

A Brief Tour of the Athens-Clarke County Library Heritage Room

By Richelle Brown

The Heritage Room, established in 1992, is the special collections unit of the Athens-Clarke County Library. As one of Georgia's larger publicly accessible and non-membership genealogy and local history collections, the Heritage Room is a regional resource. It collects and makes available both primary and secondary sources on the Athens area, the state of Georgia, and the Southeastern United States for the purpose of research and/or preservation.

Among the secondary sources is a non-circulating collection of 10,000 books on genealogy. These range from books that focus on the history and vital records of individual Georgia counties to multi-volume sets of indexes published by government agencies and lineage societies. Yearbooks from high schools in Athens-Clarke County and the University of Georgia are popular, as are local city directories dating back to 1889. The Heritage Room holds over 4,000 reels of microfilm that include local newspapers dating back to 1808 and Clarke County court records. Unless they are rare or in a fragile condition, patrons have direct access to all of these secondary source materials and may browse and use them freely.

The primary sources collected by the Heritage Room include not only textual and special media records—such as maps, photographs, sound recordings, and moving images—but also art and artifacts, rare book collections, manuscripts, architectural drawings, and textiles. The Heritage Room collects materials from local businesses, clubs, societies, organizations, local schools, and governments in an effort to preserve the history of Athens and Clarke County. These

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collections are processed to ensure their preservation and provide ease of access, and are stored in a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment. Subject to certain restrictions, these materials are available to researchers.

The Heritage Room has several pieces of equipment to assist with research. The Indus Book Scanner 9000 overhead/planetary scanner is one of the most popular pieces of equipment in the Heritage Room, and accommodates large-format bound and unbound documents up to 18" x 28." It is frequently used by Heritage Room researchers and staff working on special projects—such as scanning of family scrapbooks and plats—as well as patrons who come from elsewhere in the library. In addition to having a large collection of microfilm, the Heritage Room is a FamilySearch Affiliate Library, which allows patrons to view microfilm records owned by the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, at a local facility. Most patrons choose to use one of the two ScanPro microfilm reader/printer/scanners to view microfilm.

The Heritage Room staff answers reference questions in person and via email and phone. They also provide regularly-scheduled personal consultations in which genealogists and history researchers receive intensive assistance. A full schedule of classes and programs increase patrons' skills, knowledge, and interest.

The Heritage Room seeks to serve students of all ages and experience levels in their research into Southern, Georgia, and local area history and genealogy. With its collections, equipment, services and programs, it supports the Athens-Clarke County Library's mission to provide information and resources which address the needs of the community, foster enjoyment and a love of reading, and provide a repository of the history and culture of Athens-Clarke County.