

The Jesse Franklin Pioneers local chapter of the Tar Heel Junior Historian Association is making final preparations this week with an eye on capturing more state honors at the annual State History [Conference](#) in Raleigh on Friday. "We are in our ninth year with the group officially starting during the calendar year of 2006," said Mount Airy Museum of Regional History Executive Director Matthew Edwards. "We couldn't have done it without local support. What a great example of broad community support Chick-fil-A has been." He pointed out the local historian group has previously earned two chapter of the year awards and was named to rookie chapter of the year honors its first year. "This speaks well for the kids," Edwards said. "We have expanded the chapter's membership to include middle school age participants. We typically chose a theme yearly and build our projects around this." He said last a recent

[program](#)

was presented by Laura A.W. Phillips, who did the Survey of Historic

[Architecture](#)

in Surry County for her work "Simple Treasures," which chronicled the architectural heritage of the area.

Edwards said the group routinely meets on Thursday afternoons. Membership in the club is free. Phillips led the group in a discussion of bricks and brick making through the style of brick laying. "We try to keep the kids stimulated intellectually and physically and mix things up with classroom study," said Edwards. "We're hoping to get them interested at a young age and excited about museums. We want them to be lifelong learners with a passion for history and museums where ever they go. We are building a future constituency. This year the number of members necessitated us having a group project."

Edwards said he is hopeful the group's unique entry will earn state recognition at the convention. The group has designed a board game based on "The Game of Life" with participants role playing 1920s tobacco farmers in Surry County. "They get to see on the game board what life was like and challenges for tobacco farmers," Edwards said. "It falls outside the normal guidelines for typical projects but I'm hopeful. We won't know until the convention." He said the Museum's geo [cache](#) project and local cemetery history tour which later provided some material for the city's ghost tour and "Darker Side of Mayberry" tour were first tested by the chapter. The majority of the team is composed of veteran participants Edwards described

as a “diverse group” in grades four through eight. He said the group plans on submitting projects in photography and artifact research. The latter project challenged chapter members to [research](#)

heirloom objects found in their homes or their grandparents’

[homes](#)

and relate it to North Carolina history. “There are a lot of things lying around the house which have a great story to tell,” said Edwards. “We pepper the spectrum with projects they can do.” He said the state competition is slated to be held at the State History Museum and the entire chapter — 18 youths — gets to attend. While the conference is organized like its adult counterparts, special sessions are geared toward the young participants. One popular session last year concerned representatives linking scenes shot for the film Iron Man III to North Carolina.