

Project aims to preserve local Black history in Henderson County

## **Rebecca Walter**

Hendersonville Times-News USA TODAY NETWORK

The community is invited to help tell the stories of Black history in Henderson County with the blackhistories.org project.

Around 40 people virtually attended an informational session about the website Tuesday to learn more from Black History Research Committee President Ronnie

Pepper and member Suzanne Hale. The League of Women Voters of Henderson County hosted the event.

Henderson County's Black History Research Committee was first established in the '90s to document the accomplishments and challenges of African Americans in Henderson County.

Following the publication of "A Brief History of the Black Presence in Henderson County" in 1996, the group was dormant for 25 years, according to the group's website.

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## **Project**

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In 2020, residents came together to get the efforts up and running again. The organization is a "diverse group that includes educators, entrepreneurs, a veteran, a communications technician, a librarian

and a diplomat, all of whom share a common belief that we can better understand our community today by building a stronger understanding of its past," according to the website.

Thanks to a small grant from Dogwood Trust and more advanced technology, the organization is working to "collect, develop and share further information about the history of African Americans in Henderson County." The group's work so far is displayed on its website.

"Our vision for the website is to gather local history from a Black perspective," Pepper explained, adding that Black history has not always been told through that lens.

The Black Histories webpage includes audio recordings, maps, music, newspaper articles, photo, recipes, stories and poems, videos and other written history.

The website allows visitors to browse by time period, with section for history before 1865; 1865 to 1900; 1900 to 1950; 1950 to 1970; and 1970 to present. Exploring by topic is made easy by the website as well. Quick links are available to learn more about subjects like cemeteries, spiritual life, school life, work life, food life, culture life, Blackowned businesses, community groups, communities, and other resources.

How to help The committee is clear that the project is by the community and for the community.

"We've always thought of this as a community project," Hale said.

Resources such as detailed archives and work from local historians has contributed greatly to the cause already, she added.

The public has several ways to get involved, whether it is providing historical information, volunteering or donating. Specific ways to help include oral history

volunteers, coordinating social media, scanning documents, transcribing interviews and research.

"We want to pull in as many people as possible," Pepper said.

Information on how to help is available at [blackhistories.org/help-us/](https://blackhistories.org/help-us/).

The link to donate to the cause is [blackhistories.org/donate](https://blackhistories.org/donate). Those seeking more information about volunteering or the project can email [info@blackhistories.com](mailto:info@blackhistories.com) or [Pepper@BlackHistories.com](mailto:Pepper@BlackHistories.com).

Wednesday's virtual event was recorded, and will be available on the You-Tube channel of the League of Women Voters Henderson County at [lwwhcnc.org](https://lwwhcnc.org).

**James Fisher worked at Connemara as a valet and chauffeur for the Smyth family in the early 1900's. His story is included on the Black History Research Committee's website, <https://blackhistories.org/>. PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE CARL SANDBURG HOME NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**