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HMCPL Special Collections to Present Lecture Series on Huntsville History

Huntsville, Ala. — The Huntsville-Madison County Public Library's (HMCPL) Special Collections Department is hosting a series of lectures for America 250, highlighting important people, places, and events in Huntsville and Madison County history.

The programs will take place at the Downtown Huntsville Library and will feature topics ranging from Huntsville's growth during World War II to the Civil Rights Movement and the city's changing entertainment scene. Several of the lectures will feature materials from the HMCPL Special Collections archive.

The fall sessions will begin **Friday, Sept. 4, from noon to 1 p.m.**, with "**America 250: The Army Comes to Huntsville: Madison County during WWII, 1941-1945.**" Before Huntsville became known as the Rocket City, World War II brought significant changes to the area as the U.S. Army established several arsenals in Madison County to manufacture chemical weapons.

The presentation will look at Huntsville in 1941 as the community recovered from the Great Depression, why the Army came to Huntsville, and the impact its arrival had on the community. The program will be presented by HMCPL Special Collections Librarian David Lilly.

Other upcoming programs include:

Friday, Oct. 2 – America 250: Real Estate, Rockets, and Race: The Development of Gurley Heights, Magnolia Terrace, and McThornmor Acres in 1950s Huntsville

The establishment of Redstone Arsenal and its post-war transition into a rocket center brought tens of thousands of new residents to Huntsville. The city's population ballooned from 13,000 in 1940 to 80,000 in 1960. Huntsville strained to provide housing and an ambitious series of urban renewal projects combined with new suburban developments rapidly changed the city. Gurley Heights, Magnolia Terrace, and McThornmor Acres subdivisions were platted by white and Black entrepreneurs to help ease housing pressures. Come learn about these three National Register neighborhoods and how they offer a glimpse into 1950s Huntsville. The program will be presented by Caroline Swope, M.S.H.P., Ph.D., Architectural Historian.

Friday, Nov. 6 – America 250: The Civil Rights Movement in Huntsville

Huntsville was the site of several firsts in Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement. This presentation will examine the history of the Community Service Committee and the work of local Civil Rights leaders. It will also feature historical materials from the Community Service Committee collection held in the HMCPL Special Collections archive. The program will be presented by Special Collections Manager Cait Monroe.

Friday, Dec. 4 – America 250: Rocket City Retro: Huntsville in the '70s, '80s and '90s

Take an interstellar trip to Rocket City's past! Explore the places, activities, and local traditions that made Huntsville a groovy place during the '70s, '80s, and '90s. Join us for a nostalgic look at where people went, what they did, and what made this era of Huntsville totally tubular! The program will be presented by HMCPL Special Collections Assistant Hayden Fuller.

The lectures will be presented as lunch-and-learn programs. Attendees are welcome to bring their own meal. Programs will be held at the Downtown Huntsville Library.

A Community Archive

HMCPL Special Collections was established as the library's "Alabama Room" in January 1949 to house rare, fragile and unique materials held since 1818. In June 1949, the library began asking the community to donate historical materials. More than 75 years later, the department continues to collect and preserve materials documenting the history of Huntsville and Madison County.

The collection includes more than 25,000 photographic prints and originals, with images of local streets, cotton mills, and portraits of citizens. Other materials include scrapbooks, original artworks, local business and organization records, early church records, diaries, and personal correspondences.

Special Collections also includes the Heritage Books Collection, which contains local history and genealogical resources; the Rare Books Room; more than 900 maps; and digital media collections. The materials are available to the public for research and viewing.

"Special Collections is the community's archive," said Cait Monroe, Special Collections Department Manager. "There is so much local history in these collections, and these programs give people an opportunity to learn about that history and see some of the materials that help tell these stories."

The Special Collections staff assist patrons with historical and genealogical research and help make the library's historical resources accessible to the community.

For more information about HMCPL Special Collections, visit [HMCPL Special Collections](#). Follow HMCPL Special Collections on [Facebook](#) for historical highlights, collection information, and upcoming programs.



Mobile Library about 1931 in front of Huntsville Carnegie Library

About HMCPL

This is the public's library. Huntsville-Madison County Public Library (HMCPL) is a nonprofit 10-branch system that serves all of Madison County, Ala. For 200 years, the library has been dedicated to enriching the educational, recreational and cultural lives of communities in Madison County through materials, information and programs that foster a lifelong love of learning.

Huntsville-Madison County Public Library | hmcpl.org

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