



## Durban Avenue schoolkids make a quilt for the homeless

Each pupil crocheted a 5-by-9-inch square sewn together for Warm Up America, a group that aids the less fortunate. **A10, A11**

## Hometowns

### 24/7 INFORMATION

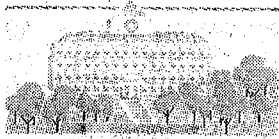
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# Student documentary explores Madison history

## H.S. students use \$10K grant from History Channel

BY VIDYA PADMANABHAN  
DAILY RECORD



### In our schools

MADISON — High school sophomore Kyle Aristizabal was intrigued by the brick tunnel found under the historic Luke Miller house on Ridgedale Avenue.

Local historians proposed several theories to explain its existence: it could have been used to harbor former slaves as part of the Underground Railroad, it could have been used as a refuge during Indian raids, or, more mundanely, it could have been used as a water conduit for a cistern.

The best part about making a documentary on the Luke Miller house was to imagine the possibilities of ancient features such as the tunnel, Aristizabal said, his face lighting up.

He personally leaned toward the Indian raid or the Underground Railroad theory, he said.

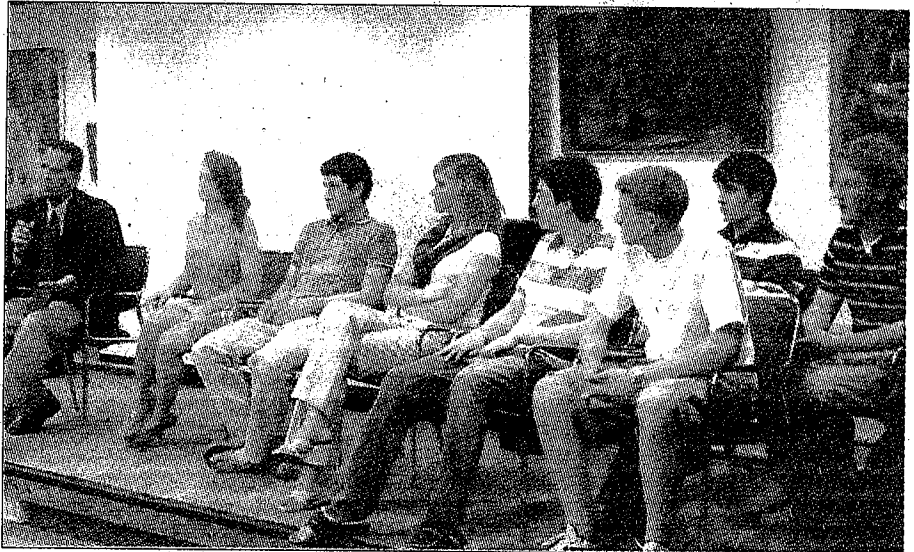
Aristizabal was speaking at a screening of the documentary at the Madison public library on Thursday. He is one of 26 Madison

High School sophomores who used a \$10,000 grant from the History Channel's "Save Our History" project to work throughout the school year on a documentary on the historic house in the borough.

Their teacher, history department chairman Mark DeBiasse, was selected as one of 25 finalists in the channel's "Save our History" Teacher of the Year awards for bringing local history to life for his students.

On Thursday evening, the library's Chase room was filled with preservation aficionados, including local historian John T. Cunningham, and members of the Madison Historical Society.

SEE SCHOOLS / A13



VIDYA PADMANABHAN / DAILY RECORD  
Madison high school sophomores who worked on a documentary about the historic Luke Miller house, listen to history teacher Mark DeBiasse answer an audience question, after a screening at the Historical Society meeting at the public library on Thursday.

## Schools

CONTINUED FROM / A9

After brief opening remarks the students screened their documentary "Luke Miller Revisited." A tightly edited, exhaustively researched, 20-minute investigation into the early story of the Luke Miller house unfolded.

The house was built around 1780 by Andrew Miller.

It later was occupied by his grandson, Luke Miller, who married three times and had 11 children, served as a major in the Continental Army and prospered as a blacksmith and landowner.

Legend has it that the homestead regularly hosted soldiers during the Revolutionary War. Gen. George Washington is believed to have stopped there frequently to have his horse shod.

More recently — though this was not covered by the 20-minute documentary — the Miller house was nearly destroyed in March 2004 when former owners put it up for sale and applied to have the property subdivided. Residents were outraged at the idea of ruining the

home and used funds from an Open Spaces and Historical Preservation referendum to save the landmark.

The borough bought the house, along with 1.2 acres surrounding it, and placed it under a conservation easement, meaning that future owners would be restricted in the changes they could make to the house.

### Bought in auction

The house is owned and occupied by David Quirk, who bought it in an auction in 2005. Some of the surrounding land was attached to neighboring parkland.

The Luke Miller house was unlike bigger and more famous locations in the area, Cunningham said in the documentary. The house, where a blacksmith prospered, "is about common life," he said.

Working on the project gave several of the students a fresh perspective on local history, they said after the screening.

"This is a house I pass by every day on my way to school," said Cait Duffy, adding that she had found it fascinating to compare places she knew to the way they were two centuries ago.

For others, the best aspect of the project was the thrill of

research and discovery.

"For me, the best part was when I'd find something and tell Mr. DeBiasse, and he didn't know about it," said Christina Rooney, prompting laughter in the audience. "That was very rewarding."

Appreciative audience members didn't hold back their praise.

"I've seen Usher's house and Mariah Carey's house on MTV Cribs," said David Quirk, the owner of the Luke Miller House. "It's pretty cool to see a video about the house where I live."

"They are discovering the joy of research," Cunningham said later about the team of students. "That's the nicest part of delving into something."

DeBiasse, along with the Historical Society and the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts, has applied for another grant to undertake an archeological dig of a brick building on the Luke Miller property, which is the theoretical location of Miller's blacksmithing forge. If the grant comes through, the dig could become next year's project for his sophomore class, he said.

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