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Harrison Bros. Hardware Co. Business Ledgers

Charlie Gibbons

University of Alabama in Huntsville

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RCEU 2023 Project Proposal

Project Title

Harrison Bros. Hardware Co. Business Ledgers

Faculty Information

Name: Charlie Gibbons

Status: Librarian I, Digital Archivist

Department/Program: Library/Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives

College: Library

Phone: 256-824-6528

UAH Email: ceg0016@uah.edu

Co Mentor: Dr. Christine Sears

Proposal ID RCEU23-Gibbons-LIB-01

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I. Project Description

The student working on this project will determine a research project based on the Harrison Brothers Hardware Company Collection (<http://libarchstor.uah.edu:8081/repositories/2/resources/65>), focusing particularly on the ledgers. These ledgers, dating from the 1880s to the early 1900s, contain a wealth of local history information through the lens of the Harrison Brothers' store in downtown Huntsville. The student will be trained on reading and interpreting historical documents; research regional background information and how to use ledgers as an historical source. The student will be trained to trace individual customers and their purchases through the ledger.

II. Student Duties, Contributions, and Outcomes

a. *Specific Student Duties*

After the student has practice working with the ledgers, the student will work with Mr. Gibbons and Dr. Sears to identify an area of interest for deeper research that will illuminate local history through their purchases and appearances in the ledgers. The student may also delve into the history of the Harrison Brothers and their Huntsville store to provide context for their work. The project will culminate in a digital exhibit sharing the student's research. The student will create the exhibit using Omeka Exhibit Builder, a plugin available as part of UAH Archives and Special Collections' Digital Collections website. The student will work with Mr. Gibbons to learn the technical aspects of Exhibit Builder as well as how to make creative and narrative choices that will showcase the student's research. Once the student completes the digital exhibit, it will be available for public viewing on the UAH Digital Collections site. The student's work might also include an article for Perpetua or local history journals. The student will have office space and technology support in the UAH Archives and Special Collections Digital Initiatives Lab, as the ledgers are held in the Archives.

b. *Tangible Contributions by the Student to the Project* (10% of Review)

The student will determine a research focus using the Harrison Brothers business ledgers as a source. Their original research will provide context and analysis showing how the Harrison Brothers Hardware Company historically interacted with individuals in the Huntsville community. The student's research will tell us about Huntsville history, how people shopped, what they purchased, who and how they went into debt and for what products and how they got out of debt, or how debt was handled. The student's research may illuminate how gender and/or race affected purchases, debts, and other issues. The Harrison Brothers Hardware Collection is an important historical collection held by the UAH Archives and Special Collections, and the student will thus be doing important work to decode what the collection can tell us about local history. The student will create an online exhibit showcasing their work, and that online exhibit will be hosted by the UAH Digital Collections site.

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c. Specific Outcomes Provided by the Project to the Student (30% of Review)

The student will learn how to focus and narrow a research project, how to read and analyze primary sources, and how to contextualize and present her research to the public. All of these are challenging and crucial skills, good for history and for virtually any future employment. The student will also learn Omeka and other digital humanities skills to construct her online exhibit.

III. Student Selection Criteria

Minimum 2 history classes. We needed a student with some familiarity with historical methods for this project.

IV. Project Mentorship (30% of Review)

The mentors will provide the student with readings on the history of shopping, hardware stores, and debt. The selected student will work closely with faculty mentors to use their knowledge of these topics, contextualize them in the history of twentieth century Huntsville, and identify and develop a research topic and research techniques using the Harrison Brothers ledgers. The student will have access to one of the faculty mentors daily during the project and will receive the support necessary to develop her research from both a theoretical and practical perspective. She will also receive training and regular technical support for learning and using Omeka to produce a digital exhibit based on her research. The faculty mentors will meet with the student weekly to discuss the project's progress, give feedback, and allow for discussion. They will also discuss opportunities for the student to present their research at conferences and other venues.