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Historian Joe Manning will speak about his research on the Catherine Young family at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture on March 15. Members of the family were part of Lewis Hine’s photos documenting the conditions of the working class in 1909 at the H.H. Tift Cotton Mill in Tifton.

Georgia Museum of Agriculture Will Reunite Family Photographed in Tifton 105 Years Ago

TIFTON - A family reunion of unbelievable magnitude, a stirring presentation by Massachusetts historian Joe Manning, and a workshop centering on oral history will be the highlights of the Lewis Hine exhibit scheduled to open at 1:30 p.m. on March 15 at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture and Historic Village (GMA) at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.
The Georgia Humanities Council recently awarded the Museum a grant which will allow GMA Curator Polly Huff and a group of English professors from ABAC the opportunity to bring to life the story of a series of photographs taken in Tifton in 1909.

Huff said the photographs were taken by Lewis Hine, a social reformer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who was hired in 1908 by the National Child Labor Committee to take photographs of children near or inside workplaces in an effort to expose their plight and eradicate child labor. He used his camera to document the conditions of the working class in the factories and mills of the urban and rural parts of the United States.

Though his research focused mainly on children working in the textile mills of the northeastern states, one of the most moving and remarkable stories revolves around a set of photographs he took at the H.H. Tift Cotton Mill in Tifton on Jan. 22, 1909. The photographs depict a family who worked at the mill.

One of those photos caught the attention of Manning. Through years of research beginning with an ad Manning placed in the Tifton Gazette in 2006, he identified the woman in the photos as Catherine Young, the widow of a sharecropper who came to Tifton to live in the mill village and work in the mill with nine of her 11 children.

The Young family photographs, along with the story of the family, have been transformed into a mobile exhibit, the Museum’s first portable educational outreach tool that will be available to other institutions and schools. The display has already toured Tift County schools. Students at ABAC have worked with the GMA staff to create accompanying curriculum materials and an extensive publicity packet to go with the mobile exhibit.

With the help of community partner South Georgia Banking Company, the GMA will bring Manning to Tifton for the presentation on March 15.
“This is not just a history lesson, but a deeply moving personal story,” Huff said of the presentation.

“The plight and the outcome of Catherine Young and her children are compelling,” Manning said. “The descendants, mostly because of seven of the children going to the orphanage, had very little knowledge of what happened to the family until I took an interest in the Hine photos, which they had never seen. “

These descendants will gather together in Tifton where Young and her children were photographed 105 years ago, and many of those descendants will be seeing, for the first time, relatives they had never heard of until the story of the family was written by Manning. It will be a family reunion, and a touching meeting between the family and the man who uncovered their story and connected them to each other.

“This event is really a celebration to honor each and every member of this family who are all important characters in an epic story of struggle and courage,” Manning said.

Manning’s hour-long presentation will explain how he first got interested in the Hine photos of the Young family, how he was able to track down their identities, and finally, their living descendants. An oral history workshop sponsored by ABAC’s School of Liberal Arts with emphasis on tracking down family history will be presented by Professor Dianne Wilcox, Chair of the Humanities Division at Georgia Military College. The workshop will take place immediately after Manning’s presentation.

Descendants of the Young family will travel from as far north as Maryland and as far west as California to meet each other and to meet Manning. There will be a time for questions from the audience. A total of 40 descendants from 11 states have been asked to be present for the opening of the exhibit.
Huff said there is no charge for the presentation, exhibit preview, and history workshop. However, anyone planning to attend must register prior to March 15 by calling (229) 391-5222.

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