

TOM CARNEY'S

THE WAY IT WAS



Old Huntsville

THE OTHER SIDE OF HUNTSVILLE'S HISTORY

The Way It Was

The Other Side of Huntsville's History

By

Tom Carney

Huntsville, Alabama



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This book is dedicated to my grandfather,
Oscar Thomas Frazier,
who always wanted to be a writer.
This is the book he would have written.

End of an Era

General John,

*I'll leave the weeping to the
women.*

*We understand each other,
you and I.*

We are of the same blood.

*What we cannot change
we accept.*

Death limits all of us.

*But still Grandfather,
there are times*

*I'd like to share
some wine with you.*

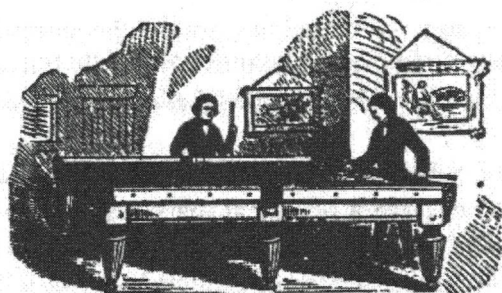
John Crow

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Introduction

In writing this book, I have included eleven stories written by other authors. *Old Huntsville* owes a large debt of gratitude to these people, for without their dedication and research much of our past would have been lost.

I have purposely listed the names of these authors at the beginning of the book, rather than with the individual stories, as their contributions have far exceeded any single article.

Cathey Carney

Clarence Scott

Billy Joe Cooley

Fred Simpson

Tom Kenny

Mike Kenny

Charles Rice

Ken Owens

John Cross

James Record

Preface

Several years ago, I wrote a short, nostalgic story about the closing of Bragg's Grocery on Hurricane Creek. It was about people, most of whom are long dead, who had traded at the store.

I had forgotten the story until late one afternoon when a strange car pulled into my driveway. An elderly, well-dressed woman got out and walked over to where I was standing.

After I introduced myself, she asked, "Please, my mother is in the car, could you say something to her?" The lady went on to explain that in the story I had mentioned her father, who had been dead for almost fifty years.

Walking over to the car, I introduced myself to the old woman sitting there. Her face was wrinkled from almost a century of living and on her left hand was a worn wedding ring that must have been almost as old as its owner. In her other hand she clutched a copy of the story I had written.

Slowly she turned her head to look at me and, after glancing again at the story, said in a low, soft voice, "Someone remembered ... someone remembered his name."

I spent almost an hour talking to the old lady that day. She regaled me with tales about the Huntsville of her youth and the people she had known. She told me about dancing to the fiddle of Monte Sano Crowder and about working at Redstone Arsenal during the Second War when she would go home every day with yellow skin, a result of the chemicals with which she worked.

I listened as she described growing up in a mill village where preachers and bootleggers rubbed elbows at the local speakeasy. It was obvious that she enjoyed remembering.

Unfortunately, her body was weaker than her memory and soon her daughter had to take her home.

The memory of that old lady stayed in my mind for a long time. "A life of stories," I thought, "and when she dies, they will be gone forever."

For the next several years collecting these stories became an obsession. Literally thousands of hours were spent talking to senior citizens and searching through old newspapers and manuscripts.

During this time, I was confronted with many questions. Are ghost stories part of our history? Does a whimsical story about a neighbourhood bar fit into a book about our city's history?

In the final analysis, the answer had to be yes. All of these stories helped to make our city special.

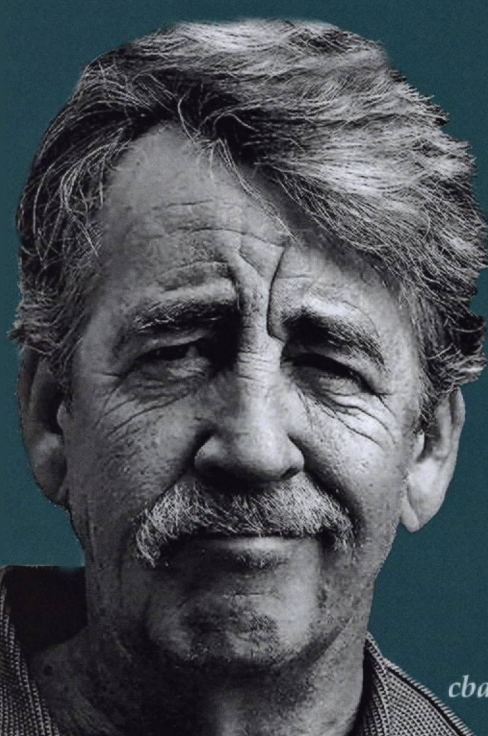
Old Huntsville Magazine makes no pretence of this being a literary work. That endeavor is best left to the scholars. I also leave to the historians the task of quibbling over people's middle initials, the exact date of some long ago occurrence and the thousand other trivialities about which they seem to be concerned.

My sole intention is to try and preserve that part of our rich heritage which has been ignored for far too long.

Tom Carney
1994

THE WAY IT WAS

From boot-legging to ghosts and everything in between, this collection of stories shows the other side of Huntsville and its development in unexpected ways. Utilizing illustrations and advertisements, anecdotes and stories, Tom Carney has created a virtual time machine that doesn't always land where you would expect it.



Tom Carney is one of the most prolific writers of our region. He has had over 600 of his works published in magazines, books, newspapers and periodicals. In addition, his stories have been featured on numerous radio and television shows across the country. Mr. Carney has always written under pseudonyms "noms de plume" and this book marks the first time he has been published under his own name.

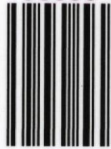


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