Although many members already know that the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society received a *Saving Our History* grant from the History Channel, I thought it might be helpful for all members to have information about the grant and project. Congratulations to all of you who support the Historical Society because only 11 out of 535 organizations that applied actually received a grant. This is a testament to the importance of what you all support with your time and talent. The title of the project is “Real People, Real History: Madison County and the Civil War, 1861-1865.” Below is part of the project narrative that describes the project and what we hope to accomplish.

**Project Narrative**

To create an online historical resource and exhibit area that preserves the public and private memories of Civil War-era individuals who lived in Madison County, Alabama, between 1861 and 1865. Tenth grade students from Huntsville High School (HHS), in conjunction with upper-level undergraduate and graduate history students from the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), will conduct primary source research in the Special Collections Department of the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

This research will be used to create a website from which the public can read and explore period documents such as diaries, letters, and photographs; explore their community’s involvement in the Civil War; and challenge individuals to adopt, research, and post their findings on a Civil War-era individual from Madison County. This project will be both the intellectual foundation and public portal for Madison County’s planned commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War that begins in 2011.

As part of its overall mission to preserve and engage local history, the Huntsville/Madison County Historical Society (HMCHS) will oversee the project. Professional historians and archivists will guide students in the preservation, interpretation,
and digitization of these records during the 2009-2010 school year. At the end of the school year, a week-long summer institute, sponsored by the UAH and HMCHS, will allow students to bring their individual projects together and collectively create an online resource dedicated to the preservation of local Civil War history within the broader context of state, regional, and national histories. This project has well-defined and practical objectives that include:

• To preserve letters, correspondence, photographs, and diaries from individuals who lived and worked in Madison County, Alabama, during the Civil War.
• To create opportunities for high school and university students to work together and with professional historians and archivists to create an online resource for the local community.
• To use primary sources to educate the public about the diverse memories of Madison County during the Civil War within the context of the American South.
• To cultivate public-private partnerships that encouraged future preservation of local historical documents and sites through community action.
• To build a free standing website that will house an online exhibit and other features based on student participation and research.
• To develop a project prototype for other communities interested in preserving their past through individual and collective programs such as this one.
• To provide practical field experience to students interested in history and preserving elements of the past.
• To create an educational resource for local, state, and regional history teachers.

This project allows individuals and groups to preserve diverse northern Alabama memories of the Civil War. As a focal point for southern unionism in the Deep South, the unique history of Madison County reminds students and the community that broad stereotypes and generalizations rarely match the reality of history. By providing students with an opportunity to
use and preserve their community's history, this project will allow students to preserve their past while enriching their futures.

Regardless of race, class, or gender, all contemporary Madison County residents were affected by the Civil War. Although no major battles were fought in northern Alabama, the diverse group of people who lived in Madison County struggled to understand how the war would change their lives and community. They expressed their fears in letters and diaries that still exist today. These documents will allow students and the general public to understand the past better. Students will touch, use, and preserve the past by creating digital records of Civil War historical documents. This interaction with tangible reminders from the past will promote historical thinking skills, empathy and understanding, and create an interest in preserving history.

Through the collaborative work of students, teachers and professors, local history groups, nonprofit and governmental organizations, schools, and community associations; this project will make primary sources available to the public and encourage the community to engage its history and create the framework to preserve its past as part of the sesquicentennial celebration of the Civil War.

In order for high school and university students to understand the importance of reaching out to the community, they will be required to help promote the project by writing newspaper articles, conduct radio interviews, and write promotional literature. Because so many different groups have agreed to participate in this proposed project, the responsibility to raise public awareness will be divided among each organization. The following organizations have already or will be approached about promoting the project: UAH’s Public Relations department, UAH National Public Radio campus affiliate station, local television stations, Huntsville Times, Huntsville/Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Huntsville City School system. In addition to these media outlets, the editor of the Huntsville Historical Review, a bi-annual history journal, has agreed to publish articles and papers written by high school students who participated in the project. Because this project and the resultant website will serve as the foundation for a larger
sesquicentennial celebration, public awareness will be a key element built into every component of the project.

This project will produce tangible resources for the community by allowing high school students to create a webpage that will document and preserve the letters, photographs, and diaries of individuals who lived in Madison County during the Civil War. These primary sources, currently stored at the public library, will become the basis for articles, short biographies, and online exhibits that will serve as the foundation for the project's website. Individual students will work on components of the project that best match their interests and skill sets. Students will be encouraged to think about other ways in which they could use these documents. Local historians associated with the Huntsville/Madison County Historical Society will provide direction and guidance in conjunction with faculty from UAH and HHS. The final website created by the project will be maintained by the Historical Society as part of its mission statement to preserve the past to enrich the future.

The Huntsville/Madison County Historical Society (HMCHS) has dedicated itself "to preserving the past to enrich the future through local education and preservation." As the sponsoring organization for this grant, the HMCHS has promised to supply local historians for the school year, provide access to The Huntsville Historical Review, and host the project's website. This project embodies the mission of the organization by promoting an interest in local history and historical preservation. It would be impossible to entice future students to become interested in the history of Madison County if historical documents and other primary sources did not exist. A project such as this allows for students to see history in a different manner because they can become part of the historical process. Their efforts will insure that future members of the community will have access to records and memories from the Civil War.
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