

History in Our Backyard: The Names and Places of Georgia Podcast- The Inaugural Season

By Amber Qian, Naomi Fagan, Katherine Perrotta, and Brittney Johnson

History in Our Backyard: The Names and Places of Georgia is a student-created podcast, funded in part by The Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region grant and Mercer University’s Office of the Provost, that debuted in March of this year. Five high school student groups who are part of the extracurricular youth leadership organization Student Leadership NORTH, with the help of Dr. Perrotta and two of her Ph.D students, created the first five-episode season of the podcast after a year of research and writing. **History in Our Backyard: The Names and Places of Georgia** uncovers the histories behind the names of the world’s busiest airport, Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, Lake Lanier, Tallulah Falls, and Chickamauga— all places that are truly in our backyard in the state of Georgia.

Each of these bite-sized recordings are the outcome of a long research journey the students of Student Leadership NORTH embarked on. This journey began with a deep dive into the archives of the Library of Congress where each team sifted through recordings, manuscripts, newspaper clippings, and more — some more successfully than others — to discover as much about their respective locations as possible. Students in each group wrote show notes with cited evidence from an array of documents that they analyzed by using strategies that were provided by the Teaching with Primary Sources Network. For example, the Lake Lanier group from Northview High School unearthed treasure troves of information from Library of Congress databases that painted a picture of Lake Lanier with the good, the bad, and the ugly. For example, through examining documents from the Library of Congress, the students learned about the lake’s namesake, poet Sydney Lanier, and the disregard for the African American community of Oscarville that existed before it was flooded by the Army Corps of Engineers to create the lake. The Library of Congress’ archives helped them to learn about the lake’s disconcerting history that they would probably not learn about in the classroom.

This experience of finding a lot of documents was not the case for other groups. A Chattahoochee High School group researching Mayor William Hartsfield found it more difficult to gather the whole story about why the airport is named after him from just the Library of Congress database. They found some sparse newspaper clippings mentioning Hartsfield but needed more information. From there, the team followed the newspaper clippings to other websites and recordings. One clipping covered the infamous Jewish Temple Bombings of 1958, and the group was able to follow that story to other sources that recounted how Mayor Hartsfield, who said the city was “too busy to hate,” advocated for business and civil rights in Atlanta in greater detail.

Another group from Chattahoochee High School researched Mayor Maynard Jackson, finding from the Library of Congress and other digital archives that his vision for Atlanta, like Hartsfield, focused on economic strength and equal opportunities for all citizens. Groups from Innovation Academy, who researched Chickamauga, and Northview High School whose episode was about Tallulah Falls or “the Niagara Falls of the South,” used information from the National Parks Service and Georgia State Parks websites to expand on the primary sources they found from the Library of Congress about the preservation of Civil War battlefields, Native American history, and protection of natural spaces throughout Georgia.

Whether students were able to find the full story from the Library of Congress archives or had to go visit other digital archives, they ventured down many internet rabbit holes to find what they were looking for. This process ensured that students who researched their topics that are featured in the first season of **History in Our Backyard** had access to real historical documents that gave a firsthand view into the histories behind the names of these significant places. Not only has this research experience made the stories behind each location more personal, but it has formed a more holistic account of the history than reading from a textbook. You can listen to Season 1 wherever you get your podcasts and on Podbean!

<https://historyinourbackyard.podbean.com/> You can learn more about the podcasts and our research process at the Student Leadership NORTH website:

<https://www.studentleadershipnorth.com/student-leadership-program/history-in-our-backyard-names-and-places-of-georgia> Questions about this project can be sent to Irene Sanders, the Executive Director of Student Leadership NORTH sanders@studentleadershipnorth.com.

Biographies

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