

RALEIGH — Mount Airy was well represented here over the weekend when a group of junior historians won several awards in a statewide competition. The Tar Heel Junior Historian Association held its annual convention and contest on April 29 at the North Carolina Museum of History, drawing about 250 youth from about 90 chapters throughout the state. Members of the local chapter, the Jesse Franklin Pioneers, earned a handful of first-place individual awards, one second-place individual and one group first place.

“This is an amazing group,” said Glenda Edwards, club advisor. “They had an incredible interest in what they were learning.” The group of about 25 youngsters in fourth through seventh grades had been developing projects for the past several months both as a group and individually, picking a project type from a number of different categories. Sponsored by the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History and Chick-fil-A, the club meets weekly after school at the museum. “It’s really one of our hallmark programs at the museum,” said Matthew Edwards, museum director. “One of the really cool things about winning is that THSHA is the largest youth state history association in the country,” he said, adding that winning projects are placed on exhibit at the NC Museum of History. “I think we have a really top-notch program,” he said. “This year’s team did a great job.” Glenda Edwards said that while the association is all focused on state history, “we try to focus on local history.” They participate in a variety of activities and field trips throughout the year, have ample opportunity to dig around the collection room at the local museum, with the projects and contest a culminating event. Kinlee Reece, a Jones Intermediate fourth-grader who wrote an essay about the Autumn Leaves Festival, said learning about past club members’ projects and successes at the contest engaged her with the club. “It wasn’t all about winning, but it gave me hope about winning,” said Reece. “Plus it seemed like pretty fun projects.” Lily Morris, also in the fourth grade at Jones Intermediate School, agreed that the projects helped make history fun. “In school you have to do exactly like the teacher says to do. We got to go free with ourselves, to put our own twist to it,” said Morris, who wrote an award-winning essay about African-American education. Not having to worry about getting a grade, the historians said they focused more on the content of their projects. “We worried about if it’s good enough for us,” Caroline Morris explained.

For the group project, the youngsters compiled research about several historical families into a simulated special issue of Time Magazine titled “Mount Airy’s Founding Fathers,” featuring a photograph of James Henry Crossingham. The article inside, by Emily Hoge and Hunter Stanish, details how Spencer’s Inc. was founded and relocated eventually in Mount Airy, and expanded to produce baby clothes. “In fact, the overlapping neck of baby onesies today was invented and patented by James Crossingham Sr.,” the article states. Glenda Edwards explained that fostering that kind of connection of between familiar sights around town with their history is one of the best parts of the club. The advisor also noted that many of the students had a personal connection to their project. Her daughter, Olivia Edwards, a seventh-grader in her third year as a junior historian, researched military medals found in her grandparents’

house. “She just wanted to know more about him because he was killed in World War II,” Glenda Edwards said. Another student, Max Filcher, researched a butter churn used by his grandmother on a daily basis. Ava Utt’s project focused on a scale her great-grandmother used to weigh babies as a nurse at Martin Memorial working for Dr. E.C. Ashby. “All these things had a personal family connection,” Glenda Edwards said. “They were able to take that and put that into this larger community going on at the time.” The winners of each category are kept secret until announced at the convention. When Lily Morris heard her name, “I thought I was going to fall down on stage my legs were so wobbly.” Caroline Morris had a similar experience. “My whole body was kind of shaking.”

The winners:

Artifact Search Contest:

- Ava Utt, Olivia Edwards and Max Flinchum.

Literary:

- Jesse Franklin Pioneers, 1st place, elementary group.
- Cora Branch, 1st place, elementary individual.

Photography:

- Max Oakley, 1st place, houses.

Essays:

- Lily Morris, 1st place, African American Historical, elementary
- Madison Lawson, 1st place, American Revolution Historical, intermediate
- Kinlee Reece, 2nd place, THJH Historical, elementary