
Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

Follow this and additional works at: https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review

Part of the History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review/vol31/iss1/11

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Huntsville Historical Review by an authorized editor of LOUIS.

Coming at the tail end of Huntsville’s Bicentennial, this outstanding book encompasses what this celebration is about – the first 200 years of Huntsville’s history. Ranee’ Pruitt, archivist at the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library, came up with this brainchild with several purposes in mind. First, this book was to provide an easily accessible timeline of events that shaped Huntsville’s history, and second, the proceeds would bring in much-needed funds for the library.

Ranee’ is known far and wide to everyone who has ever had a question about Huntsville’s history, and she was the perfect person to spearhead this project. Under her direction, a number of volunteers researched the events that were selected for the final cut, which could have gone on for several more volumes, had all of the information been included. Ranee’ envisioned a book which included, not only the major events of the day, but also the little-known humorous and interesting facts, such as what items were for sale and how they were advertised.

This book also contains never before seen photographs of people and places, and excerpts from the actual newspapers of the day. Signs of the times, such as the 1908 ordinance that “the hitching of horses on the square is a nuisance and a menace to the health of the community and should not be permitted,” offer humorous insight into the growing community. Day to day reports of deaths by the 1918 flu epidemic impress upon the reader the urgency of the situation. Area residents who died in combat during the wars of the last 200 years are sadly reported as well. There were many interesting tidbits of trivia uncovered, such as the fact that Dr. Wernher von Braun was on a flight that was the last to leave the old airport and the first to land at the new airport in the 1960s.

Other interesting entries enlighten the reader about their current events, such as the March 10, 1868 entry: “The remains of Steptoe Pickett, son of Governor R. Chapman, who died during the War, was brought to Huntsville and interred in the graveyard.” On November 5, 1869, it was announced that “A committee, under the direction of trustee Bartley Harris, was appointed to purchase a lot and build a Church for the colored Baptists of
Huntsville.” This church is today known as St. Bartley’s Primitive Baptist Church, in honor of the former slave who led the congregation. Another former slave, William Hooper Councill, championed the education of black people, and became the president of Alabama A & M. In addition, a school was named in his honor and that school is a.

The volunteers who worked on this project were: Susanna Leberman, Nancy Rohr, Donna Dunham, Jacque Gray, Brian Hogan, Thomas Hutchens, Jeanne Henry, Patricia Ryan, Jim and Linda Maples, Bob Adams, Judy Purinton, Martin Towery, Julie Blackwell, Glenda Smallwood, Robert Reeves, David Milam, and Rhonda Larkin. Ranee’ researched two a half decades herself, and filled in when new information crossed her desk at the library. Richard Smallwood edited this book, not an easy task, and Jim Maples was responsible for the incredible layout design. Dennis Waldrop created the beautiful cover, which represents the Big Spring as it must have looked to pioneer John Hunt.

Sources for this 287 page book include all area newspapers, minute books of the city clerk’s records, records from probate court, orphans court, city directories, and books on local history.

“Eden of the South, A Chronology of Huntsville, Alabama, 1805-2005” is available at Shaver’s Bookstore and the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library for $29.95. All money collected from the proceeds of this book go directly back to the library to maintain and add to the extensive collection of resource material for future generations. This is a worthy book and a worthy cause!