

NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LEE COUNTY LIBRARIES ANNOUNCES LOCAL HISTORY PRESERVATION PROJECT INITIATIVE

LEE COUNTY, NC – January 24, 2024 – Lee County Libraries is excited to announce the expansion of access to local history resources to the community via an online platform, DigitalNC.org.

The Lee County Libraries has maintained a local history room for many years, housing books, vertical files, microfilm, and other historical materials. The development and maintenance of this local history collection has been a collaborative effort with various organizations and individuals over time, including the former Lee County Historical & Genealogical Society, The Sanford Herald, the Pierian Club, the Sanford Women’s Club, the Railroad House Historical Association, and countless others.

Over the past year, the Library has begun to look ahead toward their new facility, with a renewed focus to their local history offerings. In the spring of 2023, the Library began a partnership with the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center (NCDHC) in Chapel Hill. “The NCDHC provides free digitization and hosting to small libraries and other cultural heritage organizations across the state,” said Beth List, Director of Library Services of Lee County Government. “In the process, these smaller collections become part of an outstanding statewide library of materials, centrally located on the group’s website: DigitalNC.org.”

Through that partnership, the NCDHC has already scanned two batches of materials from the Lee County Libraries collection, and hosts them, freely available, on DigitalNC.org. Materials scanned and available through Digital NC include historical photographs and documents relevant to Lee County’s local history, scrapbooks documenting Sanford’s history and the Sanford Women’s Club, City of Sanford directories, yearbooks for local high schools, meeting minutes for the Pierian Club, and, most recently, the Sanford Express newspaper. The Digital NC website does not require a login, and allows patrons to easily search for materials, ‘clip’ from newspaper articles, and browse historical items from across the state.

“While many states have websites that host historical newspapers or community archives, none that I have seen are as user-friendly or ambitious as Digital NC,” said Cataloging Library Assistant Hunter Randolph. “For example, The Sanford Express newspaper, which was previously only available to patrons on microfilm in the Library’s history room, is now available to patrons and researchers across the state. They can type in a keyword or name and find every page of the paper where it appeared within just a few seconds.”

In an effort to highlight local history resources and build community around a shared interest, the Lee County Libraries began offering the Local History Club in early 2023. So far, topics have included pottery, river industry and travel, the Lee County Fair, a tour of the Railroad House Museum, and a walking tour of Historic Downtown Sanford. Upcoming events for the club, which meets on the first Tuesday of each month, include: the Sanford Spinners, with guest speaker Woody Seymour, in February; a visit to Edwin Patterson’s Historic Site in Broadway scheduled in March; and a survey of Historic Faith in Sanford scheduled in April.

After an enthusiastic response to the walking tour of Historic Downtown Sanford, the Lee County Libraries created a virtual version of the tour in collaboration with Lee County GIS Strategic Services, available here: <https://arcg.is/z4zv10>. The Library will also be offering monthly guided walking tours as part of Sanford’s Sesquicentennial Celebration beginning in March of 2024.

The Sanford Herald has long been a collaborator with the Lee County Libraries, working together to bring microfilm copies of the paper to the Library’s patrons. In this spirit, the Library began talks with The Sanford Herald last year that culminated in a transformative gift agreement in November of 2023. The Sanford Herald donated to the Lee County Libraries their photographic print archive, a collection spanning almost a century of Lee County and central North Carolina history. Consisting of thousands of items, this collection includes photos taken by Sanford Herald staff photographers from the 1930s to the early 2000s. The bulk of the photos span the late 1940s to the early 1990s and offer a wonderful glimpse into Lee County’s past. Once the Sanford Herald’s photographic archive collection is fully cataloged, the Library will share a search tool to help patrons request access to specific materials. These materials will eventually be made available through DigitalNC.org.

For additional information about the Lee County Libraries local history collection, call (919) 718-4665 or email library@leecountync.gov; media questions may be directed to Hailey Hall with Lee County Government at (919) 718-4605 ext. 5521 or hhall@leecountync.gov.

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