

ECHOES OF THE PAST

Old Mahogany Table Stories



Nancy M. Rohr

Echoes of the Past
Old Mahogany Table Stories

Written for The Huntsville Weekly Democrat, 1909-1910

Virginia Clementine Clay

Edited and Annotated by Nancy M. Rohr

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Introduction

Echoes of the past were just about all that remained at the house at 513 Eustis Street in Huntsville, Alabama. Virginia Clementine Clay, like all three Clay girls who lived there, was a Southern lady of the old school. Born in this old home in Huntsville during the War Between the States, she was a member of one of the most distinguished families of nineteenth-century Alabama. Her grandfather, Clement Comer Clay, was the eighth Governor of Alabama, while her father, John Withers Clay (whom everyone called Withers), was a brother of United States and Confederate States Senator Clement Claiborne Clay. Virginia's father, Withers Clay, passed up politics and chose a career in journalism. For many years, he was both owner and editor of the Huntsville *Democrat*. When Yankee troops invaded Huntsville in April of 1862, the quiet life became totally unsettled as Withers Clay attempted to continue to publish in Tennessee and Georgia as his wife maintained the household. At the end of the War, Clay slowly resumed publication of the newspaper in Huntsville.

When Withers Clay suffered a stroke in 1885, Virginia, aided by her sister Susanna, assumed the duties of writing, editing, and publishing the newspaper. Survival was at stake now, and Virginia became editor of the *Democrat* while her father remained quietly at home in the background. After his death, and into the twentieth century, the two women managed to continue with the paper. On October 13, 1909, Virginia began publishing an informative series of articles recalling family conversations around an old mahogany table that had long been in her family. The table, purchased in 1825 by Virginia's maternal grandfather, John Haywood Lewis, seemed to symbolize a way of life that had already vanished but still pulsed within the girls' hearts and minds and hopefully with their readership. For the Clay women there was little else to hold except memories.

In *Echoes of the Past: Old Mahogany Table Stories*, Virginia Clay recalled many fascinating tales of nineteenth-century Huntsville. She called to mind the stories of the famous and the near-famous who helped shape Huntsville. Perhaps more importantly, she related personal incidents and recalled stories of people and events that otherwise would have been lost. This work is an attempt to continue sharing the lives of these noteworthy people. Miss Clay selected some of her own poetry to accompany the tales.

When this editor, not knowing much about poetry, asked a friend for her opinion of keeping, or not keeping, the poems in the Mahogany essays, Susan Luther replied with an essay of her own:

The poems are integral to each essay and for that reason alone – MUST be retained. To leave any one of them out would be to destroy the integrity of the piece in which the verse in question appears. More than that, they exemplify a charming and sentimental contemporary cultural practice that says much about the era in which they appeared and about the people and their ethos.

So it is with Dr. Bassett's bookcase – so to speak. The writing and copying, quoting and sharing of verses, as well as reciting them (pages 17, 55, 56) is a "genteel" cultural phenomenon that's gone the way of so many other "refinements" that make such a difference in who we think we are. And so, again, as artifacts of their time they must retained.

And, even more so, as you say of the mahogany table, since they embody "a way of life that had already vanished," or at least was well on the way to vanishing, the poems earn and deserve the place of honor which Miss Clay gives them. There is as well common knowledge among "educated" folks of lines of poetry that need not be identified when quoted because everybody knows it.

Are the poems any good? Yes, they are good. Of course, they are amateur verses, written not to the standards of “high” art but to those of the literature of sentiment that shapes them and shapes the “Mahogany Table Stories” as a whole: feeling, accessibility and “heart-culture” (to borrow the phrase of Miss Clay’s New York correspondent quoted on page 87). Or, as Miss Clay herself puts it in her introduction to the Stories, they are written and included like those of others, to serve the purposes of “sentiment, wit, humor, and pathos” and “a joyous revel song.” This is no mean endeavor, and a comparison Miss Clay’s verses with those she quotes by others shows that our author has herself mastered the idioms of sensibility quite well – meter and rhyme, refrain, and the traditional imagery and diction of sentiment. They are also for the most part, excellent recital pieces, well suited to an elocutionary culture that so valued public and family recitations.

Put a poem like “The Crowning of Monte Sano” (p. 21) next to Frank L. Stanton’s “Old Times” (p. 34) and “When Wheat Was Playing” (pp. 120-121), Carolee Pleasants’ “Across the Years” (pp. 36-37), John A. Wyeth’s “My Sweetheart’s Face” (p. 78) and even Howard Weeden’s “Thy Face” (pp. 131-132), and Miss Clay’s work by no means comes out the poorer by the comparison. Her work compares well to the expectations and practices of its time, place and occasion. Like the other verses she quotes, hers have something of the flavor an antique world, which is exactly right. (This is so even in the few instances in which her examples carry the inevitable racial stereotypes of the nineteenth early twentieth centuries, which may make us uncomfortable, but which are a reflection of their era.)

Taken altogether, Miss Clay’s verses and those she includes by others participate in the “Scrap Book” character of the stories as a whole (again, to quote one of her correspondents). The fabric would be irrevocably damaged without them. They remind me of the verses customarily written in old-fashioned autograph albums and keepsake books, which contain verses by favorite authors.

Miss Clay appears to be a woman of some influence and power, beyond that given automatically by her social position. She is a respected essayist and editor in her own right in an era when women had very few chances to assert themselves or their independence except through a limited array of means such as the written word – and so she is part of that strong woman’s tradition represented not only by such open politicians as Mary Wollstonecraft but by the more subversive, sentimental poets and romantic novelists like Mary Robinson (who often earned their livings by their pens, against the prescriptions and to often the criticism of “mainstream”: lady culture), or in the 19th century, Harriet Beecher Stowe. More than this: women made a niche as novelists, and also as (newspaper) poets, but they were not themselves often the editors or publishers: that was generally the province of men. Miss Clay is breaking a few taboos and her acceptably sentimental writing is both the disguise for and subversive extension of that. More over, I’m assuming that, while she never married, she probably could have. So that her choice is not to marry can be seen as itself a blow for freedom.

The collection of stories and embedded poems is delightful, fascinating materials from our very local, regional, and national past. The essays themselves are part of the “table talk” traditions extending back at least to the eighteenth century, i.e., the personal essay tradition that’s premised upon intimate conversation around the table, from some of the essays of Addison and Steele to the actual conversation of the S. T. Coleridge collected in a volume called *Table Talk*, to Oliver Wendell Holmes’s *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*.

Acknowledgments

This has been a labor of love—most of the time. Huntsville and Madison County, Alabama, have such a rich and remarkable past just waiting to be researched and connected to other events. This work became an occasion to learn and relate even more.

The reader must keep in mind that this editor used the material offered by the Misses Clays in their newspaper column. Moreover, this editor leaned heavily on every reference source and reference person available. One cannot possibly identify all the persons who contributed to this effort. The Clay sisters, who probably received little thanks in their lifetimes, deserve all the real credit. The innumerable archivists and librarians across the country who assisted in the research often are nameless, but they surely do great work. I can only hope, in my excitement, that I remembered to thank them, too. The staff of the Heritage Room at the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library is extra special because they tried to answer all my questions, knowing full well, of course, that this would lead to more questions. What was even more rewarding to me was their shared interest in the quest to learn more about events of the past. Thank you Ann White Fuller, Anne Miller, Dorcas Raunich, Thomas Hutchens, Richard White, Susanna Leberman, and Raneë Pruitt.

Emily Burwell patiently read and prepared each of the 28 segments from the dim and blurry original newsprint copies. She deserves an extra star in her crown for that alone. I would also like to thank Aileen Stellingwerf for editing, preparing the illustrations, and designing the layout of the book.

To Susan Luther I offer my sincere thanks for recognizing the value and the strength of Virginia Clay's writings and poems. Susan's gentle approach to poetry made me more aware of the time and setting of Miss Clay's writings, rather than just as entry for research. As a matter of interest, one of Maria Howard Weeden's poems, "Thy Face," may not have been included in any of her previously published anthologies.

The editor wishes to gratefully acknowledge the sources of the many photographs from the Huntsville-Madison Public Library that have enhanced the Clay sisters' stories. Also that of Dr. Charles Alexander Pope—Bernard Becker Medical Library, Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Missouri; Leo Wheat—Library of Congress; John Grimes—Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; and Barnwell Rhett, Jr.—South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

In order to assist today's reader, a text divider symbol has been used to separate the Clay's newspaper stories and the annotations.

Archivist Raneë Pruitt noted when she earlier reintroduced these tales, Ginny Clay wrote her stories to be read and shared around the dining room table in a gentle, homey atmosphere. So, sit back, turn off the TV, and journey back to a quieter time when people knew their neighbors, children obeyed their parents, and doors were left unlocked. It was a pleasant, slower-paced way of life. You might well find you like it.

The Huntsville Weekly Democrat

October 6, 1909



Echoes of the Past

Old Mahogany Table Stories

Beginning with our next issue of The Democrat, October 13, 1909, there will appear a series of old stories that were told around the old Mahogany Table in The Old Home of the Editor. Many a change has come, some sad, and some happy with humor, wit, reason and a joyous revel of song, since first the old table became a part of the household treasures, and now:

“For the table setting,
Fewer are the places,
Fewer round the table
Grow the loved ones’ faces.

Changes, changes, changes
Life and death are bringing;
Sore my soul misgives me;
Fears my heart are wringing.

Round the board so crowded,
Wider grow the spaces.
For the Table setting
Fewer are the places.”

There is really nothing remarkable about the old table after all; in fact an appearance rather ordinary characterizes it; its legs are small, stiff, square, and unbending – a virtue to be highly commended in a table, any – and a second virtue, is that it has brass sufficient to keep it on the move whenever an occasion presents itself, and enough to hide its real age. It is really

nearly or over a century old, but only dates its gentility from the time it came into a family with two distinctive trees at its traditional mercy to loaf under. My grandfather, John Haywood Lewis, was married to the pretty Mary Margaret Betts in Litchfield, Connecticut, anno Domini 1824 and the following year a girl baby was born to them, Mary Margaret Fenwick, at the residence of Dr. John B. Read, now the Burritt house, on "Eustace Street," as it was spelt at that time.

In the fall of 1825, Grandpa moved to the brick cottage, "directly in front of Dr. James Manning's big gate," as my grandfather was wont to direct his out-of-town friends. It was in this little cottage that our old mahogany table first became a member of the family. The old table used to have an appendix, halfway between the foot and head, and its lower proportions was heavily laden with fruits of the vine and tree, and flowers handsomely hand carved, and huge brass-tipped tiger claws were its support. After the Civil War the appendix was removed, without the aid or advice of a surgeon – and Grandma Lewis gave it to a Mrs. Carter, while the family was refugeeing at Canoe, a short distance from Mobile, during the yellow fever siege. The old folks used to tell how the old mahogany groaned with good things to eat in the old days. Scientific physicians claim that if the appendix is cut out, there will be no occasion to groan, and I believe that the theory is a fact, for this mahogany table has never groaned with the feast of viands it used to carry since I have known it – after the appendix was cut out. It is still healthy, with no scars, as its social career started in front of Dr. Manning's big gate, so will the stories it has to tell of the old families that reigned in our grandmothers' days as beautiful as ever were sent into the world, to be recalled in the bud of life. Hospitality at The Grove is a most important part of Huntsville's history – a social life full of perpetual flow of that generous spirit that diffused itself among the partakers of that hospitality. Youth is the only season of life in which happy years do not pass away swiftly. They glide softly, but do not fly; and they seem just as long as they are full of enjoyment. Such were the days in which our foreparents reveled in the first part of the nineteenth century, and the old mahogany table has a delightful fund of stories to tell, with a strain of sentiment, wit, humor, and pathos that will make it a table worth knowing – even if its fruit-laden, claw-footed appendix is cut out.

The old Mahogany Table suggested Old Portraits to me, recently, and the Twickenham Town days are recalled in these prototypes of the stately pioneers in canvas and oil. The subject is rich in romance, and fecund with interest, that broadens, widens, deepens – as:

Out of the Past they come to me,
In beautiful song and story,
Breathing a romance, sweet and true,
With a thrill of old-time glory.
Matron and maids from century wall,
Talk of lavender, old laces,
While gallant men, handsome and tall
Bow to the rose sweet graces.
Infants claspt in their mother's arms –
Proud of the babe she embraces.
In groups or alone, each hath its charm
Those old-time, dear canvas faces.

A very interesting sketch of the life of Mr. Frye, written by his daughter, Mrs. Minnie Frye Coleman, has been received and will be included among the Mahogany Table Stories, as he was among the most popular of the oil portrait artists of the South in the 1840s and 1850s.

October 1, 1909

Virginia C. Clay



Editor Virginia Clay, with no apology—after all, it is her newspaper and her memories has set the stage for the stories to come. Gather around our mahogany family table, and “it” will tell you the tales heard there. Her readers will want to recall these stories as well. Furthermore, she promised more to come with poetry often at hand and in the next issue news of the former local artist, William Frye. Those who knew the Fryes would be glad to hear about their former neighbors, and she knew her readers were anxious to hear these stories of old friends.

First, however, today’s reader must become acquainted with the distinguished characters involved with the **Clay family**. Clement Comer Clay, who would become the 8th governor of Alabama, settled in November of 1811 in Huntsville, Mississippi Territory. He had come in spring the year before, stayed with his sister, Martha, and purchased land from his brother-in-law, John Bunch. Captain Bunch, besides his farmland, owned and operated Bunch’s Tavern on the Square. The first court held in Huntsville in 1810 was likely held at Bunch’s Inn because it was one of the few places large enough to hold the session. Sheriff Stephen Neal arranged the proper touches for a courtroom for a total of \$3.70. He supplied the basics with “three home-made chairs with buckskin bottom, table, paper, and goose quills.” Such were the legal facilities on the frontier. However, lest the reader need feel a lack of both proper ceremony and authority, “Obadiah Jones, entered the court room with great ceremony, clad in a Judge’s gown, a cocked hat, with long plumes and a sword at his side. He was proceeded [sic] by Sheriff Stephen Neal, who advanced to the bench with a drawn sword.”¹

Four years later, also at the Tavern, Mrs. Bunch set out in considerable style a handsome supper for the Tennessee militiamen of Gen. Andrew Jackson as they returned victoriously from the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.²

Now Clement Clay had returned to put down roots. With him were a brand-new law degree, his law books, two horses, a servant, and some pocket change. Thus began a career that eventually allowed him to serve as leader of all three branches of government in the state of Alabama. He married Susanna Claiborne Withers, whose family was already established here. Their three sons included Clement Claiborne, the politician; John Withers, editor of the Huntsville *Democrat*; and Hugh Lawson, who often appeared to have difficulty finding a suitable situation in life. All three brothers had been trained as lawyers and at different times were in practice with their father. They also participated with their father in politics. Of these sons, John Withers Clay married Mary Fenwick Lewis, daughter of Mary (Betts) and John H. Lewis, also a lawyer.

The Lewis family also enjoyed a fine reputation in Huntsville. Ma Lewis had the promise of enormous wealth from Florida, and her husband was related to distinguished pioneers in central Tennessee. In Huntsville, the John Lewis family moved a few times before settling into their permanent home on the northern part of the street known commonly then as Maiden Lane, near the **Huntsville Female Seminary**. The lane, used by the local girls on their way to and from the Seminary, became Eustis Street. Mary Lewis, the eldest daughter, and Withers Clay had known one another all their lives.



Withers, as he was called, and Mary (Lewis) Clay had 11 children, six of whom grew to adulthood. After the Civil War, Clay slowly reestablished his newspaper, but was unable to continue after his debilitating illness in 1885. Almost immediately after Clay's resignation, the two daughters, **Virginia (Ginny) and Susanna Clay**, assumed total leadership and editorship of the newspaper. They could boast that only two issues were not printed following their father's stroke. However, they had learned their skills the hard way. Various chores were involved as they split and carried the kindling to the office, made the fire, cleaned the office, and carried water from the public hydrant on the square. Only then could they start to gather the news stories, write the articles and editorials, and set the type. Next they printed the newssheets and distributed them. All this, and they often still had to hitch the horse to the carriage in order to go out into the countryside and collect unpaid bills. Perhaps the most onerous task, Jenny noted, was to ask the gentlemen not to spit on the floor in the office.³



Mrs. Carter, the recipient of the appendix (or middle extension) of the Mahogany Table, remains unidentified. However, the great Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878 threatened the entire Mississippi Valley, eventually claiming nearly 20,000 lives. Although the Clays could not know it, they would have been safer at home than fleeing to Canoe, a small hamlet east of Atmore in Escambia County. Huntsville received 500-600 refugees, mostly from Memphis, and 23 individuals among them developed yellow fever. However the only local person who caught the disease was one chap already known to be a "dissipated young man."⁴

Number One

October 13, 1909



The old mahogany table became very sentimental t'other day as around its heart the triumvirate sat, ere its lids were closed and the "silence cloth" had struck The Old Home, the turn of converse was toward The Grove – with its sentiments, social glories, fragrant with memories. Mary Margaret Betts (Grandma Lewis) and **Bartley M. Lowe** were sent to Huntsville about the year 1811 by their fathers, Samuel Betts and John T. Lowe, from Florida where they owned thousands of acres of land on the East coast a part of the Arrendondo Spanish tract. Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick, whom Bartley and Mary called Uncle and Aunt, took care of the motherless children with all the tenderness that parents could bestow, and they loved them in life and revered them in death. The children rode three miles to school on horseback; Mary would ride behind Bartley with her arms close around his waist, and – (Here the old mahogany table began chuckling) – for when Grandma was 90 years old she kissed Lucy Bartley's daughter, with more than usual fervor, confessing, with a blush, that "I did it because she looked liked Bartley." (We laugh.) "Yes I always loved him! He was the nicest boy I ever knew! He never teased me, and would have whipt any other boy that dared try it!" This was said with the spirit of pride and fire of a 16-year-old girl with her first lover and defender. Then she began humming softly,

"Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's Young Dream."

Grandma was 14 years of age when she last rode behind Bartley. Well, we would have laught outright but the old Mahogany Table got almost black in the face and looked as if it would like to kick us if its old legs weren't so stiff. We hushed!

The mahogany reminded me, and the old Portraits on the walls of The Grove have gathered together the centuries:

Ashes of Roses

Ashes of Roses! Ah, beautiful Past!
In Ashes of Roses embalmed thou art!
Like a shadowy phantom, holding fast
To memories sweet enshrined in the heart!

Ashes of Roses! Like the passing breath
Of the setting sun, as it seeks its rest,
On dark clouds that gather to watch day's death,
Leaves a tender glow by the Past carest!
Ashes of Roses! The passions are dead
That held thee to earth with ambition's fire;
The roses are faded! The tears are all shed!
And Ashes of Roses now twine the lyre!

The melodies heard are rippling and sweet –
An Echo of Rose Leaves' shower, that sways
Soft on the ear – to the throbbing heart beats;
'Neath Ashes of Roses are buried old days!⁵

October 5, 1909

Virginia C. Clay

When this town of ours, with all the country, lay in a forest of great natural fertility, but without cultivation and the great commonwealth of the South's Mother State, Virginia, was not yet forty years old, a spirit awakened with enthusiasm for expansion, for adventure and discovery in the young men. They drifted in droves – these sons of noble sires – from the Thirteen Colonies over the vast virgin forests of the South and middle West, some with a noble patrimony, in dollars and cents, and others with a spirit of thrift and energy that wouldn't die. The revolution had given a rousing shake to the lethargic energies of the people. Minds that had been turned to politics and to speculations – to the neglect of polite letters – became alert with the intellectual ambition and culture, and a redundant supply of the best classical literature was ordered from England – for, the best classical literature was ordered from England – for after all, the Mother Country was recognized by her refractory children as superior. Wild forests became fields of richest grain. Cotton was crowned, and minds of those aristocratic pioneers began to expand to the realization that they had a rich strong commercial influence. Such were the pioneers who made Alabama and who peopled Madison County and Huntsville and which they had irradiated with their own light, and is reflected back upon them as the years advance.



The Grove was erected by Col. LeRoy Pope, and before the finishing touches were made, he decided to rise up higher, not soulfully speaking but residentially above his fellow citizens on "Pope's," now Echols' Hill. Dr. James Manning bought the mansion with its 31 acres of magnificent forest oaks, elms, and other indigenous trees. After his death, his widow presented it to her only daughter, Sarah Sophia, who became the wife of Bartley Lowe. It is a rich mansion, of massive build, with a lofty colonnade, (added by Mr. Lowe), supported by commanding robust Doric columns that measure 164 inches in circumference at the base, and 111 inches around the shaft. It is strictly what an artistic builder might call architectonic, with the columns running from a stone colonnade with broad stone steps, 16 modules in height, and surmounted by heavy architraves on the entablatures. The top is just below the eaves of the mansion. The front walls were decorated with pilasters of the same order of architecture. Its whole appearance is distinguished by a Palladian character of rich, tho somber ornament indicating that it was built in the first quarter of the 19th century. A fine lawn still surrounds it,

shaded by venerable oaks, elms and maples, and latter day queenly magnolias, that bud and bloom each year in a wealth of grandiflora moon-lit blossoms, so white, so stately, as to defy the rivalry of the rippling pink crepe myrtle, the vari-hued stiff altheas, and the billows of yellow and red lilies, of white and gold daffodils, that sway and nod in the breezes of early Spring and Summer days. Then the rich verdure of box[wood] that outlines the white, pebbly walks, and winding itself into a labyrinthine pyramidal cluster directly in front of the colonnade, and a shower of sparkling jewels spray on the white orchid lilies below, from a fountain: "To whose fall melodious birds sing madrigals."



A ponderous brass knocker marked LOWE is the enunciator. A welcome gracious and sweet, is assured from the lady of the mansion, **Miss Sarah Manning Lowe**, only surviving child of Gen. Bartley Martin Lowe. Passing thro the spacious hall, you enter elegant old double parlors, with the broad folding doors, richly furnished in old mahogany divans, sofas, chairs, tables, and on the handsome mahogany sideboard are the silver candelabras, and cut glass that have scintillated from it nearly a century, and gold trimmed pier glasses tell those ashes of roses stories over and over again. And the Old Portraits on the wall from their gold frames, corroborate them – and the Mahogany table says they are true.

Now I will tell you the story about those old portraits of the Mannings, painted by Grimes, in the 20's and of the Lowes and Davises, painted by Frye, in the 40's and 50's, just as the mahogany table told it to me.

Here is **Dr. James Manning**, dressed in a colonial suit, with a ruffled shirt, high stock, and a broad cloth suit of an up to colonial-date cut. His face is as beardless as a boy, and was so to death, and his hair brown, with eyes that are genial and kind, tho a dignity, almost an arrogance, is betrayed – that dignity and arrogance that allows no familiarity permits no breach of etiquette. He carries a handsome gold head cane. The old mahogany table says that Dr. Manning could be trusted as a friend.



He came from England to America with the two Bibb brothers, William Wyatt and Thomas Bibb, who became the first two governors of Alabama.

While in Huntsville, both Thomas Bibb and James Manning fell in love with their sweethearts and presented them with their miniatures—set in gold, painted on ivory, and brought from England. Dr. Manning wooed, won and married the daughter of Mr. Robert Thompson, (better known as "Old Blue Thompson" because he was known to keep his money in a blue bag, and humoring the personal allusion, had his portrait taken holding his blue bag.)

Sarah Sophia Providence was an heiress, young, fair, attractive, and her presence lent dignity to the Manning mansion at The Grove, and as an ideal aristocratic matron and mother, in the gold frame she appears.



Mistress Sarah Sophia Providence Thompson [Manning] wears an ashes of roses gown of silk, made in the most distractingly charming Empire style. A rare wide lace ruffle around the throat and sleeve relieves the very pronounced simplicity of the gown. A high crowned hood-fitting cap of filmy rare lace worn on the aristocratic had makes the wearer appear twice as old as she really was, for she was married in her early teens, and her first child, **Felix Manning** as a lad of five years is in the portraits with his mother.

On the wall opposite her mother, is a portrait of the beloved daughter, Sarah Sophia quaintly gowned in a blue silk Empire, trimmed in lace. (Those laces of Mrs. Manning and Mrs. Lowe are in the family still, and will probably be cherished by wee year-old Sophie Lowe Young, the 5th generation bearing the name of Sophie.) Close to her mother is Sophie Lowe Davis, in a small oval frame. She became the wife of handsome Nicholas Davis, who bought The Grove, keeping it in the family for the century that closed on August 26, 1909. We of this generation knew dear “Miss Sophie.” She left a ray of sunshine that illumines her memory and Mr. Frye in her portrait caught a sweet moment. Tho not a cantatrice, she sang songs of the heart, in voice sweet, responsive and with beautiful patrician hands she played her accompaniments on a harp, clearly and rhythmically. And —

Her harp is here, its silver string
Is mute, since she last wak'd a parting lay;
To sweep its chords would only bring
To friends a tuneless tale of its decay
Yes, there it stands, slow mouldering
Its sweetness gone, its passions quell'd,
'Round it Ashes of Roses loudly cling
Like wither'd hopes in memory held!

There is a hush, as in the gloaming, the silence cloth is laid with more than usual tenderness on the old mahogany, and we quietly slip away for a while.

Virginia C. Clay

The triumvirate now sitting around the Old Mahogany Table was, of course, the three remaining Clay daughters, Virginia, Susanna, and Elodie. The eldest sister Mary had died in 1901. Of the two remaining brothers, John Withers Clay II married and had moved to Birmingham. Their brother, William Lewis Clay, also had married and lived just a few blocks away. Many events had occurred in the Lewis and Clay families since the family had dwindled down to just these last three single women at “The Old Home” on Eustis Street. It began, as most pioneers stories do, someplace else – in this case Florida and Connecticut and Virginia and Tennessee.

In the very early settlement of east coast Florida, three men formed friendships that would affect their families later. John T. Lowe, Joseph Fenwick, and Samuel Betts arrived in the St. Augustine area to seek their fortunes. In varying degrees, they all found prosperity; yet apparently two of them lost their health and families. Little is know about John Lowe, except through his son, Bartley M. Lowe. It can be assumed that he and his wife were unable to raise their son, because Bartley Lowe was sent to live with the Fenwicks now in Alabama. Joseph Fenwick had decided to move to northern Alabama; he settled and bought property there in 1811 near what would become Meridianville.⁶

Samuel Betts, originally from Wilton, Connecticut, was one-third equal partner in a mercantile business with Fernando de la Maza Arrendondo of Spanish Florida and Havana, Cuba. In 1817 the Arrendondo firm loaned the Spanish king \$14,000, equipped troops, and sent provisions to the garrison at St. Augustine. Thus the area continued to be Spanish—for at least a while. As a reward, the Spanish king awarded Arrendondo a grant of “four leagues to each wind with absolute authority.” This became all of Alachua County, Florida. One-third of this land and the mercantile business in Florida and Havana, belonged to Samuel Betts.⁷ However, by now, Betts was a widower and in poor health. Earlier he also had sent his daughter, Mary, to the Alabama Territory to the Fenwicks. The children, Bartley Lowe and Mary Betts, were raised together in north Madison County. When Mary Betts married John Lewis, her assumed-fortune, would be his to manage. It was this money, and the promise of more, that allowed them to send their eldest daughter, Mary, to boarding school in Paris for two years.

John Haywood Lewis should have been well qualified to manage the estate of his new wife, Mary Betts. His father led a company at King’s Mountain and served in the state legislature of Virginia before settling in Tennessee. He and Andrew Jackson were members of the Constitutional Convention there. Young John Lewis was a graduate of the University of Tennessee with two degrees, and he settled in Huntsville to open his law practice at the early land sales in 1819. He and his wife had 11 babies, of whom nine grew to adulthood.

Now is a good time to meet many of the other individuals and try to get used to their relationships among one another. For as Miss Clay introduced the mansion, “The Grove,” she rummaged deeper into early Huntsville history when she described the most influential settlers who arrived on the heels of pioneer settler, John Hunt. This group was composed of aristocratic gentlemen from Petersburg, Georgia. Their tobacco lands had worn out, and they too had “Alabama Fever.” This “Broad River Bunch,” as they were often called, was composed of Col. LeRoy Pope, John Williams Walker, James Manning, Robert Thompson, Peyton Cox, and brothers Thomas and William Wyatt Bibb and seemingly their “sisters, and their cousins by the dozens and their aunts.” These seven men purchased just about one-half of all the land sold at the first Madison County land sale. Of course these wealthy men, often envied by their neighbors, had worse titles, some reflecting disdain.⁸

Of the men mentioned here, the most significant to Huntsville was LeRoy Pope. His land speculations allowed him to buy the initial parcels of land that would become the center of this frontier town, land first pioneered by John Hunt. With Pope’s influence he named HIS town Twickenham, the name of Englishman Alexander Pope’s estate. Anti-British sentiment prevailed at this time before the War of 1812 and anti-Pope factions had renamed the town Huntsville through an act of the legislature. By 1823 the then-Huntsville *Democrat* editor, William Long, gave the scornful title of the “Royal Party” to Pope and his cadre of elite power brokers, bankers and merchants. If Pope was not the wealthiest capitalist in the county, he was the most enterprising. He helped promote The Indian Creek Navigation Co., was a primary stockholder in the first bank in Alabama (the Planters & Merchants), and became Chief Justice of the first county court.

John Williams Walker had married the elder daughter of LeRoy Pope, Matilda. After locating north of town, he became a member of the first territorial legislature, president

of Alabama's Constitutional Convention, and at statehood became the first United States Senator from Alabama. Walker invited his friends, Thomas Percy and Dr. James Brown, to purchase plantations next to his, Oak Land. Brown had married a sister of Percy, and once here Percy married the second daughter of LeRoy Pope, Maria. The Percy descendants became politicians and noted writers of the South. Dr. Brown was already a member of the American Philosophical Society, and among other interests, he was a pioneer in the inoculation for smallpox. These men pledged to name their children after one another; hence the later tangle of Walker-Pope-Percy names.⁹

Dr. James Manning first settled on his newly purchased section of land, 640 acres, just south of Meridianville. He hired a cabin to be built there in 1810 and returned to Georgia for his wife and their children. Later in the fall of 1830 his dwelling burned, but the family managed to escape. They lost all their possessions and moved to town. Here he purchased property from LeRoy Pope that would become known as "The Grove." By the time of his death in 1840, among other possessions he was able to leave his wife the house, "a four-wheeled pleasure carriage," and an annuity of \$1000 per year. Because he had already given his children over \$166,000, the 135 slaves and land were distributed to balance their remaining inheritance. Traveling reporter Anne Royall said Manning was the second largest planter in the state.¹⁰ (One wonders whom she considered a larger planter.) Mrs. Sarah Sophia Thompson Manning later gave "The Grove" to her only daughter, Sarah Sophia, who married Bartley M. Lowe, the youthful playmate of Mary Betts at Fenwick's home.



One must keep a clear head when dealing with the confusion of many of these families. The Thompson family had also moved from Virginia and then to Petersburg, Georgia, where **Robert Thompson** married his cousin, Sarah Watkins. His sister, Eleanor, married Samuel Watkins, Sarah's brother. Together the men, Robert and Samuel, maintained a successful mercantile business in Petersburg. Robert was known to keep the firm's money in a blue denim bag, and he was often referred to as "**Old Blue**." Robert and Sarah Thompson

next moved to Madison County with their three daughters. Of these girls, Sophia married Dr. James Manning, and Parmelia married Thomas Bibb of Belle Mina. In the meanwhile Robert's brother-in-law and cousin, Asa Thompson, made his way to Marengo County in the Black Belt of Alabama. Of Asa's daughters, Indiana Thompson, married James Manning Jr. and Isaphoena Thompson married Dr. John Y. Bassett, both prominent Huntsville men.¹¹

As for the last man named as a large landholder, Anne Royall, a widow, described Peyton Cox as a "crusty old man and a bachelor – but the dogs may take him for me."¹² So much for any matchmaking by friends her behalf!

Miss Clay recalled incorrectly the next trivial fact. The Bibb brothers, William Wyatt and Thomas, were born in Amelia County, Virginia, not England, and if James Manning was born in England, he arrived in Alabama via New Jersey. The Bibbs migrated to Elbert County, Georgia, in 1784. As a Revolutionary War veteran Capt. William Bibb and his wife, Sally (Wyatt) Bibb, and many others, took advantage of land bounties to former soldiers. The Captain's sons received fine educations, and although his son William became a doctor, William's real interest was politics. William Bibb served in Congress from Georgia, although he just barely met the age requirements. At the age of 32, he became a United States Senator. He was a fine politician, and his colleagues said that he had a "dignified but easy bearing...his uniform courtesy and kindness won the respect of all classes." His brother, Thomas Bibb, had already come to the Tennessee Valley, and William decided to relocate in

the Black Belt of lower Alabama. In 1817 when the Alabama Territory was separated from the new state of Mississippi, President James Monroe appointed William Bibb governor. Bibb was then elected as the first governor of Alabama on November 1819. Unfortunately, while riding he was thrown from his horse during a violent thunderstorm. He spent the next months bedridden from head injuries and a damaged kidney, "in as much pain...as ever fell to the lot of any man." William Bibb died in July of 1820, age thirty-nine.¹³ Providing another connection to the "Royal Bunch," LeRoy Pope's son, Alexander, had married Dolly, sister of Dr. William Bibb.¹⁴

At that time the rules decreed that the president of the state senate replace the governor, who just happened be his own brother, Thomas Bibb. His was in a caretaker role, and Thomas probably was relieved to return to his north Alabama plantations. In 1826 Thomas Bibb built a beautiful Greek Revival home, Belle Mina, in Lauderdale County.

Continuing with these newly introduced families, it is almost impossible to untangle the familial relationships. The leading families of town knew one another from school days, perhaps earlier business partnerships, former hometowns, kinships, and marriage relations. They were a privileged group and as such would only associate with others who had attained their same self-set standards. One did not, until recently, take up with strangers.

Bartley Lowe's daughter, Sophia Lowe, raised in a wealthy family with only brothers, had all the advantages of true southern womanhood. She probably could have chosen anyone as long as he met with the approval of her family. Thomas Hobbs noted favorably, before he met his own special young lady, that Sophia Lowe was "quite an interesting young lady." William Garret described meeting Sophia, then 19, while traveling to Mobile. She was "a young lady educated and accomplished in the more solid attainments of life, in that day.... She brought into the social circle, during the trip, much of the means that contributed to break the tedium of steamboat traveling, and made the time pleasant by her cheerfulness, intelligent conversation, and singing, in all of which she was well gifted." Sophia had another admirer. In 1848 Nicholas Davis Jr. told his roommate at the University of Virginia, Hobbs, that he loved Sophy Lowe and always had, and he wanted to return home.¹⁵

Certainly young Nick Davis could easily have received the consent of her family. His father, Nicholas Davis Sr. had served as a captain in the War of 1812, moved into Limestone County as a planter, and had been a member of the first constitutional convention of Alabama in 1818. He also served in the state legislature for eight years and had run for governor twice. The senior Davis "was fluent and eloquent as an orator, with a large fund of practical knowledge...he was a patron of the turf, and carried out in his Alabama home all the attributes of a Virginia gentleman of the approved school." Among the admired pastimes for gentlemen of the day was that of horse racing. At the first of the month when a crowd was in Athens for county court business, Davis and others paraded their best racehorses around the dirt streets of the square and led followers in the direction of the quarter-mile racetrack at the edge of town. If that wasn't enough to attract folks, cock fights, dog and bear fights, intermingled with fistfights and eye-gouging, soon encouraged the remaining men to join them.¹⁶

Captain Davis had married Martha Hargrave in 1806 in Virginia. Their family, now in Alabama, was quite large, with 12 children. Among them, Anne Bradley married William Richardson, a lawyer; Martha Nicholas Davis married Judge George W. Lane; Eliza married Dr. Stith Malone; and DeWitt Clinton married Susan Lowe, sister of Sophy. Young lovesick Nicholas Davis did take time away from school to serve in the Mexican War, and then completed his studies to be admitted to the Alabama bar.¹⁷

(By now the reader may note that the First Families of Virginia and their allied kin were perceived by Miss Clay as almost nobility – educated, cultured, and wealthy, all deserving of recognition because they served as the aristocracy of the era.)

Both families must have approved the Lowe-Davis wedding in October of 1854. Thomas Hobbs noted in his journal that after a concert at Bascom Institute (later Huntsville Female College) that he stayed the night with Davis and his “sweet wife” in June of 1855. Now at “The Grove” Sophia and Nick Davis apparently raised her siblings Robert, Mattie, William, Lucy, Sarah, and the baby, Richard Lowe. Perhaps not surprisingly, her father stayed with friends in town.¹⁸

Nicholas Davis Jr. later was a Cooperationist and opposed Secession, but when his State first withdrew from the Union, like many others he patriotically went with his State. He was made a colonel of the 19th Alabama, but declined the commission and remained at home. Apparently he “became doubtful of the fortunes of war and went over to the enemy.” In the last years of the War, he presided at local peace meetings. Such was his tact, however, throughout the occupation of Huntsville by the Yankees, he appeared generally to walk freely between both sides.¹⁹ He resumed his law career after the War and defended CSA Capt. Frank Gurley against murder charges in the fall of 1865. Although the Old Mahogany Table did not speak harshly of him, many readers could readily recall darker times.

Number Two

October 20, 1909

Tell Something about the Oil Portrait Painters

Grimes in the 20s

Frye from 1847 to 1872

THE GROVE had two portraits that are cherished for the patriots that they represent – Robert Joseph Lowe (the father of Robert L. Lowe of Birmingham) and William Manning Lowe – as handsome a couple of boys as could be seen anywhere. Mr. Frye painted the future soldiers in the early '50s. The first tocsin of war in 1861 that fired the patriotism of the South, aroused the Madison County boys to action, and Col. Egbert G. Jones's brave command marched away, Robert J. Lowe in the Huntsville Company, marching with his bold comrades. William M. Lowe was then 18 years old and was a student at the University of Virginia. He was given his orders from home not to leave the University with the boys who joined the regiment ranks, but to remain with his books at school. The home orders were not obeyed – he ran away, joined Col. Jones's brave men in the first engagement at Manassas when the 4th Alabama Regiment made a name for the military annals of Southern history, unparalleled for courage.

On the battlefield Robert J. fainted and had an attack of congestion of the brain caused from camp fever, and his boy brother was shot in the forehead. Col. Hugh Lawson Clay brought them home to die. After six weeks of acute suffering Robert died, believing that a Federal bullet had killed his brother and his body was left on the battlefield at Manassas. William's skull was seriously fractured and had to be trephined. The tiny bone removed from his skull was preserved by his sister, Mrs. Clinton Davis (Sue Lowe) and is still in her desk. William recovered,

“Still the glint of his steel blue eye
Told of a spirit that wouldn't die.”

And again he entered the Confederate ranks at Murphreesboro, and remained till the War closed, courageous to the last – living to be the joy and comfort of his family. What a glorious voice he had! How the rich, mellow tones rang out in “Tenting To Night,” and in what tender notes did he sing his own composition, “Jeanie Morrison” and “The Harp That once thru Tara's Hall” was never awakened to sweeter melody than when the chords were swelled by William Manning Lowe.²⁰

Ellie Lowe, fresh, fair and sweet as a flower, in a low-neck gown of sheerest white organdy, very tiny in the waist, and very full in the skirt looks at you with eyes too old and solemn for a girl. She died in the 50's, age 16; Mr. Frye painted her life-size three-quarter portrait.

The Mahogany Table began to smile and said: Those old times before the Civil War, were funny old times; there was a difference from the times now-a-days. Now, Week-end House Parties, are considered the most elegant thing with the invitation to come Friday and

leave Sunday night or as early Monday as possible. The Grove House Parties were an endless chain, that began the first of January lasting until Dec. 31st. Week end! No end, for fifty years; old Janus didn't have time to look back; he positively had to adopt the rubber neck system to keep both faces on the future. It was a common occurrence to have a dear friend ride up in his coach with his wife an children; old mammy to nurse the baby, and little Dinah to play with the bigger children. mama's maid, papa's coachman and special man servant, and, if the races were on, little black Pompey "to ride Mahr's prize mar." They came unawares, but that was nothing. Everybody was delighted! The darkies scurried. Mint juleps were served in cut glasses. "Big pot and little ones?" They had no use for little pots; everything was big; two hams at a time, chickens fried by the dozen, with cream gravy by the half gallon, and everything else in proportion – "kas Mahr's niggers et fum de white folks's table, dey sho did!" The third story of the Grove was one large room and used as a banquet hall, where a collation was spread that would have made Lucullus green with envy.²¹ The dancing and singing was in the double parlors below, and the fiddlers were all colored and home raised, and Virginia Reels, by Money Musk, Ole Mollie Har and Arkansas Trav'ler, and Hop Light Ladies stirred the very soles of every lad and lassie, and even the dignified matron would:

"Tap her dainty heel
To the merry, merry music of the Old Virginia Reel."

Barbecues were held on every Fourth of July out in the Grove and during all political campaigns. And May Queens were crowned and Flower Queens were wreathed. At every festival, a house party was welcomed. Then they had guests who came with big trunks and hat boxes. Every prominent citizen in Huntsville kept open house then, and the length of visits indefinite. Now a dress suit case is all sufficient; a blue-flame oil stove, a tin Dutch oven, or a gas hot plate – and no certain cook – is a means of defense against the all the-year-rounder guests – especially when the appendix of the Old Mahogany Table is cut out, and finances cut down.

THE OLD PORTRAIT PAINTERS OF THE PAST

The Mahogany Table began by telling some stories about Old Portraits and lolled about The Grove, with all of its fascinating old-time graces oblivious of other portraits and their painters.

Grimes painted the portrait of Mrs. Manning and Mrs. Lowe in the early twenties and other prominent family groups. A misty story is handed down that he was a young artist with talent, a handsome face, poetical temperament, and a delicate constitution. He came from Philadelphia, found all of the big brotherly and sisterly love his artistic nature craved – and failed to receive in his own City of Brotherly Love. Mrs. Mary Mastin Irby – who was a sister to the late James and Gustavus Mastin – felt sorry for the struggling, delicate artist and she took him in her home as a member of the family. The Irbys then owned and occupied the brick cottages on the corner of Greene and Gates Streets, now occupied by Waddy Matthews. Here Grimes painted and dreamed in luxury. Many of the most prominent families were prototyped by his facile brush, and perpetuated with a license of poetical fancy for the years and generations to come. For every scar received in the battles of life, the mover had a laurel leaf from his brush and lent additional graces.

When the young artist was making arrangements to leave Huntsville he expressed deep gratitude to his benefactress, Mrs. Irby, and a desire to remunerate her; all she desired was a portrait of himself – which he painted – limning his features with a Byronic touch, artistic, poetic, a mournful vibration of the poet, who at that times is drinking to the dregs a

cup of life, love, fancy in the Eye of Greece by flirting with Theresa Macris, swimming the Hellespont in the Astral of Leander, or dreaming on the beautiful violet-crowned Acropolis – then in 1824 dropped in the sea of a wakeless slumber at Missolonghi, where the world became awakened and thrilled by the spirit of the most daring genius since the days of Shakespeare.²²

The original of this portrait is now in Mobile and is owned by Mrs. J.[John] T. Schley (Bessie Mastin). Huntsville is not entirely bereft. When a young girl, our own sweet artist, Miss Howard Weeden, made a copy of that old portrait of Grimes and it now hangs a treasure trove, on the parlor walls at the **Weeden home**, across from the old Irby home. Miss Katie Weeden owns it. Go to see her and she will show it to you and tell you all about it. You know Grimes painted the Bradleys, old Blue Thompson, Clays, Bibbs, and no telling how many other pioneers of the aristocracy.



These Old Portraits, with a very few exceptions, were not satisfactory to the originals or their families but kind old Anno Domini has given the proper distance; retrospectively, the perspective is pre-eminently correct. All of their blemishes are thrown in the darkness, their beauties are brought out to view, the whole finally softened, chastened by the melancholy light of our regret. The images now rise up in our hearts, thru shades of memory, like a spirit from the tomb, already invested with the purity of the better world – and all the more lovely, because they melt in our embrace.

The Old Mahogany Table tho bright, and always polished, was a little rough when rubbed the wrong way, and with a decided gape, at the thought of those vandals who dared relegate to the attic the portraits of those dear old fathers and mothers or grandparents who gave them all that life is worth – a good and true name – who built the Country; the town, the foundation, of our magnificent country's commonwealth.

Such people have no genuine heart of oak, even, and are unworthy of a place round The Mahogany Table – it shows a common deal table streak. The old mahogany sleepily closed its lids as it said, "Let's talk about Mr. Frye next – for I am board now."

Virginia C. Clay

Now knowing some of the players, the reader can begin to sort some of the next generation Miss Clay mentioned.

To read anything in the South, of course, the Civil War must be included. Col. Egbert J. Jones led the men of the "Huntsville Guards" off to war with great fanfare and excitement. Jones was a widower and a veteran of the Mexican War. He was quite a large man (6'5") a lawyer, and a powerful speaker. The young men of Huntsville who followed the colonel first marched to the Female College on April 15, 1861, where they received a new silk flag from Miss Sallie McKie. Gus Mastin, First Lt., accepted the flag "in a strong manly and striking address, which was in good taste and well received." Colonel Jones added "a few brief, pointed and grateful remarks." The young ladies concluding their presentation sang, "Mr. Saroni's stirring march 'to arms ye braves.'" (The silk flag, neatly folded, was recovered from the body of young Mastin after the Battle of Seven Pines.) The men of the "North Alabamians" left from the Huntsville Depot for the North where they combined with other groups and formed the basis of the 4th Alabama Regiment. Colonel Jones became a hero at the

Battle of Manassas but was wounded. Blood poisoning set in, and he died six weeks later. Reverend W. D. Chadick escorted Jones' body back to Huntsville, and the funeral procession on September 6th was the largest and most elaborate held at that time. He was interred in the city burying ground, now Maple Hill Cemetery. The local military training ground was renamed in his honor, Camp Jones.²³

Among those young men marching gaily off to war under Col. Edward D. Tracy of the "North Alabamians" was Pvt. Robert J. Lowe, 25, son of Gen. Bartley M. Lowe. His younger brother, William, age 19, was then a student at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. William was told by his parents to stay at school, which of course he disobeyed. Both brothers participated with the 4th Alabama in the action at the Battle of Manassas. Unfortunately Robert caught camp fever, or typhoid, after a forced march to the battlefield where he collapsed. During the fighting William was shot in the head and assumed to be dying. Col. Hugh Lawson Clay, 3rd son of Governor Clay, escorted both boys, apparently mortally wounded, back to Huntsville. Once home, after six weeks, Robert succumbed to his wounds. However, after surgery in Huntsville, William recovered. He returned to the army eventually, became a colonel, was captured, and sent as a prisoner to Camp Chase, Ohio. After the War he served in the state legislature for Madison County. His brother, Robert, left a widow and two young sons.²⁴ Ellie Lowe, a sister to Robert and William, had died in 1857, age 19. The portrait of young Ellie, described by Miss Clay, recently sold at an auction where no one recognized her as a Huntsville young miss. Since then, Miss Ellie has been purchased by the Huntsville Museum of Art. Sue Lowe Davis, another sister of the boys, apparently kept the sliver of bone from the trepanning of her brother's skull.

Miss Clay acknowledged the vagueness of her story as she introduced the artist **John Grimes**. She could not ever have met the man, but he certainly sounded like a charmer. John Grimes (1799-1837) was born in Kentucky and sent at the age of twelve to apprentice with a merchant in Lexington. The shop was a local gathering place for men interested in the arts. Merchant, John Grant, adopted the lad, and Grimes received a first-rate education. Among other accomplishments he received art lessons from the painter Matthew Harris Jouett. In about 1820, John Grimes came to Huntsville and found a place to live near Eustis Street. Here he painted many of the aristocrats in town. Among them were George and Eliza Steele; Mrs. Thomas Bibb, wife of the second governor; the wife of former Governor C.C. Clay, Susanna Clay with her son, John Withers Clay, about the age of two (a lost portrait); and, eight-year-old, Clement Clay, Jr. posed at the foot of the Big Spring (a lost portrait). Unhappy with the results, Eliza Steele apparently had her portrait destroyed.



John Grimes went back to Lexington, but returned yearly to Huntsville to continue his commissions. During these sessions he painted Thomas Bibb and his family and Gen. Bartley Lowe and his wife Sarah Sophia (Manning) Lowe. Grimes did travel to Philadelphia in 1825 where he continued to study and improve his technique. He also worked in Nashville but returned again in 1836 to Huntsville where he boarded at the cottage of Mrs. Mary (Mastin) Irby at the corner of Greene and Gates Streets. While here Grimes also painted portraits of Robert and Eliza (Henderson) Fearn.

One might only guess that Mrs. Irby may have "felt sorry for the struggling, delicate artist," but Grimes painted a self-portrait for Mrs. Irby in payment for her hospitality. Miss Howard Weeden painted a copy of his self-portrait and that was lost also. John Grimes died, age about 38, in Lexington and was buried with the Grant family.²⁵

Dr. William Weeden, native of Baltimore and a colonel in the War of 1812, had moved first to Marengo County, Alabama. After the death of his wife he was left a widower with two sons and three daughters. He next married Jane Urquhart, widow of James Watkins formerly of Elbert County, Georgia. They moved to Madison County in 1832 and maintained a plantation at the base of Weeden's Mountain now on Redstone Arsenal property. In 1845 he purchased a town house on Williams Street, but Weeden died on a trip to New Orleans the very next year. (Their daughter, the local artist Maria Howard Weeden, was not born until six months after the death of her father.) His widow, Jane, was left with their five children and the youngest son of his first marriage still at home. His estate included two plantations in Madison County, one in Marshall County, the house on Williams Street, and the plantation in Marengo County. The frail artist, Miss Howard Weeden, grew up in a sheltered setting of refinement and wealth.²⁶

Number Three

October 27, 1909

Tell Something about the Oil Portrait Painters

These stories told by The Mahogany Table are gathered here and there, and told by members of the family. Many have tradition only as authority, the stories coming down thru the ages like the Norse Sagas. The early Alibaman Indians kept a record of the important events of their tribe's history with a string of pearls it is said, and each of the pearls had a story of its own that was told to each generation of the Red man's tribe. The thought is a pretty one, and The Mahogany Table stories shall be like pearls: Some of them are perfect, others may be dimmed by the years and tears of memory, but if they are not all as some believe or recall there is still a pearlaceous tinge, and a hundred years from now, they will be still on the string of uncertainty, along with the Cook-Peary controversy. A History, says Webster, is a "record of facts." History, said Dr. Watts – who knew his subject, "is necessary to Divines." Neither *The Democrat* nor the Table can boast of the divine afflatus, and will accept every pearl that is free from skeletons. For it is our intention to present these stories, "Written not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart." As did St. Paul in II Cor., iii – 3.

Even Noah Webster is not without a doubtful historiographer: There is now a story told that the famous dictionary man was a great stickler for the correct use of English and when his wife one day caught him kissing her pretty Irish maid, she exclaimed: "Why Mr. Webster, I am surprised indeed!"

"My dear, why will you use English words so incorrectly? You are very incorrect – in this little instance you are the person ASTONISHED and I am the one SURPRISED!" This was the wise answer of the sage. Thus was the wife's mind diverted entirely from the little osculatory indiscretion of her learned spouse – so the story goes.

The Old Mahogany Table promises to astonish some but surprise very few.

Minnie Frye Coleman Writes Her Father's Story

Around The Old Mahogany Table one day we began talking over the number of Old Portraits painted by Mr. Frye, and the idea was suggested that a very interesting story could be gathered in a sketch of his life. The Mahogany Table advised write to Miss Katie Frye, in care of the Treasury Department, Washington, D.C. where for a number of years she has been an expert clerk. I eagerly accepted the suggestion and wrote at once to Miss Katie, receiving, very promptly, the following letter, replete with facts of the deepest interest – just as pretty a picture of sentiment and romance as could be found in a gold frame or the leaves of a novel.

Washington, D.C.

September 14, 1909

Dear Virginia,

Katie handed me your letter with the request that I answer it. I will do the best I can, but have not an especially fluent pen, and am now under the weather. To begin:

My father was born on September 13, 1819 – just ninety years to the day before the receipt of your letter inquiring about him. Singular coincidence, is it not? The place of his birth was Reslau, on the border of Bohemia. He was reared in Vienna, Austria, where his father was a large cloth manufacturer. His art education was received at Prague, in Bohemia. His grandmother was a cousin of that grand old author and philosopher, Jean Paul Richter. His brother, Christopher, was an officer in the Austrian Army, the most magnificent body of men in the world. His sister, Ida, married the son of Joseph Lanner, “The Waltz King,” of Germany. It was in his orchestra that the elder Strauss won his first laurels as a composer – and upon Lanner’s retirement, Strauss succeeded him as leader of the King’s Orchestra.

{A digression here may be of interest to you to not relevant to my father’s biography. It was Lanner’s custom to compose a waltz each week to the King and, on one occasion, being indolent or indisposed he delegated the task to Strauss, whose composition met with approval, and paved the way to his receiving the title of “Waltz King” when Lanner laid down the baton.}

Now to resume my father’s history. While at College in Prague, he and a number of students became fascinated with the “Noble Red Man” as depicted by Fenimore Cooper, and they planned to run away to the New World. It was during the Christmas holidays when they were well supplied with funds, that they made their start. My father had been the recipient of three purses – one from his Godfather, who was the Forester to the King of Bavaria, one from his grandmother and a third from his parents.

After the Christmas visit to their homes, the students proceeded to Bremen to take ship for this country. The others lost courage and turned back, but my father still felt the lure of Adventure and the Indians – so he set sail, and reached New York after a three months’ stormy trip.

His cousin Count Johann Schmidt, was then German Consul to New York. He gave him letters to influential men throughout the country, among others, to George D. Prentice. He, in turn gave him letters to prominent citizens of Huntsville. There he met my mother, Miss Virginia Catherine Hale, fell in love and married her then and there terminating his quest after the Red Man. From that year, 1847, until he passed away in 1872, he called Huntsville his home having completed his naturalization papers in 1852. I append a few of the notable people whose pictures he painted:

Jefferson Davis; Gen. Leroy Pope Walker and his wife and children; and I think your father, uncles, Clement C. and H.L. Clay, and your aunt Virginia Clay; Generals Lee, Morgan, Jackson, Forrest, and others of the Confederate Army I cannot now recall. Of the United States Army there were – Logan, Stanley, McPherson, and Mrs. Logan and children. These, with General Logan’s other mementoes, were for years kept in Mrs. Logan’s home, Calumet Place in Washington. But I believe the General’s memorials and portraits have been donated to the State House of Illinois.

In the late 60s, all of the artists in the United States were requested to compete for a colossal sized portrait of Henry Clay. My father’s portrait, an immense full-length, was selected and now hangs in the Capitol at Frankfort, Kentucky.

You will be able to learn more of the people of Huntsville than I can tell you.

Outside of Huntsville, I can recall a few only of the social world. You see I was a little girl when he died. I remember my father painted Mrs. Corinne Goodman and Mrs. Brinkley, of Memphis, and the famous Sallie Ward of Louisville when at the zenith of their "Belledom." I know but little of the prices that he received. I think two and three hundred dollars was the average price for bust portraits.

You ask about Ida and me. Ida lives in San Francisco. She spent the two years following the earthquake with us but has now returned to California. Katie is still in the Treasury. Willie, poor boy, died three years ago. I have been happily married for 25 years to Mr. Thomas L. Coleman of the dramatic profession. We have one son who will be 24 years old today. Another birth coincidence. He is named for our friend, Mr. Hugh Carlisle, of Guntersville. His full name being Thomas Carlisle Coleman, but we call him by his middle name. He has his grandfather's artistic gift, but we have directed along the practical lines, and he is a young architect.

Now I am well aware that this long story will need considerable pruning. Use as much or as little of it as you like. We are much pleased that you desire to write about our father, and hope you will send us copies.

Remember us to each of your family and believe me,

Most cordially yours,
Minnie Frye Coleman

In a later letter, requesting the full name of Mr. Frye, Mrs. Coleman replied:

My father's name was G. Wilhelm Frey – properly written – but as he had difficulty in getting his mail in this country, the Post Office people calling it "Fray" – and everything but Frye – he anglicized it by making G. Wilhelm Frye, putting the e after the y. The G was for George, but he never used that name.

I did not tell you, my friends in Huntsville, that for ten years, I have been taking my "walks abroad" in a wheel chair. I can walk about my flat, and am not lame, but the nerves controlling the heart and limbs are weak, and I can only stand three or four minutes at a time. M.F.C.

The Mahogany Table was delighted with the result of the correspondence regarding Mr. Frye, and actually left a trove of portrait stories, and struck the hypotenuse of sweet Minnie Frye herself.



Don't you recall the time and grand ovation Minnie Frye received when she first began her professional career! A crowd of Huntsville friends greeted her at the Huntsville Female Seminary, when she wore a rose colored gown of a soft, clinging material, her hair in waves and parted, with a fluffy hood at the nape of her graceful neck; and again at the old **Opera House**; and the round of applause, the shower of flowers, the ready, bright response to the encores demanded. Do you remember what an impetus her recital

gave to the elocution here, and the furor of competition it created among Huntsville girls, who tried to recite "just like Minnie Frye," and the one who recited most like her was the most popular, especially when she recited:

“Come over, come over the river to me
If ye are my laddie, bold Charlie Machree”

How the girls thrilled and audiences stamped and clapped at the finale:

“Ye’ve crossed the wild river – Ye’ve risked all for me!
And I’ll part from ye never, dear Charlie Machree!”²⁷

Just a Mahogany leaf from memory for you – Sweet Minnie Frye!



As Miss Clay suggested, almost one hundred years later, the Peary-Cook Controversy has continued. Admiral Robert E. Peary, with trained explorers and native dog sleds, claimed to have reached the North Pole in April 1909. But his rival, Dr. Frederick A. Cook, with two native Inuit men and little apparent preparation, appeared to have reached the Pole on April 21, 1908. Both men denounced one another as frauds, and the public entered the fray. Which man, if either or neither man, actually reached the geographic North Pole is still being argued.

Miss Clay may have preceded Walt Disney’s use of Anthropomorphism with her talking table, but there is a lot to be considered in this tale. In a flash of the reader’s time one must consider after the Cook vs. Peary controversy; the Indians of Alabama; the Norse epics; the use of beads to denote stories; Webster’s definition of history; the English clergyman Isaac Watts, himself a Divine; the *Democrat* not claiming to have miraculous communication of supernatural knowledge or afflatus; and the good St. Paul. Furthermore the reader is assumed to know, or, to be impressed at the use of the synonym of kissing, osculatory, when Mrs. Webster discovered the indiscretion of her learned spouse. The Noah Webster story is generally considered to be apocryphal. Miss Clay was ahead of times with the word to describe how history is obtained; by current usage it would be spelled historiographer.

The career of local artist William Frye coincided with the rise and fall of the Clay family. The newsy information came from Frye’s daughter, Minnie Coleman, who now lived in Washington, D.C. with her sister, Kate, and Minnie’s husband and son. William Frye had come to America on a mission to encounter the native Indians. Readers throughout the world had been thrilled earlier with the tales of James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1854) who said he could write a better novel and did. Among the most read of his books were *The Spy*, *Leatherstocking Tales*, *Last of the Mohicans*, and *The Deerslayer*.²⁸ During his quest to meet the “Redman” of Cooper’s depictions, Frye met George D. Prentice (1802-1870). Originally from Connecticut, Prentice had become editor of the Louisville, Kentucky *Daily Journal*, and the most powerful Whig newspaper in the southwest. Prentice gave advice to young Frye who then settled on a career for himself in America.

William Frye became an itinerant portrait artist and set up business in 1847 in Huntsville. He married Virginia Hale the next year and they raised a family of four children while he painted on commission throughout the South. In addition to the paintings recalled in the *Echoes*, during the Civil War, Frye was able to take advantage of the influx of Yankee officers who were garrisoned in Huntsville at Camp Taylor. Many of the officers wanted to send portraits back to their families in the North. Mrs. Coleman mentioned the paintings of Gen. John A. Logan, but her father painted many other portraits during the time of Federal occupation.²⁹ Mr. Frye survived the War successfully with his family intact and money in the bank. The 1870 Federal Census showed Frye had worth over \$18,000 and three household servants tending to his family of six.

Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825) was a German humorist, Romantic novelist, and philosopher. The Clay sisters might have sighed appreciatively with the sentiment by the man who was Frye's grandmother's cousin. "Recollection is the only paradise from which we cannot be turned out."

The German diplomat Count Johann Schmidt and Christopher Frye could not be identified. However Frye's sister Ida married Joseph Lanner (1801-1843) who transformed Austrian folk music into sophisticated social dances. He was called the "Mozart of dance music" and worked with Strauss. Unfortunately Lanner died of typhoid fever and left Frye's sister, Ida, a widow.³⁰ Continuing with the family news, Minnie Frye Coleman noted that her sister, Ida, had been in San Francisco during the time of the great earthquake of 1906. "Poor Willie," their brother, also died about 1906, and one might wonder if he was a casualty of the quake.

Minnie's son, Thomas Carlisle Coleman, was named for Hugh Carlisle (1842-1898) of Guntersville. Carlisle was born in Scotland and came to America as a stonemason and became a contractor. Among other things, he built the U.S. Custom House in Savannah and worked on railroad bridges and tunnels before locating in Alabama. He was actively involved in the formation of the railroad from Gadsden to Guntersville. At one time Carlisle was the largest landholder in the state with 170,000 acres awarded by the United States Supreme Court in a decision relating to defaults on the Tennessee and Coosa Railroad.³¹

Minnie Frye Coleman did not mention the unfortunate circumstances of the death of her father, William Frye. In 1869 Mrs. Frye wrote to Dr. Peter Bryce at the Alabama Insane Hospital in Tuscaloosa about her husband. He had suffered some kind of stroke and paralysis. His paintings had become distorted, and Frye could not perceive the difference. By 1871 Frye had another attack and developed violent behavior. He was diagnosed with "Influenza of the Brain," and in the fall of that year his wife committed him to the Hospital. He was judged both "a lunatic and indigent." William Frye died July 1, 1872 and was buried in the cemetery at the hospital. At least 135 Frye portraits have been identified.³²

Number Four

November 3, 1909

The Old Portrait Painters of the Past

The Mahogany Table turned to mythological and literary lore for its comparisons in one of its recent great reminiscential moods. Egypt had the famed statue of Memnon among its art treasures – it was surmounted on top of a temple, and when the rays of the sun first fell upon it at the dawn of each new day, there was emitted a harp like sound that filled the natives with greatest awe and superstition, and set scientific minds to cogitating the real cause.

At the first real dawn of civilization in Madison County and Hunt's Spring had been re-christened to Twickenham Town, and, in two years, re-incarnated as Huntsville, by a citizenry who were pleased to extend naturalization papers to the memory of John Hunt, who was the earliest pioneer settler in the 19th century.¹³ The rays of light grew warm and powerful, and with them came the influence on our vale. There was emitted a sound of axe, hammer, and saw that fell on the ear as harmonious as a Memnon chord. Again the natives in a wonder fled, and the sounds reached the far outside world, and armies from all nations sprung up, as if sown with a measure of dragon's teeth, as strong as that of Cadmus, and finally drove out the "Poor Los" from their native lair or reduced them to a safe minimum. Wigwams were replaced by log huts and cottages, and mansions were soon dotted over this "Valley, steep in sunshine" as Carolee Pleasants poetically limned it with her artistic pen.

Mackenzie, in his "Men of Feeling," said, "there is a rust about everyone at the beginning." There may exist just a little oxide that steals over the sensibilities of some, caused by the uncongenial social atmospheric conditions in their environments. But to view thru the long vista of years, society in the distance – just a peep at such a world as Grandparents lived in, and to invest it with all the pageantry of sentiment, poetry and imagination, soon wears off the oxide – and, after all, it is a glorious privilege. The Sun's rays have softly touched the Memory and sounds from Auld Lang Syne are emitted and fall sweet on the ear. All the diversified scenery of the affections may proclaim the evanescence of those days, yet the love the roses – without the thorns – if alone transferred to paper, will blossom in friendly fields forever. In their transmigratory state, the fragrant spirit of the leaves will wander in the rich garden of Memory, sparkle with the dew of attar – and Lo – "We will gather fragrance for Life's Wintry day!"

Well there are too many grand old landmarks left in the brick and mortar sentiment of the old homes still here to allow them to vanish.

There is the Beirme home a splendid specimen of that old-time sentiment: It was built by Governor Thomas Bibb, the son-in-law of "Old Grandpa Blue" as Mr. Robert Thompson's present day descendants call him. This home was presented to Adeline Bibb Bradley, the daughter of Gov. Thomas Bibb, Alabama's second Governor, and thru some unfortunate financial mismanagement it was sold for a debt, and Col. George Beirme was the purchaser.

The story goes that Mrs. Bradley was first informed of the sale by a servant. She was seated on her rear porch when a Negro gardener walked in her garden and began digging. He was summoned by Mrs. Bradley and asked what he meant.

“Miss ‘Liza saunt me fer ter plant de taters,” he replied. “Didn’t you know dat Marse George done bought dis place?”

Just imagine the surprise and chagrin that this domestic Queen experienced! It was hard indeed! Raised in the lap of luxury, yet her spirit was not broken – her energies were not debilitated. In an humbler home she moved and still reigned the Queen of her little kingdom called home.

Susan Wells Bradley, eldest daughter of Adeline Bibb and James Bradley, became the wife of Thomas Wilson **White** and the mother of 12 children. The wedding occurred in this **old mansion**. On the walls of the dear old home—on the hill—is a portrait of Gov. Thomas Bibb’s daughter, Mrs. James Bradley, with her baby Susan on her lap. This portrait was painted by Grimes in the early 20’s – at the same time that those of Sarah Sophia Providence Thompson Manning, with her little son Felix, and Susanna Claiborne Maclin Withers Clay, with her son John Withers, and Pamela Thompson Bibb and her little son, William, were painted and some dozen or more other famous “Early Settlers.” Whose beauty, grace and gallantry were handed down to us thru the “art preservative” and from a gold frame on canvas.³⁴



These old portraits on the hill are rarely limned: The one of baby Susan and her dainty mother is one that wins attention. The mother was scarcely 17 years old, when she was married and in her 19th years when their portrait was painted. She is very lovely, seated in her red velvet arm chair, her gown is dark blue silk with tiny black figures. Her beautiful throat is modestly exposed, and the Empire waist is finished with a high ruching of the filmiest real lace, and a full string of red coral entwines the throat, claspt with gold. From her shell-like ears are long pendant “ear bobs” of coral. The glossy dark hair is drest in two loops slightly over the forehead and caught in a high coil, surmounted by a tall Empress comb of tortoise shell. Tho in her teens, yet a dignity of the matron is hers, as with a loving mother’s art she hold chubby Baby Susan in close embrace. Susan is in her first short dress richly embroidered with a ruffled cap to match.

Now, says the Old Mahogany table, if you would really like to see a flesh and blood replica of baby Susan, just look at her granddaughter, Nan Fickling, daughter of Susie Wells White – Mrs. Frank Fickling.

Fair Adeline and baby Susan are on the right side of the folding door, and on the left side, is a handsome and aristocratic young husband, in a suit of black, full ruffled shirt, high collar, a black stock cravat. A typical gentleman of the Old School. At the right of the mantel is “Old Grandpa Blue” seated in a red velvet chair, dressed in a suit of dark blue, colonial cut, double-breasted with the brass buttons and a white stock collar. His gray hair is combed straight up in the center and forward at the temples. A pipe of peace and comfort with a pendant cord and tassel is in his left hand. In the right a gold head cane. An air of the genial companion, pleasantly disposed to hospitality, and the shrewd man of business pervades the portrait.

Remember, says the Old Mahogany Table that Col. Robert Thompson was a Revolutionary soldier at 16, and he is the progenitor of the families of Mrs. Robert H. Watkins, Mrs. James Manning, and Mrs. Thomas Bibb.

By the way, the Mahogany Table has advised that a history of the two Bibb brothers would make most interesting reading, and we feel interested since a sweet daughter of “Blue

Thompson,” Pamela – was the wife of Gov. Thomas Bibb, whose pretty daughter, Adeline became the wife of Mr. James Bradley of the portrait on the Hill.

The Crowning of Monte Sano

The Sun had rolled back the blanket of
mist
From the brow of the Mountain – then,
softly it kissed
The stony old face, so rugged and
seamed,
By the frosts of Old Time, till it fairly
beamed
And smiled with delight at the warm
demonstration
From the fountain of Light – bless’d
gift at Creation!
With delicate fingers it wove a bright
crown
Of crimson and gold, that it gaily
placed down.
With gaudy pomp upon the old head;
And wild Flowers, entwined, a vermeil
hue spread;
The Birds a blithe Coronation Hymn
sang;
And the Woods caught the strains the
glad Echoes rang;
The Heavens o’er head formed a canopy
blue
Above the brown throne of the Mount-
ain in view;
Then Twilight’s soft hands, with purple
quilt deep,
Hid the wrinkled-faced Monarch, who
went fast asleep
In all the gay robes, that the Frost and
Sun lent;
And Night reigned supreme o’er Love
and Age blent!

Virginia C. Clay



The classical education of the Clay sisters recalls to their readers the Colossi of Memnon on the west bank of the Nile River at Luxor, twin statues guarding the mortuary temple of the Pharaoh Amenhotep III. The quartzite statues were said to make a musical sound at first light as Memnon greeted his mother, the goddess of dawn. Cadmus, according to Greek mythology, was a Phoenician prince who, while searching for his kidnapped sister, Europa, founded Thebes.

Scotsman Henry MacKenzie (1745-1831) wrote the novel, *The Man of Feeling*, in 1771. His words later offered reassurance to generations of Southerners absorbed with the Lost Cause. "It is only from the belief of the goodness and wisdom of a supreme being, that our calamities can be borne in the manner which becomes a man."

The Clay sisters, particularly with their poetic sensitivities, would have known and enjoyed the now-forgotten local poetess, Carolee (Pleasants) Otey. Born about 1863, Carolee had married James A. Otey in 1893, but she died in 1896. Her aunt, Julia Pamela Pleasants, who married David Cresswell, enjoyed a more recognized literary career. Julia Cresswell published four volumes of poetry and three novels.³⁵

The **Beirne House** (300 Williams Avenue) is a splendid example of classic revival architecture. Thomas Bibb, Alabama's second governor and son-in-law of "Old Blue" Thompson, originally completed the house in about 1836 and presented it to his daughter, Adeline Bibb Bradley. (The house was designed as a twin to her childhood home Belle Mina in Mooresville.) There in 1840 Adeline and James Bradley enjoyed the wedding of their oldest daughter, Susan, to Thomas W. White. At the wedding reception that was so elegant and bountiful, one of the overloaded tables collapsed. According to the story there was much laughter, of course, except from servants who had to clean up.



The bridegroom in this story, young Thomas White, was newly arrived from Virginia with his parents, James and Eliza (Wilson) White, in 1839. James White became a large landowner with plantations on both sides of the Tennessee River. He also established a monopoly on the pioneer necessity, salt, which arrived at his dock and was sold at his mercantile business at Whitesburg Landing or hauled into Huntsville. So successful by 1860, the Federal Census valued his personal property at \$160,000.

In the mid-1840s, apparently Mrs. Bradley had no idea of the severity of her husband's current financial reverses as a cotton broker and commission merchant in town. He was forced to sell the house at 300 Williams and did not have the courage to tell his wife. A servant of the new owner, Colonel Beirne, came to do fresh plantings in the back yard and announced the loss of her home to Mrs. Bradley. Mr. Bradley died in 1851, age 57, and Mrs. Bradley, and three of her unmarried children, lived with the Thomas White family for many years.

The family of Susan and Thomas White had moved farther out on Eustis Street (612 Eustis) where rooms were added for their 12 children and Mrs. Bradley and her children. During the Civil War the White home was active sometimes with Rebels hidden in the basement, Yankees on the main floor, and the family lucky to have the use of the former slave quarters. Much later, in 1880, one of the daughters, Sue Wells White, married Francis Fickling and their child, Nan Fickling, according to Miss Clay, looked like Susan Bradley.³⁶

In the meanwhile Col. George P. Beirne and his family continued to live in the home at 300 Williams Avenue even when the Yankees occupied the house during the two invasions of Huntsville. Beirne descendants lived in the house until 1927 when the house returned to a descendant of original owners, the Bibb family.³⁷

Those named in the portraits may appear to all run together, but to the best of this editor's ability the reader will recall: Pamela Thompson Bibb had her portrait done with her

young son, William. At the same time her married daughter, Adeline (Bibb) Bradley, had her portrait painted with her daughter, Susan. Pamela's sister, Sarah Thompson Manning, had a portrait commissioned with her son, Felix. Not to be left out, Susanna Claiborne (Withers) Clay had a painting done with her son, John Withers Clay.

Pamela and Sophia's father, "Old Blue" Thompson, was also painted, and his portrait resides at, of course, 300 Williams Avenue. In his portrait Mr. Thompson is holding a walking cane that concealed a knife in the tip end. Life was still uncertain on the frontier of the old southwest.

Number Five

November 10, 1909

The Old Portrait Painters of the Past

“Put into your Table Book whatever you judge worthy.” Thus has advised John Dryden.³⁸ The Old Mahogany Table in its last story, judged the Bibbs worthy of this Table Book, as they represent a most interesting fraction of our Alabama’s debut into Statehood.

When the 19th century was in its first swaddling clothes, politics was the great highway to honor. It was then conceded – rather fallaciously, perhaps – since the Declaration of Independence had made all men equal, that no illustrious alliance could promote the success of any candidate. There was an airy idea of Democracy cherished that no patent of nobility would be recognized – MERIT – and MERIT alone would be accepted. That conferred by bountiful Nature with the great seal appendant of a moral and intellectual superiority.

He who endeavored to

“Stand for Fame on his forefathers’ feet.
By Heraldry proved valiant or discreet.”

We’re, to use an up-to-date expression, with apologies to the Mahogany Table, for hurling slang from its head, simply “not in it.” So our great Republican lawmakers thought they thought. It was supposititious, theoretical however.

Then, as now, blue bloods clung to an ancestry with a drop of nobility, innate, or conferred for some act of chivalry, with a marked tenacity. It is all very well; thru it, native energy, debilitated by luxury, has been strongly reinforced by adversity and we are now realizing that

As we try to climb the ladder
From our Grandsire’s Kingly Crown.
We’re shockt by sights far sadder,
Dollars turned it upside down.

It is cause for self-congratulation that America has, after all, been the great Nursery of merit, light of genius, and a ladder eminence – and the Southern States have transmitted rich material to National Fame in their Statesmen. And Alabama has contributed a noble quota.

The Old Mahogany Table looked very solemn at this sudden polemical burst; then continued. It is a well-known, incontrovertible fact, that our earliest Statesmen despite royal prejudice and opposition to sovereign power, felt the royal blood tingling and bounding thru their veins. A coat of arms, with one or two rampant or couchant animals on or near a crown, was, and is still, an open sesame to prominent political or social position, whether you are a hod carrier, typesetter, office holder or poor country Edition – if you have the coin!

When the Bibbs came here about the year 1817 or ’18, they brought prestige of name, fame, merit – as well as coats of arms on two lines – the Bibbs and the Wyatts. The

paternal ancestor was William Bibb a native of France and an ardent Huguenot. He emigrated to Wales on account of the political and religious persecutions, following the abnegation of Henry IV which culminated the Edict of Nantes' revolution. In 1685 he came to Hanover County, Virginia. He had three children, the eldest, John had seven. John's eldest son, William, was born in 1735. William's second wife was Sarah Wyatt, of Kent County, Virginia, a descendant of Sir Thomas Wyatt, of England, and of Sir Francis Wyatt, one of Virginia's best Colonial framers. He moved to Prince Edward County, Virginia in his early manhood, and was appointed Lord High Sheriff. He was a member of the House of Burgesses of the conventions of 1776-77, and was also a member of the Committee of Safety and Captain of a Cavalry Company in the army of the Revolution. Later, he became a member of the House of Delegates.

The two sons of William and Sarah Wyatt [Bibb], William Wyatt and Thomas, moved from Virginia to Georgia in the early party of the 19th Century down on the Savannah River, and from thence to Alabama.

William Wyatt Bibb, from the history recorded of him, was an unusual character. He did not have to carry from England or Virginia a brick from his ancestral home as a sample of his family merit. In his own part, well acted, lay the honors thrust upon him, both in Georgia and Alabama.

William Wyatt Bibb was born in the year 1780. He graduated at William & Mary College, Williamsburg, Virginia. Later he graduated at the University of Pennsylvania in medicine at the very early age of twenty-two. He moved to Georgia and became a practitioner in that state with a large practice and a steadily increasing one, thru personal merit and a pleasing manner won him friends, fame and political preferment. He was a physician and never a politician. But the new country needed him. In rapid success – he became a member of the Georgia Legislature for two terms, served as a Representative in Congress for three terms, and was United States Senator one term.

Alabama at that time was beckoning to men to come, partake of Nature's bounty, drink of her fountains, wax fat and grow rich from the mountains, hills and vales laid open for them by the valorous Andrew Jackson. And, with a train of other blue bloods came the two brothers, conspicuous in history – William Wyatt and Thomas Bibb who brought along the prestige of family as well as their own merit and energy.

William Wyatt Bibb was the choice of Georgians for the offices he held and he was perpetuated in the State's history by having the County of Bibb named for him, and also in Alabama, in her Bibb County.

In Autauga County, near Coosada, was the old Bibb home, and when his political career was cut short after his election as Governor of the new State of Alabama, and death claimed him in a flash of the earthly glory his mortal remains were laid to rest in the family private burial ground. Above the lowly mound is a slab of granite, and this epitaph adorns it:

SACRED
To the Memory of
WILLIAM WYATT BIBB,
Died July 10th, 1820
In the Fortieth Year of His Age
He was the First Governor of the
Territory and afterwards of the State of Alabama.
He was the eldest son of William and
Sallie Bibb, and was born in Prince
Edward County, Virginia

DEAR DEPARTED SHADE

Thy many virtues will long be treasured in the Memory of Thy numerous friends, and whilst they deeply mourn thy early fall, they are consoled with the Hope that Thou art at Rest in the Bosom of Thy Heavenly Father.

Such, at last, is the uncertain stage of
human existence;
To day we may wear the crown of the
highest earthly honor,
Tomorrow be mingled with our kindred Dust

William Wyatt Bibb married Mary, the daughter of Holman Freeman, Wilkes County, Georgia and of Revolutionary fame. Albert James Pickett, in his History of Alabama, published in 1851, pays to the mother of the two Bibbs a tribute as well as the brothers. She, he says, was a woman of unusual sense, energy, and decision of character, and worked out of debt an estate heavily embarrassed after her husband's death, and reared nine children to noble manhood and womanhood. Her son, Thomas, the second Governor of Alabama – who built the grand old Belle Mina home – Pickett says “resembled his mother more than any of the children in his strength of mind and energy of his character.”

Governor Thomas Bibb was buried down at Belle Mina in Limestone County in the family burying ground. Twenty years after all that was left of his “his splendid teeth and hair, that had grown to unusual great length” says Mrs. Eliza Bibb Greet, his grandchild, was exhumed and brought to Huntsville and re-interred in the Maple Hill Cemetery, where a tall shaft marks the spot that hold the strong firm wisdom teeth of Alabama's second Governor.

Grime's Portrait of Mrs. Thomas Bibb

Mrs. Henry J. Certain, formerly Anna Elise Hopkins, a great-grandchild of Gov. Thomas Bibb, has a beautiful three quarter length portrait, painted by Grimes, of her grandmother, Mrs. Parmelia Thompson Bibb. Seated in a crimson armchair, is the sweet faced young mother, patrician in every delineation of the artist's brush. Her blue eyes soft and expressive, her brown hair caught up under a rather artistic turban of sheer white muslin, sound around the head and tied with loose knot over the forehead. A style that was never adopted by the wearer, and was a high license effort, peculiar to the fanciful Grimes, to give to his portraits an unmistakable Grimey touch, that, like the touch of Nature, makes them all akin. Some accepted the artist's fancy and others declined. Mrs. Bibb's Empire gown is a figured maroon silk and around her neck just revealing a beautiful throat, a muslin square neck kerchief, bordered with a light filmy ruffle of lace, is draped and over the pretty hands is a fall of lace. A gold watch is pinned over the left of the waist and attached by gold chains, in loops are two jeweled watch charms and a key pinned on the other side. Her blue-eyed five-year-old son leans on his mother's lap, lovingly. The portrait is very effective.

Did you ever think, remarked the Mahogany Table, that accident often has had more influence in building up one's fortune than the pride of human talent is willing to admit? It may be – and is – a pleasant thought to cherish that we have been buoyed into notice by a

simple force of individual ability, that to self-exertion alone are we indebted for any acquisition of distinction.

Yes, said the Old Mahogany Table, it is a fact that the generality of mankind in passing upon the merit of others are apt to judge of their capacity by their financial success. Their foot prints in the sands of time must be thus, with a high figure! It is sad to ponder over the intellects that have laid dormant in the shade to the World. From constitutional diffidence, an instinctive dread of failure, sensitiveness to adverse criticism – and yes, and worse – a chilling poverty – suppress every ideal thought! Suddenly the germ is discovered warmed into action by an accidental beam of patronage!

Huntsville has had many intellects in the past that would have set ablaze the world of art, science and philosophy. There was Dr. John Y. Bassett – his versatile genius was limitless. The Philosophers of old would have gloried in his companionship. It is very probable that many a publisher has served his best champagne elixirs from SKULLS of poor authors of Alabama. Dr. Bassett's skull alone could have furnished food for thought and stimulant for debilitated intellects for generations – but he died poor – as the plutocrats would define him.

It takes a gentle, skilful hand to draw some into the arena of exertion. A kind, bold firm heart can foster and animate into active life and ambitious perseverance, one who, without it, would molder away with vain, gloomy imaginings, into a dull slothful obscurity.



Here, in the manner of John Dryden (1631-1700), Miss Clay and the Old Mahogany Table judged the Bibb family worthy to be included in their pocket diary or personal notebook. Although she writes about merit, Miss Clay clearly cherished, and rightfully so, her forefathers and those of Huntsville's pioneer settlers.

As Virginia Clay continued to inform the readers about the prestigious Bibb and Wyatt families, she did as many journalist do. She apparently researched the definitive *History of Alabama* by Albert James Pickett for information about the Bibb family. But, as a good journalist should, she acknowledged her source. This book, originally published in 1851, would have been on the family bookshelf of many homes.

The family connections of Anna Elise Hopkins, who married Henry J. Certain, lived up to the standards set by the Misses Clay and their readers. Arthur F. Hopkins, the father of Arthur M. Hopkins, settled in Huntsville in 1816 as a lawyer, was a delegate to the state constitutional convention, served as chief justice of the state supreme court and as a U. S. Senator. Although his family moved to St. Louis for a brief period of time because of financial difficulties, he returned and was considered the leader of the Whig faction in Alabama. He married first Parmelia Mosely and later Mrs. Julia Opie Gordon, the "Florence Nightingale of the Confederacy" whose vignette is on the 25¢ and 50¢ Confederate currency. This second Mrs. Hopkins was buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. His son, Arthur Mosely Hopkins, graduated from Yale and married Eliza Bibb of Belle Mina, daughter and niece of Alabama governors. Their daughter, Anna Elise Hopkins, married Henry J. Certain. This couple is buried at Maple Hill Cemetery.³⁹

The editor of the newspaper then prepared the readers for the next week's issue of the *Democrat* featuring the accomplishments of Dr. John Young Bassett.

Number Six

November 17, 1909

An Alabama Student, Dr. John Young Bassett

In the old Bassett home on Franklin Street resides Miss Lenore Bassett and Miss Laura Bassett, all that are left of the family of John Young Bassett and Isaphoena Thompson, one of the best of wives and mothers, says the Mahogany Table, and most loyal friends. It is an old house, of the early civilization pioneer days, with a broad, hospitable front door that was never shut except by accident, or some ignorant person who didn't know any better. On the door is a brass knocker, bearing the legend, "BASSETT," and above is a glass arch, in the gradating sunset design, so popular in the architecture of that day.

This broad door opens into a broader hall. At the left are two broad, tall, deep bookcases – also forever open, and a glance invites you to partake of the feast of reason, the menu of which was selected by Dr. J.Y. Bassett – and such viands they are.

It is said that physical ills are human but a Divinity has prepared antidotes near at hand to relieve those ills, just take the prickly pear for instance. If a lot of prickles happen to get in your fingers while you pluck the fruit, there is the friendly mullein leaf ever near to rub them out. In all malarial regions grow herbs that cure. And there is the ever present switch that aids the small boy who will "eat the peach of emerald hue," against parental orders.

So it is with Dr. Bassett's book case. You are apt to find Tyndall, or Huxley, Voltaire or Darwin, in close proximity to the Confessions of Faith and Thirty-nine Articles of the Protestant Church, Boccaccio's Decameron not far from the History of the Reformation and those old Christian martyrs of the 15th and 16th century, on a level with Paine and Fielding, Cervantes and George Herbert, Plutarch and Rare Ben Jonson in familiar touch with Hudibras, and the Shakespeare side dishes, seasoned with a poet here and there and something of spicy nature that gives a peculiar dash of sentiment and flavor, delightful to the mental palate.⁴⁰ Then there are the concordance and encyclopedias, along with the histories – whose opinion were accepted, or not, as Dr. Bassett pleased. This intellectual feast was over one half a century ago pre-digested by the talented Doctor, whose keen wit, and sense of humor made him the most agreeable of companions.

On the wall of Miss Laura's room is a three-quarter length portrait of John Young Bassett, painted by Francis, an artist forgotten now. It is a face that seems too serious for a man yet in his thirties, it is earnest, with prominent features, thick dark hair, over a broad forehead, fine dark observant eyes that do not show the humor that in life was so expressive. The portrait is one that will attract attention in Dr. William Osler's book, *An Alabama Student*, published in Oxford, England in 19098, where it adorns the frontline in the photogravure reproduction.

In the closing paragraph of the preface to his book, in which tribute was paid to Dr. John Y. Bassett, Dr. Osler says, "Pictures such as these, detached as many of them are from each other, have but one value to the student – to waken that precious quality of human sympathy, which may enable him to appreciate that in the simple annals of such a career as the *Alabama Student*, a life may be as perfect as in a Harvey or a Locke."

William Osler, M.D., F.R.S., and a Regius Professor of Oxford, England and honorary Professor of Medicine of Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, in his volume of biographical sketches, published last year, was inspired to give to it the title of *An Alabama Student*, from reading articles from Dr. Bassett's talented pen in Fenner's Southern Medical

Reports issued in 1849-1851. Osler at once felt the vibrations of a kindred spirit and wrote Miss Laura Bassett for information of her father. She answered by sending a number of characteristic letters written by Dr. Bassett from which the learned Oxford Professor quotes very copiously. *An Alabama Student* is evolved, tho Thomas Doyer, Oliver W. Holmes, John Locke, John Keats, Sir Thomas Browne, Elisha Bartlett, with other famous physicians are among the sketches. It took a half century to do it, but the x-ray of a discerning spirit caught the germ of genius that shown thru the years of obscurity, drank the elixir from the skull of Dr. Bassett – a village doctor – while we, remarks The Old Mahogany Table, exclaim, “Alas! Poor Yorick!”

Dr. Bassett’s father was one of a line of fine blood and distinguished in both England and America. Among early Governors of Delaware was Richard Bassett. His father, Isaac Bassett married Anne Davidson who was the first cousin to Robert Fulton, of steamboat fame and an honoree in the recent celebration in New York of the Hudson –Fulton discoveries. Dr. Bassett was born in Baltimore, and his family were intimate friends of Edgar Allan Poe, and in the autograph album of his sister, Margaret, are verses from the brain and pen of Edgar Allan Poe.

The Old Mahogany Table fairly gave a screech at the mention of the name of Miss Margaret Bassett. She was by far the cleverest, wittiest woman that Huntsville ever had in social life, and was an equal of her brother’s in deep intellect. She is spoken of now by her former contemporaries as “Old Miss Bassett,” yet she was only 51 at the time of her death. Some of the old people who recall her now are in their 60s, 70s and 80s, wearing high-heeled shoes, fluffy ruffle dresses buttoned up the back, with elbow sleeves, painted faces and blondined hair – yet dare say, “Old Miss Margaret Bassett!”⁴¹

Dr. John Young Bassett had the soul of a true lover in spite of his scientific tendency and with his artistic brush he breathed out his soul on March 1st, 1829 to Isaphoena Thompson, daughter of Asa Thompson. Asa was a brother-in-law and the first cousin of “Old Blue Thompson.” The front page of an autograph album for his sweetheart is an index to his volume of sentiment – a sentiment that breathes out love, tender, sweet, and responsive. It is artistic as well. An arch in the sepias is defined, formed of blocks that bear the name Isaphoena and the apex of the arch is adorned with musical instruments. At the foot the blocks read, Thompson. Beneath the arch is an open song book, in forget-me-not blue with music and words of Tom Moore’s “Sandy & Jenny” with this sentimental verse:

“Well health to those cheeks,
Tho they bloom, not for me,
And peace to they heart,
Tho another’s it be.”

1 March 1829 Moore⁴²

On the turned back blue cover of the song book is revealed the true lover’s name, “Bassett.” Beneath this sentiment is the following verse –

Ay, for the soul is better than its
frame,
The spirit than its temple, What’s
the brow,
Or the eye’s luster or the step of
air,
Or color, but the beautiful links
that chain

The mind from its rare elements!
 There lies
 A talisman in the intellect which
 yields
 Celestial music, when the Master
 hand
 Touch its cunningly. It sleeps
 beneath
 The outward semblance and the
 common sight
 Is an invisible and a hidden thing;
 But when the lip is faded and the
 cheek
 Robbed of its daintiness, and when
 the form
 Matches the senses no more, and
 HUMAN LOVE
 Falter in its idolatry, this spell
 will hold its strength unbroken!

This signed alone by a branch of forget-me knots, with just enough flowers to spell BASSETT, tells his love story. This probably a translation as he often indulged in turning into his own mother tongue, the beautiful thoughts of scholars of Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the classic in Greek and Rome.

Dr. Bassett was not a scoffer and in a letter to his wife from Paris, in 1836, he says "God save me from a country without religion and a government with it." In answer to her warning in regard to the dangers of infidelity, he assures her that in that land of mighty minds, such as Voltaire and Rousseau he does not feel so much an infidel, as when at home surrounded by Church-going people. And he also tells her that he has stopped swearing almost entirely as the people in Paris would not understand him if he did.

Isaphoena was very pious and prayed often and frequently. Her husband in a semi-serious mood, had for her a Prie Dieu made, very Ecclesiastical in its architecture, and presented it with the remark, "Isaphoena, here is a Praying Machine for you, that you can use in your own closet, and won't have to pray all over the house."

Miss Laura still has her mother's "praying machine" in her "Hant Room," alongside the old portraits on the walls, pictures of Madonnas, Siege of Troy, Jerusalem Delivered, and the string of human bones and a skull with other incongruous subjects in harmony met.

Dr. Bassett did not object to the piety of his wife who was a strong ballast to him, ever cheery and unawed by adversity, her love was the purest tie that Heaven ever wove for him.

When John and William Bassett, his sons were baptized by Mr. Lay in the first Church of the Nativity, the Rector said to Dr. Bassett,

 "Name these children"
 "O pshaw," he replied, "Isaphoena name your children."
 The congregation smiled of course!
 There was a marked versatility in his genius that could see the beautiful in
 "The skeleton of ancient Greece,
 enveloped in a mantle of recollection."

And enter into the vivid imaginings of the Ionian Bard, follow the Stagyrite in his peripatetic philosophizing, trace the lineage of Hippocrates, paternally from AEsculapius, and

maternally from Hercules. Then drop to the level of his fellow citizens by painting a ballroom floor for a lady friend in his artistic, beautiful designs. Then after this act, read his copy of Telemachus, bound in one volume and translated in French, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and English.

Here is a translation made by him from a German author, The Mahogany Table says, and tho, more than fifty years have passed since he was laid to moulder in the dust, a glow of vitality hangs around his name, and we revere the man who could give medicine for a body and a tonic for the Soul, might as Cardinal Newman's Lead Kindly Light, thru these glorious line:

Father I call on Thee!
Amidst the roar of the smoky battle;
And sputtering of the cannon's rattle.
Ruler of wars I call on Thee!
Father O lead Thou me!

Father O! Lead Thou me!
Lead me to victory! Lead me to death!
I know Thy commands! I yield Thee
My breath!
Lord as Thou wilt, so Thou lead'st me!

O God I have known Thee!
O God I have known Thee!
Alike in the leaves of Autumn falling!
As amidst the clouds of battle calling!
Fountain of grace I have known Thee;
Father O bless Thou me!

Father O bless Thou me!
My faithful soul I commend to Heaven
Thou canst, too, take the life that Thou
Hast given,
Living or dying, bless Thou me!
Father I pray to Thee!

Father I pray to Thee!
'Tis not for simple fame or lucre,
We come a Holy cause to succor,
Falling – fighting, I pray to Thee,
O God receive Thou me!

O God receive Thou me!
When death with thundering summons
Calls;
And my exhausted body bleeding falls,
I pray O God, receive Thou me!
Father I call on Thee!



If Miss Clay relied heavily on *The Medical Reports of John Y. Bassett, M.D., The Alabama Student* as a source, the reader can easily forgive her because she also added so much about the relationships of the family. Indeed, Dr. John Bassett was an exceptional man by any standards. John Young Bassett was born in Baltimore and among his worthy forefathers Richard Bassett (1745-1815) served in the Revolutionary War, at the U.S. Constitutional Convention, in the U.S. Senate, and as the 14th Governor of Delaware.

Dr. Bassett arrived in Huntsville with his younger brother, Frank, after graduation from medical college. In 1828 they opened an apothecary, and John practiced medicine. Unfortunately his brother, about 22, died painfully of tetanus from wounds received from the accidental bursting of his musket in January of 1830. To show their respect, Frank's mates of the Huntsville Guards wore crape on their left arms for 30 days. Doctor Bassett married in 1831 Isaphoena Thompson, daughter of Dr. Asa and Polly (Watkins) Thompson, thus becoming an in-law to the powerful Thompson and Watkins clans. Although the Bassetts had at least eight children, apparently only two adults survived when this article was written.⁴³

Miss Elizabeth Humes Chapman also wrote charmingly of her friend, Miss Laura Bassett. Miss Laura was "the most cheerful person imaginable. She was short and round. Her face was long and wide, her eyes wide... and her thin gray hair was done up in a tight ball at the back of her head." She taught for a time at the Huntsville Academy and "spread the art of being happy with the artlessness of a child. She radiated vigor and walked with head thrown back with a bouncing step. Her costume was always the same – a plain, tight fitting bask, full ankle length skirt and soft square-toed shoes." Miss Chapman added a bit that the Clay sisters may have discreetly left out of Laura Bassett's life story. "In her youth her fiancé had been killed by her brother in a duel. In addition her sister, Lenora, was an invalid. Miss Lenora, confined to a wheelchair, used her time to do fancy work, crochet, and knit. Another sister, Alice Lee Bassett Young died in 1877, leaving three children for Miss Laura to rear.... She had met each situation and made of it a crown."⁴⁴

Ma Isaphoena Bassett's "praying machine" was a narrow, desk-like kneeling bench, common in the Catholic Church. This is also possibly a reference from Matthew 6: 5-6 about praying, not in public, but alone in one's own closet. Continuing to praise Dr. Bassett's family library and the versatility of its owner, the editor of the *Democrat* threw in the most famous native of Stagira, Aristotle; the Greek physician Hippocrates for whom the physician's oath is named; the Greek doctor so skilled in healing, Aesculapius, that his very staff is a medical symbol today; Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope; and Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890) who wrote the lyrics for *Lead on Kindly Light*.

The Bassett house at 600 Franklin Street provided more connections within the social layers of town as Ben Lee Young, John Bassett's grandson, married Sophia Lowe Davis of "The Grove." Many of her family portraits and possessions later found their way naturally to the Bassett home. This may help account for the over crowded attic there.

Number Seven

November 24, 1909

Grimes in the Twenties

Frye from 1847 to 1872

Echoes of the Past

Old times were good times – they were
sweet to know
Old friends who loved us – friends
whom we loved so;
Dreamin’ of ‘em always here where
memory dwells,
They’re like sweet song’s echo – far-off
chime of bells.

Old times were good times – sweet to
see again
Smilin’ in the sunshine, tangled in the rain;
The old, the pleasant places of mead –
ows bright with dew.
The kind, the gentle faces, a-light with
love for you!

Old times – we love them – here, in
memory’s book
Lookin’ at a fellow like his sweetheart
used to look!
Stay with us forever, dear times so
tender-bright,
Till the evening bells are ringin’ and
Memory sighs – “Goodnight”
Frank L. Stanton⁴⁵

A home-coming of the old portraits would be great fun and an occasion of general rejoicing and like a gathering of the clans, suggested the Mahogany Table the other day. Many portraits of interest of those now, “gathered to their fathers,” have been gathered by the progenitors of the third and fourth generations and carried off to other states to hang on the up-to-date walls. There were two of Frye’s best portraits sent to Waco, Texas, when those of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Lewis were carried out there, and they are in the home of Gabriel Winter, a great grandson. And in Memphis is a portrait of the Fackler girls, Sallie (Mrs. Pynchon) Elvira (Mrs. Nichol) and Gypie (Mrs. Terry), also painted by Frye, ad libitum with regard to pose and dress.

They were all children, but Sallie wears a gown of plum colored velvet en traine, and is seated in a velvet chair in the woods. Elvira and Gypie are in white gowns, with pink and blue sashes. The latter carries a guitar, which she never did play on. It is a beautiful fiction in art from nature. Mrs. W.T. Morris (Leila Lacy), has in her Virginia home the group portrait by Frye of the three Lacy girls, Fanny, Leila and Lulu, the daughters of Mr. Theophilus Lacy. In Canton, Miss., New Orleans and Georgia are portraits of the George Steele family owned by Sue Steele (now Mrs. Hoffman), Angelo Steele and daughters of Ellen Steele Tracy. In Canton Mrs. Hoffman has a Grimes portrait of her father, **George Steele**. Grimes also painted a portrait of Mrs. Steele but a turban of the artist's imagination was placed on the head, that the original did not think becoming, and she never wore, so she destroyed the canvas.

Speaking of the Steeles said the Old Mahogany Table, George Steele had an unusual history and one that reflects credit on his name for ambition, energy and thrift. His grandfather lived in Virginia and was an extensive planter, owning several farms. He married the second time a gay young widow who fell heir to most of the property of the old man. His son lost his by a security debt and moved down to Madison Co., Alabama with Mr. William Fleming and "Aunt Sallie" Fleming, about 1817-1818 when George was just 18 years old, and only lived a short while after arriving here.

In 1823 George Steele married Eliza Weaver, daughter of Matthew Weaver, also a Virginian. They had seven boys and girls and the family was a happy one. George Steele became a famous contractor, architect and builder, and he knew his business from the making of the brick to giving the artistic finish in fancy fresco to the interior walls.

He had an airy castle idea of an old Virginia farm that was owned by his Grandfather Steele, and it was his pet sentiment to reproduce the buildings, and raise stock on his Alabama "Fancy Farm." He was unfortunate in the consummation of his dream of Fancy Farm with its fine stock, but in 1837-38 there arose at the foot of Monte Sano a mansion of three stories, magnificent rooms, in the center of an oak grove – if not as his fancy painted, yet home with a thousand sweet memories of its grand old rooms, ever filled with happy guests, the flower garden with its gorgeous array of blossoming plants, a fine orchard. While George Steele was accumulating wealth for his family and friends to enjoy, there was no decay of ambition. His children were given the best collegiate education, and his hospitality was princely.

There were 14 rooms in Oak Place mansion, a large brick stable, and the servants' houses of brick. In the stately old parlor, in 1846, was a memorable gathering of the patriotic young soldiers who were going to the Texas frontier and join the ranks with others who had the Revolutionary vibrations inherited and tingling in their veins to fight with Mexico. It was a tearful parting with sweethearts, and many a lover was moved to tell his love and win the promise from his dulcinea to consummate their plighted troth at the marriage altar, when the war was over. And here were married the Steele girls, Sallie to R.H. Winter in 1857; Ellen to E.D. Tracy in 1858; and Sue to C.C. Shackelford in 1866. The Mahogany Table looked brighter with a dozen or more social memory lights shining from its heart.



How a Presidential Election was Celebrated in March 4, 1845
Oak Place—the Scene of Historic Occasion

Let me tell you of one great feast of soul at Oak Place. It is an old story to the oldest citizens remarks the Old Mahogany Table, but it is like a pretty romance to read and hear it now.

When this landscape garden valley,
with its culture of to-day,
Stood a half unbroken forest, on its
Eastern slope, there lay,
Years ago a rustic village, on the mar-
gin of a Spring,
Where the trappers brought their pill-
age to its sleepy traffic's ring.

And it struck deep root and strengthened
by fair fortune smile upon,
'til a growing town of promise cast its
shadow in the sun;
where the famous "Old Bell Tavern"
stood with proud, important air,
with its steps and porches sloping
downward to the dusty Square.

And the Old Stage woke the echoes
with its winding bugle's thrill
As it rolled with nosy clatter thru the
peaceful village still;
And the fertile, fruitful country lavish-
ed on the town its wealth;
And the mountain breezes blowing,
filled the balmy air with health.

"Til it stood the polished center of the
famous valley lands;
Settled by the courtly gentry from the
Old Dominion strands;
And her sons grew, crowned with ge-
nius, and her daughters polish-
ed e'en
As the cornerstone of temples, charm-
ed with grace and cultured mien.

From "Across the Years" by Carolee Pleasants

As another Presidential election and inaugurations has made history during the past year, the minds of the elder voters revert to the great campaigns and election of the past, with old and new methods compared.

Carolee Otey Pleasants, one of the most gifted of Huntsville's daughters, twenty years ago, wrote the poem "Across the Years," from which the above extract was taken,

because in it is so prettily interwoven the simple life of the pioneer days with the very strenuous one of today.

To hear the few old people now left tell of those olden days with the glamour of only love, beauty, chivalry shed upon them, seems like a fairy story – a romance rosy and real.

A little northeast of Huntsville, nestled at the foot of Monte Sano, and shadowed by its lofty cedar-grown heights, almost hidden by a grove of majestic oaks, that surround it is one of those fine old residential representatives of seventy years ago. It is big, with a refreshing air of hospitable thoughts intent pervading its entire architecture – massive stone porches, broad halls, and elegant rooms, said “Gath,” in a letter to the Philadelphia Times, large enough to drive a team thru, and famous as the scene of lavish hospitality in days gone by.

So effectually do the oaks shield the old mansion, that one must drive up to its portal, ere aught but the verdure of the trees and grandeur of the mountains is revealed.

Captain George Steele, the owner, architect and builder of this monument of that beautiful Past, was a politician, honest as the day and a good Democrat. During the Presidential campaign of 1840, Captain Steele picked out among a fine stock, a splendid ox that had never worn a yoke, named him Van Buren, and said he intended to celebrate the election of the next Democrat President with a grand free barbecue and serve Van Buren ox roasted whole. He was doomed to disappointment – Van Buren was defeated!

Nothing daunted, Captain Steele kept the ox on fattening diet, and in four years celebrated the inauguration of a Democratic President, when James K. Polk was received by a triumphant and happy party in the White House.

The ox had grown in grace and luscious physical proportions, and he was slaughtered for the feast given at Oak Place in March 1845. Four thousand citizens from Madison and adjoining counties and states with pleasure accepted the generous and courteous invitations, scattered broadcast to Whig and Democrat alike, and partook of the Van Buren ox, stall-fed and roasted whole.⁴⁶

All kinds of vehicles, from the lowly ox cart to the elegant carriages drawn by dashing teams were brought into requisition to bring the poor, the rich, the high and low, welcomed alike.

Long tables were arranged under the majestic oaks. On the center table, was a magnificent cake pyramid, four feet high, surmounted by a figure of President-elect, James K. Polk. This pretty conceit in confections Captain Steele ordered from Nashville, sending his own team to insure its safe delivery.

The barbecuing was the work of Mr. Smoot, an artist in that line, and Van Buren went thru the barbecuing process for twenty-four hours. With his handsome horns, highly polished – he presented a very luscious spectacle, stuffed with turkeys. There were pigs and lambs barbecued, hams boiled and their accompaniments in jellies, sauces and bread without stint, ice cream and cake, and immense cut-glass bowls of syllabub.

Matthew Weaver Steele, the gallant young son of the host, just home from college honors, delivered the address of welcome and Clement Claiborne Clay, a handsome young lawyer and a future statesman was the orator of the day.

Every man present received a hickory cane cut from Monte Sano, and the most prominent citizens were presented with canes highly polished by the well known slave, Charles Peck, and adorned with silver ferules and heads of gold or silver, engraved with the name of receiver and the date. Mr. Steele’s daughter, Mrs. S.S. Hoffman, still has several of the canes, and in The Old Home Place is the silver head of the cane inscribed with the name of John H. Lewis.

After the speechmaking, feasting and handshaking, a string band of the best picked banjoists, guitarists and fiddlers, from the plantation slaves, in happiest mood, played the Reels, Jigs and other dances, and in the grand old rooms, aristocrats and Democrats cut the pigeon wing, sang Auld Lang Syne, danced the Old Virginia Reel in gayest mood.

Few are left, sighed Old Mahogany Table, who recall those happy hours, the majority are "beyond the sunrise," who joined hands on that occasion – in which a social scene was presented in Huntsville, such as was never enjoyed before, and never attempted since.

"Ah, the instruments are shattered,
And the Strings are snapt in twain,
And the fiddlers are forgotten,
And will never play again."

Maybe it's all for the best, that it is out of style, said The Old Mahogany Table, cheerily, to serve such feast as that served at Oak Place. With my appendix gone I don't believe that ox Van Buren would set well on my constitution, to use a vulgar expression.

Pardon the frequent references to my lost appendix but it is a fact that every body who has once had one, loves to talk voluminously about the dear departed help 'em eat, and I am not different from others – save in the quality or the appendix cut out my middle, sobs the head of the Mahogany Table.



If Miss Clay seemed to chatter too much about family portraits, one must consider that portraits are a visual proof of glories of the past – especially when almost everything else is gone. The paintings, there on the walls for all to see, represented former status and better days. Thus by association, the Clays, with no money available now, were equal in many respects, to those currently wealthy families in town who boasted of their portraits.



The Frye portraits of the Clay grandparents, Mary (Betts) and John H. Lewis, were given to their second daughter, Ellen Lewis. She had married Gabriel Jordan, a civil engineer who supervised the construction of the Huntsville Depot. This family moved to Mobile and then later settled in Waco, Texas. Their daughter married John Gano Winter, a noted lawyer, and the portraits, which were never seen again in Huntsville, went to the Winter's son, Gabriel.

The Fackler girls may be a little more complex to consider. In the magnificent house at 518 Adams Street lived merchant-entrepreneur, John J. Fackler, and his wife Elizabeth. Their daughters, painted when the girls were young, were Sallie, now in 1910 Mrs. Lewis C. Pynchon; Elvira, now Mrs. Nichol; and Mary (Gypsy), Mrs. David S. Terry. The painting apparently was in Memphis.

This should probably be Mrs. John T. Morris (Leila Lacy) of Virginia who had a group portrait of herself, and her sisters, Fanny and Lucy (Louisa) the three youngest daughters of Frances and Theophilus Lacy. Mr. Lacy was the cashier at the **First National**

Bank. In early years, the cashier was required to live in the bank building, and his large family lived in an elaborate apartment in the upstairs of that impressive building.



The George Steele family portraits became even more scattered, and it is difficult to determine who had which portrait in 1910 much less almost 100 years later. One thing is certain: No one has the reviled painting of Mrs. George Steele in a turban!

John Grimes painted portraits of William Fleming and his wife, Sarah Lewis Fleming. Fleming arrived from Virginia in 1818. Two years later he was wounded while trying to break up a fight, and his portrait shows the scar.⁴⁷

Here the editor, Miss Clay, leaves the realm of what can be verified, and talks about family stories as she recalled them. It is known that George Steele, the architect of so many of Huntsville's fine antebellum buildings, came from Virginia. Where he studied or how he obtained the extent of his architectural skills is unknown.

George Steele's grandfather, Captain Steele, served under General Washington in the Revolutionary War. Young George apparently recalled the homestead he had left behind in Virginia and produced his own mansion, Oak Place, on Maysville Road. This home has, among other unusual features, uniquely designed front doors, which roll into a metal track in the walls on each side. The massive front doors were opened, or closed, with silver doorknobs. The right-hand parlor measured 28 by 30 feet, with walls 16 feet high. The bottom floor was fashioned as an English basement with a large room, spacious enough that when all the doors were opened there was room for a banquet table. Altogether there were 11 rooms with a kitchen annex and rooms for the servants. Steele's four sons went to college, and the three daughters went north to boarding schools before marrying.

Newspaper accuracy is important, and one should not try to recall dates without the actual facts. After all, the marriages of the Steele sisters were before Miss Clay's time. Sallie Steele actually married Richard W. Minter in 1853; Ellen married Edward D. Tracy in 1856; and Sue married Charles C. Shackelford in 1866.⁴⁸

Originally George Steele, an avid Democrat as many on the frontier were, had planned a barbecue to celebrate James K. Polk's election to the presidency in 1840 – an event that did not occur. But the young ox had only been temporarily saved, and four years later when Polk (a Democrat from Tennessee) was elected, the party announcements were sent out – four thousand invitations! The cake was made in Nashville and delivered to Oak Place by wagon cart. Van Buren, the unfortunate ox, was roasted whole, stuffed with turkeys, and displayed with his horns highly polished. Each man who attended the gala event, regardless of his politics, received a commemorative walking stick, with a silver-capped cane going to the more select gentlemen in the group.

Mr. Wyatt P. Smoot, in charge of the barbecue that evening, continued to be affiliated with the Steele family. In the 1860 census Mr. Smoot, his wife and their three children (Manda, Osborn, and Susanna) still lived on the property of the widow Eliza Steele and her family.

Apparently the Pigeon Wing, a fancy dancing step that involved waving the arms, knew no political bounds. Everyone participated. Perhaps this is the place to leave the reader with a mental picture of all those folks decked out in their best finery dancing the night away at Oak Place.

Number Eight

December 1, 1909

Grimes in the Twenties

Frye from 1847 to 1872

Old Mahogany Table was sad when a member of its board recorded a passing of an old friend – for she had been here just as long as I have and her mother was Mrs. Lewis’s devoted friend, and father was the friend of Mr. Lewis, and his family physician. Mary Fenwick Lewis and Mary Jane Erskine were the most intimate friends from babyhood and the last visit that Mary Lewis paid on February 14, 1898 was to call on dear Mary Jane, who had been ill – and three days later, she was with God, and Mary Jane’s violets were placed in her hands. Mary Jane’s tears flowed and a benediction sent to the bereft children of her old friend, Mary Lewis.

Ah yes! Sighs the Table; just wait until the ice has grown around your heart, then to visit the scenes known in your childhood, or those sunned by your parents’ memories, if it is not by thoughts of Lang Syne, melted – well, it is useless to try – it is frozen beyond all hope of thawing out.

Did you ever think remarked the Old Mahogany Table, reflectively, that there are some tender yet strong memories of the past, in which something indefinable has linked, as if by an electric chain with the present and future?

Virginia belonged to that past. It was the fountain head of all that was good, true, noble and beautiful in man and woman. It was the ideal seat of a government without a peer or parallel. And to whose laws, wealth, culture and fashions the entire South bowed. The Mother of Presidents held the weight in scales against any other States, over the Southland. It required true grit for a native of royal descent to desert the Old Dominion of their aristocratic grandsires, with the heritage of “I am Lord of all I survey” idea. But there came news by a sort of grapevine telegraph method, tempted the aristocrats to leave their Virginia heath and turn to the Land of Promise – Alabama.

River obstructions were removed, mountains were lowered – all dangers diminished regarding the meeting of a hostile Indian tribe. Beyond the hills of home was a new State to be added to the family of the American union – a Baby to be born to add to the family a name that bade fair to lend luster to the Union. The garden spot where the American Eagle – not the Stork – dropt the new state in its mother’s lap, was Huntsville, and it stretched itself from the Tennessee to the Gulf and call lustily to Mother Virginia for recognition. Huntsville was the family pride and when Virginia’s noble gentry came down to greet the infant it was skirted with groves of pines and magnificent oaks, and rising green hills, that seemed to undulate to the western horizon while the green fields and the meadows by a magic touch, ripened and burst into full fruition, with grain the abundance, and cotton that sold for 25 cents a pound. And there was the great motive power for mills in the gushing flow of crystal water that disengaged itself from the rugged picturesque boulders, clothed in a wild luxuriance of verdure and supplied an elixir of life to the inhabitants, and by the ingenuity of Dr. Thomas Fearn, on its stream, floated the royal crafts that annually carried King Cotton and his courtiers down to the Tennessee River, from whence they moved to markets of New Orleans and disseminated through the world – that is, where the altogether is not the national costume.

The Erskine and Russels

As you enter the front door of the James H. Mastin residence glance at the walls, and you will see three of the most interesting portraits in the town. One of Dr. Edmund Irby by Grimes, painted in the early '20s when the young painter was in his home; and two by Frye, of Dr. Alexander Erskine and his wife Susan Catherine Russel.

Dr. Irby has dark hair and eyes, with a kindly expression. He wears a dark suit, white shirt and high stock collar.

Dr. Erskine has bright auburn hair and blue eyes (physical virtues that have been handed down with other strong family characteristics) and his wife Susan Catherine with the brown eyes and hair, a face placid and sweet and a royal air of the Queen Mother, homemaker and Christian lady. She wears a black dress and fine white lace collar. The Old Mahogany Table settled itself to tell something interesting just as it was told by "young Dr. Zan Erskine," who is now 77 years, and his father's namesake.

The Erskines were Scotch-Irish and blue stocking Presbyterians, and were descended from Rev.d Ralph Erskine, the eminent Presbyterian Divine of Scotland. Old Dr. Alexander Erskine's father was Michael Erskine, whose antecedent located in Cecil County, Maryland and he married a young widow, named Mrs. Paulee. I diverge here to tell a most romantic history of Mrs. Paulee.

Mrs. Michael Erskine Captured by Indians

After the Declaration of Independence had been proclaimed, Mrs. Paulee with her father's family was moving to Kentucky, from Pennsylvania about 1776 or '77. As they crossed thru the Southwestern Virginia country into the Miami section of Ohio, a band of Red Men appeared, with their Chief, Wahbahpossito, (meaning white bark) and Mrs. Paulee was captured and was held in captivity for four years. Wahbahpossito befriended and protected her gallantly thru the years of her life with them. A party of hunters passed that way, saw the beautiful pale face, and called on the Chief Wahbahpossito and offered him \$600 ransom for the paleface captive, which he accepted and Mrs. Paulee was restored to her people, who were then in southern Virginia.

She married Michael Erskine and died when in her 94th year. And this was the mother of old Dr. Alexander Erskine, whose portrait by Frye hangs on the wall in the **Mastin home**.



It is a strange coincidence, says the Old Mahogany Table, that, at the time Dr. Erskine's mother was captured by Wahbahpossito's band, another Mrs. Paulee was captured. She escaped and returned to England. Some years after she returned to America, and when ninety years old, she was murdered in the city of Baltimore.

Dr. Erskine, Sr., studied medicine in Philadelphia in 1814-15 and moved to Huntsville in 1818. He was married in 1820 to Susan Catherine Russel who was a daughter of Col. Albert Russel, a Lt. Colonel in the Revolutionary Army under Washington, and his wife, Anna Frances Hope.

Dr. **Erskine** occupied the residence on **Franklin Street**, (now the home of his grandson, William J. Mastin). His partner, Dr. Thomas Fearn, 527 Franklin was next door (The Garth residence). Between the two homes, was a Doctor's Shop, (there were no drugstores then), where the two doctors did their pill rolling, dissecting and performed other duties of their profession. Their practice in city and town extended over a radius of 50 or 60 miles, and visits were made on horseback, over foot trails thru the forests, and over the mountain passes, river and creeks, regardless of driving rain, snow, or the burning heat of the Summer sun.

Drs. Erskine and Fearn were for 19 years, in partnership. When Dr. Fearn had other business interests, Drs. Erskine and Sheffey formed a partnership that continued six or eight years. Doctor Fearn was one of three prominent Fearn brothers from Virginia; Thomas already mentioned married Maria Henderson and Richard Lee Fearn married Mary Jane Walker, daughter of John Williams Walker.⁴⁹



Colonel Albert Russel moved from a Virginia farm, near Leesburg, down to Spring Hill, Tennessee and, lured by news of 25 cent cotton in Madison County, Alabama, moved to Huntsville in 1818, bought an extensive farm, just west of town, and built a splendid cedar log cabin on Russel Hill. The house now occupied by Frank Mastin was built by the Colonel's son, Dr. Albert Russel, the father of John Hope and Mary.

There were eleven children born to Dr. and Mrs. Erskine, nine of whom lived to maturity. Dr. Erskine died in 1857, and his wife joined him in the year 1892, full of years and honor. Dr. Alexander Erskine, who in this year, November 30th, 1909, is the last surviving child of Alexander and Susan and is a scholar, a Christian gentleman and for 50 years has been a beloved prominent practitioner in Memphis, and for 21 years held in the Medical College at Memphis, the Chair of Obstetrics and Disease of Children, retiring on account of age, a few years ago. He and his brother John, were educated at the Greene Academy, and studied medicine with their father and at the New York University. In 1858 the two brothers went to Memphis and a large practice was built up by them. In 1878 when yellow fever raged, John fell, a martyr to duty, under the blow of the ruthless sickle of Death, deeply mourned. Alexander was spared thru many epidemics and is now, at 77 years, the beloved, honor friend and physician in Memphis.

Dr. Alexander Erskine [Jr.] was married twice. His first wife was Mrs. Augusta White, and his second wife Miss Louise Gordon of Columbia, Tennessee. There are several children of the last marriage. Their home is in Memphis.

The Mahogany Table loves to talk of the dear old friends of Mr. John H. and Mary Betts Lewis.



The Clay sisters, in this small community, would have known many of these people or at least their family's stories. Apparently their mother, Mary (Lewis) Clay, had visited her friend Mary Jane (Erskine) Mastin the day before Mary Clay died. The women were born in the same year, 1825, but Mrs. Mastin lived on until November 23, 1909.

Virginia Clay regarded the First Families of Virginia, with pride knowing full well that many of those in Huntsville who arrived from Tennessee, Georgia, or the Carolinas had come from Virginia first. Joseph Baldwin's character in *Flush Times* said that a Virginian

“never gets acclimated elsewhere; he never loses citizenship to the old Home. He may breathe in Alabama, but he lives in Virginia.... He manifests his magnanimity by never reproaching non-Virginians with their misfortune of birthplace.... he thinks the affliction is enough without the triumph.”⁵⁰

The reference here was to Dr. Thomas Fearn, promoter of the construction of the Indian River Canal from the center of town at the Big Spring to the Tennessee River that would allow cotton to be sold in New Orleans and then to world markets.

Mary (Lewis) Clay’s friend Mary Jane (Erskine) had married James H. **Mastin**, and they lived at **515 Franklin Street**. While the painter, Grimes, lived with the Mastins, he also painted Dr. Edmund Irby. Irby had married Mary G. Mastin. Doctor Irby died before the Clay sisters were born, so Virginia Clay was describing the portrait from seeing it at the Irby home. William Frye painted the next two portraits mentioned of Susan (Russel) and her husband, Dr. Alexander Erskine. Erskine had married Susan Catherine Russel in Huntsville in 1820, and they had a large family. “Young” Dr. Alexander (called Zan) related the narrative of his grandmother’s adventure.

Almost unbelievably, the amazing story of Mrs. Paulee, later Mrs. Michael Erskine, was quite true. Only the name of the Indian chief had been changed, perhaps the result of a Southern accent. On Sept. 23, 1779 John Paulee and his wife Margaret (Hanley), age 27, were traveling from Monroe County, Virginia, now West Virginia, to Kentucky. Near Rich Creek, east of Petersburg, Shawnee Indians attacked their group and Mr. Paulee and their baby were mortally shot. Margaret Paulee, her sister-in-law, Polly, and a child were taken prisoner. The Shawnee party continued on with their captives to a village between the Miami and Scioto Rivers in what is now Ohio. At the time of her capture, Margaret was pregnant and in May gave birth to a son she named John. She was adopted by an Indian family named Wa-ba-kah-kah-to and remained with them for five years until Margaret was exchanged for the sum of \$200. Along with eight other ransomed captives, she walked to the Greenbrier settlement arriving in May 1784. A year after her return she married Michael Erskine and they had five children, Jane, Henry, William, Alexander, and Michael Erskine. Before her death at the age of 90 in 1842, Mrs. Erskine dictated her story to her grandson.⁵¹ The story of the murder in Baltimore of the other Mrs. Paulee has not been confirmed.



Although the Editor Miss Clay does note Erskine’s ancestor, Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, she may not have been fully aware of the importance of his standing in Scottish church affairs. As a dissenter from the Church of Scotland, Reverend Erskine (1680-1754) was quite distinguished among leaders of his day. He felt that the members of a congregation had a right to choose their own pastors. (His father had been imprisoned for this nonconformity, and his brother, Ralph, was also a prominent minister in the movement.) Erskine and three other ministers led the way for formation of the Secession Church of Scotland.⁵²

Mrs. Paulee-Erskine’s son, Alexander, was educated as a doctor at the University of Pennsylvania and he too moved toward better prospects in the new lands. Dr. Alexander Erskine settled in Huntsville at 515 Franklin Street about 1817. Here he married Susan Catherine Russel in 1820. His youngest brother, Michael, and his family stayed with them for three years before Michael Erskine moved farther west, eventually settling in Guadalupe County, Texas. Three of Michael’s daughters were raised with their aunt and uncle Erskine in Huntsville.⁵³

Doctor Alexander Erskine practiced medicine with his friend and next-door neighbor, Dr. Thomas Fearn. (One might not expect Miss Clay to use slang, but a pill roller was a *common term* of the day for a pharmacist or doctor.) Doctor Erskine's next partner was Dr. Lawrence Sheffey. This doctor and his wife, Elizabeth (Humes) Sheffey, raised a large family of twelve children. Unfortunately he was a better doctor than bill collector and, with his death of cholera in 1865, she was left destitute.⁵⁴

Nine of Susan and Alexander Erskine's eleven children grew to maturity and three became doctors, Albert, Alexander, and John. Albert chose to practice in Huntsville, and the other two settled in Memphis. Dr. John Erskine, a man of noted leadership qualities, served on the Memphis Board of Health. Unfortunately he led the vote to oppose the quarantine of the city in 1878. Although Memphis had suffered from Yellow Fever before, this epidemic took more lives than the Chicago fire, the earthquake of San Francisco, and the Johnstown Flood all together. The first death in the city occurred on August 13th, and on September 17th, Dr. John Erskine died probably as much from overwork as the disease that also struck him down. Dr. Alexander Erskine survived the epidemic and lived until 1913. He became a noted physician and professor of gynecology at Memphis Hospital and Medical School. The reader will recall that it was his son Dr. "Zan" Erskine who told the Paulee story.⁵⁵

Now to the Russel family. Doctor Erskine's wife, Susan Russel, was from another prominent family in town. Colonel Albert Russel, veteran of the Revolutionary War, arrived in Huntsville from Leesburg, Virginia in about 1818 and built his home on what became known as Russel Hill, near Butler High School. Huntsville's most prominent hotel in the 1920s was named in honor of an early president of the Studebaker Corporation, Russel Erskine, a descendant of the families.

Number Nine

December 8, 1909

Echoes of the Past

Apropos of my story of the barbecue at Oak Place given by Capt. George Steele to celebrate the election of Col. James K. Polk to the Presidency, said the Old Mahogany Table, I must tell how the President-elect was received in Nashville, by his home people. The account was given by a special letter to THE DEMOCRAT of December 4, 1841, **Governor Clement C. Clay**, who was an intimate friend of President Polk, and his son, Clement C. Clay, rode thru the country to attend the celebrations and participate in the festivities.

Young Clem Clay was active Editor of THE DEMOCRAT during the campaign of 1844 and edited it for the very best interest of James K. Polk and received many tributes of praise from prominent contemporaries, as did J. Withers Clay, his brother.

It was a triumphant occasion and the Democratic citizens of Nashville made it a memorable one.

Tho the Old Mahogany Table was at that time a Whig in its political views on account of the tri-daily attrition with John H. Lewis, controlled its head, it heard the defeat of Mr. Henry Clay discussed dispassionately and the jokes exchanged with his Democratic friends were good-humored – for John H. was always full of joke and jest, as you will find out later.



Reception of President-Elect Polk In Nashville

How a Political Contest Was Closed Sixty-five Years Ago

Nashville, Tenn., November 30, 1844, Special correspondence to THE WEEKLY DEMOCRAT:

Contrary to all the signs and appearances on last Wednesday night, the sun rose beautifully on Thursday and gave us one of the brightest and loveliest days of the year.

It was just such a day as the great Democracy desired to enable them to give a comfortable manifestation of the sincere gratification with which they hail the elevation of Colonel Polk to the Presidency. It was an affair which might well gladden the heart of any American citizen. And if our Whig friends, in larger numbers had joined in the manifestation of respect for the President-elect, we should pronounce it one of the very finest exhibitions we have ever witnessed. Those liberal high-minded Whigs, who joined in the manifestation of respect to the President of the nation, we tender thanks of the Democracy.

A Grand Procession

We shall undertake to describe the procession, which seemed to be a line of carriages, horses, and footmen without end.

In view of the many great rallies of both parties during the Summer we pronounce the procession of Thursday as GRAND, as REALLY SPLENDID! The several military companies made a fine appearance in the long line. We were very glad to see the gallant Tenth Legion, from Sumner, in its rich uniform, in attendance. Col. Polk rode in an open carriage drawn by four beautiful bays. Along the whole line of march, for more than three miles, he was constantly greeted with the hearty cheers of his joyful friends. When the procession reached the Square, and brought itself into one compact mass, the whole public square seemed covered with human beings, horses and carriage. The carriage in which Col. Polk rode was halted in front of the Nashville Inn, and near the Court House steps, from which the latter place, the Hon. A.O.P. Nicholson addressed the President-elect on behalf of the immense crowd. Mr. Nicholson said:

The Democracy of Nashville had to him assigned the happy privilege on this occasion, the privilege of tendering to him the warmest congratulations upon the late signal triumph of their cause. He could assure him that in the vast assemblage of Democrats who then surrounded him, there was not a single one whose heart was not then running over with delight – not one who did not most cordially unite in tendering him sincere congratulations upon his elevation to the Chief Magistracy of the Union! (Cheers.)

Congratulations of such an assemblage might well excite in his bosom a feeling of commendable pride. Some of the gallant old pioneers of the country, who came in advance of civilization, bearing its torchlights into the then wilderness, were here to day, and were lingering among us, as living monuments of what our fathers were who settled this land. He saw to: in the assembly many chivalrous sons of Tennessee who covered themselves and their State in glory in the last war.

He saw a vast mass of the bone and sinew of the country – the working men. There, too are those gallant volunteers, who flew to their arms at the first tap of the drum, and were yet at their post when the last roar of the anon died away upon the ear.

All these said Mr. Nicholson, Unite cordially in congratulating you, but all would leave an aching void still, were he not assured that his fair friends, so numerous in attendance, also united in the joyous congratulations to one who had imbedded himself in their hearts and affections by his private virtues, amiability, intellectual capacity and a faithful devotion to Democracy.⁵⁶

Then continued The Old Mahogany Table, Mr. Dickinson began to review Old Hickory's administration, especially his foreign relation policy that "We ask for nothing but what is right, and submit to nothing that is wrong." He was careful to let the President-elect know that he was expected to act accordingly and see to it that Oregon and Texas were both added to the Union. Of course the cheering was as wild as any over the recent big anti-amendment victory in Alabama.⁵⁷

Then the President-elect arose and in his usual graceful, aristocratic and magnetic manner bowed, and replied:

"I return to you, sir, and to my fellow citizens, whose organ you are, my very sincere and unfeigned thanks for this manifestation of the popular regard and confidence, and

congratulations which you express for me, upon the termination and result of the recent political contest. I am fully sensible that they cannot be personal but it is the eminent success of our Democratic common principles that has spread joy over the land. The political struggle, thru which the country has just passed, has been most exciting. Extraordinary circumstance made it so. It is terminated now, and I sincerely hope and believe has been decided by the sober and settled judgment of the American people.

In exchanging your mutual happy congratulations on this result, the Democratic party should remember in calmly reviewing the contest that the fellow-citizens who differed in opinion have equal rights with ourselves; and that minorities as well as majorities are entitle to a full and free exercise of their opinion and judgment, and all alike are entitled to respect and regard and in rejoicing over the Democratic success, it should be in no spirit of exultation over the defeat of Opponents but because we honestly believe that our principles and policies are better calculated than theirs to promote the true interests of the people and of the country. In the position in which I have been placed by the voluntary and unsought suffrage of my fellow citizen it becomes my duty as well as pleasure faithful and truly to represent in the Executive Department of the government, the principles of our Democratic party, who elevated me to it. But, at the same time, it is proper that I now declare that I shall not regard myself as the representative of a party only – but of the whole people of the United States.”

(Here the Old Mahogany Table stops to chuckle, because before its appendix was removed, it was a Whig, and then the way that the President sat on Mr. N’s dictation, did its old Mahogany heart a word of good.)

I trust, continued Col. Polk, that the future policy of the Government may be such as to secure great prosperity and happiness for all, without a party distinction. (Loud, prolonged cheers.)

Colonel Polk, attended by his friends Dr. Robertson and Major Claiborne, (who was a brother-in-law to John H. Lewis who was the Whig head of the Old Mahogany Table) and Mr. Nicholson then rode to the Nashville Inn amidst shouts of the warmhearted Democrats.⁵⁸

Well, said the Mahogany Table, this did not end the festivities. All during the afternoon immense crowds pressed around the Inn to shake the hand of their President and express a personal gratification at his and the Party’s immense victory.

After dark, the manifestations of joy were renewed. On Wednesday, ladies of Nashville decorated the Democratic Liberty Pole in handsome style with evergreens and flowers. And at night it was lighted up with many lamps and presented a SPLENDID SIGHT! The Old Mahogany fairly quivered, when I shouted “splendid sight,” just as John H. Lewis, in mock triumph had read it in THE DEMOCRAT 65 years ago.

The military companies were out in fine style with torchlights that made the streets as bright as day. Houses of our Democratic friends were ablaze with light – tho this illumination was preconcerted. Everything seemed to go off in good style – the Democrats all were as happy as we ever saw men and nothing was said to wound the feelings of the Whigs.

Captain Nicholas Davis

I do not believe, remarked sadly the Old Mahogany Table, that there was a man in the Whig party that suffered more from disappointment at Henry Clay’s defeat, than did Capt. Nicholas Davis (the grandfather of Mrs. David D. Shelby and Hon. Wm. Richardson, who is our present Representative in Congress.) He was a warm personal friend of Henry Clay, and had gone to school with the “Millboy of the Slashes” in Hanover County, Virginia, and had retained a warm place in his heart for his old friend.

Miss Honrietta Davis has a portrait of her grandfather, Captain Davis, that was painted by John F. Francis in September 1844 the year that saw the fall of Henry Clay. It is a life-sized bust portrait and shows a strong face, with a large broad forehead, clear blue eyes, a firm mouth. An indomitable will tho a kindly nature pervades the features, and his gray hair combed up and his tulle white shirt and stock, the coat he wears betokens the gentleman planter. He was a large man, strong and well proportioned, industrious, an unusual executive ability that enabled him to manage his many slaves with skill, was a marked characteristic. At Walnut Grove, in Limestone County, he built a splendid cedar log cabin; a castle it was to him and good enough for a king. There he gathered many friends who enjoyed his lavish board, his magnificent horses of the finest and most famous racing breed. Capt. Nicholas Davis and his wife were most genial of companions. Walnut Grove became the rendezvous of Statesmen, prominent citizens, rich, poor and alike were happy recipients of a hospitality unsurpassed by those who preferred a colonial mansion to a log house.

His wife was Martha Hargrave, who was of Quaker descent, from John Pleasants. Her portrait by Francis shows a sweet round face, tho with strong character. A helpmate, adored by her loving husband, a kind mistress to her slaves, who thought nobody was compared to "Ole Miss and Ole Marster Nich," and ever the hospitable hostess.

Captain Davis was born on September 19th 1781 in the "Slashes" of Hanover County, Virginia and moved to Limestone County, Alabama in March 1817. His family, the Davises and Raglands, were among the earliest settlers of Yorktown from England. He was one of the framers of the first Constitution of Alabama, a member of the first Legislature that in 1819 convened in Huntsville and also in 1820 at Cahawba, where he was the president of the Senate and continued in that office for ten years. He was an impartial, firm, honest, efficient and a faithful officer, says Pickett, and from his appearance, "he might have been pointed out as one of the noblest specimens of an intelligent yeomanry."

As a Whig member of the Electoral College he represented Alabama in the Van Buren and Harrison contest, and again as Elector saw the defeat of his friend, Henry Clay. Captain Davis died at his old Walnut Grove home in September 1856, mourned by his friends.

It is a little curious, remarked The Old Mahogany Table, parenthetically, that all this chapter in my story happened just 65 years ago and the majority that James K. Polk received was 65 – he receiving 170 votes and Clay only 105 in the Electoral College.

That campaign result made special impression upon me from the fact that John H. Lewis pounded my poor head with his fist when he heard the returns because he lost his wager and had to pay George Steele \$7000 for that brick kitchen building with 13 rooms, at The Old Home, instead of \$3,5000 had Henry Clay been elected.

The spirit was upon the land in the election year of 1844. Politics in the South, even then, centered on campaign promises offered at orations and followed by hand shaking at local barbecues. In April of that year, Clement Clay Jr. became a special editor of the *Democrat* to follow and report the progress of the elections in Tennessee and Alabama. Having lost the 1840 elections, the Democrats were now preparing for their next chance, and the "Great National Mass Convention" allowed Democrats to campaign without restraint. Nashville was bursting with visitors who pitched tents at, where else – Camp Hickory. Governor Clay, a long-time friend of James K. Polk, was considered a leading speaker. Clement Jr. reported for the folks back home via the *Democrat*. His account noted there were two miles of food on the great dinner table and "the utmost good order prevailed.... No spirituous liquors of any kind were permitted to be publicly brought on the grounds." Governor Clay continued to speak for his friend Polk through the summer and fall, and Clement Jr. also did his part. Proudly the

Clays extended an invitation to the president-elect Polk and his wife to visit the Clays and their supporters in north Alabama.⁵⁹

The Davis family has already been introduced to some extent. The two grandchildren noted are William Richardson Jr. (1839-1914), who was the child of William Richardson Sr., and Ann Bradley (Davis). During the Civil War, young Richardson enlisted as a private, and rose to captain in the 50th Alabama Infantry. He was wounded, captured, and as a prisoner escaped, became a spy, and was recaptured. As such, he was then sentenced to be shot. According to the family stories, Nathan B. Forrest rescued him. Later Richardson became a Judge and succeeded Gen. Joe Wheeler in Congress. David Davie Shelby (1847-1914) was a lawyer and at one time Huntsville City Attorney, an Alabama state senator, and judge of the U. S. Circuit Court. He married Eason, daughter of Zebulon Pike and Wilhametta (Eason) Davis.⁶⁰

The Davis granddaughter, Honrietta, remains unidentified. Artist John F. Francis (1808-1886) worked as an itinerant portrait painter only briefly and settled on still life paintings after 1850. It is unclear if he ever came to Alabama, or perhaps the senior Davises traveled north for their portraits. Martha Hargrave Davis was the daughter of Jesse and Mary (Pleasants) Hargrave and granddaughter of John and Agnes (Woodson) Pleasants of Quaker heritage.⁶¹



Captain Nicholas Davis and Henry Clay (1777-1852) were both born in “the Slashes” a section of Hanover County, Virginia. Henry Clay, a founder of the Whig Party, made five failed bids for the Presidency, but later said, “I would rather be right than President.” Truly a major participant in national politics, he was known as “The Great Compromiser.” Henry Clay and Clement Comer Clay were distant cousins, but Senator Clay’s widow, **Virginia Clay-Clopton**, proudly distanced the two men. She implied one to be more worthy and scholarly, “Henry Clay’s father was a dancing master, and Clement C. Clay’s was a tiller of the soil and a lover of letters.”⁶²

Virginia Clementine Clay noted her other grandfather, John H. Lewis, unfortunately lost his bet on the outcome of that very Presidential race and paid his builder George Steele double the amount for the addition to the Lewis house on Eustis Street.

Number Ten

December 15, 1909

GRIMES'S PORTRAITS of the late Governor Clement Comer Clay and his dainty little wife, Susanna Withers, are at The Old Home of the granddaughters, the Misses Clay, on Maiden Lane. They and the FRYE PORTRAITS are highly valued and have an honored place on the parlor walls, I am pleased to see, said the Old Mahogany Table a few days ago.

Suppose we examine these portraits by Grimes:

This one of Governor Clay is a three-quarters length, and was taken when he was 32 years old. At first glance you are not impressed that this is a portrait of a leader among men and no follower. It has a pleasant expression, broad intellectual forehead, with dark hazel eyes, a clean-shaven face with a firm mouth, that displays determination and indomitable energy of mind and body. These characteristics are strong we all admit, with exception of the sternness. Those who knew him in his home life, and as a friend, say that he was the gentlest of gentlemen, and as courtly as a knight, an excellent raconteur and a genial companion. Tho he allowed no liberties as an old citizen of Tuscaloosa once said of him in a reminiscent article:

"Everybody respected and admired Governor Clay, and tho his friends felt an affectionate regard for him, no one of them dared slap him on the back or accost him in familiar terms. There was, accordingly, an *esprit de corps* in his dainty, refined little wife, who was his junior by ten years, and for fifty-one years his faithful companion."⁶³

Over the mantel in the back parlor is the portrait of Susanna Claiborne Clay, with her second son, John Withers Clay in her lap. The mother is as straight as an arrow. She never touched a back of a chair and was never known to get off of her dignity. She wore a narrow 12½ slipper, and a number 5 glove. She was 5ft 6 in tall. Her voice was as soft as a lute, and she never touched even a door knob without protecting her hand with her kerchief or tip of her fingers, if forced. The young mother is seated in a red velvet armchair, and

(A frivolous person giggles and says something about all of the Grimes' ladies having their portraits painted in that same chair.)

The Old Mahogany Table declined to notice the interruption and continued. She wears a black gown, revealing her pretty, girlish throat, with a full air lace ruching around the neck of it, and a red coral necklace is clasp around as graceful a throat as Grimes has ever painted. Her face is very sweet, and complexion very fair. Her eyes

"Are grey in the twilight shadows,
And blue in the sunlight glow."

"She looks like a Queen," was the excuse that the artist gave for placing a crown of jewels on the mother's head which she, of course, never wore. The mother was in her 22nd year and Baby Withers was about 16 months old, with beautiful earnest brown eyes. He has on a suit of dark red velvet, made with trousers and low neck and short sleeves waist of the same material. A hat of black velvet with a full black ostrich plume is on his precious baby head, and in his hand is a pink rose, given him as a peace offering. He did not desire that his baby form be perpetuated on canvas, so pulled the rose to pieces. The young painter caught the inspiration and in the portrait perpetuated the babe strewing rose leaves at the feet of his "sainted mother," for whom, in filial adoration in after years, till her death in 1866, he kept

fresh and sweet the rose leaves in her path, by his pure life, piety and love for her. A love that, in after years, was returned to him in the tender devotion of his own children.

Sir Walter Raleigh, in the time of Queen Elizabeth, has the credit of encouraging the Hon. Sir John Clay, of Wales, England, to send his young sons John, Charles, and Henry to America, and family history further states that Sir John gave them each £10,000 with which to begin life in the New World, remarked the Old Mahogany Table, a few days ago.

(If this story is genuine, I very well understand why there is a general, tho sporadic kick, in my internals over the hard manual labor that has been our fate. The Dollars of our Daddies and Grand Daddies would come in handy, along with the legacy of a good name. We love the good name legacy, and the dollars would be a valuable appendix to keep up the standard set in the table of contents.)

The Old Mahogany fairly shook with rage at this reference to appendix as if something personal was meant by it.

Whenever you write family history, do it with your back close up against the skeleton closets. A little darkey in Huntsville was asked if she ever had any ancestors, and replied: "Yessah, all of us chillun had'em might bad, and dey jes broke out all ovah us in biles, but mammy she give us a dose er castor ile an' we ain't had none since – never – castor ile sho is a mighty good thing fer 'em."

Well, says the Old Mahogany Table, as neither history nor tradition has in any store given you "bile ancestors" it is wise to be silent and thankful.

The three Clay brothers landed with Sir Walter about the year 1621, on the James River, in what was then known as the Virginia Plantation. Alabama Clays are descended from (1) John Clay and his son, (2) John; and his grandson, James. James married Margaret Muse and their son, William, was born in 1760. He went into the Revolutionary at sixteen years of age and fought thru the war. He was in several tours and was at Yorktown when Cornwallis surrendered.

William Clay was married at the age of 27, in 1787, to Rebecca, a daughter of Samuel Comer. They were Clement Comer Clay's parents. They moved to Grainger County, east Tennessee, and had a large farm. Rebecca Clay was full of energy, had an executive ability worthy of a man. She had her retinue of slaves that she trained to be the most accomplished servants. Under her guidance they raised sheep, and from the shearings, they gathered, they spun and wove into cloth that she taught them to cut out and make into warm clothes for everybody – white and black – on the farm.

It was in Rebecca's day that the sea captain brought over to South Carolina, some flax seed that started a woman to growing it and out of it make linen. Rebecca invested in some of the flax seed and successfully raised it and learned to bleach it. Her grandsons, Clement, Withers, and Lawson, recalled with pleasure their visits to Grandfather and Grandmother Clay's farm, where the servants wore white linen in the Summer.

Ask the spirit of these old pioneers of the South that sprung from English aristocracy what freedom meant to the country, and they would tell you that it meant the formation of a new creed by the separation of Church and State; the revelation of a wonderful innate genius; a great awakening of the true celestial spirit of freedom, more homely and mechanical than classical and, in short, was simply the creation of utility adapted to mankind and to an active life inspired the impulses, will, and intellects, directing them into the channels of a visible universe, entirely material.

The Old Mahogany Table breathed a few minutes, and then reverently said, “Yes, and this germ of freedom forced out the beauty and strength of our women making to flush, circle and flower in a perfect womanhood.” This is what Freedom meant!

We often wonder how those boys of the Revolutionary Army received their education, the Old Mahogany Table says. They must have been ambitious and great students of the few books to which they had access, and possessed the broadest sense of observation. When William Clay wrote to his young son, Clement, in 1812, the letters preserved in the family now are indicative of the refined, intelligent gentleman, careful in diction and chirography. In one of his letters he tells Clement:

“Your Grandmother is enjoying fine health and has full possession of her faculties, reads the papers each month, conducts her own domestic affairs and rides five miles on horseback to meeting every Sunday that the weather permits.” Evidently, the horseback rides to meeting did not injure her, as she was 96 years old when she died. A spirit rapping of John H. Lewis on the Old Mahogany Table suggests that had the old lady not taken those long rides to meeting, she might have survived in another century, future generations of her grandchildren, who couldn’t walk a couple of blocks to meeting, with gasping for breath. Such was the energy that was the inheritance of Clement Comer Clay.

Let us review his life as a statesman and citizen. He was educated by an austere and unlovable cousin, a Mr. Muse, and was a graduate of the University of Knoxville. He studied law under Hon. Hugh Lawson White, the famous Tennessee lawyer and statesman, and in 1809 was admitted to the Bar. In 1811 he came to Huntsville, and his career as a good citizen, true patriot, and wise, pure statesman, and able lawyer and jurist began, continued thru 55 years – and ended in 1867, without a stain on his name.

In 1813, Mr. Clay enlisted in the war with the Creeks as a volunteer, and as Adjutant guarded the Tennessee River section, then surrounded by Indians. In 1817-18 he was elected a member of the Territorial Legislature and was a member of the first Constitutional Convention that met in Huntsville in 1819. Fifteen members were appointed to draft the Constitution, and C.C. Clay, then 30 years of age, was one of that number. He read the proof sheet, which, with corrections in his handwriting are in the possession now of his granddaughter, Virginia C. Clay.

C.C. Clay was elected judge of the Fifth Judicial District when but 30 years of age, and later, when Supreme Court was held by the Circuit Judges, although the youngest member of the body he was elected the first Chief Justice of the young state of Alabama. Judge Clay was on the Supreme Bench four years, resigning in 1823. In 1828 his County sent him to the Legislature, and he was elected the Speaker of the House for the sessions of 1829-31, and was elected to Congress. As a Representative, his views were in harmony with those of Old Hickory. He favored a strict Revenue Tariff, and ad valorem duties and disapproved the Nullification measure then pursued by South Carolina. In 1835 he was elected the Governor of Alabama by a majority of 13,000 votes – the largest ever given in any previous election. And, in 1837 he was elected to the United States Senate without opposition.



Senator Clay resigned his seat in the Senate in 1841, on account of his wife’s poor health. In 1842 he made a Digest of the Alabama Laws. In 1843 by a special appointment, he filled a vacancy on the Supreme Bench. The last years of his active life were devoted to his legal profession. He was a member of the Episcopal Church, having been confirmed by Bishop Nicholas Hamner Cobbs, and in January 1867 died in its Holy Faith.

There was a pleasant social side that made C.C. Clay many friends, and his home was the abode of hospitality most generously dispensed. He had as his guest in 1813-14 General Andrew Jackson and when President Cleveland visited Alabama in 1890, an old citizen wrote the following reminiscent story:

“The visit of President James Monroe to Huntsville is one of the most important events of the young State, and it made an impression all over the county. He rode in without warning, on June 2nd 1819 and created consternation. He was accompanied by Lieutenant Monroe, U.S.A. and his Private Secretary, Mr. Gouveneur. They came to examine the situation of fortifications, via, Augusta, Georgia and returned via Louisville and Lexington. The breath of the good people soon returned, and they set about to make the Chief Executive’s stay pleasant.

A dinner was given by Clement C. Clay, at which a number of citizens gathered. Mr. Clay made an address in which he assured the President of the people’s pleasure at his visit. The next day he was given a banquet by Mr. Clay, LeRoy Pope, Toby Jones and Henry Minor, all illustrious names in the history of the state. He departed, it is said, with a new idea of the patriotism of the South and the hospitality of the people of Alabama.

It seems paradoxical, said the dear Old Mahogany Table, that a man like Gov. Clay could bend to amuse his little grandchildren – who adored him – with a songs like:

Walk a-talka Ginger Blue git over
Double trouble.
Ole Virginny never tire.”

There was an ancient Dame
And she loved a gay young man.
She always cast sly looks at him.
But only thru her fan.
With winks and blinks
This waddling minx,
Could scarcely keep her one eye idle
For she loved the gay dragoon
With his long sword, saddle bridle.

Chorus: Whack Rowdy dow dow
Dow dow Dowdy Dowdy
Whack Rowdy Dow Dow
Dowdy Dowdy Day!

I agree with the Old Mahogany that there never was such a beautiful song, and its weird minor strain and my own Daddy’s [Withers Clay] vigor in “Whack” part thrills me now!



The Grimes’ portrait of Governor Clay currently hangs in the Huntsville Heritage Room of the public library. The portrait of his wife, Susanna, with her son, John Withers Clay, is among the missing portraits. One begins to understand the nature of a quintessential Southern lady from this description of Mrs. Clay. Moreover one suspects, even though Mrs. Clay always wore gloves, a servant stood at the ready to open her every door.

Here Virginia Clay acknowledged that the gift of £10,000 to each of three original Clay sons might not be true, but more importantly, the money could be used right then and

there. It is to be hoped that those particular Clay brothers did not arrive with Sir Walter Raleigh's venture, the Lost Colony at Roanoke. Jamestown colonists arrived in 1620, but unfortunately for him, Raleigh was already beheaded. The flax seed and linen clothing, as seen by the Clay boys, must have made quite an impression on Rebecca Clay's grandsons as they visited in Grainger County near Knoxville. Clay's law education was actually received from his great-uncle Hopkins Muse, and one understands the source of the third Clay son's name, Hugh Lawson. Right Rev. Nicholas Hamner Cobbs, the much-loved first bishop of the diocese of Alabama, Protestant Episcopal, confirmed Governor Clay. The genealogy here is sound except for the death of Governor Clay who died September 6, 1866.⁶⁴

If President Cleveland visited Huntsville, the stopover was not noted in local newspapers. There was, however, a Cleveland Club in the 1880s. (More about that later.)

After his election, President James Monroe enjoyed a four-month trip, from June until August 1819, touring the country. His alleged purpose was to inspect Southern fortifications, but this President understood the need to bring together the young country. His mission was to see and be seen by the populace. The small, tightly knit group who visited consisted of the President; Samuel L. Gouverneur, his private secretary; and Lieutenant Monroe. Samuel Gouverneur and Maria Hester Monroe were married just a few months later in March of 1820; she was the first presidential daughter to marry at the White House. (The two young people were first cousins as Hester Kortright, his mother, was sister to first Lady Elizabeth K. Monroe.) The setting was lovely, because the White House had recently been completely refurbished since the disastrous fire set by the British in 1814.⁶⁵ Lieutenant Monroe was likely a son of the President's brother, David.

The unexpected arrival of President Monroe and his entourage in Huntsville on June the 1st electrified the entire community. Leaders, Capt. Irby Jones, LeRoy Pope, C.C. Clay, Col. Toby Jones, and Henry Minor, pulled themselves together and organized a dinner the next day with the most presentable one hundred citizens. After they enjoyed a sumptuous meal, the gentlemen raised their glasses for 18 toasts accompanied by the firing of cannon and appropriate songs. The citizens of Murfreesboro, Tennessee were the hosts to the distinguished travelers two days later, ready or not.⁶⁶

Number Eleven

December 22, 1909

THE FRYE PORTRAITS that are on the parlor walls of The Old Home are beautiful in their likenesses and as works of art, remarks the Old Mahogany Table, and Mr. Frye seems to have been inspired to his best work in the portraits he made both of the Clay and Lewis families.

Over the piano, between the two front windows, hangs the handsome portrait of Susanna Claiborne Withers, the wife of Governor C.C. Clay, three-quarter in length. She wears a gown of black silk, of the style of 1847, with a dainty throat lace collar, and a ruffle of lace at her wrist, and falling around her in graceful folds is a white crape shawl with deep-knotted fringe. Her hair is smoothly combed over her ears.

She was only 47 years old, but there were in-laws who criticized her vanity in not wearing a cap. Her life was one devoted to her family, and her executive ability enabled her to have about the most accomplished servants in the town. Each Fall and Spring she would go to the plantation, have every seamstress to come to the log house, and clothes were cut out from homespun cloth and made up for every slave on the plantation under her eye. Tho she never did anything but the most delicate needle work, embroidery and bead work with her own hands.

When the grandchildren spent a day at Grandma Clay's she had beautiful little dresses and fresh suits for them and they were "little gentlemen and ladies." When they spent the day with Grandma Lewis, they tore around like Comanches from attic to cellar, ran up and down the brick wall and climbed every tree that was climbable, and Mammy Sue gave them something to eat on the back kitchen gallery whenever they were hungry. Grandma Clay taught them hymns and read stories of Maria Edgeworth, and taught them to sew and knit. At Grandma Lewis's the Lewis girls (there were eight of them) played practical jokes on them, showed them how to make kites and dance, told them fairy stories and taught such songs as –

“White folks I sing to you
A song that am quite true
Of myself and my banjo strings,
And you and you and you;
Now Sam don't grin I say;
My strings are all in tune,
Jes't lis'en to de banjo play
Ter de white white folks
'Round' de room.

Grandpa Lewis, who was a Whig you know, sang Jim Crow:

“Ole Ginul Jackson, don't care a peg
Straight up an' down like a hand dog's leg”

Chorus: Turn erbout jump erbout.
Do jes' se – ev'y time I turn erbout
Jump Jim Crow.



Grandma Clay was loved and held in respect as the children's Queen, while Grandma Lewis was their chum and an adored one, said The Old Mahogany Table.

On the right of the folding door is a Frye portrait of **Mary Lewis Clay**, wife of John Withers, the second son of C.C. Clay. In that painting done in 1847, when she was 22 years old, she wears a corn colored Parisian silk gown décolleté, with full skirt and tight waist and a long light blue velvet opera cloak that is bordered with ermine, is loosely tied across the chest with a blue silk chord. On her arm is a gold bracelet set with blue lava medallions. Her black hair is drawn over her ears, and a white rose is on the right side. Her eyes are blue and complexion fair. There was really something psychological in the correct way that a little darkey read the character of the originals in these two portraits, said the Old Mahogany Table. The little darkey was sent in the parlor to make a fire, and he ran out, brumbling and

saying, "Ize skeered ter stay in dar by myself. Ize skeered er dat grand looking over der pyanner. She looks she say: Will you hurry up an' make dat ah fiah, er I'll make yer mammy whup yer. But dat lady wid de banjo she jes say, 'Gwan honey, jes' do de bes' yer kin, I don't keer.'"

That was the idea exactly. She never shouldered "little troubles," but there never were such homemakers as Mary Lewis and her daughter Mary Lewis Clay. They were both women of the brightest natures, highly accomplished and gifted teachers. They sang, and played on the piano and guitar, and at Christmas time, Grandma wrote plays for her children that were presented in the parlors of The Old Home, with the prettiest tableaux and latest songs out. When Mary came back from Paris, they had French plays, recitations and songs, and Mary taught her sisters the latest dances, that she had learned in Paris from a former ballet dancer – the Polka, Cracovienne, Redowa, Waltz, Varsovienne, Cachuchs, Hornpipes and others, danced in costume.

On New Year's Eve just before the stroke of 12, Sarah Lewis, dressed as the Old Year, entered reciting the appropriate address, written by their mother, and at the stroke of 12, Ellen, beautiful and graceful, drest in a fancy costume, danced in with a song and a fancy dance as the New Year. Such a gay time they had – with only Pa and Ma as audience and their praise and plaudits were all sufficient to satisfy these Old Home actresses.

They were good times, and there was the happiest, jolliest family of eight of the most accomplished girls that ever gathered under one roof tree.



The Frye portrait of 47-year-old Susanna (Withers) Clay has just recently returned home to Huntsville and is on display at the Huntsville Museum of Art. Reminiscing, Virginia Clay admired her Grandmother Clay who taught them hymns and read them moralist tales by the Irish writer, Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849). But she and the other children delighted in Grandma Lewis, who allowed the children to sing slave music and told them fairy tales. And

there was Mammy Sue, feeding the youngsters snacks on the back porch of the kitchen at the Lewis house, so they could continue their madcap games. The lyrics to “Jump Jim Crow” vary greatly since first performed in the 1820s, and the music was quite popular even before it became really famous at minstrel shows. The portrait of Mary Lewis Clay, wife of Withers Clay, can just be seen in the photograph from their family scrapbook. At her boarding school in Paris, Ma Lewis had urged her daughter to study the guitar. Although the French thought it was “common,” Mrs. Lewis felt it was heart-warming to the family circle. Obviously the servant did not find who had the guitar.

All of the Lewis girls were considered musical, and before her marriage the second oldest, Ellen, played the organ at Church of the Nativity. In the letters exchanged while Mary was at her school, each of her siblings commented about what they were playing or what sheet music Mary should bring them. Abroad she also learned the latest dance steps, which of course, would be taught to all the young people as soon as she returned home.

If one is confused about the two women named Virginia Clay (Mrs. Senator Clay, Virginia (Tunstall) Clay and her niece the editor Virginia Clementine Clay), it is more difficult to sort out the three women named Mary Lewis. The oldest was, of course, grandma Lewis, Mary (Betts) Lewis. Her daughter, Mary Lewis, married Withers Clay. Their oldest surviving daughter, who never married, was also Mary Lewis Clay. Miss Mary died in 1901, aged 47.

The other Lewis children born after Mary were Ellen, who married Gabriel Jordan Jr.; Eliza who married William Lea; Sarah; Myra, who married B.F. Fauory; William Lindsay, who died at the age of 23; Florida; Elodie, who later married Samuel Tanner Jr.; and Lucy. Through unfortunate circumstances Ma Lewis, who shared her home with the Withers Clay family, also supported two widowed daughters and four spinster daughters. Ma Lewis had also lost two sons in their infancy. These infant stones are the only two markers set for the entire Lewis family at Maple Hill Cemetery; apparently there was no extra money for tombstones.

The family entertainment in better times at New Year’s, as told by young Virginia Clay, was part of the family stories, which were told by her mother. This was their heritage and their only inheritance. Ah, the dancing so lively. Difficult to identify now, the cracovienne was a lively Polish dance introduced in 1844; the redowa was a Bohemian folk dance similar to the polka and introduced in 1845; the varsoviennne was a French dance; and, the hornpipe was a dance usually performed by a single person, accompanied by someone playing a wind instrument.

At times the eight jolly dancing Lewis girls—Mary, Ellen, Eliza, Sarah, Myra, Florida, Elodie, and Lucy—must have tried the patience of their one brother, William Lindsay, and their parents Mary and John Lewis.

Number Twelve

December 29, 1909

David Lewis was the antecedent of a long line of Lewises in America, says the Old Mahogany Table. He was a native of Derbyshire, Wales, and along in the early part of the 18th century, he came over to America and landed on the coast of Virginia and settled in Hanover County.

His marriage resulted in his being a progenitor of ten children, 56 grandchildren, and Lord only knows how many greats. There were in the Revolutionary war 18 Lewises – all kin – and John H. Lewis’s father – Joel – was (a strange coincidence), born the same year, 1760, that Great Grandpa William Clay was, and in the same month, William Clay on August 4th, and Joel Lewis, the 28th, and was 16 years old, the same age, when he was enlisted in the Revolutionary army, in Surrey County, North Carolina.

Joel Lewis was one of them at the battle of King’s Mountain, North Carolina, and captured Ferguson’s jewel-handled dagger, that was greatly prized in the family. The patriotic sons – John H., Joel, Hickman, James, William Dixon, Coles, Claiborne, Eastham, Micajah, and David killed rats with the blade and for 50 years displayed the jeweled handle – and it disappeared!

In the old City Cemetery, in Nashville, is an old tombstone in the southeast corner near the Shelby vault on the other side of Pine Avenue, in a pile of old tombstones, and, on this special one of interest to us, remarks the Old Mahogany Table, is the following very interesting epitaph:

Sacred to the Memory of
JOEL LEWIS, who was born August 28, 1760.

He was an officer in the Revolutionary War, and contributed his full share of Patriotism, Prudence, and Bravery toward the Independence of the Country. He reared a Numerous and a very Respectable Family, and set them A Striking Example of the Life of a Virtuous Man, and Useful Citizen. He was a Firm, Practical Believer In the Great Doctrines of Revealed Religion; and with an Unwavering Faith and Christian like. He died on the 22nd of November, Anno Domini, 1816. Col. Joel Lewis was a prominent Man in his day: He was Davidson County’s first Senator in the State Legislature. He was a Member of That Body in 1796, and Again in 1799. His Seat was Contested in 1796 by James Maxwell, but Lewis was Seated. The Contest in 1796 was the First Contested Election in the State.

When the Old Mahogany Table read the Epitaph, and came to the paragraph of Joel Lewis’s “numerous and respectable family,” there was a smile that audibly rippled around its board. You see how provocative it was of a laugh. Joel Lewis married Miriam Eastham, and their union was blessed with 18 children!

John H. Lewis was fond of telling of how any children his mother had, and he had only “a pitiful thirteen” in his family group. John H. would tease his mother, and tell of the old darkey who preached:

“Yes my brederen, when you sarch de Scripters you’ll see dat in dem good ole days dey was de fergittentest set of people you ever see. Now dere was ole Fader Abraham he fergit

Isaac an' Isaac, he fergit Jacob, an' den Jacob he fergit de twelve tribes what fergit ev'ybody else in de worl' up ter de day ob de ole one-eyed Matthew who tells de tale ob deir fergitten qualities in de New Tes-ter-ment"

Now the family tree gives the fruit by name: William Terrell Lewis, son of David, was born in Hanover County, Virginia, and settled in Albemarle, thence moved to Surrey county, North Carolina, there married Sarah Martin, who presented him with 11 offsprings. He moved to Nashville, Tennessee, and died there about 1802. The family prolificacy did not die with William Terrell Lewis – oh no! Joel Lewis's branch alone, shows that there were besides the 18 children the goodly number of EIGHT-FOUR of the dearest, cutest, splendidest GRANDCHILDREN in the world.

It seems the greatest pity that Great Grandpa Joel couldn't have lived long enough to have his 18 children and his 84 grandchildren gathered about his knee, and coming home for Christmas at Grandpa's. Wouldn't it have been the sweetest picture in the world? Just think of EIGHTY-FOUR LITTLE STOCKINGS hanging up by one Grand'pa's fireplace. Isn't it just too cunning for anything!

The Old Mahogany Table almost split with laughter where its appendix used to be, at the thought of such a homely sight.

Think what a joy it would be to have 84 Xmas horns sounded, and 84 happy young voices greet one Grandpa with a chorus in the merry Xmas hymn:

"Carol Brothers Carol,
Carol joyfully.
Carol for the coming
Of Christ's Nativity,
And pray ye Gladsome Christmas
To all good Christian Men,
Carol Brothers Carol,
Christmas comes again.⁶⁷

Wouldn't a sight like that knock the Malthusian doctrine into a cocked hat and stretched Roosevelt's mouth to its utmost grinning capacity as he would exclaim, "I am delighted," chimed in the Old Mahogany Table merrily.

In those good old days, ideas were a little different – then the Good Lord was believed to send the babies, by an Angel from Heaven. Now any old buck rabbit or long legged stork or a country Doctor is credited with finding the little Darlings in a cabbage patch or a wild rosebush. It is any wonder that the little Darlings have the colic, prickly heat and roseola – if there is anything in suggestion! Exclaims the Old Mahogany Table, interrogatively, Poor Old Table! It is beginning to catch on to "Influence of suggestion" theory and floundering between Scylla of the Eddy and Charybdis of the new Worcester Emanuel movement creed!

Mary Lewis Clay was one of the oldest of Joel Lewis's grandchildren. In John H.'s family there were 13; his sister, Ann Octavia Knox had 14, and his sister Sarah Claiborne, added 12 to the family tree.

Miriam Eastham Lewis was married the second time to Col. Crabbe, and in 1841, died in Winchester, having for a number of years outlived her husband.

Old Mahogany Table, recalled many pleasant occasions of Christmas at its board, and Mr. Frye's portraits of John Withers Clay and Mary Lewis Clay are fountains of golden memories that in a surge of crystal stories of two beautiful lives gush with a happiness supreme born of a love sincere, earnest, tender and trustful thru the nearly 50 years of their

married life, and indeed, from their early sweetheart days, when she was just five years old and Withers ten. Mary would spend the day with Grandma Clay and Withers, always the gallant gentleman, would escort her home. She would drop her kerchief – he would pick it up, lift his hat politely and hand it to her. “Just to see him go thru with that absurd performance, I kept dropping it until he positively refused to pick it up again,” Mary told the children.

Here, at the right of the door is the Old Home parlor, hangs the portrait of John Withers, second son of Governor Clay, who in a letter of January 1820 to Dr. Thomas Fearn, describes him as “an usually fine boy, of whom I am very proud, arrived January 11.” The portrait was painted in 1847, by Mr. Frye, and is numbered among the artist’s best. It is three-quarters life length and very handsome. The face is manly, gentle, pure, a clear brunet complexion, fine intellectual forehead, black hair, carefully combed, brown eyes, full of the spirit of truth that his sweet life conveyed. His was a life of obedience to the Scriptural teachings – a life of chastity – taught him at his Mother’s knee and in precept and example by both parents. Poverty came to him, but not so dire – “Only enough to discipline the Soul, my Darling.” “Jehovah-jireh! Let that be your guide. He would say to mother, and, with a laugh and song of joy she would reply, “That’s all right, Old Man – you are undoubtedly the Jehovah-jirehist old Christian I ever saw!” Sealing it with a kiss.

Ah, sighs The Old Mahogany Table, I love you Frye, for your portraits at the Old Home, for –

You were a faithful painter of each
dear face,
And limned the mind and the gentle
grace;
And made the waters of Lethe go
Where sorrow held away and tears did
flow;
With magic brush, dipt in softest hues,
You let all your ART and HEART suf-
fuse!
And exprest the soul in painting rare
Of queenly forms and faces fair,
Of manly men who filled Fame’s niches
In State, the Nation – Home enriches!
Spirit of Frye! Thru Eternity,
Here’s homage to your memory.



The Lewis and Clay families were justly full of family pride. From Wales to Virginia and South Carolina, the Lewis prodigy forged their way into pioneer history. Lewis men were prominent in the decisive battle at King’s Mountain and the jewel hilted poniard, a prize of Lt. Col. Patrick Ferguson’s surrender, became a play toy for the numerous Lewis boys—until unfortunately it disappeared. Moving on to Tennessee, many of David Lewis’s family became prominent on the political scene. Colonel Joel Lewis attended the convention and helped write the constitution for Tennessee in 1796. Just to clarify, John H. Lewis’s mother, Mary Eastham Lewis, was first married to Joel Lewis and they had 18 children. After his death in 1816 she married Colonel Crabbe and settled in Winchester, Tennessee. Large families continued to run in the family. Among her daughters the eldest, Sarah Martin Lewis, married first James King (with whom she had three children) and then Col. Thomas Claiborne

(with whom she had nine children). Her younger sister Anna Octavia Lewis married William Knox, a merchant and banker in Montgomery, and they had 14 children.⁶⁸

Proud of her large family, Miss Clay acknowledged the theory by Thomas Malthus (1766-1854) that plants and animals in nature produce far more offspring than can possibly survive and this unchecked, resulted in poverty and famine. The reference to Roosevelt is of course, Teddy, whose newspaper caricature often showed him grinning with mouth widely agape.

This next paragraph offered versions about how babies arrive, of which Miss Clay had little real experience. The “Influence of Suggestion” is at the least common sense, however it was intended. In Miss Clay’s day the mythology would have been included in the curriculum and readers would know about Scylla, the dangerous rock on the Italian side of the straits of Messina opposite the whirlpool Charybdis—thus one is between two dreadful choices.

Reverend Elwood Worcester (1862-1940) was Rector of the Emanuel Church in Boston. He led a new movement that attempted to combine spirituality and lay counseling in the local church.

Number Thirteen

January 5, 1910

The Old Mahogany Table became interested in some old family letters the other day, and one from Mary F. Lewis written to her father, John H. Lewis, is so intensely Lewisy, that an extract might be interesting. Mary was just in her 14th year when the letter was written, and was on very familiar terms with "Pa." In the Summer, after his dinner, John H. would blow up his air cushion, and lay himself out under the trees. As soon as he was fast asleep, in a stealthy manner, Mary would creep up – softly unscrew the stopper – slowly the air would escape, with a whistling sound – and suddenly the pillow was collapsed, and John H.'s head with it. Mary was gone and no one in sight.

"You Mary," he yelled, "you rascal. Ma, make Mary behave!"

"That is YOUR blood, not mine, you manage it yourself," Grandma Lewis would calmly reply.

Such were the terms, and this is the letter:

Huntsville, Ala., May 25th, 1839

Dear Pa:

I have at last concluded to copy off the letter I began to write you before you left us. Ma is always saying,

"Mary, do spend your time more profitably," when, indeed the heat is so oppressive that I feel like sitting on your armchair and just reading all the while – luxurious quite? Parson Allan, who, you know attends particularly to every change of the weather, found his thermometer had risen to 89 and ours was at 85 degrees at 10 a.m. Fearing the extreme heat of the atmosphere would make some of the girls ill, Miss Swift gave us half holiday last Friday.

I am enlivening my leisure hours – after studying Ancient Geography, Geometry, etc., reading *Lady of the Lake*. Although I am no judge, I think that Sir Walter must be a fine writer to be able to interest, and to make his works understood and admired both by adults and children.

I am sorry that you went away, as I have not slept well since you left, yet am glad, so I can tease Lindsay just as much as I wish. Ma has taken off his cap and flannel wrapper, and he is the ugliest little bison you ever saw....

I feel a strong disposition to string out my letter so Ma cannot add a P.S. but fear she will cross it, and – to use one of my big phrase – in avoiding Scylla, I will plunge into Charybdis! The next time I write will use some of my stiff phrases, like those used by Elizabeth Young, who uses "epistles," instead of letters, in writing to her parents, and other classic phrases.

I hear that Dr. Pickett and his lady are here; and, he is gray as a rat and as deaf as an adder.

All send love – distribute as you please – you will find it all in the wafer.

I am, as ever, Dear Pa,

Your affectionate daughter,
Mary Fenwick Lewis

There was a sweet entente cordiale between Mary Lewis and her father, says the Old Mahogany Table, a camaraderie rarely seen between father and daughter.

John H. was a Master of Arts Graduate of the University of Knowledge, and had one of the most valuable libraries in the State including the ancient and modern classics, encyclopedias, and a rare collection of foreign and American magazines, and the best fiction. He loved his books – he and Mary discust [sic] and enjoyed them together. What she did, Pa thought perfect, “and adverse criticism of Pa or Ma, was like the sin against the Holy Ghost,” Mary said.

In a letter, written on June 18, 1846, to his University of Virginia classmate, Rev. Henry C. Lay, at the Alexandria, Virginia Theological Seminary, J. Withers Clay thus describes his finance:

“I wooed her with passionate fervor, when returning from a party, and won an assurance that she was willing if Pa and Ma were (like a dutiful daughter – God bless her!) Pa and Ma made no objection, and I was beatified!

But you would like to know something of my betrothed. Her name is Mary Fenwick Lewis. She is a daughter of a retired lawyer, who is in very comfortable circumstances with an ample fortune for himself and family, having 70,000 acres of Florida land. If my love had the wealth of the Queen of Sheba however, it would not add to her merits in my eyes. I have always been distrustful of myself when considering the merits of young ladies of fortune, lest money should be the chief attraction, and the sphere of my soul be limited to the circumference of the “Almighty Dollar.”

To return to my lady love – she is nearly 21 years old, about 5ft, 5 inches tall, weights about 125 pounds, is of a robust appearance, and is perfectly embonpoint. She is not a beauty to analyze her features. Yet, I think the touts ensemble would not fail to attract the attention of a stranger. Her hair is dark brown – approaching a black – her forehead smooth, high, expansive – her brow delicately arched, her eyes partaking of the blue, gray and hazel, each slightly, with express – soft, gently, pure never dull and when amused, sparkingly expressive. The nose I never could describe. I cannot say her’s is handsome, and the same may apply to her chin. Her mouth is handsome, full of sweetness in repose and expressive of great firmness when the occasion requires. Her complexion is fair and a health betokening bloom is ever on her cheek. There is a great deal of character in her face, the chief element being a heavenly purity of expression that distinguishes her to the degree surpassing any other face I can recollect to have seen. To assure you, that this is not a lover’s hyperbole, it is a general remark of persons speaking of her: “She looks so pure!”

It is this external characteristic that caught my youthful fancy, and has oft times held me spellbound in her sweet presence. Her face but mirrors forth the purity of a soul, chastened by early fervent piety, an elevated caste being communicated to it by a mind highly and judiciously cultivated and deeply imbued with religious truth. Her manners are gentle, winning, graceful, a compound of French politeness and English or American discretion – combing the artless simplicity and the purity of a sinless child, with all the dignified demeanor of the chaste and cultivated Christian woman. Until her 17th year her education was received in Huntsville, when she went to Paris, and returned the polished woman that I have described.

She was the playmate of my youth. Our families have been intimate, hence I know her well, and am not laboring under the delusion of a love-sick puppy. Now for her religious faith. She is now a member of the Presbyterian Church, and says she was influenced to make a profession of faith by me, tho she preferred the Episcopal Church. She joined the Presbyterian because her mother was one. Just to think of my being instrumental in making a schismatic!! When her mother asked her what we would do about our Churches she said, "I'll follow him, of course."

The very heart of the Old Mahogany Table softens whenever the name of Mary Lewis is mentioned, and its face shines.

On the evening of November 11, 1895, 49th anniversary of their wedding, I produced this old letter to Mr. Lay, and read it aloud, making absurd interpolations, declaring that he wrote just like Bertha Clay and the Duchess. Father was paralyzed, and could not express himself freely, but said with a spirit of exasperation, "Jennie you scoundrel! Shut up!" Then laught at his own vehemence, and tenderly joined in with Mother, as she sang:

"Always the same, Darby, my own.
Always the same to your old wife Joan."

She never lost the ideal womanhood that father had portrayed, either for her husband or children. Such was the woman who educated her children at home, teaching French, music, piano, guitar and vocal and elocution, besides English branches. In 1865, during the Civil War, in a letter to father, (she was 38 years old and had six children to care for), she says:

"I am giving ten music lessons daily, and go to most of my pupils as I can't afford an extra fire at home, and I am so happy in my work. I went down to Ma's (Mrs. Lewis) yesterday, to take her some butter I had bought from a country darkey. When Sarah saw the butter she screamed with laughter, as she had churned the milk, and by the advice of the Negro, had washed it in carrot water, making it a rich yellow. I paid one dollar a pound for it and the dollar paid for some coffee and sugar for Ma. They had nothing to eat but a little corn meal in the house, but were as happy as larks as they had received some pretty new songs and had learned them. I believe the girls would not care if their stomach grew to their backbones, just so they could have all the music they wanted. I have taught my quartet (Clement, 16, Willie 13, Mary 11, and Susanna 7) "Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming" and "Les Regrets" (and they sing them well). Susanna sings a good alto in perfect harmony."

When my mother taught us the poetry and preaching were beautifully blended. The didactic was exempt from the dry, dull digging of the stoic student under a merciless Master or Mistress. She was so happy, buoyant pure that a child under her guidance was buoyed with hope, faith, ambition and love for knowledge, so delightfully imparted. A government in her schoolroom and her family circle, never autocratic, was one purely popular, and the road to learning was thornless and no mists were on the hills' summit, ever sun kist, under her guidance and we strove to get near its effulgence. Christianity became to father and mother a living creed with the fullest realization that its wondrous story could never unspiritualize it. In the education of their children, they strove with the spirit of Horace, who in his odes to Roman literature's destiny said with a self-consciousness not egotistic in his belief:

"I have built a monument than
bronze more lasting,
Soaring more high than Royal
pyramids;
Which nor the stealthy gnawing
of the raindrops;
Nor the vain rushing of Bereas

shall destroy;
Nor shall it pass away with the
unnumbered
Series of ages and the flight of
time —
I shall not wholly die!"

Mother's Portrait

As you look from your painted canvas,
With your eyes of Heavenly blue,
I feel some day you will come back,
To those who long for you.

There's a lovelight warmly glowing
Within my heart that's true —
I'm a-weary Mother Darling,
Weary waiting here for you.

I long for your hand's soft soothing;
Your gentle, tender tone,
In lullaby, sweetly crooning;
"My child, you are not alone."

I know you will welcome me, Mother,
Hold me close to your loving breast,
When at twilight of life together,
God giveth, in Sleep, Sweet Rest!

Dec. 31, 1909

Virginia C. Clay

From an 1839 letter, written by then 14-year-old Mary Lewis, the father-daughter relationship does indeed seem dear. Members of the Lewis family were great letter writers and over the years many letters were kept and treasured. This collection, as separate from the extensive papers of the C.C. Clay family at Duke University, is preserved in the Heritage Room of the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.

Parson John Allan (1788-1843), the much beloved minister of the Presbyterian Church, was well known for keeping a record book of the weather. Miss Swift taught a Sunday school class in the church and at Mrs. Child's day-school. Ma Lewis in a letter in April 1843 mused that the widower Allan and Miss Swift might be considering marriage, they were "cunning old coons, both." His untimely death in November of that year ended any chance of that.



The Lewis baby may have looked like a little bison, but Mary's newborn brother, Lindsay, was especially cherished. The Lewis family had already lost two sons in infancy, John Herman at four months in 1833 and John Heber at 13 months in 1840. Elizabeth Young was apparently a classmate. Dr. Pickett (1790-1843) and his lady were probably Steptoe and Sarah Orrick (Chilton) Pickett from nearby Limestone County.

Withers Clay wrote of his love for his future wife,

Mary Fenwick Lewis, to Henry Champion Lay (1823-1885) an old-college chum and dear friend. This letter was written after Mary returned from “finishing” her education abroad in Paris. Her education allowed Mary to teach all the classes, which then enabled the household to survive during the Civil War and during Reconstruction. Reverend Lay accepted a call in 1847 to become the second minister of the **Episcopal Church** of the Nativity.⁶⁹

Charlotte M. Brame (1836-1884), also known as Bertha M. Clay, wrote 10¢ popular romance novels for working class women.

Number Fourteen

January 12, 1910

The Old Mahogany Table began on a Christmas stream of thought 't other day, a flood of memories gushed from its old heart with a strain of the minor that was chromatic at times – then in a perfect arpeggio of melody, merry and joyous, it began “an amorous descant song,” that twittered itself into chords of bright days that “played old tunes on the heart.” To talk of “WE” too much, may produce ENNUI, puns the Old Mahogany Table, but as I am well-seasoned myself, it continued, there is a season for all things. I believe, and a Christmas season always brings a dash of spice that invigorates me from head to foot, and I forget my lost appendix when I begin to talk of The Old Home in old times.

Grandma Lewis was a great woman! A homemaker, with exquisite romance and sentiment regarding a home, and a continued – all the year round drama was playing with shifting scenes – each a lesson of the happy life. Each season in great historical events was celebrated with interesting programs prepared apropos of the occasion, by Grandma.

No child could be persuaded to leave home on such occasions. It is believed that the first Christmas Tree Festival ever given in Huntsville was arranged by Grandma Lewis, when she lived in the cottage in front of Dr. Manning's gate, when Mary Lewis was eight years old. Mary remembered receiving such a beautiful pair of pantalets made of bright green satin and embroidered in beautiful pink wild roses. These were tied with a draw string just above the knee. Ma embroidered a pair exactly like them for Mattie Pope (the sweet daughter of Mr. Ben Pope), and there were no happier little girls in town, as we walked out wearing our gorgeous pantalets that hung so gracefully down to the ankles. Mattie and I were just as proud as peacocks.

I remember the first Christmas that Mary spent in France, when at Madam Trigant's school, on Rue Pigales in 1843. She was just 18 years old, and for the first time away from home and Ma and Pa! The desolation of it! The agony of it! Some of the girls went to their homes, others to spend the feast with friends. Mary was left alone and her courage almost forsook her, as the grim monster HOMESICKNESS in its gruesomeness, obsessed her very heart.

Ma'mselle Baudin was a dear little old lady, eighty years old, who was a native of the Island of St. Domingo, and all of her family were massacred there. Her father, fearing violence for his little girl, wrote her name and the family story on a paper, fastened it on her, and putting her in a water-bound cask, and with prayers for his little Marguerite's soul, he consigned the cask to the ocean, and in a few hours it was picked up by a passing ship from Bordeaux and the child was resuscitated and taken care of by Mme. Tiot, and carried over to Baltimore, where she resided for some years, and was taken to France where she became a pensioner of the Queen.

She drew a very small pension from the French government, barely enough to clothe her scantily, and her board was given her by Mme. Trigant, she in return acting as a chaperone for the girls and doing light sewing and mending.

Ma'mselle Baudin looked just like a hickory nut doll, with weazened little brown face, sharp little nose and keen, bright black eyes. Her hands brown and bony, looked like two curious bird claws, as she twanged guitar strings. Her voice was high pitched and always cracked on the high notes when she sang and her bony fingers swept chords of accompaniments from a funny little guitar. But, oh, the thrill of the songs she sang, in that

piping voice! The tender soothing touch of her bony fingers! The aromatic fragrance of the Reseda, (mignonette) that Mary gave her, with some Marguerites on her fete day (as her name was Marguerite) that grew in a box on the window sill. No fires were in the pension. The weather was cold, damp, dreary; a tiny chauffer with a few lumps of charcoal made the day less dreary in Ma'mselle's little room. With my heart filled with that longing that solitude and tears cannot wash away, and only human sympathy can lull to restfulness, I rushed to the room of my dear little old friend, and in a flood of tears told her of my heartache.

Drawing a low stool close to her, she bade me sit down. Sit down, cherie, sit down and I will sing to you. She would say in a funny patois French. And these were the lullabies that she sang that soothed a heart aching for the aliment of mother love, and with the bony fingers gently smoothing the head that rested on her knee, she sang the lullabies that came in its quavering notes of the melody wings with the aroma of the Reseda – sweet as Araby the Blest.

“Do, do, l'enfant do, l'enfant dormira tantot!
Dormez donc, chereuse amour,
Pour vous je viellerai toujours,
Dormez donc, chereuse amour,
Dormez, dormez pour vous je viellerai toujours.”

There was a high note in the last bar, and the precious old voice cracked on it every time. But that never counteracted the soothing qualities of those mignonette-embalmed sweet lullabies of France, and the little old voice without its crack, would not have been the same. In fact, the crack belonged to its calming charm on the young, homesick girl from faraway America. She also taught her the playful round:

“Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques,
Dormez vous, Dormez vous,
Sonnez les matines, sonnez les matines,
Ding – Dong – Dell”

In Mary's autograph album, enclosed in a piece of old paper, is a single gold and purple pansy, gathered in 1845 by Mlle. Baudin, at the Cemetery out at Montmatre, and sent to Mary with the following affectionate inscription:

“PENSEE! Allez porter ma pensee a
celle a qui je pense sans cesse et a
laquelle je penserai toujours!”

Think! Go, carry my thoughts to
her, of whom I think without ceasing,
And of whom I will think always!

The Old Mahogany Table says that a story of Mary's life in France never palled on her children, and a fragrance as sweet as the mignonette of Mlle's lullaby “hangs round it still.” Each story was a melodrama – a tone picture that, as she recited them, she acted – singing the songs of a la Mlle Baudin or Jenny Lind, reciting from Moliere, a la Rachel, whom she heard in France, and dancing a la ballet – just for us – sighs the Old Mahogany.

Mary (Lewis) Clay did not let the sound of cannon even destroy the Christmas spirit. In 1863, she had a big ginger cake made, a lot of molasses candy, and with home-made toys, such as hickory nut dolls, a set of cornstalk furniture, lumber jacks and reed whistles. Santa Claus filled the homeknit stockings – and she gave a Christmas Tree to Ma and the Lewis girls, and they sang aloud in praise. With the spirit of peace and good will still thrilling in the dear old hymn:

“Shout the glad tidings exultingly sing
Jerusalem triumph, Messiah is King.”

Thus it was, that the sweet Mother Mary wrought a golden veil of poesy and romance around those weary days of 1861–5 that obscured the wounds of war on the beautiful South. To her, affliction was a school in which great characters are formed, and greatest virtues are acquired. She told the war stories with a fascinating, smoldering fire of wit and keen humor, that would suddenly burst thru the dark clouds of adversity and illumine her soul, while she delighted our hearts – and we never did hate the Yankees – no we didn’t! Her nature was so sparkling – her stories were melodies, attuned to the best, purest thoughts!

Cherish her memory, The Old Table bids. There never was such a Mother. Her light was blessed as it enabled her children to pursue with greater safety and pleasure their youthful sports! As they matured, the ideal was not shattered! Passing years never dimmed her splendor, nor decay spread her powers upon her disk. Thru pathless fields of light she passed from view the same unwary orb. Stainless was the Sky she wandered in, and pure the ray she left to shed an influence, brighten soften the lives in the home where her children breathe the benediction that

“Its choices habitant has fled our Sphere,
And Heaven may glory in its welcome guest!”



These recollections about Ginny Clay’s grandmother, Mary (Betts) Lewis, speak little of the hardships and bad times. The Lewis family had lost all their anticipated wealth even before the Civil War and, at one time,



their home on Eustis Street was put up for sale on the steps of the **Courthouse** because of debts. “Homemaker” was a relatively new word, but Mrs. Lewis earned the title merely for prevailing in such circumstances. On the other hand, they enjoyed such seemingly joyful memories!

As young girls, Mary Lewis and Mattie Pope were thrilled apparently with their pantalets. Matilda Walker Pope (1826-1871) was a daughter of Benjamin S. Pope (1783-1860). Not related to LeRoy Pope, Benjamin was from Delaware and arrived in Huntsville about 1814. He married Elizabeth Wyatt, became a planter, and more importantly served as Register of the Land Office for twelve years. The Benjamin Pope home from 1828 until 1851 was at 621 Franklin Street, later owned by Martha Moore, and the house will be eventful in yet another story. In 1854 Mattie Pope married Peter M. Dox who became a noted jurist and member of Congress.

Mary Lewis's gift to her elderly friend in Paris was pale green, finely scented French lace. Ahh, the story of Ma'mselle Marguerite Baudin begs to be affirmed. The French authorities must have believed some part of the tale to give her a pension. Certainly this elderly lady was at the finishing school in Paris of Mme Trigant and her sister, Mlle Liot. Certainly there was a revolution in 1795 on the island of St. Domingo. Everyone at the school accepted this story, and so far it has not been disproved, either.

Number Fifteen

January 19, 1910

The Frye Portrait of Parson Allan

If you go up to the First Presbyterian Church, and into the Library and Study that adjoins the Sunday School Room you will see over the mantel a life-size bust portrait of Parson Allan, the first regular Presbyterian Pastor in Huntsville, suggests The Old Mahogany Table. You see Gideon Blackburn, a good man and active evangelist, came here in 1818, and gathered together a small congregation, raised the thoughts of the people above the mere sordid and then, all absorbing question of the 25 cents cotton, attracting a substantial prospecting population, to the Higher Spiritual Life. The Reverend Gideon Blackburn drifted to other and larger fields. In 1820 Reverend John Allan accepted a call here from the Tennessee Synod.

Parson Allan's portrait that adorns the Presbyterian Church Study is one made by Mr. Frye and copied from one by an earlier artist. It is a beautiful piece of Mr. Frye's best work.

This portrait of Parson Allan always attracts the visitor to the Study. It is full of genial, good humor, with a face large and round, a cleft chin, a mouth firm yet not severe. His clear blue eyes, auburn hair and ruddy complexion, betray the Scotch nativity, and the fine nose, broad high forehead indicative of the student, that he was. He was the true "Reverend Champion," of each sin-sick Soul, and helpt each one the Heavenward road with a tender grace.

"A man he was to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year."

Goldsmith depicted many of the fine characteristics and alluring virtues in his "Village Preacher of the Deserted Village," [line 141] possest by Parson Allan, and he left a name fragrant with pleasant memories of his pastorate here.

The Old Mahogany Table was pleased to receive from Dr. John Allan Wyeth – a grandson of Parson Allan, and one of New York's most distinguished and popular surgeons, who has earned and won laurels on both continents for his professional skill – the following story of his family, that will be one of The Old Mahogany Table's choicest morceaux.

**Reverend John Allan, D.D. First
Pastor Installed in the
Presbyterian Church
In Huntsville**

John Allan, son of David Allan, of Ayrshire, Scotland, was born on the 21st of April 1788, in Hertford, England. When 16 years old, his parents emigrated to America and landed at Charleston, South Carolina, settling on a plantation in Georgia, 100 miles north of Augusta. Soon thereafter, the family removed to Athens, where at the University of Georgia, John Allan graduated in 1807. He was a linguist, having been well educated in the French, Latin, Greek

and Hebrew languages. On July 20th, 1809, having entered the Presbyterian ministry, John Allan married Nancy Hodge, then living near Gallatin, Tennessee.

Nancy Hodge was the daughter of Joseph Hodge and Euphemia Agnew. Joseph Hodge was born in England in 1755 and settled in North Carolina, served in the Continental Army under General Greene, and was severely wounded at Guilford Court House. For his services in the Revolutionary War, Hodge received a large grant of lands in Sumner County, Tennessee, where he moved with his family. He died on February 28th, 1822. (Euphemia Allan, wife of Judge Louis Wyeth, was named for her grandmother.)

In 1820 John Allan was called to the Presbyterian Church in Huntsville. (Altho he had charge of the church here, Dr. John Allan was not regularly installed as Pastor until 1823.) Parson Allan also taught school at the old Greene Academy. The Allan family became the center of a large and cultured society which, for so many years, distinguished that delightful community. Nancy Allan died in Huntsville, July 24, 1841, and John Allan died there on November 14, 1843. The children of Rev. John Allan and Nancy Hodge Allan were William Thomas, Eliza Eleanor, James McCartney, Euphemia, Mary Ann, Harriet Mebane, Sarah Jane, and Laura.

The eldest son, William Thomas, was born in Sumner County, Tennessee, Dec. 10, 1810, received his early education at Greene Academy and graduated at the Oberlin University, Ohio. He married and settled in Illinois and died in Genesee on June 5, 1882.

Eliza was born in Christian County, Kentucky, Dec. 7, 1812. She was married on August 4, 1831 to David A. Smith, a lawyer residing in Courtland, Alabama. Soon after this event, Mr. Smith liberated his slaves, 13 in number, carried them with his family to Morgan County, Illinois, where he settled to practice law and became a popular and prominent citizen, and a contemporary and friend of Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, and many others of that list of remarkable men who distinguished that section of the country.

James Allen, born in Sumner County, Tennessee, November 23, 1814, was educated at the Greene Academy here, and took his college course at Danville, Kentucky. He settled in Henry County, Illinois, where he became a successful farmer and died December 20, 1885.

Euphemia Allan was born June 17, 1817, at Gallatin, Tennessee and was married on April 9, 1839 to Louis W. Wyeth. She died on December 27, 1895 at Guntersville.

Mary Ann Allan was born in Huntsville and died in 1836, age seventeen.

Harriett Mebane died in infancy, September 29, 1822.

Sarah Jane was born in Huntsville, in 1825, never married and is living in Jacksonville, Illinois with her niece, Mrs. James Kellogg.

Laura was born in Huntsville. After the death of her father she, with her sister Sarah, went to Jacksonville, Illinois where she married Marshall P. Ayers, a distinguished citizen and banker of the state and died there on April 18, 1906.

Judge Louis Weiss Wyeth

Louis Weiss Wyeth, the son of John Wyeth and Louisa Weiss, was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on June 20, 1812 where he received his classical education and graduated in law at Carlisle University. He settled in Marshall County, Alabama in 1836 where he died July 7, 1889.

Nicholas Wyeth (Or Wythe, as the name appears in some of the earlier records) and a brother came in 1630 from England to America. The former settled at Newtown, Boston,

Massachusetts; the latter joined the colonists of Virginia. The Virginia branch of the family became extinct with George Wythe (An only son, born in 1726, died in 1806 without issue.) George Wythe was buried in St. John's Churchyard in Richmond. He was the first Chancellor Virginia, the friend and counselor General Washington, and also a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

The grandfather of Louis Wyeth, his two sons and two nephews were members of Thatcher's Company who at Concord Bridge attacked the British on April 19, 1775. Their names are mentioned in Paige's History, "In commemoration of their patriotism."

The mother of Louis W. Wyeth was born in Philadelphia on April 29, 1715 and died in Harrisburg on June 1, 1822. Her father was born and reared in Prussia and settled in Philadelphia in 1755. He studied law and became one of the leading jurists of that community. He was the President of the German Society of Pennsylvania and drafted its constitution and afterwards became a Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and the Orphans' Court. He died on October 22, 1796.

Louis W. Wyeth was appointed Judge of Probate of Marshall County, and later, was elected a member of the Alabama Legislature. He was twice elected the Judge of the Fifth Judicial District. He declined re-election and also declined the Chief Justiceship of the Alabama Supreme Court. His Presbyterian religious convictions were very strong and lasting. In the Civil War, although beyond the age of conscription, twice he enlisted and rendered service. His life was long and useful, "without fear and without reproach" and died July 7, 1889. "Large was his bounty and his soul sincere."⁷⁰

Dr. John Allan Wyeth is not only an eminent physician and surgeon with international reputation, but wields a pen that, dipt in patriotic sentiment, has idealized Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, added luster to and made immortal a number of soldiers in the Confederate ranks, and has wielded it as a lover in lyric as sweet and tender as Petrarch has e'er indited to Laura. (Haunted by her beauty, Francesco Petrarch, scholar and poet, perfected the sonnet form as he addressed many of them to Laura.)

Read, says the Old Mahogany Table, what he sings of his sweetheart's face, and judge for yourself if Tom Moore is more dainty or exquisite:

My Sweetheart's Face

My kingdom is my sweetheart's face,
And these the boundaries I trace;
Northward her forehead fair;
Beyond a wilderness of auburn hair;
A rosy cheek to East and West:
Her little mouth
The sunny South,
It is the South that I love best.

Her eyes, two crystal lakes
Rippling with light,
Caught from the sun by day
The stars by night;
The dimples in
Her cheeks and chin
Are snares which Love hath set,
And I have fallen in!
June 1892 John A. Wyeth

In two wee poems from the German he has caught the authors' sentiments and vibrated them to us in sweet tones of love – in the one – an optimistic philosophy in the other. The lyric of love is translated from Heine's pretty "Du Bist Wie Eine Blume." Heinrich (1797-1856) considered himself the last romantic poet who just also happened to love an ironic twist to his lyrical poetry.

Thou Art As a Flower

As gentle, pure and fair
As some sweet flower Thou art!
I look at thee and sadness
Comes stealing thru my heart.

An on Thy head I lay
My hands with this one prayer
That God may ever keep Thee
So gentle, pure and fair.

From the German of Neumann, this "Das Herz," is daintily translated:

The Heart

Two chambers has the heart,
And Sorrow
And Joy dwell there apart.

In this when Joy awakes;
In that one,
Sorrow its slumber takes

O Joy, thy vigil keep!
Speak gently
That Sorrow still may sleep.

Ma and Pa Lewis, before becoming influenced by Withers Clay's religious leanings, were practicing Presbyterians. Gideon Blackburn (1772-1838) conducted local revivals in 1818 organized by the evangelical missionary from Tennessee. Reverend John Allan, noted earlier, founded the Ebenezer Presbyterian Church on Hobbs Island Road in 1833 and became the first full-time minister at the First Presbyterian Church in town.⁷¹

Parson Allan's description is given with affection, even though Miss Clay never met him. Miss Clay continued with a line of Oliver Goldsmith's (1730?-1774) *The Deserted Village*. This family genealogy of the Allan and Wyeth families appears to have come directly from the soon-to-be-published autobiographical book, *With Sabre and Scalpel*, written by the parson's grandson, Dr. John Allan Wyeth. The two German poems and their translations are

also in his book. Very few people in town in 1910 really would have known either of these families, much less their genealogy.⁷²

Miss Clay was also aware of the Wyeth ancestor, George Wyeth, (1726-1806) a signer of the Declaration of Independence from Virginia. He was the first professor of law at William and Mary College and taught Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay, James Monroe, and John Marshall among others. At his death Wyeth left his entire library to Thomas Jefferson. Miss Clay was well aware that the Virginia branch of the family had died with George Wyeth. However she did not note, or perhaps know, that this Wyeth had been an abolitionist and freed his slaves. Allegedly a nephew of the family realized that George Wyeth's will would leave a portion of the family estates to support those slaves. The young man decided to increase his share of the property by poisoning the slaves. George Wyeth was also accidentally poisoned by the arsenic and died a painful death at the age of eighty. (The young relative was tried for murder but found innocent in a court of law.)⁷³

Alabama's branch of the Wyeth family came from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Miss Clay here gave reference to Lucius R. Paige's *History of Cambridge, 1630-1877*. Paige mentioned Thatcher's Militia Company where five Wyeth men out of a company of 75 soldiers fought the British at Concord Bridge. The mother of Judge Louis Wyeth (1812-1889), unnamed by Miss Clay, was Louisa Weiss whose father, Wilhelm Ludwig, was the first president of the German Society of Pennsylvania, the oldest German organization of its kind. The Judge's father was John Wyeth of Cambridge who had relocated in Harrisburg where Louis Wyeth was born. Young Wyeth moved to Guntersville after law school and began his practice in 1836. Two years later he married Euphemia, the daughter of Parson Allan of Huntsville. Following the Civil War, at his own expense, Louis Wyeth arranged for trainloads of donated food from midwestern states to bring food supplies to citizens of Marshall and DeKalb counties.⁷⁴

After heroic Civil War service, Judge Wyeth's son, Dr. John Allan Wyeth (1845-1922), began his medical practice in Marshall County in 1869. However he studied additionally in New York City where he became a member of the Bellevue Hospital faculty. He helped found a medical college and was elected president of the American Medical Association in 1901. He published numerous medical reference books and articles about the Civil War. Besides his autobiography, Wyeth wrote the very popular *The Life of General Nathan Bedford Forrest*. In Alabama Dr. Wyeth planned and developed Wyeth City at the foot of Sand Mountain, brought in industry and factories for local workers, and influenced the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railroad to lay a spur tract to this new town to transport in the raw materials and ship out the finished products.⁷⁵

Miss Clay particularly was proud of Wyeth's works about the War, but also his ability to write sonnets as Petrarch had written to his Laura. Included was poetry by Dr. Wyeth, equal, Miss Clay thought to the Irish poet, Tom Moore. This was followed by a lyric poem by Christian Heinrich Heine (1797-1856). Perhaps Heine's most famous line, used to comment later about Nazi atrocities, was, "Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too" (*Almansor*, 1821).

Number Sixteen

January 26, 1910

The Winston Family:

William Winston

Mrs. Judith McGraw Jones Winston

Helen Winston

Gov. John Anthony Winston

“Lost Springs with sobs replying
Unto weary Winter’s sighing,
While those we love are dying.”

Quotes the Old Mahogany Table just a few days ago when the news came of the passing away of Mrs. Mary Keziah Winston Cooper – ah yes it sighs,

“To the past go more dead faces,
As the loved leave vacant places.”

In the death of Mrs. Cooper was the occasion of the passing into the Great Beyond of the last child of William Winston and Judith McGraw Jones.⁷⁶ Mr. Frye painted a valuable portrait of Mr. William Winston and one of his wife – three quarters length, and in the original gold frames.

Judith is seated in a red velvet chair and wears a matronly gown of a black silk, lace collar, and a deeply fringed white crepe shawl, whose folds are rich and rarely portrayed by the artist. A miniature by Dodge of her daughter – Judith the sweet wife of Governor Lindsay – is pinned at her throat. Her eyes of a blue gray are expressive, the mouth a firm sweetness betrays, and the entire features are indicative of a true gentle woman.

William Winston has blue eyes, fine forehead and curly brown hair. That he was an aristocrat, anyone can see – expressive hands, gentlemanly dress, air of a valetudinarian, with a kindly calm of manner, all prove the royal lineage traced from King Malcolm II of Scotland. He moved from Virginia to Tennessee, near The Hermitage and there became an intimate friend and a later ardent advocate of Gen. Andrew Jackson both in his career as a warrior and statesman. There were seven of the Winston brothers and two sisters. One sister was the mother of Senator Edmund Winston Pettus, and Polly married Joel Jones.

About 1816 or '17 William Winston moved to Huntsville and within one mile of this flourishing village, did the first native-born Governor of Alabama first see the light – Gov. John Anthony Winston. Governor Winston made an incorruptible Governor, strong and one who was conservative in expenditure of public money. He was not in harmony with his Legislature during his terms of office, from 1853 to 1857, and unconstitutional measures were with vigor vetoed, until the name of “The Veto Governor” and John Anthony Winston became synonymous – while the Legislature raged and the people rejoiced at his economic wisdom that saved the State many a dollar. Like a number of otherwise loyal Southerners, John A.

Winston strongly opposed Secession, realizing the devastation it meant to the South, and believing that the matter of abolition could be settled by Congress if affairs were wisely managed. He attended the Convention of Secessionists, presented his views, that were forcibly rejected, and, with spirit of his ancestors still alive in his breast, he said to Jefferson Davis: "Now you have raised the Devil, put him down!"

Winston assisted in the effort to put him down by fighting in the ranks bravely. Then he died from consumption caused by exposure, shortly after the struggle ended at Appomattox.

I wish they had followed his advice, said the Old Mahogany Table, with a sound like a groan – then I would have my appendix now. (Poor Old Table that appendix still sticks in – or rather, out of its craw!)

There were in the Winston family a number of prominent men who have distinguished themselves as statesmen and among them three governors – Jno. A Winston of Alabama; John Pettus of Mississippi, who married Parmelia Winston a half sister of Mrs. Cooper, and his cousin; and, Robert Burns Lindsay who married another sister, Sarah Miller Winston.

The M.T. Russell house on Madison Street was built by Anthony Winston, and the residence now occupied by Mr. Otey Robinson was built and occupied by John J. Winston. The Winstons and Lindsays came up from Tusculumbia to have their portraits painted by Mr. Frye and all were very satisfactory. Those of William Winston and his youngest daughter, sweet Helen, were taken from daguerreotype pictures and were considered excellent by the family. When the little three year old Judith Lindsay first saw the portrait of Helen, she screamed out in delight, clapped her wee hands and in wild excitement danced around saying, "Oh, it is Helen! My "little Helen." Could a prettier tribute have been paid an artist's inspiration?

The story of Helen Winston and her associates will have to be reserved for another time, tearfully says the dear sentimental Old Mahogany Table, for I do not wish to be hurried, and then you know, sometimes,

"Fond memory's faithful part
Outlives the limner's art,
And throws a vary hue – a
living grace
Around the portrait of a once
loved face."

In this story I have to tell, there are so many dear ones associated, that are,

"Like glimpses of forgotten dreams."⁷⁷

And I feel a thrill in the

"Throngs of gentlest memories
that charm the soul."

And then, THE DEMOCRAT thinks that if it raises two columns to those Echoes of mine, I am mightly set up.

**Pleasant Greeting to
The Old Mahogany Table**

The Old Mahogany Table has been a happy recipient of a number of pleasant greetings from friends far and near, but none has conveyed a sweeter or a more appreciated tribute than the one below from our good friend and former contemporary, Mr. John Boyd:

Huntsville, Alabama

January 18, 1910

Miss Virginia C. Clay,
Editor of *The Democrat*

My Dear Miss Clay,

For the past three months I have enjoyed each week, perusing the very readable articles in *The Huntsville Democrat*, entitled, "Echoes of the Past." The Old Mahogany Table even minus its appendix is certainly rich in folk lore and reminiscence of a by-gone age when truth, valor and love went hand in hand in the sunny land of Dixie.

There is something refreshing as well as reminiscent in each of these excellent "Echoes." To your older readers they recall the ancient days of Southern chivalry and Southern hospitality. And to your younger readers they give a truthful insight of their forbears in the golden age when the Old South stood for all that was grand and glorious "in arts, in arms, in song."

I must congratulate you on your very delightful blending of humor and pathos in these timely articles. They are couched in perfect rhythm – the very quintessence of poetic prose, and they gently glide:

"From grave to gay, from lively to
severe;
From tears to laughter, and from
laughter back to tears."⁷⁸

These well written "Echoes of the Past" the OLD MAHOGANY TABLE Stories are too valuable to remain hidden in the files of *The Democrat*. May I not hope that at some future day when the series are completed that you will gather and publish them in book form, as I firmly believe that thousands, besides myself, would gladly subscribe for and highly prize the volume.

Hoping my suggestion will appeal to you.

I remain

Respectfully yours.

John Boyd

**Refreshing Breezes
From New York**

A friend in New York, in a personal letter, wafts this pleasant breeze that softens the Old Mahogany's heart, and fans into activity the Editor's wits and will:

"I am inclosing \$1.00 for a renewal of my subscription to *The Democrat* – which, you know, without saying, I cannot afford to do without.

It is needless to say that I read with interest all of The Old Mahogany Table sketches; and by the way, I wish you would have all of these sketches and put them in a Scrap Book. When you get to the end of these stories, which I hope will not be soon – you may send me the Scrap Book, and, in return for which, I will send you \$5.00."

Another appreciative friend, of New Jersey, tho a stranger, saw the Number Six story, that told of the Bassetts, in a letter to the Editor, sends a greeting to the Old Mahogany Table, and says: "I am so charmed with your dear Old Mahogany Table Story, No. Six, that I wish to begin with the first one, and subscribe for *The Democrat* just as long as they last." In a later letter, he says that it was thru Miss Lenore Bassett Young – who is "a jewel of a girl, a fine type of the true Southern gentlewoman, to whom my wife and I are much devoted."


I am a Tennessean. I love the people of the South, all their traditions, their refinement and their heart-culture, so, when I saw that you were writing such delightful readable sketches, showing the inner lives of my people in their every day ways, as I knew them – and not in their Sunday duds for inspection of strangers – I, at once, wanted all those word pictures of my homefolks that you had to give, hence my subscription.

Do not think that the eyes of the world are busy reading what you write and allow the thought to spoil your stories for us homefolks. Keep the same spirit in them as in the only one I have read – No. Six – and do not forget it is all in the family – just a bit of family gossip, and what you write will be read and appreciated by the family. You are helping to tell a marvelous story of the true South in your lives and in your type, and I wish to read it and to save it for my grandchildren and their children to read – as authentic history of the times and the people, who are last passing into that Great Beyond – a heart history – not for the world at large, but for the children of the family."

Judd Mortimer Lewis, the Houston (Texas) *Post's* funny man sentimentalist and poet, in a personal letter says: "I congratulate you on your clever, very interesting stories from The Old Mahogany Table. I note the Lewises in every branch, are sentimentalist. Those 18 babies and 84 grandbabies do appeal to me. What a glorious family tree is represented!"⁷⁹

Dr. John A. Wyeth says: "I enclose you data of my family as requested. I have found your Echoes of the Past from the Old Mahogany Table, very clever and interesting."

And there are others.



Today's reader will again need a clear mind to attempt to sort this new family group, the Winstons. However, they were truly figures of prestige and power in Alabama history, and their stories are worth recalling.

Virginians, Captain Anthony and Keziah (Jones) Winston, came to Huntsville about 1810. A veteran of the Revolutionary War, Winston was a first cousin to both Dolley Madison and Patrick Henry. In about 1820 the Winstons moved again to more spacious lands in nearby Colbert County. In Tuscumbia their Federal-style home was particularly known for hospitality. On the other hand, the Winston men were also known for their readiness to take on fights or engage in an occasional duel at the town square.

Captain Anthony raised 11 children, but only a few will be recalled here. One of the sons, Isaac Winston, married Catherine B. Jones. They reared their five children at nearby Belle Mont, one of Alabama's first great plantation houses. This Palladian style home, recently restored, dominated the hilltop overlooking a 1,680-acre plantation.

William H. Winston, another son of Captain and Keziah Winston, married Mary Cooper. (Miss Cooper was a sister of his law partners, William and Lydal B. Cooper.) As a widower he later married Judith McGraw (Jones) whose portrait is mentioned in the story. Miss Clay did not mention that Judith Winston was killed in 1874 by a powerful tornado that blew over the observatory of their brick mansion in Tuscumbia.⁸⁰

Of William H. Winston's children, John Anthony, the oldest, was born in Madison County, and he would become the first native-born governor of the state of Alabama in 1853. John A. Winston was a Democrat, who disapproved of using state funds for internal improvements. He and his legislature were often in disagreement and, as Miss Clay noted, Winston was known as the "veto governor." However, Winston encouraged education and signed a bill in 1854 creating Alabama's public school system. Brewer's *History of Alabama* offered a striking account of 50-year-old Governor Winston's Civil War activities with the 8th Alabama Infantry at Seven Pines. "Governor Winston led it forward with his bridle reins in his teeth and a navy pistol in each hand. Being ordered to surrender, he replied that he didn't join the army to surrender." In admiration, the citizens of Hancock County, Alabama, voted to rename their county in his honor.⁸¹

Miss Clay delicately refrained from mentioning John Anthony Winston's personal life. At the time the scandal, however, would have quickly spread across the state—after all, divorce was still quite exceptional. Winston had married in 1832 Mary Agnes Walker and they lived on a plantation in Sumter County. An excellent businessman he operated a cotton factor firm in Mobile and owned vast acreage in Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Texas. Unfortunately his wife died, and unfortunately still he married a second time. His new wife, Mary W. Longwood (or Logwood), evidently had an affair with their family physician, Dr. Sidney S. Perry. Winston discovered the situation in 1847, took the appropriate action, and shot the doctor dead. The encounter was declared justifiable homicide and there was no punishment. The state legislature decreed Winston's divorce from Mary Agnes in 1850.⁸²

Some of the grandchildren of Capt. Anthony Winston included Sarah Winston, half-sister of Governor Winston, who married Robert B. Lindsay who became the 22nd governor of Alabama. Sarah was thus sister to Gov. John A. Winston, sister-in-law to Mississippi's Governor John Jones Pettus, who had married Parmelia Winston, and a cousin of Alabama Senator Edmund W. Pettus. Not hurting his political influences, Edmund Pettus married Mary Chapman, daughter of Judge Samuel Chapman, the elder brother of Alabama's former governor, Reuben Chapman. Enough?

Robert Burns Lindsay (1841-1902) was the only foreign-born citizen to serve as a governor of Alabama, a situation made possible by the 1868 state constitution. He was born in Scotland and immigrated to begin a law career in Tuscumbia. He personally opposed Secession but served in Roddey's cavalry in the Civil War. During Lindsay's administration the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) was established to provide education in agriculture and mechanical arts. As noted, he married Sarah Miller Winston, sister of Gov. John A. Winston.⁸³ The Lindsay's enlightened daughter, Maud, opened a private kindergarten in her home. She taught, after that, in Alabama's first free kindergarten. As a

single woman she dared to cross the strict social barriers of her day by teaching there. She also taught story telling at New York University in the summers, and wrote 16 children's books the most noted being *Mother Stories*.⁸⁴

Number Seventeen

February 2, 1910

The Frye Portrait of the Winston Family

**Helen Winston, The Youngest
Daughter of William Winston**

A Sweet May Queen of the Fifties

“We have had our May, my darling,
And our Roses long ago!”

Ah, says The Old Mahogany Table, it seems but yesterday that the famous first May Queen was given at The Old Home, by Mrs. Lewis and her talented daughters, instead of half century! I feel as I talk about Helen Winston and her portrait, that —

“Memory plays an old tune on the heart.”⁸⁵

Helen Winston’s portrait was a masterpiece by Mr. Frye, and painted from a photograph taken in her dainty May Queen dress. She was 12 years of age beautiful, young and fair with soft brown hair, on which a gold amber tint was lightly fallen. Her eyes of blue are tinged with hazel shadows and,

“From ruby lips to finger tips,
She’s made of mortal blisses,
Angels above, that worship Love,
Would languish for her kisses!”

Pretty Helen wore a Queen’s gown of white tarleton, with low neck and short sleeves, caught up with sprays of white star jessamine, a gold chain and shell pendant adorns the pretty throat and calmly sweet is the expression that adorns her innocent face.

In robe ethereal white,
Doth she appear,
Translucent, with a radiance bright;
Her blue eyes clear;
As the convolvulus unfolds its charm.
When kist by the Sun’s first ray,
Breathes a welcome warm,
She glows in rare beauty,
Ephemeral – gay –
With simple heart and sweet –
Then dies away –
Ere the burning fires of life
Her mind doth guile,
And feel the burning strife
That scars Youth’s smile.

V.C.C.

Four times was Helen chosen Queen of May, but the last time she was chosen, was in Tuscumbia, and it was not destined that she would mount again the May Queen's throne, for a spell of fever wearied her body, and on April 29, 1860, God took her soul to his Great White Throne—

“Stainless as a lily; White
As a thought of Heaven, in light.”

When Helen was Queen at The Old Home, said The Old Mahogany Table, a more glorious May was never known in Huntsville, nor a prettier al fresco scene ever witnessed. The festival was presented on a stage erected directly in front adjoining the back porch. The porch was used as a green room, and it was curtained off with Grandma Lewis's best parlor curtains of white lace, that were wreathed in ropes of vines intertwined with flowers, and twined with green wreaths and blossoms. The yard was crowded with citizens, and all the benches from Mrs. Lewis's school rooms and chairs were placed in the yard, and the fence and trees were filled with boys.

The Coronation was set for 3 o'clock, and the excitement and enthusiasm of the participants and the audience was intense when the Arts, Graces, Muses, Seasons, Flowers, and the principal characters began the first opening chorus, “Here is the Queen of the May.”

Among the participants were:

Helen Winston.....	Queen
Clement C. Clay.....	Standard Bearer
Mollie Scruggs.....	Crown Bearer
Alice White.....	Crowner
Laura Ward.....	Scepter Bearer
Elodie Lewis.....	Music, with harp as an emblem
Lila Bibb.....	Poetry, emblem, a lyre
Floras.....	Kitty Bibb, Mary and Sallie Severs, Julia Elgin, Julia Landman, Lucy Ross, with flowers for the Queen
Annie Hayes.....	Love, a heart of flowers
Emma Tate.....	Friendship, a Ring
Katy Dill.....	Hope, an Anchor
Mollie Mills.....	Iris, a Rainbow
Mary Norvell.....	Wood Nymph, Bow and Arrow
Martha East.....	Shepherdess, Horn and Crook
Mary Beasley.....	Faith, a Cross
Alice Beasley.....	Charity, a Bible
Lucie Lewis.....	Spring, a Cornucopia of Flowers
Bettie White.....	Summer, Basket of Fruit
Sunie White.....	Winter, Axe and Fagots
Molle Brandon.....	Autumn, Sickle and a Sheaf of Wheat

Ellen Ward.....	Aurora, a Star
Ellen White.....	Night, a Crescent
Ellen Robinson.....	Temperance, Crystal Water
Lizzie Angel.....	Truth, a Mirror
Bettie Allen.....	Memory, a Portrait
May Lane.....	Sea Nymph, Ocean Shells
Clement C. Clay.....	Patriotism, Star Spangled
Lizzie Hunt.....	Hebe, a cup,
Mary Clay.....	A flower girl

The Choruses sung were: Here is the Queen of May; We are the Flowers, Receive thy Crown, On thy Brow this Crown I place; Here is a Scepter for thee fair queen; long live our beauteous Queen; Star-Spangled Banner.

The solos that were sung were: On Strike the Lyre; There's Music in the Forest Leaves; Oh it is Love that Makes the World go Round; The Shepherd's Horn; Meek and Lowly; We Come, the Merry Summer Months; Winter Winds Sing; Helen Dear; Tis Night; A Glass, but Not of Sherry; Ocean Shells; Les Regrets, or Days of My Happy Childhood's Home; Come Quickly Away; The May Queen is Our Darling Pride.

Mr. Lawrence Cooper says that one of his earliest, brightest memories is on that May Queen at the Old Home, and he swung around a pole with a ribbon.

After the last Chorus was sung, the participants formed a beautiful finale tableau. Clement Clay handed Queen Helen from her throne. They stepped to front of the stage, and both were blind-folded. As they stood together a filmy bridal veil was thrown over the head of Queen Helen. Truth stepped forward and held her mirror in front of them. The bandages were removed, and amidst a shout of admiration, that rent the air as pretty Helen and handsome young man saw their blushing faces reflected as bride and groom in fair Truth's flower wreathed mirror.

A year later – and Queen Helen was with God, who loved her best, and ten years later Clement was drowned, in the same month that fair Helen died, on April 26th, 1869, in the Alabama River, while on duty as steward on the boat *St. Elmo*. The boiler burst and Clement was thrown overboard and he alone was drowned of all on board. The morning that her darling boy was drowned, recalled The Old Mahogany Table, his mother, as usual, opened her little school with prayer, and she read with more unction than usual the beautiful Psalm: "Out of the Deep have I called unto Thee."⁸⁶ And with the children she sang the hymn "Breast the Waves Christian," just about 9:30 o'clock, the hour that the steamboat, *St. Elmo* was blown up, and Clement found a watery grave for two weeks. His body was brought home in May, near the anniversary of the famous May Queen, just a decade before. As for his mother, sighs again The Old Mahogany Table, tho'

"Something had snapt within her breast."

And she bore her pain with the fortitude of a true Christian, and "The soft dew of pure religion found her Soul its Home."

The Echoes shall waft
 On gentle breeze,
 The songs of May days past!
 No mournful paean in shaft
 From Cypress Tree!
 In Mem'rys Urn are cast
 Ashes of those days
 When shadows seemed chasing
 Bright sunbeams there,
 And Lutes, in soft praise,
 Sooth the heart with music –
 Like Vesper Prayer

V.C.C.

There is a beautiful portrait by Mr. Frye, painted of Clement when he was only five years old. He is represented standing on the Big Spring bluff, and a sweet air of childish innocence in the tiny figure pervades the portrait. At The Old Home is another portrait of a sweet pure, manly face, painted from a photograph taken of Clement at the age of twenty. The boys to taunt him would call him "Par on," and teased him about hanging on to his mother's apron strings; but, he still clung there, and her heart strings were only tuned to happiness by her precious boy's love and purity of character.

The Old Mahogany Table paused for a moment, retrospectively, then in the song of Memory, still garlanded in Forget-me-nots at The Old Home, began to sing softly in the twilight:

Les Regrets

"Days of my happy childhood home,
 Far, far away forever flown,
 Joys that I grieve I e'er had known.
 Never to return!
 Hours of delight, without alloy,
 Still, still I mourn each fatal joy,
 Vain, vain regrets, my soul employ.
 Thoughts that in me burn.

Oh mem'ry why wilt thou with me
 dwell?
 Why make my aching heart to swell?
 Thou ring'st of happiness the knell
 Mournful on mine ear;
 Hope ne'er again with me may soar.
 Never whisper to me: "Grief is o'er!"
 Pity, alone, the tear may store
 Dropt upon my bier!"



Miss Clay used an 1859 keepsake program to be able to name the participants and the music of the May Day celebration. Ginny Clay was not born until 1862 and she could only have heard stories about the early festivities. However, after the Civil War, when the Lewis

and Clay girls resumed teaching, this event became a part of the curriculum, perhaps even a fundraiser.

The children of the **May Day Pageant** performed in the yard and on the porch of the Lewis home and day school on Eustis Street. The "other house" was the addition built earlier, noted in tale Number Nine. These children were probably chosen because they attended the school of Ma Lewis and later her daughter, Mary Clay. Certainly many of them also attended the Episcopal Church of the Nativity. The 1860 Federal Census and later marriage records help identify most of the children. Of course, Helen Winston, whose family was shared in the previous tale, was clearly the star with young Clemmy Clay, then about 12 years old. Other Lewis children included Elodie, 16, and Lucy, 12. The Clay baby then was Sue, age one.

It is interesting that Mrs. Lewis did not have in her school pageant the children of the really important names in town. For instance there were no Mastin, Fearn, Walker, Percy, or Pope children, at least in the play. And they would have had a starring role if they attended. The students were an eclectic mix, children of a gunsmith, a carriage maker, a widow, doctors, and farmers, almost certainly chosen for their ability to pay the school fees.⁸⁷ Those other children about town, too lowly to attend, watched from nearby treetops or from behind the fence.



The sweet May Queen, Anna Helen Winston, died in Tuscumbia on April 22, 1860, not yet fourteen years old.⁸⁸

The standard bearer in the pageant, Clement Clay, son of John Withers and Mary Clay, drown on April 26, 1869, when the steamship *St. Elmo* exploded in Mobile Bay. He had survived the Civil War, providing a steady arm for his mother, only to die in the steamship blast. He was not twenty-one. Ginny could not have remembered the events well; she

was only seven at the time. However, she would have known something dreadful had happened. When Clemmy's body was finally located, their mother, still with a nursing baby, took the trains to Mobile to bring his body back to Huntsville for burial. Mary Clay wrote her sister, "Our dear Clemmy was so full of life. He was so affectionate, so proud of his parents, his dear brothers and sisters . . . making himself an acceptable guest to the old and a genial friend to the young." Back in Huntsville, Mary could not attend church services; she had no mourning dress or bonnet to wear. She was ill and baby Elodie had to be weaned.⁸⁹ Unfortunately for Huntsvillians, the whereabouts of the Frye portrait of five-year-old Clement Clay at the bluff of the Big Spring and the painted portrait are unknown.

Number Eighteen

February 9, 1910

Sully's Portrait of David Irvine

Dr. MacDowell and His Famous Surgery

The Old Mahogany Table became interested the past December 1909, in a very interesting editorial account in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* of Dec. 10th, of a banquet given in that city to the memory of Dr. Ephraim MacDowell, as the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the operation which has "created Dr. MacDowell the father of ovariectomy, and the man who brought last fame upon his country, and his state and profession." There were 125 guests assembled to do honor to the great man's memory and perpetuate his fame as a surgical discoverer.

Mayor-elect Schwab was toastmaster and introduced Dr. S.C. Swartzel, who, was the first speaker, and impressively took his hearers back to the little town of Danville, Kentucky, made famous by the great surgeon and told them of the monument erected there in 1879 to Dr. MacDowell's memory, that bears a beautiful testimonial in the epitaph,

"A grateful profession reveres
his memory and treasures his
example."

Dr. E. MacDowell was born in 1771 in Rockbridge County, Virginia. He had in his youth acquired an education under trying circumstances, later went over to Scotland and the native heath of his famous and noble antecedents, attended the Edinburgh University in 1793. He returned to the United States, settled in Danville, where on December 9, 1809, he removed a tumor from a Mrs. Crawford, who lived 40 years after the daring operation, performed without anesthetics or antiseptics; and he was only 38 years old.

There were men in the profession at the time who denounced it openly as a "most outrageous and murderous operation!" Well it made him famous all over a civilized world, and his death in 1830 was deeply regretted. Dr. Swartzel described Dr. MacDowell as a man of lofty aims and as a sterling character, who considered his great profession a high and holy office.

Now, this great man, says The Old Mahogany Table, is the maternal grandsire of the Addison White family of this city. He was the father-in-law of David Irvine, father of Mrs. Addison White, who sank to Eternal Rest just two years ago.

Over the mantel of the dining salon at the home of Miss Susan MacDowell White and Mr. Newton K. White down on Adams Avenue, is a very handsome portrait of their grandfather, David Irvine that was painted by Sully the greatest artist of his day. David was a mere lad, but 21 years old, when this portrait was taken, and he a young law student, has his law books and briefs near him on a table and his quill pen is a strong, picturesque evidence of his willingness to accept you as a client with the determination to win the suit and plead your case at the Bar of Justice, "unawed by the influence of the rich or the great." An aristocracy of birth that pervades the portrait is one characteristic that is distinctive, and a will that is indomitable, with physical energy and firmness would attract the admiration of the discerning.

It is the leader among men, no follower, that is portrayed in those strong features, and his dress is another evidence of the truly refined gentleman, that at once distinguishes him.

Did you ever see a picture of Washington Irving, questions The Old Mahogany Table? Well, look again, and you will see a pretty good portrait of the young David Irvine, the features, style of dress and combing the hair are the same. They were near kin, sprung from the Irvites of the Western Border of Bonnie Scotland.

Since I began these stories of the ancestors of my old Huntsville friends, a fund of information has swept my way, remarked The Old Mahogany Table, in different ways that make the fact that our glorious country has a history of its own to toast, and every man is a king, a sovereign, every woman a queen, (or should be), in her own home – superior to man, as long as she does not struggle to be his equal. The queens have always reigned in the Irvine families I have known, and the gallant men are pleased to do homage to them as their SUPERIORS.

But I diverge, remarks The Old Mahogany Table. Ever since I lost my appendix, there has been a little lack of co-ordination – I suppose it is on account of the hard work to make both ends meet – and the women nearest to me, have been forced to be the equals of men! I will continue my pleasant story of the Irvines, just as soon as I can gather the necessary material for a feast, fresh from Scotia's heath, with an epic aroma, a love lyric, a spice of romance, breathing patriotism and the victories of the gallant clan who in the field fought and conquered, and in the Castle, wooed and won.



This may have been one of the shorter tales, but it continued to reinforce the sense of connections within a small town.

At first the news item from the Cincinnati newspaper may appear to have no association with Huntsville. Moreover, surely the word “ovariotomy” had never appeared in print in a Huntsville newspaper before. After all that was a very private “female” word in a time when the legs of the piano were tastefully draped and covered from sight. In 1809 Ephraim MacDowell successfully operated in his home, with no anesthesia, and removed a 50-pound ovarian tumor from a woman. In desperate need, Mrs. Crawford had ridden 60 miles on horseback to Danville, Kentucky for the surgery. Dr. James MacDowell, his nephew, although protesting, assisted with the surgery. This was the first time the procedure had been performed anywhere, and Ephraim MacDowell had not even completed medical school. Later, in 1879, a monument was dedicated in Danville to Dr. MacDowell, who was finally given an honorary doctor's degree.⁹⁰ Louis Schwab, physician and mayor of Cincinnati, presided at the banquet in 1910 commemorating the operation that brought such world-wide fame to the backwoods of America. In 1929 the state of Kentucky donated a statue in the National Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol to Dr. Ephraim MacDowell.⁹¹

Now one must make the mental leap from Dr. MacDowell to Huntsville. Apparently Dr. Ephraim MacDowell's ancestors had arrived in America in 1673 and settled in Virginia. The oldest son, John, was a surveyor and was killed by the Iroquois on Christmas day in 1742. His son, Samuel, married Mary McClung, the “prettiest girl in Virginia.” Their family moved onto Danville, Kentucky, where his oldest son, Ephraim, married Sarah Shelby. (This was Dr. Ephraim MacDowell of the preceding story.) Their daughter, Susanna, married David Irvine.⁹² This now leads one to the prominent White family of Huntsville that the reader has already met.

In 1844, Sarah Irvine (the daughter of Susanna and David Irvine) married Addison White, a son of James and Eliza White, who had arrived in Huntsville in 1839. And so, the

Sully portrait of David Irvine was displayed over the mantel in the dining salon in the home on Adams Avenue, which belonged to Susan MacDowell White and her brother, Newton White.⁹³

The links to the Huntsville families and Statuary Hall continue. John C. Greenway (1872-1926), grandson of Addison and Sarah (Irvine) White, was born in Huntsville at the house at 528 Adams Avenue. The dashing and athletic Yale graduate, Greenway, was a friend to Teddy Roosevelt and an officer of Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Later Greenway was commissioned a brigadier general for his service in WWI. (His widow Isabelle Greenway later became a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.) The state of Arizona submitted the General's statue to the National Statuary Hall. Thus, two members of the Dr. MacDowell family have statues in our nation's capitol.



Then, to continue connecting circles, another nephew of Ephraim MacDowell, Dr. Joseph MacDowell, taught at the Cincinnati Medical College. One of his students was **Charles Alexander Pope** (1818-1870) of Huntsville, son of Benjamin Pope whom the reader met earlier. (Dr. Pope in 1841 settled in St. Louis and became Dean of the Medical School. He was held in such high esteem, the school was often affectionately called "Pope's College.")

Miss Clay suggested that Washington Irving and David Irvine looked alike and shared the same kinship. She will continue this theme in the next issue of the series. But first The Old Mahogany Table, for a brief moment, editorialized that women were equal to men, and perhaps SUPERIOR. The Table was aware that the women of its household had been forced to make both ends meet and as such were at the least equal to men. As a concession, perhaps thrown in because the male readers paid the monthly bills, woman was "superior to man, as long as she does not struggle to be his equal."

Number Nineteen

February 16, 1910

Sully's Portrait of David Irvine

Dr. MacDowell and His Famous Surgery

The recent discussion over the country of the high cost of food products – and the causes, with investigations of the government, and the ways and means of correcting the same, has been a subject that has interested The Old Mahogany Table recently. And when the story was told that a millionaire economist had suggested as one reason for the trouble in securing the freshest most appetizing in quality and value, that the lady of the house would stand at her 'phone give orders for her table viands, leaving the quality and price to her grocer rather than go out and do her marketing, examine the articles of diet, and demand a reasonable price and the best quality, it was especially interested. The Old Mahogany Table does not enjoy gathering up its viands by 'phone, it prefers to receive its morceaux by wireless, and to prepare and serve them ad libitum with plenty of spice, mixed with grains of common sense, a dash of humor, and quick fire; dish out to suit the appetite and to furnish mental nutriment and heart aliment. It is one of its greatest delights to know its ingredients and the producing of an agreeable effect upon those who partake of them.

The Irvines of Kentucky have a most romantic lineage, and a bright, clever descendant of the family, Miss Lucinda Boyd, after traveling thru the Western Border of Bonnie Scotland has woven a family story as charming and as fresh as its sparkling Kirtle waters, and with the purple heather abloom and the emerald of the holly bush glistening in the sun of sentiment.

Crines Erevine was the founder of a royal line in Scotland and Kings of the name of Irvine. Crine Irvine, in 1004 wooed, won and was wed to Beatrix, a lovely daughter and heiress of Malcolm II of Scotland. Their son became the heir to the throne and as Duncan I, his reign began in 1034. From this royal marriage, a direct line is traced to the American Irvians, (the name being variously spelt Irvin, Irving, and Irwin). Bruce is one of their line and under his banner the Irvine clan fought for their freedom and shook off the shackles of English tyranny, under the burden of which Scotland groaned, and restored it to its pristine glory.

The Irvians and their great fighting force fill in the Annandale branch on the West Border, an important niche in Scotia's history with its monuments of feudal times on the banks of the fair Kirtle, and its vicinity. There are the remains of many towers, with the radius of a few miles, that perpetuate the name, fame and valor of the Irvine clans and are preserved, with all the romance, exquisite sentiment and the patriotism in which stone, books and hearts of the Border Lairds and their ladies.

William de Irvine (1260-1333) the first Laird of Drum, was armor bearer for Robert Bruce and was with him from the incipency of the struggle against Edward I of England until the victory at Bannockburn.

By a charter under the Great Seal, William de Irvine was awarded, for his unswerving fidelity and very valuable services, a large portion of the Royal Forest of Drum in Aberdeenshire. The charter is still extant with the date, "February 1st in the 17th year of our reign, (1323)." Another charter in the 18th years of his reign, dated at Kynro, October 4th is

preserved in the family archives and grants lands in free barony. The family crest is a silver shield, a hand holding a holly branch surmounting it. On the shield there are three holly leaves entranced.

The legend says that Robert Bruce, on one occasion, was overcome by fatigue, when the enemy was in pursuit, close and hot. He fell asleep under a holly bush, and a faithful Irvine kept watch whilst he found brief refuge in

“Nature’s sweet restorer.”

The Irvines were among those

“Scots what ha’e wi’ Wallace bled,
Scots wham Bruce has often led,
Welcome to your gory bed.
Or to glorious victory!

* *

Wha for Scotland’s King and law
Freedom’s sword will strongly draw;
Freeman stand, of freeman fa’ –
Caledonia! Oa wi’ me!

* *

Let the proud usurper low
Tyrants fall in every foe!
Liberty’s in every blow!
Forward! Let us do or die!”⁹⁴

Again were they prominent at Flodden Field, in September 1513 when James with 8000 of his men met death, and where Clare knelt by the side of the dying Marmion, and reverently prayed and tenderly sung to him, ere his hand waved the fragment of his blade, and his dying lips shouted, as if in triumph over death and the grave – “Victory!”

Of course we have all read from the gifted pen of Sir Walter Scott all these stories, says *The Old Mahogany Table*, and for three quarters of a century – a realism brings them closer to us when we know that there are active in them the antecedents of those to whom we are so closely allied by ties of friendship and are in closest social contact.

Seven Irvine brothers came to this country between 1725 and 1731. There were Alexander, George, David, William, Robert, James and Samuel. They fled to escape political persecution, first to Glencoe, Ireland thence to America.

David Irvine was a man of splendid business acumen and good judgment. By careful management he acquired a rich landed estate in three states – Kentucky, Mississippi and in Missouri. Irvinton is the beautiful old colonial home built by Mr. David Irvine, just outside of Richmond, Kentucky and has for three score years been the Mecca of the outside world who visit the cultured little town and is pointed out with a pardonable pride by citizen who glory in its glories. Mr. Irvine was born in 1796 and died in 1872.

In 1844 Mr. Addison White, who was one of Virginia’s handsomest and most chivalrous beaux, the descendant of a knightly race, wooed, won and wed, at Irvinton the queenly daughter of the mansion, Sarah Shelby Irvine. From Kentucky to Alabama he brought his bride – graceful, refined, dignified and cultured, with a graciousness that won our love and commanded our homage. She charmed the social and blest the domestic sphere, tenderly remarks *The Old Mahogany Table*, and in her were combined that trinity of rare virtues – a loyal wife, good mother, and perfect hostess. Tho she grew in grace ‘neath Alabama’s sun, until she entered that realism of Glory’s Endless Day, leaving a cheering light shining in the heart of those who knew her best and loved her most – her loyal home loving heart yearned for the spot where:

“The sun shines bright on the old Kentucky Home,”

and the notes of Foster’s famous lyric, would bring to her eyes brighter lights thru the mists of memory’s tears, and to her cheek a deeper glow, while the smile on her lip was full of sweetness.

Thru the White, Irvine, MacDowell and Shelby lines the family can claim distinction as Colonial Dames, but no distinction could be greater than to be child of such a mother as Sarah Shelby Irvine White, asserts The Mahogany Table, and I waft a benediction to her memory as the truest type of woman.



The Huntsville Telephone Exchange had been in service since 1883. Miss Clay did not allow the “Table” to acknowledge that it didn’t use the new fangled machine for its news, but it preferred the wireless way of speaking with humans who used a different spice to liven up the stories and produce the desire effect for its listeners.

From the next paragraphs it is obvious a friend in Huntsville had shared with Miss Clay a copy of the book by Lucinda Boyd (1840-1913), *The Irvines and Their Kin*. Mrs. Boyd had traveled to England and Scotland gathering the material for this book which was released in 1908. The genealogy included follows the accepted version, except for the exact names of the seven Irvine brothers.

Number Twenty

February 23, 1910

Portraits of the Moores, The Harrisons and Barnards

Frye's Portraits – John W. Dodge

And, Interesting Miniatures

With those dear old friends of sweet days gone by, says The Old Mahogany Table, I feel a close, tender association and soothing —

“So, when my spirit on the trip
Of life is weary grown,
There must it seek companionship,
And friendship's gentle tone.”

There is a very handsome portrait of Col. Benjamin Harrison at the home of his great granddaughter, Miss Martha P. Barnard on Adams Avenue. It is a fine copy made by Mr. Frye from the original portrait painted by a Virginia artist. It is a life-size bust portrait and enclosed in a handsome gold frame. It is a strong, aristocratic face, with gray hair surmounting a broad forehead and a pair of kindly brown eyes attract and win your confidence and admiration. He wears a suit of gentlemanly black, and a stock collar and a cravat of the style of the '30s. He was a descendant of the Signer of the Declaration of Independence, of the same name, and a near relative of President Harrison and Gen. Wade Hampton of Revolutionary fame.

The Old Mahogany Table became indignant because we smiled here at the “near kin” genealogy, with that truly frivolous vein that is just “Lewisy” – not malicious.

No, they are not near silk, near gold, nor near aristocratic – they are of pure lineage from a genuine aristocracy – a line that in each generation, has been represented worthily by its men and women in the public life, as businessmen and statesmen, and, in social as leaders – cultivated and refined.

Colonel Benjamin Harrison came in 1833 to Alabama, from Brunswick County, near Petersburg, Virginia and bought large plantations in Limestone County and Madison County and was a thrifty, intelligent planter, and accumulated a handsome fortune, giving to each one of his three children a valuable estate in a plantation.

Martha Leslie Harrison, daughter of Colonel Harrison, was descended from the Captain – Leslie, who fought under General Washington. She was beautiful in her old age, you remember, says The Old Mahogany Table, with her crown of snow white hair, sparkling eyes, and expressive face, full of vigor of mind and body. She must have had a rare gift of beauty to attract lovers and admirers in her girlhood, and the friends who recall her say she possess unusual charms and was a great social favorite.

Martha Leslie Harrison was married to Dr. David Moore, in Brunswick County, Virginia. Dr. Moore was the scion of a large and influential family. In the grand Old North

State, from early Colonial days, the Moores have stood in the limelight of public life, and upheld the family standard with reflected credit, from the time two Colonial Governors lent luster to the genealogical tree.

Ere the Moores had made for themselves "a local habitation and a name"⁹⁵ in America, the family was noble and distinguished in Ireland. Sir Roger Moore was one of Dr. Moore's worthy ancestors. His mother was Rebecca Fletcher of Virginia, (and of the same family as the numerous Fletchers now in Madison County.)

Dr. David Moore was one of those energetic, successful pioneer planters, who found the Golden Fleece hanging from the cotton stalk – a thousand good pounds to the acre, annually – remarks The Old Mahogany Table, enthusiastically. It was at a time when the staple was shipt from Whitesburg and Triana to New Orleans on flat boats at the cost of \$600 for each cargo of 400 bales. The cotton was stored on flat boats, to await the tide, and usually two or three trips a year were made. A pilot poled the boats to Muscle Shoals from Whitesburg or Triana, receiving from \$175 to \$200 for each trip. This is somewhat of a divergence, however.

Dr. Moore was not a selfish man, and his chief goal was not the golden fleece for self-aggrandizement. He was ever a leading spirit in all public enterprises and lived to see Huntsville freckled with evidences of his generosity in the industries and buildings public and private improvements.

It was not destined, nor did Dr. David Moore desire to remain out of the public life of which his family had, for centuries been active participants. In the service of Alabama, he was elected to the Legislature in 1820, and returned 13 times. From 1822 to 1825 he was sent to the State Senate. But for influence he preferred the Lower house, of which he was, in 1841, unanimously chosen Speaker.

Regarding Dr. Moore's fine business methods and judgment, said the OLD MAHOGANY TABLE, they were infallible, judging from practical results. He amassed a large fortune, as evidence of those virtues, having begun life as a poor man, with wealth of brain, braw and an innate indomitable energy and will as capital. Moreover, he was the Christian gentleman, a substantial and ready friend to young men, and with a beacon light of Charity shining thru his soul and lighting his pathway from earth to Heaven, with the Christian's Faith and Hope to make the way surer.

Then, there was the exquisite dainty daughter of the house, Harriet Haywood, who was named for Dr. Moore's first wife. Her maternal ancestor was of the Leslie family of Scotland, whose intermarriage with the royal blood of Scotland, the Bruces and Stuarts allied them also with the best blue blood of America where every citizen can boast of royal bloody, by the honor earned in acting well his part, and every citizen is an individual sovereign – a right for which the Harrisons, Leslies, Moores, and other collateral branches of the family fought to secure and maintained right nobly.

Lovely Harriet Moore and her lover husband is a separate and distinct story that must, with its romance, fill the Twenty-first Number of my stories so I will reserve it, says The Old Mahogany Table. But, who was that lover husband? Dr. John D. Barnard, of course, says The Old Mahogany Table, and in the parlor of his granddaughter, Miss Mattie P. Barnard hangs his portrait that was painted by John W. Dodge. I will tell you all about the wedding and reception of these lovers next. A graphic description of this brilliant society event of the Autumn of 1854 is given by Mr. John Withers Clay in a letter to his brother, Clement C. Clay, which I will read to you, promises The Old Mahogany Table, and, at the same time, I will tell you some interesting stories about Hattie Moore's and John Barnard's lineage.

A Valentine for the Old Mahogany Table

Bearing a sweet message of love, laden with perfume and beautiful in its form and purity, a Japanese lily, as a valentine was sent by Mrs. Kate L. Townes to The Old Mahogany Table, and made its heart glad. No one has expressed more pleasure or given more encouragement to the Old Mahogany in its dear old stories of the past, and it extend to Mrs. Townes a grateful acknowledgement of her sweet thought. The Old Table is not so ancient that it cannot appreciate pretty attentions in flowers especially and the lily abloom on its heart, made it glow with delight and love for St. Valentine and Mrs. Townes.

There are just enough blossoms on the two stalks – 19 – to spell The Old Mahogany Table, a pleasant floral co-incidence, along with the fact that Mrs. Townes had tenderly placed them on its heart ere the soul that gave the Old Mahogany Table life, is departed.



How lovely of friend, Kate (Wildbahn) Townes, to send a Valentine's Day remembrance to the Clay home. They were neighbors and both she, and her husband, John Leigh Townes, were descendants of old distinguished Madison County families. She was descended from John Hunt and his ancestor, of the same name, had been a delegate to the state constitutional convention.⁹⁶

The reader can readily sort out the family of Col. Benjamin Harrison of Virginia. His ancestors included a kinship to President Benjamin Harrison and Gen. Wade Hampton. (Miss Clay did not mention the fort named for General Hampton in nearby Limestone County. This was the first fort ever established by the Federal government to protect the native American Indians.) In 1833 or 1834, Dr. David Moore, a widower, married Harrison's daughter, Martha Leslie Harrison, and, of course, she joined him in Madison County. Mr. Harrison saw the opportunity and, with his family, also migrated to Alabama and settled on "Nubbin Ridge"—an area bordering both Madison and Limestone Counties. Unfortunately, in very few years, four of his daughters and Mrs. Harrison died, followed by Mr. Harrison in 1850, "an amiable upright man."⁹⁷

The next relationships are just a bit more difficult, but the pioneers are so notable they need to be acknowledged. Dr. David Moore (1789-1845) was truly one of Madison's leading citizens. Although he was born in Brunswick County, Virginia, he and some of his mother's family immigrated to Alabama as Miss Clay mentioned. Grandfather James Fletcher moved his extensive family, and they also settled on "Nubbin Ridge." Moore's cousin, Algernon Fletcher, became a banker and a member of the state legislature. Cousin Richard Fletcher chose a medical school in Pennsylvania and practiced in northern Alabama.⁹⁸

David Moore's profession was medicine. He was a friend of Andrew Jackson, and a surgeon on Jackson's medical staff in the battles with the Creek Indians of 1813-14 at Horseshoe Bend. However Moore's real success was in business and development. He had arrived in Huntsville, Mississippi Territory, in time for the first land sales; LeRoy Pope appointed Moore one of the three original land trustees of his newly laid-out town. Doctor Moore was one of nine subscribers to the first bank in the Alabama Territory, and served in the legislature of the new state. There, he was responsible for enacting "The Woman's Law" to protect women from business misfortunes incurred by their spouses. Moore owned nine plantations locally, and his cotton, annually 1000 bales, was shipped directly from Huntsville to Liverpool, England. This led him, with six others, to incorporate and oversee that the turnpikes were macadamized. Among the roads modernized were the ten miles to the

Tennessee River, the river port; the road to John Connally's Tavern and the racetrack to the north; and the road west toward Athens.⁹⁹

Dr. Moore had married, first, Harriet, a daughter of the esteemed lawyer Judge Haywood of Tennessee. They had no children. After her death he married Martha Leslie Harrison, just introduced. By the time of his death in 1845, he and Martha had four living children: David Leslie, Samuel Harrison, Kate, and Harriet. (Two babies had died in infancy.) Dr. David Moore, at that time, was the largest landholder in North Alabama. His estate left the children with enormous sums. Fifteen years later, according to the 1860 Federal census, their inheritance was still largely intact. Young David's worth totaled \$417,000; Samuel and their sister Kate's share was \$317,000; their married sister Harriet's share was \$310,000. And of course Moore's widow, Martha, would have had her own considerable dower's portion.¹⁰⁰

Cleverly, Miss Clay did not continue with the story of the romance of young Dr. Moore's daughter, Harriet, and Dr. John Barnard. In later issues there will be stories of not one, but two more romances. Keep in mind that Miss Clay described the widow, Harriet's mother, Martha Leslie (Harrison) Moore in her later years with attractive sparkling eyes and vigor of mind and body.

Number Twenty-One

March 2, 1910

Harriet Haywood Moore

Dr. John D. Barnard

“Where Memory, with its fond
 revelings,
Sheds a tender light o’er all”

There used to be a canvas of Hattie Moore, but viewing it with an artistic eyes Hattie destroyed the canvas – the artist did not catch, in his limning, the refined, spirituelle expression that had characterized her classic features, but a miniature, says The Old Mahogany Table, painted by a Philadelphia artist named Smith, tells the story to this generation of her beauty. She paid the artist \$100 for her miniature, when his fame was in embryo. Later, persons of means were pleased to have on of the artist’s miniatures at \$600.

Did you ever read a gem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, interrogated The Old Mahogany Table, with the title “A Portrait?” Not waiting for nor expecting a reply, it continued. Well with a few changes, and apologies to the poetess, I will recite a few of the stanzas, selected because they describe Hattie Moore as I knew her when she was 18 years old and lookt like that miniature, painted by Smith:

“I will paint her as I see her,
When she lookt upon the sun;

Her face is lily-clear,
Lily shaped, and dropt in Duty
To the law of its own beauty.

Oval cheeks encolored faintly
Which a trail of soft brown hair
Keeps from fading off to air:

And a forehead fair and saintly
Which two brown eyes undershine
Like Meek prayers before a shrine.

* * * *

Quiet talk she liketh best,
In a bower of gentle looks—
Culling flowers or reading books.

And her voice, it murmurs lowly,
As a silver stream may run
Which yet feels, you feel, the sun.
And her smile, it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common jestings are.

And if any painter drew her,
He would paint her unaware
With a halo round her hair.
And all fancies yearn to cover
The hard earth whereon she passes,
With the thymy-scented grasses.

And all hearts do pray, "God love her!"
Ay, and always, in good sooth,
We may all be sure He doth!"

The above pen picture portrays her well – both in person and in character.

Hattie Moore's maternal ancestors, says The Old Mahogany Table, as I told you, were the Leslies of Scotland, who married into the royal blood of Bruce and the Stuarts. When a school girl of 17, her beauty and grace were so markt, that she was called by her admirers, "Le Reine Blanche," [The White Queen] a name given to Marie Stuart when a young girl wearing white as mourning for her young husband, Francis II, the King of France. This was before Marie Stuart had lost exquisite innocence of expression, so enthusiastically described by contemporaries. Hattie never cared however, to be called like Marie Stuart and was not proud of the Stuart blood, tho she was of the Bruce lineage.

Harriet Moore's education was one of her special charms. Her intellect was as beautiful as her face, and shone thru her soulful eyes. Her letters and notes were models of rhetoric, as dainty in chirography and diction, as her own sweet self. She went to Mrs. Lamb's finishing school in Philadelphia and studied French, literature and art with pleasure and ambition worthy her family and temperament – learning to speak French like a native Parisian, thoroughly acquainted with the literary classics, and in her art she has left to her children a lovely copy of Raphael's Sistine Madonna, that the great artist "Raphael the Divine," would not disclaim as worthy reproduction, declares The Old Mahogany Table.

The Sistine Madonna
Of "Raphael the Divine"

From the Great White Throne of God
there came,
To the arms of a Virgin, a Babe, whose
Fame
Was carried, as if by the wings of a
Dove.
Bringing Sweet Peace to all – from
Above:

And she read in the eyes of the Little
One, sweet –
In the Baby wails, and His heart wild
beat – a
A story that thrilled, with a vague un-
Rest –
For a moment – the Mother's tender
breast:

But the first sparkling Star in the
azure dome,
Seemed softly to carry the Message
home –
Home to the heart of the Mother here.
Who closer clasp her Babe, so dear;

And out thru the night, so calm and
still:
Peace on Earth! To all Good Will!
He, The Anointed, you now careess,
Cometh with Joy the World to bless!
It fell like a balm from the deepening
sky,
On the Soul of this Mother – the tear
in her eye
Glistened a moment – a smile bright-
ened up
The pure, sweet face – there was Joy in
her cup!

Like the Peace that cometh after great
sorrow –
The Blessed Babe was hers, till the
morrow
Sacrifice pure, would snatch from
her arm;
His Childhood's steps she would keep
from all harm!

Every voice in the breeze that passeth
by,
Whispers like Angels from the Eastern
sky;
And softly bears Love and Peace that
is sure –
Like a calm after tempest – Her Babe
is secure!
Shout the Glad Tidings! Thruout the
whole Earth!
The Babe is Our Saviour! Blest ma-
donna gave birth!

And Raphael's brush, with Divine In-
spiration,
A Halo hath left o'er the Light of Sal-
vation!

Virginia C. Clay

Pretty Harriet Moore met her love, Dr. John D. Barnard in Philadelphia, when he was a medical student there. He was a worthy descendant of a noble and landed gentry of England – of the Barnards of Northhamptonshire, who from ancient times were

distinguished for services in the Government and the wars of Great Britain. It is a matter of history that, in the reign of George II, the great Company of London Merchants elected Sir John Barnard Lord Mayor of London to defend their civic rights from the oppressive means and measure of Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister. This, with signal ability, he accomplished, and became noted for his incorruptible and fearless character. The story is told, continues The Old Mahogany Table that on one occasion Sir Robert Walpole cynically remarked to a small party of friends, "There is no man that has not his price." A gentleman teasingly asked, "What have you found to be Sir John Barnard's price?" After a thoughtful pause, the Prime Minister replied, "Popularity!" But the verdict was that Sir Robert's answer was begging the question, declared The Old Mahogany Table.

Two nephews of Sir John Barnard accompanied General Oglethorpe on his expedition to colonize Georgia. Colonel John Barnard commanded the famous British regiment known as The Rangers, and both maintained a family distinction and became officers of distinction. Edward Barnard at the death of his brother succeeded to the command of The Rangers.

Col. John Barnard received for his valuable services to the British government, a grant from the Crown, of an island opposite the city of Savannah. This he named Wilmington Island, in honor of William III of Great Britain whom he admired for his military talent, and because an ancestor had fought in William's wars. This grant is on record at Savannah – and Mattie and Katie Barnard, the lovely daughters of Dr. John Barnard, inherited a tract of this same island.

Did you ever notice, remarked The Old Mahogany Table, that in some old families the descendants inherited not only sentimental traditions and records of distinction, but valuable estates and handsome jewels, gown and laces that fit in so well with the beautiful stories of antecedent fame. Others have the tender memories – adorned with a wealth of brilliant achievements, along with a set of old fleece-lined underwear and an old linen black satin gown – worn in Washington during the administration of Andrew Jackson, an old teapot 200 years old, with the spout off, and a few pieces of old silver, and a bookcase full old tomes of the classics in the old English, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Spanish and God only knows how to make other unreadable, and unfit-to be read old books for up-to-date minds polite, and perhaps a few "objects of bigotry and virtue" as Mrs. Partingdon would say – and an old Mahogany Table with its appendix gone. The Barnards and Moores inherited the first and we and the Bassetts the 2nd list of valuables.

I will have to tell the story another time about the famous wedding of the beautiful Harriet Moore and Dr. John Barnard in 1854 whose descendants have the landed estates, jewels, silks, along with the beautiful traditions and historical stories of laurels worn for the victories won, again promises The Old Mahogany Table.

The type made The Old Mahogany in its last story say that Miss Mattie B. Barnard was a granddaughter of Dr. John Barnard, and in fact, she is his eldest daughter – GRAND in mind and NOBLE in heart.



The story of the unappreciated canvas destroyed by Hattie Moore, by 1910 was, of course, only a memory.

Today's reader will be hard pressed, as was this editor, to find a copy of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "A Portrait" that apparently, with a few changes, described Hattie Moore.

Hattie certainly attracted loyal admirers, male and female. However, Miss Clay's reader must not connect Miss Hattie's royal Scottish connection too closely with Mary Stuart, the ill-fated queen. It was not uncommon; many Huntsville young girls went north to "finish" their education, and Philadelphia was a popular site. Perhaps that was when the miniature was painted.

Dr. John D. Barnard was also a noble character, one worthy of Miss Hattie. His ancestor, Sir John Barnard (1685-1764) Lord Mayor of London has long been considered in academic circles as one of the men who might have written Shakespeare's material. Another John Barnard was the original commander of the provincial mounted Rangers who, from the 1740's, protected the vast Georgia colony from the Indians, the Spanish and French marauders.¹⁰¹ As a reward, John Barnard was given a royal grant for Wilmington Island. Barnard Street and Oglethorpe Avenue in Savannah connect in the very center of today's Savannah, Georgia.

The Old Table acknowledged that the fleece-lined underwear, a spout-less teapot, reader-less old books, and a table without its insert were perhaps the only tangible Clay inheritance. There for just one moment, tender memories and brilliant achievements seemed to be weighted by an unseen hand and the scale was not in balance. (The location of the old fleece lined underwear that did duty in the 1840s in Washington City is unknown.)

Mrs. Partingdon was a scatterbrained heroine created by humorist Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber (1814-1890). She became the American version of Mrs. Malaprop.

But what about the promised romantic story of Harriet Moore? Well, that will have to wait. Obviously memories may overcome, leaving one weary, with a shortened article.



Number Twenty-Two

March 9, 1910

Harriet Haywood Moore

Dr. John D. Barnard

“Memory’s song is an old love tune,
Shadows grow soft in the afternoon.”

The wedding of Harriet Moore says The Old Mahogany Table, was one of Huntsville’s greatest social events, and the village was all excitement and the village belle, beauty and heirs, her handsome financē, and their prospective marriage, were discussed around every old mahogany table in the fine mansions, and deal table of the darkey’s cabin. Ole Mis’s niggers sho hel’ dey haids high an’ wouldn’t have nothing tuh do wid de free niggers nuh de niggahs er po’ white trash – ‘ceptin’ ter tell’em erbout Miss Hah’iet’s fine clo’es an’ jewelry an’ things. With a look of scorn at the free niggers and the slaves of the poorer white people.

No Editor would have dared publish an account of that wedding when the event occurred, says The Old Table. It was not the style, and he would have been held personally accountable for a gross liberty and an infringement of the unwritten *lese majestie* social law that governed the Southern home.

Those who objected then are in their last resting place, so I will give you an extract from a letter written by **John Withers Clay** on November 17, 1854 to his brother, Clement C. Clay, telling about the wedding.

“Mary and I attended the marriage party of Dr. John Barnard and beautiful Harriet Moore. They were married at the Church of the Nativity. (The first little Episcopal Church) They gave the most brilliant entertainment so far as outward appearances are concerned that was ever seen in Huntsville. Mr. Lay married them, of course.

The pulpit, chancel and its furniture were decorated with evergreens that were interlaced with chrysanthemums, (the only flower that the heavy frosts had left), and brilliantly illuminated with 50 wax candles, at least, on the chancel, and a wreath of evergreens and flowers over the vestryroom door.”



(In those days remarks, parenthetically, The Old Mahogany Table, the use of tissue paper flowers to adorn the Church would have horrified the Priest and congregation. And, had any member of the Church suggested that love songs be sung by a girl in a décolleté gown, or a cotta and cap stuck on one side of a tulle pompadour, with a lace collar, a sunburst and a tulle choux to adorn her throat – wel’ – nothing but the insane asylum would they have thought suitable for such a sacreligious person! Doing, what you call “stunts” in the Church of God – a Sanctuary – would never have been countenanced!)

Now to continue the letter:

“At Mrs. Moore’s house, the walk on both sides, from the gate to the door, was illuminated with transparencies, in white and colored, the white square in shape and home manufacture, one of either side having two hand painted hearts, pierced with darts. The colored globular with Chinese figures of various devices, imported from Philadelphia.

Nothing unusual about the parlors. The supper table was most elegant. The meat supper exceedingly rich and abundant. The confectionery table was adorned with finest pyramids, ice creams and charlotte russes; oranges, pineapples, and very costly wines. The table of sweets was in the form of an X. The main table at one end, had a Love-in-the Mist of French kisses and oranges . A pyramid about 4 ½ feet high – at the opposite end was a wooden stand with wire arms covered with evergreens – and on the arms were hung a large number of flower wreathed baskets filled with bonbons. The guests were requested to take the baskets of bonbons, and the tree was left stript.

In the center of the table was a five-story pyramid of candy with emblematic figures in the interior. This, Rev. Mr. Cobb told me was a model of the monument erected to Sir Walter Scott in Edinburgh. It was a marvel of the riches Gothic architecture, and full five feet high or more.

There was a very large and glittering pyramid of salvers of cutglass filled with jelly. There were also smaller pyramids of cakes on the arms of the X table besides a number of other good things, too tedious to mention.

The furniture of the bridal chamber cost \$2,500. The French rosewood bed bore a rich crimson satin damask canopy with lace curtains. The head of the bed is as high as the cornice that held the lace curtains.

The wardrobe of rosewood is in the Gothic style with mirrored doors. A superb satin armchair and sofa and rosewood writing materials. A rosewood washstand with a marble slab, a most beautiful china chamber set, and a magnificent bureau the marble of which was graced with a large rich white satin pincushion with trimmings of lace 1/8 of a yard wide, perfumeries and toilet appurtenances innumerable, etc. The robe de nuit and cap of fine cambric trimmed with honiton lace, which Mary says costs at least \$10 a yard. On the mantel were two handsome marble statuettes of Baal and Virginia.



The wedding dress of a costly white silk was beautiful with tulle overdress and trimmed with puffs of tulle and bows of satin ribbon and pearls. Her necklace was of pearls, and her hair was twined with pearls and adorned with French crepe flowers with feather petals, very beautiful and costly. Her whole dress cost \$500 and the necklace of pearls \$1,000. Her veil was simple tulle.

The wedding, I learn from very good authority, cost not less than \$10,000. Everybody seems pleased with the groom who is an accomplished and very pleasing gentleman, and he certainly has good reason to be pleased with Huntsville.”

This wedding reception, that was so graphically described by Mr. Clay, says The Old Mahogany Table, was given at the **Moore residence** on Franklin Street that is now occupied by Harry Moore Rhett, a son of Harriet by her second marriage to Col. R.B. Rhett.

—•••—

Certainly bridal weddings and receptions have changed since 1854. Any newspaper account then, for fear of being disrespectful to Southern sensibilities, would not have described the event for its readers who had not been privileged to attend. Although it might have seemed inappropriate to use a private letter written from Miss Clay's father to her uncle, here was a previously unpublished story—news. The wedding on November 18th at the Church of Nativity and the reception at the bride's home were quite remarkable for many reasons.

The Right Rev. Henry C. Lay performed the ceremony at the festively decorated original church building, which later, in 1859, was replaced by the current Gothic-style structure. Miss Clay mused that modern trends in weddings with love songs performed during the service by a girl in a low-cut gown or a short vestment with ornate hairstyles and an accompanying net were sacrilegious, at the very least. Tsk, tsk, what had the sanctified church atmosphere come to in 1910?

In the 1859 wedding the mother of the bride, lovely widow, Martha (Harrison) Moore, hosted the reception at her home at 621 Franklin Street for Hattie and Dr. Barnard. The guests were served an elegant wedding supper, and the sweets were so unusual they deserved description by the writer, Withers Clay. Bishop Cobb, also a guest, recognized that the candy pyramid was modeled after the monument completed in 1846 of Sir Walter Scott in the gardens at Edinburgh. The original overwhelming Gothic monstrosity is just over 200 feet high with 64 statuettes of Scott's fictional characters. Mrs. Moore's version must have been quite something to behold.

Apparently it was common to invite the guest to admire the bridal chamber of the newlyweds, even the night attire of the bride.

Unfortunately Dr. Barnard died in April 1860, leaving an exceedingly wealthy, 24-year-old widow, Hattie, and three small children, Mattie, 5; Kate, 3; and David, a 1-year-old. According to one local historian another guest, unmentioned in the Clay account, was **Robert Barnwell Rhett Jr.**, who described the bride as "beautiful and lovely as a rose."¹⁰² But more about him later.



Number Twenty-Three

March 16, 1910

Leo Wheat's Portrait By Frye

Helen Keller and Leo Wheat

Play, Sing Dance in the Old Home

“When some chance word or idle strain,
Unlock the flood-gates of our pain,
For those who taught us weeping.”

* *

“’Tis but the Past that shines the while
Our power to smile renewing.”

These stories of our ancestors who made Huntsville's history are not prosing – they need no glossary or thesaurus to awaken a kindred spirit of gravity and mirth. There are feelings of all kinds, from the humorous to the pathetic, and, at times they are even dipt in poetic luxury, with a perpetuity of life, some quaint and time-worn, others fresh as daffodils, and sweet as violets. You will even hear these old people, at times, talking with an air of patronage to the up-to-date youth comparing their antebellum ideas and conditions to those of the present day. But we love the old stories, just the same, and, thru them, have learned to love the portraits of those social *dramatis personae* of years ago.

The sweet Spring flowers, soft air and flood of sunshine have brought memories very sweet and beguiling of an afternoon spent at The Old Home 16 years ago, on April 14, 1894, when the honored guests around The Old Mahogany Table were Helen Keller and Leo What – two wonderful geniuses, with divergent, God-given graces, but in close communion of sentiment that wel'ed up from each with an electric thrill of responsive heart tones.

Mr. Frye, you know, painted a portrait of Leo, when the lad was young, pure, innocent. Where it is now, says The Old Table, I do not know, but I remember well when it was painted. People said it was angelic and bore a divine inspiration.



Now about that memorable after, says The Old Table, with a tender reflection, and I will talk about Leo later, in a story all his own.

There were present to meet these two celebrities – Helen Keller a mere slip of a girl; her accomplished teacher, Miss Sullivan, who is in reality, no less wonderful then Helen herself; **Leo Wheat**, of Virginia; Rev. Oscar Haywood; Mrs. A.S. Keller, Helen's mother; Mrs. Hopkins, one of the matrons of Perkins Institute for the blind in Boston; Captain and Mrs. George Turner; Dr. A.B. Shelby; Mrs. David Clopton. And of the home folks there were grandma, father, mother, and the girls, Mary, Susanna, and Jennie at home to receive them.

Helen, the mute interpreter of God's Glory, in her face reflected the emotions of her pure heart as she recited the "Psalm of Life," and played "Home Sweet Home" on the piano. Leo, began, with that divine genius, to play a medley of Southern airs, and struck the chords of "Dixie."

Helen, deaf, dumb and blind, felt the vibration of the stirring strains, kept time in perfect rhythm with her feet, her face illumined with emotion. Then suddenly, she rushed over toward Leo, saying in a peculiar, tho not unmelodious tone, "That man's music will run me wild."

She rushed across the room to the piano, alone, and put her beautiful arm around his neck. The strains of "Dixie" ceased – a tender pause – then Leo began to play "Home Sweet Home." Helen again felt the vibration, and said, in tremulous excitement, "He plays 'Home Sweet Home.'" Drawing his face to her she kissed him.

There were the two greatest geniuses of the South – one who had baffled science, and the other who had swayed multitudes on both continents, remarks The Old Mahogany.

Helen had paid to Leo, the greatest tribute he had received, tho thousands had knelt at his shire in adoration of his music.

"Ah," sighed Leo, "Huntsville to me, has always been nearer Heaven than any other place, and here is one of God's own Angels with me today." He then began to compose a tone picture to Helen, while she rested her arm around his shoulder, smoothing his brow with her soft hand, and drying the tears that would rain down his cheeks.

The scene changed, Helen desired to dance, and Mary Clay taught her the waltz steps. She first marked the time on Helen's hand, saying "glide – two, three," while Leo played his exquisite waltz, "Girls of the South." Then, [Helen] sat on the floor, felt Mary's feet while she made the five dancing positions, then the waltz step. Helen learned the waltz as quickly as children in full possession of their faculties, and touched my old heart with her beautiful faith, hope, love. God bless that memory, exclaims The Old Mahogany Table, of Helen who tenderly carest the invalid father, of The Old Home, J. Withers Clay, and patted Grandma Lewis, and dear Leo, for

He awoke the chords of memory,
In melody's refrain.
And vanisht pleasures joyous
Were with us all again.

The faces dead came with his lay
So bright with love and life.
And glorious was the yesterday
No sorrow, pain or strife.

V.C.C.

The Old Mahogany Table began to chuckle t' other day. You see one of the members of its Board – who had constituted herself the Chairman, because the Chairman had less to do than any other member – had an attack of heart failure, and The Old Table – who has never had occasion to groan, since its appendix was removed, has had beautiful violets and daffodils to rejoice its hard old heart to the core. They came from friends with messages, those beautiful

Daffodils

Like a cup of cold water to parched lips,
Are the golden daffodils given
To mortals below
Who weary of snow,
Sing praise to this promise from Heaven
Their golden cups filled
With sunshine spilled
From the heart of the light of our days.
Breathe a message from Spring;
And joyously bring
To the Giver of All, hymns of Praise

V.C.C.

Violets

Thy charms with fragrance hang o'er
me,
Like mingled beauty of the twilight
sky.
I'd twine a wreath of love for thee —
Sweet violets!

Thou fill'st my soul by thy sweet pow-
er,
With tho'ts of heaven — God's Mercy
true,
An incense sweet at every hour —
Sweet violets.

To him who gave the fragile form
Strength, - and beauty birth
In prayer we seek — thru life's wild
storm—
Sweet violets !

Thy sweetness simple, colors few;
Yet a lesson of love thou teachest,
In humble spot they beauty grew—
Sweet violets!

First promise of Spring thou dost
bring;
Our hopes and joy renewing
On the autumn's chilly wing.
—Sweet violets!

To read the lesson thou did'st give
In this modest little flower,
We pray Thee teach us how to live
—Sweet violets!

**Pleasant Greetings To
The Old Mahogany Table**

Dear Miss Virginia: Let me add my name to the list of friends who enjoy your "Echoes of the Past."

I look forward with pleasure to each story, and carefully preserve them, as these reminiscences are very dear to me, having known members of some of the families, and been familiar with the history of others since early days.

In later years one of the most charming evenings I ever spent was around "That Old Mahogany Table," while your household was a happy, unbroken one, and although you say, The Old Table has not groaned since the loss of its appendix it was radiant that evening with the delicious refreshments dispensed by "mother," and "sister Mary" under the spell of Leo Wheat's entrancing strains of music.

Some of the places are vacant now, the loved faces missing, and "hushed is the Lute string," but memory fondly holds this picture, the bloom and the color of "the after glow" is left to us yet.

Very truly yours,
Mrs. George Turner



Of the old stories that Ginny Clay dearly loved, this was perhaps her sweetest recollection. Those gathered around the Old Mahogany Table that Spring in 1894 could not have known the impressions that would remain. They were simply neighbors who happened to be gathered in friendship and music.

Let us try to identify the friends sharing an afternoon of Southern hospitality who had such divergent paths. Hosting the entertainment were the family of grandma, Mary (Betts) Lewis; mother, Mary (Lewis) Clay; father, Withers Clay quite impaired from his stroke of ten years before; and their daughters Mary, Susanna and Jennie. The youngest girl, Elodie, was missing from the group. Also there was Aunt Virginia Clay-Clopton, who after the death of her husband Sen. Clement Clay Jr., had married Judge David Clopton, an old family friend. At his death in 1892 she was widowed again. Perhaps not wanting to lose the prestige of the Clay name, Virginia had made the unusual use, then, of a female hyphenated name. Her niece, Virginia, chose not to use the hyphenated name in her story.



Dr. Anthony Shelby was born in Madison County, and in 1882 he had taken over his father's well-established medical practice. He and his wife, Mary (Bouldin), lived at 508 Madison Street. Reverend Oscar Haywood could not be identified with certainty, but there are some interesting possibilities.¹⁰³ Captain and Mrs. George Turner also remain unidentified.

Pianist **Leo Wheat** (1841-1915) was probably in town to visit his sister, Selina Seay. Leonidas Polk Wheat was considered a world-class pianist, and his tour manager for 30 years, Major J.B.

Pond, also managed Mark Twain, Henry Ward Beecher, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Leo Wheat's story was so exciting, and Miss Clay will write more about his earlier visit to Huntsville in the next issue.

Helen Keller (1880-1968), her mother, Mrs. Arthur Keller, Mrs. Hopkins, and Miss Anne Sullivan had come over from Tusculumbia, probably by train. Kate Adams was the second wife of Arthur Keller, owner of the local newspaper there. Their daughter, Helen, had suffered a childhood illness that left her blind, deaf, and mute at the age of 19 months. The Perkins Institute recommended one of their students, a sight-impaired teacher herself, Anne Sullivan, to teach Helen. Their friendship would last 49 years. Helen progressed so quickly that she went to Boston for continued education and then to Radcliffe College where she graduated in 1904. She truly became world-famous after the publication in 1903 of her book, *The Story of My life*. Helen Keller received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Lyndon Johnson in 1964.



As this time of leisure in the spring of 1894 drew near, for some, it marked the very late autumn of their lives. Faces would, indeed, soon be missed. Withers Clay died on Palm Sunday of 1896. Ma Lewis died in 1897 at the age of 91, having sewn and arranged her funeral clothes in preparation. Mary Clay died in 1898, and her tombstone was lovingly inscribed, "Her children arise up and call her blessed." Miss Mary Clay died in 1901. **Virginia Clay-Clopton** lived until 1915. During those years she was noted as an activist for women's suffrage and as a leading figure in the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Number Twenty-Four

March 23, 1910

Leo Wheat's Portrait by Frye

Leo Wheat, The Inspired Musician

Helen Keller and Leo Wheat Play,
Sing, and Dance in The Old Home.

“Mem’ry tuned his amorous lay,
When time had turned his temple gray;
Love reveled in his aged veins
Soft was his lyre and sweet his strains.”

A.C. 320 – Hermesianax¹⁰⁴

I have often wondered, sighed The Old Mahogany Table if Ella Wheeler Wilcox had in mind dear Leo, when she wrote that gem, her masterpiece, “The Musicians.”¹⁰⁵ Let me quote some of the verses and those that knew him, will be able to see the similarity. Here is how his music sounded when he played at The Old Home, that memorable afternoon, April 14th, 1894. Leo, with his sweet brown eyes sparkling, his long hair worn in soft curls, betokening the poet musician, came dancing in, kissed the invalid father rapturously, soothed his paralyzed hand tenderly, gathered Grandma Lewis in his loving arms, embraced “my own dear mother, Mrs. Mary,” and “sweet Auntie,” Mrs. Clopton, and everybody else in the room – man, woman and child, then rusht to the piano, poured forth his soul, till

The strings of my heart were strung
with pleasure,
And I laught when the music fell on
my ear;
For he and mirth played a joyful measure,
And they played so loud I could not hear
The wailing and mourning of souls aweary.
The strains of sorrow that sighed around.
The notes of my heart sang blithe and cheery.
And I heard no other sound.

* * *

Pan, the musician, the soul refiner.
Restrung the strings of my quivering heart.
And the air that he played was a plaintive minor,
So sad that the teardrops were forced to start,
Each note was an echo of awful anguish.
As thrill, as solemn, as sad as slow;
And my soul for a season seemed to languish
And faint with its weight of woe.

It was just the way poor Leo excited the emotions in The Old Home and again at Abingdon Place, when Captain Humes and his sweet wife gave a Love Feast to him, says The Old Table. Mother Mary was there and wrote for The *Democrat* a notice in which she said:

“After dinner, Mr. Wheat regaled us with a post prandial of musical gems. By request, he gave us Paderewski’s Minuet a L’Antique, as we had never heard it before. Then his own Tone Pictures of melody and harmony, so enrapturing that our eyes filled with tears, and, anon, so joyous that we soared above the clouds. As the trees of ancient Greece were moved by Apollo’s godlike lyre, so did those dignified dames keep time to the gentle rhythm.

Dixie was fairly shouted by the resounding instrument – and such dancing you have never seen since those antique matrons were sweet sixteen. The modest maiden of the house, (Felicia Hubard), smiled at the rapture of the old folks as they glided thru the giddy mazes of the dance.

The melody changed and a wondrously beautiful hymn, composed by the pianist, for President Davis’s requiem,¹⁰⁶ was played and sung. Then “The Last Rose of Summer,” and “Goodbye Sweetheart.”

“And whether the music were major or minor, It was always sweet and grand.”

Leo’s father was Dr. John Thomas Wheat, an Episcopal minister, and was Rector of the University of North Carolina, and of a village church near there. Leo played the organ at both, and would steal to the instrument in the afternoon, whilst “Heaven’s primeval minstrelsy” like a living fountain sparkled in his being – enrapturing his hearers.

Dr. Wheat was anxious for Leo to enter the ministry, but he said, “No, let some other fellow do the preaching, I will play, and with his preaching and my playing, more and more will come to be saved.”

His sister, who was a clerk in the pension department at Washington, at \$75 a month, sent him to Leipzig, where he became a thorough musician. He and Arthur Sullivan collaborated on an opera which has never been produced. While in London visiting Arthur Sullivan they together played for the Prince of Wales, now King Edward VII, who often visited them in their apartments, and Leo was invited to return to London and be Edward’s guest at the palace, but he did not return.

J.B. Pond took Leo on a concert tour and the engagements netted him \$100,000 a season, which, in an elegant home in Dupont Circle in Washington he soon squandered and was left a vagrant without home or friends.

At one time he was arrested in Baltimore for assaulting a man on the street, who, he said, looked at him impertinently. He was taken to the station house, and when the highly insulted stranger appeared the next morning to present charges against his assailant, Leo was brought out, an old piano was in the hall, he rusht to the instrument, caressed the yellowed keys for a moment, then began to play. The officer, Justice and complainant stept and listened, for

He tried a tender strain that melted
in their ears;
It brought up blessed memories, and
drenched them down with tears,
An’ they dreamed of old time kitchen
with tabby on the mat,
Of home an’ love an’ baby days – an’
all that.

An' then he struck a streak of hope –
a song from souls forgiven –
That burst from prison bars of sin, an'
stormed the gates of heaven;
The morning stars they sung together
--no soul was left alone –
They felt the Universe was their's, an'
God was on his Throne!

An' then a wail of deep despair, an'
darkness come again –
An' long black crape hung on the door,
of all the homes of men;
No love, no light, no joy, no hope, no
songs of glad delight –
'T was just a tramp who staggered
down and reeled into the night.

But they knew he'd told his story, tho
he never spoke a word.
An' was the saddest story that mortals ever heard;
He tol' his own life history, an' no eye
was dry that day –
Every man just felt like saying: "My
brother, let us pray!"

Well, continues The Old Mahogany Table, the complainant withdrew his complaint, refused to appear against the prisoner, and left the station house with a heart sore and opprest for the man who had told his story in a string of sweet melodies.

When he was in Huntsville on April 15, 1891, he played at the Church of the Nativity and held the congregation for an hour after service. The *Democrat* told of his music at the time:

"As the last Amen of the white-robed choir was heard – a moment's reverential hush fell on the congregation – then began a beautiful life story in music. In patriotic strain were the "Men of Harleck" marshaled in line – not for battle, but for prayer – and the congregation resumed their seats spell-bound, whilst the mighty host knelt and their voices were heard in "Nearer My God to Thee;" they were buoyed by "Onward Christian Soldiers," then "Auld Lang Syne," low, sweet and tender, filled the eyes with tears for the dear days ago, and to the dear old folks there came beautiful memory pictures of the sainted father, Dr. Wheat, as he received into Christ's fold his little grandchild, John Thomas Seay, 50 years before, tenderly kissing the little one ere he handed him back to his mother.

Leo's sister, Selina Seay, was a beautiful harpist. She with her husband and little family lived on the Camp place, west of Huntsville and were in moderate circumstances, but sweet Selina found time to entertain her town guests with her harp, to cook a good dinner for them, and to teach Sunday schools for the poor whites and blacks in the neighborhood.¹⁰⁷ Roberdeau Wheat, the gallant commander of the Louisiana Tigers, was Leo's brother

In May 1901, Leo was in Atlanta, and captured Georgia with his music. In the Atlanta *Constitution* of May 24, 1901, Frank L. Stanton tells the story in verse.

When Wheat Was Playing

(To Leo Wheat of Virginia)

Somehow the tears, they would come
 straying
Down my cheeks when Wheat was
 playing;
And yet I saw God's glorious skies
Through all the mist that dimmed my
 eyes,
In loveliest meadows life went maying,
 When Wheat was playing!

The keys beneath his fingers thrilling;
With melody the world seemed filling;
I saw the birds in blossoms sweet –
 I heard the hearts of roses beat!
Unconsciously my soul seemed praying,
 When Wheat was playing!

The blue of skies – the gloom of moun-
 tains –
The tinkle of sweet silver fountains;
The wave of trees – the flash of
 streams –
Life, with its darkness and the worlds betraying,
 When Wheat was playing!


Beneath blown vines in youth's bright
 bowers,
I heard the chime of silvery hours;
And in the twilight lingering late,
Love killed his sweetheart at the gate;
And sweetest words her lips are saying,
 When Wheat was playing.

Life Death and Love that live for-
 ever.
And lips that meet, and hearts that
 sever;
But earth in music seemed to roll,
Touched by the magic of her soul!
And, yet, somehow, the tears came
 straying
 When Wheat was playing.

Frank L. Stanton.

Poor Leo! Sighs The Old Mahogany Table, drink was his curse and gradually stole his very brain until he wound up in a mad house – hopelessly insane.

Virginia C. Clay



Ginny Clay's mother had reported this visit by pianist Leo Wheat for readers in the newspaper earlier. Mary (Lewis) Clay was quite knowledgeable about music, and she had been clearly thrilled with his performance. The dinner was at Abingdon Place, the home of Capt. Milton and Ellelee (Chapman) Humes, on Meridian Street. Humes, a Virginian, settled in Huntsville immediately after the Civil War, studied law with Gen. Leroy Pope Walker, and began his law practice in 1866. He was very active in numerous business developments in town, some more successful than others. His wife was one of the daughters of former Gov. Reuben Chapman. After dinner, dancing replaced the more formal music, and evidently a good time was had by all. Mrs. Humes' niece, Felicia Hubard, was also in attendance. This young woman's mother, Felicia Chapman, had married Bolling Hubard in January of 1874 and joined him in New York City, where he established what would become a distinguished law practice. Unfortunately she died there in January of the next year, three days after the birth of their daughter. The baby, Felicia, was sent to live in Huntsville with her Chapman relations, and her aunt, Ellelee Chapman Humes was appointed her legal guardian in 1882. Felicia Hubard became a gifted pianist who traveled abroad and made friends in high social circles. The Huntsville *Democrat* printed a story by Elizabeth Chapman, that noted the talented Miss Hubbard was the first American to take the Paderewski medal at the Conservatory of Music in Paris. Unfortunately, her aunt, Ellelee Humes, had many years of more onerous guardian duties to perform later. Felicia developed severe mental problems and was committed to a private sanitarium on Long Island, New York, from 1900 until her death in 1934.¹⁰⁸

Leo Wheat's father, Rev. Dr. John Thomas Wheat, was a noted Episcopal minister who had answered a call to serve his church in New Orleans. He became a member of the Louisiana Convention that passed the ordinance of succession and was a chaplain in the Confederate Army. His son, Capt. John T. Wheat, was killed at the Battle of Shiloh. Another son, Maj. Chatham Roberdeau Wheat (1826-1862), led the "Louisiana Tigers," perhaps the wildest battalion in either army. Admiringly, all troops from Louisiana in General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia proudly became known as "Louisiana Tigers." Major Wheat died at the Battle of Gaines Mill. Many years younger than his gallant brothers and clearly not suited for the army, Leo Wheat remained abroad during much of the American Civil War.¹⁰⁹

Manager J.B. Pond had accompanied Leo Wheat on his European tours, and they mingled with every musical figure of the day. As a token, many popular composers and musicians wrote fragments of their music in Wheat's keepsake album. His scrapbook also contains personal notes and autographs from Sir Arthur Sullivan and Mark Twain who later visited Wheat and his family at their Berryville, Virginia home, "Rest Easy."

In 1889 pianist-composer Leo Wheat sent sheet music of one of his newest scores to the White House, and Mrs. Cleveland thanked him cordially. She considered having his music "was the next best thing to hearing you play it." Apparently she had enjoyed hearing him play in Washington; he was quite well known about town. Music dealer, E.H. Droop, wrote on the back of Leo's scrapbook picture, "The Irresistible Virginian as we call him...rarely without a flower in his lapel in a little silver holder filled with water. Great gosh! How he *can play* the piano! He leans toward playing and interpreting the 'lighter' things in music! When he plays his own waltzes, etc. etc. the women flock about him as over a box of 'sweet chocolates' – poor old Leo! His life and career – a tragedy...potentially great pianism...gracious and with a courtesy of the highest order."¹¹⁰ The admiring Huntsville females didn't have a chance against such a dazzling celebrity.

Apparently Leo Wheat visited Huntsville at least two times. His sister, Selina Wheat, had married Dr. John Seay, and through their efforts an Episcopal chapel near the Jeff community was established in the 1850s. On April 15, 1891, Leo Wheat played the piano or

the organ at Church of Nativity for the christening of his nephew. However, Wheat's life and genius became a tragedy. "He possessed an unusual personality complex with graciousness, civility and courtesy of the highest order." Regrettably, Leo Wheat died at St. Elizabeth's Hospital for the Insane at Anacostia, D.C. in 1915.¹¹¹

Number Twenty-Five

March 30, 1910

**Mrs. David Moore
And Dr. Charles Patton**

Col. Robert Barnwell Rhett

The Old Mahogany Table dropt into a train of thought about its old friends, the Moores and Barnards, again and told with a smile – or as much of a smile as an Old Mahogany Table can give – a romance in the family, where orange blossoms bloomed on cypress boughs, by a clever piece of grafting and a widow's ruse. This is the way it was managed: The pretty widow Moore was still wearing weeds for her handsome husband, Dr. David Moore, when Harriet was making arrangements for her wedding. Ever and anon, a tear glistened in her eye in memory of dear departed. Dr. Charles Patton saw the tear, and you know Cowper says:

“The tear that is wiped by a little address,
May be follow'd perhaps a smile.”

Adroitly, Dr. Charles, a handsome widower took advantage of the flurry to make the little address, without exciting comment. The widow smiled, her tears bedewed the cypress and weeds, until they smiled into orange blossoms, and 30 days after Hattie's brilliant wedding they were quietly married.

Dr. Barnard and his bride remained two weeks in Huntsville and enjoyed a series of entertainments given in their honor, then they went on their bridal trip to visit Dr. Barnard's kin in Savannah. En route home, they stopt in Augusta at the Planters' Hotel. In passing thru the hall, Mrs. Barnard exclaimed “Dr. Barnard, if that lady there was not in colors, I would say that it was mother!”

At the same time, Dr. Barnard caught sight of a handsome gentleman following them – and recognized Dr. Patton. A romance dawned upon their minds, and when Dr. Patton, a little embarrassed, kissed Hattie, then they knew what had happened – all was forgiven – and they were happy ever after, as the old-fashioned love stories end.

Quietly, the pretty widow [Martha Moore], who you know was fair and fascinating, and only 45, ordered her own trousseau without a sign of her own romance, while Hattie was busy with her own wedding affairs and never dreamed of her mother's intentions. And as Job would say, “He caused the widow's heart to sing.”¹²

Tho after the marriage, all the little Moores went out to their father's grave, and all the little Pattons to their mother's grave, they comforted each other and made quite a happy family with their step parents.

Only five years of matrimonial bliss was granted Dr. Barnard and his sweet young wife, Harriet Moore, for he was taken away from her, and his soul was wafted back to its God, leaving his wife with two lovely little girls, Martha and Katherine – better known to their friends as Mattie and Katie, and one handsome little son, David Moore. Her romance did not end here, however. She was destined to be wooed and won again – by a gentleman and

scholar. Ere her weeds had been shed, she had ardent admirers, lovers and would be financiers, remarked The Old Mahogany Table. One of our own family connection would gladly have joined his fate with the pretty widow – H.L. Clay – who wooed her ardently. But he failed to bring the desired blush to her cheek, light the eyes, and smile to the lip, those sure signs of love's reciprocity, that Robert Barnwell Rhett did.

Robert Barnwell Rhett was a widower. His last wife was the handsome, lovely accomplished Josephine Horton, of Huntsville. His family was closely identified with the history of South Carolina and, indeed of the Union. He was a graduate of Harvard College. "Cum Laude," – a scholar, and throughout his life, a student.

He became Editor of the famous old paper – The Charleston *Mercury*, in 1857 – and throughout the War of the Confederacy, by his vigorous editorials, made it the leading organ of Secession. His services to the cause, was not thru his paper alone, however. He was the patriotic militant, with his sword as well as his pen, and served on the staff of General R. S. Ripley in South Carolina, and was repeatedly under fire in Charleston and the islands adjacent. Fifteen of the Rhetts were in the Confederate service – four brothers and near relatives, and one brother was killed at Cold Harbor.

The Cause was lost, his hopes were blighted, but he faced the future with fortitude, and became again an active partisan against the tyrannical rule of Reconstruction days. As Editor of the Charleston *Mercury*, he fearlessly made a great fight against carpet bag rule, and thru his influence, after a bold struggle he saw South Carolina in the hand of the white men.

Colonel Rhett, with his statesmanlike qualities and superior judgment, assisted in settling the debt of South Carolina and restoring her credit, when a member of the Legislature.

The Old Mahogany Table recalls here that J. Withers Clay and Robert Barnwell Rhett stood shoulder to shoulder as aggressive Democrats, whose principles were infallible, and courage undaunted. "The people must be heard and their rights vindicated," (The *Democrat's* motto) was their standard unselfishly enforced as editors and citizens.

As Editor of the New Orleans *Picayune*, again did Colonel Rhett with a vigorous, loyal pen fight the arbitrary rule of the Carpetbagger government of Louisiana. [He] imbued the people with courage to resist the tyranny and redeem their state to its ante bellum autonomy. Again in 1875, he lent his vigor to free the commonwealth of Mississippi. In 1876 he was called back to his native state and became a political leader of the South as the Editor of the Charleston *Journal of Commerce*.

He was a vigorous advocate of Wade Hampton and had the joy of seeing him inaugurated and his state freed from tyranny. I will tell you more about Colonel Rhett and his family another time, promises The Old Mahogany Table.

Virginia C. Clay

On account of several typographical errors in the beautiful poem to Mr. Leo Wheat, written by Frank L. Stanton and published in The Old Mahogany Table stories, we re-produce the poem with corrections.

When Wheat Was Playing

(To Leo Wheat of Virginia)

Somehow the tears, they would come
 straying
Down my cheeks when Wheat was
 playing:
And yet I saw God's glorious skies
Through all the mist that dimmed my
 eyes.
In loveliest meadows life went maying.
 When Wheat was playing!

The keys beneath his fingers thrilling;
With melody the world seemed filling;
I saw the birds in blossoms sweet – a
 I heard the hearts of roses beat!
Unconsciously my soul seemed praying
 When Wheat was playing!

The blue of skies – the gloom of moun-
 tains –
The tinkle of sweet silver fountains;
The wave of trees – the flash of
 streams – a
Life, with its darkness and the world's
 betraying
 When Wheat was playing!

Beneath blown vines in youth's bright
 bowers,
I heard the chime of silvery hours;
And in the twilight lingering late,
Love kissed his sweetheart at the gate;
And sweetest words her lips are saying
 When Wheat was playing!

Life – Death, and Love that live for-
 ever,
And lips that meet, and hearts that
 sever;
But earth in music seemed to roll.
Touched by the magic of her soul!
And, yet, somehow, the tears came
 straying
 When Wheat was playing.

Frank L. Stanton

Earlier Ginny Clay had promised another romantic story for her readers. In the *Democrat*, "Cypress Boughs" was the heading above the death announcements, and "Orange

Blossoms” signified the bridal column. Ginny cleverly continued using them to begin her tale. This column was about the lovely Martha Moore, the widow of Dr. David Moore who had died in 1845. One month after the wedding of her daughter, Harriet, to Doctor Barnard, Martha (Harrison) Moore chose to marry Dr. Charles H. Patton. For reasons known only to her, Martha evidently neglected to mention this bit of forthcoming news to her daughter, Harriet. A widower, Doctor Patton’s wife Susan (Beime) Patton had died in 1852. Patton was president of the Bell Factory Cotton Mill, the first substantial cotton mill in Alabama, and he was a large plantation owner. His brother, Robert M. Patton, later became governor of Alabama from 1865-1869.¹¹³ Doctor Charles and his wife, Susan, had three children, Mary, Mattie, and Oliver; a son, William, had died in infancy. Mrs. Moore had four children: David, Samuel, Kate, and Harriet (who had just married John Barnard).



Barnard and her three children on Franklin Street. In the same census, three of Patton’s children were living with him and his wife, Martha, at **403 Echols Avenue**.

Some time after the Civil War, Martha Patton obtained the home at **603 Adams Avenue**. Her bachelor son, Samuel Moore, later inherited the house where he enjoyed entertaining. Perhaps his most noted gala was the occasion to honor his prize cow, Jersey, Signal’s Lily Flagg. This cow set the record for butterfat produced at the Chicago World’s Fair, and it only seemed appropriate to paint the house butterfat yellow, provide an Italian orchestra from Nashville and invite 1000 closest friends for a party.¹¹⁴



Here Miss Clay appeared to tangle with the possibility of romances. Ginny Clay’s uncle, Hugh Lawson Clay, married his wife, Celeste Comer, in May of 1855. Previously he could have possibly been courting the widowed Martha Moore who was 14 years older than he, or her daughter, the wealthy Hattie Moore who was seven years younger than he was. (Hattie however was not widowed until 1860.) Alas, both women were spoken for, and the Clay finances were not improved by marriage—again.

According to Miss Clay, the fortunate man to marry Hattie, Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina, was a figure to be reckoned with. But here Miss Clay’s knowledge and Owen’s book failed her. Rhett was a remarkable figure in national politics. But Miss Clay in her eagerness to recount the story as she thought she knew it, bearing in mind the events had happened more than fifty years earlier, had made a grievous error. The facts are correct about a Robert Barnwell Rhett. But how could one man have run his vast plantations, two newspapers, killed a man in a duel, returned to South Carolina to reemerge as a political figure again, and still had time for two wives in Alabama? Of course, it was not he. The gentleman Miss Clay wrote about was Robert Barnwell Rhett, Junior. The biographer of Barnwell Rhett

acknowledged in his recent book that the two Rhetts, father and son, were doomed to be even in their own time mistaken for one another.

Although young Barnwell Rhett truly settled in Huntsville after his second marriage, his fame was joined with that of his father in South Carolina. In her biographical sketch, Miss Clay had used a favorite resource again, Owen's *Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, this time, without acknowledging her source. The two Rhetts owned and operated the Charleston *Mercury* and were early and ardent secessionists. Rhett Sr. was known as a fire-eater and his biographer, Laura A. White, rightfully called him "The Father of Secession."¹¹⁵

Widow Hattie Moore married Robert Barnwell Rhett Jr., "Barny," as he was known throughout his life. Barny's first wife, raised at China Grove plantation in Madison County, was Josephine Horton. She was a daughter of Rhodah and Lucy (Otey) Horton. Barny and Josephine Horton married in 1851. The couple had four children, Josephine Horton, Robert, Walter Horton, and Lucy Otey Rhett. After her mother and older sister died in a typhoid epidemic, Barny renamed his second daughter Josephine Horton Rhett. (She later married Daniel Bacot and wrote poems and short stories under the penname Hulda Leigh.)¹¹⁶

Barny Rhett and Hattie Moore were married in July 1867 in Huntsville, although he remained active with his father's political schemes. For a short period he was in Louisiana and editor of the New Orleans *Picayune*. Those who knew him considered Barny high-toned, gentle and chivalrous. By 1870 he settled in North Alabama and purchased cotton land. Still involved with politics, in 1880 he worked successfully for the election of Gen. Joe Wheeler to Congress. Barny served as a trustee of the University of Alabama and was president of the Cleveland Club of Huntsville. He also was an investor of the Elora Railroad, which linked Nashville through Elora to Huntsville, to the Tennessee River, and then upstream to Guntersville, Alabama. Oh, the duel was with Judge William H. Cooley, a competition newspaperman in New Orleans—the Judge died.¹¹⁷

Number Twenty-Six

April 6, 1910

Robert Barnwell Rhett

Rhett Vs. Smith

“The Blazon of Gentry” is an old, old English book on heraldry that was recommended in Peacham’s “Compleat Gentleman,” as a book to be bought. In his analysis of this science of heraldry, that just now is exciting a greater degree of enthusiasm in its American votaries, than ever before, he says:

“Christ was a gentleman, as to his flesh, by the part of his mother, and might, if he had esteemed of the vaine glorie of this worlde (Whereof he often saide his kingdom was not), have borne coat-armour. The Apostles, also, (as my authour telleth me) were gentlemen of blood, as many of them descended from that worthy conqueror, Judas Machabeus. Thru the tract of time, and persecution of wars, poverty oppressed the kindred and they were constrained to servile workes.”

Peacham also gives the exact arms, properly blazoned, of Semiramis, the Queen of Babylon, which he found in The Blazon of Gentry, that he recommends as worthy to be bought.

There have been some foolish persons, remarks The Old Table, who have assiduously disregarded this “Blazon of Gentry.” – rather spurned it as just a piece of snobbery, to be blazon your family worth and virtues to the world. This is not altogether wise – nor fair to that ancestor, who, by some deed of valor has honestly earned the insignia due him. And, then, there is a standard given for every generation to live up to those virtues possess by our ancestors and keep the record of each high and above reproach – wearing the coat-of-arms worthily and with reverence – as the brave Confederate of to-day wears his humble little bronze cross to let the world know how he stood as a defender of his home and country.

Rhett Vs. Smith

A young man whose name was Smith,
Had so many kin and kith.
He changed it to Rhett,
So to-day, you bhett,
All the Smith kin and kith are a mith!

Now I am not responsible for that limerick, declares The Old Mahogany with dignity, but I am forced to accept much that is not according to my old-fashioned ideas, on account of my amanuensis.

The Rhett’s of South Carolina, Col. Rhett’s family connection, remarked The Old Table, were originally named Smith, and Sidney Smith, in Lady Holland’s memoir is credited with saying: The Smiths never had any arms and have invariably sealed their letters with their thumbs.” Well, as the famous Smith said that he “cultivated his intellect on a little oatmeal,” we should not be surprised at his hand to shoulder performance in sealing his letters.¹¹⁸

There are some people, who as Shakespeare would say, have their “Bruised arms hung up for monuments.”¹¹⁹

These Smith-Rhetts, or Rhett-Smiths, did not regard their family “Honour as a mere escutcheon” and the name to Colonel Rhett made no difference.

All of this flying off at a tangent, however, is unnecessary, the Rhett-Smith is our subject.

The Old Mahogany Table never confines itself to one subject, and even the same story is apt to contain quite as great a variety of subjects as any that Montaigne ever prepared for a feast with a starting point, from which it is very apt to leave the groove and strike the hypotenuse, as extemporaneously and unshackled as any the great Frenchman ever prepared for his intellectual guests.

There was some political capital made out of the Smiths changing their name to Rhett, and Colonel Rhett was amused by the criticism made that the name of SMITH was too common for his fastidious family and for that reason it was changed by Act of Legislature to Rhett. There was nothing snobbish about Robert Barnwell Rhett. He was proud of the Smiths thru whom he was related to the best English blood. His brothers – there were nine of them – each having a family, who desired the change, on account of the various Smiths unrelated, who encumbered the earth, and “sealed their letters with their thumbs,” in the community. He needed no prestige of name, as he had attained an enviable distinction in public life, bore record that any Smith, Jones, or Clay would have felt pride in but the nine brothers won as a majority – Senator Robert Barnwell Smith became Senator Robert Barnwell Rhett, as a lineal descendant of Colonel William Rhett, and the family have borne the name right royally. The Rhetts were distinguished in England and Ireland, descended from nobility.

The Duke of Sutherland, Marquis of Bath, and Lord Landowne were in the same line of ancestry, and entertained Colonel Rhett as a kinsman, whilst in England. In Ireland, Colonel Rhett’s ancestor was Roger Moore, a direct descendant of the Marquis Drogheda, who was the same Roger Moore from whom descended Harriet Moore Barnard, who became his second wife.

Colonel William Rhett, was appointed by the Lord’s Proprietor of the Carolinas in England to govern the Colony of Charleston. The governing of this Colony of Charleston, at that time, required a fine executive ability, strong will, and delicate tact. These were possessed by Col. William Rhett, and he accomplished the task that elicited hearty thanks. Tributes of praise were showered on him by the citizens. One of his most notable achievements was ridding the Colony of the notorious pirate, Black Beard, whom he brought to Charleston with his crew and had the executed.

By-the-way, continues The Old Mahogany Table, we are indebted to Rhett’s ancestor, Thomas Smith for the introduction of rice culture in America. Thomas was a brother of Sir Nicholas Smith, of Exeter, England, who between 1640-5, landed in New England with his brother, Thomas. Attracted by the stories of South Carolina’s fertility, Thomas drifted southward, and finally settled there.

The quaint historical record says:

Thomas Smith was possessed of considerable property and was much esteemed for his sobriety and wisdom by the people. He was appointed Governor and Landgrave in 1690 by the Lord’s proprietors in time of much dissensions. Sir Nicholas Smith remained in Massachusetts and became one of the antecedents of the John Adams family.

While Governor, a brigantine from the island of Madagascar anchored at Sullivans’ Island and the captain invited Landgrave Smith to pay him a visit. The Landgrave accepted the invitation, and he was presented with a bag of seed rice. This was divided among his friends

and was planted in their gardens with rich success, making for the new colony's marshy soil a most profitable product – indispensable in our markets to the producer and consumer of the present day.

Three times did Robert Barnwell Rhett offer the wealth of his love, his land and his life to the attractive widow Barnard ere she smiles on his suit. But, at last she did, and the handsome widower with his three children and the charming widow, with her two children, became one, in the holy bonds of matrimony in 1867.

Harry Moore Rhett has a portrait of his father, painted in the '60s, that was considered a very fine likeness. It is a handsome face, but, owing to the inferior quality of paint used, his very much darkened. Colonel Rhett was loved, honored and revered for his integrity, gentleness of manner, and true Christian piety. His stepdaughters loved him as if he were their own father, and he well deserved it, declares The Old Mahogany Table emphatically.

*The Old Mahogany Table Has
A Rose on Its Heart*

The Old Mahogany Table has a rose on
its heart,
An opening bud of Spring
A message of love with a woman's art;
In choral praise we sing.

With childhood's happy day it is blent.
And a matron's proud career.
A memory sweet of glad ours spent
With a maiden's welcome cheer;

To her whose melodies outpoured
From a soul of love and mirth,
Upward to God the sweet notes
soared –
Then sank in the hearts on earth!

Dormant it lay for a little while –
Till a rose, so sweet and fair,
Awoke the lute notes – like Angel's
smile –
And sweet songs float on the air!

V.C.C.



This 26th of the newspaper series appeared almost as if the writer had lost where she intended to go and how to get there. But this editor will try to continue. *The Blazon of Gentry* written by John Ferne in 1586 presented an overview of heraldry. (Blazon was the formal description of a coat of arms.) Henry Peacham (1576-1643) wrote a handbook in 1622 that was a guide for young men of good birth who should know about such emblems. His text offered what the student should study and the knowledge needed for a gentleman to appear cultivated but also to be a man of accomplishments. Surely Miss Clay did not have an original copy of either book, but she gamefully used Old English spelling.

Judas Machabeus and his family served as a center of patriotic and religious revolt of the Jews against the king of Syria. One might wonder exactly how Peacham knew the exact coat of arms for Semiramis, the 800th century B.C. Queen of Babylon. Semiramis, according to legend, was a figure in feminine-centered religions and likely associated with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

However, if any reader of the *Democrat* foolishly spurned the seeming snobbery of a family coat of arms, he, or she, surely should recognize the badge of contemporary courage. The Confederate veteran's lapel pin spoke of his deeds to defend home and country.

Indeed, the Rhett family name originally was Smith, and thereby hangs another tale. Miss Clay acknowledged that the topic must be returned to, but first a note about Montaigne (1533-1892) the French essayist who also occasionally had trouble keeping on the subject. (The reader must grapple on his own about the use of hypotenuse in this context.) Whether the Old Mahogany Table needed an amanuensis, an assistant or secretary, or Miss Clay required one—perhaps both did. One has the feeling that much of the Table was often covered in papers of all sorts and shapes.

The Smith/Rhett limerick used to introduce this section was part of the political bantering produced by the political opponents of the elder Barnwell Rhett. Although they claimed to be proud of the Smith name, the nine Smith brothers in South Carolina agreed to legally change the family name to Rhett in 1838. Of course political pundits of any century would enjoy the opportunity to scoff and snicker.

Moreover the ancestor who in 1698 captured Stede Bonnett, the “gentleman pirate,” was Col. William Rhett. Lt. Robert Maynard killed Blackbeard, or Edward Teach (c1680-1718), in a naval fight off the Carolinas coast.

The Carolinas were considered one colony until 1729 when they were separated. Rice had been cultivated there since the late 1680s, and several men, including Thomas Jefferson, were given credit for the successful development. With the detailed information about the Smith ancestors, Miss Clay used another reference available to her bookshelf. (The Lewis-Clay families were proud of their large personal library.) Miss Clay chose to use more in-depth genealogy, but the reader must be reminded that here she was writing about Rhett, Senior.

In Huntsville, when Robert Rhett Jr. finally married the widow Hattie Barnard, she had only two remaining children as her son, David Moore Barnard, had died in 1865, not quite seven years old.¹²⁰

Number Twenty-Seven

April 13, 1910

“Still the mosaic Life so deftly
wrought
Within the halls of Memory is hung.
As wonderful as if the things we
Sought:
Have all been found and all our songs been sung.”

Did you ever notice, remarked The Old Mahogany Table how some people tried to entertain you with a long-winded story, and most of it is made up of that important air of knowing all – and ur – ur – ?

Oh, yes, Oliver Wendell Holmes describes it exactly in his “Rhymed Lesson,”

‘And when you stick on conversation burrs,
Don’t strew your pathway with those dreadful –urs.’¹²¹

Yes, responded The Old Table, thoughtful, it is good advice; such people are now called “Bromides.”

I will not “UR” in diverging from my rule of one family story this time, but will for a change – tell some short ones – of that “mosaic life” of our ancestors, that,

“The mind
of desultory man studious of change
and pleased with novelties, might be indulged.”¹²²

Huntsville is the oldest English settled town in Alabama, and Madison is the oldest county. Mississippi Territory, we all know, was created by an act of Congress in 1798 and in 1802 Georgia ceded her claim to the United States. Robert Williams was Governor of the Territory and created Madison County in 1808, just about the time that James Madison was making his presidential canvass, and your ancestors and mine were beginning an American line of family trees, so to speak, says The Old Mahogany.

A land sale was held in Nashville in 1809, and LeRoy Pope, just from Georgia, bought the site of Huntsville at \$23 an acre, donating one-half to the public with a wonderful spirit of liberality – but his story is separate and distinct, a complete chapter in itself, interpolates the Old Table. The citizenry consisted of 200 or 300 squatters, waiting to become settled.

In 1830, Madison County – the old *Democrat* will tell you – that the population of Madison County was 27,990, and now it is just 43,7000 – after four score years of opportunity.

The first public school was established in 1811 on land donated by Gen. John Brahan, on the very site of the present public school, (famous afterwards as the place of learning for many of our great men of Alabama) known as the Greene Academy. That also is another story.

In 1831-2 our Representative in Congress, Clement C. Clay, earnestly advocated the pre-exemption law, which was passed. In consequence, a tremendous land sale boom struck the town and county causing an influx of the best blood of Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas to come to Alabama and settle, starting with moderate means, and growing rich as planters.

Dr. David Moore donated the present site of the First M.E. Church, on the corner of Randolph and Greene Streets, of which he was a devout, active member. Now for fear of my ur – ur – ing just cover me with a silence cloth, please – yawns The Old Table.

“Come, then expressive silence.”¹²³

In Memory of Mrs. Robert Barnwell Rhett

Thy Face

If of thy dear and lovely face
No likeness had been left,
Our broken hearts and longing eyes
Would still not be bereft.

Since every precious altar place
And every picture – shrine
That holds a fair Madonna face.
Holds, also, dearest – thine!

And in each picture, with its look
Serene and Angel-wise.
We see the very smile that once
Illumined thy lovely eyes.

Howard Weeden

The above tribute is from the pen of Huntsville’s sweet artist-poet, whose wit, wisdom and humor have illumined the literature of the South in her artistic books, “Shadows on the Wall,” etc., says The Old Mahogany Table and her stories will make a rich addition to the memories that linger with me lovingly.

Thy Voice

With love to Miss Mattie Barnard

“Twas in a dream thy voice came sing-
ing

Of “Angels ever bright and fair:”
And in each note my heart is cling
“Take, oh, take her to they care!”

Softly, sweetly, with all thy graces,
On mine ear the love-notes fell,
Bringing back those best-loved faces
In thy dear voice, sweet Philomel

Twas but a dream – but thy soul was
there
And the late notes came from thy
heart,
Soared to heaven – and with Vesper
Prayer
Of Angels, became a part!

No clouds are dark with the setting
sun,
When thy dear voice is so full of
love.
For memory gilds the darkest one
With a blessing sent from above!

March 15, 1910 Virginia C. Clay

A Golden West Message
For the Old Mahogany Table

The Elliston,
677 Ellis Street
San Francisco, Cal
March 27, 1910

Dear Virginia,

I herewith enclose \$1.00 for a year's subscription to your paper, beginning with the first number containing The Old Mahogany Table stories in the Echoes of the Past.

The descriptions of my father's paintings as well as your stories of the old family friends – all so indelibly impressed on my memory – have made me feel what a delight it will be, in years to come, to read and re-read these stories. So I have determined to get them all and make a book.

It will be interesting for my friends of later years. I am so eager to begin them.

Hoping this will reach you in good time, with love to you and your sisters.

I am very sincerely,
Ida Frye Flood



This litany of local history was generally accurate. The pioneers, up to then illegal squatters, had eagerly awaited the official formation of the county of Madison and the chance to purchase the newly opened lands. However, it was a hardship to attend the sales in Nashville, and many a would-be-settler lost his chance to legalize his homestead. Edward Betts, in his history, said that LeRoy Pope purchased half of the 30-acre town plat for \$25 per acre of which he donated half for public use.¹²⁴ When Miss Clay wrote her census information, the 1910 Federal Census had not been completed, and the official version showed a population of 47,041.

John Brahan (1774-1834) was an army buddy of Andrew Jackson and John Coffee, and they each had purchased land in Bedford County, Tennessee, near one another. In 1804 Lt. John Brahan, 2nd U.S. Infantry, had witnessed the treaty between the United States and the Cherokee nation at Tellico garrison. By 1809 Captain Brahan was the highest-ranking military officer in the area. Brahan, having been intimately acquainted with Meriwether Lewis, was called upon at the time of the death of Lewis. Brahan had connections, he said, of deep respect and esteem for Lewis, and he was one of the two men to report Lewis' questionable suicide to ex-president Jefferson at Monticello.¹²⁵ General Andy Jackson selected Brahan to be Register of the Land Sales of 1809 in Nashville, a very important, and useful, appointment. These lands of "Old Madison" County offered 24,000 acres that were sold in three weeks. With still more land for sale later, Brahan and Coffee migrated to northern Alabama where Brahan settled in Huntsville, among a cadre of new friends. They would serve him well later.

The 1818 land sales, prices realized \$2,500,000. "Never did lands sell better in the United States," declared the Receiver of Funds, John Brahan, now General John Brahan. However he, like many who purchased land, did so on speculation, and he ended up with 44,677 acres and a debt of \$318,579. A bit short on cash, he made the required down payment of almost \$79,000—from the federal funds he controlled. He eventually acknowledged "with mortification" his indebtedness to the Secretary of the Treasury, William Harris Crawford, and signed over all his own holdings to the United States government. Crawford, not mentioning any by name, observed that some of the Huntsville speculators were "a set of public swindlers." Brahan still could not cover his debt, and the trustees in Huntsville assigned to administer this property made up the difference. They included Clement C. Clay, John W. Walker, LeRoy Pope, and Obadiah Jones, the new receiver. Brahan's Huntsville home burned in 1830, and perhaps it was time to move on anyway. (The Merrimac Mills later purchased the property near Brahan Springs.) Brahan relocated and built his estate, Sweetwater, near Florence, Alabama, but at the time of his death he was still indebted to the U. S. Treasury. Nevertheless his family was well known; one of his daughters, Jane Locke Brahan, married Robert Patton, brother of Charles H. Patton, later governor of Alabama.¹²⁶

Greene Academy, the first school of its kind, was established by the legislature in November of 1812; John Brahan was one among the many trustees. The Pre-emptive law of 1841 allowed settlers the first chance to purchase land they had already occupied, thus easing the difficulties that had been faced by many of the original settlers like John Hunt. The First Methodist Church purchased land in March of 1832 for their building at Randolph and Greene Streets, and David Moore was one of five trustees.¹²⁷

And now even the old Mahogany Table asked for silence.

Number Twenty-Eight

April 20, 1910

Did you ever think, remarked The Old Mahogany Table, that, while Antiquarians have mourned over the decline of heraldic taste, and the coat-of-arms that have been a connecting link between the Old World and the New World generations, that have vanished, that many of the nobility inherit their coat of arms from ancestors not as great in battle or patriotic virtues as the great Fathers of the American Revolution? The sentiment is sweet to me of the old traditions that garland those lares and penates of both the Old and the New World family records. It is pleasant to retain the trophies of the social and valorous triumphs of the ancestors who won them. The past achievements are regarded with a certain pride, and the old furniture, the old china and silver, the old mirrors that reflect the relics – and are still glad to give a smile in return for every smile that is shed upon it. The old portraits, whose spirits hold sweet communion with us. When these practical evidences of those old day are ever before us and cherished with sentiment – however low the intrinsic value – the family tree is worth cultivating, and as long as the branches are not rotten to the heart, there will be no need of the axe nor the pruning knife for the tender twigs.

Don't let the auctioneer follow the undertaker – if you are worthy of your name, pleads the Old Table who loves the old ties fondly.

Virginia C. Clay

The Old Mahogany Table, tho it was a branch of the Lewis family has unbounded admiration for the Clay side of the family and never failed to extend a welcome to John Withers Clay's family.

Clement C. Clay was always a favorite around the board, and Withers loved his brother tenderly. Grimes painted a portrait of the precious little blue eyed, golden haired boy when only five years of age, and his bearing was as manly and imposing at that tender age as when his portrait was painted twenty-five years or more after, by that popular artist Mr. Frye, when he was elected to the U.S. Senate. They are hanging on the walls at Wildwood where his beloved wife and widow now live.

The Old Table remembers hearing it said, that on the 4th of July after he was five years of age, that someone, at a celebration of that day, knowing with what remarkable precocity he was gifted, picked the little man up placed him on a table and had him read the Declaration of Independence.

His dear mother, a modest woman, never giving way to excitable feeling, in her quiet manner expressed the greatest admiration in her sweet, gentle face for her dear boy, whom she felt would be a Statesman, some day. As for others present,

“Still they gazed and still the wonder
grew,
That one small head should carry all
He knew.”¹²⁸

God bless his memory say the children, who knew him best! His face was as sweet as his character. Withers tells his story best as a loving tribute to his brother.

S.W.C.



Susanna W. Clay knowing her dear uncle so well and loving him better than any of her kin, begged The Old Table to give her the pleasure of writing the above introduction to the article so beautifully written by her father. So, with the old-time stately, but most gracious manner, the request was granted. Many thanks to the dear Old Table, which we have always loved and revered.

Clement Claiborne Clay

Clement Claiborne Clay was born December 13, 1816 in Madison County, Alabama. After 12 days illness with pneumonia, he died at his home, "Wildwood," near Gurley, Ala. At 5:10 p.m. on January 3, 1882, aged 65 years and 21 days.¹²⁹

The deceased was an invalid from his youth, having all his life struggled against physical ailments. Nevertheless by his indomitable pride of character, will, industry and energy, he graduated at the University of Alabama in 1834. He went to the university of Virginia to enter there in September 1834, but a severe attack of pneumonia forced him to return to his home. He was the Private Secretary of his father, Clement Comer Clay, while he was Governor of Alabama from December 1835 to August 1837. He entered the University of Virginia as a law student in September 1837, and severe illness forced him to leave the University. He returned the next session and received the degree of Bachelor of Law, July 18, 1839. He was licensed to practice the law in Huntsville, Ala., in 1840, was elected a Representative to the Alabama Legislature in 1842, for two years and re-elected in 1844. In 1846 he was elected county Judge of Madison County, resigned in 1848, and returned to the practice of the law. In November 1852 he was elected and served as U.S. Senator for six years and before his first term had expired, he was elected for a second term, beginning March 4, 1859.

In January 1861 on the Secession of Alabama from the Union, he resigned his seat in the U.S. Senate. He was subsequently elected Confederate States Senator, served a term and was appointed joint Commissioner with Hon. Jacob Thompson and James P. Holcomb to Canada, and returned from his mission not very long before Lee's surrender. When President Andrew Johnson issued his Proclamation offering rewards for the arrest of Mr. Clay, Jefferson Davis and others, for alleged conspiracy for the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, in spite of suggestions to escape, he said he did not intend to wander as a vagabond under criminal accusation, but would surrender himself, face and defy his accusers. He did surrender to the military officer in command at Atlanta, Ga. And, thence, with Jefferson Davis, to Fortress Monroe. He remained in Fortress Monroe, suffering greatly in body and mind, for about a year, with shattered health, he was released on his parole, to answer further demands of the U.S. Government. He has remained, ever since, devoting himself to his private business and duties. His political disabilities, without his solicitation, were removed about a year ago.

He was, always, a consistent advocate of principles of the States Rights Democratic school of politics and in the performance of public and private duties, was guided by strict moral principles, and acted with the courage of conscientious conviction.

He gave himself to God in the communion of the Protestant Episcopal Church many years ago, and died in it.

We deem it not indelicate for us to state these biographical facts. We indulge in no panegyric. It would, perhaps, be impossible for a brother's mouth to speak, or hand to write becomingly, what his head and heart dictate relative to a dead brother, therefore we simply publish facts in history, embalm, his virtues and achievements in the casket of our soul – a sanctuary into which no stranger can, unbidden enter – leave his character and fame to speak for themselves, sadly consign his body to the grave, and with faith, hope and trust in Christ, commend his soul to his most merciful heavenly Father. In his dying hours he was surrounded by his wife, two brothers and other living relatives and friends.

The day before his fatal attack, he clipped from a paper, folded and laid away the following verses from the pen of the poet-priest, Father Ryan, beautifully expressive of sentiments our brother often uttered in his long, sad, and weary pilgrimage.

Rest

'Tis hard to toil when toil is almost
vain,
In barren way;
'Tis hard to sow and never garner
grain
In harvest day.

The burden of my days is hard to bear,
But God knows best;
And I have prayed – but vain has been
my prayer,
For Rest, sweet Rest.

'Tis hard to plant in spring and never
reap
The autumnal yield;
'Tis hard to till and, when 'tis tilled,
to weep
O'er fruitless field.

And so I cry a weak and human cry.
So heart oppressed;
And so I sigh, a weak and human sigh,
For Rest – for Rest.

My way has wound across the desert
years,
And cares infest
My path, and, thro' the flowing of hot
tears
I pine for Rest.

'Twas also so; when still a child I
laid
On mother's breast
My weary little head – e'en then I
prayed
As now, for Rest.

And I am restless still; 'twill soon be
o'er
For down the West
Life's sun is setting, and I see the
shore
Where I shall rest.



Consciously or not, Miss Clay chose to end the series with her own family history. The family tree was worth cultivating with pride, but sadly she included a plea to not let possessions later be sold at sales as unfortunately the Roman gods, lares and penates, perhaps had not been able to protect the descendants of the household or their possessions now scattered.

Senator Clay had often joined the family at the old table. His last years were spent not far away at his plantation, Wildwood, near Gurley. Although the Grimes and the Frye portraits were hanging on the walls there, his wife, Virginia, lived in Huntsville almost exclusively when she wasn't traveling.

Much of the biographical material is consistent with Owen's published volumes. However Miss Clay mentioned Senator Clay's secret mission to Canada during the Civil War. With him was Jacob Thompson (1810-1885) of Mississippi the U.S. Secretary of Interior from 1857 until 1861. He then was the Inspector General for the Confederate army. The last two years of the War he served as a confidential agent to Canada. (William Faulkner may have based his character Jason Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* on Thompson.) On the trip also was James P. Holcombe (1820-1883) a former University of Virginia law professor who was already in Canada when Thompson and Clay arrived.¹³⁰ There is little to verify the mission's aims, but it is generally accepted that the men were sent in 1864 to negotiate peace. President Lincoln, however, decided not to receive the delegation, and after a year Clay returned to the South.

At the death of President Lincoln, a reward was offered for the capture of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Sen. Clement C. Clay as plotters of his

assassination. Clay and Davis gave themselves up, and were held for year without trial in Fortress Monroe. Clay then returned to Huntsville in poor health and reduced circumstances.

Father Abram J. Ryan (1839-1886) was called "The Poet Laureate of the South." Well read, as one might expect in the South, he also knew personally many of the people involved in the national political scene. Father Ryan said of Virginia Clay, the editors' aunt, "I have heard Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Everett, Choate, Gladstone, Douglass, Prentiss, Yancey, Jefferson Davis, and all of the great orators of my day; but I tell you, the greatest of them all is Mrs. Clement C. Clay."¹³¹ He served as a Catholic Chaplain in the Confederate army but he was best known for his writings immediately after the War. He spoke for the weary heart of the vanquished with his lines from *The Conquered Banner*:

"Furl that Banner, for't is weary;
round its staff 't is drooping dreary...
For there's not a man to wave it,
And there's not a sword to save it...
Furl it, hide it – let it rest!"

Epilogue

So there they are—tales “told” by a battered old mahogany table at the home place on Eustis Street, just as the Clay sisters published them in 1909 and 1910. What grand days and memories they must have enjoyed at times. However, the stories did not mention the grocer, yeoman farmers, or working men and women who must have surrounded their daily experiences. Nor did they mention events of the Civil War or the Spanish American War, both of which impacted their city considerably. (Perhaps women, or ladies, did not discuss such events publicly.) Although they must have heard gossip and stories of the seamier kind, they did not speak poorly of anyone in print.

After researching the names and events of these tales, one might once again observe three continuing themes of early Huntsville life, or life on any frontier community for that matter. First, Huntsville has never been merely an isolated backwoods village. From its early beginnings, Huntsville and Madison County, Alabama, have always been a part of the larger scene that involved travel by waterways, roadways and later railways, to the major cities of the north and south. Citizens here were exposed to the “latest” medicine, merchandise, literature, manners, dances, and music.

One might also draw the conclusion that danger, or the threat of violence, was never far away. It might be the cockfighting and knuckle-fighting, eye-gouging fisticuffs on a Saturday night by the lower classes or any class for that matter. The upper class was no exception; consider the duel that took the life of Laura Bassett’s fiancé. The family portrait of “Ole Blue” Thompson shows the gentleman holding his walking stick. Discreetly hidden, a dagger is concealed within the tip of his cane.

While searching for the participants of these stories, and other incidences, of early life in Huntsville, there has always appeared to be a tenuous thread of connections. Until recently, with the use of the Internet, we did not “take up with strangers.” The early settlers traveled with groups of people related by their former neighborhood, by marriage, familial relations, and business relationships.

These two women, Virginia and her sister, Susanna, single ladies of the Gilded Age toiling in a man’s world, understood perhaps more than they wanted to know. They understood the importance of the past and its heroes. If they seemed to live in the past too much, perhaps it was because they saw too little in their futures. Unfortunately for the Clay girls, they had to work to maintain their position in town and to put food on the table. They were not always successful. The competing newspapers often had a bigger circulation in the county. It was also known about town that one of the sisters might appear at the back door of a neighbor for a visit—just in time for supper. Perhaps they were simply hungry; it is hard to live only on atmosphere. The gentleness the Clay sisters offered were tones reminiscent of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “...gracious soft-voiced girls, who were brought up on memoirs instead of money.”¹³⁵

Appendix

In an article for the *Huntsville Historical Review*, Dr. John Rison Jones Jr. noted the importance of the use of genealogy for historians. Rather than a stepchild of historical research, as it has often been perceived, genealogy can offer the very human side of everyday life.¹³³ Clearly, in this case, genealogy can help to keep the “players” sorted. The groupings truly reinforce the closeness of kinships in the Huntsville community.

Connections

The following are notations about some of the families related in the text. It is not intended to be a complete genealogy or even a listing of all the children in their exact birth order. Hopefully it will add clarity to the family accounts.

Clay

John Withers Clay m. Mary Fenwick Lewis

Caralisa (died age 5)

Clement Comer Clay II (died age 20)

John Withers Clay (died age 2)

William Lewis Clay

Mary Lewis Clay

Clarence Herbert Clay (died age 2)

Susanna Withers Clay

John Withers Clay II

Virginia Clementine Clay

Ellen Lewis Clay (died age 6 days)

Elodie Clay

Clay

Gov. Clement Comer Clay m. Susanna Claiborne Withers

Sen. Clement Claiborne Clay m. Virginia Tunstall (Belle of the Fifties)

John Withers Clay m. Mary F. Lewis

Hugh Lawson Clay m. Celeste Comer

Withers

Judge John Wright Withers m. Mary Herbert Jones

Maj. Gen. Jones Mitchell Withers m. Rebecca Forney

Susanna Claiborne Withers m. Gov. Clement Comer Clay

Priscilla Withers m. William McDowell

Mary Eliza Withers m. Dr. Claudius Mastin

Ann E. Withers m. Francis J. LeVert

Augustine Withers m. Mary J. Woodson

Mary D. M. Withers m. Robert Withers

David Wright Withers "my unfortunate son"

Maria Withers m. Rev. Anastasius Menacos (or Mercos)

William F. Withers

Manning

Dr. James Manning m. Sarah Sophia Providence Thompson

Robert J. Manning m. Louisiana Thompson

James T. Manning, Jr. m. Indiana Thompson

Peyton Thompson Manning m. Sarah Weeden

William Watkins Manning m. Elizabeth Weeden

Dr. George Felix Manning m. Sarah Millwater

Sarah Sophia Manning m. Gen. Bartley M. Lowe

Lowe

Gen. Bartley M. Lowe m. Sarah Sophia Manning

Sophia Lowe m. Col. Nicholas Davis

Ellie Lowe

Dr. John Thomas Lowe d. c1893

Robert Joseph Lowe (d. in the War) m. Matilda Holding

William Manning Lowe

Susan Lowe m. DeWitt Clinton Davis

Bartley M. Lowe m. Fannie Jolley

Sarah Lowe

Lucy Lowe

Davis

Capt. Nicholas Davis, Sr. m. Martha Hargrave

Martha Nicholas Davis m. Judge George Washington Lane

Lawrence Ripley (Rip) Davis

DeWitt Clinton (Clint) Davis m. Susan Lowe

Col. Nicholas (Nick) Davis m. Sophia Lowe

Anne Bradley Davis m. William Richardson

Zebulon (Zeb) Pike Davis m. Williametta Eason

Davis

Col. Nicholas Davis, Jr. m. Sophia Lowe

Lowe Davis m. Lucy Meriwether

Sophia Lowe Davis m. Ben Lee Young

Weeden

Col. William Weeden m. (2) Jane Urquhart widow of James Watkins

Sarah H. Weeden m. Payton Manning

Elizabeth Weeden m. William W. Manning

Howard Maria Weeden

Capt. William Weeden

Col. John David Weeden m. Mattie Hays Patton (dau. of Gov. Robt. Patton)

(g.dau. of Gen. John Brahan)

Bibb

1st Gov. William Wyatt Bibb m. Mary Freeman

Bibb

Dolly Bibb (sister of William and Thomas Bibb) m. Alexander Pope

Bibb

2nd Gov. Thomas Bibb m. Parmelia Thompson

Adeline Bibb m. Maj. James Bradley

Emily Julia Bibb m. Col. James Jay Pleasants, Ala.Sect. of State

Thomas Bibb, Jr. m. Anna Pickett

William Dandridge Bibb m. (1) Mary Chambers

(2) Mary Louise Mitchell

David Porter Bibb m. Mary Pleasants Betts

Elmira Bibb m. Archibald E. Mills

Robert Thompson Bibb m. Anne Bradley

Eliza Parmelia Bibb m. Arthur Mosely Hopkins

Bradley

Maj. James Bradley m. Adeline Bibb

Susan Bradley m. Thomas W. White

Emily Julia Bibb m. James Jay Pleasants

Porter Bibb m. Mary Betts

Pleasants

Col. James J. Pleasants m. Emily Julia Bibb

Thomas Pleasants

Julia Pleasants m. Judge David Creswell

Adaline Bradley Pleasants

James Jay Pleasants m. Laura Robinson

Thompson

Capt. Robert (Old Blue) Thompson m. Sarah Watkins
(His sister, Eleanor Thompson, m. Sarah's brother, Samuel Watkins)

Sarah Sophia Providence Thompson m. Dr. James Manning

Pamelia Thompson m. Thomas Bibb of Belle Mina

Eliza Thompson m. Dr. Waddy Tate

Thompson

Asa Thompson (brother-in-law and 1st cousin to Robert Thompson) m. Mary T. Watkins

Indiana Thompson m. James Manning, Jr.

Isaphoena Thompson m. Dr. John Y. Bassett

Louisiana Thompson m. Robert Manning

Bassett

Dr. John Young Bassett m. Isaphoena Thompson

Dr. Henry Willis Bassett m. Carrie Neal

Watkins Thompson Bassett (d. in the War)

Alice Lee Bassett m. Daniel Young

Laura Bassett

Lenore Bassett

Bettina Bassett (d. 1844)

John Young Bassett (d. in the War)

William Davidson Bassett

Clemens

Jeremiah Clemens m. Mary L. Read

Frye

William Frye m. Virginia Catherine Hale

Ida L. Frye m. Capt. P.H. Flood

Katie Frye

Minnie Frye m. Coleman

Willie Frye, d. 1906

Wheat

Dr. John Thomas Wheat m. Selina Blair Patten

Leo P. Wheat

Capt. John T. Wheat, d. 1862

Maj. Roberdeaux Wheat, d. 1862

Selina Wheat m. Dr. John Seay

Steele

George G. Steele m. Eliza Ann Weaver

Matthew Weaver Steele m. Catherine Erskine Fearn

John F. Steele

George G. Steele m. Ada Fearn

Sallie Fleming Steele m. Richard Winter

Ellen E. Steele m. Edward Dorr Tracy

William Angelo Steele m. Kate Murphy

Susan E. Steele m. (1) Judge Charles Shackelford

(2) Robert Hoffman

Benjamin S. Pope

Benjamin S. Pope m. Elizabeth Wyatt

Eliza Jane Pope m. Francis T. Mastin, Jr.

Matilda Pope m. Peter M. Dox

Dr. Charles Alexander Pope

Parson John Allan

John Allan m. Nancy Hodge

William Thomas Allan

Eliza Allan m. David Allen Smith

James Allan

Euphemia Allan m. Louis Weiss Wyeth

Mary Ann Allan (d. young)

Harriett Mebane Allan (d. in infancy)

Sarah Jane Allan

Laura Allan m. Marshall P. Ayers

Judge Louis Weiss Wyeth

Louis Wyeth m. Euphemia Allan

Mary Wyeth m. Hugh Carlisle

Louisa Wyeth m. William H. Todd

John Allan Wyeth m. Florence Nightingale Sims

Capt. Anthony Winston

Capt. Anthony Winston m. Keziah Jones

Anthony Winston

John Jones Winston

William H. Winston m. (1) Mary Bacon Cooper

(2) Judith McGraw Jones

Joel W. Winston

Isaac Winston m. Catherine Jones

Edmund Winston m. Mary Jackson

Thomas J. Winston

Alice Winston m. John Pettus

Mary (Polly) Dandridge Winston m. Judge William Steele

William H. Winston

William H. Winston m. (1) Mary Cooper

(2) Judith McGraw Jones

Gov. John Anthony Winston m. (1) Mary Agnes Jones

(2) Mary Logwood (or Longwood)

Sarah Winston m. Gov. Robert B. Lindsay (only foreign-born Alabama Gov.)

Parmelia Winston m. Gov. John J. Pettus

Helen Winston, May Queen, d. 1860

Mary Keziah Winston m. James L. Cooper

LeRoy Pope

LeRoy Pope m. Judith Sale

Alexander Pope m. Dolly Bibb

William Pope m. (1) Jane Patton

(2) Frances Erwin

LeRoy Pope, Jr. m. Mary Foote

Matilda Pope m. Sen. John Williams Walker

Maria Pope m. Thomas Percy

Sen. John Williams Walker

John Williams Walker m. Matilda Pope

Leroy Pope Walker, Sect. of War, C.S.A.

Percy Walker

Charles Henry Walker (d. infancy)

Mary Jane Walker m. Dr. Richard Fearn

John James Walker

William Walker

Richard Wilde Walker

Addison White

Addison White m. Sarah Shelby Irvine (daughter of David and Susan MacDowell Irvine)

Alice White m. Dr. G.C. Greenway (parents of Gen. John C. Greenway)

Eliza White m. Oliver Beirne Patton

Susan Wells White m. Francis Fickling

David Irvine White m. Lucy Matthews

Newton White

Shelby White m. Judge Richard. W. Walker (son of Sen. John W. Walker)

Dr. David Moore

Dr. David Moore m. (1) Harriet Haywood
(2) Martha Leslie Harrison

(1)

No children survived

(2)

David Moore

Samuel Harrison Moore

Kate Moore m. John Grimbell

Harriet Haywood Moore m. (1) Dr. John D. Barnard

(2) Robert Barnwell "Barny" Rhett, Jr.

Dr. John D. Barnard

Dr. John D. Barnard m. Harriet Moore

Martha (Mattie) Palmer Barnard

Kate Barnard

David M. Barnard

Dr. Charles A. Patton

Dr. Charles A. Patton m. (1) Martha Lee Hays
(2) Martha L. (Harrison) Moore

Robert Barnwell (Barny) Rhett, Jr.

R.B. Rhett m. (1) Josephine B. Horton
(2) Harriet (Moore) Barnard

(1)

Walter H. Rhett

Two others

(2)

Harry Moore Rhett

John Brahan

John Brahan m. Mary Weakley

Robert Brahan m. Martha Haywood

Jane Locke Brahan m. Gov. Robert M. Patton

Mary Narcissa Brahan m. John Coffee, Jr.

John Coffee Brahan m Mary Haywood

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ABBREVIATIONS:

CFS – Clay Family Scrapbook, HPL

HPL – Huntsville-Madison County Public Library

MCRC – Madison County Records Center

HPL – VF – Huntsville Public Library Vertical Files

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¹ Judge Thomas Jones Taylor, *History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama*, eds., W. Stanley Hoole and Addie S. Hoole (University, AL: Confederate Publishing, 1976), 120.

² Ruth Ketring Nuermberger, *The Clays of Alabama* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1958), 5, 6; Sarah Huff Fisk, *Civilization Comes to the Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823* (Huntsville, AL: Pinhook Publishing, 1997), 23-25; *Madison Gazette*, May 10, 1814.

James Saunders, a contemporary, described Governor Clay as an imposing person and a man of great prestige. However prestige is not always a good thing when on the campaign trail in the rural setting of early Alabama. Gabriel Moore, who defeated Clay more than once, said of C. C. Clay, "When he comes you will not see him keeping company with the poor people, but you will find him with the rich ones...and when he arrived with dignified demeanor the crowd gave a cold reception but he was welcomed by rich planters." Clay associated in the early days with the political power of LeRoy Pope. Clay was defeated in 1827 for Congress but by 1836 he understood the political mood and supported Andrew Jackson. When Clay ran for governor, he won by the largest majority ever given one man up to that time. James Edmonds Saunders. *Early Settlers of Alabama*. 1899. Rpt. Tuscaloosa, AL: Willo Publ., 1961, 284-5.

³ Clay Family Scrapbook, Huntsville Madison County Public Library (hereafter cited as CFS)

⁴ Khaled J. Bloom, *Mississippi Valley's Great Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 283-4.

⁵ The color "ashes of roses" was noted used in 1872, but likely Virginia also admired Rudyard Kipling's use in *Five Nations*, "Opal and ash of roses, Cinnamon, umber and dun." *OED*.

⁶ Nancy M. Rohr, ed. *An Alabama School Girl in Paris: The Letters of Mary Fenwick Lewis and Her Family, 1842-1844* (Huntsville, AL: SilverThreads Publ., 2001), 12-16.

⁷ Spanish Land Grants in Florida, Unconfirmed and Confirmed (Tallahassee State Library Board, 1940-1941), 3:74.

⁸ Hugh C. Bailey, *John Williams Walker* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1964), 68, 69.

⁹ *Ibid*, 65.

¹⁰ Virgil (Pat) Jones Scrapbook, HPL, 2:38; Anne Newport Royall, ed. Lucille Griffith, *Letters from Alabama 1817-1822* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1969), 245.

¹¹ *Heritage of Madison County, Alabama* (Clanton, AL: Heritage Publ. Consultants, Inc., 1998), 441,442.

¹² Royall, 122.

¹³ Samuel L. Webb and Margaret E. Armbruster, eds. *Alabama Governors* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University Press, 2001), 13-17.

¹⁴ Gov. George Rockingham Gilmer, *Sketches of Some of the First Settlers of Upper Georgia, of the Cherokees, and the Author*. (Rpt. Danielsville, GA, 1989), 87.

¹⁵ Faye Acton Axford. *The Journals of Thomas Hubbard Hobbs* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 73, 82,108.

¹⁶ Dunnavent, Robert Jr. *Historic Limestone County*, Vol. 1 (Athens, AL Pea Ridge Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁷ Thomas McAdory Owen, *Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1921), 3: 467.

¹⁸ Axford, 165; 1860 Madison County Federal Census.

¹⁹ Gen. Edward C. Betts, *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama 1804-1870*, 1909, Rpt. (Huntsville, AL: Old Huntsville, Inc. 1998) 109,130.

²⁰ *The Harp That once thru Tara's Hall*

The Harp that once through Tara's Hall the soul of music shed
Now hangs as mute on Tara's wall as if that soul were fled

So sleeps the pride of former days so glory's thrill is o'er
And hearts that once beat high for praise now feel that pulse no more
No more chiefs and ladies bright, the harp of Tara swells
The chord alone, that breaks at night its tale of ruin tells
This freedom now so seldom wakes, the only throb she gives
Is when some heart indignant breaks to show that still she lives.

Thomas Moore 1779-1852

²¹ Janus, was of course the two-faced Roman figure of mythology who was the god of gates and doors, beginnings and endings. The Roman consul Lucullus in his retirement was known for his extravagant banquets and long parties.

²² These are allusions to the thrilling Lord George Gordon Byron. The Ottoman Turks had laid siege to the central Greece town Missolonghi in 1822-23. Some idealistic Europeans, feeling for their plight, joined the fight for Greek independence. Among them, Lord Byron died there in 1824, and even more attention came to the Greek cause.

²³ Charles Rice. *Hard Times: The Civil War in Huntsville and North Alabama* (Huntsville, AL: Old Huntsville, Inc., 1994), 34-44.

²⁴ Owen, 4: 1072.

²⁵ Edward Pattillo. "John Grimes, Alabama's First Portrait Painter," in *Alabama Heritage*, Winter 2002: #63, 1-17.

²⁶ Frances C. Roberts and Sarah Huff Fisk. *Shadow on the Wall: The Life and Works of Howard Weeden* (Northport, AL: Colonial Press, 1962), 6,7.

²⁷ What young, romantic girl could resist the histrionics at the recitation of *Charlie Machree*, a Scottish tune newly produced on sheet music by Mrs. J. H. Long, words by W.J. Hoppin, music by Howard M. Dow, 1876. <rs6.loc.gov/ammem/mussmhtml/mussmTitles68.html>.

Charlie Machree

Come over the river to me if ye are my laddie, Bold Charlie Machree.
Here's Mary McPherson and Suzy O'Linn who say
ye're faintheart, and dare na plunge in.
But the dark rolling water, though deep as the sea,
I know will na scare ye, nor keep ye fra me;
for stout is yer back, and strong is yer arm,
And the heart in your bosom is faithful an warm.
Come over, come over the river to me,
If ye are my laddie, Bold Charlies Machree.

I see him! I see him!

He's plunged in the tide; His strong arms are dashing the big water aside! O the dark
rolling with shoots swift as the sea;

But blithe is the glance of his bonny blue eyes;
And his cheeks are like roses, two buds on a bough;
Who says ye're fainthearted, my brave Charlie now?

Ho! Ho! Foaming river, ye may roar as ye go, But ye canna bear Charlie to the dark loch
below.

Come over, come over the river to me, my true-hearted Charlie Machree

He's sinking! He's sinking!

Oh what shall I do? Strike out Charlie, boldly, ten strokes and ye're through.

He's sinking! O Heaven! Ne'er fear man, ne'er fear; I've a kiss for ye,
Charlie, as soon as ye're here!

He rises! I see him! Five strokes, Charlie, mair!
He's shaking the wet from his bonny brown hair.

He conquers the current, he gains on the sea!
Ho, where is the swimmer like Charlie Machree.
Come over the river, but once come to me,
And I'll love ye forever, dear Charlie Machree

He's sinking! He's gone, O God, it is I, it is I who killed him.
Help! Help!, he must not die. Help! Help! Oh, he rises;
Strike out and ye're free.
Ha! Bravely done, Charlie;
Once more now for me!
Now cling to the rock, now giv us yer hand;
You're safe dearest Charlie; ye're safe on land!
Come rest in this bosom, if there ye can sleep;
I canna, canna speak to ye, I only can weep.
Ye've crossed the wild river ye've risked all for me,
And I'll part fra ye never, Dear Charlie Machree.

²⁸ Two of Cooper's daughters had attended the same boarding school in Paris that the Clay sisters' mother, Mary (Lewis) Clay, had attended. See *An Alabama School Girl in Paris*.

²⁹ See *Incidents of the War: The Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick*.

³⁰ <<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph-Lanner>>

³¹ Larry J. Smith, Ed. *Guntersville Remembered* (Albertville, Alabama: Creative Printers, Inc. 2001) 65-69; Dr. John Allan Wyeth, *With Sabre and Scalpel*. (NY: Harper & Bros., 1914), 385.

³² E. Bryding Adams, "William Frye, Artist" in *Alabama Heritage*. Spring 1994, #2, 30-38.

³³ Betts, 32. The name was changed to Huntsville, in honor of John Hunt the first settler, by an act of the Mississippi Territorial Legislature on November 25, 1811, perhaps to indicate anti-British sentiment before the coming War of 1812 or perhaps to reflect anti-LeRoy Pope feelings.

³⁴ Here just for a second Miss Clay's memory failed her, and her interpretation lured her into a small error. In 1899 Col. James Saunders published his *Early Settlers of Alabama* with genealogical notes by his daughter. In the second section the complicated Withers family tree is expanded, and the name Maclin was given as the married name of Miss Clay's grandmother's sister. (Saunders, 516.)

³⁵ Madison County Marriage Records, <http://www.co.madison.al.us/mcrc/> (Hereafter cited as MCRC), 19: 378; Roby, Diane, Dorothy Scott Johnson, John Rison Jones, Jr. Frances C. Roberts. *Maple Hill Cemetery, Phase One* (Huntsville, AL: Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, 1995), 31; Benjamin Buford Williams. *Literary History of Alabama: The 19th Century*. (Canbury, NJ: Association of University Presses, 1979), 123.

³⁶ Susan Wells White married Francis Ficking in 1880. (MCRC)

³⁷ *Glimpses of Antebellum Homes*, 11th ed. (Huntsville, AL: American Association of University Women, Huntsville Branch, 1999), 36.

³⁸ John Dryden (1631-1700), *Britannia Rediviva*. Line 208.

³⁹ Owen, 1: 843; Rohr, *School Girl*, 74, 93; Roby, 140.

⁴⁰ Surely Miss Clay did not have personal knowledge of the contents of *The Decameron* or she would not have noted it being among those on the good doctor's esoteric bookshelf.

⁴¹ Obviously newspaper editors can pick and chose. Dr. Claudius H. Mastin, a local man himself, wrote in *The Medical Reports* about Dr. Bassett's sister, Margaret, in a definite different view. She "a maiden lady of advanced age, a woman of education, disappointed hopes and endowed with a liberal share of bitter sarcasm, was a weight which hung upon John...she was a terror to the community, the bitterness of her tongue stirred up strife, and her brother had to bear the brunt of it all." (Thomas, Charles C. *Medical Reports of John Y. Bassett, M.D., The Alabama Student* (n. c; n.p. , 1941), 58,59)

⁴² The remainder of the poem, "Sandy and Jenny" by the Irishman Tom Moore (1779-1852) could not be located.

⁴³ Pauline Jones Gandrud, *Marriage, Death and Legal Notices from Early Alabama Newspapers*. (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1981), 468; Owen, 1:11.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Humes Chapman, *Changing Huntsville*. (Huntsville, AL: Historic Huntsville Foundation, 1889), 141-142; Chapman, 59.

⁴⁵ Frank Leiby Stanton (1857-1927) wrote a popular newspaper column for the *Atlanta Constitution* with a wide circle of readership. His cheerfully optimistic daily column was first called "News from Billville" and then "Up from Georgia." Today's readers might enjoy this example of inspirational works.

I.

His hoss went dead an' his mule went lame;
He lost six cows in a poker game;
A harricane came on a summer's day,
An' carried the house whar' he lived away;
Then a airthquake come when that wuz gone,
An' swallered the lan' that the house stood on!
An' the tax collector, he come roun'
An' charged him up fer the hole in the groun'!
An' the city marshal --he come in view
An' said he wanted his street tax, too!

II

Did he moan an' sigh? Did he set an' cry
An' cuss the harricane sweepin' by?
Did he grieve that his ol' friends failed to call
When the airthquake come an' swallered all?
Never a word o' blame he said,
With all them troubles on top his head!
Not him He clumb to the top o' the hill--
Whar' standin' room wuz left him still,
An', barin' his head, here's what he said:
"I reckon it's time to git up an' git;
But, Lord, I hain't had the measels yit!"

⁴⁶ A lot of out-of-towners must have been in attendance; the population of Huntsville by 1850 was only 2863.

⁴⁷ Pattillo, 14.

⁴⁸ Marriage Records, MCRC.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Lee Fearn, Cabell Ferneyhough and Elizabeth Lee Lusk, *Fearns of Virginia*. (Richmond: Expert Graphics, 1973), 26-27.

⁵⁰ Joseph B. Baldwin, *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi*. (New York: Appleton & Co., 1853), 73.

⁵¹ <http://www.public.asu.edu/~iacexb/erskine.html>: John, the son that Mrs. Paulee gave birth to while in captivity, later entered the fur trade, and was attacked and killed by Mandan Indians in Yellowstone. From sturdy stock, a close relative of Mrs. Paulee Erskine, Mary Hanley, was killed, at the age of 84, while trying to stop a team of runaway oxen. ("The Handley/Handly, Hanley Collection," Cabell County Historical Society, Huntington, West Virginia.)

⁵² http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Ebenezer_Erskine:

<http://www.puritansermons.com/erskine>.

⁵³ The famous Erskine Cattle Drive, a herd of 1054 cattle led by Michael Erskine, to San Francisco fought off hostile Comanche attacks along the way.

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles>.

⁵⁴ Chapman, 167-168.

⁵⁵ Jewell S. Goldsmith and Helen D. Fulton, *Medicine Bags and Bumpy Roads*. (Huntsville, AL: Valley Publishing, 1985),133.

⁵⁶ Sumner County, Tennessee had furnished a military company of men at the War of 1812, the War with Mexico, and the American Civil War – the gallant Tenth Legion. Hon. Alfred Osborn Pope Nicholson (1808-1876) was a U.S. Senator, Democratic of course, from Tennessee. He was proud to note that his party, the winning party, was the choice of “working men.”

⁵⁷ David W. Dickinson (1808-1845), a nephew of William Hardy Murfree, was U.S. Representative from Tennessee. Although President Tyler launched a campaign to annex Texas, the Senate had rejected it. Now with the election of Polk, Southerners felt it was just a matter of time, and indeed, within a year, Congress voted to take possession of Texas. The spirit of Manifest Destiny escalated, and Oregon was the next goal.

⁵⁸ Felix Robertson (1781-1865) was considered to be the first white male child born at Fort Nashboro, the village founded by his father, Gen. James Robertson. Both men served as physicians on the frontier. Felix served two terms as Mayor of Nashville. <http://www.tnportraits.org/1887/htm>. Sarah Martin Lewis, sister of John H. Lewis who was the grandfather of the Clay sisters, married as her second husband Major Thomas Claiborne (1780-1856) of Nashville who served in the Tennessee state house of representatives and as U.S. Representative from Tennessee. William Terrell Lewis, *Genealogy of the Lewis Family*. (Louisville, KY: Courier-Journal Job Printing Co., 1893) Rpt., 101. All this excitement centered at the famous Nashville Inn, which had always served as an important meeting place since it was built in 1796. President Monroe stopped here in 1819 before coming on to Huntsville; Andrew Jackson was taken here when wounded in the 1813 showdown with the Benton brothers; the Marquis de Lafayette stayed here during his tour of 1825. Unfortunately the building was destroyed by fire in 1856. (<http://www.kirchnerprints.com/nashville.inn>)

⁵⁹ Nuermberger, 93-96. This description of dignity and calm, however, contrasted sharply with the election of 1828 that was described as a scene of “riot, turbulence, disorder and debauchery.” Alabamians had come a long way apparently. (Daniel Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier*. (Baton Rouge, LA: State University Press, 1997), 180. Polk and his wife did not have time, after the election to visit Huntsville.

⁶⁰ Owen, 4:1438; Robey, 116; Owen, 4:1541. Norah Davis, a daughter of Zeb and Wilhametta Davis, caused much consternation in Huntsville with the publication in 1905 of *The Northerner*. This novel presented a New York capitalist who came to a fictitious “half-asleep, half-awake” southern town and was met with prejudice, mob violence and lynchings. Many citizens of Huntsville thought they recognized themselves, and it was not a flattering sight.

⁶¹ (<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/shared/shared-main.jhtml?requested=423929>);

Owen, 3:467.

⁶² Virginia Clay-Clopton Scrapbook in Clement C. Clay Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University Durham, North Carolina.

⁶³ Clay Scrapbook, HPL.

⁶⁴ Most of the genealogies of the Clay family consider two possible groups of Clay brothers in Jamestown. Five brothers named include Francis, William, Thomas, Henry and Charles. Others insist the brothers were three - Henry, William and Charles Clay. No one doubts that Clays were early settlers. And, after all, it was a long time ago.

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~genbel/novdec/families1.html>

⁶⁵ Smith, Marie and Louise Durbin, *White House Brides*. (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1966), 19-29. For fascinating insights into the later years of this marriage and how shy Maria often saved the family silver from Samuel’s gambling debts, read the chapter on the Monroe wedding.

⁶⁶ Preston, Daniel, Ed. *Papers of James Monroe, A Documentary History of the Presidential Tours*, Vol. 1. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 664, 665.

⁶⁷ Hymn by Rev. Charles L. Hutchings. The third line should be "Carol the good tidings, carol merrily" and the last line "Christmas day again."

⁶⁸ Lewis, 56, 57, 62, 99, 100, 109, 100. Joel Lewis died in 1816 and was buried in the cemetery at 4th Ave. S. and Oak Street in Nashville. See Sect. 7, #70001 for a description of his marker.

⁶⁹ Rt. Reverend Henry C. Lay rose in the ranks of the Episcopal hierarchy and before his death served as bishop of a diocese in Maryland. Owen, 4:1020.

⁷⁰ Thomas Gray (1716-1771), *The Epitaph*.

⁷¹ James Record, *A Dream Come True: The Story of Madison County and Incidentally of Alabama and the United States*. (Huntsville, AL: Hicklin Printing, 1970), 82.

⁷² Wyeth, 520, 524-525, 527-531. Published also there in 1914 is an interesting poem, perhaps an omen of things to come, entitled "'Hoch Der Kaiser."

⁷³ <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/signers/wythe.htm>

⁷⁴ Owen, 4: 1816-1817.

⁷⁵ Larry J. Smith, *Guntersville Remembered*. (Albertville, AL: Creative Printers, 2001), 56-60; Owen, 4:1813-1814.

⁷⁶ Mary Keziah Winston who had married James L. Cooper died in 1884. (Roby, 111).

⁷⁷ Alfred Lord Tennyson (1829-1892) from *The Two Voices*.

⁷⁸ Alexander Pope (1688-1744), *Essay on Man*, Epistle iv, Line 379.

⁷⁹ Judd Mortimer Lewis (1867-1945) poet and columnist known as "Uncle Judd," joined the *Houston Post* in 1900, and, except for a short period with the *Houston Chronicle*, he was with the *Post* for forty-five years. He wrote poetry and prose humor and was selected by the Texas legislature in February 1932 to be the first poet laureate of Texas.

⁸⁰ No author, "Historic Places No Longer in Existence" in *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*. Vol. IV, 1976, 33.

⁸¹ Willis Brewer, *Alabama, Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men from 1540 to 1872*. (Montgomery, AL, 1872), Rpt. Baltimore, MD, Clearfield Co., 2000, 530-531.

⁸² Owen, 4:1790; Webb and Armbruster, 61.

⁸³ Wiggins, 76.

⁸⁴ "Biographies, Colbert County," in *Journal of Muscle Shoals History*. Vol. IV, 1976, 95.

⁸⁵ Eliza Cook (1817-1889) began "Old Dobbin" with "How cruelly sweet are the echoes that start when memory plays an old tune on the heart."

⁸⁶ *Psalm* 14, "Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me and out of the deep waters."

⁸⁷ From the 1860 Federal Census and the Madison County Marriage records, one can learn about some of the children and their future. For instance Lizzie Angel, 12, was the daughter of a gunsmith in town. Betty Allen was about 8, and her father was a carriage maker. In 1871 she married Edward Strong. Alice Beasley, 11, and her sister Mary, 12, were children of Dr. James Beasley. Martha East, 12, lived at the home of John J. Ward who was mayor of Huntsville then. In 1869 she married Benjamin Gillons. Also at the Ward household were his daughters, Laura, 16, and Ellen Ward, 11. Ellen married in 1872, LeRoy Wilson.

Katy Dill, 13, lived with her mother, Annie, and stepfather music teacher, Herman Saroni. Katy married Claude Figures in 1882. Julia Elgin's father was a plasterer, and she was 12 years old. In 1868 she married Thomas D. Duncan, a former Confederate soldier she met during the War. May Lane was 10 and was a daughter of Judge George W. Lane. Julia Landman, 17, was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer, James Landman. Annie Hayes married Duncan Thompson in 1870. Lizzie Hunt, 9, was the daughter of Eliza and Dr. Samuel Hunt. Mollie, 14, lived with her widowed mother, Almyra. Mary Norvell, 12, was the daughter of a commission merchant. She married Thomas Johnson in 1867. Emma Tate, 16 in 1860, lived with the Matkin family, and in 1866 she married Samuel Lowry.

Fourteen-year-old Alice White's father was Addison White, a wealthy farmer at Madison Station. She married, in 1870, Gilbert Greenway. Her sister, Bettie, 11, later in 1867, married Charles Hunt. Both weddings were at the Church of the Nativity. Ellen White, 11,

was the daughter of Thomas White and in 1867 she married Charles M. Hunt. Sunie could either be Susan, age 9 or Elizabeth, age 9 of either of those families.

Ellen Robinson, 13, was the daughter of Dr. Pleasant Robinson. Lucy or Lizzie Ross was the daughter of the railroad superintendent. Sallie Severs married John Bailey in 1874. Molly Scruggs, 13, was the daughter of Narcissa and John Scruggs. He was a very well-to-do merchant. Emma Tate, 16 lived with the William Matkin family.

⁸⁸ Joyce Dawson Mitchell, Comp. *Olden Times of Colbert and Franklin Counties in Alabama*. No p., no place, 1991, Vol.2: 228.

⁸⁹ Rohr, *School Girl*, 249-250.

⁹⁰ <http://elane.stanford.edu/wilson/Text/4j.html>

⁹¹ This editor has been told by good authority that the very chair used in the surgery of Mrs. Crawford is in the parlor of a house on McClung St. in Huntsville.

⁹² www.mcdowellhouse.com/descendants.html

⁹³ Thomas Sully (1783-1872) of Philadelphia was one of the foremost portrait painters of the early 19th century.

⁹⁴ Robert Burns (1616), *Bannockburn*

⁹⁵ William Shakespeare (1564-1616) *A Midsummer Nights Dream, Act v. Sc.1.*

⁹⁶ Owen, 4: 1679; Mrs. Townes died in 1915. (HPL VF).

⁹⁷ Gandrud, 346, 298, 324, 354, 481, 502, 524.

⁹⁸ Owen, 3: 588.

⁹⁹ Owen, 3:1227; Taylor, 55; Robey, 29; 1860 Federal Census.

¹⁰⁰ 1860 Federal Census; Robey, 29; Taylor, 55.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.hsgng.org/pages/gacolonialrangers.htm>.

¹⁰² Gandrud, 362; Pat Jones, 1:85.

¹⁰³ Goldsmith and Fulton, 156; Owen, 4: 1541; A search for Reverend Oscar Haywood on the Internet provided four possibilities of identification. A man of that name won several bicycle races, including one against a horse that the reverend won, in Victoria Corner, New Brunswick, Canada. Reverend Haywood in Troy, North Carolina, invested in a local newspaper in 1888. Reverend Oscar Haywood was a national organizer for the KKK and began a new drive for members in New York City in 1922 when the movie *The Birth of a Nation* was reissued. The most likely choice, however, was Rev. Oscar Haywood who served a Baptist church in Jackson, Tennessee in 1891.

¹⁰⁴ Hermesiansax was a Greek writer earlier than the 7th Century poetess Sappho.

¹⁰⁵ Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919) was a very popular poet of her time. She would be more noted for such things as, "Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep, and you weep alone." There are actually six verses to the poem, "The Musicians," and it is not faithfully rendered in the *Democrat*.

¹⁰⁶ The requiem for President Davis would have been written in 1889 at his death.

¹⁰⁷ The Camp family probably lived at what became the manor house associated with Oakwood College. Dr. John Rison Jones, Jr. "Evolution of the Land Holdings of Oakwood College 1896-1996." In *Huntsville Historical Review* Vol. 23, #2 (Summer-Fall) 1996, 2-3; Dr. John Rison Jones, Jr., telephone interview by editor, August 26, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Owen, 3:317, 868; Gandrud, 371; Robey, 32; Huntsville *Democrat*, Sept. 2, 1934; Madison County Probate Packet # 4699.

¹⁰⁹ Charles L. Dufour. *Gentle Tiger: The Gallant Life of Roberdeau Wheat*. (Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State Press, 1985), 8, 232.

¹¹⁰ Cited in Elise K. Kirk. *Music at the White House*. (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986), 143,144. (Thank you again Peggy Baird.)

¹¹¹ Frances C. Roberts, *Sesquicentennial History of Church of the Nativity, Episcopal*. (Huntsville: Church of the Nativity, 1992), 30; Wheat *Album*, LC.

¹¹² Job 29:12-17. "I caused the widow's heart to sing..."

¹¹³ Owen, 4:1328; Goldsmith & Fulton, 125-6.

¹¹⁴ Williams *Huntsville Directory City Guide, and Business Mirror*, Huntsville: Coltart & Son, 1859, rpt. Strode, 1972, 39; *Glimpses*, 17.

¹¹⁵ Owen, 4:1430-31; Boatner, Mark M. III. *Civil War Dictionary*. NYC: Random House, rep. 1991.

¹¹⁶ <www.cofc.edu/~speccoll/Main.html> Library of the College of Charleston.

¹¹⁷ Owen, 1431: *North Alabama*, 259.

¹¹⁸ Sydney Smith (1771-1845) was an English clergyman and writer. The two-volume memoir by his daughter, Lady Holland, complimented his wit and was published in 1855. (*Lady Holland's Memoir*, 1: 244). Smith was not ashamed of his family's "lack of arms." This editor's personal favorite is, "Avoid shame, but do not seek glory – nothing is so expensive as glory."

¹¹⁹ William Shakespeare (1564-1616), *King Richard III. Act i. Sc. 1*. This begins with the familiar, "Now is the winter of our discount.... Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths, Our bruised arms hung up for monuments...."

¹²⁰ Robey, 29.

¹²¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes (1808-1894), *A Rhymed Lesson, Urania*. "The earth was made so various, that the mind of desultory man...."

¹²² William Cowper (1731-1800) *The Task, Book i. The Sofa*, line 506.

¹²³ James Thomson (1700-1748), *Hymn*, line 118.

¹²⁴ Betts, 14;

¹²⁵ Dawson A. Phelps, "Tragic Death of Meriwether Lewis" in *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., Vol. 13, No. 3 (Jul. 1956), 315; David Leon Chandler, *The Jefferson Conspiracies*. (New York: William Morrow, 1994), 295, 298, 300; Thomas Jefferson Papers. images 312-314, October 18, 1809, letter from Captain John Brahan. American Memory from the Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query> , September 1, 2008.

¹²⁶ Nuermberger, 67; cited in Dupree 85, 89; Owen, 1:205.

¹²⁷ Betts, 17, 47; Ruth Sykes Ford, *History of the United Methodist Church of Huntsville, Alabama*. (Huntsville: Administrative Board of the First United Methodist Church, 1984), 33.

¹²⁸ Oliver Goldsmith (1820-1905) *The Deserted Village*, line 209.

¹²⁹ Colonel Saunders noted in his volume that Senator Clay died in "great debility." (Saunders, 290).

¹³⁰ Virginia Clay-Clopton, Ada Sterling, ed. *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 430.

¹³¹ Samuel Wesley Fordyce. Misc. notes for autobiography, Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, Arkansas, MC 1311, Box 7, folder 6.

¹³² F. Scott Fitzgerald. Cited in Sara Mayfield, *Exiles from Paradise: Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald*. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1971), 2.

¹³³ John Rison Jones, Jr. "The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society: The First 50 Years." *Huntsville Historical Review*. Summer-Fall 2002 (Vol 28 #1), 14,15.

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ECHOES OF THE PAST

Old Mahogany Table Stories

Echoes of the Past: Old Mahogany Table Stories, written in 1909-1910 by Virginia Clementine Clay for *The Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, will delight families with ancestors in nineteenth-century Huntsville and Madison County, as well as providing information for genealogists and historians. Miss Clay mentions most everyone who was anyone and relates the stories that flesh out the characters of history.

Dr. Leah Atkins

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Ranee Pruitt