

Thinking inside the box: Archives intern makes valuable collection accessible

Note: Heather Whaley is a University of North Alabama history major who has completed a public history internship at the Limestone County Archives for the Fall 2015 semester. Her primary project was to prepare the Malvina Moore Collection of local historic photos, daguerreotypes and ferrotypes for proper physical housing and for digital sharing on www.limestonearchives.com.

By Heather Whaley

Limestone County Archives Intern

For the past 3 ½ months, an 18" by 12" by 6" box has been my life.

The Malvina Moore Collection contained within the box has become a constant companion during my time at the Limestone County Archives. During the few months I have been working with the collection I have become very familiar with the Moore, Hammerly, Allen, and Ragsdale families of Limestone County. As a Lauderdale County resident, I also have started to familiarize myself with some of the historic places in Limestone County. It has been very interesting to actually handle some photographs and documents from the 19th and early 20th centuries, and being able to digitize these items has been a wonderful experience.

The Malvina Moore Collection is a collection of historic photos, ferrotypes (also known as tintypes) and daguerreotypes of prominent Limestone County families dating back to the 1850s. For years the collection was housed in a wooden drawer in the Limestone County Archives. We are currently working on moving the items out of that wooden drawer and into the 18" by 12" by 6" box to put away into storage.

My main job with the Moore Collection was to make sure that there was a digital copy of the items on our online database along with the information that accompanied the items. Once I completed this, I had to ensure that the housing for the items were okay, and if they were not I would rehouse the items. Along with rehousing the items I had to recreate an information card that would be on the outside of the housing. After this was completed I had to ensure that the Moore Collection, along with the Thomas Balentine Collection, and the Katherine Ohara Tycer Collection, were stored correctly so that whenever we need to access the collection, we are able to find them quickly and efficiently. Also the photos need to be protected from pests and other things that may try and harm the items.

Even though I have never lived in Limestone County nor have I ever met Malvina Moore or anyone in her family, I feel a special connection to her and her family. History can do that; it can help create connections that may have never come about any other way. I have thoroughly enjoyed being able to ensure that this collection is able to be documented properly, housed, and "displayed."

Because I have worked so closely with the Malvina Moore Collection, I do have a few favorite items that I have worked with. One of my favorite photographs in the collection is item 2015.011.007, which is a photograph of a young Malvina Moore and her mother, Mrs. B.L. Allen. I think that it is such a sweet photograph of a mother and daughter. However, the one item

that I have absolutely fallen in love with is item 2015.011.015, which is a daguerreotype photograph of a man who was an admirer of Eliza Ann Hammerly. The reason I love this photo so much is because the case that the photo came in is absolutely beautiful. The front has a mother-of-pearl, hand painted rose and the rest of the case looks just like a very small book. I love looking at it, and it makes me wish that I was living in the 19th century so I could see things like this all of the time (this is what I was talking about when I said that I was easily excitable about history). They are truly works of art and I am fascinated by the fact that someone could care so much and give something so beautiful to another person.

When you work in public history, you do not only have to deal with the documents and photographs that you house, you must also be a public face within the community. History does not always have the same support as the arts, or even science and math. As a public historian it is our job to get people excited about history. I am personally a history nerd so I am easily excitable when it comes to anything history related. The feeling I get when I am working with the Malvina Moore Collection is what I want to share with the public. These feelings are not something that can be taught to students, which is why I am thankful that internship opportunities exist so this experience can shape the way I approach working as a historian, or maybe archivist, from here on out.