the library to cooperate in providing services for its workers. As a result a contract was drawn between the TVA, the Huntsville Library Board, Madison, Jackson, and Marshall Counties.¹⁰ While this contract was in effect, a library was opened for negro members of the community. (For details, read the article on the Dulcina Deberry Library which follows.) Huntsville's librarian served as regional director for a period of two years until TVA funds were withdrawn when the construction of the dam was completed, and the regional library service of the Huntsville Public Library became a self-sustaining organization supported by the city and participating counties. In 1952 the library returned to a one-county basis of operations and the Huntsville-Madison County Library began to serve the entire city and rural areas by means of bookmobiles and branch libraries.¹¹ With the rapid expansion of Huntsville in the 1950s, the American Association of University Women undertook to aid in the construction of a new library that would more adequately serve the needs of the growing population. They formed the Friends of the Library who took on the task of sponsoring the necessary legislation to create a Library Authority which could then function to apply for federal funding for a new building.¹² On December 18, 1965, the new Huntsville Public Library building on Fountain Row opened its doors to the public and all citizens without regard to ethnicity were welcomed. Almost immediately the new facility proved to be inadequate to serve the needs of the growing population.

So rapid was the growth of Huntsville and Madison County that by 1987 a new \$8,000,000 library was constructed, making possible increased support for all aspects of Huntsville' cultural and intellectual community. This progress was reflected in a report published in the newsletter of the Friends of the Huntsville Madison County Public Library, September-October 1995, and reproduced here with permission.¹³

10 Ways the Library Improves the Quality of Life in Huntsville and Madison County

1. Some 178,023 area citizens have library cards, 70 percent of the population (the national average is 40%). On an average day, 3400 citizens visit the Main Library or its eight branch libraries.
2. The Library is the preschooler's door to learning. Loans for preschool picture books average 9,000 each month, or 108,000 per year.
3. The Library is the homework center and resource after school, in the evenings and on weekends, for public and private school students in Huntsville.
4. Reference librarians have helped local citizens answer 183,000 reference questions--one every 1.5 minutes.
5. The Huntsville Heritage Room is the official archive for the history of Huntsville, providing local scholars, newspapers, television stations, genealogists, Alabama history students, and many others with books, microfilm, historic documents, and photographs.
6. The Subregional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped provides Braille transcribing service and free talking books by mail, along with machines. to 414 citizens and 17 deposits. Talking book borrowings totaled 19,244 in FY 1993-94.
7. The American Library Association honored the International Media Center for its outstanding service to Huntsville's multicultural population. This department assists local residents who do not read English as their native language, as well a students studying foreign languages and people who need to learn a foreign language for work or travel abroad. It has an outstanding collection of foreign films and represents almost 50 languages.
8. Citizens dial into the Library's online catalog from home, school or office to search the holdings of the Huntsville Public Library and 16 other libraries in North Alabama. Reciprocal borrowing agreements allow access to almost a million titles in North Alabama.
9. The Library provides limited Internet access free to local residents at the Main Library.

10. Outreach Services to inner city housing communities, nursing and retirement homes, day care centers, and other institutions ensure access to library service for all segments of the community.

In reviewing the past, it is evident that the library has kept pace with the growth of the community, and does indeed contribute to the quality of life enjoyed by the citizens of Huntsville and Madison County.

ENDNOTES

¹*Alabama Republican*, June 20, October 26, 31, November 21, 1818; October 29, 1819; December 7, 1821; February 15, March 1, 1822; June 10, 1824; *An Act to Incorporate the Huntsville Library Company* approved by the Alabama Legislature December 23, 1823. Taken from the files of the Historical Collection, Heritage Room, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library and the archives of Alabama's Constitution Village, Huntsville, AL.

²*Alabama Republican*, October 29, 1819. Historical Collection, Heritage Room, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

³*Southern Advocate*, March 7, 1837. Book plates in volumes of the original library collection also contain Hermathenian Library book plates pasted beside them.

⁴Manuscript copy of "The History of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library 1818-1955" by Mrs. C. S. Russell and Mrs. Claude Herrin, 1955, on file in Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, p. 1.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1

⁶Elizabeth H. Chapman, *Changing Huntsville 1880-1890*, Huntsville, Historic Huntsville Foundation, Inc., 1989, pp. 81-84.

⁷Manuscript copy "History of Huntsville-Madison County Public Library," p. 2

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 3

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 6

¹¹*Ibid.*

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¹²Friends of the Library Scrapbooks, Heritage Room, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

¹³*Cover to Cover*, Newsletter of the Friends of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, Sept./Oct. 1995. p. 3.



Mrs. Dulcina DeBerry as a young woman. (She lived to be 91.)



Mrs. Elizabeth Parks Beamgard is seen awarding reading certificates to children at the Dulcina DeBerry Library on Pelham Street.

Ann Geiger Maulsby

On May 31, 1940, the branch library for the Negro community of Huntsville, Alabama, was started in the basement of the Lakeside Methodist Church on Jefferson Street. This was a project of the Works Progress Administration¹

Dulcina Deberry, who was well qualified for the position, served as first director of this branch. She had been a teacher in North Carolina and was active in the Lakeside Methodist Church.² Mrs. DeBerry was in Huntsville at this time because her mother, Violet (Mrs. Henry) Torrence, a Huntsville resident, was in ill health and needed care.³

The Director of Regional Library Services, Mr. Hoyt Galvin,⁴ gave Mrs. DeBerry a key to the church basement, told her to see what she could find and to make something of it if she could. She found a dark, damp room furnished with two ugly unpainted tables, two rough benches, and a schoolroom desk with no chair. The holdings, 27 juvenile volumes, 39 books for adults, and 10 used magazines, were stored in a large unpainted drygoods box. Mrs. DeBerry had ten days to get all in order for the library opening, June 10, 1940. She and her helpers, two high school boys, painted the six pieces of furniture and thoroughly cleaned the basement. The minister's wife, Mrs. Z. K. Jackson, donated a chair for the librarian to use. A group of young girls gave pots of growing flowers to decorate the window seats.⁵

Handbills furnished by the main library as well as newspaper notices announced the opening date. By then the Bookmobile had delivered additional books and magazines from the Huntsville Library, so the new branch opened with a total of 60 books for young readers, 79 adult books, and 20 used magazines. In a few weeks the number of patrons grew from fewer than 10 to nearly 30. Every two weeks the main library exchanged the books and delivered special requests. Many teachers and college students used this service.⁶

Thirty-nine children registered in the Vacation Reading Club which opened June 15, 1940. Twenty-three of those children completed their required reading and received reading certificates in a ceremony on August 31, the end of summer vacation. Principals of schools, ministers of the churches, leading citizens and families of the children attended. For the first time the people of the area came together to see what the library had to offer and to learn what the people could do for it. Someone suggested that an organization be formed to help sponsor the library. A Board of Directors was named which consisted of Dr. Joseph Drake, President of Alabama A & M College, Dr. R. S. Beard, Mrs. Myrtle Turner, principal of Winston Street School, Mr. Leroy Lowery, and Mr. Shelby Johnson.⁷

The library held a Children's Story Hour every Friday afternoon, led by the librarian or an invited storyteller. The programs included songs and games. On the last Friday of each month the mothers of the participants could attend.⁸

In October of 1940 the library offered its services to the Madison County schools, so that teachers were able to use library books in their classrooms. Thirty schools participated. The library gave used magazines, newspapers and pamphlets to the county schools for students to use for posters and other assignments.⁹

Heating the basement of the Methodist Church was a problem to the librarian, and sponsors began to look for a suitable place to move the library. Mrs. Myrtle Turner, secretary of the Board of Directors and principal of Winston Street School, offered a room in that school. The city Superintendent of Education, W. G. Hamm, approved on condition that the librarian be qualified to teach in the public school system. Mrs. DeBerry qualified, and on November 30, 1940, the library was relocated to the Winston Street School.¹⁰

Thus, the new library became the Winston Street Branch. The room was large and well lighted, but had no library furniture. After much thought, the Board planned the Negro Book Week Musical Benefit as a money-maker to properly furnish the library. On February 16, 1941, the Alabama A & M College presented the program. It made enough money to buy materials, and workers in a local National Youth Association workshop constructed the equipment and furniture needed--a book locker, two library tables, eight chairs, a bulletin board, one large magazine rack, and two display shelves.¹¹

The Second Annual Musical Benefit presented music from the Councill High School Glee Club, the Oakwood College Chorus, the Councill High School Choir, and the Winston Street School Chorus. Money from this benefit purchased 100 books for young readers. The Third Annual Musical was an even greater success; the proceeds from this event bought more bookshelves which were needed for the library's expanding book collection.¹²

The Winston Street Branch Library concentrated on serving the children of the Negro community. Two-thirds of the patrons were young readers. The special activities for children included Story Hour, the Vacation Reading Club, a Holiday Book Party during the Christmas season, and an Annual Library Tag Day. The proceeds from the Tag Day helped pay for the subscriptions to children's magazines--*Jack and Jill*, *Wee Wisdom*, *Child Life*, *The American Girl*, and *Boy's Life*. The tags were made by the school children; each child was encouraged to buy a tag for one cent and wear it to show his support for the library. By the end of three years, the Winston Street Branch Library, under the direction of Mrs. DeBerry, had approximately 4,000 books and 12 subscriptions

to standard magazines in a well-equipped small library, owing to the efforts of community leaders.¹³

Winston Street School itself was a product of the Works Progress Administration. The Huntsville Board of Education made plans in January of 1938 to secure options on property for a site for a proposed Negro school building. By April 1 of the same year, they had selected the lot situated on the corner of Winston and Yarbrough Streets. The school opened in the fall of 1939 as an elementary school and operated for 19 years. In 1958 the children of that area began attending the new Calvary Hill School on Poplar Avenue. In 1984 this became the Academy for Academics and Art, a magnet school. In the 1980s the building which housed the Winston Street School was demolished to make room for the I-565 highway through Huntsville.¹⁴

On May 1, 1943, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), started by President Franklin Roosevelt in July of 1935, ceased operation. The Huntsville Library Board in its September meeting voted to open a branch in the Winston Street School, to be supervised by a qualified member of the school faculty, Mrs. DeBerry. Thus the Huntsville Library system assumed financial responsibility for the branch library.¹⁵

In 1947 the library moved from Winston Street School to a building owned by the Huntsville Board of Education on Pelham Street, near Council High School, a spacious and more convenient location for the public it served. Mrs. Elizabeth P. Beamgard, director of the Huntsville Public Library, was instrumental in obtaining the use of the building which the library used for three years. Soon after the move from Winston Street School, the name of the branch became The Dulcina DeBerry Library.¹⁶

Dulcina DeBerry reported in 1950 that more than 5,400 books of all types were circulated in the previous year. More than 1,500 books and magazines were *distributed* to children in the Summer Reading Program. The proceeds of the annual music festival still provided books and furnishings for the library. The musical benefit programs continued at least until 1952.¹⁷

In June of 1951 the library moved to Church Street, where it shared a two-story building with the Church Street Community Center. The Center occupied the first floor, with Mrs. Nannie Brandon as Director. The large area of the second floor housed the library facilities, including the children's room, the adult room, and the office of the library director.¹⁸

Mrs. DeBerry returned to her home in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1951. The DeBerrys later moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where Mrs. DeBerry died in 1969 at the age of 91.¹⁹

Mrs. Fannie Jackson, who had been the assistant librarian, became the Director of Dulcina DeBerry Library after Mrs. DeBerry moved away, and remained director until April 1, 1956. When Mrs. Jackson resigned, the members of the Board of Directors were Mr. O. Z. Scott, President of Alabama A & M College, Professor Henry Torrence, Mrs. Fannie Fearn, Rev. T. H. Huston, Rev. C. B. Foxx, Mrs. P. Horton, Dr. and Mrs. H. C. Fearn, Mrs. E. B. Rowe, and Mrs. Fannie Jackson. The Reverend H. P. Snodgrass, who had helped Mrs. Jackson during her time as director, became Director of Dulcina DeBerry Branch Library on April 1, 1956. Miss Dorothy Webb was Director of the Huntsville Public Library at the time. When Calvary Hill School opened in 1958, Reverend Snodgrass managed both the school library and the DeBerry Library.²⁰

Civil Rights Acts passed by Congress in the 1960s gave black Americans voting rights, equal access to public accommodations, and made discrimination in housing, employment and education illegal. By the early 1960s the Carnegie Library building on Madison Street was too small for Huntsville and Madison County. On December 28, 1965, the new Huntsville Public Library building on Fountain Row opened its doors to the public, and all citizens of Madison County were welcomed.²¹

The Urban Renewal Program came to Huntsville in the 1960s, and Church Street became a part of that program. The Community Center, funded by the United Givers Fund, was demolished. The branch library moved to a dwelling in Edmonton Heights, a neighborhood near Alabama A & M College. In August of 1968 the Library Board decided to use more Bookmobiles and phase out "the former DeBerry Library, now housed in Edmonton Heights." The Huntsville Library Board closed the Dulcina DeBerry Library on October 1, 1968.²²

ENDNOTES

¹Dulcina DeBerry, *Accomplishments of the Winston Street Branch Library of Huntsville, Alabama, From 1940 to 1943*. Unpublished manuscript located in the Archives of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, p. 1.

²Obituary of Dulcina DeBerry in Cleveland, Ohio, newspaper, 1969, courtesy of Mrs. Henry S. Torrence, May 25, 1990, who was interviewed on that date.

³Ibid.

⁴Vertical file, *Huntsville Library, 1940-1960*, Heritage Room, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

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⁵"History of Dulcina DeBerry Library," author unknown, unpublished and on file in Archives, Heritage Room, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, 1957.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid..

¹⁴Interview with Barbara Coffee, staff member, Academy for Academics and Art, April 6, 1995.

¹⁵*Huntsville Times*, May 2, 1943.

¹⁶*Huntsville Times*, July 2, 1947.

¹⁷*Huntsville Times*, August 3, 1950; April 3, 1952.

¹⁸Letter from Elizabeth Parks Beamgard, Librarian, to Dr. Harvey D. Nelson, Superintendent of Education, Huntsville, AL, May 21, 1951.

¹⁹Dulcina DeBerry obituary.

²⁰Letter from Dorothy Webb, Librarian, to Mrs. Charles Handley, February 29, 1956; *Huntsville Times*, September 3, 1958.

²¹Christina H. Russell, *The Carrot or the Stick for School Desegregation Policy*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990, pp. 1-2; *Huntsville Times*, December 28, 1965.

²²Minutes of the United Givers Fund Board Meeting, November 21, 1967; Minutes of Library Board Meeting, August 1968; October 1, 1968.

Annual Report of the Treasurer
HUNTSVILLE-MADISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 July 1, 1994 - June 30, 1995
 John M. Shaver, Treasurer

Checking Account Balance, June 30, 1994	\$1,293.46
Savings Account Balance, June 30, 1994	<u>\$3,435.14</u>
TOTAL	\$4,728.60

Receipts:

Dues.....	\$5,692.00
<i>Historical Review</i> Sales.....	396.55
Map Sales.....	687.25
Interest on Savings.....	<u>104.09</u>
Total Receipts	\$6,879.89
Funds Available	11,608.49
Purchase Cert. of Deposit	5,000.00
Funds Available	\$6,608.49

Disbursements:

Historical Review Printing.....	\$2,332.05
Program Expense.....	417.99
Postage.....	340.48
Meeting notices.....	103.85
Marker Committee.....	95.77
Reprint Maps.....	454.00
Copy Review.....	51.26
Archives Committee.....	7.69
Post Office Box Rent.....	35.00
Arts Council.....	50.00
Trade Day Booth.....	25.64
Membership Refund.....	<u>10.00</u>
Total Disbursements	\$3,923.73

Checking Account Balance, June 30, 1995	\$1,645.53
Savings Account Balance, June 30, 1995	\$1,039.23
Certificates of Deposit	<u>\$5,000.00</u>
TOTAL BALANCE	\$7,684.76

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If you know someone who may be interested in becoming a member of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, please share this application for membership.

HUNTSVILLE-MADISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 666
Huntsville, AL 35804

Membership Application 1994-95

Name _____

Address _____

Telephones: Home _____ Work _____

Annual Dues: Individual: \$10.00 Family: \$18.00

My check for \$ _____ payable to Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society includes a subscription to *The Huntsville Historical Review* and all the Society's activities.

Signature

Notes

The purpose of this society is to afford an agency for expression among those having a common interest in collecting, preserving and recording the history of Huntsville and Madison County. Communications concerning the organization should be addressed to the President at P. O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804.

Manuscripts for possible publication should be directed to the Publications Committee at the same address. Articles should pertain to Huntsville or Madison County. Articles on the history of other sections of the state will be considered when they relate in some way to Madison County. All copy, including footnotes, should be double spaced. The author should submit an original and one copy.

The Huntsville Historical Review is sent to all members of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society. Annual membership is \$10.00 for an individual and \$18.00 for a family. Libraries and organizations may receive the *Review* on a subscription basis for \$10.00 per year. Single issues may be obtained for \$5.00 each.

Responsibility for statements of facts or opinions made by contributors to the *Review* is not assumed by either the Publications Committee or the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society. Questions or comments concerning articles in this journal should be directed to the Editor, P. O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804.

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