

Birmingham History Center

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UAB Department of History and Anthropology
Digital Community Studies Project



Birmingham History Center

THOMAS E. JERNIGAN SR. MEMORIAL

To join our E-mail List send us an E-mail at:
info@birminghamhistorycenter.org



Letter from the Director/Jerry Desmond

We were pleased to have Rosie O'Beirne's StoryCorps class from the UAB department of History and Anthropology visit the History Center in June. StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives.

Since 2003, Story Corps has collected and archived more than 30,000 interviews from more than 60,000 participants. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to share, and is preserved at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, and millions listen to weekly broadcasts on NPR's *Morning Edition*.

At UAB, the Digital Community Studies Project features original work produced by students investigating the local cultural, social and historical landscape of Birmingham, Alabama. It allows students to develop their interviewing and film making skills. We look forward to future collaboration with UAB, included an exciting new project that will be revealed, we hope, in our next newsletter.

DEZ

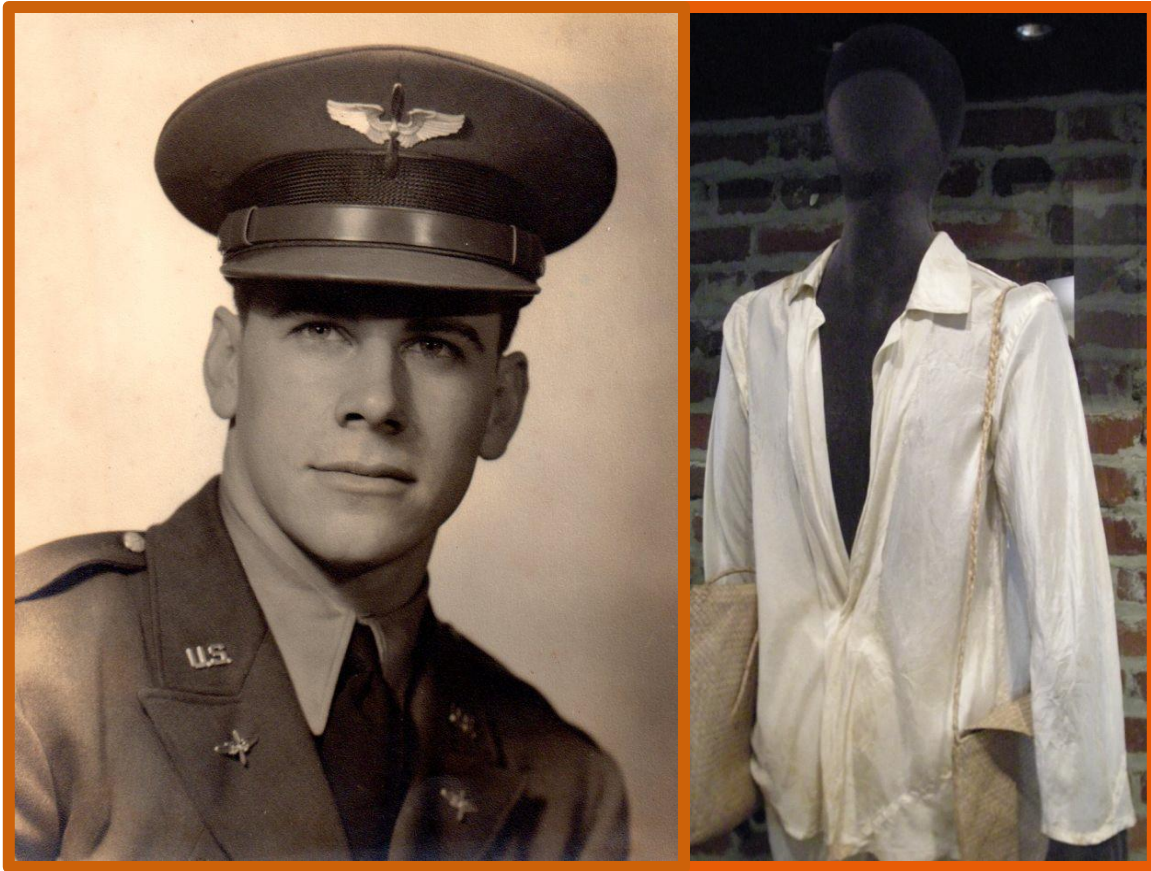
Featured New Artifact



This frock coat and vest came to us from a local collector who visited the History Center during our new Saturday hours. During the tour, I happened to mention that the Center does not have a very large collection of men's clothing from the period of Birmingham's founding. Men of that time period tended to wear their clothing until it was worn out. . . thus, the scarcity. A few days later he brought this perfect example of a frock coat and vest and gave it to us on a one year loan.

The men's frock coat was very popular in the period between 1860 to 1890. Frock coats like this one which could be buttoned all the way to the top, creating a high stand up collar, were often worn by clergymen. Frock coats were often worn open with a shirt and vest. In the 1860s, the day vest was also often fairly low cut with a broad shawl collar. From the 1870s, the day vest would tend to be fairly high cut and have a small, notched lapel or no lapel at all.

On Exhibit – Elliot Dent, Jr. World War II Ace



Captain Elliot Dent, Jr. and his “silk pajamas”

A couple of years ago, as Dr. Marvin Whiting, our exhibit designers and I were going through the History Center’s collection looking for interesting artifacts to put in the museum, we came across Box 76.3 – E. Dent. In it we found several photographs, some telegrams and newspaper articles and what looked like a pair of silk pajamas. Marvin was immediately able to tell us the story of Elliot E. Dent, Jr., World War II Flying Ace and his amazing trek through the jungles of the Philippines. The silk pajamas were something else entirely. After hearing the entire story, we knew we had to put them on exhibit.

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Birmingham History Center

THOMAS E. JERNIGAN SR. MEMORIAL

On Exhibit – Elliot Dent, Jr. World War II Ace(Continued from page 3)

Captain Dent, USAAF, in his P-38 "Lightning" aircraft

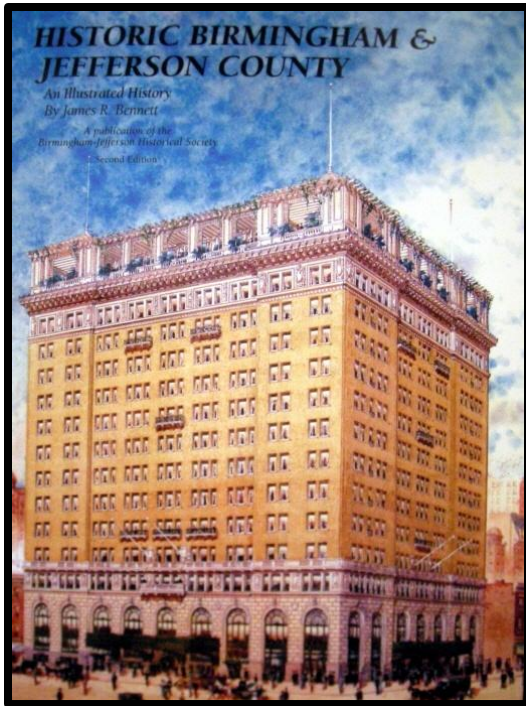
During World War II, Elliot Dent of Birmingham became a member of the 7th Fighter Squadron, 49th Fighter Group, 5th Air Force in the war against Japan. He flew over 250 combat missions and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal and the Purple Heart for service during the war.

On November 1, 1944, leading a flight of P-38 aircraft, Captain Dent found himself battling four Japanese Zeros over the Leyte Gulf, Philippine Islands. After shooting down three of the enemy planes, one of his engines was hit by antiaircraft fire from a Japanese destroyer. Parachuting into the sea, he was able to reach the enemy occupied shore.

Living with Philippine resistance fighters for several weeks, he was able to walk 40 miles along hidden trails across the peninsula. There he was rescued by a PT-boat and taken back to his base. During his trek, his Filipino allies used his silk parachute material to fashion a shirt and pair of pants (on exhibit) in order to help with his disguise. The hat and bag they made for him are also on exhibit.

Charge to the account of		1206		1206
TELEGRAM	CABLE	WESTERN UNION		CHECK
TELETYPE	DAY LETTER	A. N. WILLIAMS		ACCOUNTING INFORMATION
WIRE	WIRE LETTER	PRESIDENT		TIME FILED
WIRE LETTER	WIRE LETTER			
Send the following telegram, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to				
QA67		NOV 19 AM 3 28		
Q.WA67 43 GOVT-WMU WASHINGTON DC 19 414A				
ELLIOTT E DENT				
2531 LANARK RD BHAM=				
FOR VICTORY BUY WAR BONDS TODAY				
THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON CAPTAIN ELLIOTT E DENT JR HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE ONE NOVEMBER OVER LEYTE IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED =				
DUNLOP ACTING THE ADJUTANT GENERAL				

Telegram notifying Dent's father that he is missing in action.



The History Center has 2nd edition hardcover copies of Historic Birmingham and Jefferson County by James R. Bennett on sale for \$45.00, tax included. For an extra \$6 we will ship it anywhere in the country. Pick one up at the Center or call 205-202-4146 to reserve your copy.



Check out the newest feature on our website – 1731 Blog Avenue. Go to <http://birminghamhistorycenter.org/> and click on the Blog button at the top of the page. Interact with our panel, ask questions, make comments – we want to hear you talk back. **But be careful**, you just might learn something new about our wonderful city.

Enduring Companies Project

The following companies have agreed to sponsor our Enduring Companies Project

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Strickland Paper

Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Alabama



Joshua Dollar (above) is a history major at UAB. He is doing research for our 75 Year Old Company project.

2011 Summer Student Interns



We are pleased to have a couple of young historians working with us this summer.

Nat Marx (left) is a history major at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. He is cataloging unfinished files in our collections department.

Jefferson County Moment The Legend of John Henry

“When John Henry was a little bitty baby
No bigger than the palm of your hand
His daddy looked down at Johnnie and said
Johnnie’s going to be a steel driving man Lawd, Lawdy
Johnnie’s going to be a steel driving man”

-The Ballad of John Henry

Where did John Henry, “the Steel Driving Man,” compete in a famous contest with a steam powered machine? The folks in Talcott, West Virginia were so confident that the events happened there that they commissioned a statue. However, they may want to ship the monument down to Leeds, Alabama. Long believed to be mostly myth or half-truth obscured by time, the legend of the man versus machine race has been extensively studied by retired Georgia professor and folklorist John Garst.

Garst's research has mainly focused on local eye-witness accounts of such a race near the Coosa Mountain Tunnel or the Oak Mountain Tunnel of the Columbus and Western Railway (now part of Norfolk Southern) near Leeds, Alabama. Based on documentation that corresponds with the account of C. C. Spencer, who claimed in the 1920s to have witnessed the contest, Garst speculates that John Henry may have been a man named John Henry Dabney, who was born a slave to P. A. L. Dabney, the father of the chief engineer of that railroad, in 1850.



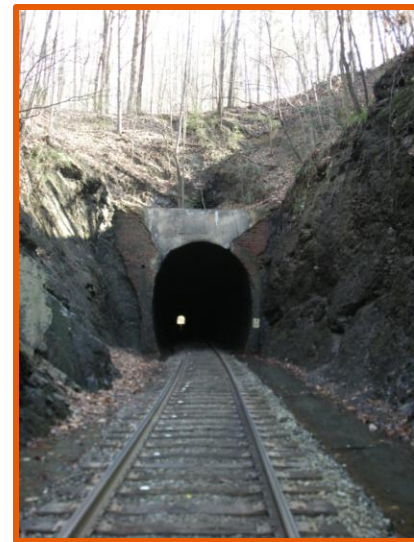
John Henry Statue at Talcott, West Virginia



John Henry Postage Stamp, 1996



John Henry historical marker at the Leeds, Alabama train depot.

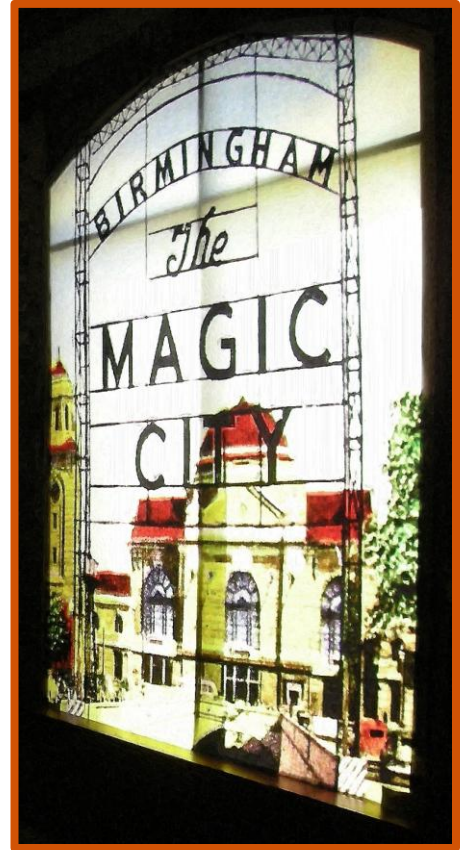
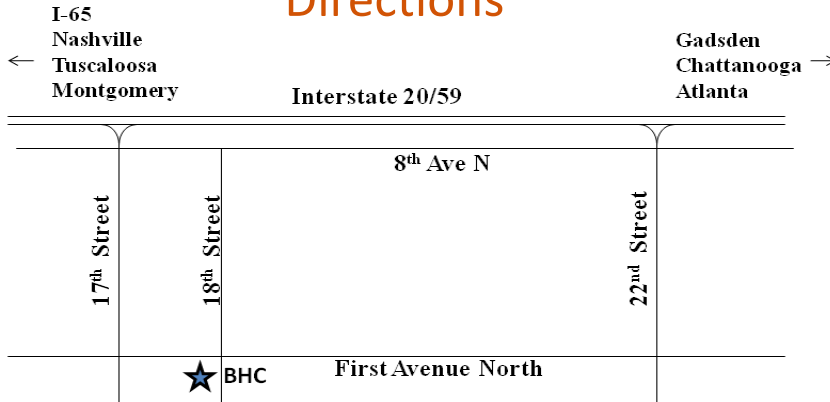


The Coosa Tunnel

Birmingham History Center

Recently opened in the Spring of 2010, the BHC features exhibitions of historical events of Birmingham and Jefferson County from the 18th century to the present. Admission charged; \$4 adults, \$3 seniors and veterans, \$2 students, children under 6 free. Visa, Discover, Master Card accepted, tickets available also by phone. Group rates available, free parking. Open 9:00 am - 4:30 pm, Monday – Friday, Saturday 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. Located at the corner of 18th Street and First Avenue North in Birmingham at the historic Young and Vann Building.

Directions



Birmingham History Center

1731 First Avenue North
Birmingham, AL 35203

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