“Huntsville’s Technological Evolution” is the topic at our June meeting. The speaker is Dr. Ray Watson of Huntsville. His speech will be a summary of his book on technology and engineering in the Tennessee Valley, from 1800 to 1945, just prior to the Rocket Age. Watson is one of the original founders of Brown Engineering, which later became Teledyne Brown Engineering.

This is the Historical Society’s annual membership renewal meeting. We meet as usual in the auditorium of the Main Library at 2:00. Refreshments will be available and visitors are welcome. Information at 256-539-5287.

Historical Marker Committee Update

By Alex Luttrel & Deane Dayton

Historical marker refurbishment is now continuing, thanks to the warmer weather of Spring. The Marker Committee contracted with Restoration Huntsville (Ken and Landon Boyd) to refurbish an additional eight Alabama Historical Association markers. The eight were chosen based on their poor condition noted during a survey of all markers throughout Madison County. Those markers selected for refurbishment at this time include: St. Mary’s Church of the Visitation, First Presbyterian Church, Birthplace of General John Hunt Morgan, First Bank in Alabama, Buckhorn Tavern, Town of New Market, Town of Gurley, and Oakwood College. The Boyds were given the approval to begin the work in early May after all sponsoring organizations and/or property owners were notified of the plans. Three new aluminum posts were also ordered and received from Sewah Studios to replace several that had been damaged.

Changes to the Alabama Historical Association (AHA) Marker Committee were announced at the AHA’s annual meeting in April. Dr. Norwood Kerr recently retired from his position at the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) and also stepped down as chairman of the AHA Marker Committee. Norwood served for over two decades as the chair and during his tenure hundreds of markers were approved and erected throughout the state. Scotty Kirkland, also an employee of ADAH, has assumed the duties of Chairman of the AHA Marker Committee. Norwood has agreed to continue as a member of the committee along with Dr. John Hall, Gayle Thomas, Dr. John Hardin, and Alex Luttrel.
HISTORICAL MARKER APP

Work is progressing on the Historical Marker Web Application. The app will run on a smartphone, tablet or computer. It provides historical background, maps and directions to the 125 historical markers in Madison County. The app development team includes David & Rebecca Hitt, Kelly Hamlin, Alexis Albright, Jessica White, Jimmy Pemberton, Jacque Reeves and Deane Dayton.

For members new to this technology, an app is a self-contained program or piece of software designed to, in our case, be downloaded by a user to a mobile device.

STATE BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION MEMBERS MEET HERE

By Arley McCormick

The full Huntsville/Madison County Bicentennial Committee met here on May 3rd for an update from the state organization. The gathering was hosted by Bart Williams, executive director at Constitution Village. The program was ably presided over by committee chairman Julian Butler and began with briefings by members of the State Bicentennial Commission, including Steve Murray, director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. The overviews illustrated efforts now underway since the State Legislature passed a budget that includes money for the Bicentennial.

But the most impressive presentation was an extemporaneous report by John Allen on four significant activities the Historical Society is engaging in for the Bicentennial. Jay Lamar, the Executive Director of the State Commission, acknowledged that Huntsville is leading the state in preparing for the Bicentennial. Actually, she could have said the Historical Society is leading the state, but she was polite.

One example cited by Lamar is that the State is pushing a number of programs to engage schools, including conducting a teacher working-group discussion sometime this summer. However, your Historical Society is already engaged in a “local history-in-schools-support program. The HMCHS program will include an app for teachers of local history when the next school term starts. Our team of John Allen, Dean Dayton, and Kelly Fisk Hamlin are almost ready to execute, perhaps a year ahead of the State’s program.

Other concepts announced include displaying the six Alabama constitutions at the Art museum, Reenactment of President Monroe’s extemporary visit to Huntsville in 1819, and a celebration at the Constitution Village regarding the signing of the Constitution by delegates of the 22 existing counties that participated in the convention.

The Huntsville/Madison County Committee will focus its energy on activities in 2019, but encourage club and societies to organize events consistent with the Alabama Commission’s focus on becoming a Territory in 2017 through becoming a state in 1819.

The last event celebrating the Bicentennial years will be the December 12th; the date when President Monroe actually signed the document that made Alabama the 22nd State. The first event for the Bicentennial will be a cocktail party in Mobile next year, kicking off the celebration.

SCHOOL OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Historical Society is developing a local history outreach program targeting schools located in Madison County, starting with the Huntsville City Schools. Arley McCormick, John Allen, Kelly Fisk Hamlin and Deane Dayton met with curriculum directors and teachers at the Annie C. Mertz center. The Society plans to develop a website with a list of local history digital resources for teachers and has designated Kelly Hamlin as the primary contact between the schools and the Historical Society.

This is our first City Schools work session. Shown left to right: Kari Curtis, Hampton Cove; Dr. Deane Dayton; Kelly Fisk Hamlin; Morgan Scott, Lakewood; Dottie Creel, Curriculum Specialist; Emeka Marshall, Huntsville Jr. High; Dr. Cathy Vasile, Director of Instruction; and Brian Coontz, Mountain Gap.

FORTY FIVE YEARS OF HISTORICAL REVIEWS

Since 1971, the Society has published 95 Historical Reviews. In those 45 years they have all accomplished two goals: 1) good stories for members who love local history, and 2) segments of local history have been captured for researchers anywhere in the world for all time (big thanks to our own Dr. Deane Dayton for scanning the Reviews into the worldwide web). The Reviews are categorized by subject matter, author, and year. You can access them now by going to www.HuntsvilleHistoryCollection.org
HISTORICAL REVIEWS AS BOOKS

Because the Historical Reviews are such a rich source of local history, a committee of the Historical Society is plucking out related stories to bind into several books, and in some cases, with updated annotation, as new information has been uncovered. The primary focus will be on stories related to the upcoming Alabama Bicentennial (2017-2019); however, there will be other categories too.

These books will be available to our members at regular meetings, or for sale to anyone on Amazon.com. This could turn into a revenue stream for the Society. Jacque Reeves is heading this effort. More information will be forthcoming.

MEMBERSHIP BROCHURE REVISED

The HMCHS membership brochure has been updated to reflect several changes, including dues, which are now a single fee of $25 whether single or family. Also, the brochure has a green tint to distinguish it from the old one, which had a brown tint.

KUDOS TO HMCHS MEMBER

Historical Society board of directors member David Hitt presented a talk on the “iCubeSat 2016” rocket at the University of Oxford in London, England. The workshop was held May 24-25. Hitt, is a member of the strategic communications team for NASA’s new Space Launch System rocket, which is managed at Huntsville’s Marshall Space Flight Center.

Hitt is the author of two books on space history, “Homesteading Space” and “Bold They Rise.” Congratulations, David!

WE GET LETTERS – AND ARTIFACTS

Here is a sampling of the letters, pictures, and artifacts that are sent to the HMCHS on almost a weekly basis. In addition, we receive telephone calls, mostly from people inquiring about architectural codes for old downtown houses, or from builders who want to know if there are any old cemeteries on the acreage where they hope to build. Most of the letters ask questions about genealogy. We refer some of those to the Library’s Heritage Room.

The large watercolor painting of the old Madison County Courthouse turned up in Moulton and was mailed to us. The framed print was rescued from the Redstone Arsenal Thrift Store. A packet of Huntsville Garden Club booklets was sent to us from Nashville by a Mrs. Dilworth covering the years from 1940 to the early 1960s. From Minneapolis, we received four prized photos taken in the early 1900s of Huntsville scenes. And some nice person in Mt. Hope, Ala., sent us several old photographs of downtown Huntsville during the Sesquicentennial of 1955 (some of these have been posted on the Society’s Facebook page).

Many of these artifacts may be turned over to the Huntsville library’s archives. However, it may be time for us to locate our own repository for items such as these. It would be a holding center until the items could be curated and sent on to the best destination. Such a facility might become a magnet for other archives, such as from estate sales, so that the artifacts don’t wind up in flea markets, or worse, in the landfill.

DR. JOHN RISON JONES AWARD FOR SOUTHERN HISTORY - WINNER FOR 2016

The pro-slavery ideology of four southern Presbyterian ministers is the subject of the winning paper by UA-Huntsville student Jake Nelson. The annual Dr. John Rison Jones prize is worth $250 and will be awarded to Nelson at Honors Day for the College of Liberal Arts. The selection was made by former Historical Review editor, Dr. John Kvach. Nelson’s paper will be printed in a future Historical Review.

From 1850 to 1867, the four ministers supported the institution of slavery, arguing that it was a morally acceptable system according to Scripture. One of the ministers was Frederick Augustus Ross, who was minister of Huntsville’s First Presbyterian Church from 1855 to 1875.

Everything about us today is a consequence of our history.
Board of Directors: John Allen, Wayne Smith, Sharon Lang, Arley McCormick, Jacque Reeves, Gary Wicks, Carol Cadori, Ron Bledsoe, Deane Dayton, David Hitt, David Byers, Mary Daniel, George Mahoney, Sam Tumminello, Bob Adams and Katie Hale (designer/web).