

# *The Huntsville Historical Review*

Fall-Winter 2004-2005

Volume 30

Number 1



Memorial To Victims of 1989 Tornado  
In Front Of Faith Presbyterian Church

*Published By*  
*The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society*

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## President's Page

It seems like a short time ago that I took the position of President of this wonderful organization, and now I'm writing my last message. I couldn't possibly go out without expressing my sincere appreciation to all the wonderful members and officers who have supported me tremendously during my tenure. Huntsville's history is rich and diverse, and thank goodness we have individuals with different interests that will continue to research and share with the world what a wonderful place we have come from.

This issue introduces a new editor, Jacquelyn Procter Gray. As a writer, Jacque is no stranger to the historic community here, and although she is a native of New Mexico, her ancestral ties to North Alabama precede statehood. Mr. Shapiro's story in this issue highlights Daniel Hundley, one of her colorful ancestors.

This year is a special one to all of Huntsville, and I look forward to sharing our bicentennial celebration with each one of you.

Virginia P. Kobler  
President

## Editor's Notes

# Happy Birthday Huntsville!

Whew! 2005 is finally here! Did John Hunt imagine, when he settled on the banks of the Big Spring, that we would celebrate his arrival 200 years later? He probably didn't have time to think about it. He was busy fighting snakes, trying not to upset the Indians, and getting an appropriate shelter ready for his family. Much is unknown about our namesake - some sources say he was a soldier in the American Revolution, some say he was practically an American aristocrat, while others say he was a simple farmer who happened to be here at the right time. We can't even agree on where he is buried! Odds are that we'll never know, though recently discovered legal papers in Tennessee indicate that he left Huntsville, bought property in Tennessee, and probably spent his last years there. We may never know the answers to these questions, but we don't have to know them to celebrate one of the most progressive cities in the United States and appreciate how far we've come in the last two centuries. Thank you, John Hunt.

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In this, my first issue as editor of this publication, it is my pleasure to have worked with a veteran writer, as well as one of my favorite people, Mr. Norman Shapiro. We also welcome new writers to these pages, Mr. James-Paul Dice, Meteorologist for WHNT Channel 19 in Huntsville, and Dr. Frank Westmoreland, a Limestone County resident with fascinating ties and history in North Alabama and Tennessee. History is never boring, and these gentlemen have logged in hours upon hours of research in order to write these wonderful stories.

Jacque Gray  
Editor



# Madison County's Tornadoes – Mother Nature's Deadly Destruction

JAMES-PAUL DICE

Huntsville and Madison County are no strangers to severe weather – especially one of nature's most destructive storms – the tornado. It is not surprising our current fascination with twisters since this area has been a geographic bulls-eye since the beginning of weather records. Fast-moving upper-level winds and a rich supply of moisture from the Gulf of Mexico in the Fall and Spring make the Tennessee Valley one of the most tornado prone areas in the United States.

As a meteorologist working in television, most of my time is spent concerning myself with current conditions and predicting future weather. Admittedly, past weather has never been a top priority. But, there are valuable lessons to be learned from our history and the world of meteorology is no exception to that rule. Looking back, it is easy to see our community is much better off today than a century ago, both from lessons learned and improvements in technology.

These days, tornado spawning circulations are detected on Doppler radar usually long before any damage is done. Instantly, warnings are issued and sirens are sounded. But, imagine a Huntsville farmer tending to his cotton fields in the late 1880s. A dark cloud could mean a harmless afternoon soaker or deadly winds capable of driving a straw of hay into the bark of a tree. Without today's technology, it was difficult to determine if the cloud was going to be friend or foe.

Little information is available on early tornados in Madison County, however the earliest newspaper account from this area was described in the much faded April 19, 1822 issue of the *Huntsville Republican*:

“On Saturday night the 13<sup>th</sup> instant, this county was visited with one of the most destructive tornados ever known in the country. It passed through the county in a northeasterly direction, prostrating trees, buildings, fences, and every other moveable object in its course. From the best information we have been able to collect of the injury done by this dreadful visitation, it commenced in the county of Lawrence, crossed the Tennessee River, and passed through the county of Limestone, pursuing a north-easterly course through Madison, passing about four or five miles northwest of

Huntsville, sweeping like a beacon of destruction everything in its way for about a quarter of a mile in width. It spent its greatest fury in this county.

The deadened trees were generally uprooted, the trunks of the green ones in the forest were twisted and broken off about fifteen feet from the ground, and almost every building of all description razed with the ground so that in many instances it is impossible even to designate their foundations. The roots of houses, large ? logs, furniture of every description, and even trees were carried a considerable distance and scattered over the country. In short, this tremendous gale, which accompanied as it was with rain, hail, thunder, and lightning, was attended with all the alarming and destructive ?.

It happened in the dead of night while nature was sunk in slumber and forgetfulness and although a great number of dwellings were destroyed by its fury, we have not heard of the loss of any lives. A great number of persons indeed almost every individual in the prostrated houses was very severely bruised and wounded, but by the care of a kind Providence who aids in the trumpets and directs the storms, they have escaped with their lives.

We have not been sufficiently informed of the individual instances of distress by the tornado to give a circumstantial dread of them, but would be glad to give place to any interesting particulars that may be communicated for publication.

Since the above was in type, we have learned that the tornado passed through the northern part of Franklin County almost 70 miles distant from this place. We also learn that it continued its devastation through the eastern part of the county, and extended into Decatur and the northwestern part of Jackson County. Five lines were said to be found in the upper part of Madison County, which is upwards of 10 miles from any pine woods in the direction of the tornado.”

The Weather Bureau began in 1870, and it was at that time that a more accurate method of record-keeping was established. Unfortunately, there is no real data before that time to track the nature or severity of tornadoes in Madison County. Since 1884, there have been 58 confirmed tornado touchdowns in Madison County. Some of these twisters were harmless, but 16 of those tornadoes claimed lives.

Madison County's first recorded tornado killed two people on April 1, 1884. The tornado developed around 9:50 p.m. and was on the ground for 10 miles and tracked northeast from near Owens Cross Roads to the south of Gurley. According to records, the tornado was an F2 with winds ranging from 113 to 157 mph. In the April 4, 1884 edition of *The Advocate*, a story under the headline "A Terrible Storm" reported that the house and farm of Mr. Pulley, occupied by John White, was carried away. Mrs. White and her mother-in-law, Mrs. Connor, were killed. Mr. White had a child on each knee, and although the children were not injured, both of his shoulders were broken.

The next deadly tornado happened early on March 21, 1913, at around 1:30 a.m. The storm was on the ground for about 40 miles tracking from Trinity in Morgan County to just south of Meridianville. Three people were killed, including two children. Twenty were injured. The storm destroyed a church, several homes, and every building on a plantation.

Just four years later at 1 a.m. on May 28, 1917, another deadly tornado struck Madison County. The path was spotted just southwest of New Hope. The twister stayed on the ground for 18 miles, moved through Marshall County and ended in Jackson County. Twenty homes were destroyed, six people were killed, and 35 were injured. The devastation was 1/2 mile wide, 18 families were left homeless, and feathers were blown off of chickens. In the newspaper story, entitled "Prompt Relief Response to New Hope Destitute," names were listed along with their contributions to the homeless. Some contributions were as little as one dollar and as much as 50 dollars.<sup>1</sup> Many years later, the tornado was rated as an F3 with winds ranging from 158-206 mph.

Another tornado struck in the darkness on April 20, 1920. This one was a monster! The tornado was estimated to be about a quarter-of-a-mile wide and originated two miles south of Lily Flag Street in Huntsville. Home were either leveled or swept away from the storms carrying 207-260 mph winds. The storm claimed the lives of 27 and injured 100 residents.

Twelve years later, 38 people were killed when another F4 tornado struck. Again, it happened at night at around 8 p.m. on March 21, 1932. The tornado began near Lacey Springs, moved through southern Madison County and Jackson County, and traveled 75 miles to Ladds Switch, Tennessee. The estimated 207-260 mph winds collapsed a large hosiery mill near Paint Rock and destroyed 125 rural homes in Jackson County. The storm injured 500 people. The biggest problem with relief effort was in finding the damaged homes and injured people who lived in somewhat inaccessible areas such as coves and mountain sides. Damage to the prop-

erty of C.M. Rousseau of Paint Rock was especially extensive. He lost his store, gin, two saw mills, a full implement warehouse, and a barn. He was in the hospital and listed in critical condition – from a nervous breakdown!<sup>2</sup>

At 10:15 p.m. on April 5, 1936, an F3 tornado traveled 50 miles from Rogersville in Lauderdale County, through Limestone and extreme northern Madison Counties, and ended up in Lincoln County, Tennessee. Five people were killed and 13 injured.

At 12 a.m. on April 11, 1939, a small tornado killed one and injured 11 when it struck five miles southwest of Woodville. Several small homes and a mill were destroyed by the estimated 113-157 mph winds.

At 3 p.m., March 22, 1952, a deadly F4 tornado moved into Madison County near Redstone Arsenal. The storm claimed four lives in Morgan County when it leveled 35 homes. Fifty people were injured.

A tornado struck at 5:40 p.m. on March 11, 1963 in southwest Limestone County. The twister traveled around 47 miles, moving through Hazel Green and Pleone in Madison County. Three people were injured, two killed near Cullman, and a woman died the next day when she tried to cross a creek in Limestone County and her car was swept away. The tornado had dumped 7.5 inches of rain in Limestone County alone! The erosion damage was estimated to be four million dollars. Dramatic photographs on the front page of *The Huntsville Times* say more than words about Mother Nature's wrath.<sup>3</sup>

Tornadoes do not always strike in the Spring. On December 18, 1967 at 3:24 a.m., a deadly tornado hit the Talucan Community in Morgan County. The storm was on the ground for 22 miles, causing the most damage in Huntsville. Two people were killed and 27 were injured. Two houses were destroyed and 46 homes had major damage. The tornado was later rated as an F2 with 113-157mph winds.

On April 3 and 4, 1974, Madison County was part of the most deadly tornado blitz to ever hit the United States. The outbreak lasted for 16 hours and affected 13 states. When it was over, 330 people were killed and over 5,000 were injured. The first tornado to affect Madison County as part of this huge system occurred at 5:50 p.m. It was the most powerful tornado known to man – the F5 with estimated winds at between 261-318 mph. The tornado was on the ground for 52 miles traveling from Lawrence County through portions of Morgan County, through Limestone County and ending in Madison County near Harvest. Twenty-eight people were killed and 267 were injured. In Madison County alone, nine people lost their lives. But it was far from over.

Less than an hour later, another tornado developed. This was a devastating F4 tornado with estimated winds at between 207-260 mph. The funnel spanned more than a quarter mile in width and traveled for 62 miles. Twenty two people were killed, 250 injured, and more than 1000 buildings destroyed. The tornado originated in Limestone County and traveled through Capshaw in Madison County and eventually Lincoln and Franklin Counties in Tennessee. Another deadly tornado, part of this same system, occurred at 9:24 p.m. This twister moved from near Decatur and traveled for about 46 miles through south Huntsville and ended near Princeton in Jackson County. Two people were killed and seven were injured.

The late Bob Dunnavant, a staff writer for *The Huntsville Times*, wrote an incredible and descriptive account of his experience in Limestone County that day:

“...about 30 of us – deputies, members of a Rescue Squad, a sprinkling of the curious, and a few reporters – [were] all competing with the grass for a connection to the dirt. Only several hundred yards away a funnel cloud twisted and roared. It was like something out of the Old Testament, a pillar of clouds, black, majestic and ominous, moving across the farmlands of southern Limestone County...the process of unraveling the havoc had begun. Then a radio warned that a second funnel was forming to the west. As we watched, a dark, stormy cloud lit by lightning hovered and lengthened into the recognizable hook shape. It appeared to be headed directly for the highway. With one narrow escape already chalked up for the evening, Sheriff Buddy Evans advised the crowd to head for the drainage ditch. As we moved toward cover, the dull roar, like a jet revving its engines for takeoff, floated across the suddenly still evening. Then the wind began to rise, and in a group we went face down not caring that the ditch was half full of water. From that vantage point the funnel seemed to be floating across the horizon. As the roar suddenly jumped several decibels, and a hard rain began, visibility was blotted out and there was an intense impulse to hug something. So I hugged the bottom and sides of that ditch, and wondered how far the storm would carry my body.”<sup>4</sup>

When the skies finally cleared, the damage was beyond belief. In Huntsville, the roof of McDonnell Elementary School was ripped off, homes were leveled, trailer houses tossed like toys, and a new amusement center

near South Memorial Parkway was flattened. The Cadillac dealership at the corner of the Parkway and Drake Avenue was pummeled, the Pizitz Tire Center was destroyed and the southern end of Parkway City (now Park Place Mall) was sucked open. The local myth that a tornado would never touch down on Monte Sano was blown away just like the trees that were sucked up and spit out.

The most deadly tornado in recent history, and one of the most deadly on record, happened on November 15, 1989. It is widely known as the "Airport Road Tornado." The F4 tornado was a half-mile wide and packed winds up to 260 mph. The first damage occurred near Madkin Mountain on Redstone Arsenal. The tornado continued northeast toward South Huntsville. Unfortunately, the tornado happened around 4:30 p.m. at the peak of rush hour. Most people were in their cars and unaware of the weather conditions. The tornado killed 21 and injured 463 with 259 homes destroyed. More than \$100 million in damage was done to businesses and homes along and near Airport Road.

Another F4 tornado struck on May 18, 1995 at 4:33 p.m. The nearly mile-wide tornado began in Limestone County, traveled into Madison County, and ended near Scottsboro in Jackson County. In Madison County, most of the damage was in the Anderson Hills development north of Huntsville. One person was killed and 55 injured.

In terms of the number of tornados to touch the ground, 1974 had the highest number ever recorded by the National Weather Service. Over 315 people lost their lives in the 148 tornados that spanned over 13 states. The second highest number to touch down occurred on February 19, 1884 when 60 tornados landed in the South and killed over 400 people. The third was in April 1965, when 51 tornados touched down and killed 256 people in the Great Lakes region. In terms of lost lives, in April 1936, tornados killed 446 people in Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.<sup>5</sup>

Much has changed for the better. Twenty-five years ago, we could see only green blobs on radar scopes and the National Weather Service had to wait for visual confirmation of the tornado before issuing a tornado warning. Today's meteorologists view evolving storms in graphic detail and can now issue warnings before tornados even form. The average lead time on a warning is 11 minutes and with improvements in tornado tracking and detection, the warnings and accuracy continues to improve. Through outreach programs from local television stations and the National Weather Service, the public is also more aware of the dangers of tornadoes and how to play it safe during severe weather.

On April 3, 1975, the one-year anniversary of the 1974 tornado, 17 live oak trees were planted in the median near the intersection of Williams Street and Monroe Street in remembrance of the people from Madison County and Huntsville who lost their lives. On Airport Road, the newly built Faith Presbyterian Church rose from the ashes of the 1989 destruction. A brick wall was erected as a memorial to the 21 victims of the 1989 tornado. On the wall, 21 bricks are pulled out horizontally and mortared firmly in place. They represent the human lives lost on that terrible day and remind us that they will never be forgotten. Why is it so important for us to detect these storms before they happen? Because we are not in Tornado Alley – we are on the Tornado Super Highway!

*Special thanks to the National Weather Service Huntsville Tornado Database and the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Huntsville Daily Times* dated May 31, 1917

<sup>2</sup>*Huntsville Daily Register* dated March 24, 1932 “Alabama Lost Heavily when Storm Struck”

<sup>3</sup>*The Huntsville Times* dated March 12, “Where the Elements Claimed their Victims”

<sup>4</sup>*The Huntsville Times* dated April 5, 1974, “Newsman Laid in a Ditch and Watched Twister Pass” by Bob Dunnavant.

<sup>5</sup>*The Huntsville Times* dated February 23, 1983, “Twisters of Fate – When Tornados Hit is Chance But the Season is Here” by Lane Lambert.



# North Alabama's Response To the Fear and Facts of Slave Revolts

NORMAN M. SHAPIRO

Slavery was introduced in the Western Hemisphere with the establishment of the European colonies in the 1500s and into the region which is now Alabama in the early 1700s when it was part of France's Louisiana Colony. And with the institution of slavery, the fear of slave uprisings was implicit whenever relatively large numbers of slaves were present. When the Mississippi Territory, which comprised "Alabama," was established by the U.S. Congress in 1798, Governor David Holmes wrote to General James Wilkinson who was the senior officer in the Army, "... of the slaves who compose so large a portion of our population, I entertain much stronger apprehensions. Scarcely a day passes without my receiving some information relative to the designs of those people to insurrect. It is true that no clear or positive evidence of their intentions has been communicated; but certain facts, and expressions of their views have justly excited considerable alarm among the citizens."<sup>1</sup>

The most terrifying consequences of slavery, however, were the outright slave rebellions which were often bloody and uncontrolled. But because American plantations were far smaller than those in other parts of the Western Hemisphere and because in the United States, unlike other areas, whites outnumbered slaves, slave rebellions were smaller and less frequent than in the West Indies and South America. The most massive rebellion outside the United States was the slave insurrection of the 1790s that overthrew slavery and French rule in Saint Domingue and established the nation of Haiti. Although no insurrection of that magnitude occurred in the United States, there still were a significant number and some elicited great apprehension and responses in slave-holding areas, including north Alabama, which it is our purpose to examine.

Herbert Aptheker, who provided the most extensive analysis of slave revolts in the United States, proposed and utilized as a definition for a slave revolt that it (1) involve a minimum of ten slaves and (2) that contemporary references label the event as an uprising, plot or insurrection, or the equivalent of these terms. On this basis he writes that he found records of approximately two hundred and fifty revolts and conspiracies in the history of American Negro slavery.<sup>2</sup> He also describes many more slave disorder incidents, including a few in Alabama, but doesn't always distinguish the ones counted among the 250. Leah Rawls Atkins, however, writes

in her section of the most recent comprehensive, history of Alabama, “Although no slave insurrections occurred in Alabama, there were numerous rumors of slave unrest, and the white population lived in fear of a slave uprising.”<sup>3</sup> There were incidents in Montgomery County, Talladega and other areas in Alabama, nevertheless, noted by Apthecker and at least four other sources that might well “qualify” as insurrections.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> And, in addition, there was an astonishing, but little-known, event in Madison and Limestone counties in May, 1861, that also indicates that Alabama was not immune to slave insurrections.

The event is recorded in an unpublished diary, *Daily Journal of Colonel D. R. Hundley for 1861*. Daniel Hundley was a distinguished citizen of North Alabama and his entry for January 1, 1861, states, “This is the beginning of a new year. I pray God its ending may not be as gloomy as its beginning. Politically the heavens are dark and portentous (sic), and war, famine, and pestilence may all be looked for during the next twelve months. So far as my private affairs are concerned they are in a deplorable state. I do not love to think of them. I can only put my trust in God and be prepared in my own mind to meet the worse.” But in spite of the gathering storm of war and his unhappy state of mind, he resumed the life of a Southern Gentleman who was characterized typically as, “a hunter, a fisherman, and a fine rider, and his love of the outdoors contributed to his physical perfection.”<sup>8</sup> The Madison-Limestone Insurrection extended over the last two weeks in May, 1861, about one month after the fall of Fort Sumter. It is best recounted in Daniel Hundley’s own words:

SATURDAY, MAY 18, 1861: Startling news! I have just learned that a Vigilance Committee in Triana has just ferreted out a most hellish insurrectionary plot among the slaves, and in consequence I expect to go out patrolling tonight, a thing I never did before. I have already rode about thirty miles today, but I do not expect to close my eyes tonight.

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 1861: Returned home just after daylight. Was going nearly all night, but owing to a change in plans only succeeded in arresting one negro. We arrested him about half past two o’clock.

MONDAY, MAY 20, 1861: Today I became a member of a Committee of Public Safety, to investigate into the insurrectionary movements of the slaves in the neighborhood of my father’s residence. We have punished several, and the testimony elicited is very startling. The whole servile population appears to be disaffected, and the most egregious falsehoods everywhere pass current among them.



**Daniel R. Hundley**

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 1861: Our Committee continued its labors today, and the developments are utterly confounding. It seems that the negroes have concluded that Lincoln is soon going to free them all, and they are everywhere making preparations to aid him when he makes his appearance.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 1861: Engaged all day in the labor of the Vigilance Committee. Similar committees are being organized in every neighborhood.

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 1861: So far as our investigations have now extended, we are led to believe that Peter Mud, Andrew Green, and Nicholas Moore, slaves, and one or two free negroes, aided by base white men, are the leaders in the proposed servile insurrection.

FRIDAY, MAY 24, 1861: Our Committee still continues their labors. Our task today was to examine the slaves of Mrs. Rice, many of whom had to be severely whipped, and some will be hung.

SATURDAY, MAY 25, 1861: By invitation, members of several committees today met with the Triana Committee. This Committee has already hung one free negro, named Jacobs, and today had up an old English abolitionist, who, for lack of proper evidence, was sent to Huntsville jail to await the future action of the Committee.

The war news is not very exciting this week.

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 1861: They hung one negro of Mrs. Rice's in Mooresville yesterday. A jury of twelve men selected by his overseer, were allowed to hear the evidence against him, and afterwards bring in their verdict – it being the desire of the citizens to preserve the spirit at all events, although it may be necessary in these exciting and dangerous times to override the letter thereof.

MONDAY, 27 MAY, 1861: Our Committee renewed its labors again today, and we had a very exciting session, owing to the fact that Dr. John Pickett had run off Peter Mud, one of the ringleaders in the conspiracy, and were informed by telegraph that the police had secured him in Memphis.

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 1861: Our Committee today visited the plantation of Mr. Sam Moore. On yesterday, Andrew Green, one of the instigators and leaders of the conspiracy, was hung in Triana. He made a partial confession.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 1861: Being at leisure, I went fishing today, in both forenoon and afternoon. The war news is exciting. Lincoln's men have taken possession of Alexandria, and thus the

“sacred soil of Virginia” has been invaded. They lost one of their best officers, Col. Ellsworth, but otherwise there was little damage done on either side. (Col. Elmer E. Ellsworth commanded the First Zouave Regt., N.Y. Militia. He was assassinated at the Marshall House after the Union troops had taken possession of the city of Alexandria, Virginia, May 24, 1861.

THURSDAY, MAY 30, 1861: We had an exciting time in the Committee today. First we tried a free negro, who was sentenced to the penitentiary for life. We then tried parson Peter Mud. Peter was proven to be one of the principal conspirators, but the influence of his master’s family in his behalf was great – however, he was found guilty by the jury, and was hung about half an hour after sundown.

FRIDAY, MAY 31, 1861: We met the Triana Committee again today. Two negroes were tried, but the final decision in their cases was postponed for one month – in the meantime the negroes to remain in Huntsville jail. We also tried the case of Bob Williams, white man. He was given until Christmas to settle up his affairs and leave the country.

SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 1861: Being at leisure once more, I went fishing in the forenoon. We have had many rumors of battles this week but nothing serious has occurred so far that I know of. The rumors have all proven to be false, and what our President is doing I am at a loss to conjecture. I should be glad to hear that he has driven old Abe’s blackguards out of Virginia.

Hundley doesn’t mention insurrection again until June 9 when he writes, “The committee seems to be satisfied with their labors thus far and by apparent general consent are doing nothing more about the rumored insurrection.” (a strange choice of words considering that Hundley indicates that they had hung at least four negroes). No report of the events recorded by Hundley were found in either of the two Huntsville newspapers, *The Southern Advocate* or *The Huntsville Democrat*, which were still in publication at the time, and the Limestone County newspapers of that period have not survived. Hundley’s account is mentioned, however, in two recent local histories<sup>9,10</sup> and his entry for May 25, 1861, is probably confirmed by the following notation in the Madison County Commissioner Court Minutes for the May term, 1861:<sup>11</sup>

“Ordered that the County Treasurer pay to James H. Weaver Ten Dollars for Keeping County Prisoners in Jail to wit Jacobs and McVey.”<sup>12</sup>

The fact that this insurrection may have been unreported was not unusual according to Aptheker who notes that, "In any number of cases one finds admissions from Southern newspapers that their coverage of this feature of current events was something other than complete, even if the matters were not of local origin." He then continues, "Thus, one must depend frequently upon government archives, personal letters (sometimes published in distant newspapers), journals, **diaries**, and court records in an attempt to piece together the story." <sup>13</sup>

Copies of the handwritten diary are available in the Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, the Southern Historical Collection of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and in Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University. Hundley left other diaries: A *Daily Journal for 1859* which is at the Clements Library of the University of Michigan and the *Daily Journal of Colonel D. R. Hundley for 1864* which he later expanded and published under the title, *Prison Echoes of the Great Rebellion*.<sup>14</sup> He also wrote and had published an influential treatise, *Social Relations in our Southern States*.<sup>15</sup> Hundley's activities with regard to the above "insurrection" are mentioned in two review articles<sup>16,17</sup> of the latter publication but it will be seen in Appendix I. that his contributions to the history of this period go far beyond this incident.

## The Major Slave Revolts

Although slave revolts within the present borders of the United States were noted as early as 1526,<sup>18</sup> it is the notorious revolts of the nineteenth century that have drawn the most attention and/or impacted North Alabama. These are usually associated with the name of the revolt leader and are noted here with brief descriptions below from various sources: Gabriel Prosser in Henrico County, Virginia, 1800; Charles Deslondes in St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes, Louisiana, 1811; Denmark Vesey in Charleston, South Carolina, 1822; Nat Turner in Southampton County, Virginia, 1831; John Murrell in Madison County, Mississippi, 1835; and John Brown's Raid in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, 1859.

Gabriel Prosser, son of an African-born mother, grew up as the slave of Thomas H. Prosser. Gabriel became a deeply religious man, strongly influenced by Biblical example. In the spring and summer of 1800, he laid plans for a slave insurrection aimed at creating an independent black state in Virginia with himself as king. He planned a three-pronged attack on Richmond that would seize the arsenal, take the powder house, and kill all whites *except Frenchmen, Methodists, and Quakers*. Some historians believe that

Gabriel's large army of slaves, assembled 6 miles outside the city on the appointed night, might have succeeded had it not been for a violent rain-storm that washed out bridges and inundated roads. Before the rebel forces could be reassembled, Governor James Monroe was informed of the plot and ordered out the state militia. Gabriel and about 34 of his companions were subsequently arrested, tried, and hanged.

Charles Deslondes, a free mulatto from Saint-Domingue, led a group of about 400 slaves in a large revolt in Louisiana in 1811. The insurgents launched an attack from a plantation upriver from New Orleans and marched down River Road toward that city, killing two whites, burning plantations and crops, and capturing weapons and ammunition. Planters organized militiamen and vigilantes, and were reinforced with United States Army troops from Baton Rouge and New Orleans. The free black militia offered its services to the authorities, and one company was accepted. The two sides met outside of New Orleans, and sixty-six slaves were killed in the battle, with others missing or captured and held for trial. Two whites were killed. Of the slaves who were tried, twenty-one were sentenced to death, shot, and decapitated, and their heads were placed on poles along the River Road as a warning to other potential rebel slaves.

Denmark Vesey was a boy in 1781 when he was sold to a Bermuda slaver captain named Joseph Vesey, and accompanied him on numerous voyages until 1783 when he settled with his owner in Charleston. In 1800, Denmark was allowed to purchase his freedom with \$600 he had won in a street lottery. He was already familiar with the great Haitian slave revolt of the 1790s, and while working as a carpenter he read anti-slavery literature. Dissatisfied with his second-class status as a freedman and determined to help relieve the far more oppressive conditions of bondsmen he knew, Vesey planned and organized an uprising of city and plantation blacks. The plan reportedly called for the rebels to attack guardhouses and arsenals, seize the arms, kill all whites, burn and destroy the city, and free the slaves. As many as 9,000 blacks may have been involved, though some scholars dispute this figure. Warned by a house servant during the last week of May, 1822, white authorities on the eve of the scheduled outbreak made massive military preparations, which forestalled the insurrection. During the ensuing two months, some 130 blacks were arrested. In the trials that followed, 67 were convicted of trying to raise an insurrection; of these, 35, including Vesey, were hanged, and 32 were condemned to exile. In addition, four white men were fined and imprisoned for encouraging the plot.

Nat Turner was born in Southampton, Virginia on October 2, 1800. Nat, the son of slaves, was the property of Benjamin Turner, a prosperous plantation owner. He was taught to read by Benjamin's oldest son, Samuel,



**The Capture of Nat Turner**



who became his master after Benjamin's death about 1810. Nat apparently developed deep religious beliefs and, encouraged by his parents, gradually began to believe that God had chosen him to lead his people out of slavery. Turner was sold to Joseph Travis in 1831 and in February of that year, he took an eclipse of the sun as a supernatural sign from God to start an insurrection. It wasn't until August 21, 1831, however, that Turner and about seven other slaves killed Travis and his family to launch his rebellion. In all, about 50 whites were killed including Elizabeth, the widow of his former master, Samuel Turner. Nat had hoped that his action would cause a massive slave uprising, but only 75 joined his rebellion. Over 3,000 members of the state militia were sent to deal with Turner's rebellion which was put down in a few days. In retaliation, perhaps more than a hundred innocent slaves were killed. Turner went into hiding but was captured six weeks later. His subsequent trial featured his now well-known, confession and he was executed on November 11, 1831.

One piece of, perhaps, significant information that has apparently been overlooked by historians is that Benjamin Turner, who died in 1810, bequeathed to his son, Samuel, seven of his thirty slaves: Sam, Natt, Lydia, Nancy, Drew, Chary, Miver and Elick. (Southampton Wills and Administration, Book VII, p.109. Obtained from Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.) Nancy was Natt or Nat's mother. Accordingly, the famous slave may not have been named Nat or Nathaniel as he is sometimes called.

John A. Murrell or Murel was a minor criminal in western Tennessee whose several convictions included a ten-year term for slave-stealing commencing August 17, 1834, and who died of tuberculosis six months after his release in April, 1844. Virgil A. Stewart, who may have been an accomplice of Murrell, bears main responsibility for inciting this event. Shortly after Murrell's incarceration, Stewart arranged for the publication of a pamphlet, issued under the name of one Augustus Q. Walton, entitled *A History of the Detection, Conviction, Life and Designs of John A. Murel, the Great Western Land Pirate* (Athens, Tenn., 1835). According to this work, Murrell had been the demonic, homicidal head of a huge band of outlaws—the Mystic Clan -whose foul intent was to stir up slave revolts throughout the South and steal everything they could get their hands on during the confusion. Stewart was depicted as a hero who at great personal risk had saved the South by exposing Murrell before his conspiracy was fully hatched. The story had few believers in Tennessee, where folks knew about Murrell, but there were tremendous repercussions throughout much of the South (and North Alabama) when Stewart started peddling the pamphlet in Mississippi. Already fearful of slave uprisings on remote farms and plantations, the whites of the area began inquisitions of slaves suspected of rebellious

leanings; and under torture some of these falsely implicated other potential troublemakers, both black and white. Dozens of blacks and perhaps fifteen whites were hanged or murdered, and many more were whipped and banished—as were all known gamblers along the lower Mississippi River.

John Brown, on October 16, 1859, led eighteen men, thirteen whites and five blacks, into Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Three other members of his force formed a rearguard at a nearby Maryland farm. A veteran of the violent struggles between pro- and anti-slavery forces in Kansas, Brown intended to provoke a general uprising of blacks that would lead to a war against slavery. The raiders seized the federal buildings and cut the telegraph wires. Expecting local slaves to join them, Brown and his men waited in the armory while the townspeople surrounded the building. The raiders and the civilians exchanged gunfire, and eight of Brown's men were killed or captured. By daybreak on October 18, U.S. Marines under the command of Brevet Colonel Robert E. Lee stormed Brown's position in the arsenal's engine house and captured or killed most of his force. Five of the conspirators, including Brown's son Owen, escaped to safety in Canada and the North. Severely wounded and taken to the jail in Charles Town, Virginia, John Brown stood trial for treason against the commonwealth of Virginia, for murder, and for conspiring with slaves to rebel. On November 2, 1859, a jury convicted him and sentenced him to death. Brown readily accepted the sentence and declared that he had acted in accordance with God's commandments. Responding to persistent rumors and written threats, Henry A. Wise, governor of Virginia, called out state militia companies to guard against a possible rescue of Brown and his followers. John Brown was hanged in Charles Town on December 2, 1859.

### **The Response to Slave Revolts**

Herbert Aptheker makes an interesting observation in his opening chapter on nineteenth century slave revolts: "Probably the most fateful year in the history of American Negro slave revolts is that of 1800, for it was then that Nat Turner and John Brown were born, that Denmark Vesey bought his freedom, and it was then that the great conspiracy named after Gabriel, slave of Thomas H. Prosser of Henrico County, Virginia, occurred."<sup>19</sup> This "fateful year" was about four years before Isaac and Joseph Criner settled near New Market becoming the first of a long procession of known immigrants to what would become Madison County, Alabama. John Hunt settled in 1805 and by 1809, the first census of the area, taken in January, 1809, listed 353 heads of families, of whom 82, or 23 per cent, were slave holders.

Denmark Vesey: The first local newspaper, *The Madison Gazette*, wasn't

published until June, 1812, and no copies have survived.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, the first of the revolts to be noted in North Alabama was the Denmark Vesey revolt in the Summer of 1822.

*The Alabama Republican*, which became the successor to *The Madison Gazette* in August 1816, published on July 26, 1822, an undated item from *The New York Spectator*:

“An insurrection of the negroes at Charleston, South Carolina, is stated to have been recently organized. Among other things, these sable heroes were to have murdered Governor Bennet, and one of the leaders was to receive in marriage, as a reward for destroying his master, the fair daughter of the Governor, a young lady about 16 years of age. We are assured that the plot was detected three days before the period fixed for its accomplishment, and the ring-leaders committed for trial. No notice of the affair is taken in the Charleston papers; but private letters received in town yesterday, say that it was intentionally kept secret.”

The *Republican* then printed on August 23, 1822, a dispatch from Charleston, dated July 27, which included the following: “Yesterday, about 8 o’clock, 22 culprits expiated, on the gallows, the crime of which they had been convicted – an attempt to raise an insurrection, not only in the city, but in various parts of the State of S. Carolina.” There was no further news of the event in the newspaper until September 20, 1822, however, no copies of the *Republican* are available between August 30 and September 20, 1822. On that date, the *Republican* published a copy of a lengthy letter from Governor Thomas Bennet of South Carolina, dated August 10, 1822 from Charleston, which summarized the whole affair and the investigation which ended on August 8, 1822, a period of about ten weeks. There was no mention of any local response in the available newspapers. It will be noted that articles appeared in the Huntsville newspaper about a month, more or less, after their occurrence which was typical of newspapers before the telegraph became available for the transmission of news around 1846. Obviously, this could have an effect on the local response and in this case, the happening was essentially over before the first news of the event reached North Alabama.

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Unlike the earlier events, the Nat Turner revolt of 1831 provoked considerable response in Huntsville. A story in *The Democrat*, entitled,

“Insurrection in Virginia” on September 8, 1831 used a somewhat larger typeface to accentuate the story:

“Our last Virginia papers bring us the disagreeable tidings that an insurrection of the Negroes has lately taken place in Southhampton. Between 25 and 30 families have been murdered. The negroes are said to be runaways from the Dismal Swamp; but this we presume is incorrect. The number of insurgents is estimated at 4 or 500. Inevitable destruction is their certain doom. The following, from the *Petersburg Intelligencer* contains most of the facts.”

The article from the *Petersburg Intelligencer* was dated August 26, 1831, and began,

“A great excitement has prevailed in this town for some days past, in consequence of the receipt of information on Monday night last that an insurrection had broken out among the negroes in Southhampton.” The article continued with essentially the same preliminary information as the leads.”

Two days later the *Southern Advocate*, under the same headline, noted, “The eastern mail of Tuesday night brought us accounts of a most heartrending and deplorable calamity which has befallen our fellow citizens of Southhampton County, Virginia.” This article continued with an even more lurid description of the same preliminary information and also proposed an initial prescription for a response:

“From the contemplation of this scene of ruffian violence and ruthless destruction, would it not be well to look to ourselves? Are we entirely exempted from all danger of a like visitation – and ought we not to take some precautions to guard against its possible occurrence? We know that this is a delicate subject and requires delicate dealing, but it ought to be looked boldly in the face. The first step towards safety is to disarm every negro whether bond or free in the community, and to keep them disarmed. This step we consider indispensably necessary. Another precautionary measure is rigidly to enforce the laws in relation to their own time, by slaves. By this proceeding the safety of the community will be rendered more certain, whilst a public nuisance will be removed – as it is known to be a nuisance of an almost insupportable character. The number of free negroes and slaves who hire their own time and

(who are for the most part a thievish, idle and worthless class of society) is at once a source of danger to the whites and, and of corruption to the slaves. We throw out the hints for the consideration of the corporate authorities, believing that the time has arrived for energetic measures to be pursued.”

This pattern continued for several weeks with both newspapers printing stories from Virginia and other Southern newspapers in addition to local items. The *Huntsville Democrat* of October 13, for example, printed a dispatch from the September 19 *Richmond Compiler* which provided a detailed description of Nat Turner and announced that the Virginia governor had offered a reward for his capture. It also reported on the court proceedings of the trial of some of Turner’s band wherein 21 slaves were condemned, nine recommended for reprieve and 12 executed. Turner was still at large and hiding when *The Huntsville Democrat* of October 20 printed one of the many false reports of his capture. He was finally captured on October 30, brought to trial on November 5 and executed on November 11, 1831.

Additional recommendations for response appeared in the newspapers throughout the period: The October 15 *Southern Advocate* printed an editorial on the inadequacy of the state’s patrol laws and suggested that the legislature invest the Judge of the County Court and the Commissioner of Roads and Revenues with the power to levy a special tax in addition to the ordinary county levy which would permit the establishment of effective patrol detachments. In the same issue, the *Advocate* published a local ordinance which created a night watch and patrol of two persons, prescribed their duties and established penalties for violations. The complete ordinance appears in Appendix II.

During the week before the meeting of the Alabama Legislature on November 21, 1831, both papers pleaded for action on the “problem” of free negroes. This subject was addressed in the *Southern Advocate*’s first news of the Turner insurrection on September 10 and was considered, throughout the South, to be one of the main instigators of insurrection. The *Huntsville Democrat*, in an editorial on November 17 entitled “Free Negroes and Mulattoes,” declared:

“It has been a matter of astonishment to us, with what careless indifference our Legislature have, heretofore, looked upon the degraded, wretched and mischievous population, placed at the head of this article. They occupy a kind of middle existence between the freeman and the slave, but under circumstances that forbid a close

association with either, - nature herself has erected an eternal barrier to their intercourse with the white man, and policy dictates the danger of their communication with slaves. - A numerous population in a situation like this, is dangerous to the morals, peace and tranquility of the community.”

The editorial went on to suggest that the Legislature consider making an appropriation for taking them to Liberia as the Colonization Society had done all that they could do.<sup>21</sup> The *Southern Advocate* on November 19 was a little more solicitous in writing that “some measures should be adopted to prevent an increase of this species of our population, by forbidding the migration of free people of color to this State, and by prohibiting the further emancipation of slaves, unless with the condition of removal beyond its limits.” The *Advocate* also reiterated its earlier plea for adoption of a most rigid code of patrol regulations.

The *Huntsville Democrat* of October 6, 1831, printed a significant item about the recent discovery of “incendiary documents” in the South. These publications were associated with the abolitionist movement which became very important in the three decades leading to the Civil War. The undated story from the *Tarborough Free Press* of North Carolina appears below.

“The excitement produced a few months since, in the Southern country, by the discovery of several copies of the notorious ‘Walker Pamphlet,’ is doubtless still fresh in the recollection of most of our readers.<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding the pointed rebukes which the publishers of that inflammatory production received from many of the well disposed and reflecting part of our northern brethren, it appears that some misguided and deluded lunatics are still bent on exciting our colored population to scenes at which the heart sickens on the bare recital, and which instead of improving their moral or physical condition, cannot fail to overwhelm the actors in ruin, and curtail the privileges of all the others. Let them view the first fruits of their diabolical projects in the Southampton massacre, and pause – an awful retribution awaits them.”

A letter from a gentleman in Washington City, dated the 20<sup>th</sup> ult. to the Postmaster at this place says:

“An incendiary paper, *The Liberator*, is circulated openly among the free blacks of this city: and if you will search, it is very prob-

able you will find it among the slaves of your country.<sup>23</sup> It is published in Boston or Philadelphia by a white man, with the avowed purpose of inciting rebellion in the South; and I am informed, is to be carried through your county by secret agents, who are to come amongst you under the pretext of pedling(sic), &c. Keep a sharp look out for these villains, and if you catch them, by all that is sacred you ought to barbecue them. Diffuse this information amongst whom it may concern.

What a fine subject such a fellow would be for Capt. Slick's company to operate upon! If he should be caught in North Alabama, we shall pledge him our word that he will receive *unceremoniously*, one hundred lashes; a neat coat of tar and feathers, and he will be glad to get off at that. – Eds.Dem.”

The name, Captain Slick, applied to the vigilante-type justice that prevailed in most communities during the time of the Mississippi Territory.

Another view of these precarious times is afforded by Betty Fladeland's biography of James G . Birney who was a prominent (see Endnotes) resident of Huntsville from 1818 to 1833.<sup>24</sup> Fladeland writes, “Events in the summer of 1831 strengthened Birney's inclination to move from the slave states.” She then continues:

“On the night of August 21 Nat Turner, a slave preacher at Southampton, Virginia, led a group of fellow slaves in an uprising which resulted in the massacre of fifty-five white people. There was no evidence of a widespread or organized conspiracy, but the uprising aroused fears that such might be the case, and it resulted in a tightening of restraints on both the free colored persons and on slaves and in renewed feeling on the part of many that the blacks, especially those who were free, should be removed from the country as far as possible.”

It was not so much fear of a slave uprising as it was the reaction of the whites that Birney watched with dismay. In Huntsville, the papers were full of reports and articles on the insurrection. People talked of little else. A night watch and patrol system was set up, with a ten o'clock curfew for Negroes which was to be strictly enforced. Warnings were issued against any “incendiary” publications, and there were threats of tar and feathers for peddlers who might circulate them. William Lloyd Garrison's *Libera-*

tor, which had been established that year, was especially criticized as a paper designed to incite rebellion.

Birney, along with others, took the opportunity of reintroducing the law of 1827 against importation of slaves which had been repealed in 1829. It passed in January, 1832, but with several amendments. The new bill prohibited the teaching of any colored person, free or slave, to read or write; forbade free negroes from associating with slaves without the consent of their masters; limited to five the number of male slaves who could assemble at any one place off the plantation where they worked; and provided the death penalty for anyone circulating seditious or incendiary literature.<sup>25</sup>

News reports of the Southampton insurrection excited the whole country, the magnitude of the response varying by region. In the North, it energized the abolitionists; the Southern States revised and strengthened their slave laws, as noted above. Reports and rumors of similar outbreaks were prevalent throughout the South and especially in Virginia and the Carolinas. North Alabama's particular reaction to the Nat Turner insurrection may have been influenced by the fact that many of the resident families were ultimately native to Southside, Virginia. Brothers Simon, Sugars, and Thomas Turner and their cousin John Turner, who were early settlers and plantation owners in Madison County, were second cousins of Nat Turner's first master Benjamin Turner, and there were other Turner cousins in Madison, Limestone, Morgan and Lawrence County.

Signaling the apparent end of the matter, the *Huntsville Democrat* on December 15 printed the following story entitled, "The Last of Nat" from the *Norfolk Herald*. But the effects persisted until and after emancipation and, as we will see later, intellectually to the present day.

"Nat Turner – This wretched culprit expiated his crimes (crimes at the bare mention of which the blood runs cold) on Friday last. He betrayed no emotion but appeared to be reckless of the awful fate that awaited him, and even hurried the executioner in the performance of his duty! Precisely at 12 o'clock he was launched into eternity. – There were but few people to see him hanged. . . . A gentleman of Jerusalem has taken down his confession, which he intends to publish with an accurate likeness of the brigand, taken by Mr. John Crawley, portrait painter of this town, to be lithographed by Endicott & Swett, of Baltimore."

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John Murrell: News of the John Murrell affair reached North Alabama on July 21, 1835 when the *Huntsville Advocate* reprinted a report



from the Clinton (Hinds County, Mississippi) *Gazette* of July 11 that described the episode. Hinds and Madison County, Mississippi, were the sites where the supposed insurrection was uncovered. A committee of investigation was promptly formed in Madison County and apprehended two white men, Cotton and Saunders, both of them steam doctors and occasional preachers by profession.<sup>26</sup> Before they were hanged in Livingston, Mississippi on July 4, Cotton confessed and furnished detailed plans and a list of the prominent conspirators. A dispatch from the *Natchez Courier and Journal* printed in the *Huntsville Advocate* on July 28 indicated that “gamblers, itinerant preachers, steam doctors and clock peddlers were generally considered the guilty leaders.” Daniel S. Dupre in his political, economic and social history of Madison County’s formative years, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*, also describes the event and the Madison County response in some detail from the newspaper accounts that continued for most of the year.<sup>27</sup> Herbert Aptheker examines the reaction of the whole South in his chapter, 1835 – 1839.<sup>28</sup>

Coming only four years after the Nat Turner insurrection, it is not surprising that the Murrell affair provoked such an extreme reaction. The *Southern Advocate* published chapters of Stewarts book on Murrell in August and throughout much of the Fall and the *Huntsville Democrat* also published portions of the book. The fact of white involvement confirmed the view throughout the South that abolitionists were eminently responsible for such uprisings and when the Anti-Slavery Society began flooding the South with anti-slavery tracts in the Summer of 1835, this action contributed to the hysteria. Dupre writes, “The response to the insurrection (in Mississippi) was swift and brutal. As was often the case, vigilante justice borrowed the dispassionate trappings of law to lend an air of legitimacy to the proceedings.”<sup>29</sup> A similar response was noted in most of these cases, e.g., *Daily Journal of Colonel D. R. Hundley for 1861*.

On August 25, 1835, the *Southern Advocate* reported that a public meeting was held at the Madison County Courthouse on August 19 where Thomas Bibb (Alabama’s second governor, 1820-1821) was called to the chair and appointed a committee of twenty “whose duty it shall be to determine upon such measures as are deemed necessary and expedient, in all cases connected with the subject of Abolition, and other matters, which have recently so much disturbed and agitated the public mind - - -.” The twenty men appointed, Dupre noted, were all civic leaders and slave holders and “the composition reflected the desire of Madison County’s citizens to face the crisis as a unified and harmonious community.”<sup>30</sup> The committee’s deliberations were announced at a public meeting on August 29 and in the *Southern Advocate* on September 1. The report began with an introductory editorial that expressed the importance of the meeting and its subject:

“THE MEETING—the proceedings of which are given was decidedly the largest and most respectable ever held in this town, on any occasion, whatever. The Preamble and Resolutions are temperate and firm, and such as befit the occasion. The feelings of indignation which pervade this community, are not, and indeed could not be reflected in proceedings of this nature, so as to convey an adequate idea of them, to persons at a distance. The monstrous impudence of a foreign emissary, springing from a starving population of millions, and coming forward to excite to insurrection and massacre, one better fed and better clothed, in every respect, is unparalleled in any age of the world. We do not apprehend any immediate danger from these efforts, but let it be remembered that vigilance is the parent of safety, and this admonition is particularly addressed to those in authority. Captains of companies, in every beat, throughout the county, should detail PATROLS, for every night in the week, and see that they will do their duty efficiently. We will only detain the reader from the proceedings of the meeting to state, as it was stated in the meeting, that the original committee, by placing themselves on the Grand Committee, intended to show their fellow-citizens that they exacted no responsibility from them, which they were not willing to assume themselves.”

The report of the meeting was then made by Arthur F. Hopkins, a justice of the Alabama Supreme Court and a member of the committee. It began with a long preamble castigating “the efforts of NORTHERN FANATICS to excite our slaves to insurrection and butchery” but at the same time expressed disbelief that their Northern Brethren would sustain such action. It noted that the right to property in their slaves was not a question open to discussion and if it had been there would have been no constitution, and much more. Then followed eight numbered resolutions, the first five confirming the above sentiments, and Resolution 6, which named 160 persons to a Grand Committee of Vigilance consisting of 16 sub-committees or divisions. The Committee was charged with the duty “to arrest and bring to punishment all accessories of the abolition societies and other suspicious persons; to suppress the circulation of all inflammatory publications calculated to excite an insurrectionary spirit amongst our slaves, and to take such other measures as may by them be deemed necessary to secure the public tranquility: and the committee shall be especially charged with these subjects and every consequence growing out of them.” And then, *inasmuch* as these eight resolutions were concerned with state’s rights and

abolition in general, the committee added and recommended the adoption of the following unnumbered resolutions in relation to the other subject which agitates the community i.e., the recent events in Mississippi, "That we view common Gamblers as Vampires preying on the Vitals of Society.- That it be the duty of the Committee of Vigilance, to bring to punishment, such as, at this time, or may hereafter infest this Town and County, and that they deliver them to the Law, or act otherwise according to emergencies . . ." They then added two paragraphs from the law of the state that provided the death penalty for any free person that aided or persuaded the insurrection of slaves and for any person that distributed, circulated or published insurrectionary materials.

The *Southern Advocate* on September 1, 1835, also reported on a similar "large and most respectable meeting of the citizens of Triana, Alabama and the vicinity" on August 29 where a committee of 22 was appointed "to draft resolutions for the purpose of meeting a crisis growing out of the subject of Abolition, and other things which might involve the safety, and continue to disturb the peace of the community, if not met at the threshold." In addition, this edition of the *Southern Advocate* reported that the subject of abolition was taken into consideration at a quarterly meeting of the Methodist Conference of the Limestone Circuit on August 22, 1835 and the presiding elder appointed a committee to draft a set of resolutions touching the question. The resulting resolutions were drawn from their belief that abolition was unconstitutional, subversive and destructive to the interest and happiness of the country and would prove injurious to the cause of Christianity. The first resolution, however, decried the association of the name itinerant members with Clock Peddlers, Steam Doctors, etc. in the newspapers as "a calumny on the character of a highly respectable and eminently useful body of men, and a blow insidiously leveled by the spirit of infidelity at religion itself through its Ministers." The second of the five resolutions, in equally pious language, disavowed and deprecated any participation by members of the Methodist Episcopal Church with abolitionists or abolition principles and any compromise with vice or the companions of vice in any form.

Madison County was not alone in its response to the apparent crisis. The September 15, 1835, *Southern Advocate* published an account of a public meeting of the citizens of Somerville and Morgan County at the Courthouse in Somerville on September 5, 1835. Here also, abolition was of primary concern and Northern abolitionists were characterized in the first of five resulting resolutions as un-Christian, fanatical and even treasonable. The last and most significant resolution called for the establishment of a Committee of Vigilance whose duty was "to call on all suspected per-

sons for a satisfactory explanation of suspicious circumstances, and who shall cause to be arrested all persons who violate the statute against seditious writings." The last was punishable by state statute with death. The resolutions were unanimously adopted and 68 persons were appointed to the Committee which included four persons from each Captain's beat and twelve from Somerville, which was then the county seat. Also reported in the September 15 *Advocate* was another general meeting in the town of Triana on September 5 which adopted the Preamble and Resolutions previously adopted by the Huntsville meeting upon recommendation of the Triana committee of 22.

Although the citizenry remained apprehensive for the remainder of the year, no insurrections were reported in Madison County. Responding to rumors of a contemplated insurrection in the northwestern part of the county, the Grand Committee of Vigilance announced at a meeting in Huntsville on November 26, 1835 that after a full investigation of the facts and circumstances surrounding these rumors there was no cause of alarm to the community at large, but the Committee recommended additional vigilance on the part of the public and the police.<sup>31</sup> The Committee made additional recommendations in resolutions concerning the movements and communications between slaves. Concerned about the possibility of a disturbance during the Christmas season, the Committee of Vigilance of the Whitesburg and Pond beats, one of the 16 sub-committees of the Grand Committee, met on December 11, 1835, and unanimously adopted even more restrictive regulations on their slaves.<sup>32</sup>

In his analysis, Dupre writes, "No rebellion materialized in Madison County; the committees patrolled the countryside, but there is no record of their having arrested anyone, white or black. That very little happened in Madison County does not diminish the importance of the insurrection scare of 1835. The threat had been real to the white citizens of the county, as the outpouring of editorials and the resolutions of the committees revealed. Actually, the very uneventfulness of Madison County's experience was more typical of the South in 1835 than was the violence in Mississippi."<sup>33</sup> (Aptheker, however, notes the hanging of a white man that summer near Lynchburg, Virginia, for attempting to interest slaves in an uprising and the lynching of three whites in Aiken, South Carolina, and Jefferson County, Georgia, for seditious activity.)<sup>34</sup> Dupre continues, "The language of the editorials and committee resolutions reveals two significant facts. First, the focus of concern among the citizens of Madison County and the South in general was the abolitionist movement, not an indigenous uprising of slaves. Second, the depictions of both Murrell and the abolitionists were filled with images of conspiracies, of deception and manipulation that threat-

ened both community order and the people's liberty."<sup>35</sup> And we can conclude that the scare certainly enhanced the South's concern with abolitionism that became more militant with the establishment of Garrison's *Liberator* in 1831.

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John Brown: John Brown's Raid received broad coverage in the October 26, 1859, *Southern Advocate* with dispatches and editorials from Baltimore, dated October 17, 18 and 21; from Harper's Ferry, dated October 19, 20 and 21; from Washington, D.C, dated October 18, 19 and 21; and from Philadelphia, dated October 22. The *Advocate's* own editorial on the next page provided a short and general summary of the incident:

"We give full telegraphic details of this rash and bold attempt at insurrection in Virginia at Harper's Ferry. It was concocted by Brown, assisted by advice and means furnished by prompt abolitionists in the North. It was confined to whites and free negroes – no slaves appear to have been engaged willingly in it, and they did not join the traitors as expected. Arms and ammunition were provided by Brown, and his expectations were that a general rush of fanatics to his standard would take place and that there would be a vast uprising of slaves in Virginia and Maryland. The prompt action of the authorities of Virginia and of the General Government are worthy of all praise. Mr. Buchanan, at once, ordered the laws to be enforced; the insurrection to be suppressed by armed force; the traitors to be seized wherever found. Now that it has been suppressed, let the traitors have a short shrift and a speedy hanging. This attempt is directly traceable to the abolitionists: Giddings, Stewart, Gerritt Smith, Sumner, &c., are more guilty than Brown and his deluded followers.<sup>36</sup> They are the real culprits. – The blood that has been shed and that of the victims who will suffer at the rope's end, attaches to them alone. They are the great criminals, We trust the letters found in Brown's house and now in the hands of Gov. Wise, will affix legal guilt upon them, so they may be tried for inciting rebellion."

This was followed by a statement from the Washington correspondent of the *Cincinnati Gazette* concerning the papers found with Brown. The papers gave details of his arms and equipment purchases and indicated "that the conspiracy of which he was the head and front, has an extensive

organization in various states.” The correspondent concluded, “There can be no doubt that his grand aim was to create a general servile insurrection.”

On another page the paper presented a long, undated commentary on “Free Negroes” from the *Weekly Southern Era* of Opelika, Alabama, and recommended it for consideration of the next Legislature. In conspicuously racist language, the commentary elucidated a number of “facts” and suggested that the Alabama legislature at its next session, pass a law forbidding the presence of free negroes in the State. It is apparent that abolitionists and free negroes were usually blamed for instigating these insurrections. Huntsville’s Board of Alderman also did its part by passing on December 6, 1859, an ordinance (Appendix III) to expel some of its own free negroes from the city.

The *Southern Advocate* published no further remarks on the Brown affair until December 7, 1859 when it printed an editorial from the *Charleston Mercury* which criticized the excessive military display ordered by Virginia’s Governor Wise at Brown’s execution on December 2 as detrimental to the South. On December 14, 1859, the *Advocate* presented its final comments in a story entitled, “Let Quiet, not Agitation Prevail.”

“Our readers will bear witness that we have not filled the columns of the *Advocate* with the thousand and one rumors about the miscreant John Brown, nor aided in making a hero or martyr of him. He has been hung as he ought to have been the day after the jury convicted him. His fellow criminals are to be hung on the 16<sup>th</sup>, as they deserve to – Let them be hung, and let that be the end of the matter with us. And let all their imitators and aiders be served in the same way. – We commend the observations of the *Baltimore American* as being the common sense opinions of the public to our readers.”

The *Baltimore American* also condemned Virginia’s handling of the execution.

### **Villains or Heroes – the Continuing Controversy**

In spite of the many incidents of insurrection prior to the abolition of slavery, the prevalent view of historians up until the mid 1930s was the white Southern view that the American slave in the plantation economy was docile and submissive. It was then that a group of revisionist historians, including Herbert Aptheker, began to challenge the conventional wisdom. The distinguished contemporary historian of slavery, Eugene Genovese, wrote many years later, “More than any other scholar Herbert

Apthecker, in his *American Negro Slave Revolts* and pioneering essays, argued for a revolutionary tradition among the slaves. He demolished the legend of the contented slave, which Ulrich Bonnell Phillips<sup>37</sup> especially promoted . . .”<sup>38</sup> And in a book on this subject published earlier this year, Scot French, a professor of African-American studies at the University of Virginia writes, “In 1860, there were four million slaves in the United States. By December 1865, there were none. The abolition of slavery secured by federal armies on the Civil War battlefield and formalized in the Thirteenth Amendment, made both slavery and slave rebellions relics of the past. Yet the rebellious slave, as a symbol of black aspirations to freedom and equality remained a formidable presence on the social and cultural landscape of the nation long after slavery’s destruction.”<sup>39</sup> In this section of the paper it will seen that the symbolism of some of the incidents considered here continues to reverberate in fact, in fiction and in folklore up to the present day.

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Gabriel Prosser: The following story about Gabriel Prosser by staff writer, Julian Walker, appeared in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* of October 11, 2004:

“More than two centuries ago, Gabriel, a blacksmith and indentured servant, organized what was to have been one of the largest slave revolts in American history, only to see foul weather and betrayal foil his plans. For leading the plot, Gabriel was executed Oct. 10, 1800 at the Richmond gallows.

Yesterday evening, a crowd including scholars and members of the civic group that lobbied for a city memorial to Gabriel - sometimes called Prosser’s Gabriel or Gabriel Prosser in reference to his Henrico County owner - walked to the intersection of North 15th and East Broad streets for its unveiling. The air was thick with the smell of incense and the sound of African drums as the walkers approached.

The ‘Execution of Gabriel’ historical highway marker denotes the site where Prosser was hanged.

‘Oh my God, it’s beautiful,’ said Ana Edwards, a founder of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality group which lobbied for the marker. ‘This is a tremendous symbol. Gabriel Prosser is an inspiration for attempting to do something that monumental at a time when resources for slaves were phenomenally low.’

A seminar about Gabriel was held at Centenary United Methodist Church, 411 E. Grace St., earlier yesterday. . . . Among the speakers at that event was Haskell H. Bingham, a great-great-grandson of Gabriel and a retired Virginia State University administrator. . . .”

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Denmark Vesey: It was evidently a coincidence that three new books on Denmark Vesey were published in 1999.<sup>40,41,42</sup> Recognizing this anomaly, *The William & Mary Quarterly* arranged for a review which was published in the October 2001 *Quarterly* in “Forum: The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, part 1.”<sup>43</sup> In an introduction to the Forum, Robert A. Gross, Book Review Editor of the *Quarterly* writes, “Scholars have found in the Vesey conspiracy a testament to African-American resistance to slavery and a revealing glimpse into the world of black Charlestonians during the early republic. In this spirit, three books on Denmark Vesey and his abortive uprising appeared in 1999. Why this sudden upsurge of interest? To address this question and assess the books, *The William and Mary Quarterly* commissioned Michael P. Johnson of Johns Hopkins University to write a review essay. That assignment acquired a life of its own.”

Johnson opens his review essay with the following words: “In the pantheon of rebels against slavery in the United States, Denmark Vesey stands exalted.” He then goes on to explain how historians had since 1822 considered Denmark Vesey to be a heroic figure and “a bold insurrectionist determined to free his people or die trying.” But after beginning the review, he came to believe that historians were wrong about the conspiracy. In the background investigation for his evaluation, Johnson looked at the original court transcripts which exist in manuscript in the South Carolina State archives. He found significant differences with the Official Report of the Trial Record which was used by virtually all previous historians and the authors of the three current volumes. The Official Report was apparently seriously flawed. Among other discrepancies, Johnson found that the original transcripts showed that the blacks confessed to a conspiracy only after being beaten and tortured and that the coerced confessions mirrored newspaper accounts and rumors in Charleston about the rebellion in Haiti (Saint Domingue) in 1791. Johnson, after a detailed analysis, concluded “not only that Vesey was innocent of organizing a slave rebellion, but also that, in fact, *no rebellion conspiracy ever existed—except in the frightened minds*



of white slaveholders, who, Johnson argues, coerced testimony from a handful of slaves and free blacks to convict Vesey and the others.”<sup>44</sup>

Johnson also found that Edward Pearson, editor of one of the volumes, *Designs Against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822*, had made errors in transcribing and copying the records. Because of these errors and the issues Professor Johnson had raised about the accuracy of the “trial record,” the University of North Carolina Press had discontinued printing of the book.

Dr. Gross’s statement that the assignment had acquired a life of its own refers to the fact that Johnson’s findings were not accepted by all experts and had also raised questions about the written history of slavery and slave resistance. Accordingly, the *William and Mary Quarterly* invited the authors of the three Vesey books and five distinguished historians to comment on the controversy. These essays and Michael Johnson’s “last word” appeared in the January 2002 *Quarterly* in a *Forum: The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, part 2*.<sup>45</sup> The controversy was also reported in the weekly magazine *The Nation* and *The New York Times*.<sup>46,47</sup>

In his essay, Professor Pearson apologized for the mistakes he had made in the transcribed record but insisted that “the accompanying analysis based on my reading and consideration of the evidence stands, I believe, as a sound piece of scholarship that contributes not just to an understanding of the plot itself, but also to the historiography on the antebellum South and urban slavery.”<sup>48</sup> And whether or not there was an actual conspiracy, Pearson points out in his book that during the 1960s, civil rights workers invoked Vesey as a founding figure in the struggle for black freedom. He also makes some interesting observations about its cultural impact:

The conspiracy and its leader have also inspired artists, including several musicians, who have memorialized the events of 1822. Composer and author Paul Bowles, best known for his novel “The Sheltering Sky,” wrote an opera based on the plot in 1937. Fifty years later, Charleston native Thomas Cabaniss followed in Bowles’s footsteps, writing an opera called “Denmark Vesey.” The plot also attracted the attention of one of the nation’s greatest songwriters and composers. George Gershwin, who drew heavily on the folktales and language of low country blacks for “Porgy and Bess,” began work on a libretto with collaborator DuBose Heyward for a musical drama about Vesey. After Gershwin’s death in 1937 and Heyward’s three years later, Dorothy Heyward eventually completed the work as a play called “Set My People Free,” which opened on Broadway in 1948. More recently,

Australian composer Vincent Plush premiered a piece entitled *Denmark Vesey Takes the Stand* that drew on the trial record as well as Heyward's play, using voices, instruments, and theatrical devices to recreate the last days of Vesey and his fellow insurgents.<sup>49</sup>

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Nat Turner: The history of American slave revolts is characterized by unproven superlatives, e.g., the largest in history, the most extensive, the bloodiest and/or the most famous. The Nat Turner revolt certainly merits consideration for the latter two characterizations. Noting that Turner's celebrity has vacillated over the years, Scot French, author of the most recent and comprehensive analysis of the Turner revolt and its historic image, writes:

"The changing image of Nat Turner mirrored the shifting ideologies of black and white Americans as they grappled with the social revolution wrought by emancipation. Conservative black leaders of the post-Reconstruction era, who assigned themselves the task of 'uplifting the race,' emphasized the education and high moral character of 'Old Prophet Nat' rather than the violent acts of murder and mayhem that characterized the rebellion itself. They depicted the rebel leader as an American patriot and a Christian martyr. More radical black leaders, rising to the fore at the turn of the century, adopted Turner as a symbol of 'New Negro' assertiveness in the face of white racism and mob violence."<sup>50</sup>

White Southerners, for the most part, considered the Turner and other revolts as aberrations and held on to their belief in the faithful and docile slave. French also questions whether Turner's original "confession" was a precise transcription, and suggests that it might have been altered to downplay the hysteria and extent of the rebellion.

Nat Turner's "memory" persisted over the years: A few months after the beginning of the Civil War, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a strong abolitionist and supporter of John Brown, published a short history of Nat Turner in the *Atlantic Monthly*.<sup>51</sup> There was considerable debate on Nat Turner among blacks in the 1880s, and in 1889 "two black newspapers engaged in a debate over whether it was more appropriate to build a statue to white hero – John Brown – or a black one – Turner."<sup>52</sup> William S. Drewry, a native of Southampton County, Virginia, published the first book-length study of the Turner rebellion in 1900.<sup>53</sup>

The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nat Turner insurrection, 1931, coincided with two other singular events: the beginning of the trials of the Scottsboro Boys and the depths of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Communist Party saw the case as providing a great recruiting tool among southern blacks and northern liberals and in the June 6, 1931 edition of *The Liberator*, a publication of an organization of black Communists, Cyril Briggs tried to relate Turner to black struggles of 1931.<sup>54</sup> The party, through its legal arm, the International Labor Defense (ILD), pronounced the case against the Scottsboro Boys a “murderous frame-up” and began efforts, ultimately successful, to be named as their attorneys. The trial went on for more than six years coinciding, but not connected with, the beginnings of the revisionist, rebellious slave history. And as noted by Scot French, “By the mid-1930s, a small cadre of revisionist scholars, writers, artists, and activists was mass-producing counter-images of Nat Turner as black American patriot and working class hero. Their work anticipated the emergence of a mass movement against Jim Crow after world War II and the ‘Negro Revolt’ of the 1960s.”<sup>55</sup>

In 1960, four black college students began sit-ins at a lunch counter of a Greensboro, North Carolina, restaurant where black patrons were not served. The turbulent decade continued with demonstrations, riots and violence including the assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. In his autobiography which was published shortly after his death, Malcolm X wrote, “I read about the slave preacher Nat Turner, who put the fear of God into the white slavemaster. Nat Turner wasn’t going around preaching pie-in-the-sky and ‘non-violent’ freedom for the black man. . . . Somewhere I have read where Nat Turner’s example is said to have inspired John Brown to invade Virginia and attack Harper’s Ferry nearly thirty years later, with thirteen white men and five Negroes.”<sup>56</sup>

In the middle of August, 1965, an incident between traffic police and pedestrians developed into two days of spontaneous riots in the Watts area of Los Angeles. The summer of 1967 saw devastating riots in many cities including Newark and Detroit. William Styron’s novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, was published in the fall of that year and received much attention because of the racial situation at the time.<sup>57</sup> The book received rave reviews, became an immediate bestseller and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968. Styron’s book, however, provoked a bitter response from some of the black community which continues to the present day and is described in many sources including the recent books by Scot French<sup>39</sup> and Kenneth S. Greenberg,<sup>58</sup> a PBS documentary broadcast on February 10, 2004,<sup>59</sup> and an article in *The New York Times*.<sup>60</sup> The dispute also killed plans by Twentieth Century Fox to film the novel. Scot French summarizes the controversy as follows:

“The October 1967 publication of William Styron’s novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner* returned the rebellious slave to broad public consciousness and spurred the most intense debate over Turner’s memory since the era of Reconstruction. . . . The black backlash against the novel, culminating in a volume of essays (*William Styron’s Confessions of Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*),<sup>61</sup> overshadowed the protests of white Southern partisans who complained that Styron had defamed *their* ancestors and distorted *their* history. Styron’s efforts to create a common history, merging the perspectives of slave and slaveholder, satisfied the descendants of neither. To this day, the Styron controversy remains a focal point for historians and literary critics interested in race, memory, and the cultural politics of the civil rights and Black Power eras.”<sup>62</sup>

Another look at the Turner controversy was provided by Pulitzer prize-winning journalist and author, Tony Horwitz, in a 1999 article for the “A Reporter At Large” section of *The New Yorker Magazine*.<sup>63</sup> Horwitz visited Southampton County and interviewed residents of both races including some with familial connections to the tragedy. He found attitudes that varied from indifference to bitterness, and the bitterness of the local whites had contributed to the sinking of the Hollywood plans to film Styron’s novel. The whites particularly resented “Styron’s unflattering depiction of their forbears as ‘brandy-fragrant, sun-scorched, snaggle-mouthed, anus-scratching farmers’ and also feared ‘the film might inflame the tense racial atmosphere in Southampton which was then in the midst of turbulent integration.’”<sup>64</sup>

Horwitz interviewed several other important “players” including Styron, Mike Thelwell and Vincent Harding, two of the “Ten Black Writers,” and Scot French. Horwitz had apparently thought about writing a book on Turner and had visited Southampton County before, in 1995. During that visit, he had talked to Gilbert Francis who had co-produced a documentary on Turner for the Southampton County Historical Society. Francis was a descendant of a family that was massacred in the rebellion and when Fox was planning to film Styron’s novel in the 1960s, Francis had been the principal liaison between Hollywood and the local community and had demanded changes in the script. Horwitz interviewed Styron at the Connecticut farmhouse where he has lived since 1955 and learned of his thoughts on the issue after thirty years. Styron told him he believed, “critics rejected the entire exercise of a white man’s writing from a slave’s perspective,” and in this sense, French thought “he unwittingly created one of the first politically incorrect

texts.”<sup>65</sup> Horwitz also extensively interviewed Scot French who told him some of what he had learned in the five years that he had spent researching both the Turner revolt and the way it was remembered. French hoped to publish his work the next year but his fine book wasn’t published until 2004. Some of his last words on the subject were, “We’ll never lay this story to rest.”<sup>66</sup>

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Our last two subjects, John Murrell and John Brown, have also enjoyed celebrity in the literature and elsewhere. Murrell’s legend was publicized after Virgil Stewart’s 1835 book in 1847 editions of the *National Police Gazette*. Mark Twain mentions him in Chapter 26 of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and devotes most of Chapter 29 of *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) to Murrell. A sketch of Murrell by James L Penick appears in *American National Biography* wherein he mentions the above sources and another book by Robert M. Coates, *The Outlaw Years: The History of the Land Pirates of the Natchez Trace* (1930). Penick also states that, “The only scholarly treatment to date is James L. Penick, *The Great Western Land Pirate: John A. Murrell in Legend and History*.<sup>67</sup>

John Brown’s life and legend have been documented in song and story, films and a PBS documentary. Most notable are the song “John Brown’s Body,” sung to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” Stephen Vincent Benet’s poem of the same name, and Stephen B. Oates 1970 biography.<sup>68</sup> A popular reggae band now also bears the name, John Brown’s Body. Harper’s Ferry National Historic Park was established May 29, 1963. John Brown’s Fort (the Harper’s Ferry Armory) was acquired by the National Park Service in 1960 and the restored building was moved back to the Lower Town in 1968. Because the fort’s original site was covered with a railroad embankment in 1894, the building now sits about 150 feet east of its original location.

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The continued importance and significance of the present subject was emphasized in 1968 by the establishment of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, a part of the Yale Center for International and Area Studies. The Center is “dedicated to the investigation and dissemination of information concerning all aspects of the Atlantic slave system and its destruction. It seeks to foster an improved understanding of the role of slavery, slave resistance, and abolition in the founding of the modern world by promoting interaction and exchange be-

tween scholars engaged in research in each of these distinct areas, and by assisting in the translation of scholarly information into public knowledge through publications, educational outreach and other programs and events.”<sup>69</sup>

## APPENDIX I

Daniel Robinson Alexander Campbell Hundley was born December 11, 1832 in Limestone County, Alabama. His father, John Henderson Hundley, of Halifax County, Virginia, moved to Alabama where he was a planter and also a minister and a physician. It is noted that “Daniel Hundley himself was a patrician who believed one’s highest calling was to be a gentleman.”<sup>70</sup> After graduating from Bacon College in Kentucky in 1850, he entered law school at the University of Virginia and then at Harvard where he received his law degree in 1853. He married his first cousin, Mary Ann Hundley of Virginia that year, and moved to Chicago primarily to manage his father-in-law’s financial holdings, a task for which he was apparently not too well suited. Before he returned to Alabama in November 1860, Hundley contributed two articles on public affairs in *Hunt’s Merchant Magazine*, a popular periodical of the day, and these lead to his publication of *Social Relations in our Southern States* wherein his purpose was to defend, justify and provide an accurate picture of the South.

Alabama seceded from the Union on January 11, 1861, deepening the prospects for war, and Hundley wrote to Governor Wise on January 21 asking him “to accept my services and to give me a commission.” Nothing apparently came of this request but on May 14, four days before the “startling news” of May 18, he writes that he had drawn up papers for a proposed rifle company to be called the Beauregard Rifles and the next day purchased a copy of *Hardee’s Tactics*<sup>71</sup> (for \$1.35) so that he might learn something of the art of war preparatory to the labors he soon expected to begin. He continued his planning and recruiting until August 10 when his company was activated in Memphis, Tennessee, under Col. John D. Martin as Company D, 1st Mississippi Regiment which name was soon changed to the 25th Mississippi Regiment. The name was changed again to 2nd Confederate Infantry on January 31, 1862 and then it was disbanded and reconstituted as a part of the 55th Alabama Infantry after Shiloh. Captain Hundley, however, missed the “blooding” of this regiment at Shiloh as he had, on December 12, 1861, made application to Gen. John S. Bowen, the Division commander, for a recommendation to Gen. Polk for authority to raise a regiment. He was subsequently given command of the 31st Alabama Infantry which participated in the campaign in East Tennessee in the

Spring of 1862. His regiment was ordered to Vicksburg in the winter of 1862 and fought with distinction at the battle of Chickasaw Bayou and at Port Gibson where he was wounded. The regiment later fought gallantly in the Atlanta Campaign where Hundley was captured and sent to Johnson's Island. His experiences at this Confederate Officers military prison, and his exciting and almost successful escape are described in his book, *Prison Echoes of the Great Rebellion*.<sup>14</sup>

After the war, Hundley returned to the family home in Mooresville, Alabama. He practiced law once again and edited *The North Alabama Reporter* in Huntsville for a short time. He also served as Solicitor in Lawrence County, Alabama. His most enduring contribution and legacy, however, is *Social Relations in Our Southern States*. In his introduction to the L.S.U. Press Reprint, Cooper writes that Hundley "hoped that an analysis of the South by a Southerner who admitted 'there is much in the Slave States to call forth unqualified approbation, or equally unqualified denunciation' would spark Northerners and Englishmen to view the South rationally and to realize they had nothing to fear from it."<sup>72</sup> Cooper also notes that, "Although contemporaries paid little attention to *Social Relations*, it has become an invaluable source for students of the antebellum South."<sup>73</sup> WorldCat, the worldwide union catalog available on the Internet through FirstSearch, indicates that "*Social Relations in our Southern States*" is available in hundreds of libraries worldwide. It is available in Great Britain, for example, at the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the University College of London and the universities at Oxford, Cambridge, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Durham, and New Castle. A recent study of southern intellectual history by Michael O'Brien, Reader in American Intellectual History at Jesus College, Cambridge, devotes many pages to Hundley's analysis of the social structure of the antebellum South. O'Brien writes, "Few Southerners, in fact, ever wrote in a concerted way about social structure. They produced reams about race, gender, politics, and religion, but class did not often seem worth a sustained analysis. The great exception was Daniel R. Hundley, who published in 1860 a book called *Social Relations in Our Southern States*."<sup>74</sup>

Daniel was not the only prominent member of the Hundley family. His nephew Oscar Richard Hundley (1854-1921) was Huntsville City Attorney 1882-1884, a member of the Alabama state legislature 1886-1887, the Alabama senate 1890-1897 and was appointed U.S District Judge 1902-1903. He was responsible for the building of two of Huntsville's architectural gems: the elegant circa 1900 residence at 401 Madison Street and the building at 128 South Side Square formerly known as the Hundley Building.

The Historic Huntsville Foundation, however, decided to rewrite history by renaming the building after its founding chairman, renowned architect and preservationist, Harvie P. Jones, who had researched the building and drafted preliminary plans for its restoration before his death in December 1998.

## APPENDIX II

### AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH A NIGHT WATCH AND PATROL\*

Be it ordained by the Mayor and Alderman of Huntsville, That a Night Watch and Patrol of two discreet and vigilant persons, shall be established for the purpose of guarding and patrolling the Town at night, under the following rules and regulations, viz:

1<sup>st</sup>. It shall be the duty of the Watchmen to ring the bell of the courthouse at 10 o'clock, P. M. precisely; at which time they shall commence their tour of duty, and patrol all the streets and alleys of the town until break of day — crying the hours and half hours thro'out the night

2<sup>nd</sup>. It shall be their duty to arrest and put in jail, all coloured persons whether bond or free, whom they may find from their proper lodgings after the commencement of the Watch; unless the Watch are satisfied that they are upon business of emergency — in which case it shall be their duty to see them to their proper quarters.

3<sup>rd</sup>. It shall be their duty to report, or, at their discretion, to arrest all disorderly white persons, hold them in custody, and bring them before the Mayor in the morning, to be dealt with according to law.

4<sup>th</sup>. It shall further be their duty to enter any enclosure or house, where there may be an unlawful assembly of persons of colour.

All slaves committed to jail by the Watch under this ordinance, shall be liberated in the morning upon their master's paying the sum of one dollar to the jailer; and in case of his neglect or his refusal to do so, the said slave shall receive fifteen lashes to upon his bare back, to be inflicted by the constable, and then be discharged.

All free persons of colour committed to jail under this ordinance, shall be fined at the discretion of the Mayor in a sum not exceeding ten dollars; and be held in custody until the same is paid.

All fines collected under this ordinance, shall accrue to the Corporation.

The Night Watch and Patrol shall be appointed for the term of three months, in the first instance; and afterwards for such length of time as the



Board may agree upon. They shall receive such compensation quarterly as may be stipulated by the Board — shall be liable to be dismissed at all times; and in case of neglect of duty shall forfeit their back pay in part, or in whole at the discretion of the Board.

Teste: PEYTON S. WYATT, *Clerk.*  
AN ORDINANCE SUPPLEMENTAL To ORDINANCE NO. 21

Be it ordained by the Mayor and Alderman of Huntsville, That from and after the 15<sup>th</sup> of November next, it shall be unlawful for any free person of colour to hire a slave, or keep a hired slave about his, her or their premises, under a penalty not exceeding twenty dolls. For every such offence; and the continuance thereof for one week after a recovery under this ordinance, shall be considered a new offence.

And be it further ordained, That all such free persons of colour so offending, shall be committed to jail until the fine assessed them shall be paid.

Teste: PEYTON S. WYATT, *Clerk.*

\*Minutes of Huntsville Board of Aldermen, page 155, 12 October 1831.

### APPENDIX III

An Ordinance for the Removal of Free Persons of Color Out of the Huntsville Who Have Immigrated to this State since the First of February 1832.\*\*

Sec. 1. Be it Ordained by the Mayor and Alderman of the Corporation of Huntsville, that from and after the first day of January, 1860, it shall not be lawful for any free person of color, who has removed within this State since the first day of February, 1832, to reside or live within the Corporate limits of the Town of Huntsville, and any person or persons being found, within its limits after that time, either as a resident or a hireling, shall be arrested and brought before the Mayor who upon proof of the charge, shall assess a fine of twenty dollars against him or her, and upon failure to pay the same, he or she shall be sentenced to imprisonment in the jail above for twenty days, or ordered to work on the streets of the corporation for one month, at the discretion of the Mayor, and for a second offence, shall in

addition to a fine of twenty dollars, receive on his or her bare back, twenty-nine lashes, with the like penalty for any subsequent violation till he or she remove.

\*\*Minutes of Huntsville Board of Aldermen, Page 319, December 6, 1859.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Clarence Edward Carter, Editor, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. VI. (Mississippi), p. 299.

<sup>2</sup>Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, (NY: International Publishers, 1993), p. 162.

<sup>3</sup>William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press, 1994), p. 109.

<sup>4</sup>Aptheker., pp. 354, 357.

<sup>5</sup>Laura A. White, *The South in the 1850's as Seen by British Consuls*, (The Journal of Southern History, 1935), I, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup>Frank Moore, Editor, *The Rebellion Record: a Diary of American Events*, (NY: Arno Press, 1977), Vol. I., p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>William L. Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse, Alabama and Mississippi in 1860*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 172,173.

<sup>8</sup>Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South – The Southern Rage to Explain*, (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. 67.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Henry Walker, Jr., *History of Limestone County*, (Limestone County Commission, 1973), pp. 118-120.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Rice, *Hard Times –The Civil War in Huntsville and North Alabama*, (Old Huntsville, Inc., 1994), pp. 16-21

<sup>11</sup>Madison County Commissioner Court Minutes 1856-1861. These volumes are held in the Madison County Records Center in the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

<sup>12</sup>These men may be the free negro, Jacobs, and the “old English abolitionist” mentioned in Hundley’s diary entry for May 25, 1861. No other record (census etc.) were found for these individuals.

<sup>13</sup>Apthecker, p. 159.

<sup>14</sup>Daniel R. Hundley, *Prison Echoes of the Great Rebellion*, (NY: S.W. Green, Printer, 1874).

<sup>15</sup>Daniel R. Hundley, *Social Relations in our Southern States*, (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979, 1960) Reprint of the H. B. Price 1860 Edition. Edited, with an Introduction by William J. Cooper Jr.

<sup>16</sup>Blanche Henry Clark Weaver, *D. R. Hundley: Subjective Sociologist*, (Athens: Georgia Review, University of Georgia, X., Summer, 1956), p. 75.

<sup>17</sup>Hobson, p. 75.

<sup>18</sup>Apthecker, p. 163. The revolt occurred in a Spanish colony whose probable location was at or near the mouth of the Pedee River in what is now South Carolina.

<sup>19</sup>Apthecker, p.219.

<sup>20</sup>Frances Cabaniss Roberts, *Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County*, (A Dissertation, 1956) p. 233. A copy of *The Madison Gazette, October 19, 1813*, American Antiquarian Society Library, Worcester, Mass., is labeled Vol. II, No. 73, which indicates that Vol. I, No.1, would have been published in June, 1812.

<sup>21</sup>The American Colonization Society (ACS) was formed in 1817 to send free African-Americans to Africa as an alternative to emancipation in the United States. In 1822, the society established on the west coast of Africa a colony that in 1847 became the independent nation of Liberia. By 1867, the society had sent more than 13,000 emigrants. Beginning in the 1830s, the society was harshly attacked by abolitionists, who tried to discredit

colonization as a slaveholder's scheme. And, after the Civil War, when many blacks wanted to go to Liberia, financial support for colonization had waned. During its later years the society focused on educational and missionary efforts in Liberia rather than emigration and dissolved in 1964.

<sup>22</sup>David Walker (1785-1830) was an African American abolitionist who wrote a famous antislavery pamphlet, *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, in 1829 which urged American slaves to fight for their freedom. Its publication marked the beginning of the radical antislavery movement in the United States.

<sup>23</sup>*The Liberator* was the weekly newspaper of abolitionist crusader, William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) for 35 years (Jan. 1, 1831-Dec. 29, 1865). It was the most influential antislavery periodical in the pre-Civil War period and represented a change from Garrison's previous philosophy of gradual emancipation to immediate and militant abolitionism.

<sup>24</sup>Betty Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist*, (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955). James G. Birney was born in Danville, Kentucky, in 1792. Birney graduated from Princeton University in 1810, studied law in Philadelphia and opened a practice in Danville in 1814. He won election to the Kentucky legislature in 1816 and in 1818 moved to Madison County, Alabama, a frontier area where land sales were booming. He established a large cotton plantation there near Triana and in 1819 was chosen for the Alabama state legislature where he was active in several areas including slavery issues. After several unsuccessful cotton harvests, he sold his plantation and most of his 28 slaves and opened a law office in Huntsville in 1823. Birney was elected 5<sup>th</sup> circuit solicitor in 1823, Huntsville alderman in 1828 and Huntsville mayor in 1829. At first an advocate of gradual emancipation and a supporter of the American Colonization Society, his views changed over the years and he publicly endorsed immediate emancipation after he left Huntsville. He was elected executive secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society (founded by William Lloyd Garrison), in 1837. This Society split soon afterward, one faction advocating the Garrison's inflammatory approach and the other, which became the Liberty Party, emphasizing electoral activity. Birney was the Liberty Party's presidential candidate in 1840 and 1844.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 48,49.

<sup>26</sup>Steam doctor was the name applied to certain medical practitioners in the early 1800s who espoused the medicinal value of botanicals and the Indian practice of using steam treatment to cure various ailments.

<sup>27</sup>Daniel S. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*, (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

<sup>28</sup>Apthecker, pp. 325-329.

<sup>29</sup>Dupre, p. 226.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>31</sup>*Southern Advocate*, December 1, 1835

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., December 16, 1835

<sup>33</sup>Dupre, p. 230.

<sup>34</sup>Apthecker, p. 327

<sup>35</sup>Dupre, p. 231.

<sup>36</sup>Giddings, Joshua Reed (1795-1864), Ohio Congressman 1838-1859.

Stewart, Maria W. (1803-1879), A free Black political activist, author and lecturer.

Smith, Gerritt (1797-1884), A wealthy abolitionist who helped to found Liberty Party.

Sumner Charles (1811-1874), Massachusetts Senator 1851-1874.

<sup>37</sup>Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, (New York, London, D. Appleton, 1918). Phillips, 1877-1934, was an authority on the antebellum South.

<sup>38</sup>Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll; The World the Slaves Made*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1974), p. 587.

<sup>39</sup>Scot French, *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), p. 135.

<sup>40</sup>Edward A Pearson, Editor, *Designs against Charleston: The Trial Record of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy of 1822*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>41</sup>Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey*, (Madison, Madison House, 1999).

<sup>42</sup>David Robertson, *Denmark Vesey: The Buried History of America's Largest Slave Rebellion* (N.Y., Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

<sup>43</sup>Michael P. Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," (The William & Mary Quarterly, Vol. 58, No. 4, Oct. 2001.) pp. 915-976.

<sup>44</sup>News Release – Office of News and Information, Johns Hopkins University, October 23, 2001.

Internet:<http://www.jhu.edu/newsinfo/news/home01/oct01/vesey.html>.

<sup>45</sup>Forum: "The Making of a Slave Conspiracy, part 2," (The William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. 59, No.1, Jan. 2002.) pp. 135-202.

<sup>46</sup>Jon Weiner, *Denmark Vesey: A New Verdict*, (N.Y., *The Nation*, March 11, 2002).  
Internet:<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml%3Fi=20020311&s=wiener>

<sup>47</sup>Dinita Smith, *Challenging the History of a Slave Conspiracy*, (N.Y., *New York Times*, February 23, 2002).

Internet:<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/23/arts23TANK.html?ex=1100667600&en=dcaa687c4d16a650&ei=5070>

<sup>48</sup>Forum, p. 139.

<sup>49</sup>Pearson. p. 7.

<sup>50</sup>French, p.135,136.

<sup>51</sup>Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Nat Turner's Insurrection*, (*Atlantic Monthly*, VIII August, 1861) pp 173-87. Higginson (1823-1911) became famous as Commander of a black regiment during the Civil War.

<sup>52</sup>Eric Foner, Editor, *Nat Turner*, (N.J., Prentice-Hall,1971) p. 146.

<sup>53</sup>William S. Drewry, *The Southampton Insurrection*, (Washington, D.C., 1900).

<sup>54</sup>Foner, p. 158.

<sup>55</sup>French, p. 136.

<sup>56</sup>Malcolm X with Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (N.Y., Grove Press)

<sup>57</sup>William Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, (N.Y., Random House, 1967).

<sup>58</sup>Kenneth S. Greenberg, Editor, *Nat Turner : A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>59</sup>Frank Christopher and Kenneth S. Greenberg, Producers, *Nat Turner: A Troublesome Property*, VHS, 60 m., 2002 (Funding provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities)

<sup>60</sup>Felicia R. Lee, *Nat Turner in History's Multiple Mirrors*, (N.Y., *New York Times*, February 7, 2004.

<http://www.wehaitians.com/nat%20turner%20in%20history%20multiple%20mirrors.html>.

<sup>61</sup>*William Styron's Confessions of Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1968).

<sup>62</sup>French, p. 216.

<sup>63</sup>Tony Horwitz, *Untrue Confessions: Is most of what we know about the rebel slave Nat Turner wrong?* (N.Y., *New Yorker Magazine*, December 13, 1999, pp. 80-89.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid, p. 89

<sup>67</sup>James L. Penick, *Murrell, John Andrews*, (N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1999), 16, pp. 177, 178.

<sup>68</sup>Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge this Land With Blood: A biography of John Brown*, ( NY,: Harper & Row, 1970).

<sup>69</sup>From The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition Internet: <http://www.yale.edu/glc/>

<sup>70</sup>Hobson, p. 63.

<sup>71</sup>Joseph W. Hardee, *Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics*, (Memphis, Southern Publishing House of Hutton & Freligh, 1861).

<sup>72</sup>Hundley, *Social Relations* —, p. XXIV

<sup>73</sup>Hundley, *Social Relations* —, p. XXV

<sup>74</sup>Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South*, (Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 379.



# Who was Nick Davis?

FRANK G. WESTMORELAND

A road is named for the man, so for goodness sakes, he must be somebody! Nick Davis was a very prominent man, but who today even knows who he was? First of all, he was my great-great grandfather. In Robert H. Walker's book, *History of Limestone County*, Walker wrote, "...without doubt, the outstanding citizen of the young county in its formative state and for a long time afterward was Nicholas Davis."<sup>1</sup>

Nick Davis was one of the 44 delegates to the first Alabama Constitutional Convention held in Huntsville and his signature is affixed to our constitution. Led by Huntsville resident and future Alabama Governor Clement Comer Clay, Nick Davis further served as one of the 15 delegates who actually wrote the constitution. Although he lived most of his life in Limestone County, his contribution to his adopted state, along with those of his children, is the subject of this story.

Like many of the early settlers in this territory, Nicholas Davis was born in Virginia, specifically Hanover County in 1781. It was a low swampy district called "the slashes." His father was a sergeant in the Virginia Line during the American Revolution, and his neighbor and closest friend was the Honorable Henry Clay. As his mentor, Clay exercised a great influence in Nick's life.

Nick married Martha Hargrave in 1806 and served as a United States Marshall in Virginia, but in 1808, the Davis family, which now numbered three, followed his friend Henry Clay to Kentucky. Nick felt obligated to fight against the British during the war of 1812, especially since his father had fought against them in the American Revolution. When the war ended in 1814, Captain Nicholas Davis returned to his family.

Nick had heard of Andrew Jackson's fight in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and was particularly interested when he learned of the new land available in the Alabama Territory. He liquidated his assets in Kentucky and on March 17, 1817, he purchased a large tract of land on Limestone Creek. In June he began construction of his log house that he named "Walnut Grove." Over time, his property holdings escalated and his plantation of 2312 acres was known as "Fairview."

Captain Davis was described by an unknown author as "large and well-proportioned. His eyes are deep blue, very expressive, and indicative of benevolence, or much of the 'milk' of human kindness. He is a

man of great energy and character and is remarkable for his physical strength and industrious habit.”

As a leader in Limestone County, it was no surprise that he was chosen as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Huntsville in July, 1819. According to Harry Joiner, author of *Alabama – Then and Now*, Nick and his fellow delegates provided a bill of rights which guaranteed basic freedoms such as religion, speech, and the press. They made sure that all white males over 21 could vote and there was no property, religious, or literacy test required to vote or hold public office. They had little regard for men who had fought a duel, for they were not allowed to serve in public office.<sup>2</sup> Apparently at least one exception was made, for future governor Clement Comer Clay, whose personality was described as “contentious” once dueling with Dr. Waddy Tate. Finally, the constitution authorized the establishment of state banks and the University of Alabama.

Albert James Pickett wrote in his *History of Alabama*, that after the convention had finished, Captain Davis was elected as a member of the first legislature of the State of Alabama, which sat at Huntsville in the fall of 1819. In 1820, he was again a member at Cahawba, where the legislature was permanently established. The people of Limestone County placed him in the Senate in 1820 and when he arrived at Cahawba in the early winter, he was selected to preside over the body. “His impartiality, honesty, firmness, talents, and efficiency caused him to continue in the office of President of the Senate for the period of ten years.”<sup>3</sup>

In his obituary, written in *The Southern Advocate* dated October 2, 1856 it was stated that “As a legislator, he was practical, sensible, useful and influential. He opposed with all his ability, our system of State Banks, and had his counsels been heeded, the State would not now have a debt hanging over her.”<sup>4</sup>

As the democrats gained political strength in Alabama, Nick’s Whig friends persuaded him to resign his position as President of the Alabama Senate to run for Congress. He resigned in 1829 and found his Democratic opponent was his old friend Clement Comer Clay of Huntsville. *The Southern Advocate* reported that after a spirited contest, Nick was defeated by Clay, but “no man, however, ever enjoyed more of the love and esteem of his political opponents.”<sup>5</sup>

He ran for governor again, but was defeated a second time by John Gayle, also a Democrat. Finally, he was defeated a third time by Democrat Reuben Chapman, another of Huntsville’s fine residents.

Nick's personality and excellent character gained him much respect and admiration. Pickett wrote of Davis's defeat for Congress and said, "every man in the district who voted against him was ready to acknowledge that, as a representative, he would have been honest, faithful and efficient."<sup>6</sup> Author Willis Brewer wrote, "He was exceedingly candid and hospitable and swayed opinions of men as much by his large heartiness as by his strong magnetism."<sup>7</sup>

At the close of the 1844 convention, Nick took leave of his fellow Whigs and was described as being the "old man eloquent" in his parting speech. He spoke of the future of the country he loved and his hope for the future, his visions, and the importance of his party's influences to develop the energies and greatness of the country. His tears revealed his emotion as he took his seat.

Nick had many friends and loved to have them near him. His old friend Henry Clay often visited Nick at Walnut Grove, and although his wealth grew substantially over the years, he remained a modest man and was satisfied to live in his log house rather than



**Nicholas Davis**

a pretentious mansion. Pickett described Nick's life at Walnut Grove, "Many refined and intelligent gentlemen in Huntsville and its vicinity, and other portions of North Alabama, deem it their imperative, but most pleasing duty, to pay him two long visits every year. Often his large old log-house, which he erected when he first came to Alabama, and which he venerates so much that he would not exchange it for a palace, contains forty or fifty visitors at one time – who – for days together, are entertained by his agreeable conversation, fed from his abundant table, and delighted with the survey of his extensive groves...."<sup>8</sup>

Davis was a true patron of the turf, and was devoted to the sport of kings. Besides breeding and owning fine racehorses, he maintained a race-track in the bottom beside Limestone Creek at Walnut Grove. According to

Robert Walker, “merely by summoning his houseguests of the moment, this pioneer Limestoneian could assemble a goodly crowd to witness his thoroughbreds run.” According to Picket, “Nicholas Davis raced his horses at New Orleans, Nashville, Mobile and throughout the South generally. He was present at the celebrated contest between the horses of Andrew Jackson of Tennessee and James Jackson of North Alabama at Huntsville.” Robert Walker further said that “his horses were frequent entries at the races at Huntsville’s Green Bottom Inn, where the gentry of the time gathered to match their equines and their pocketbooks. On more than one occasion, Andrew Jackson’s horse “Flash competed at the Huntsville races, and it may have been that one of Old Hickory’s steeds outlasted a Davis entry to add to the Limestoneian’s dislike of Jackson.”<sup>9</sup>

The contributions and accomplishments of Nick and Martha’s children are more familiar to Madison County. Just to mention a few of the more colorful descendants, son Nick Davis, Jr. was a close friend to Jeremiah Clemens. He dedicated his book “Mustang Gray” to Nick and wrote, “But it is not these alone that move me to write your name on the first page of this volume. The last words your mother was ever heard to speak, were warm regard for me, and to the hour of his death your father honored me with a friendship which is among my proudest recollections. In the whole range of my acquaintance I have never known two persons more remarkable for unswerving integrity of thought and action or more distinguished for a lofty scorn of all that was low or vile in humanity.”<sup>10</sup>

Nick, Jr. served as a lieutenant in the company commanded by Captain Hiram Higgins and fought in the Mexican War. He served two terms in the State Legislature, and although he fought against secession, he became a lieutenant colonel in the Confederacy. As an attorney, he defended Captain Frank Gurley who was accused of murdering Union General Robert McCook. He married Sophie Lowe, a member of a prominent Huntsville family.

Martha Nicholas Davis married George Washington Lane, a well-known pro-Union resident of Huntsville.

Lawrence Ripley “Rip” Davis was the private secretary to Governor Houston. In 1859, he was elected as a member of the Alabama Legislature. Although he opposed secession, he yielded to the majority’s wishes. He was active in many aspects of public life until his death. His daughter, Sue Davis, was the author of *The Authentic History of the Ku Klux Klan*. She brought a lawsuit against Margaret Mitchell, accusing her of stealing entire sections of her book to write Mitchell’s best seller, *Gone With the Wind*. Another of Rip’s daughters, Bessie, lived in Washington D.C. for a number of years and was known far and wide for creating beautiful cakes. She provided all the cakes for the White House functions for President Woodrow

Wilson. She owned a secretary that she said was the one upon which Patrick Henry wrote his famous “Give me liberty or give me death” speech.

William R. Davis was wounded and captured at the Battle of Shiloh. He was about to be shot as a spy in Murfreesboro when he was rescued by General Nathan Forrest and his men. He was later wounded at Chickamauga and served in the legislature after the war, probate judge in Madison County and was a member of the U.S. Congress at the time of his death. It was William who suggested that General Forrest be made the leader of the Ku Klux Klan.

Zebulon Pike Davis was a five-time mayor of Huntsville. His daughter Norah was the author of *The Northerner*.



**Martha Davis**

Martha Hargrave Davis died in 1853. According to the family story, she was buried in a metallic casket, the first most people had ever seen. While some members of the family believed that Nick moved from Walnut Grove after his wife died, and lived with his daughter in the home he built for her on the corner of Clinton and South Street in Athens, Robert Walker wrote that he died at his home in 1856. Of his death, Walker wrote, “...it was a kind of providence that removed him

from the scene – full of honors, admired and respected by his constituents, beloved by his family – before the Federal troops invaded and ravished Limestone in 1861.”<sup>11</sup>

Walnut Grove apparently burned sometime after Nick’s death. No trace of it can be found today. Only the lonely monument of Nicholas and Martha Hargrave Davis remains near the site of the house and by the side of the road which bears the name Nick Davis. The portraits of both Nicholas and Martha Davis hang in the Alabama State Archives Building in Montgomery, near the seat of the government that Nick served with devotion for so many years. The writer of his obituary succinctly captured the spirit of Nick Davis in one sentence. “It is seldom indeed that any man passes away and leaves so wide a blank in the society he adorned with his virtues and blessed with his charities.”

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Walker, Robert Henry Jr.: *History of Limestone County*, (Limestone County Commission, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>Joiner, Harry: *Alabama Then and Now*, (Athens: Southern Textbook Publishers, Inc., 1987).

<sup>3</sup>Pickett, Albert James: *History of Alabama*, (Tuscaloosa: Willo Publishing Company, 1962 (1851)).

<sup>4</sup>*The Southern Advocate*, (Huntsville, Alabama: October 2, 1856).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Pickett

<sup>7</sup>Brewer, Willis: *Alabama, Her History and Resources, War Record and Public Men*, (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company Publishers, 1975 (1872)).

<sup>8</sup>Pickett

<sup>9</sup>Walker

<sup>10</sup>Clemens, Jeremiah, *Mustang Gray: A Romance*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1858).

<sup>11</sup>Walker

<sup>12</sup> *Southern Advocate*

# Fare Thee Well

## From The Papers of John Williams Walker

EDITED BY JACQUELYN PROCTER GRAY

Among the men who stand out in the early formative years of Alabama is John Williams Walker, who accomplished much and earned incredible respect in the short 40 years of his life. In his 1927 book, *The History of Alabama and Her People*, Albert Burton Moore described Walker as "...one of the strongest men, from cultured home and best education possible, exceptional native ability, trained in classics and law, scholarly..."<sup>1</sup>

Walker was orphaned by the time he was nine years old. He went to live with his older brother, Memorable Walker, but John became his brother's keeper when Memorable succumbed to tuberculosis while John was still a very young man. John lovingly took care of his brother during his extended illness, and it is believed that he contracted the illness that would plague him and eventually claim his life as well.<sup>2</sup>

Born in Amelia County, Virginia<sup>3</sup>, Walker came to Huntsville via Petersburg, Georgia at a time when many other prominent planters and neighbors from Petersburg settled here as well. In his book *Early Settlers of Alabama*, Col. James Edmonds Saunders stated that Petersburg "was literally depopulated."<sup>4</sup> These early settlers showed an unusual interest in Alabama politics, and were known by those who disapproved of their ambition as the Georgia Faction or Georgia Clique.

Attorney John Walker was the Speaker of the Alabama Territorial House of Representatives in November 1818 when the Territorial Legislature passed a petition for statehood. John was elected president of the convention that met in Huntsville on July 5, 1819 to write the constitution that enabled Alabama to become the twenty-second state of the union on December 14, 1819.

Although John's name was suggested to become Alabama's first governor, he instead went on to become the first U.S. Senator from Alabama until his resignation in 1822.

The following excerpts are from letters sent to Walker and his wife Matilda, daughter of another Petersburg, Georgia transplant, LeRoy Pope. Most of them are from their daughter Mary Jane, but others indicate the political climate and little-known interesting facts about the Walker family. Mary Jane was sent to an exclusive girls' school when she was 10 years old. These letters allow us to eavesdrop on the most intimate details of one of Huntsville's most interesting families. History becomes three-dimen-

sional with the addition of the emotions felt almost two centuries ago. Grammatical errors and misspelled words are retained as written. The collection of letters these excerpts are taken from, are from a gift to the Huntsville Public Library's Heritage Room. Originals are in possession of the State Department of Archives and History.

The first letter is a rambling, angry plea from Alabama's first governor, William Wyatt Bibb, himself a member of the Georgia Faction, to Senator Walker in Washington City:

"Coosada 21 Feby, 1820

Dear Sir:

I have received one letter from you which is the only communication of any kind that reached me from either of our members. My health is very bad. For three weeks I have not left my room and seldom my bed. I now write in bed, and but for a little matter of interest, should be silent. The object of this letter is to communicate to you the fact that the U-S are indebted to me, in the hope that you may obtain the amount for me. I have never received one cent for office rent, Stationary & c, although the Act of Congress appropriates \$350 a year for those objects. I think I commenced my official duties in November 1817 and they were continued to the signing of the Constitution on the 2d of August 1819, during the whole of which time my private pocket has supplied the Territory with an office, furniture and stationary. That the amounts has exceeded that appropriation I have no doubt, but supposing the appropriation as much mine as the salary, I did not think it necessary to keep an account of the expenditures, nor was I apprized of the requirements by the Comptroller until about a year had elapsed. Not only have I furnished the necessaries for my office, but also for the Secretaries, and were I disposed to present accounts, I should be justly entitled to the salary of the Territorial Secretary during the time I had to perform his duties (there being no secretary) which was at least six months, and when too, more business was done, that would have claimed my attention for years afterwards. I was under the necessity of employing Major Noble to assist me, without ever having a cent from the Government.

Last fall Richard Smith being my Attorney I requested him while drawing for my salary to ask for the appropriation also. He informed me that the Comptroller required a detailed account. I then wrote to him, nearly what I have said to you, and added that



unless a draft was sent on that statement, I should never again mention the subject either to him or the Comptroller, and that is the last I have heard of it. I felt indignant as I still do, but I see no reason why I should support the country from my private funds, and I do think I have been abominably treated. The truth is, that other Territorial Governors have been allowed a certain compensation as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, but I have never applied for it, although the "Secretary of War" informed me of the allowance. And I will venture to add, that this government has been more cheaply administered (so far as the US are concerned) and as ? (so far as my private pocket is concerned) than any other.

All I wish you to do, is, to apply to the Comptroller and you may state what I have said. If he refuses still what is due me, let the subject drop, and he and the Government may go to the devil for aught I care. If payment is to be made, please direct Richard Smith to send me a draft on the St. Stephens Bank for the amount, addressed to me at Fort Jackson. I am so unwell that I cannot write more. Yours sincerely, Wm W Bibb"

He further writes: "...I doubt whether you can make sense of what I have written, but I am not disposed to obtain every cent that has been allowed to other Governors, since sheer justice is denied me. Wm W B"

Although the date of the following event was not disclosed, it illustrates the danger of the time. Governor Bibb narrowly escaped death when he and his personal servant, Peter, stopped to eat and rest at Fort Dale. Just an hour later, hostile Creek Indians attacked Fort Dale and killed the family that had just hosted the governor. Governor Bibb sent troops to protect the fort from the Creeks who were exacting revenge for the treaty that ended the Creek War of 1813-1814.<sup>5</sup>

Walker's brother, James Sanders Walker, wrote to him the next day, revealing some hostility between them:

"Coosada 22 Feby 1820

It would seem my dear brother that we were both studious to preserve silence toward one another. Having held out so far I can contain no longer and perceiving by a paragraph in your letter to the Governor that you promised him answers to many letters he may write I take it for granted. I may expect some return to the same kind. Although I do not claim it as a right, Perhaps if you wish to write oftener to his excellency and occasionally to Mr. Hall

both of whose correspondence I have access to I might excuse you for neglect of me. But I fear you do not write enough to keep up your popularity which I should be sorry to see decline when it may stand you in most stead. The Governor's health is very bad and says he would resign now if any other man was President of the Senate than his brother. He therefore proposes to hold on until the next session of the legislature when the General Assembly may direct how his place will be filled. You are doubtless apprised that I came down with him. If I could have effected sales and otherwise arranged business I should have returned about this time to your house. But I fear I shall not get back before you do and perhaps not until summer, when it may suit you to come down with me in the fall and see the improved appearance hereabouts.

I went to Cahaba the latter part of the sales last month with the view of purchasing a couple of fractions in 18.18 lying between my land and the Talapoosa River over against the fork but the Governor reserved them on the morning of the last day of the sale - and I was obliged to be content with two small fractions adjoining the town site of Fort Jackson opposite Peter's Bluff on my Fraction 3....Adieu my dear Brother, J.S. Walker "

James Sanders Walker stayed in Georgia for some time after John came to Alabama, but eventually moved to Alabama as well. He had hoped to marry John's sister-in-law, Maria Pope, but she instead married John's friend from school, Thomas Percy.

On April 13, 1820, Governor Bibb wrote once again to John Walker from Coosada:

"Dear Sir:

Still confined I can barely say that I have received letter of the 18th Ult. I regret that I ever again mentioned the subject of my expenditures for Stationary, office rent & c; and certainly should not have done it but for an accidental conversation with some friends on my sufferings (which at the moment were as great as I could bear) fretted by pain and reflection, I wrote the letter and am sorry for it. It is now ten weeks since I have been out of my bed room; and I have suffered as much pain during that time as ever fell to the

lot of any man. Within a few days, I have discharged large quantities of blood in passing urine, which appears to come from near the neck of the bladder, where in September last I was considerably bruised. The pain which I had so long suffered in despite of all remedies, is much lessened, and my physicians say I will not recover. What the result will be, I consider uncertain but I have sufficient fortitude to meet any event.

I am desirous to resign, but my brother Thomas who has been with me several weeks and is still here, together with my friends generally have prevailed on me thus far to continue in office, at least until the meeting of the Legislature, if I should live so long. My family are well, as is your brother. Yours truly, Wm W Bibb”

Governor Bibb apparently recovered enough to be out riding on his horse in the summer of 1820. A thunderstorm erupted and frightened the Governor’s horse, throwing him to the ground. Alabama’s first governor was mortally injured. On July 10, 1820, he succumbed at the age of 40. Thomas Bibb served his brother’s unexpired term and became the second Governor of Alabama.<sup>6</sup>

On November 15, 1820, Thomas Percy, who watched over Matilda Walker and the children while John was in Washington City, wrote:

“My dear Walker,

I mean to make this letter very short - of this I give you warning - for why it is late at night and I have some business writing to do; besides I have spoiled 3 quills in the vain effort to make a pen with which I could write...So before I go any farther I will tell you the only thing I have to tell you in this letter. It is that Charles Henry has been scaring us all with a cursed croup. But thank God we have vanquished it and got the little fellow on his legs again. I was at Oakland this evening and left him merry as a grif. Mrs. W[alker] keeps up her spirits admirably as yet. Not the least symptom of depression...My dear Jack if I had something worth telling you I really could not do it with this damned pen. So fare thee well. Tho. G. Percy...a man named Turner cut his throat in Huntsville a few days ago for love of a damsel named Turner likewise and thereupon found himself much relieved.”

On May 17, 1821 Maria Percy wrote to her sister Matilda Walker. She was apparently traveling with Matilda's daughter Mary Jane Walker, to accompany her to a girls' school in Pennsylvania.

“My Dear Sister,

We arrived at Kins about an hour ago, 8 miles beyond Knoxville all very well in very tolerable spirits....Mary Jane and Charley have proved to be fine travellers they both have fine appetites. Charles has fattened perceptibly and has been the best fellow you ever saw...I have but one drawback on my enjoyment and that is the absence of my dear little Walker. O what would I not give to see him I have wished a thousand times we had brought him with us. I know he is much better off but still, I have some very painful thoughts about him. Do write very often and let me know how the dear little fellow bears our absence. Mary Jane and myself have made an arrangement to write from every town, we take it alternate, so that it falls to her lot to write from the next town which will be Abbingdon. Mary Jane and myself have become very expert riders and walkers; we walked part of the way up the mountains, and rode the remainder, I carried Charley on my lap and rode a man saddle. So you see what a heroine I am getting to be. The accommodations have been very miserable. This is the second house that has nay thing like comfort about it...Your Maria”

On May 29, 1821, Maria Percy wrote to her sister Matilda from Staunton, VA:

“...The country is by far the most beautiful I have ever seen, affording scenery of the most pleasing kind, mountains and green fields...covered with cows that are literally dripping with milk as they walk along. The most delicious butter and milk I ever tasted, fine spring houses at almost every fifty yards.

My letter has had a considerable interruption from a hailstorm, the most remarkable that has ever been seen here, some of the pieces measured six inches in circumference. It will have one good effect which I am not sorry for, cooling the atmosphere. Mary Jane has improved in her appearance more than you can imagine; her face has plumped out and looks quite round. Her cheeks rosy as two apples. Charles has stood the journey better than any of us, he eats bacon, and drinks buttermilk manfully. Poor little Walker, how

much I do regret leaving him. I think sometimes I would be perfectly willing to give up my trip to see him. Travelling would have been a great service to him in many respects. Its all folly now to repine; I know he is happy where he is, and I shall love the dear little the better when I get home...I have not seen a strawberry since I left home, it is one of the good things I have wished for every often."

On June 20, 1821, ten-year-old Mary Jane Walker wrote to her mother from Philadelphia. Note that in many of Mary Jane's letters, she left the periods off of most sentences.

"...Oh how glad I would be to see little Charles Henry. I suppose he can almost talk by this time. Oh how I should like to hear him say cow again I suppose he rides his stick horse like he use to. I was very much pleased [to see] the museum and the Academy of fine arts. I saw a great many fine paintings at the Academy. I saw the Mammoth at the museum and the mouse under him as father told me I would. Philadelphia is a very hansom city indeed. I have not seen one ugly street. Chestnut street is a very hansom [street]. Uncle Percy has not yet placed me at school he intends to place me with Madam Sigoigne she has gone to Frankfort to stay all the summer....

Miss Sigoigne is very pretty indeed to tell the truth she is the prettiest lady I ever saw I forget Aunt Louisa when I said this but except her she is the prettiest lady I ever saw....From your affectionate Daughter Mary Jane Walker"

Maria Percy wrote to her sister Matilda Walker on July 2, 1821 from Philadelphia:

"...Now of Mary Jane, she is in fine health and spirits, delighted with every thing. The fruit, the fancy stores, and toy shops are perfectly irresistable to her. We placed her last Monday with Madame Sigoigne...I made some little additions to her wardrobe such as frocks, frills, & c...in the academy [of fine arts] we saw some most beautiful paintings, one very large, by Alston, the dead man in the tomb of prophet, a splended thing. Also Mr. Wests celebrated piece of Christ healing the sick a very imposing picture. The other day we went on board the 74. We were very politely received by the officer's and conducted through every part of the vessel. It is fitted up in a very superb manner, elegant damask sofas, brussels carpets, sideboards, and bookcases, all arranged in

the neatest order. My father [LeRoy Pope] was with us, and filled with admiration of the great vessel.

Philadelphia I think not so gay a city as Baltimore the ladies are much more dressy, and fashionable, and society (it is said) more accessible to strangers....This is not the season for parties, so I have not seen much display in that line all the fine plate and glass ware seems to be shut up, with their drawing room's for winter....New York seems to be the centre of attraction for all southern people, they give it the decided preference...This little village [Bristol] is just opposite to Burlington the residence of Governor Bloomfield. Mrs. Brown talks of making it her head quarters this summer. The said lady is very talkative, very showy, and all that - a little too fond of talking of the Diplomats, people that I don't know or care anything about. Mr. Percy went over early this morning to present his letter to Governor Bloomfield but found them absent on a visit to New York.

I must tell you something of the fashions, though they are so various that it is impossible to say what is most fashionable. Long waist with broad belts are altogether worn. Worked trimmings are still very much used. The latest fashion are tucks, with strips of spotted muslin between reaching nearly to the waist. The tucks are made about three quarters of an inch wide and the strips of muslin the same width that sleeves trimmed in the same manner nearly tight to the arm. The body's are made narrow on the shoulders, a large point in front, sometimes two, one above and below. The backs nearly plain, some cut surplice fashion to correspond with the front, but they are generally worn plain. Plaid ribbons are all the rage the belts with ribbon and large beaus in the backs. Handkerchiefs made of the spotted muslin, worn inside the dress with the quilled ruff. The long india worked scarf very much used. I have purchased a very handsome one and a very neat leghorn hat. I find all the trimmings, and small articles nearly, or quite as high as they are in Huntsville....I was very much shocked to hear of poor aunt Nancy's death, and regretted it most deeply. She had been so long a victim of disease that death was robbed of half its terrors. I hope my mother did not suffer seriously from the fatigue and distress she must have felt...For heaven sake don't exhibit these miserable sketches, they have been made in great haste, just to

give you some idea of the fashion. Recollect that the muslin is attached to the skirt first, and the tucks made and sewed on... Maria Percy”

On July 30, 1821, homesick Mary Jane writes to her mother:

“My dear Mamma,

...Oh how I long for the day when I shall embrace you. Oh how I long too kiss all my dear little Brothers and see my dear home again....You must kiss all my dear little Brothers for me a thousand times and tell them they must work my little garden for me. Tell Percy he must write to me and tell him he must write to me by next mail and to except twenty kisses from me give my love to all my relations....your affectionate Daughter Mary Jane Walker P.S. Tell the servants that I have not forgotten them.”

Dr. Samuel Brown, who was married to Thomas Percy’s sister until her unfortunate death in childbirth, wrote to Walker from Saratoga, on August 1, 1821:

“Dear Walker:

If they say we were killed or had a bone broken or a limb dislocated by oversetting the state as we came from Albany to this place I say they lie damnably. We were only bruised and skinned in a few places and are now all getting well. Percy sustained the worst injury having his left arm severely bruised by attempting to make a Pillow of it to save his brains from being dashed out against a large stone. But he did save his Brains and will not loose his arm nor a joint of it although to save these I thought it proper to take 50 or 60 ounces of Blood from him at five Bleedings - this happened on Saturday and now which is Wednesday we are all well enough to read novel and gossip through the taverns except Percy who reads and receives talkers in his room because his arm is still too big for his dandy coat which he hopes to put on the day after tomorrow. Charley was the only person who escaped - we are all as gay as larks. Colo Pope, Mr. Saul and Daughter and servant made our party, nine which lays us in debt to Heaven for that many thanksgivings which I hope you will assist us to offer up...Love to you all - S Brown”

Brown's reference to Percy may have been a number of gentlemen including his brother-in-law Thomas Percy, nephew Percy Walker, or any of the many Percys of the next generation. The Charley referred to in his letter may have been Charles Brown Percy, his nephew. Because they named their children for each other, as well as having other names in common, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain who they refer to.

On August 7, 1821, Mary Jane wrote about her brother. Records cannot confirm which child this was, perhaps John T. Walker.

“Dear Papa,

I was very much delighted to receive a letter from you last night saying that I had a new little Brother. You cannot think how much surprised and delighted I was I think from our description of him he must be Beautiful. You describe as being as plump as a Partridge with deep blue eyes and a fine complecction and black hair oh how I should like to see the dear little fellow and love him with kisses.... Your affectionate Daughter, Mary Jane Walker”

In September 1821, Mary Jane wrote:

“My dear Mama, ...I have not received any letters from you or papa for a long time; Uncle received one from papa a few days ago in which he said you were all very well I am sure you cannot complain of my not writing for I write every Saturday....”

Maria (Pope) Percy wrote to her brother-in-law John Walker from Baltimore on September 4, 1821:

“My dear Brother

I have put off writing until the eleventh hour...At all events, I have no notion of being laughed at by you when I get home. I have always been of the opinion that a lady has a right to expect the first letter. Now if you had been so civil as to have written to me, I can't tell how many kind things you might have had from me. Letter writing you know, I never have been famous for, and I fear it is an incurable fault. I have not thought the less frequently of you, nor is it possible for me to express the anxiety I feel to see you all. Crazy, I certainly shall be, if I am not at home soon....

On our return trip to Philadelphia I found Mary Jane in good health, but her spirits a little depressed, she was full of the inten-



tion of going home with us, her Uncle talked her out of it; and cheered with the prospect of seeing you in the winter, she parted from us in very tolerable spirits....Nancy took it suddenly into her head to leave me, which obliged us to look about for another nurse. I succeeded in getting one, not altogether to my satisfaction. My northern trip has convinced me of one thing, that we in a slave country, are better off than they are here, with all their freedom. Upon the whole, Alabama has gained in my estimation very much, by comparison....But I am tired to death with travelling, and long to enjoy the pleasures of home again. My father we left in New York, very impatient to get home. I met with Archy Stokes there he looks younger than he did fifteen years ago. I made a great many enquiries about our old friends in Georgia. He said he would like to see Matilda very much. I remarked that she was somewhat changed since he saw her, being now the mother of six children. Poor fellow, it was more than he could boast of.

You may tell sister I have executed her commission with regard to the scarf Mr. H and myself were two days engaged looking for one of the first quality, we purchased it first, having the concurrence of Mrs. Blight's good taste. Perhaps she will not be quite satisfied with the price (being only 29 Dols) not having cost as much as you intended it should. She must console herself with the fact, that they rarely exceed 30 dols. Mr. Percy is now very much engaged making arrangements to leave the city tomorrow....The yellow fever is prevailing in some parts of the city, and though there is no alarm in this part of it, still I should like to be clear of the city as soon as possible. Charles health has been exceedingly delicate all the summer, travelling I hope will be of service to him...God bless you my dear brother. Maria Percy”

Mary Jane Walker wrote to her father from Frankford on September 15, 1821:

“...I will endeavor, my dear father, to apply myself to all my studies and to make myself beloved by everybody, for I know it will contribute to your happiness. I am glad to hear that the children amuse themselves, kiss them all for me...”

Mary Jane sent a letter to her brother at the family plantation known as Oakland (Meridianville, Alabama) on September 29, 1821:

“My dear Brother,

I was very glad to hear by Pap’s letter which I received last Monday that you intended to rite to me, being the eldest I will give you the example I hope you will soon follow it. You cannot think, my dear Brother, how much pleasure it will give me, to have a letter from you. Tell me all about Oakland and how you past your time and if the Children ever talk about Mary Jane as for me I often talk of them and think of them still oftener it will give me a great deal of pleasure to hear about their little amusement. Tell Pope [LeRoy Pope Walker] he must work my garden as I left it under his care. You must all kiss little William for me. Tell Father I am very much obliged to him for his kind letter which I will answer next Saturday....I remain your most affectionate Sister”

On November 20, 1821, Silas Dinsmore wrote to John Walker in Washington City, presenting himself for the new job opportunity caused by the death of surveyor Thomas Freeman. Freeman was buried in the family plot of his good friend, Sheriff Stephen Neal. His grave was unmarked for 178 years, ironically near the Huntsville Meridian in Maple Hill Cemetery.

“...The Huntsville paper by yesterday’s mail announced to us the death of our mutual friend Major Freeman, Surveyor of the US lands South of the State of Tennessee. I have for two years past been engaged, under him, as Principal deputy in the land districts east of the Island of New Orleans, I have familiarized myself to the discharge of the duties of the office, the business suits my age, habits and inclination, and as the public service requires that a surveyor should be immediately appointed to take charge of the office at Washington, I beg leave through you, and others whom I presume to call friends, to offer to the President of the United States my services; your good offices to promote my views, are respectfully solicited and will be gratefully remembered....

Take care of your delicate health in that cold and variable climate. Your services will be wanted nearer home, two years hence....”

J.S. Walker wrote to his brother from Montgomery on November 23, 1821:

“...I recd at Tuskaloosa your letter written on the 24th of Oct just before which I wrote you...some account of the duel that it was expected had taken place between George McDuffey and Richard

H. Wilder. I now learn that Col. William Cumming was the author of Baldwin and I perceive that nothing was done about a month ago when Baldwin thinks it high time that Mr. McD should come forward - or else submit it to be considered a ? fellow. I am also informed that the allusion by Baldwin was to Simkins and not McDuffey - but that a young man by the name of Mr. Walker Carnes, a son of Judge Carnes, has avowed himself to be the author of the 'voice of Georgia' or 'spirit of Georgia.'....

...The Steam Ship Robt Fulton is expected at Mobile shortly from the North. I suppose though she will have to stop at the Point. It is said that Tuskaloosa and Coosawda are the only places spoken of at Cahawba for the permanent seat of Government. Very much will depend upon where they establish the University which I should think ought to be at Wilsons Hill or in the lower end of Jones' Valley. Appropos, my Wig, as soon as possible, 'Poor Tom, a Cold.' Adieu my dear Brother, health attend you and yours. J.S. Walker"

An unidentified friend wrote to John Walker on December 20, 1821. We could surmise from the first statement that it was written by Dr. Samuel Brown, who kept a watchful eye over Pope and Walker while they were at a boarding school in Lexington. We could also guess that he may be expressing sympathy over the death of John and Matilda Walker's son, Charles Henry. Although Charles is not listed among John's children in "The History of Alabama and Her People" by Albert Burton Moore, there is a marker at Maple Hill Cemetery showing that two-year-old Charles Henry, son of John and Matilda Walker died October 1822. There is a discrepancy over the date of the child's death. Either the date on the marker at Maple Hill is wrong, or there was a typographical error when the handwritten letters were much later typewritten.

"My dear friend,

I feel that it is more necessary than ever that I should inform you frequently of the welfare of those dear boys whom you have still left with me and for the first time in my life the thought of writing to you is a source of distress. Anxiety on your account is the constant everyday feeling of my life but when I am to write to you my heart bleeds afresh. What can I say to you that will give you ease or diminish your grief. Alas nothing. The blow you have felt is too dreadful for me to essay anything like consolation. Under such calamities, we can only bow our heads to the Providence which crushes us and hope for mercy....

...Of Matilda I cannot think without the keenest anguish. I often think of writing to her, but when I attempt it the pen drops from my hand. I know not what to say. Could I bare my heart and show her the deep seated anguish which wrings it for her sake I would do it - but words cannot do this - they are vain and feeble and almost I would say impertinent..."

Two-year-old Charles Henry was in the care of Maria and Thomas Percy while Matilda was in Washington City with her husband John. Charles Henry came down with a cold and was prescribed an emetic from Dr. Fearn. His coughing grew worse and he had difficulty breathing, so he was given calomel and castor oil. Two days later, the Percys called Dr. Erskine who applied blisters to the child's chest, ankles, neck, and head. After an illness of six days, he died. Fearing that Matilda would have a breakdown upon learning the news, the letter informing them of their son's death was withheld for two months by a family friend in Washington.<sup>7</sup>

From Philadelphia, Mary Jane wrote to her mother on December 22, 1821:

"...I have not yet had the pleasure of receiving a letter from you and I assure you that I am very anxious to hear from you, and Papa, and hope soon to have that happiness as Christmas is approaching. Madam Sigoigne gives us a weeks Holiday and a Party for our New Years gift and we expect to enjoy ourselves a great deal, but I am sure I would have a great deal more pleasure if you were here today. Mrs. Stocker who lives next door intends giving a party to her niggler Niece and Susan and Myself are invited we are all going to spend the evening at Mrs. Meades next Tuesday....Kiss William a great many times for me as a Christmas Gift give my love to Papa and tell him I hope to get a letter from him and believe me for ever my dear Mother your Affectionate Daughter."

Mary Jane wrote to her father on January 5, 1822:

"...I received your kind letter Monday with ten dollars. It was more than I expected and I thank you very much, it gave me a great deal of pleasure, as I was able with that to make little Presents to my Friends and to the Servants. I spent New Years Day very happily and dined with Mrs. Blight. She sends her compliments to you and Mama. Madam Sigoigne gave us a very pleasant Party Saturday we danced until twelve o'clock. I received Mama's letter

in which she says she was very near returning to this Place. I want to see little William very much indeed....”

On January 14, 1822, Alexander Pope (probably Matilda and Maria’s brother) wrote from Cahaba:

“Dear Jack, I labored like a galley slave from 20 Aug to 30 Sept in the heat and sweat of crowds of men frightened almost to death with the idea of taking the yellow fever - with their pockets full of onions garlic and other strong scented things much to the prejudice of my olfactory organs while taking in their Declarations and I have been diligently employed ever since and have but just now gotten the first copy of my Abstract of Relinquishments made out which will employ me fully a week or ten days to add up the numerous columns of - I have had two clerks all the while at the abstract for further credits and they are not more than 2/3 done. As you have been such a Champion for the Debtor’s for Pub Lands I have full faith in your best exertions to compensate those who have so much labor to perform for the accomodation of those very debtors. And I shall rely soly on you as I have no acquaintance with Mr. Moore besides having no wish to have any - We understand that Matilda was to have gone on with you and we see by the papers that you are at your post we are thus assured you are both well or at least we hope so. Yrs Truly Alexr Pope”

On January 18, 1822, Mary Jane wrote from Philadelphia to her father:

“...It is three weeks since I have had the pleasure of having a letter from you although I have written every Saturday as you requested. Your Silence makes me very uneasy as I am afraid Mama is sick....I suppose little William is very much grown do give him a kiss for me I long for the month of April that I may embrace him myself....Adieu dear Papa”

On January 25, 1822, she wrote again to her father:

“...Mama wishes to know if I have commenced music tell her that I have not, that Mrs. Sigoigne not knowing if I shall remain with her next summer thinks that it is not worthwhile for me to begin if I go with you in the Spring, for before I could get another teacher, I would forget all I know, and it would only be throwing away money. We have had a most dreadful fire, the Orphans Asylum was burnt last Wednesday there are 23 children missing, poor

little things, I suppose they had died with the cold...your Affectionate Daughter Mary Jane”

On February 16, 1822, Mary Jane wrote to her mother:

“...I received yesterday evening papa’s letter in which he mentions that he will take me away in the Spring. Although I shall feel very happy to be with my Family still I shall be very sorry to leave Mrs. Sigoigne and the Family. I went to Mrs. Banekers last Saturday where I danced and amused myself a great deal. With what joy will I tell you my dear Mamma that I have just gained the prize. I am so delighted that I hardly know what I am writing. Anne Eyre also gained one but mine was the first. We have had a great deal of snow so that every moment we hear slays. Tell father that I will not begin music because Mrs. Sigoigne does not think it worth while....”

She wrote to her father on February 22, 1822:

“...Today being Washington’s birthday we all have holiday and I cannot employ it better than writing to you before I go out....My writing Master gave me a premium the other day and I am trying to get another for good behavior. I went a slaying the other day with Miss Adele and I can assure you I like it very much I went to little Miss Brugiere’s Ball last Monday where I danced the whole evening and amused myself a great deal....Mr. Ware arrived last Sunday he told me you were all very well and he did not think you would be here before May, he says William has grown very much and is a very fine little Boy....”

Addin Lewis, the mayor of City of Mobile, wrote to John Walker in Washington City on March 7, 1822:

“Sir,

...On the Night of the 5th inst. This city was set on fire by incendiaries in three different places, fortunately, however, but one took effect, the other fires kindled went out without doing damage. The property consumed was chiefly Insured, and the loss to our citizens is not very considerable. By the position in which the fires were kindled it is evident that the intention of the villains was to destroy the greatest part of the City. We have three Persons in Prison on suspicion of having been concerned in the hellish Deed....”

On March 23, 1822, Mary Jane wrote to her father from Philadelphia:

“...I would be very glad if you would write to me in French as that would encourage me a great deal more. You asked me in your letter what was the French for William, it is Guillaume, but they generally say William as it is much the prettiest and I thought as he is so pretty and so good I would call him by the prettiest name...Mrs. Blight set out the day before yesterday for Washington. I did not write to her as I have suffered a great deal with a toothache. I went to the dentist and had two teeth taken out and two Plugged and I can assure you that I did not scream at all and the Dentist says that I have a great deal of courage...”

On March 30, she again wrote:

“...I received a letter last week from Percy, which pleased me very much, he tells me he has been very sick and was bled five times, but that he has now quite recovered...General LeFebore called to see Mrs. Sigoigne last evening. He asked for me and kissed me twice for you and told me to thank you for your kind attention to him while he was in Washington....I forgot to tell you that I went to see an Elephant the other day although I had seen one before. this one being much larger I was a little frightened at first I saw him uncork a Bottle of Wine and drink the Liquor without any Difficulty and eat cakes out of the children’s hands.”

Mrs. O. Blight wrote this interesting letter to Matilda Walker from Grove Hill, Bolecourt County, Virginia on April 19, 1822:

“...In passing thro, this ancient Dominion of our rising Empire, I could not with-stand the temptation to peep at some of my old friends....I called to see Mr. J. W. Eppes (Mr. Jefferson’s son in law) who I met a most cordial reception from...he lives in Buckingham about 30 miles from Carterville, where I crossed the James river....the refined hospitality of virginians make up for every deficiency in their roads - for I never met with such facinating manners - and such charming reception before - its magical to the warm heart of a traveller - and no wonder that Europeans call these gentry the nobility of America....I hope you are pleased at Mrs. Benson’s - with her young Gentlemen &c Mary Jane is quite at home there, dear little warm hearted sprite she is - how I should like to see her flying about like a Bird....”

Matilda Walker wrote to her husband John from Philadelphia on May 5, 1822:

“...I am sure I never walked half as much in my life and I find it has been very beneficial to me, it has increased my appetite and I am much stronger than usual, and the exercise I take during the day makes me glad enough to go to bed early where I sleep soundly without intermission. My nerves are not near as irritable as they were when in Washington, which I attribute entirely to the exercise I have taken here....I visited the museum a few evenings ago with Mr. Ware; I very soon grew tired. I can't say it is a very interesting place to me. I have also seen West's celebrated painting and was sorry I was not amateur enough to admire it very much. I have postponed visiting the remainder of curiosities of this city until your arrival...I hope nothing will retard your movements immediately after the rise of Congress...Little William improves hourly, he is more gay than ever...I bid you adieu my dearest husband, I hope a few days will bring you to my arms....”

William is mentioned in many of the family letters. According to “The Dictionary of Alabama Biography” by Thomas McAdory Owen, he was named William Memorable Walker. He fought in the war with Mexico as first lieutenant of 3rd US Dragoons and during the Civil War, as Captain of 1st Regiment Artillery at Ft. Morgan at Mobile Bay. He died in 1864, whether as a result of the war is not known.

Sam Brown wrote to John Walker from Frankford July 25, 1822:

“...We have all been terribly vexed by your silence, for since you left Baltimore we have been in perfect ignorance of your movements and of your health & that of your family of which so many of us are interested. We did indeed think that a Buletin of health would have been sent back, at least once a week that we might be enabled officially to satisfy your numerous friends both male & female who find no subject which seems to them so likely to please me as Mr & Mrs. Walker. Mary Jane has once or twice looked somewhat dejected at your silence but I have removed her fears by exciting her feelings by some ? which I employed to characterize your indolence & antipathy to writing. She now seems convinced that you are not one of those who write from every Post town & blacken a sheet as often as you wash your face. No I have all the honor of this charming punctuality & it is to maintain this high



standing ? Literary men that I now write to you; for truly I have spent six weeks here in great solitude....We have made no arrangements for our return to the west. As Milton says I am 'made of sphere metal' & look for a movement to the west as regularly as the seasons return - And as long as you are in Congress you will be governed by the combined influence of the centrifugal & centripatal forces...."

A distressed Mary Jane wrote on August 10, 1822 to her mother:

"...Another week has passed, and no letters from you. What is the reason of your silence? to what must I attribute it? I am very much afraid that some of the family is sick. If nothing has happened to you on the road, you must certainly be at Alabama, and as it is now two months since your departure, you must think how anxious I am to hear from you and my dear little Brothers...."

She wrote to her brothers on August 24, 1822:

"...As I have written to Percy it is now my turn to write to my dear little Pope and John James to tell you how much I love you and how much I think of you...I shall expect to find my garden very flourishing by the time I get home. The bell has just rung for prayers and I must bid you goodnight...."

The Pope that she refers to here is LeRoy Pope Walker, first Secretary of War for the Confederate States of America. In this role, he ordered the first shot fired at Ft. Sumter which started the war. He was 5 years old at the time Mary Jane wrote this letter. LeRoy Pope Walker died at the age of 67 and is buried at Maple Hill Cemetery in Huntsville.

She wrote from Philadelphia to her mother on September 25, 1822:

"...Tell Percy that I am very glad to hear that he is going to learn Latin and that I hope he will make great progress in it...You can see from the date of this letter that we are now in Town....We have had a Fortnight's holiday....I have spent the vacation very pleasantly I went to the Circus the other night with Dr. Brown where I was very much amused after the horsemanship was over they represented a pantomime called La Perouse or the desolate Island. I had my teeth cleaned the other day and I intend to try to keep them so...."

On October 20, 1822, she wrote again to her mother:

“...I went to see a Lioness her Whelps and a Sea Serpent, that was 32 feet long when it was taken, but it is now only 26 on account of its having shrunk so much, it was taken in the Delaware, not far from New York, and it has neither heart, Bones or Brains, but a very large liver, and I assure you that it is quite a curiosity....”

H. Hitchcock wrote to John Walker from Cahaba on December 1, 1822:

“...Your brother James S., left this [place] for Coosada, on thursday last, we had the pleasure of his company for the 10 days preceding - He expected you would write him at this place & on his departure authorised me to receive & open your letter - This I have done & by one recd. last evening I learn that you have resigned you seat in the senate of the U.S. I regret extremely that your ill health has driven you to this measure, The loss of your public services will be severely felt, I regret it much on this account, But I regret your resignation more from the cause which has produced it, you have done right in resigning, and I hope & trust, my dear Sir, that the cause will be soon, if not entirely, yet greatly removed, - Your friends here feel the greatest anxiety for your recovery and among the number I hope [you] will not consider me as luke warm or indifferent....The Legislature has as yet done nothing of a general nature - Messrs McKinley, Bibb, Clay Fram & Moore are spoken of as your successor. One of the 2 first named will probably succeed; - Mr. Crawford I think will succeed Col. King. these are my predictions only, for it is impossible to calculate with certainty....”

William Kelly filled John Walker's unexpired term. On February 8, 1823, Mary Jane wrote to her father:

“...I am glad to hear that you are pleased with my writing without lines, I shall continue to do so....I shall also follow your advice concerning the structure of my T's and I's and try to avoid making them so very similar and the dating of my letters also. I shall in future put the day before the month, the month before the year, the number of the house before the Street the Street before the City and the City before the State. I am very sorry to hear that you think you will not come on in the Spring, but I hope you will think more favorably by and by and that your health will permit you to come and embrace me who longs to see you....”

On February 21, she again wrote to her father:

“...As almost all the southern mails have failed within these two or three weeks on account of the badness of the roads, I have been deprived of the pleasure of receiving your letters for which I am very sorry. I am not uneasy as scarcely any of the young ladies have had letters for near two weeks and I know that it is owing to the roads and waters....Madame Sigoigne wishes to know what you think of Joyce’s *Dialogues on Pneumatics Hydrobates, the Pressure of Fluids, Mechanical Machines &c, &c* as she is not acquainted with the book, but she thinks that is rather too difficult for us to understand, now, and that it is a book calculated more for boys than girls and that they will not be of much use to us; she therefore wishes to know your opinion concerning them....”

L. Newby, a childhood friend of John Williams Walker, lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In sorrow, he wrote to Matilda Walker on April 29, 1823 after learning of Walker’s death:

“...Through the newspapers yesterday, I recd. the distressing intelligence of the death of my friend, your dear and lamented husband, and though personally unknown to you, [I] take the liberty of offering you my most sincere condolence on this mournful occasion. Surrounded as you are, by your numerous relatives and friends, you have no need of the sympathies of a distant stranger - but, however numerous may be the friends who mingle their tears with yours, believe me Madam, there are none who more sincerely lament this severe visitation of the Almighty - none who more sincerely sympathize with you and your dear little ones, in the dispensation of His will, than him who addresses you. Your dear and lamented Walker, was the companion of my boyish days....Possessing talents of the first order, he rose to a level with the first men of our Country, at an age when most statesmen have scarce pass’d the threshold of public life. His rapid and brilliant course may be fitly compar’d to the Meteor - its brevity renders the resemblance but too great!...I have just been reading one of his letters dated ‘Twickenham 25 Dec. 1811’....In this letter, he acquaints me with the consummation of his happiness, near two years before, in his union with you, and of the birth of a daughter, Mary Jane, whom he describes with all the freedom of a friend, and all the fondness of a father, as ‘the most interesting child’ he had ever seen - ‘fascinating, intelligent and beautiful’ - and then adds - ‘perhaps you will smile after this, to be told that she is like me’....I beg

to be remember'd to your dear little ones, most affectionately - tell them that he who writes this, loved their dear father, and cannot but love them - and I pray that He, 'who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,' may not let you 'sorrow as those who have no hope' - but that He grant you a patient resignation to this most severe stroke of His Providence...."

John Williams Walker's health was never robust after his brother's death from tuberculosis. In fact, he had had several hemorrhages and had already resigned his position due to his illness. His headstone at Maple Hill Cemetery records that he died on March 23, 1823 at the age of 40. On December 26, 1823, Walker County was named in his honor.

Evidently, Mary Jane came home as a result of her father's death. Her next letter is dated January 30, 1824, ten months after Walker's death. The remaining letters were written exclusively to her mother from Philadelphia:

"...I intend to read as many of the Waverly Novels as I can procure. I must acknowledge however that I think it will be quite a difficult matter to get any; as I cant bear to ask my northern acquaintances to lend me a novel, as they think it almost a crime to give a young girl a novel to read! But what astonishes me is that at the same time they will give their Children, any book which goes under the simple name of a Tale though it be filled with love and romance..."

On February 8, 1824, Mary Jane, who began calling herself Maria, wrote:

"...Mrs. Sigoigne says that I am a perfect french girl, so you must not be surprised to find me very volatile when I come to the backwoods I say this by way of warning, as I expect all the people will stare. I am glad to hear you are in Huntsville....In short I wish to see the greater part of your letters dated Huntsville, this my dear Madam you must do, or you will incur my short bitter displeasure...It is the greatest torment for me to sit up all day on a chair without talking, without laughing, and as straight as an arrow. I pity those poor Quakers from the bottom of my heart. What a sisible figure they cut with their broad brim hat and long skirted coats! I think if we could establish a half dozen of them in our Corn Fields in the Backwoods, they would be excellent scare Crows. But I must not be satirical and especially on such grave and harmless people. I can say one thing however in their behalf, that is, they are the neat-est people I have seen...."

On March 13, she wrote again:

“...Now I must tell you what I dreamt the other night, though there is nothing more foolish than telling dreams. I thought the Servant came running up stairs to tell me that Uncle and aunt Pope were come. I was so overjoyed, I could scarcely go down to the Parlour. They both thought me very much grown, and after the usual questions, they gave me a letter together with a packet from you. After having read your most interesting letter, I proceeded to open the wonderful bundle, but just as I was examining its contents the bell rang for us to get up, I woke thinking I held the bundle but lo! when I looked I found it had fled...”

On March 20, 1824, she wrote to her mother:

“...I was very much surprised to hear of the marriage of Mr. McHenley. He seemed so devoted to his first wife, that I scarcely thought he would replace her so soon, and by a woman much inferior in character, to tell the truth men are curious animals, as changeable as the wind. We women though so much abused, are according to my way of thinking (and to every body else that has common sense) far superior in every thing: their powers of invention are certainly much greater. The men would be mere barbarians if they had not the fair sex to soften their manners and excite their sensibility....”

On March 27, 1824, she sounded rather angry at her mother as she wrote:

“...To tell the truth I did not expect to hear from you this week, as I hear you are pretty lazy about writing affairs and a letter once every other week is as much as you choose (not can) to afford....Master Alexander Pope, shall not escape my vengeance, yes vengeance, as he must know that I am most implacable in my resentments. It has been now three months since I condescended to write to him....I have no news to tell you even the news papers are as dull as they can be the fact is they only talk of the election of the President. I never take up a Gazette without seeing the name of Andrew Jackson in full. You must know that I amuse myself with inventing fables about my geneology....the other night one of the girls was talking about one of her uncles in England and from that circumstance I took it...into my head to tell them that I had an Uncle living in Dorsetshire, and that he had a large family of Chil-

dren their names are Horatio Clement, Charles, Henry, Margaret, Eloise Caroline and Emily. I told them that my Uncle had been brought up in France and had married a french lady of the name of Eloise De Souvit Louis; that after his marriage he had travelled all over Europe and being rather of an ecentric disposition he had named each of his children after the persons he had met in the different countries. Thus Clement was named after a Mr. Harris a gentleman who took great care of my Uncle when an accident happened to him in visiting the mines in Sweden. I gave the name of the green Mansion to my Uncle's place, and to make them believe in the veracity of my recital I told them that I would ask you to be so good as to send me the manuscript of the Green Mansion that we have at home....”

On April 10, 1824, just over a year after her father's death, Mary Jane/Maria wrote:

“...I am my dear Mamma...without exception the gayest and wildest girl in school....I suppose will be no excellent recommendation for me in the backwoods, however I hope that after I have resided there a short time I will reconcile you savages to my french character. My ? is filled with nonsense to day, to tell the truth I can not tell the time when Maria or Mary Jane Walker is not in high spirits or not up for some fun. Some of the still silent northern girls look with astonishment on my southern buoyancy of spirits and my wildness while I stand laughing at their astonishment....Miss Adele intends to make me quit mourning in a week or two as black is so excessively warm in Summer....Tell Lucy, I am very much pleased to hear she is so good a seamstress and that I hope she will be an excellent waiting maid by the time I come home. Remembrance to the servants....”

On September 11, 1824, she wrote to her mother again:

“...I am enchanted with the prospect of a jaunt to Nashville....My pleasure however is very much damped at the idea of leaving dear Mrs. Sigoigne and Miss Adele who have taken Maternal care of me. I have been treated during more than three years as one of the family, and shall always entertain the most lively gratitude towards them....If you do not find me improved it will not be owing to them, as they have done every thing in their power to correct my faults and render me as I ought to be. After this you would not be astonished if I am a partisan of the French, and I shall always defend them against malice....I think the English degrade themselves

very much by their envy of that nation, nay it certainly is and nothing else I much prefer the openness and urbanity of the french character to the haughty reserve of the english, a reserve which excites my contempt more than my respect....There is nothing I detest more than a would be great man or woman I am always tempted to show my contempt...and certainly would do so if I were not restrained by good breeding. I am very often obliged to fight out the cause of the french....You must not think by this that I prefer the French to the Americans; I am not quite so mean as that ....I love my own Countrymen too truly to abandon them for foreigners....LaFayette will be here on monday week, preparations are making to receive him very handsomely, the City is to be illuminated from 6 or seven Oclock in the evening until eleven at night, of which I am very glad. Everything is LaFayette.....A ball is to be given to him in the Theatre. A very splended one it is to be I suppose. I wonder if he will honour us with a visit to the South....”

On October 16, 1824, she wrote:

“...Two weeks have elapsed since I have heard from you My dear Mamma, which circumstance does not put me in the best humour in the World. I begin to think now that Southern People (myself an exception) are pretty lazy about writing, at least all my Relations. Uncle Percy has never yet acknowledged the receipt of my last letter which I think is rather ungallant on his part; I suppose his present excuse is that I am coming home very soon and therefore it is not necessary....Percy no doubt is much taller than I am, as they say. I am a dwarf for my age, which does not sound very harmoniously to my ear I do not despair however as all the family are very tall....the girls were talking about the Southern people and one of the little Girls spoke rather ungrammatically, and as that always puts me in the Fidgetts I put the pen in my mouth and by that means made such a pretty Salmagundi of my paper. Every day one of the little Girls receives a sermon from me for speaking ungrammatically....”

On October 22, 1824, she wrote to her mother:

“...I expect to set out in a week ? the ? Road and shall be with you (if nothing happens) the latter part of November I shall pass my birth day with you my fourteenth birth day. Tell Grand Mamma she must give me a party on that day This is in jesting, it must therefore be taken as such....”

Apparently, she did not leave as soon as she expected. She wrote again on December 17, 1824 from Philadelphia:

“...I am glad that you are pleased with my letters, and I shall try to improve more and more, as there is nothing more flattering to the heart than the praise of a parent; especially from one so affectionate as mine....So Masters Percy, and John James are going, or rather are gone to the Academy in Huntsville. I suppose it is a good school and I hope the boys will make much progress. I wrote to John James and Pope last Week, but sermonised them so much that I doubt much whether they had patience to finish it....I expect they think that I dont follow all the good advice I gave them; which to be sure is not far from the truth. I really think Master Johnty [John T.] is quite a Gentleman to read Ivanhoe, Walter Scott’s finest Novel....You can’t imagine how much I want to see Richard; it seems to me I should devour him with kisses. Who does he look like?”

Richard Wilde Walker was born February 16, 1823, just over a month before his father, John Williams Walker died. Richard Walker died in 1874. Mary Jane’s brother Percy Walker was born two years after Mary Jane and represented Mobile County in the State legislature. He died in 1880. Brothers William Memorable Walker, LeRoy Pope Walker, and baby Charles Henry Walker were mentioned earlier in this story. No information has been found on brother John T. Walker.

This is the last letter Mary Jane wrote to her mother from Philadelphia, dated December 20, 1824:

“My dear Mamma,

I have only time to tell you that I depart on Monday, at 6 Oclock contrary to my expectations. I was only apprized of it yesterday, and had not therefore made any preparations. Mr. Jackson had promised to let me know ten days before hand, but he seems to have forgotten. I shall not be able to procure as many things as I wished. I do not know yet whether I can bring the Children any thing so they must not expect much. I shall be dressed. Adieu Adieu Love to all”

John Williams Walker’s estate was not settled until 1831. Although he appeared to have much wealth, what was left did not cover the debts. Richard Holding bought the estate after a judge ordered it sold and Thomas Percy paid off the debt that was not covered by the sale.<sup>8</sup>



Mary Jane Walker, only daughter of John and Matilda, married Richard Lee Fearn, a physician from Mobile. The "Dictionary of Alabama Biography" names their son, who was also an accomplished politician, John Williams Walker Fearn. Mary Jane made a lasting loving tribute to the father she adored.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Albert Burton Moore, *The History of Alabama and Her People*, 1927.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh C. Bailey, *John Williams Walker, A Study in the Political, Social, and Cultured Life of the Old Southwest*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1964).

<sup>3</sup>Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography, Volume IV*, (Spartanburg, South Carolina: The Reprint Company, 1978).

<sup>4</sup>Col. James Edmonds Saunders *Early Settlers of Alabama*, originally published by L. Graham & Son, Ltd., 1899. (Republished in Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Willo Publishing Company, 1961).

<sup>5</sup>Marie Bankhead Owen *The Story of Alabama, Volume 1*, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1949).

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Hugh C. Bailey, *John Williams Walker, A Study in the Political, Social, and Cultured Life of the Old Southwest* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1964).

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

# Administration

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society and *The Huntsville Historical Review* is to provide an agency for expression for all those having a common interest in collecting, preserving, and recording the history of Huntsville and Madison County. Communications concerning the society should be addressed to the President, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804.

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