

A year of history... looking toward the future

Annual report of the Chapel Hill Historical Society 2016-2017

A home for history: Our new reading room and research library.

Come visit our new quarters on the lower level of the Chapel Hill Public Library on Library Drive. The Chapel Hill Historical Society has made itself at home in Room 47. We are open 15 hours a week, and we welcome everyone to visit and to use our library and archives.



The Chapel Hill Historical Society is deeply grateful to the Chapel Hill Public Library and the Town of Chapel Hill for making this space available to us. We have already collaborated with the Public Library on several projects, and we look forward to many more in the future.

Research requests

The Society maintains a collection of books and resource files relevant to Chapel Hill history. In addition, we have bound volumes of the Chapel Hill Newspaper and other periodicals, including school yearbooks and telephone books.

Visitors contact CHHS seeking information about their families and about local history, people and buildings. Our staff and volunteers are often able to provide valuable resources to guide their search.

In the last year, we received over 100 inquiries and requests for assistance.

Susan Newrock, pictured at right, is the staff contact person who helps researchers navigate our files. She often calls on members of the Historical Society with deep knowledge of the questions presented.



Here is a small sample of the queries we fielded in 2016-17:

- A researcher investigating family history going back to 1700s found relevant land records, maps and texts.
- Researchers asked for help identifying historical documents about (a) the early history of the Chapel Hill Fire Department and (b) the first African-American police officers in the Chapel Hill Police Department.
- The Chapel Hill Public Library requested assistance in locating information about specific locations identified with Chapel Hill authors (homes, offices, settings) for a walking tour of the downtown area. The information will be integrated into an interactive phone application so users can explore the downtown physically while accessing photographs and texts relevant to local authors.
- A researcher requested information about a relative who operated a dry goods and grocery emporium on Franklin Street in the 1920s.
- A researcher asked for assistance in documenting the burning of the high school on Pittsboro Street.

The CHHS is a trove of invaluable historical resources. Among my favorite archived treasures are first edition books, which contain color photographs and illustrations so often omitted from reprinted editions. However, the real gems of the CHHS are the dedicated staff members who are a wealth of knowledge regarding not only Chapel Hill history, but also the greater historical context through which we might better understand our past, present, and future.

Kim Smith -- independent scholar

Bringing history to the community: Educational programs open to the public

The Chapel Hill Historical Society provides an active forum for learning about our community's past. Historical Society presentations are free and open to the public, and we seek a wide audience. The conversations that take place during and after these presentations are an important part of the work of the Society.

This year, we had a compelling series of presentations. Information about specific programs is available on our website, including many of the photographs, charts and slides used to illustrate the talks:

<http://www.chapelhillhistoricalsociety.org/en/2011/programs.html>

Doing Our Bit: UNC and the Great War

The Carolina campus transformed into a military training ground when the U.S. prepared for war in 1917. The Wilson Library NC Special Collections shared its exhibit, and Sarah Carrier, NC Research & Instructional Librarian, talked about UNC, Chapel Hill and Orange County involvement in WWI. You can view this presentation [here](#).

Four Chapel Hill Writers Whose Lives Light up our Past

Paul Green, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, helped Betty Smith embark on her literary career. George Moses Horton is often remembered as the "black bard" or "slave poet" of North Carolina; Caroline Lee Hentz helped him get published. In April, 2017, Patrick Horn and Valerie Yow presented the work of these four writers and their lives in Chapel Hill.

From Astronomical Illiteracy to Science Festivals: The Morehead Planetarium's History and the Training of Astronauts

Dr. Todd Boyette, director of the Morehead Planetarium and Science Center at UNC - Chapel Hill, shared the history of John Motley Morehead and the Morehead Planetarium, which opened in 1949 as the first planetarium in the South.

Five Orange County African-American Families Remembered

Kim Smith presented original research on the extended family of the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, which descended from Harriet Smith, an enslaved woman on the Mary Ruffin Smith plantation in Orange County. Kim Smith's talk re-introduced remarkable members of the Smith, Fitzgerald, Morphis, Kirby, and Toole families.



CHHS Remembers Its Own History

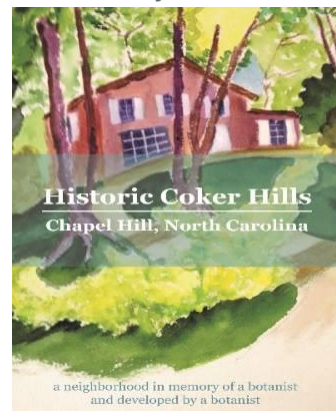
We celebrated the story of the Historical Society itself on its 50th anniversary, how we got to the present, and our hopes for the future. Former leaders related how the Society changed, struggled, and prospered during their time in office. You can view the presentation material [here](#) and enjoy a [sample](#) of the recorded music by Chapel Hill area musicians played at the event.

Brent Glass: 50 Great American Places: Essential Historic Sites Across the U.S.

Dr. Brent D. Glass, Director Emeritus of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, read from his recently published book, *50 Great American Places: Essential Historic Sites Across the U.S.*, at Flyleaf Books in Chapel Hill. Dr. Glass was Chair of the Oral History Committee of the Chapel Hill Historical Society, and was responsible for the publication of many oral histories of local residents.

Historic Coker Hills

The Historical Society is proud to have partnered with Jill Blackburn-Ridky on her book: [Historic Coker Hills: A Botanists' Neighborhood in Chapel Hill](#). The neighborhood was developed by UNC botany professor William Chambers Coker. It is the site of important modernist architecture and an active family community.



Jones Ferry: A Road to the Past

Where was Jones Ferry? Richard Ellington shared extensive original research on why and how the road came about and the suspected location of the ferry itself. He used maps, historical tax records and on-the-ground investigation to show how Jones Ferry Road has changed in location and importance over the years.

Our “Town Treasures”

Every year, the Historical Society recognizes “Town Treasures” who have contributed to our community with service and leadership.

We are proud to recognize the following 2016 recipients: Lula Alston, Dr. Marvin Block; Shirley Block; Woody Durham; Henry Jones; Dr. George Lensing, Jr.; Peggy Misch; Gordon Neville; and Lisa Price.



Chapel Hill Historical Society's 2016 Town Treasures - L. to R. seated: Dr. Marvin Block, Shirley Block, Lula Alston. L. to R. standing: Gordon Neville, Woody Durham, Henry Jones, Dr. George Lensing Jr., Lisa Price, Peggy Misch.

Proclamations were presented to the Town Treasures of 2016 by Mayor Pam Hemminger (Chapel Hill) and by Mayor Lydia Lavelle (Carrboro). Biographies of the Town Treasures can be found on our website at

<http://www.chapelhillhistoricalsociety.org/en/2011/treasures.html>.

Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger presents a Town Proclamation to Woody Durham,



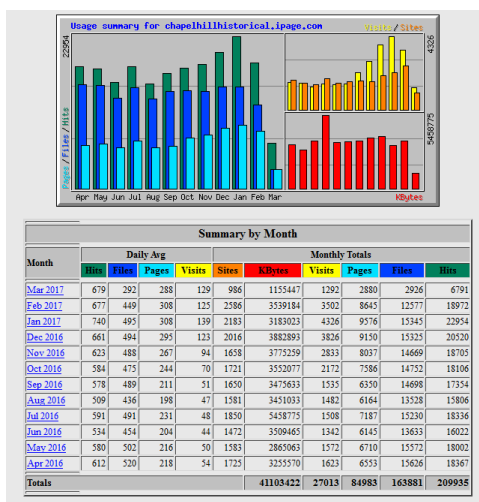
Interactive and Digital Resources

Come and see the “Chapel Hill Then and Now” interactive bulletin board outside our office at the Chapel Hill Public Library. The display in 2016-2017 was a look at Fowler’s Food Store, located at 306 West Franklin Street from 1949 until it closed in 1990. The display consisted of photographs, newspaper advertisements and text. A notebook was available at all times on a podium next to the bulletin board, in which members of the public were invited to post their memories of Fowler’s, its staff and its unusual product lines.

A new interactive **digital timeline** of Chapel Hill history is posted on our website: <http://www.chapelhillhistoricalsociety.org/en/2011/timeline4.html>

The site is a searchable “virtual museum.” It allows students and members of the public to explore events and trends in Chapel Hill history, both political and cultural. We welcome suggestions from the public for additions to the timeline, and we are embarking on an effort to embed photography and resourcing, to make it more useful. In the future, we would like to install a “walking timeline” of bricks that tell the story of major Chapel Hill events in chronological order.

Our **Facebook** page, <https://www.facebook.com/chapelhillhistoricalsociety> , also provides a new forum for interaction about Chapel Hill history. Visitors to the page have posted comments and questions, some of which have led to new research.



The Historical Society **web site** shows a dramatic increase in web traffic this year. From April until September, 2016, the site registered approximately 1,500 unique page visits per month. Between October, 2016 and February, 2017, the site registered an average 3,500 page visits per month.

Support and Partnerships

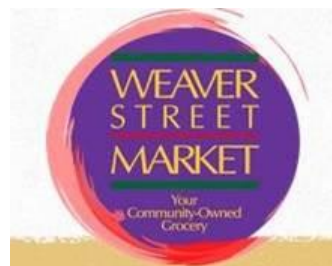
The Historical Society is deeply grateful for the support and collaboration of the following organizations which partnered with us last year.

- The **Town of Chapel Hill** and the **Chapel Hill Public Library** provide us with space for a library and reading room, open to the public, on the lower level of the library building. They have also provided space for our public events, and display space in the library hallways.
- The **Strowd-Roses Foundation** provided generous support through a grant, which we used to support our programs in 2016-17.

The following organizations assisted us with speakers and/or locations for public presentations:

- Center for the Study of the American South, University of North Carolina.
- The Morehead Planetarium.
- The Southern Historical Collection of the Wilson Library Special Collections.
- Flyleaf Books.

The following businesses contributed to a reception for the Town Treasures: Harris-Teeter, Weaver Street Market, the Fresh Market, and Mediterranean Deli Baker and Catering.



Goals for the Future

The Historical Society has identified short, medium and long range goals for its future. In addition to maintaining our research collection and educational programs, we have several special projects we hope to complete:

- Restoration of the McCauley Cemetery beside University Lake. Our research and efforts to restore the site are being carried out collaboratively with the University of North Carolina, OWASA, McCauley family members, and groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution.
- A digital/video history of Chapel Hill that can be shown to community groups and schools.
- Curriculum modules about Chapel Hill history that can be used in schools and youth organizations.
- A brick timeline of Chapel Hill history to be installed in a public location.
- Publications about Chapel Hill history.
- An event honoring Howard Lee, former mayor of Chapel Hill.
- Digitizing of resources and purchase of software to make our website and digital resources widely available to the public.
- And much, much more.

These projects, and our regular operations and programs, all cost money. The Historical Society is a private non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Although we are housed in the Public Library, we receive no direct or program support from any public entity. Much of our work is carried out by enthusiastic volunteers. Financial, budget and membership information is available on request.

Your tax-deductible contributions and memberships sustain the work of the Historical Society. We welcome donations at any time, and we urge you to become a member of the Society. You can join online at

<http://www.chapelhillhistoricalsociety.org/en/2011/join.html>

We also welcome your participation in the Society as a volunteer! Come join us as we continue to tell the story of our community.

Contact us:

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Board of Directors, 2016-2017 (left to right): Sarah Geer, Thomas Jepsen, Marsha Jepsen, Mary Anderson, Carl Anderson, Richard Ellington, Bill Burlingame, Rachel Reynolds, Valerie Yow. Not pictured: Frances McVey, Susan Worley.
