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Historical Research in Madison, Morgan, and Limestone Counties

Susanna Leberman & Samuel Gibby

Research opportunities for historical scholarship, public history, memory, and cultural heritage have become more advanced and resources are now more readily available. However, researchers need to know where to go to get the necessary information for their research. Researchers working in the North-central Alabama counties of Madison, Morgan, and Limestone might find this resource checklist of particular help. The criteria for the list of resources is based on five basic ways the general public can learn about history and access historical records that support scholarship, genealogy, and cultural heritage. These ways include archive rooms, artifacts and memorabilia, academic resources, public history events and exhibits, and other miscellaneous educational and online resources.

❖ **Madison County**

- ***The Huntsville-Madison County Public Library***

The third floor of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library is one of the best places for researchers to study history. In addition to being the home to the Library Special Collections department, the building also houses the Madison County Records center and Tax Accessor's archives.

RESOURCES:

- Archive Room (contains over 25, 000 photos, books, and documents)
- Special collections floor (national genealogy resources, newspapers, books, databases including ancestry.com, archive and genealogy classes,

assorted year books, city directories 1859-present, cemetery records, local memorabilia and rotating public history exhibits in Partnership with Calhoun-ex: Elvis at Von Braun Center, Alabama and the Presidency)

- African American resources (includes African American genealogy classes, slave schedules, scrapbooks, sheet music, letters, poetry and art, microfilmed African American newspapers and freedman's bureau records.
- Native American Genealogy classes, books, Trail of Tears information, Dawes rolls, artifacts
- Madison County Record Center (extensive website <http://madisoncountyal.gov/mcrc/>) includes Probate Court Records: Orphan's Court (pre-Probate Court), wills, administrations, guardianships, adoptions (may or may not be sealed record, depending on year), marriages, deeds, mortgages, cotton mill affidavits, Commissioner's Court Records, maps, etc. (1809 – 1968) Circuit Court Records: Chancery Court (pre-Circuit Court), divorces, civil suits, criminal cases
- Madison County Tax Assessors Archives (early land records, property tax records, and maps)
- HMCPL Digital Archive-- digitalarchives.hmcpl.org-- (including thousands of photographs and documents)

Contact and URL:

915 Monroe St SW
Huntsville, AL 35801
(256) 532-5940
Library Main Website: hmcpl.org
Digital Archive: digitalarchives.hmcpl.org

- ***University of Alabama in Huntsville Salmon Library***

The Special Collections held at M. Louis Salmon Library at the University of Alabama in Huntsville house theses and dissertations produced within the University. It also houses research reports produced within the University, and preserves the history and development of the space program.

RESOURCES:

- Documentation of Saturn V rocket history and the Skylab collection
- Bob Jones collection, papers of the former Congressman who represented North Alabama's fifth Congressional District for thirty years (1947-1976)
- German scientist papers
- Oral History Interviews and Video recordings
- Francis Roberts's papers
- Harvey Jones Collection
- Academic books (physical and online)
- Online journals and periodicals

Contact and URL:

4700 Holmes Ave.,
Huntsville, AL 35899
(256) 824-6530

Library Website: www.uah.edu/library

UAH Archives and Special Collections Libguide:
libguides.uah.edu/archives

- ***Alabama A&M J. F. Drake Memorial Learning Resources Center Library***

Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University received the designation as a land grant institution. It was the first black school in Alabama to receive funds from the Second Morrill Act of 1890 in August 1891. In 1904, the Carnegie Library was constructed on "Normal's Hill" under the leadership of Alabama A&M's first principal and president, Dr. William Hooper Council. In 1968, the Joseph F. Drake Memorial Library was built.

RESOURCES:

- Archive Room (strong emphasis on African American studies and historically black colleges)
- Yearbooks
- Campus Queens
- William Hooper Council and past University history
- Historically Black Leaders research
- State Black Archives (located on campus and includes research and memorabilia concerning Buffalo Soldiers)
- Academic books (physical and online)

Contact and URL:

4900 Meridian St
Huntsville, AL 35811
(256) 372-5000

Library
Website: alabamam.sdp.sirsi.net/client/default
State Black Archives
Website: stateblackarchives.wix.com/sbarcm

- ***Oakwood University Eva B. Dykes Library***

The Oakwood University Archives is the repository for the historical records of Oakwood University, African-American Seventh-day Adventists, alumni, faculty, and administrators.

RESOURCES:

- The Clara Peterson-Rock Museum (visual history of Oakwood University in context of American History and Adventist history)
- Emphasis on African American studies and religion
- Year books
- Oakwood College Bullins

Contact AND URL:

7000 Adventist Blvd NW
Huntsville, AL 35896
(256) 726-7000
Oakwood University Digital Collections:
archive.org/details/oakwooduniversity

Archives Libguide:
libguides.oakwood.edu/c.php?g=260563&p=1740676

- ***Huntsville History Collection***

The Huntsville History Collection is an internet portal that provides information about the history and historic architecture of Huntsville and Madison County. This large website includes interactive mapping. It also features the Huntsville Historical Review and Quarterly in full text and by subject in a Wikipedia-styled format.

RESOURCES:

- It includes the Huntsville Historical Review Quarterly, with a search engine that focuses on the subjects and authors.
- The Southpaw Postcard Collection- this is a private collection of 500 Madison County and Huntsville postcards. The subjects of the postcards include homes, scenes of buildings, streets, Marshall Space Flight Center, Big Spring, Monte Sano, etc.
- Glimpses of Old Huntsville – This is a series of audio recordings by local historian, author, and storyteller Nancy Rohr. She narrates the accounts of life in early Huntsville, the residents of the city's historic homes, and tells stories about the local heroines of the Civil War.
- Madison Memories Collection – This is an extensive collection of memorabilia by John P. Rankin, who researched Madison County's history for 20 years. The collection includes:
 - Cemeteries of Redstone Arsenal - These are reports that document the 50 cemeteries residing on Redstone Arsenal.

- Oral History Series – This is a series of oral histories from Madison County residents from 2004 to 2006.
- Pioneer Family Folders – This is John Rankin’s research papers concerning the Madison pioneer family, which is organized by family in a series of online directories.
- Vintage Vignettes – Originally published in ‘The Huntsville Times’, they are a series of short stories by John Rankin that discuss the history and the people of Madison and Madison County.

Contact and URL:

huntsvillehistorycollection.org

Email the Webmaster:

webmaster@huntsvillehistorycollection.org

- ***Calhoun Community College’s Center for Southern Political History***

Calhoun Community College’s Center for Southern Political History preserves political literature, and partners with the Huntsville Public Library on public history displays. It also promotes public debates on current political issues. It not only encourages political involvements in all levels of the government, but it also provides researchers a room to read current periodicals. The Center also promotes the importance of history, political science and social science disciplines.

RESOURCES:

- Political Memorabilia (both locally and nationwide) (buttons, signatures, political papers, etc.)
- The Senator Tom Butler Archive collection

- Document Exchange
- The Representative Sue Schmitz Political Arts Collection
- Photographs

Contact and URL:

Cummings Research Park Campus
102 Wynn Dr.
Huntsville, AL 35805
(256) 890-4737

Website: calhoun.edu/about-calhoun/center-for-the-study-of-southern-political-culture

- Local Museums and Helpful Links

These are the local museums and helpful links that help demonstrate Huntsville's public history programs. These places are helpful to researchers who are studying a particular subject in North-central Alabama counties' history. These helpful resources include:

- *Burritt on the Mountain* (historical mansion, living history park, authentic pioneer cabins) 3101 Burritt Dr SE, Huntsville, AL 35801 (256) 536-2882 (<http://www.burrittonthemountain.com/>)
- *Early Works* (Huntsville Depot, Constitution Village) 404 Madison St SE, Huntsville, AL 35801 (256) 564-8100 (<http://www.earlyworks.com/>)
- *Space and Rocket Center* Davidson Center, Huntsville, AL 35805 (256) 837-3400 1-800-637-7223 (<http://rocketcenter.com/>)
- *U.S. Veterans Memorial Museum* (extensive war library and memorabilia including WWII tank and small encryption machine) 2060 Airport Rd SW,

Huntsville, AL 35801 256 883-3737
(<http://www.memorialmuseum.org/>)

- *Weeden House Museum* (African American art, poetry, and antique furniture) 300 Gates Ave SE, Huntsville, AL 35801 256 536-7718 (<https://weedenhousemuseum.com/>)
- *Huntsville History Tour* (Online resource, walking tour, and Web App) 500 Church Street NW, Suite One Huntsville, AL 35801 800-Space-4-U (256-772-2348) (<http://huntsvillehistorytours.org/>)

- ***NASA Marshall Space Flight Center***

This is the historic center where the development of the Space Launch System takes place. This place also has ties to the Redstone Arsenal.

RESOURCES:

- Exhibits and Memorabilia
- Archives
- Online Timeline

Contact and URL:

Redstone Arsenal
Huntsville, AL 35812
256-544-6840

Websites:

<http://www.nasa.gov/centers/marshall/home/>
<http://history.msfc.nasa.gov/>

- ***Huntsvilleal.gov***

This is a website for Huntsville City's, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Interactive Services

department. This index provides links and details to historical resources and demographics for Huntsville, AL.

RESOURCES:

- Historical Markers
- Interactive Maps
- Maple Hill Cemetery Burial Locater
- City Greenways
- A Link to Request Property Addresses for Variance
- Brick Locaters

Contact and URL:

308 Fountain Circle
Huntsville AL 35802
256 427-5100

Website: <http://www.huntsvilleal.gov/gis/index.php>
Direct link to Atlas of Huntsville/Madison County:
<http://www.huntsvilleal.gov/gis/atlas/atlas.htm>

❖ **Morgan County**

• ***Morgan County Archives***

Created by the Morgan County Commission in 1995, this Archive is located in a historic bank in downtown Decatur. The Archive is the official repository for local county government records and also contains exhibits and public access computers for genealogy and research.

RESOURCES:

- Genealogy classes
- Database access (ancestry.com)
- Memorabilia/Artifacts

- County government records
- Photographs and postcards
- Rotating exhibits
- Located in a historic building

Contact and URL:

624 Bank Street N.E.
Decatur, AL 35601
(256) 351-4726

Website: www.co.morgan.al.us/archivesindex.html

- ***The Blue & Gray Museum of North Alabama***

For those interested in Civil War studies, The Blue & Gray Museum of North Alabama is a large privately owned collection of Civil War artifacts. Robert Parham, the owner of the collection, organized, displayed, and opened this collection to public viewing in the museum.

RESOURCES:

- Privately owned Civil War museum
- Artifacts (weapons, uniforms, etc.)
- Memorabilia (coins, buttons, drums)
- Small models

Contact and URL:

723 Bank St.
Decatur, AL
256-350-4018

Website: <http://www.alabamacivilwarmuseum.com>

❖ Limestone County

• *Limestone County Archives*

In 1980, the Limestone County Commission established The Limestone County Department of History and Archives. In 2004, the commission purchased the 1905 L&N Depot and redesigned it in order to house the Limestone County Department of History and Archives. This building is the biggest resource for Limestone county records produced by the Circuit Court, Board of Education, County Commission, Probate Court, Revenue Commission, and Board or Registrars. The archives also contain periodicals, family histories, family photographs, and microfilmed newspapers.

RESOURCES:

- Historic Depot Building
- Photographs and Memorabilia
- Limestone County death records
- Historic funeral programs
- Deeds, Wills, Marriages
- Court cases
- Tax blanks
- Plat books
- Voter registrations

Contact and URL:

102 W Washington St,

Athens, AL. 35611

Website: <http://limestonearchives.com/>

• *Limestone County Historical Society*

This is a website that promotes Limestone County's local history by printing and distributing educational materials. They also promote locating, marking, and preserving historical sites and records. This website is a great resource

for the public to learn about Limestone county's public history events and tourism.

RESOURCES:

- Public History events
- Promote Limestone County Archives
- Website provides links to other museums

Contact and URL:

Limestone County Historical Society
P.O. Box 82
Athens, AL 35612

Website:

<http://www.limestonecountyhistoricalsociety.org/>

❖ Additional Statewide Resources

● AlabamaMosaic

AlabamaMosaic is the statewide digital repository focusing on history, culture, places, and people. This virtual library draws from Alabama's archives, libraries, museums, and other repositories electronically accessible. With over 100,000 digital objects and 34 member institutions, AlabamaMosaic is a comprehensive way to research University Archives and other types of a public memory keeping organizations.

RESOURCES:

- Photos Postcards
- Letters and Diaries
- Oral histories
- Newspapers
- Yearbooks and Scrapbooks
- Sheet Music
- Maps

- College records
- Census records
- Church records
- Government records
- Funeral programs

Contact and URL:

alabamamosaic.org

- The Alabama Department of Archives and History (<http://www.archives.alabama.gov/>).

The Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) is a central institution connecting all things Alabama history. The ADAH mission statement: "We tell the story of the people of Alabama by preserving records and artifacts of historical value and promoting a better understanding of Alabama history." Housed in a beautiful historic building in downtown Montgomery, across from the capital, it is also the home to the Alabama Museum. The website offers links and recordings of historical presentations, as well as online indexes, records, and other high demand materials available at ADAH. **HHS**

RESOURCES:

- Local government/County records on microfilm
- Civil War Soldiers database
- Military Records
- Newspapers on microfilm
- Digital Collections
- Vertical Files
- Newspapers not on microfilm
- 1867 Voter Registration database

- Alabama City Directories
- Maps
- World War I Goldstar database
- Alabama Church and Synagogue Records Collection
- Governors' Executive Orders database
- Reading and Research Room
- Online Research Request forms

Contact and URL:

P.O. Box 300100 / 624 Washington Ave.
Montgomery, AL 36130
(334) 242-4435
Website: archives.alabama.gov

Susanna Leberman is the Archivist at the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, where she is responsible for maintaining the archival collection, creating digital collections, writing grants, assisting patrons with research projects, and giving public history presentations and performances. Susanna has an M.A. in History from the University of Alabama-Huntsville.

Samuel Gibby works with the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library archive, he handles tasks such as creating digital collections, maintaining archival collections, and assisting the archivists in their public history presentations. Samuel has a Bachelor's Degree in History from the University of Alabama in Huntsville.