

September 7, 2022

The Thomaston-Upson Archives along with the Upson Historical Society have embarked on an exciting new collaborative project to upgrade each of their respective exhibit spaces.

Through the guided assistance of a professional curator, the two sites will make a number of improvements including: reconfiguring their exhibition areas, painting the existing display cases as well as lining them with contrasting fabric, adding informative banners and kiosks, and introducing several re-usable lollipop stands, a mainstay in modern museum equipment. Coming Spring 2023, the upgrades will be revealed along with a massive exhibition which will be hosted by the two repositories in a joint grand-opening event.

The exhibition will expand on the recently created World War II displays held at each site. The Archives will add to the existing military display which features oral histories from local veterans such as Joseph Hammonds, Thomaston's "one-man-army." In addition to the military portion, a significant amount of space will be dedicated to wartime industry, with an emphasis on textiles. Reports from 1945 state that both of the local mills (Thomaston Mills & Martha Mill) produced 25% of the nation's tire cord, which went into a multitude of integral war equipment. This portion will also include a step-by-step visualization of the many processes which comprise textile manufacturing. The Upson Historical Society's Pettigrew-White-Stamps Home will also expand on their representation of life on the Homefront. Stories of loss and sacrifice will be told through the families who endured the unthinkable. Organizations and citizens who did their part to contribute to the war effort will also be highlighted, such as the community wide bicycle parade, a popular event held on the square in 1942 which encouraged folks to ride their bikes in order to conserve fuel. Other light hearted moments will be featured such as a certain "Shirley Temple" performer who entertained troops on the rooftop across the street from Hotel Upson, while they were bivouacked awaiting active duty.

A major goal of the exhibition project will be to add Thomaston to Georgia's WWII Heritage Trail, which currently features 10 historic sites across the state. Having a place on the trail will quite literally put Thomaston on the map, with added exposure and publicity as one of the partnering sites, thereby increasing tourism. Thomaston's role as a leading textile manufacturer for wartime products will also fill a gap of industrial production currently missing on the trail.

Other benefits of this project include showing younger generations the various aspects of labor of Thomaston's workforce in textile production. Terms like carding, roving, warping, and winding are already becoming foreign as time progresses and it is our hope to keep the rich heritage of the area's leading 20th century manufacturer alive in an ever-changing industry. Further, the project will help both repositories update their spaces in line with more professional standards seen in museums and historical sites across the country.

Funding for this project has been secured for the Thomaston-Upson Archives, through previously donated funds. The Upson Historical Society, a 501c3 non-profit tax-deductible organization, will be seeking donations and grants to fund their portion. For additional information, please contact either the Thomaston-Upson Archives (706) 646-2437 or the Upson Historical Society (706) 601 3610. Stay tuned for future developments!