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Local group has been exploring family trees for 50 years

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Since 1965, the members of the Walker County Genealogical Society have been helping people discover their family heritage and tracking down their family trees.

In honor of the society's founding, the members hosted a special 50th anniversary celebration fair Saturday afternoon at the W.S. Gibbs Conference Center. Families and organizations came together to commemorate the society and its 12 charter members.

"These ladies had a mutual interest and love for their ancestors and the preservation of history. Their books and family collection are the core to the collection we have at the Huntsville Public Library," said Johnnie Jo Dickenson, first librarian for the society. "They had a vision of greatness and we gather today to honor these ladies who had a great love for God, home and country and we thank them for the vision they had 50 years ago."

Organizations from Walker, Trinity and Montgomery counties came out to celebrate, and included representatives for the Daughters of the American Revolution, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Dickenson Research Professional Genealogists, the Sowell-Dickenson Family, the Josey Family and the Smither-Waller-Spivey family.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints were also at the event and had various computers set up so attendees could get a start on their own family research. At lunch, folks got to chow down on hot barbecue sandwiches provided

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JOSHUA YATES/HUNTSVILLE ITEM
First Vice President of the Walker County Genealogical Society Clara Malak, at podium, speak to a crowd during their 50th Anniversary Celebration on Saturday at the Katy and E. Don Walker Education Center.

FAMILY

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by the Forrest Masonic Lodge No. 19, a group Dickenson called a big supporter of the society.

"When I need to move books at the library, they are there to help," Dickenson said of the members of the Forrest Masonic Lodge in Huntsville. "In the past two years they've given us \$8,000 to purchase books for the library, so they are a really big supporter of us."

The main purpose behind the genealogical society is to help folks learn

about where they came from, and what happened in their family history that in turn, has shaped who they are today.

"We want to bring people together and look at what has happened in the past and to generate a lot more interest in people learning about their family histories," Helen Park, president of the society, said. "To learn about your family history helps you understand who you are, and we don't want to lose that because we are all from different kinds of people and different places, and it's important to understand who you are and why you do what you do."

The society has a vast collection stored at the Johnnie Jo Sowell Dickenson Genealogy Room at the library. That collection is made up of more than 14 special collections that have been donated by the charter members. It includes more than 8,000 volumes of states, county and family history, 1,800 rolls of microfilm, 200 maps, 10 boxes of historic photographs, 4,000 vertical files and 6,500 digitized images.

During the event, Huntsville Mayor Mac Woodward and City Councilman Joe Rodriguez declared June 20 as Walker County Genealogical Society Day. Woodward congratulated the organization



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Visitors were able to take a trip back through their family histories during the Walker County Genealogical Society's 50th Anniversary Celebration Year Celebration on Saturday at the Katy and E. Don Walker Education Center.

for all they have done in documenting the amazing and historic heritage that makes up Walker County.

"Sometimes we don't

think about the people you bring to Huntsville and the attention and visitors you bring to our community, because of all the great

work you all are doing, and the great work you are doing with our library," Woodward said. "We appreciate it and thank you."