

# *The Huntsville Historical Review*

Summer-Fall 2006

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## **The Clement Comer Clay Bridge 1931 – 2006**

*Photo Courtesy of  
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## President's Page

Are you really going to read all those books again? Clear out your bookcases, boxes, under the beds, your car, and everywhere you've stashed books you no longer need and bring them to our December 10<sup>th</sup> meeting. For the first time, we are having a sale to benefit you, as well as the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society. We ask that you bring only history-related books, and that you will set the price, keeping in mind that we ask you to give 10% to the Society to help us pay the risings costs of *The Huntsville Historical Review*. Call Nancy Rohr at 883-1933 or e-mail her at [rohrrs@att.net](mailto:rohrrs@att.net) if you have questions or want to get involved. Just think, you might even find enough new books to buy to fill up those now-empty shelves!

We are fortunate to have so many talented and knowledgeable members of our Society. Ours is among the most active in the area, and we invite you to find a niche or two to your liking and participate too. Robin Brewer is working on our website; Alex Luttrell is a dynamo with the Marker Committee, and Emily and Jack Burwell are always furnishing outstanding door prizes for our meetings. If you have a particular niche you would like to join or introduce, please let us hear from you!

Bob Adams  
President





## Editor's Notes

It never ceases to amaze me, when I read the submissions to the *Huntsville Historical Review*, how we attract such outstanding writers and researchers. Our dedicated writers leave no stone unturned to get to interesting facts. This issue contains two Civil War stories by Norman Shapiro and Nancy Rohr, full of “new” information. Mr. Shapiro’s story, *Saints and Sinners*, brings out little known information about the era of Reconstruction. He references the fascinating facts found in records of the Southern Claims Commission, the agency established to reimburse private citizens for Civil War losses incurred by the military. Nancy’s story features two memoirs, with well-researched annotations to help the reader understand the facts surrounding the Union occupation of Huntsville. These memoirs are never dull and boring, for they reflect the reality of the horrors of war, as well as the softer side of humans.

Dex Nilsson has ferreted out every Huntsville/Huntville in the United States. Our readers will be surprised by the results of his extensive research. Channel 19 news anchor Robert Reeves has spent much time covering the demolition of the C. C. Bridge at Whitesburg. With the diligent help of Raneer’ Pruitt, our archivist and faithful Historic Society member, he has uncovered long-forgotten information and photographs.

Jacque Gray  
Editor



# Saints and Sinners

NORMAN M. SHAPIRO

On April 24, 1861, twelve days after the first shell fell on Fort Sumter, the Huntsville, Alabama newspaper *Southern Advocate* reported:

*The middle-aged and old men of Huntsville met at the Court House on Saturday to organize Companies for defense, &c. Dr. P. B. Robinson was in the chair and R. S. Spragins Secretary. Near 300 names were on the roll. A committee was appointed to draft rules, &c. for the through (sic) organizations of the members, who are to be officered, drill and act for the good of the public. From the number enrolled one regular, uniformed and efficient volunteer corps will be formed. The rest will be in one or two Companies for home security, and to act whenever the exigencies require.*

This group was only one of many organizations formed or activated during the periods of excitement that followed Lincoln's election, the secession of the several states and the establishment of the Confederacy. Madison County's elite military company, the Madison Rifles, which was originally organized in 1855, departed for Mobile on March 26, 1861 and later became Company D of the 7<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. The Huntsville Guards was organized following the Rifles departure in March and the election of officers of another volunteer company, the North Alabamians, was mentioned in the above edition of the *Southern Advocate*. The latter two companies left for Dalton, Georgia, on April 29 where they became part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. Many more military units were formed in subsequent years through 1864.

Ad hoc groups like Huntsville's "old men" were established in towns and cities throughout the Union and the Confederate states, sometimes for different reasons, but based on "the taking of the law into one's own hands, the classic definition of vigilantism."<sup>1</sup> Frequently associated with violence, vigilantism has a long history in America and "arose in response to a typical American problem: the absence of effective law and order in a frontier region."<sup>2</sup> The "Regulators" in South Carolina in 1767-1769 are considered to be the first vigilante movement. This movement was an organized effort

by backcountry settlers to restore law and order and establish institutions of local government. Plagued by roving bands of outlaws and angered by the assembly's failure to provide the western counties with courts and petty officers, the leading planters, supported by small farmers, created (1767) an association to regulate backcountry affairs. They brought criminals to justice and set up courts to resolve legal disputes.

Most are familiar with the vigilantes of the old West which have been prominent in fact, fiction, and film for many years. Richard Maxwell Brown identifies in summary, "326 American Vigilante Movements, 1767-1904," and suggests "that there may have been as many as 500 movements, but, at the present, only 326 are known."<sup>3</sup> He also lists variant names for the vigilante groups: "Vigilance Committee," "Committee of Vigilance," "Committee of Safety," "Slickers," "Stranglers," and in central Texas, simply, "mobs."<sup>4</sup> The original name for such groups "Regulators" is now obsolete. Brown writes that there were four major peaks or waves of vigilantism in the nineteenth century: the early 1830s, the early 1840s, the late 1850s, and the late 1860s. Prominent in the 1830s was the alleged Murrell conspiracy in Mississippi and Alabama which was described in some detail in an earlier paper by the present author.<sup>5</sup> In his compilation, Brown does not consider the vigilante campaigns which were evident during the secession debate and the 1860 election in the south.<sup>6</sup> Also, he does not examine the vigilante movement that attended the beginnings of the Civil War in both the North and the South and particularly in North Alabama which is of interest for this paper.

Organizations like the above Huntsville group arose primarily from fear and expectations: fear that the absence of the young men who were joining volunteer units and going off to war would diminish law and order; fear of abolitionists and slave revolts; fear of treason (disloyal acts); and fear of sedition (disloyal speech). In a recent book on the treatment of Alabama's unionists during and after the war, Margaret Storey writes, "Antebellum Southern society had long utilized extralegal courts and tribunals to adjudicate community safety, particularly anything pertaining to slave insurrections. During the secession crisis, Alabama had seen a marked increase in operative vigilance committees, many of which bullied pro-Union men. Once the war began, these locally constituted groups persisted, now composed of men too old for soldering."<sup>7</sup> She continues, "most vigilance committees were bound by no particular statute; consequently, any punishment of guilty individuals was left to the "sound discretion" of the mem-

bers of the committee itself. Alabama's vigilance committees thus assumed the power to implement a wide range of punishments for unionists, from humiliation and intimidation to incarceration, exile, and even death."<sup>8</sup> While there was no authority for this assumption of power, Alabama's governors approved of the practice which was indicated, for example, in correspondence with vigilance committees requesting advice:<sup>9</sup>

*Eufala, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1862*

*His Excellency John Gill Shorter*

*Dear Governor – The Vigilance Committee of this City have instructed me to request your opinion for their guidance in the disposition of the following case – A. says “that he would see every women and child in the South killed & and every negro freed before he would to the ‘war’” – and when asked – “When does our Congress meet – says- when it does he hoped they might all be captured” – Is he guilty of any legal offense! & What is the penalty! What disposition should the Committee make of this case and party – Your early answer is earnestly requested.*

*Truly &c*

*Lewis S. Cato*

Surprisingly, the answer was almost immediate:

*Executive Department*

*Montgomery, Alabama, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1862*

*Col. Lewis S. Cato*

*Eufala, Ala.*

*Dear :*

*The Governor is absent on business, and will not return for some days. Without intruding as his aid, to commit him in regard to your enquiry, contained in your letter of the 10<sup>th</sup> inst., my opinion is, that if the language of “A” quoted by you, amounts to any offense, it is sedition, unless I am not aware of any Statute passed by Congress for the punishment of sedition, and, therefore of opinion that the language referred to, does not constitute any legal offense. There can be no doubt that “A” is a bad man, and guilty*

*of a moral offense of a high character, & deserves to be punished, & one of the objects of the vigilance committees – as I understand them – is to reach such cases as are not provided for by the Law – Such cases must be left to the sound discretion of the Committees, and they should not hesitate to deal with them as the good and safety of the community demands.*

*Yr. Ob't Serv't.*

*A. B. Moore*

Andrew B. Moore had served Alabama as the 16<sup>th</sup> governor from 1851-1861. He had been appointed Aid de Camp to Governor John Gil Shorter's military staff on December 12<sup>th</sup> 1862.

In her book, Margaret Storey summarizes the experiences of over three hundred white unionists and pro-Union African Americans, primarily from North Alabama, utilizing information in the papers of the Southern Claims Commission.<sup>10</sup> The federal government established the Southern Claims Commission on March 3, 1871 to allow individuals to file claims for their losses due to actions by Confederate or Union activities during the Civil War. Each individual filing a claim had to prove their loyalty to the Union and document their losses using testimony which comprised answers to fifty-one questions, four of which covered the actions taken against their person or property on behalf of the Confederacy:

(18) Were you ever threatened with damage or injury to your person, family, or property on account of your Union sentiments, or were you actually molested or injured on account of your Union sentiments? If so, when, where, by whom, and in what particular way were you injured or threatened with injury?

(19) Were you ever arrested by any Confederate officer, soldier or sailor, or other person professing to act for the Confederate government, or for any State in rebellion? If so, when, where, by whom, for what cause: how long were you kept under arrest; how did you obtain your release; did you take any oath or give any bond to effect your release; and if so, what was the nature of the oath or bond?

(20) Was any of your property taken by Confederate officers or soldiers or any rebel authority? If so, what property, when, where by whom; were you ever paid therefore [sic], and did you ever present an account therefore to the Confederate government, or any rebel officer?

(21) Was any of your property ever confiscated by rebel authority, on the ground that you were an enemy to the rebel cause? If so, give all the particulars, and state if the property was subsequently released or compensation made therefore.

Special questions were also asked of supporting witnesses, female claimants, colored claimants, and colored witnesses on behalf of white claimants.

Alabama's unionists suffered all of the punishments mentioned above plus banishment, shooting or hanging and the threat of same. The ultimate penalty, however, was most often carried out by conscript cavalry after April 1862 with passage of the "Conscription Act."

Identification of the members of vigilante groups presents an even more difficult problem as their activities may have been extralegal to varying degrees. Accordingly, one would not expect to find such references in the usual historical sources: personal letters, estates or civil records. One promising source for the information is the "Case Files of Applications From Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons, 'Amnesty Papers,' 1865-1867."<sup>11</sup> Here, the application required answers to twelve background questions including:

(4) Have you served on any "vigilance committee" during the war before which persons charged with disloyalty to the Confederate States have been examined or tried? If so, when and where, and how often? What person or persons were tried or examined by you? What sentence was passed or decision made in each case? When, where, and by whom in each case?

Thus, those persons who admitted to having served on vigilance committees were also required to provide information on committee activities.

The pardons were required for persons who were excepted from the amnesty proclaimed by President Johnson on May 29, 1865, and who desired to obtain restoration of full citizenship (which included the right to vote). There was some urgency attached to the completion of this process inasmuch as an election of delegates to a state constitutional convention was ordered for August 31, and the convention was to meet on September 10 (they actually met on September 12).

The excluded classes included practically all Confederate and State officials, for the latter acted as Confederate agents, all the old political

leaders of the state, many of the ablest citizens who had not been in politics but had attained high position under the Confederate government or in the army of navy and others. The largest class included every person in the state whose property in 1861 was assessed at \$20,000 or more. The “Case Files” for Alabama were examined in an earlier paper where the ninety-five pardons that were granted for Huntsville and Madison County were listed with vitae of the grantees.<sup>12</sup> It was evident that the persons on the pardon roles represented the economic and political elite of Huntsville and Madison County during this period and a likely group to prevail in “the middle-aged and old men of Huntsville.” Unfortunately, a review of the files found that only four residents admitted membership on a “Committee of Safety” that was formed in the spring of 1861 and was obviously the above group. These gentlemen were George P. Beirne, Septimus D. Cabaniss, James J. Donegan, and James H. Mastin and their individual answers to Question (4) above, are copied in Appendix I with their respective vitae from the earlier paper. It is evident that they generally agree in their description of the Committee’s activities/accomplishments, which were relatively benign. Cabaniss’ explanation is much more detailed and suggests that he may have been a member of the governing Committee of nine members. He also indicates that a large majority of what he calls the “Military Association” and a majority of the “Committee” were opposed to secession which is consistent with what we know of Huntsville/Madison County in 1860.

But there were other vigilante committees in Madison County, as noted by Daniel Hundley in his diary for May, 1861 which was abstracted in the previously mentioned earlier paper.<sup>5</sup> And most unfortunately, there is no information on these committees. On May 25, 1861, Hundley wrote, “By invitation, members of several committees today met with the Triana Committee.” This ad hoc committee which was established because of a “rumored slave insurrection” responded as quickly and furiously as any of the perpetrators mentioned in Margaret Story’s book. In action for only about two weeks, the Committee was responsible for beatings, jailings, banishments, and hangings reminiscent of the Murrell conspiracy in 1835, which was mentioned earlier.

Fortunately, we found that the records of Alabama’s capitol, Montgomery, provide substantially more information on the operations of the wartime committees. In his book, *Confederate Home Front – Montgomery During the Civil War*, William Warren Roberts Jr. writes, “During the war’s



first summer, city council members drafted a loyalty oath, and citizens adopted it at a courthouse meeting on August 2. The oath pledged fidelity in the ‘mortal struggle for...rights and independence with a reckless and relentless foe.’ Concerned citizens meeting at Estelle Hall a week later established a twenty-four person Vigilante Committee. Some of the city’s best-known residents – Dr. Robert Ware, Frank Gilmer, James Farley, and Judge Abram Martin – were members.”<sup>13</sup> Abram Martin, who was appointed Chairman of the committee, was born in Edgefield District, South Carolina, in 1798 and moved to Montgomery County in 1832 where he practiced law served as circuit judge from 1837 to 1843. During the war, he was named Collector of Government Revenue in the State of Alabama. According to his “application for Presidential Pardon” dated 8 August 1865, he was appointed Chairman of the Committee of Vigilance by “a large meeting of the citizens of Montgomery in my absence —.” Appendix II contains his complete statement in response to Question (4) of the Application.

In summary, Judge Martin writes that the Governor of the State was apprised of the formation and existence of the committee; that he was invited to its sessions and his council was taken; and that he believed the Governor approved of the “course” of the Committee. Judge Martin recollects that thirteen persons were brought or came before the Committee and all but two of them were “discharged generally” or tried and discharged. O. P. Sellers was brought before the committee on charges of disloyalty and was held in custody until a Military Post was established in Montgomery. Daniel Starr was tried by the Committee and “at the insistence of his attorney and...in accordance with his own wish was returned to jail for protection from the populace.” Martin does not mention the rest of Starr’s story which is reported in the book by Dr. Roberts, noted above:<sup>14</sup> Starr was a brickmason who had been born in Connecticut but had lived in Montgomery for over a decade. He had little contact with the local Unionists but his dislike of secession was apparently well-known. A search of his home revealed a journal which was described as an “Abolition manuscript” and he was summoned before the Vigilante Committee. The night after he was returned to jail to await trial in circuit court, he was seized and lynched by parties unknown. His corpse was discovered hanging from a tree on the edge of town on the next morning, March 15, 1863.

The following copy of an undated letter from Governor Shorter’s Administrative files regarding the Montgomery situation may also be illuminating for Huntsville:

*To his Excellence  
Jno. Gill Shorter,  
Gov. of Ala:*

*The Committee of Safety have received the enclosed resolution from The Vigilance Committee, and have given them the following response.*

*To the first resolution the Committee say –*

*“Resolved that the Chairman, in response to the resolution of the Vigilance Committee, be instructed to inform that Committee that the subject of the resolution is our belonging to the military authorities, and that this Committee is informed that an order to that effect is daily expected from the commanding general at Mobile.”*

*The Committee of Safety concur in the second resolution of the Committee of Vigilance, except that they recommend that business houses be closed at 3 o'clock P.M. instead of 1 P.M.*

*All of which is submitted by*

*Yr obt servt  
Geo. W. Stone  
Chairman Com. Safety*

George Washington Stone, above, was born in Bedford County, Va. in 1811 and died in Montgomery in 1894. A distinguished lawyer, he was elected associate justice of the Alabama Supreme Court in 1856 and re-elected in 1862. He served in that capacity and as chief justice for nearly a quarter of a century and delivered over two thousand and one hundred decisions. In his “Application for Presidential Pardon,” he answers “unqualifiedly no” to Question (4) and the other applicable questions. Thus, it is apparent that Montgomery had both a Vigilance Committee and a Committee of Safety although the same is not mentioned in Dr. Robert’s book.

For Huntsville/Madison County, this may account for the fact that so few of the applicants for presidential pardons admitted service on any “vigilance committee.” The four gentlemen, however, who did admit such service, apparently had no problem in equating “vigilance committee” and “committee of safety.”

## Appendix I

### Answers to Question 4, pertaining to membership in vigilante committee

For each of the individuals below, the listing includes information from the 1860 U.S. Census Population and Slave Schedules.

Name: **Septimus D. Cabaniss**  
Place of Birth: Alabama  
Date of Birth: 1815  
Occupation: Lawyer  
Value of Real Estate: \$20,000  
Value of Personal Property: \$60,000  
Number of Slaves: 0  
Date of Pardon: September 15, 1865

He never served on any "Vigilance Committee," but inasmuch as that term and "Committee of Safety" are generally regarded as synonymous, it is perhaps proper that he should state the fact that in the latter part of the spring, or early part of the summer of the year 1861, he did serve for a short period of time on a Committee which, according to his recollection, had the latter name, and inasmuch as he is aware now, as he was then, that such committees have been most commonly, in times of excitement, the instruments of the bad passions and prejudices of others, rather than a safeguard against them, and being always averse to doing anything not in conformity with law, he deems it due to himself to state the circumstances under which it was organized, and to say that he would not have consented to serve upon it but for his knowledge of the high character of the gentlemen associated with him for intelligence, integrity and discretion, and the belief that the existence of that Committee could serve to allay excitement, and to prevent less discreet persons from taking the law in their own hands.

In the winter and spring after the election of Mr. Lincoln, there was an apprehension in the minds of many of our citizens, and especially the Ladies, that there would be an insurrection among the slaves. This increased, after the companies of Volunteers had gone to the Confederate Army, leaving no military organizations in the county. To allay this excitement, nearly every male citizen of Huntsville and vicinity between the ages of fourteen and eighty years, voluntarily united in a Military Association, forming a

small battalion. As a consequence of this uneasiness and the state of the country, there was, as is usual in times of high excitement, a disposition on the part of some of the community to take the law in their own hands; and when the Military Association was formed, it was agreed that it should be under the control and direction of a Committee of nine citizens, selected at the time of its organization, who should be charged with the duty of investigating any matters which the safety of the Community might seem to require. Several startling reports were brought before the Committee of insurrectionary plots which, when calmly investigated, proved to be without foundation; and a considerable excitement was also aroused against several persons charged with, or suspected of, disloyalty to the Confederate States; but it was allayed by the Committee, and no one was punished, except one person whose name is not now remembered. The sentence in his case was, that he should, within a certain time, leave the County or State, and not return. According to the recollection of the undersigned, it was provide that this person had been in Huntsville but a few months, was a gambler by profession, and came from Memphis or New Orleans. Robert K. Dickson, a citizen of Huntsville, was also before the Committee, charged with uttering disloyal sentiments. The facts charged against him were investigated. The Committee advised him to be more discreet in his language, and he agreed to do so in future. Excitements arose against others who were charged with disloyalty, and were allayed through the instrumentality of the Committee; but the undersigned does not recollect any other persons whose cases were tried; and he is satisfied that the object of the Committee in those cases was prompted by a desire to preserve good order in the Community, and not to punish persons for their political sentiments. A large majority of the Military Association, and according to his recollection, a majority of the Committee, had been opposed to the secession of the State. He does not remember how often he served on said Committee, was probably at eight or ten meetings – possibly more; they were held in Huntsville.

Name: **James J. Donegan**

Place of Birth: Ireland

Date of Birth: 1800

Occupation: Farmer

Value of Real Estate: \$138,000

Value of Personal Property: \$175,000

Number of Slaves: 47

Date of Pardon: September 22, 1865

In the Spring of 1861, a committee of safety was organized in this place, composed of three hundred of the most respected citizens of Huntsville and its vicinity, the objects of which were to keep in proper subordination their slaves of the country, to abolish all legal traffic in liquor and generally to provide good order in the community. To this committee I belonged, and it is the only one, with which I have in any way been connected. During its existence, so far as I am connected therewith, two persons were reported to the committee for the imprudent use of intemperate language, calculated to engender strife and bad feeling in a community, already too much excited. Having been admonished of the injury they were doing in the community, they were permitted, at their own request, to leave the community without molestation to their persons or property. No other persons were brought before the committee, except for offenses entirely unconnected with political questions, and I can safely affirm that its existence, which lasted but a few months, contributed in a large degree in promoting quiet and good order in this community.

Name: **George P. Beirne**

Place of Birth: Virginia

Date of Birth: 1809

Occupation: Farmer

Value of Real Estate: \$55,000

Value of Personal Property: \$235,000

Number of Slaves: 103

Date of Pardon: September 1865

In the spring of 1861, there was an organization in the town of Huntsville, of which the undersigned was one, formed for the purposes of preserving order, good conduct and the safety of the community. It was composed of three hundred of the most respected citizens of Huntsville and its vicinity. It continued its being until about the fall of 1861. The principle acts of this organization were directed to keep in their proper subordination the then slaves of the country and to prohibit the sale of liquors to negroes and others without license, all of which was done to the satisfaction of the community by the seizure in two instances of liquor kept for sale in violation of law and without the arrest or punishment of a single negro. In two or three instances, persons were brought before the committee for intemperate language, in one of the cases by letter and in the other by extempore

demonstrations. Being admonished of the impropriety of doing anything to stir up strife and bitter feelings in a community, already too much excited, these parties, at their own desire, were permitted to leave without interference with or violence to, their persons or property. The undersigned can safely say that the conservative action of the Huntsville association during its brief existence, exercised a most salutary influence upon other committees in this region and had a decided tendency to promote order and to prevent violence of any kind.

Name: **James H. Mastin**

Place of Birth: Virginia

Date of Birth: 1815

Occupation: Farmer

Value of Real Estate: \$20,000

Value of Personal Property: \$35,000

Number of Slaves:

Date of Pardon: September 22, 1865

That in the spring of 1861, about three hundred of the most respectable and orderly citizens of Huntsville and its vicinity met and organized a Committee of Safety for the purpose of keeping the slaves in proper subordination and of securing good order in the community and (to secure these ends) of preventing all illegal dealing in liquor. I was a member of this committee and of no other. To it two persons were reported as having used language calculated to produce strife and ill feeling. These parties were informed of the injury they were doing and were allowed, at their own request, to leave the community without interference with either them or their property. No other persons were brought before the Committee of Safety charged with anything at all connected with politics and I am satisfied that much good was done by it in keeping order and quiet in the community.

**Appendix II**  
**Answer to Question 4, pertaining to membership**  
**in vigilante committee**  
**Response by Judge Abram Martin**

I was appointed Chairman of the Committee of Vigilance raised in the city of Montgomery by a large meeting of the citizens (as I have understood it was) in my absence and without my knowledge of its assemblage, the purpose for which it was held, or the action that was taken at that meeting, until sometime after it was assembled and adjourned: that prior to this meeting gross infractions of law and order had been perpetrated by lawless men of our own community, and apprehensions were entertained of their recurrence of these scenes; and apprehensions were also entertained that spies and other men unfriendly to the South were and would be sent among us to learn our condition, operating plans and movements, and report them to those with whom we were engaged in war. To meet such emergencies and protect the country from consequences naturally following such a state of things was the primary object, as understood by the undersigned of the organization of the Vigilance committee, which he respectfully states without reference to himself, was composed mainly of the most prudent, cautious, correct and intelligent gentlemen of Montgomery and its vicinity and that its proceedings were conducted with a view to order, peace and harmony among our own principles and its action was conservative and intended, and calculated to protect and not endanger the rights of the citizens.

In connection with this subject, I desire to bring to the notice of your Excellency that the Governor of the State was apprised of the formation and existence of; that the committee was in communication on matters of public interest; that he was invited to its sessions, and his council was taken and I am gratified to believe its course received his approbation and that he gave it credit for cooperating faithfully, patriotically, and justly with him in the great cause, at that time, most dear to us all, and to which the great body of the Southern people were devoted heart and soul.

In accordance with the object of my appointment as a member of this Committee, and with a solemn, and I trust, a just appreciation of my obligation and duty to all the people of the state, I did serve on it during a part of the war, and before which persons charged with disloyalty to the Confederate states were examined and tried. They transpired in the court house

and council chamber of the city of Montgomery. I recollect at this time thirteen persons who were brought, or came before this Committee. I have no recollection of others. The names of these persons are as follows: Lehman, Abel Hawk, Leonard Pilken, Harvey Lee, W. Halfman, Mack Page, Sam'l House, Philip Palmore, Stickney, Thos. Rusk, Montrose Molineaux, Daniel Starr, A. P. Telley.

The first seven persons enumerated above were discharged generally. Lehman and Pilken resided in New York, Stickney was a Northern man, who was residing in the South at the commencement of the war. He afterwards removed with his family to New York, and during the war returned to Montgomery. Hawk had resided in Montgomery but was absent a considerable time according to my recollection and then returned during the war. Harvey Lee was residing in Montgomery and made several visits to the West and after he was before the Committee, and before the termination of the war left the State of Alabama with his family. I understand he resides now in Illinois. W. Halfman was residing in Montgomery, went north and remained some time and returned to Montgomery. An excited feeling prevailed against him, and at the instance of his father, the son appeared before the Committee, and was examined and discharged. Palmore was sent under arrest from Pensacola, was tried and discharged. House, Page and Rusk were before the Committee on charges preferred against them. They all resided near Montgomery except House and he resided in Wetumpka. They were discharged.

Starr was tried and defended by Thos. ? and turned over to the civil courts at the insistence of his attorney and I am informed in accordance with his own wish, was returned to the jail for protection against the populace. O. P. Sellers was sent I understand from Pensacola by the military to the Mayor of this city. How long he was in the custody of the authorities I do not know. He was afterwards, according to my recollection brought before the Committee on accusations of disloyalty and satisfactory proof was made of the charge against him. On this slate of facts the Committee detained him in custody until a Military Post was established in Montgomery. He was then turned over by order of the Vigilance Committee to the military authorities.

While Sellers was in custody, he directed the prosecution against on — and through his wife engaged my professional services on the case. I mention this fact to show that Sellers did not regard me in the light of his oppressor.



No person was shot or hung by my order acting alone or in conjunction with others, for real or supposed disloyalty to the Confederate States.

I have not shot or hung, or aided in hanging or shooting any person for real or supposed disloyalty to the Confederate States.

I have not ordered, or been engaged in hunting anyone with dogs who was disloyal to the Confederate States, or supposed to be so.

I believe the Republicans of the Northwest were organizing a party to emancipate the slaves of the South; that their object was so avowed; I believe the emanating strength of that party would soon have enabled it to effect their object by an amendment to the constitution; that in this contest the South was certain to be defeated. I believed the Southern States had the right to secede, and in this opinion I had the concurrence of some of the ablest political leaders of the North. I believed secession by the South would be peaceable and in this opinion too I was informed by reliable authority that Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Seward concurred, and I believe that this course of secession would have been peaceable but for subsequent outside pressure upon the federal administration; - and so believing I was in favour of the ordinance of secession at the time of its passage on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1861.

I voted in every instance for the discharge of every party put on his trial before this Committee but Starr and Sellers and voted in their cases as indicated above. I was in favour in all cases of allowing the accused the right to be heard by himself and council and the right to compel the attendance of witnesses in his behalf. As chairman or member of the Vigilance Committee I never directed, or procured it to be assembled, but on information lodged by others, except in the case of Montrose Mollineaux.

In one case I recollect I deferred the calling of the meeting together although requested to do so by several persons for near a week after confirmation accusing a party was lodged with me, and not then until complaints were made by a citizen of my inattention to the public interest. Indeed the Vigilance Committee became a byword on the streets and was ridiculed for its neglect of duty – want of firmness of action in the discharge of its duty to the public.

Montrose Mollineaux, who appeared to be a man between 25 and 30 years of age, came to my house, made great professions of s? in the cause of the South, showed what he said was a gun shot wound received in battle through his wrist and to test him I interrogated him on many points. He represented he was born in Virginia on or near the line of Tennessee, re-

moved when young with his father to Tennessee, where he remained until eight years before our interview, and thence to Huntsville, Ala. He could not tell the county of his birth, nor the county in which Nashville was situated, nor the counties surrounding Nashville, nor the counties surrounding Huntsville, nor their county seats, nor the counties of Tennessee adjacent to Madison County, nor could he tell anything of Fayetteville and Pulaski, the two towns on the principle routes from Huntsville to Nashville.

This and other circumstances, seeing he was a man of fair intelligence, satisfied me that Mollineaux was a spy, and upon consultation with other members of the Committee I directed arrest.

When his trial Mollineaux being confronted by a witness who knew him admitted that he had not been shot, and he had made this representation to obtain the hospitality of various persons with whom he called in his travels.

After his discharge Mollineaux, I am informed Mr. S. B. Pleasants, called on him and hired a horse and buggy on pretense that he was an engineer on government service at Choctaw Bluff and wanted a conveyance to ride in the country on business of the government. Mollineaux did not return as promised and Pleasants went on pursuit of him into Covington County where he found the buggy that Mollineaux had disposed and had, he was informed, received a saddle on account of the sale, and then mounted his horse and continued his flight in the direction of Milton in Florida wither Pleasants pursued him and the man in whose possession he found the buggy refused to give it up without suit and Mr. Pleasants thinking this course of procedure would be attended with more trouble and expense than the buggy was worth, abandoned it and lost horse and buggy. This statement I made on the information of Mr. Pleasants.

Sworn to & Sub.  
I. H. Nettles, J.P.

Respectfully  
A. Martin

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence, Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 95, 96.
- <sup>2</sup> Brown, p. 96.
- <sup>3</sup> Brown, pp. 305 – 319, 96.
- <sup>4</sup> Brown, p. 97.
- <sup>5</sup> Norman M. Shapiro, *North Alabama's Response to the Fear and Facts of Slave Revolts, The Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1, (Fall-Winter 2004-2005), pp. 30-35.
- <sup>6</sup> William L. Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse-Alabama and Mississippi in 1860*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974.)
- <sup>7</sup> Margaret M. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss-Alabama Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), p. 63.
- <sup>8</sup> Storey, p. 64.
- <sup>9</sup> *Alabama Governor Shorter Administrative Files*, Microfilm Roll No. 511, Alabama Dept. of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.
- <sup>10</sup> *Southern Claims Commission Approved Claims; 1871-1880: Alabama*, National Archives Microfilm Publication M2062, The National Archives, Washington D.C.
- <sup>11</sup> *Case Files of Applications From Former Confederates for Presidential Pardons ("Amnesty Papers") 1865-1867*, National Archives Microfilm Publication M1003, The National Archives, Washington D.C., 1976.
- <sup>12</sup> Norman M. Shapiro, *The Pardons of Madison County, The Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (Winter-Spring 1995), pp 1-29.

<sup>13</sup> William Warren Roberts, Jr., *Confederate Home Front – Montgomery during the Civil War*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), p. 109.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts, p. 111, 112.

<sup>15</sup> *Alabama Governor Shorter Administrative Files*, Microfilm Roll No. 508, Alabama Dept. of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

# Captain Slick's Company

JACQUELYN PROCTER GRAY

The word *vigilante* is derived from the word *vigilant*, which means to be watchful. Although it certainly isn't comfortable to know that others may be watching us, that knowledge alone may keep many of us from breaking the law. The story of vigilantes is ever-popular in fiction and television, and while we may support their effort to hand out justice when the justice system itself has failed, their actions may be premature and misguided.

According to many historical sources, early settlers entering into a newly established community faced the problems associated with a lack of law and order. Solid church homes as well as competent lawmen held violence in check, but before either of those factors could be in place, women especially complained that the menfolk tended to drink more, cuss more, fight, and steal. These were ordinarily law-abiding citizens! After all, unless an equally aggressive victim took offense, there was no one to keep their activities in check. Out of these circumstances, a vigilante society is often born.

Although settlers began to pour in shortly after John Hunt's arrival in 1805, it wasn't until 1809 that a law was passed allowing for a judicial system to be established in Madison County. It was at that time that Stephen Neal came to be our first sheriff and justice of the peace. Before Sheriff Neal's arrival, law and order was enforced, maintained, and the guilty were punished by a vigilante group known as Captain Slick's Company. Their actions were swift and harsh, and the object of their lessons did not always live to commit another offense.

For a relatively minor offense, the criminal was given a warning to leave town. If a thief did not leave in the pre-determined time, he faced the probability of a whipping, having both ears cropped, and his cheeks branded. Thirty-nine lashes was the basic punishment, inflicted on men and women, and in addition they may have been required to stand at the public pillory for all to see in order that they too would remember to obey the basic laws of mankind. They would also come to recognize the community criminals and perhaps have a chance to inflict a little pain, just for good measure.

Someone who stole a horse or mule also stole one's livelihood, making this a most serious offense. An impromptu jury was summoned to assess a fine, not to exceed \$500, receive 39 lashes, branded with the letter "T" and jailed for not more than one year. In addition, they would be required to return the horse or mule or pay the value to the victim of the crime.

If a white person was found guilty of perjury, they were fined \$300 and received 39 lashes, and forced to stand in the pillory two hours. A slave or mulatto person found guilty of perjury would receive 39 lashes and have one ear nailed to the pillory, stand for one hour at which time the ear would be cut off and then they would lose the other ear in the like manner. Why such a difference in the punishment? Slaves would not have had \$300 for a fine.

Other similar punishments, including the death penalty, were meted out. In the book, "Historic Huntsville from Early History of Huntsville, Alabama, 1804 – 1870" by Edward Chambers Betts (published 1909 and reprinted in 1966 by Southern University Press), Mr. Betts tells us that the origins of Captain Slick's Company cannot be proven, and may perhaps be a legend. However, if they actually did not exist, they may have survived in rumor-form in order to intimidate potential criminals.

# We Are Not Alone – The *Other* Huntsvilles

DEX NILSSON

Most residents know that Huntsville, Alabama, was named for Revolutionary War veteran John Hunt. In 1804, Hunt saw the great limestone spring Indians had talked about and a year later brought his family to settle here, erecting a cabin, and establishing the start of the community that would bear his name.

But there are (or were) over twenty other places named Huntsville in the country. Two are named for our city. Some, not surprisingly, are named for folks named Hunt, but none apparently related to our John. The origins of still other places are not always clear. Here are the stories of the other Huntsvilles:

**Arkansas** - Huntsville is in Madison County, in the northwest corner of the state, about 20 miles east of Fayetteville and the University of Arkansas.<sup>1</sup> It is a town of about 2,000 people. Explorers came into the region in 1827 naming the place after their home town of Huntsville, Alabama. Madison County was established in 1836, and it was clear that Huntsville would be the county seat. The name was made official in 1840.<sup>2</sup>

**Colorado** – A list of Colorado places<sup>3</sup> lists Huntsville as being established in 1860 when the area was still part of the Kansas Territory. There was a post office there from 1860-1871. Location was in what is now Douglas County, just south of Denver.

**Connecticut** – In the far northwest corner of the state are villages of Canaan, North Canaan, and South Canaan, all in Litchfield County. Present-day Canaan had previous names, one of which was Huntsville.<sup>4</sup> Huntsville was east of Canaan as mentioned in *The Connecticut Guide* of 1935: “About 1-1/2 miles from South Canaan, a road climbs south .... Farther east on R. 43 we pass the hamlet of Huntsville, seat of an early iron forge.”<sup>5</sup>

**Illinois** – It’s not on standard maps, but there is a Huntsville at zip code 62344 in Schuyler County about five miles northwest of the village of

Camden. Schuyler County is in rural western Illinois. There are on-line histories of Huntsville detailing the first residents from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kentucky, and saying that the village was laid out in 1836.<sup>6</sup> There was no settler named Hunt, none came from the South, and none of the histories tell why the village was named Huntsville. One write-up mentions “As the records have been lost, the particulars cannot be given.” John Reinhardt, supervisor at the Illinois State Archives, says the state has no additional information.<sup>7</sup> Current population is 160.<sup>8</sup>

**Indiana** – There are two Huntsville villages in Indiana. They seem to be named for a Hunt family who settled in the east central part of the state. Huntsville in Madison County was laid out in 1830 by Enos Adamson and Eleazer Hunt, and Huntsville in Randolph County in 1834 by land owners William and Miles Hunt.<sup>9</sup> The first village is about 20 miles northeast of Indianapolis, the second 35 miles further east.

**Kansas** – There is a Huntsville Township in Reno County about 20 miles west of Hutchinson, which is the county seat, and a little way below the Arkansas River. A Kansas state history<sup>10</sup> discusses the area in 1870 thusly: “The first settler was Lewis M. Thomas, who located a claim in Little River Township in Nov. 1870. The next month he went to Lawrence to purchase supplies and on his return was accompanied by John Hunt, who located in the valley of the Little Arkansas.” By 1873 there was a town there called Huntsville, but by 1905, it had disappeared.

**Kentucky** – Huntsville is about 50 miles northeast of Bowling Green, in Butler County. It is a tiny community named for early settler Daniel Hunt.<sup>11</sup>

**Maryland** – A community called Huntsville exists in Prince Georges County just east of the District of Columbia line. It was listed in the 1940 *Gazetteer of Maryland* which simply said it was “in Prince Georges County.” It appeared again in the 1993 listing of “Maryland Place Names from the files of the Geological Survey” by the Maryland State Archives which pinpointed it by longitude and latitude and located it on its map.<sup>12</sup> But it’s not on any road map, there is no description of it in the usual Maryland place name references, and researchers at both the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore and the Prince Georges County Library Maryland Room could provide no additional information about it.<sup>13</sup>



**Minnesota** – Huntsville is a township in Polk County in the northwestern part of the state just across the Red River from Grand Forks, North Dakota. Its population is 586. It was organized and named in 1874 for Bena Hunt, one of its first settlers. Bena had arrived from Winona in the distant south-eastern corner of Minnesota.<sup>14</sup>

At one time there was a second Huntsville Township, this one in Marshall County, a bit further north and named because it was a good hunting place - for moose! Its name was changed to Huntley in 1902 to avoid conflict between the two.<sup>15</sup>

**Missouri** – Huntsville is a town of about 1,500 in Randolph County, in the middle of the state and halfway between St. Louis and Kansas City. It was settled about 1821. In 1830 it became the county seat. Four landowners, including Daniel Hunt of Kentucky, donated land for the courthouse. Hunt had been the first of the four to have settled in the area, so the town was named for him. This may be the same Daniel Hunt for whom Huntsville, Kentucky, is named.<sup>16 17</sup>

**New Jersey** – It's not on most maps and it doesn't have a zip code, but its half-dozen old buildings are still there, in Sussex County, between Andover and Johnsonburg in the far northwest part of the state. The first recorded name was Pettitt's Mill, a gristmill, in the 1700s. In the early 1800s, Judge Abraham Hunt took possession of the mill property, and the surrounding hamlet became known as Huntsville.<sup>18</sup>

**North Carolina** – A town named Huntsville was chartered in Yadkin County, just west of today's Winston-Salem, in 1792 by Charles Hunt of Salisbury who sold lots there. The town was re-chartered in 1822,<sup>19</sup> but has long since disappeared.

Today there is a Huntsville Elementary School in Huntsville Township in Rockingham County. The county is in central North Carolina just below the Virginia state line. School principal Judy Coleman relates<sup>20</sup> information from Bob Carter, the county historian: "Huntsville was one of the seven original townships created as part of Reconstruction in the county after the Civil War. The community took its name from the 'Northern Hunters,' former soldiers from the North who traveled back to the area after the war to hunt

quail on the fertile hunting ground found in many Piedmont communities. The hunters paid landowners' property taxes in exchange for being allowed to hunt on the land. Thus the name Huntsville seemed appropriate."

**Ohio** – Huntsville is a village in Logan County about 50 miles northwest of Columbus. The first buildings were constructed in the early 1840s, and the village was surveyed in 1846 on land owned by George Hover and Thomas Wishart. Was it named for them? No, it was named for Aaron L. Hunt who had done the surveying! <sup>21</sup> The town began growing in 1847 when the Mad River and Lake Erie Railroad arrived. Huntsville was finally incorporated in 1865. In the census of 1890, population was 430; in the census of 2000, it was 454. <sup>22</sup>

**Oklahoma** – Huntville (no s) was in Kingfisher County, about 25 miles northwest of Oklahoma City. It had a post office from 1892 until 1903, but it no longer exists. It had been named for the first postmaster, John M. Hunt. <sup>23</sup>

**Pennsylvania** – Wilkes-Barre is the major city of Luzerne County. Less than ten miles northwest in Jackson Township is the tiny community of Huntsville. One of the first pioneers in the township was Levi Hunt, a Revolutionary War veteran from Connecticut, and it is his name that Huntsville celebrates. <sup>24</sup>

**Rhode Island** – Providence County is the northern county in the state. An undated on-line list<sup>25</sup> named *Populated Places in the County of Providence, Rhode Island*, includes Huntsville. I could find no present-day information about it.

**Tennessee** – Huntsville is the seat of Scott County. It is about fifty miles northwest of Knoxville and near the Kentucky state line. It was "named in honor of an early hunter." <sup>26</sup> Population in the 2000 census was 981.

**Texas** – Huntsville is in northeast Texas, in Walker County, a city of about 35,000 people. It was formed in 1836 when Pleasant and Ephraim Gray opened a trading post on the site. Ephraim became the first postmaster in 1837 and named the place after his home town of Huntsville, Alabama.<sup>27</sup> But brother Pleasant had moved there earlier and was really the first to name the area as Huntsville, albeit informally.<sup>28</sup>

Huntsville, Texas, is best known for being the site of Texas prison executions, but it is also the home of Sam Houston, first president of the Republic of Texas, and home of Sam Houston State University.<sup>29</sup>

**Utah** – Thiokol Chemical Corporation was once one of this city's largest employers and a leading supplier of solid-propellant rockets. In the mid 1950s the company bought extensive lands in Utah near Brigham City for its rocket test range, and several people from here moved there. About 25 miles southeast of Brigham City is the village of Huntsville, and you might think there's a connection. Sorry, there's not. Huntsville, Utah, was founded in 1861, when a group of seven families settled there and named it for Captain Jefferson Hunt, one of their leaders.<sup>30</sup> Population today is about 650.<sup>31</sup>

**Vermont** – An on-line listing<sup>32</sup> says a community of Fairfax was created by grant in 1763. Within it was a place called Huntsville. On a map of 1895<sup>33</sup> it is shown as Hunt V. next to Fairfax. It turns out that it is not a town by itself but is and always has been part of the town of Fairfax. In Fairfax it is known as the Huntville (no *s*) community, and there are also a Hunt Street and a Hunt House, all named for an early Hunt family.<sup>34</sup> Fairfax is in Franklin County in the northwest corner of the state, bordering Lake Champlain.

**Washington** – In remote southeastern Columbia County on the Touchet River<sup>35</sup> is a tiny community called Huntsville. It was "named for a pioneer Hunt family."<sup>36</sup> There is no further detail. In that area is a Huntsville Cemetery, explored by the county genealogical society in 1978, but of the 22 graves, none are for someone named Hunt.<sup>37</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Road Atlas*, Rand McNally, 2005. Geographic information for all the sites that follow was taken from this source.

<sup>2</sup> <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/>

<sup>3</sup> This list is copyrighted COGenWeb 2006 at [www.rootsweb.com/~coplaces/city-h.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~coplaces/city-h.html)

<sup>4</sup> Litchfield County, CT, New Names for Old Places, at [www.betweenthelakes.com/Litchfield/newnames.htm](http://www.betweenthelakes.com/Litchfield/newnames.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Histories are excerpted from *The Combined History of Schuyler and Brown Counties, Illinois*, 1882, and the *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Schuyler County*, 1908, Dyson, Howard F., ed. Also Van Ormer, Mrs. Charles, "Huntsville, Laid Out in 1836 ...," *The Rushville Times*, October 7, 1948. All via [www.rootsweb.com/~ilschuy1](http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilschuy1)

<sup>7</sup> E-mail from John Reinhardt, *Huntsville, Illinois*, August 8, 2006

<sup>8</sup> [www.epodunk.com](http://www.epodunk.com)

<sup>9</sup> Baker, Ronald I. and Carmony, Marvin, *Indiana Place Names*, Indiana University Press, 1975

<sup>10</sup> *Kansas: a cyclopedia of state history ...*, Standard Pub. Co., Chicago, 1912

<sup>11</sup> [www.epodunk.com](http://www.epodunk.com)

<sup>12</sup> [www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/refserv/quickref/html/placenames.html](http://www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa/refserv/quickref/html/placenames.html)

<sup>13</sup> E-mail from Francis O'Neill, Reference Librarian, Maryland Historical Society, August 15, 2006, and e-mail from John Krivak, Hyattsville Branch Library, Prince Georges County, August 15, 2006

<sup>14</sup> *Minnesota Place Names*, Minnesota Historical Society, at <http://mnplaces.mnhs.org>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> *History of Randolph County, Missouri*, via <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~towlescanote/history.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Ramsay, Robert L., *Our Storehouse of Missouri Place Names*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1973

<sup>18</sup> Scully, Tammy, *Towns without zipcodes (sic), Signs to Nowhere* via [www.njiskylands.com/tnhuntsville.htm](http://www.njiskylands.com/tnhuntsville.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Powell, William S., *The North Carolina Gazetteer*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1968

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Judy Coleman, principal of Huntsville Elementary School, August 6, 2006

<sup>21</sup> *Historic Glimpses of Logan County*, Logan County Historical Society, 2003, per e-mail from Chris May at [lcdlref@oplin.org](mailto:lcdlref@oplin.org)

<sup>22</sup> <http://huntsvilleohio.com>

<sup>23</sup> Shirk, George H., *Oklahoma Place Names*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1965

<sup>24</sup> *History of Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, Part II, Biographical Sketches*, Bradsby, H.C., ed., S.B. Nelson & Co., Publishers, 1893

<sup>25</sup> [www.rootsweb.com/~riprovid/prvcts.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~riprovid/prvcts.html)

<sup>26</sup> *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*

<sup>27</sup> Estill, Harry F., "The Old Town of Huntsville," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol.3, No. 4

<sup>28</sup> Mahoney, George M., "Huntsville – Alabama and Texas," *Huntsville Historical Review*, Vol. 16-17, 1986-87

<sup>29</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huntsville, Texas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huntsville,_Texas)

<sup>30</sup> Official Web Site of Huntsville, Utah, at [www.huntsvilletown.com](http://www.huntsvilletown.com)

<sup>31</sup> [www.epodunk.com](http://www.epodunk.com)

<sup>32</sup> [www.rootsweb.com/~vtfrankl/towns.htm](http://www.rootsweb.com/~vtfrankl/towns.htm)

<sup>33</sup> [www.livgenmi.com/1895/VT/County/franklin.htm](http://www.livgenmi.com/1895/VT/County/franklin.htm)

<sup>34</sup> E-mail from Henry Raymond, vice-president Fairfax Historical Society, at <http://www.vtgrandpa.com/fhs/index.html>

<sup>35</sup> [www.nww.usace.army.mil/DPN/images/touchet-riv1.htm](http://www.nww.usace.army.mil/DPN/images/touchet-riv1.htm)

<sup>36</sup> Phillips, James W., *Washington State Place Names*

<sup>37</sup> [www.interment.net/data/us/wa/columbia/huntsville/index.htm](http://www.interment.net/data/us/wa/columbia/huntsville/index.htm)

# And Then There Was One – Demise of the C.C. Clay Bridge

ROBERT REEVES

In 1931, a new bridge was finished at Ditto's Landing, one of 15 memorial bridges built between 1929 and 1931 by the Alabama Bridge Company. The C. C. Clay Bridge cost more than \$400,000 to build, an astonishing amount of money in those Depression days. Still, it gave many needy workers jobs, albeit temporary, through the Work Projects Administration, an agency formed to help keep people employed.

The completion of the bridge, which took two years, was much anticipated by those who had to use the ferry to cross the Tennessee River to get back and forth between Madison and Morgan County. The cantilever truss bridge opened for traffic as a toll bridge on March 13 with E. E. Terry, chairman of the Madison County Board of Commissioners being among the first to cross the bridge. By the time the official dedication was held on July 23, 1931, the bridge was the third most profitable bridge in Alabama. E. D. Johnston, a local attorney, was the main speaker at the 5 p.m. event attended by thousands of people. Guests of honor were Miss Emily Clay, the great-granddaughter of Clement Clay and her mother, Mrs. J. W. Clay. John Hay conducted the Joe Bradley "Million Dollar Band" as one of the ladies christened the bridge by breaking the ceremonial bottle of champagne onto the immense structure. The marker was unveiled and the crowd cheered. Huntsville's mayor, A. W. McAllister, gave the welcoming address.

The bridge was a modern marvel. It had been over one hundred years since a man named James/John Ditto had established his ferry business in the same location. He had come from North Carolina, where he was a most unwelcome resident. Perhaps it had something to do with his role in the American Revolution. He was a Tory and was believed to have guarded over his neighbors who had sided with the rebellious American citizens. He and his neighbors barely tolerated each other, as court records indicate, and so he set off for a little peace and quiet. Ditto came to Hunt's Spring, perhaps even before John Hunt did, but settled along the Tennessee River at a point that would become known as Ditto's Landing, where he established a ferry business. Among his customers was a portion of Andrew

Jackson's army as they made their way south to fight the Indians in the Creek Indian Wars.

Mr. Ditto found trouble again when the migration into this part of the country brought others who may have known of Mr. Ditto's former allegiance to England – as court records again indicate. He stayed on however, and the community of Whitesburg grew up around the ferry landing. James White, the "Salt King" of Abingdon, Virginia, established the port community which thrived as more and more settlers poured into the region and sent their cotton on barges down the Tennessee River. Many wagons made their way from Cotton Row in downtown Huntsville down the Whitesburg Pike (present-day Whitesburg Drive) toward Ditto's Landing.

The community, which was incorporated in December 1824, began to dry up when the railroad came to Huntsville. It was easier and more economical to send cotton on the train and so the people of Whitesburg left. In 1905, the post office closed, sounding the official death knell.



**Ca. 1928 Ferry Crossing**

*Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library*



The ferry business survived however, and people still needed to get from one side to the other. More roads were being built and so, under the administration of Governor Bibb Graves, fifteen bridges would be completed and named in memory of outstanding Alabama figures. The Whitesburg bridge was named for one of Huntsville's most outstanding citizens, Clement Comer Clay.

C. C. Clay came to north Alabama at a very exciting time in the territory's history. His law office was established one block from the courthouse. He rented out one room to the post office and the upstairs to a team of surveyors. He was very intelligent, if somewhat contentious, and was chosen to chair the committee of 15 men who put the first Alabama constitution onto paper for the 44 delegates to the 1819 convention to haggle over. He of course was one of those distinguished delegates who helped usher the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Union into the greatest nation in the world.

Clement Clay was the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama, a member of the Alabama Legislature, and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He accepted the nomination for governor in 1835, and beat his opponent 2-1, making him the 8<sup>th</sup> governor. Before he completed his term in office however, he resigned to become a member of the U.S. Senate, where he served until 1841. In 1846, Mr. Clay retired from public life. His life would not end in quiet comfort however. He was arrested and questioned by members of the Union occupation in 1862 and kept under house arrest for much of the remainder of the Civil War. He died in poor health and poverty in 1866. His grave at Maple Hill Cemetery in Huntsville reflects his personal fortune with its very simple headstone.

Clement Clay's son, Clement Claiborne Clay, is perhaps even more well known than his father. As a member of the Alabama legislature, he announced that Alabama would secede from the Union. He became a member of Jefferson Davis' Confederate cabinet. At the end of the War, he turned himself into authorities when he found out there was a warrant for his arrest. He was imprisoned, along with Jefferson Davis, at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, accused of being part of a conspiracy to assassinate President Lincoln. Clay was released after one year and returned to Huntsville, in time to see his ailing father before his death.

The Clay Bridge was a fitting memorial to a prominent Alabama statesman, and so it was the contribution he made in life, and not the hardships that should be remembered. The 1,566 foot bridge was a formidable web of steel and concrete. Although there are few of us who will miss the white-

knuckle drive across the narrow two-lane bridge, we will certainly miss the nostalgia and perhaps the memory of our first journey across it. Soon after the toll bridge was completed, 4,000 ft of gravel was laid down on the dirt road that led to Lacey's Spring. That same road was later finished all the way to Arab, and later it was paved all the way through Birmingham. Highway 231 was called the "Airline Highway," known as the finest highway to Birmingham and "points South."



### **Penny Postcard**

*Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library*



### **Mid-1960s, Clay Bridge on the left**

*Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library*

After 75 years, it was time to retire the faithful bridge. A new \$21.5 million three-lane bridge which took over four years to build, opened to traffic in June 2006. The Clay Bridge would have to be removed in order to build yet another bridge, to begin construction in 2007 to carry northbound traffic over the river. The Department Of Transportation had hoped that a preservation group would take the Clay Bridge, but where would one put an enormous historic bridge? And how would one get it there?

And so in the summer of 2006, the explosives experts began work to demolish the grand old bridge. Thousands of people came to see the demise of the landmark in stages. It will take several weeks to bring down the bridge, one section at a time, until all that is left are white-knuckle memories and pictures.

Of the 15 original WPA bridges, only one survives – the B. B. Comer Bridge in Scottsboro. But time is running out for the Comer Bridge as well, it too is scheduled for demolition.

## ENDNOTES

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# The Memoirs of Laura Wharton Plummer and Mary Jane Wharton Bruckner

NANCY ROHR

## Introduction

*Memories: do they hang in the air about a place long after the players have left? If so, they linger about neighborhoods of Huntsville with a special awareness, recalled by the written word – the memoirs of two sisters. These women in their later years, urged by their families, wrote down their experiences and recollections about the War Between the States. The Wharton girls were born and raised in Madison County, Alabama. They remained here through the duration, never becoming refugees during the War. Their stories offer an additional sense of the times – the stress, hardships, fears, danger, and a few sweet recollections of family, friends, and Huntsville.*

The first memoir, written by Laura Wharton Plummer, set a scene of a cottage at the edge of Huntsville on the road to Athens, in front of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad. (Today this would be generally where the Interstate highway, Holmes Avenue and Pulaski Pike meet.) In their home at the start of the War were Laura, age about 25; her husband, Rev. James R. Plummer, a Methodist minister, age 38; her stepdaughter, Lou, nine, and their child, Dora, about three years old.

Farther away, up Pulaski Pike, about five miles north of town, Laura's sister, Mary Jane Wharton Bruckner and her family lived near her father, Dr. George Wharton. Considering that Mary Jane's husband, John T. Bruckner, was away in the War, and he subsequently died, this would become an advantage for her. At least Mrs. Bruckner would have some male protection in these difficult times. Mary Jane in 1861 was about 27, and at home with her were her young children George, Eugene, and Herbert, ages six, four, and two. Next door were Mary Jane and Laura's parents, Dr. George and Eliza Wharton and their daughters still at home, Bettie, 22; Ellen, 19; Susan, 17; Blossie, 13; and Dr. Wharton's uncle Dr. Dabney Wharton, age about 79. (This property is about where Winchester Road meets Pulaski Pike.)



## SEWING MACHINES!

-OF-

Several Different Varieties,

MAY ALWAYS BE FOUND

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## BRUCKNER'S DEPOT,

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## Foreign and Domestic Dry Goods,

**NORTH SIDE OF PUBLIC SQUARE,**

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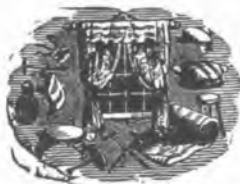
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALER IN ALL KINDS OF

### MATTRESSES, BEDDING,

Feather and Spring Beds,

Pillows, Bolsters, Comforts, Blankets, Sheets, and  
Slips, always kept on hand, or made at the  
shortest notice.

Opposite the New Hotel.



Huntsville Directory City Guide and Business Mirror 1859-1860

Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Library

These two accounts, written about 50 years after the events, are primarily about life during Civil War. Theirs is not the soldier's account of battles, but the woman's perspective of life on the home front. Furthermore both sisters chose also to call to mind Reconstruction and the Ku Klux Klan. However one of the disadvantages of recollections in later years is the error of memory that slips in and becomes real. There was no intention to mislead. These inaccuracies will be mentioned in the endnotes, and an appendix will give additional family information.

Thanks to Lynn Williams of Auburn University, who first called attention to Laura Plummer's memoirs; this resulted in locating the second work. Diana Stankus, great-great granddaughter of Reverend Plummer, kindly shared her extensive genealogical research. And, continued thanks to Brian Hogan and Morris Penny who carefully noted where memories misled and sight faded the accuracy of the Wharton sisters.

Edgar Lee Masters suggested, "We stand about this place – we, the memories." And still they do. First Laura's memoirs, followed by those of her sister, Mary Jane.

Memoirs of  
Laura Wharton Plummer  
*A Brief Sketch of My Life*

During the Civil War

Written Exclusively for and Dedicated to

Her Children and Grandchildren

**Chapter I.**

At this distant date, when the bugle call to arms and the tramp of soldiers have for many years died away, when we rest so peacefully and so protectedly in our beautiful homes, I seat myself, at the urgent request of

my children and grandchildren, to write out for them my experiences during the Civil War.

As I stand by the ashes of blighted hopes and look back through the mists and the sunshine of fifty years, memories come crowding over me so thick and so fast that I am overwhelmed, and scarcely know where to begin. It all seems like some grand drama enacted before me, and I sit and wonder how we, who had all these years been so free from care, so nurtured in the lap of luxury, ever stood the mental and the physical strain of those five years of war and disaster.<sup>1</sup> Nothing but the true patriotism inherited from our Revolutionary heroic grandfather and the hope of final victory ever kept us going, and willing to suffer and, if need be, die for our homes and native health that our brave soldiers were fighting for.

We were living in our pretty little cottage home in the suburbs of Huntsville, Ala., which rivaled any town in the South for the beauty of its homes and the wealth and native refinement of its citizens. This was our first home, having been married but a few years. Here the honeysuckle twined and hedges and flower-beds rival each other in adding grace and beauty to the spot. Oh, the pride and delight we bestowed upon it! I'd catch myself singing all the day long strains from the dear old song then so popular:

*"Oh! Give me a cot in the valley I love,  
A tent in the greenwood, a home in the grove.  
I care not how humble, for happy 'twill be  
f one faithful heart will but share it with me."*

Life was so full of sweetness, so lavish of love as we gathered around our cheerful hearthstone that we could not realize that war, with all its attendant horrors, was so close upon us. We saw our brave brothers and boys respond to the first call to arms, vainly dreaming it would be but a short while before they would return crowned with victory and wreathed with honors.

For two years we hugged this delusion to our hearts. The many glowing air-castles we builded would one by one fade in the distance, yet still holding a promise of a beautiful realization in the near future."<sup>2</sup>

It was wonderful to see our women, who had never a care, trudge into town and bring back arms and carriages full of soldiers' clothes to be made up. I shall never forget the dozens and dozens of pants and shirts and coats I made with my own fingers, and the piles and piles of socks I'd knit at



night for them. A new experience for me, but I had a model Southern mother who had all through our childhood and later life required us to learn to sew and knit, often saying the prophetic words; “You never know what you are coming to in this life.”

She little dreamed that “the coming to” was so close, and that the knowledge was so soon to be brought into service. And just here let me give that sainted mother all praise for her wonderful ability in managing her household and rearing her children. But back to my story. The call for lint and bandages. It was amazing the number of linen sheets and tablecloths that were cut into bandages and scraped into lint.<sup>iii</sup>

The first time a large body of soldiers came into Huntsville was a hot day in mid-summer. We heard the tramp, tramp of feet, and looking, we saw our Confederate soldiers. The street was full of them, as far as we could see. They halted in front of our home and a messenger asked if General Breckinridge’s army could get water. Mr. Plummer replied: “Yes, every drop in the well.” Three or four men came in, some to pump and others to fill buckets along the line in front of our house. They would drink, fill their canteens and move on, until the entire division had been supplied with as cold, pure freestone water as was ever drunk. Meantime, how delighted I was to gather every flower and fern and pin them on the soldiers’ coats.<sup>iv</sup>

The band would intersperse with beautiful music, and as the last one disappeared on their way South the sweet strains of “My Old Kentucky Home” was wafted back. I well remember General Breckinridge as he galloped back and forth on his splendid gray horse and waving his hat to us as he moved on – every inch a soldier and gallant gentleman. Those were busy days; the stores were empty, as their supply was cut off.



**General John C. Breckinridge, CSA**

It was a marvel, the ingenuity we possessed in remodeling and combining old dresses into a new one. The hat question was quite amusing. No more hats for men or women! Here our thrift was again called upon. I guess some of you will laugh when I tell you I went out to my father's farm, gathered the long, ripe rye straw, bleached it, plaited it and made hats for Mr. Plummer and myself. The children could still wear the dainty little sunbonnets. I must say our hats were quite as pretty as the rough straw hats I see to-day. You can scarcely realize how dependent we were on little comforts that are so bountiful in our every-day life, such as matches, salt, coffee, tea, etc. One match had to light a whole house, by carrying a lighted candle or taper from room to room. For coffee we paid \$10 a pound, in State Bank of Tennessee money – many times that amount in Confederate money. This was used only a few grains at a time to parch with potatoes or dandelion root or rye, hoping it would give some flavor to them. We made tea of raspberry leaves, but salt was a necessity hard to supply. My father had the floor of his smokehouse dug up, where the meat had dripped for years as it was smoked, put this soil in large boilers of water, poured off the muddy water, and after repeating this process several times the last water was boiled, the salt depositing on the bottom. Oh, how glad we were to get a little bag of it, and how thankful! If you have never eaten unsalted food you can hardly appreciate our joy in the possession of this precious bag of salt.<sup>v</sup>



We were sadly in need of clothes; the old ones could be held together no longer. Mr. Plummer must have some warm underwear, but the question of where it was to come from was the enigma to be unraveled. Not a shirt or yard of goods was to be bought! I at last fell upon a plan. When Dora was a baby a friend had sent her a very large, fine sheepskin, on which she

sat and played away many baby hours. I cut the wool off of this sheepskin, mother had it spun for me, and I determined to knit him some undershirts of it, but where to find knitting needles long enough was the stumbling block, which Mr. Plummer solved by making of cedar wood and polishing them. My task was soon done, and a perfect success they proved. Mr. Plummer often said they were the most pleasant shirts he ever wore. I sometimes thought he was so lavish of his compliments as a reward for my work. Then he must have a new coat. His *best coat* had to be his *only one* so long that it was gone, too. I remember that he had a long black cloth circular cloak, such as gentlemen used to wear, lined with plaid flannel. So I took it to his tailor, had the coat and lining cut and undertook the making myself. A Herculean task it proved! After many times putting in and taking out, I brought forth a real nice, pretty coat. I had to go to a tailor only once for instructions, and that was sewing in the sleeves. I felt very proud of my success and was duly complimented on my work. So you see, children, there is usually a way cut of everything if we try hard enough to find it.

My shoes also were about to say good-bye. I went to a shoe man, bought a last and some soles, and I guess I looked the shoemaker sure enough when I made the tops of cloth and with a leather strap over my foot and knee sewed them on the soles. Yet another feather in my cap!

## Chapter II.

One day in April 1862, the news reached us that the Yankees were approaching. The citizens called a meeting, which resulted in about fifty men going to meet them to try to make terms with them for the protection of the people. They returned at nightfall, not having seen a trace of the enemy, and we were content, thinking it was what we so often called grape-vine news, and many a hearty laugh in after days did we have over their folly, showing very forcefully how little they knew of war or large armies.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of April the great battle of Shiloh was fought. Our army suffered great loss. The wounded and dying were suffering for attention. A telegram came asking all physicians to come at once to their relief. My father, among many others, responded to the call and left well-equipped with surgical instruments, lint, bandages and such medicine as he could get. Two days later, just at the dawn of day, we were aroused by a rapid knocking at our door, and there stood father, saying: "The Yankees are all around you." We looked out and beheld the large commons, not far off, all

white with tents, but over them, in grace and beauty, floated our own Confederate flag. General Mitchell's army had made a forced march in the night and was all spread out before us, flying our flag as deception. He had seized the telegraph lines and telegraphed to Shiloh to send every available man to Virginia via Huntsville, signing the name of one of our Confederate generals. So a long line of about eighteen or twenty cars filled inside and on the top with Confederate soldiers were rolled right into his quarters and sent at once as prisoners to the North. <sup>vi</sup>



**General Ormsby Mitchel, U.S.A.**

The railroad ran just back of our garden, as the last of the long train stopped there father [had gotten] off, and coming through our garden was unobserved. Father had the knapsack of his nephew, who was killed at Shiloh, on his back, which he readily took off. This was a new trouble to dispose of. We knew they would burn the house if it was found and both father and Mr. Plummer taken as prisoners. Mr. Plummer's quick resourcefulness soon found he could lift the ceiling of a large linen press and throw it into the attic.

By this time all was the wildest confusion, soldiers on horses and soldiers on foot were everywhere – galloping, shouting, halting, swearing, cursing and pounding on doors and rushing into the houses searching for Confederate soldiers who might have escaped. They rushed into our house, demanding any Confederate soldier there, threw open every door and closet and wardrobe, took our breakfast from the table and eagerly devoured it. *And oh, such horrible language!* We, who have been so gently reared, had

never heard such language, and I was almost petrified with fright. I dare say I would hardly have been able to give a coherent answer to anything if tested. I was speechless and scarcely dared to breathe.

Very soon a Confederate soldier who had made his escape from the train came in a back door and begged us to hide him. He opened my wardrobe and got behind the hanging clothes, not many minutes before two Yankees came in demanding Confederate soldiers. I promptly threw open this wardrobe door, saying: "Search the house, if you wish; you see there is no soldier here." My promptness to open the door put them off their guard. They looked everywhere else and left. Mr. Plummer said to the fellow in the wardrobe: "Come out, put on this suit of old clothes and I'll hide your uniform and I'll enter into a written agreement to hire you at a dollar a day to work my garden until some plan can be formulated for your escape." The man was very grateful, was soon in citizens' clothes and hoeing in the garden for dear life, but the poor fellow was so nervous and frightened when he came into dinner that a Yankee opened the door and asked who he was. Mr. Plummer very promptly said: "A man I hired to work my garden." During the day he kept close watch where the picket stands were and just at nightfall he bundled up his uniform and made his escape. We afterward heard from him in the army in Virginia.

I can hardly depict the depravity of these Yankee soldiers. Think how you'd feel to have them walk into your room and lift the cover off your bed, throw it over their shoulders and walk off with a triumphant laugh! Yet to these things we had to submit. I once said to them: "Why do you bring this war on defenseless women and children? Go to the field and meet our brave boys there and leave us alone – that would be manly." But soon found the least said the best. We were helpless, and had to submit.

I don't remember ever to have seen Mr. Plummer more indignant than one day returning from church in a down pour of rain a soldier on horseback rode up on either side of him and lifted his umbrella up from him, tore it into shreds and threw it back to him. The humiliation was bad enough, but there were no more umbrellas to be had, and no money to buy one if there had been.

But I must go back a little. I find I have omitted an important part of my story. The afternoon of the capture of Huntsville, about 4 o'clock, two soldiers came with an order from General Mitchell to arrest Mr. Plummer. He was carried to headquarters, where he found other prominent citizens and ministers also arrested.<sup>vi</sup> Mr. Plummer begged that they send him home

with a special guard, that I was there alone except with two little children, but General Mitchell would hear to nothing of the kind. He used every argument and promised be back in the morning, all to no avail. Then it occurred to him to give the Masonic sign, and without a word General Mitchell ordered that he be sent home with a guard.<sup>viii</sup> I can never tell you how relieved I was just at dark to see him coming in. I was so frightened as to be almost beside myself. That poor guard suffered that night.<sup>ix</sup> He had been on a forced march the night before and had to use many devices to keep awake, leaping jumping, throwing buckets of water over himself, etc. The next morning he gave me the minnieball that guarded my husband that night, which was in time lost. Things in a measure grew more quiet and we were beginning to adapt ourselves to the new order of things.

One afternoon Mr. Plummer went to see a sick neighbor. After he had gone, another neighbor sent for me to please come at once, as her baby had croup. I left Lou, my little step-daughter, and my little 4-year-old Dora with Betty, my trusty girl. I found the baby very ill, so it was quite late in the afternoon when Mr. Plummer and I both returned and found both children in the swing in the front yard. They said Bettie had told them to stay there until she called them. Bettie was nowhere to be found. Immediately it dawned upon us that she had gone to the Yankees. I was provoked beyond measure, and began to look to see what she had taken. 'Twere far easier to tell what she had left. All could be summed up in two words, "Almost nothing." She had spread a Marseilles counterpane on the floor, emptied every dresser drawer and wardrobe into it, tied it up and gone off the back way. Some of the neighbors saw her go, but thought I was sending my washing out to be done.

Every dress – winter and summer – among them three silk dresses, heavy winter dresses, besides other simpler dresses, my hat, winter cloak and shawl, every piece of my underwear, stockings and shoes, counterpanes, sheets, pillow slips, towels, table line, etc., and, indeed, I had not a vestige of clothing left except what I had on. She could not use men's or children's clothing, so Mr. Plummer and the children escaped. All of this, when not a yard of goods could be bought for love or money.

The next day was Sunday. As usual, the carriage from home called to take me to church.<sup>x</sup> It was a little more than my pent-up feelings could stand. I met them, crying like a child. When I told them my tale of woe, Davy, the carriage driver, who was Bettie's father, denounced her in bitterest terms and was almost as upset as the rest of us were. The sisters from

home shared their scanty wardrobe with me, so as to make at least a change for me.

Mr. Plummer got some hanks for thread from the Belle factory near Huntsville.<sup>21</sup> I had them dyed with ground ivy a pretty gray, which was woven with a pin check of black. A neighbor gave me some scraps of black alpaca which bound the ruffles and trimmed the dress, and you would be surprised to have seen what a pretty dress I made of it. A Negro, some months afterward, from the country told me she had some of my handsome linen underwear, embroidered and with Valencia lace (the real, we did not have imitation then), that she had bought from Bettie for a pair of old shoes; that the Yankees who were taking her off, were attacked by the bushwhackers and they dropped her; she let the bundle fall into the river, and was glad to get shoes for her feet for the clothes. Most of them she gave to the Negroes about her for something to eat. You may imagine what a desecration it seemed, that that great black Negro should be wearing my handsome wedding clothes.



**Bell Factory**

*Courtesy of the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library*

Before many months Mr. Plummer heard of a man who would go up into some of the towns in Tennessee and bring back in his saddlebags anything he could. Mr. Plummer got him to bring back two calico dresses for me, for which he gave in Bank of Tennessee money \$77, the cheapest, meanest calico I ever saw; but they did look so pretty to me, I needed them so badly.

Forrest's Cavalry began to worry the Yankee army very badly, and bushwhackers were busy picking off all straggling soldiers, and many a one never returned to his place. This provoked the provost marshal into assuming an order that all mills be shut down, both flour and corn; all roads leading out of town be heavily guarded; that nobody from the country be allowed to come into town or *visa versa*, and not an ounce of anything be sold to the citizens. Determined to starve the people into submission.<sup>xiii</sup> Our stock of edibles was soon exhausted. We were reduced to just enough [corn] meal for two meals when a soldier came in and demanded corn for his horse. Our beautiful carriage and horses having been taken long before, Mr. Plummer told him we had only enough [corn] meal for two meals, and a bushel of corn which we expected to parch and live on after that; this he could not give him for his horse. The soldier said: "I mean to have that corn, so up and get it for me." Mr. Plummer whispered to me to put his pistol in his hand behind him while he kept the man at the back getting a drink of water. This I did, and I trembled with fear as I saw them move toward the stable. I was greatly relieved when he returned, but what a strange look on his face; what could it mean? He was pallid and trembling, and said: "I never in my life made up my mind to kill a man before, but if that man had taken that corn, I never meant he should come out of that stable. I was determined to kill him and bury him in the stable until I could get rid of him some way." First he tried to persuade the man to leave, as he knew the government had corn in abundance for the army. This failed; then he put the pathetic side to him, when the man, much to his relief, said: "Well mister, you talk so clever like I believe I'll leave you your corn," and he left. The next day when our last meal had been eaten our deal old trusty Davy came in from father's (they would let a Negro pass through the pickets, but not a white man) and said: "Marse George and Miss Liza sent me to see if you had anything to eat." With a choking voice I said: "Nothing but some parched corn." The Negro was greatly distressed; he had driven us all to school, from little children up to womanhood, and as he used to often boast, he had educated us.





**General Nathan Bedford Forrest, CSA**

The next night at dark Davy tapped at my window and said: “Me and John have a wagon-load of tan bark outside, and under it we have brought you something to eat.” You may well imagine the wagon was backed into the stable and unloaded. Our storeroom was soon replenished with two large hams, some shoulders and side meat, lard, flour and meal, and we most devoutly thanked both our heavenly and earthly father for it.

Shortly after this Mr. Plummer was taken ill with typhoid fever. He grew worse rapidly, and father and Dr. Newman both pronounced it a desperate case.<sup>xiii</sup> So troubles multiplied; but on, the rest grew small beside this great one staring me in the face. I almost staggered as I thought of the possible end. I went off to myself and, kneeling with my Bible before me, prayed that I might open it at some text that would reassure and comfort me, and I opened and read this text: “The prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up.” (James 5:15) I hugged this promise to my heart and claimed it as if said to me personally. He was exceedingly nervous, and we found it hard to keep him in bed when a regiment of cavalry, camped just beyond, would pass twice a day taking their horses to the big spring to water. Seeing someone was sick, as the bed was pulled out in the

middle of the floor to get all the breeze if there should be any, the weather being intensely hot, thinking to annoy us all they could by whooping and carousing and making every possible noise. Finally one day they halted and an officer came in. I met him at the door. He introduced himself as the colonel of the cavalry, and said: "I see someone is sick here, and I want to know if my men have worried you or made a noise as they passed like the noise I heard this afternoon." I told him yes, twice a day. He saw the tears well up in my eyes, and said: "I am a Frenchman, madam. I do not at all approve of the way you people are being treated. Take my word for it, if I ever hear of such conduct again the offender shall be punished, and I'll give orders that the horses are to walk past this house and not a word be spoken." I thanked him as well as I could, and from that day the most orderly troops imaginable passed the house.

Two days later we were staring Death in the face. The doctors had pronounced Mr. Plummer hopelessly ill, and in a lucid moment he had called each of us around his bed, bade us good-bye, and with his hands covering our heads was commending us to our Heavenly Father's care. Just at this crisis Jim, the negro nurse, whispered to me, saying: "There are two soldiers with their guns pointed at this bed, and they told me to tell you that if you did not bring out a Confederate soldier in three minutes they would let loose all four barrels of their guns on that bed." Father started out. They cursed him as an old baldhead and drove him back. Father secured Mr. Plummer's pistol, but I went out to them and said: "Gentleman, there is no Confederate soldier here. My husband is dying; won't you please let him bid us good-bye in peace?" Just then Jim came out behind me and said: "Maybe they think I'm a Confederate." He was a mulatto. I led him up to them and asked if this was the man they wanted. They grabbed him by the collar and dragged him off, I pleading with them to be kind to him. The next day I bought Jim back with a glass of brandy, which we had been giving Mr. Plummer, a little every two hours. Then I was duly alarmed, for if any citizen was caught giving liquor to the soldiers their house was to be burned; but no disaster followed.

But back to my husband. Three doctors said he could not live until midnight, and as the order had been given to shoot down any citizen found on the street after dark, father had every preparation made to have him shrouded. He dropped into a deep sleep, two hours passed and the time for his medicine came, but he could not be aroused. Two more hours

passed and still the deep sleep continued; time for the third dose came and still he could not be aroused. From pure exhaustion, consequent upon six weeks of extreme anxiety and nursing, I had dropped to sleep. My mother called me, saying: "Laura, if you want to see Mr. Plummer alive, come now; he is almost gone." I repeated to myself and claimed the Bible promise, and said: "No, mother, he will hear me; he will not die." I put my arms around him, kissed him and said: "Oh, Mr. Plummer, won't you open your eyes and speak to me?" At once he opened his eyes with a look of intelligence in them and said: "Oh, Laura, I have had the sweetest vision. Let me tell you." (as near as I can remember, these were his very words), "I was walking beside a dark river, the Savior had hold of my hands; it was the River of Death; we started across, met obstacles, came back, walked a little further down the stream, started across again, the water was so cold, met obstructions again and returned. We walked further down the stream; here we came to a general fording place; hundreds had crossed and were on the other shore, and hundreds were still crossing. We started over; the water was so cold and now was above my waist. We stopped, the Savior looked at me and said: 'Are you afraid?' 'No, not so long as you hold my hand.' Then the brightest smile overspread His face and He said: 'Not yet,' and led me back to the shore. Just here you awaked me."

He lived twenty years after this, to spend his life in devotion and work for this same Blessed Savior. I write this, dear children, because I want you know how close your father lived to the Savior. "Go and do likewise."

I was greatly shocked one day, on looking out, to see my little 4-year-old Dora in the arms of a great, rough soldier, he kissing and caressing her lavishly. I called to her to come to me at once. The soldier, with tears in his eyes, brought her to me, saying: "Madam, don't be alarmed for your little girl. I called her to me. I left a sweet little flaxen-haired girl behind me, away off North. I saw your little girl playing with her shaggy dogs, so like my own, I could not resist the temptation of pressing her to my bosom." I had seen so little of tenderness in the Yankee soldiers and so much of roughness, that my fears were naturally aroused. Dora promised to bring that soldier some potatoes the next day, so at the appointed hour she was at the gate with her little basket of potatoes. He gladly took the potatoes and left a dime and a cake of soap in the basket. This soldier

came after supper one night and asked the privilege of rocking Dora to sleep, which he did and put her in her little bed as tenderly as a mother could. The passage of Scripture came to me. "And a little child shall lead them,"<sup>xiv</sup> and I was led to believe there was a tender spot in every heart which would call forth affection and good impulses if the right one stroked the chords.

We were on contested grounds, being a border State, or near one. We would often go to bed in the hands of one army and awake to find another had possession of us.<sup>xv</sup>

One night about 10 o'clock we heard loud orders to "Halt! Halt!" with the hurried tramp of horses and men all around us, with the never-failing accompaniment of profanity, and the incessant explosion of guns. Our house had its rain of bullets, and the boom of cannon told us a heavy skirmish was going on. There was a large double chimney in the house; we wrapped ourselves in blankets and quilts and crouched behind this chimney as the safest place in the house, fearing every moment the house would be broken into or set on fire. When morning came we found Forrest had dashed in and seized a lot of government stores and made his escape. These attacks always exasperated the Yankees and they vented their spite on the citizens; but we were willing to bear it, if it brought relief to our soldiers.<sup>xvi</sup> Words availed nothing, so we were left with our only weapon – silence.

Late, after midnight, one night I heard a faint whisper at our door. I had learned to sleep and listen at the same time. I woke Mr. Plummer and told him someone was whispering at the door. He asked who it was, and the answer came: "A friend, open the door." But we had learned not to trust everybody who professed to be a friend. Mr. Plummer said: "Give your name." "D.C. Kelly," came in reply.<sup>xvii</sup> He was one of our best friends a major in Forrest's Cavalry. We there sat in the middle of the room, on the floor, in utter darkness, and talked for half an hour and then he wended his way in the darkness to where his family were. How it touched our hearts to be near our own soldiers and hear them talk.

Newspapers were rare, especially those from beyond the Yankee lines, and occasionally when one was smuggled in it was passed from hand to hand until it almost dropped to pieces. About this time our little Katie came.<sup>xviii</sup> What a stormy advent in a country where no man's life was safe. Her little innocent face was as calm as a mid-summer's day; war and disaster could not hurt her.

### CHAPTER III.

The president of the Huntsville Female College gave offense some way and was sent to some Northern prison.<sup>xix</sup> The trustees at once besought Mr. Plummer to fill the vacancy. In a few days he was duly elected, and we were settled in the college. It was with many a heartache I left my dear little cottage home. Now our troubles, anxieties and responsibilities were increased manifold. With a family of seventy-five girls, besides teachers and servants, we had our hands full, and more than full. Mrs. Wilson, the former president's wife, still took charge of the dining-room and kitchen, while I took charge of the girls, etc. It was a heavy care, and told on my health. I grew thinner, and paler, and weaker, until I was fast in bed. We had a few resident physicians, and they had so much to do I could get no medical attention. They advised Mr. Plummer to call in the post doctor. He gave but little encouragement; it seemed the long strain had been too much for me and nature was about to succumb. My father was not allowed to come to see me. I determined to make one last effort. I had them prop me up with pillows and someone to hold my arm while I wrote to General Logan, then in charge of the forces there. I told him I did not think I could live but a short time, indeed his own doctors had told me so, and as a dying woman I begged that he send me a pass for my father to come to see me. That my father was a loyal, true Southern man, and would not take the oath of allegiance to the United States (no man was allowed to come into town without taking this oath), but would he not, in mercy to one so near the grave, allow him to come in to see me? General Logan's reply to my note was very touching, sending me the pass with the promise to renew it as often as needed. It was but a matter of a few hours before my father's carriage, with him in it and every possible comfort in the way of pillows and blankets, was at the front, and when the night closed in I was in my dear old childhood home, where with the best of care both baby and I were nursed back to health again. I have ever a tender feeling for General Logan, and thought how the fates of men and women change, as I, years afterward, stood by his monument in Chicago.<sup>xx</sup>



### **Huntsville Female College**

*Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library*



### **General John A. Logan, U.S.A.**

Returning health and strength soon called me back to the many duties awaiting me, and no light charge was it to care for so many girls under the circumstances. They were cut off from their homes, seldom if ever hearing from their friends, and my ingenuity was often taxed to quiet their fears

and cheer their homesickness or to infuse a spark of hope in them when it was so dim in my own heart. We moved on pretty well for a time and were beginning to feel settled and in a way secure, when we learned that Forrest had surrounded the town, driven in the pickets and demanded a surrender of the fort and army. All citizens were again ordered inside their doors. Just here a real laughable thing occurred: it did not seem so laughable at that time as thereafter. My nurse, a woman of middle age, came running into my room from the campus, with the baby in her arms, scared almost to death, threw the baby like a bundle on the bed, saying: "Here, Miss Plummer, here's your chile: I got to go for my life to the fort; Marse Forrest gwinter catch us all and kill us." We could see town, a few hours were given to let all who wished to leave the town go out. The streets were crowded with people, in wagons and on foot, carrying armfuls of clothes and bedclothes, provisions and cooking utensils, making for the country. It seemed but folly for us to undertake it – with so large a family, it would have been impossible to have taken care of them, so we decided to await developments.<sup>xxi</sup>

There were buckets of turpentine, with long faggots, put at every street corner, with two men to guard it, with orders that if Forrest did attempt to take the town to set fire to every building. Shade trees were cut down at every corner to blockade the streets; everything was in readiness. We had gone into the basement of the house, everyone with her quilt or blanket and pillow, ready to run when the orders were given. About noon the first fire from the fort came, which was answered by Forrest, and all that day and night we could hear the peculiar whiz and whistle of the shells as they passed over our heads, we being in the direct line from the fort. If I live many years yet, I'll never forget the sound of those shells, peculiarly their own. The horrors of that day and night would be hard to tell. We did not know what a moment would bring forth. Forrest demanded a surrender, or at daylight he would take the town by storming it. But you may imagine our surprise and delight when, at 6 o'clock the next morning, all was as serene and calm as a mid-summer's day. Forrest and his men had crossed the Tennessee River with a long train of supplies he had captured, and this feint of a fight was to run in the pickets and cover the wagon train until it was across the river.<sup>xxii</sup>

Just as we were going in to dinner one day a Union man, Rev. John Edmondson, called to tell me he had just heard of the death of my brother-in-law, Mr. Bruckner, killed in the battle before Atlanta, Ga. He was *aide-de-camp* on Colonel Coltart's staff, and his colonel being killed, he took

charge of the regiment and was killed with a Minnie ball in the head. The shock was terrible. I loved Brother John as a brother indeed, and in truth, a truer or noble man could not be found. Mr. Plummer and I went out at once to bear the sad tidings to my sister, at my father's home, in the country. We found her anxiously watching at the bedside of her baby, who afterward died. How it fell like a thunderbolt on her! She almost collapsed. Death, under the most favorable circumstances, is always a shock; but oh, my, how terrible under existing circumstances this was! Our hearts were all torn and bleeding, yet we knew her suffering was far beyond ours, and we felt so helpless to soothe and comfort her.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Conflicts and trials seemed unending, when the order came for us to vacate the college at once for a hospital. This was a puzzling question, how and what to do. Mr. Plummer succeeded in getting General Rosecrans, in charge at that time, to send the girls through the lines to their Southern homes. They were wild with delight, and we bade them good-bye and God-speed with mingled feelings of regret and rejoicing, too. We felt it better for them.<sup>xxiv</sup> The question now came, what were we to do? Our church had been used by the army as a hospital, and was burned to the ground through carelessness; our home was rented, and we felt nonplussed, indeed.<sup>xxv</sup> Mrs. Willis Harris, a friend, invited us to come to her house until we could find a place, where we were soon enjoying her home for a short period. Mr. Plummer lost no time in his search for a house. Dr. Slaughter and family were refugeeing South, and his agent was glad to offer his house to us. We gathered our effects together and moved there. There was no cooking stove in the kitchen and but little furniture in the house. Knowing there was no hope of getting a cooking stove, we collected here and there an oven, some pots, and old-fashioned crane and andirons, teakettle and skillet and had to go back to the old-time days of cooking in an open fireplace. A new order of things to me. We had some provisions left at the college, which gave us a start.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Mr. Plummer opened a little private school in one room of the house. I say little, because there were very few families who could send their children to school. The Episcopalians had built a handsome new church just before the war; their old one was unoccupied, and they tendered this to the Methodists, and Mr. Plummer was unanimously persuaded to preach for them. Everybody at that time was in a great financial strait. No money to hire a sexton, to buy coal, etc, and, of course no salary for a minister, except the pennies taken up in the Sunday morning collection, which was



always less than \$1, and often not more than 25 cents. But he thought he'd hold the church together, if possible. Fortunately, the church was near us. Mr. Plummer would make the fires and my cook and I cleaned the church.<sup>xxvii</sup>

One Sunday, just as the services were about to open, we heard the familiar tramp of soldiers and the dropping of guns on the pavement; then in walked a hundred soldiers. We knew they had some purpose in view, but Mr. Plummer carried on the service as if nothing unusual had occurred, preaching a deeply spiritual sermon and praying for all soldiers in arms and for peace to overspread the land, and that war might be swept from our borders. They waited very respectfully until the congregation had dispersed, then the officer in charge said: "We came here to-day to arrest you, but your sermon, and your prayers for peace and your deep piety have touched us and we have changed our minds." The collection that day was \$10. What a wealth it did seem! The verse from the Bible came to me: "Soft words turneth away wrath."<sup>xxviii</sup>

Some soldiers were shot by the bushwhackers and again they decided to starve us. We provided against this. Mr. Plummer had bought a lot of dried herring and just a joke they proved. We could not get rid of them, so we gave them to the negroes. The oft-repeated question came up, how are we to make a living? Times grew steadily harder. This time we settled it by taking Yankee officers to board, thinking they would be a protection as well as give us an income. We let them have two rooms in the house and others came to day-board; then, again, this entitled us to buy from their stores, which was a great relief. We had an understanding that we would treat them as gentlemen, but they must extend to us the same courtesy, and that the great issues of the day would be forbidden topic. They proved to be very pleasant men, and no disagreeable conflict ever occurred. They were devoted to the children and made great pets of them.

Two old maids lived alone next door. One cold night, about 2 o'clock, we were aroused by these two ladies' screams, begging Mr. Plummer to come over there quickly. As soon as possible, he jumped over the yard fence and found a soldier had bursted open their door and was lying on floor bleeding to death. Mr. Plummer ran across the street to the hospital and brought a surgeon, but the poor fellow was in a hopeless condition. He and the street guard had gotten into a fight and he was fatally stabbed. Mr. Plummer told him his time was short, and if he wished to send any messages to his family he would send them for him. He gave their names and addresses, and asked Mr. Plummer to take a picture out of his inner vest

pocket. He pressed it to his lips – it was a picture of his wife and child – and said: “Tell them I die with their picture to my lips.” Mr. Plummer then prayed for him, and he died just as the prayer ended. Mr. Plummer took his watch and picture and sent them to his wife and received a very grateful letter from her.<sup>xxxix</sup>

I find my story growing too long, so I must necessarily omit many things. The seat of war had moved further South, and we were left with a regular garrison, which made our lives less hazardous and more quiet. A wealthy man, Mr. Calhoun, owned the entire block across the street from us. His house and grounds were very handsome. He spent his summers in Paris and his winters in Huntsville. The war caught him abroad and he stayed there. This property was taken for a hospital. There were paintings that cost thousands of dollars, and the most expensive of Italian statuary. These the soldiers sent home to their friends as trophies of the war.<sup>xxx</sup>

I can't resist the pleasure of telling you a little incident that occurred to a cousin of mine. Cousin Martha Spotswood. She was a woman who thought everybody was as honest as she herself was. An army follower, or peddler, called at their homestead and wanted to sell her some nutmegs. Oh, how delighted she was! She had seen no spices or extracts for years, and was eager to get them. He grated a little in her hand to let her see how fine they were. “Oh, it was so good; give me a dozen!” She paid him hard-earned money and a big price, too for them. The man wrapped them up and was quickly gone. She at once tried one and found they were all wood. As long as she lived the joke followed her, and her abuse of the Yankees followed the joke.<sup>xxxi</sup>

The news of Lincoln's death came like a thunder-clap. Orders were issued that every house should put crape on their front door-knob. Some did, but many did not. One man had a great big Negro doll made and hung it by one foot to his door-knob, for which he was promptly put behind the bars.<sup>xxxii</sup>

If two or more people were seen talking on the street, or a smile or laugh was heard, a soldier was there to forbid it. But must hurry on. The war was over. Our brilliant hopes lay like withered leaves at our feet; our hearts were bleeding and sore; unbidden tears would fall, and we would sit and wonder what the end would be. Was it possible, all of these years of privation and suffering were for naught? These questions would come and come, but no answer followed. Everything seemed so uncertain. We knew great and momentous things or changes were just before us, and still we'd ask ourselves the question, what will the end be?

## CHAPTER IV.

Duties stern and urgent called us on. We found no time to ponder and muse; so, with broken spirits and blasted fortunes, we drove ourselves to the task of living again. The sight of our soldier boys coming back brought gladness to our hearts, and we welcomed them as heroes, for heroes they truly were, braver and better and dearer in their tattered garments and almost shoeless feet than their opponents. Overpowered and whipped, but not conquered!

The reconstruction days were upon us and I am almost constrained to say, the hardest of all to bear. The Negroes laid down their work and were demanding the forty acres of land and a mule the government was to give them. Unhappy, discontented and suspicious, they would listen to no reason, expecting great things, as they had been promised by the Yankee soldiers – receiving nothing, they became rebellious; at sea with neither rudder nor anchor, they sought where and on whom to vent their spleen, refusing to work, yet demanding a support. Their threats were many and far-reaching, coming depredations and threatening to rise, kill the white people and take possession of their homes and lands.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

But I leave you to learn all about these days of terror from your history, and be sure you get a history written by a Southern man who knew whereof he wrote.

Back once again to my little story. Of course, we had to give up Dr. Slaughter's house, our beautiful little cottage home was burned, the old well all that was left to mark the spot, the five and one-half acres of ground, for which we gave \$4,500, was sold for \$200 years after. The last mail that left Huntsville for the South, before the capture by General Mitchell carried the deed to a farm in Florida for Confederate money. We hoped for years it, too, had been captured, but no such good luck.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Father would have us come to his home while Mr. Plummer went out and looked for work. Soon bankruptcy was on every hand. Mr. Plummer had the rest of his means in money loaned to four wealthy men and secured beyond fear, as he thought. But he was paid up in bankrupt notices – not a cent left, except \$800 father had saved for him. With this we had to begin life anew. He was in time elected president of the Soule Female College, at Murfreesboro, Tenn. The building had been used as a hospital, and, oh, the scraping of walls, the disinfecting, papering and painting that had to be done. But we were finally moved in and school opened. Everybody was

glad of a chance to send their children. Five years without schools told fearfully on their education, and we had many grown girls at school.

I am telling you all of this, children, to tell you of the Ku-Klux Klan.<sup>xxxv</sup> The negroes had become so insubordinate that some means had to be taken to check them, in order to live with them at all. Being a superstitious race, it was found best to work on the superstitions, hence this organization sprang up. Nobody knows where, or who they were. One night we heard that several hundred of them would pass about 10 o'clock in front of the college. We had every light out, the curtains drawn and the girls all seated at the windows; not a word to be spoken – absolute stillness. At the appointed time they came, and I could hardly wonder that they struck terror to the Negroes. They were the most weird, ghastly objects I ever saw. Their horses were all robed in white, that came almost to the ground; their ears were standing about two feet high, and they had great flaring red eyes. The riders wore long black robes extending to the horses' knees. They wore black masks, from which hung long white beards. On their heads were hats three feet high, with holes all over them, through which the light from the lamps inside shone. They carried long swords and longer wands, all white, and some carried grotesque banners and weird lanterns. Not a sound was heard, except the regular sound of the horses' hoofs on the pike. But they brought quiet and security to the people as nothing else had done, and we hailed them with delight and honored them as our rescuers.

Many amusing things occurred with them. If they heard of any misdemeanor they'd visit that home that night and punish the offender, or scare him almost to death.

Now children, big and little, old and young children, my little story is finished. Are you very tired? I hope not, for I don't want you to remember me as a tiresome old woman. It was a pleasure for me to write these facts for you, that you may know just what we people in the South passed through, and to tell you that you have nothing but pride in recalling the lives of your ancestors – *a true, loyal, patriotic people, willing to suffer and die for home and native land.*

*Laura Wharton Plummer*

Christmas, 1910

Seventy-five Years Old

## Mrs. Mary Bruckner's War Experience, Etc.

My father, Dr. George R. Wharton, came of an old English family of the nobility who came over with William and Mary and all who bear the name are proud of it. He was born in Virginia but raised near Nashville, Tenn. And came out to Huntsville, Ala. When quite a young man, where he was associated with his uncle, Dr. Dabney M. Wharton, in practice of medicine. He was a successful physician whom everybody loved and honored.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

My maternal Grandfather, Capt. Richard Harris, died at my father's house, 1853, in his 94<sup>th</sup> year. He had fought through the Revolutionary War and was standing in a few feet of Gen. Washington when Lord Cornwallace's [Cornwallis] sword was delivered. This was done by a member of his staff, Cornwallace himself being sick and was received by an officer of corresponding rank.

I have often heard him say that as the armies were drawn up facing each other, there was probably never so marked a contrast in the appearance of any two bodies of men as in those assembled there.

The British had just drawn new uniforms and were dazzling in their crimson broadcloth coats, while the Americans were ragged and dirty and many of them barefooted. The feeling of exultation was so high that one American boy jumped upon a stump waving his hat cried, "The day is ours." Instantly he was shot down, another one repeated the act with the same result, and I think the third but am not sure. Had they restrained their enthusiasm a few moments longer the arms of the enemy would have been laid down and nothing to mar their joy.

The last few years of his life were saddened by the war clouds on the political horizon, causing ominous forebodings for the safety of the Union so dearly achieved, fearing lest all their hardships and sacrifices had been in vain. We of the present day have but a faint conception of their troubles. My Grandfather's mother was a widow, but sent all her sons, six in number, to the small pox camp to be inoculated for small pox (vaccination not having been discovered) before entering the army.<sup>xxxvii</sup> No wonder he loved the Union, and that we were all more or less imbued with the feeling. Indeed the South was generally in the beginning for the Union. Well do I remember hearing a speech from Hon. Jere Clemens, Alabama's most gifted son, in which he said, "Tomorrows sun in his long journey will shine upon no land so fair, so heaven blessed as our own South-land, and shall we with

suicidal hand apply the torch that will lay waste so fair a heritage? Heaven forbid?" I mention these facts to show that the better class of people and the larger proportion of the southerners were not for secession in the beginning of the war.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

But after the John Brown episode and Harpers Ferry raid,<sup>xxxix</sup> we found that our slaves (whom the Yankees had sold us because they could not work them profitably in their cold climate) were being incited to insurrection and murder, the tide of public opinion veered like a mighty avalanche sweeping everything before it; leaving but a few Union men in the south and they were regarded with suspicion.

It was at that time that my father said to my mother, "Eliza if your father were living now he would say "let the Union go."

This brings me to our immediate family. I married Mr. J.T. Bruckner and when he entered the Confederate Army, I and my three little boys went to my father's house to stay until the close of the war. Ours was a happy home. Father, Mother, and six daughters. The house was a large old fashioned brick building with many airy rooms situated on an elevation with a declivity in front and on either side, at the foot of which a cave spring that was 30 ft. below the surface and was welled with stone. The steps also leading down to the water were of stone. After a heavy rain the water arose to the top and flowed out in a bold stream through the large grove of forest trees in front of the house. This grove had a white fence around it with a gate at either end. Imagine the mountain as a background and you have an idea of the ancestral home. It was here most of us were born and we love it. I might tell you of many privations we went through when the war came on, and the many expedients resorted to in hiding valuables, but you have read of similar stories elsewhere. Our servants were faithful as a whole, many of them remaining until the end of the war and afterwards, but still there was a lurking distrust all the while, for freedom is sweet and had it been attempted in a different spirit it would have been all right.

Never shall I forget the first cannon we heard when Gen. Mitchel's army corps entered Huntsville. At last we were in the midst of it. I believe it was that very morning that several scouts came up the hill and demanded breakfast. Several of us left the table as they strode into the dining room with pistols and clanking swords. From this time on it was almost a daily experience for them to take off cattle and provisions of some sort.

Once they were about to take off the entire pen of fattening hogs, when my father told them if they did the negroes would suffer and that saved

them. At one time they sent 30 large army wagons into the field and carried them off filled with corn. The next day this was repeated and when an officer came to the house to give vouchers for it to be collected when the war was over at greatly reduced rates amounting to almost nothing I felt exasperated and said to him, "I wish with your Yankee ingenuity you could construct a Rail Road from Earth to Heaven and put us women and children on it instead of coming here to starve us because you are too cowardly to meet our army in the field."

"If we did Madam you would have to go with a Yankee conductor and you would not like that."

I replied, "I would consider the matter." So he got the better of me. Fortunately that was a very prolific year for crops and we managed to stand it, but the strain was sore. Our heavenly Father knows how to fit the burden to the back.

Just here let me say that my Mother's beautiful Christian character shone out making her the presiding genius of the household, as she considered and provided for everybody's comfort. It was a source of much sorrow to me that we were cut off from our army, it being very seldom that my letters from my husband could reach me. The Tennessee River, ten miles away, was the dividing line between the two forces and twice I went to it with clothing for him, which as it was necessary to pass through the picket-lines, had to conceal under the convenient large hoop skirts of those days. At one time I carried a full suit of uniform of gray jeans, made from wool grown on the place and spun by the Negro women. Both times they reached him as I learned after his death. Once a letter to me from him was picked up on the river bank and carried to my brother-in-law's house, Mr. Plummer, evidently having been thrown down by a Confederate soldier, as he hurried across the river to escape capture.

This letter was in answer to one telling of the death of my baby and was written on the battle field as they were awaiting an attack at Missionary Ridge.

One night on returning from visiting a patient, my father found the front grove filled with sutlers' wagons for the army corps in town. He went to their office and insisted upon his moving inside their lines, saying they had doubtless been watched by Bushwhackers as they passed through the barrens, a section of poor land with stunted growth, and while he was as ignorant as they of their movements, he greatly feared some of their horses would be stolen through the night. This they refused to do. Sure enough

that very thing happened, and as a reprisal they came out and carried off pretty much every thing they wanted as he had foreseen. When our fine carriage horses went, we all cried. We had kept them hidden on the mountain, as they were young of fine breed and thoroughly broken by a professional. Not long after this a party of men perhaps a dozen rode up to the gate and called father out and asked if he had any horses. Father told him there were two condemned horses in town, some of the family having gone in, in the school cab, besides he had an old mule which one of the neighbors had borrowed. They ordered a squad of men to go over to the neighbors with him to get the mule, at the same time telling them to take father on the hill and kill him. They also allowed just 15 minutes for us to get out of the house what we could, before it was burned. He stayed so long that we went to him fearing trouble. He took me aside and told me to dig up the gold buried in the basement and take care of it. My sister Blossie said, "Father I will go with you." Of course there was the wildest confusion in the house, although we did not know of the order to kill him. Martha, the house girl, blew the horn called the negroes from the field and in a short time they had a wagon loaded with flour, lard, sugar, meat, coffee, etc. While the women came in to help tie up wearing apparel, beds & bedding, in sheets to be thrown from the windows when they where they picked up and carried out of danger of the flames.

When they reached the gate with father and Blossie leading to the road, a merciful Providence came to our relief. Capt. Williams who was in charge of the raid on the place a few days before rode up saying, "Doctor, you seem to be trouble." Yes," said my father, "This man has ordered my house burned and me killed." Capt. Williams said, "I am a superior officer and countermand the order." Then turning to the man told him to move on that he knew he had no such orders. After he left Capt. Williams said, "Do you know that man? He was raised in your own county and is the meanest man in the army, his name is Ben Harris and you certainly would have been killed had not I met you."<sup>xl</sup>

It was not long after they left when we smelled burning feathers, soon found they had burned a neighbor's house and thrown the feather beds in the flames.

After the war was over one afternoon as we sat on the front porch two pedestrians came and asked shelter for the night. My father replied, "I do not keep a hotel but have never turned a man from my door at nightfall."

After supper the conversation naturally drifted to the war and father told them of the Ben Harris incident, remarking, "I am glad that man died



for I should have felt compelled to hunt him up and kill him.” The next morning only one of them came down to breakfast, he remarking that his companion had gone into town. Father had occasion to go into town that day himself and seeing the man on the street asked who he was. “Why Doctor,” was the reply, “that is the son of Ben Harris, the man who ordered your house burned and you killed.”

After my father’s death, my Mother, my Sister Ellen, my two sons and myself moved to Atlanta, Georgia. When my mother died in Nashville, 1893, Ellen who had been delicate all her life, had never married, came to live with my two sons and myself. Unto all of us she had been a blessing more than I can tell.

I pass over the death of my good noble husband as of no interest to others, only saying at the age of 30 years, when the war was over, my husband, two children and property were all gone, leaving only myself and two small children. The God of the widow and fatherless has been our stay and help in every time of need.

## Chapt. 2

Added as I had omitted many things I should have mentioned.

At last the deprivations of the Yankees became so frequent and distressing that starvation seemed staring us in the face in the near future, so it was necessary to have a safe guard which the commandant of the post kindly furnished.<sup>xh</sup>

One night about 9 o’clock the front door bell rang and upon opening the door, father was amazed to find a company of soldiers in the porch and at the gate. The Capt. told him they had been invited to an oyster supper there. Father said, “It is a mistake gentlemen. I never heard of it before, besides I could not get an oyster if my life depended on it. (We were not allowed transportation on the Rail Road), and moreover there is a very sick young lady in the house and I beg you to withdraw your men as quietly as possible.”<sup>xlii</sup>

He then remarked that the negroes had had a party the previous Saturday night and perhaps that caused the mistake. That made them still madder as they saw a practical joke had been played off on them, so they left in a rage. On reaching the picket post when asked where they had been, replied, “To see the Devil.”

“Did you see him?” “Yes.” (It occurred to them to retaliate by fooling some one else.) “At Dr. Wharton’s chained in the stable,” giving an awful description of an animal saying he had come down from the mountain. The next day they came flocking out to see the devil. Mr. Taylor, the safe guard, could not imagine what they meant, until they repeated the story told at the picket post, and he was provoked.

Finally the General sent for father and asked him to bring that animal whatever it was into town, that he believed every man in the army corps would ask to go to see it. Father who was much of a humorist replied, “There is a singular man out there, one side of whom if a line would be drawn down his forehead, is quite black and that side of his head has kinky hair.” “And what color is the other side?” “Oh, that is black too,” replied my father. He then told the story and so vanquished the devil, would his prototype could be so easily exorcised.

### Chap. 3

When the war was over and military rule was over, we were in a measure at the mercy of our former slaves, uneducated, elated at their emancipation and feeling they had the sympathy if not the approbation of the carpet-bag officers placed over us who were the temporary arbiters of what pretense of law there was were already committing acts of the lawlessness and outrage. Under such circumstances did the defeated and impoverished south drift into the reconstruction period of terror.

Remember we had no courts or administration of civil law for four years. Is it astonishing then that some expedient should have resorted to for the protection of our homes and firesides?

Hence the Ku Klux Klan.

Knowing the superstitious nature of the Negro race, it was deemed best to work upon their fears. We had seen nothing of them though. One night two neighbor boys with sheets around them and slightly disguised came over for a frolic.<sup>xliiii</sup> After spending a while in the parlor with the family they started home and as they ran down the pavement the children cried out, “Hurrah for the Ku Klux.” Immediately the negroes rushed out and fired on them as they put off at full speed down the road when the negroes from the other quarters came out thus placing them between two fires.

They then discarded horses and disguise and fled to mountains where they spent the night. Father went out and tried to quiet them, but to no

good, they told him to go back into the house, they did not wish to harm him, but no Ku Klux would ride on that hill. Not long afterwards, Father, Mother and my sister Ellen left for a visit of several days, when one day at noon a real company of Ku Klux came and told the Negro women (the men had left the field and ran to the mountain on the first intimation of their approach) that they had heard their threats and came in the day time to show them they could do so. After searching for arms they left word for the men to bring their guns to a certain place and that would be the last of it. If they did not the next time they came there would be trouble.

One woman went into the town and rushed into the court-house saying she had been wounded by the Ku Klux and was looking for a doctor, whereas not a shot had been fired and no one hurt. As soon as they came in sight this woman ran up stairs to my room and locked the door.

The Negro men refused to work until Father came home though Mr. Wilson offered to go to the field with them. When the laws were re-established the old organization sank into obscurity from which it emerged, its mission ended.

I have entered upon the task of recording these memories rather reluctantly in consideration of my 77 years and my imperfect eye-sight caused by cataract which though partially restored by an operation, leaves me very nearsighted, obstructing the free use of my arm to come within range of vision.

Mrs. Mary Wharton Bruckner  
(Sister of Laura Wharton Plummer)

## Appendix

“It is indeed a desirable thing to be well descended, but the glory belongs to our ancestors.”<sup>xliv</sup> At the risk of sounding like an essay on genealogy, it is necessary to place the players at the scene, to give information about the Wharton family. Little is known now in Madison County about them, but this was a distinguished family, truly remarkable people in remarkable times.

Laura and Mary Jane Wharton’s father, Dr. George Wharton, arrived originally in Huntsville to practice medicine with his uncle, Dabney Miller Wharton. Dr. Dabney Wharton, a druggist and physician, was born in Powhatan County, Virginia in 1780. He had married in 1809 a local girl, Virginia Anne T. Swann. The couple settled in Madison County where he operated a drug store on the Town Square in partnership with Drs. M.S. Watkins and William H. Wharton, perhaps a brother. In 1824 with a new partner, he anticipated delivery from New York of “a splendid assortment of Medicines, Paints, Surgical Instruments, etc.” Dr. Dabney M. Wharton, with other leading figures in Huntsville, helped form the Colonization Society in 1832 to assist African slaves to return to their homeland. Dr. Wharton could walk to his office on the Square from his home conveniently located at the corner of Williams and Adams Streets. Later the home of Leroy Pope Walker, first Secretary of War for the Confederacy, occupied this site. Mrs. Wharton, Virginia, died in 1843. Dr. Dabney Wharton died in Hinds County, Mississippi in 1866.<sup>xlv</sup>

His nephew, the girls’ father, Dr. George Richard Wharton, a graduate of Transylvania Medical School in Lexington, Kentucky, decided to take up practice on the frontier and came to join his uncle, Dr. Dabney Wharton. Here George married Eliza P. Harris, daughter of Capt. Richard Harris, in 1832. According to the 1850 census George and Eliza had a growing family of girls that included Mary, 16; Laura, 14; Elizabeth, 12; Ellen, 10; Cornelia, 7; Ann, 3; and Eugenia, 3/12 months. This baby died in August of 1850. The couple’s only son, George, had died in infancy in March of that same year. Living with them at this time, the start of the Civil War, also were Mrs. Wharton’s father, Richard Harris now, 91; Susan L. Thompson; and her daughter Jane, age fifteen.<sup>xlvi</sup>

One acquaintance described life in Huntsville. Sue Dromgoole Mooney, also the wife of a Methodist minister, wrote about the new friends she met. “Social life was at full tide, and many were the invitations to dine, to drive,

to take tea. . . . The homes in all the region round about were elegant and the people of the highest type – educated, cultured Christians. I recall with much pleasure the home of Dr. George R. Wharton a few miles from Huntsville. He had a number of beautiful daughters, among them Miss Laura. . . .”<sup>xlvii</sup>

Of the girls, Mary Jane, the eldest, married John T. Bruckner in 1854. John Bruckner owned the “Sewing Machine Depot” on the north side of the Square. His advertisement in the City Directory of 1859-1860 showed a modern sewing machine that every housewife might yearn for. His young family lived five miles out on the Pulaski Pike, with his father-in-law, Dr. George Wharton. Bruckner was enumerated in 1860 as being an artist. Their children were George W., age 5; Eugene, 3; and baby Herbert, 1 year old. Mary Jane had lost a son, John at 21 months of age, and George would also die in infancy, leaving her with two sons.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Laura Wharton married Rev. James Plummer. James Ranson Plummer, Jr. had been born in Columbia, Tennessee on April 24, 1822 and attended Jackson College. He then graduated from LaGrange College (now University of North Alabama) and was licensed to be a minister in 1844. Reverend Plummer served the First Methodist Church in Lebanon, Tennessee in 1847 and 1848. He married Sarah Ann Elizabeth Ford of Athens, Alabama early in 1851, and their daughter Martha Louetta Plummer was born December 9, 1851. He next served as pastor of the First Methodist Church in Huntsville from 1851-1853 where he had responsibility for First Methodist and the colored missions in Huntsville. His small family moved to Quincy, Florida where unfortunately his wife died on October 7, 1855 leaving him a widower with a young daughter. Remaining in Florida Reverend Plummer served as presiding elder of the Tallahassee District for the next two years.<sup>xlix</sup>

However he returned north to the Tennessee Conference and met the second Wharton daughter, Laura. They married on January 21, 1857. Their daughter Dora Dee Plummer was born March 8, 1858, and the family settled on the Athens Road just west of the city limits. By 1860 with them were his daughter, Mattie, sometimes called Lou, age 8, and their baby Dora, age two. Previously out of harm’s way, in April of 1862 the Civil War began in earnest in Huntsville, Alabama as the Yankees came to town.<sup>1</sup>

Reverend Plummer’s work in Huntsville was extensive. For instance he was the Presiding Elder; a member of the Committee for the Female College; he continued his efforts with the colored missions in 1862; pastor of the First Methodist Church during the tumultuous years 1863-1864. Much of this service was while Yankees occupied Huntsville as a garrison town.<sup>1</sup>

As the Plummer family continued to grow with the birth of their daughter, Katherine Merle, in November of that year, Reverend Plummer also assumed duties as President of the Huntsville Female College. Mrs. Plummer described with painful memories this very difficult time for Huntsville, the College, her personal health and that of this newest baby. These were trying times for everyone.

After the Civil War there was little keeping the Plummer family in Huntsville. Reverend Plummer needed to make a living, and Methodist ministers are accustomed to moving. His next appointment was to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and at the same time he served as President of the Methodist school, Soule Female College. The College proved a daunting prospect for the couple. All that remained was the actual building of the school, which had been used as a military hospital and was now in a state of disrepair. The Reverend and Laura plastered, painted, papered the interior, and scrubbed to remove signs of war. With used and borrowed furniture, carpet, bedding, desks and seats, the school reopened. Former students returned and new ones enrolled, as families were eager to regain some semblance of normalcy, and 130 pupils attended the first session. While in Murfreesboro, the next daughter, Eliza Wharton Plummer was born in 1866.<sup>14</sup>

Another girl, Clara, was born to the family in 1870. Reverend Plummer now assumed pastoral duties in Lebanon during 1871-1872. And still another daughter, Laura Bruckner, was born in Franklin, Tennessee in 1872. Reverend Plummer served his church in Gallatin and a daughter, Elizabeth (Bessie) Harvey Plummer, was added to the family. They settled next in Clarksville where he became President of Clarksville Female Academy from 1877-1880.

In 1878 Clarksville Female Academy, Rev. James R. Plummer, President, published a catalogue designed to attract girls and young ladies to their "Family and Day School." (Laura Wharton Plummer was included with the faculty as matron, and the brochure acknowledged that hers was a difficult department yet "where she is known this is a sufficient guarantee of its efficient and successful management.") One's reputation went before one in those days.

The trustees wanted the public to note they were associated with the latest technology, "*We are in telegraphic communication with the world.*" Moreover parents needed to know "extravagance in dress is discouraged, and parents are earnestly requested to help us in this matter. Let your daughter

be required to leave her jewelry, fine silks, and satins at home.... We have adopted a plain, but very neat uniform....” Moreover pupils would never be unaccompanied; teachers were required to attend boarding pupils in their walks, shopping and public worship. Parents could also peruse the list of current day and boarding pupils. The last pages of the brochure were testimonials about the school and particularly about Reverend Plummer, “who is in every respect well qualified for the delicate and responsible trust committed to him.” One might assume our Laura Plummer was equally well qualified for her duties.<sup>liii</sup>

Here also in December of 1878, as Mrs. Mooney wrote sadly in her memoirs about the Plummer family, “Little Bessie’s feet grew tired... and one day in Clarksville at The Academy the angels came for her. It was the first shadow on their tent, and we sadly missed the bright little face from the door where she often stood ‘looking for father.’ I doubt not it was so as she looked from the highly heights.” Bessie was three years old.<sup>liv</sup>

Two of the girls, Lou and Dora, in these years graduated from the Clarksville Academy. After that the family lived in Nashville, where Reverend Plummer became the first manager for the newly opened Wesley Hall of Vanderbilt University in 1881-1882. Reverend Plummer died in 1885 in Nashville and his funeral was held at McKendree Church.

Laura Plummer, writer of this first account, died May 19, 1924 in Jackson, Tennessee, where she most likely lived with her daughter, Dora, now married to James Emory Jackson. Laura’s older sister, Mary Jane Bruckner died September 25, 1922 and is buried at Maple Hill Cemetery in Huntsville.

Mary Jane Wharton Bruckner and Laura Wharton Plummer’s grandfather, Richard Harris, certainly added a luster to their family heritage. He was a son of Benjamin and Ann (Epps) Harris of Southam Parrish, Cumberland County, Virginia. Captain Harris was, according to his tombstone, a “Soldier of the Revolution & of the Cross.” He had joined the Revolutionary Army at the age of 17 and was an eyewitness to the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Little York. (Mrs. Bruckner filled out those moments of oral history in her part of the story.) After the war, Harris united himself with the Methodist Church, and then – by marriage – with Judith W. Sims, daughter of Benjamin Sims of Cumberland County. They came to Madison County in 1809 to settle near Blue Spring.<sup>lv</sup>

The Harris children, the Wharton girls’ aunts and uncles included: William Harris, married Millicent Garson, as a widow she later married

John R.B. Eldridge, a widower; Richard Benjamin Harris, married Ann H. Clopton and moved to Jackson County; Francis Epps Harris, named for his uncle, also moved to Jackson County and married three times; Barbara L. Munroe; Mary Ann, married Isaac Washington Sullivan, a physician and a Methodist minister. Deeply concerned with their salvation, Sullivan preached to the Indians through an interpreter. At his death, the good Reverend was buried near Gurley.<sup>lvi</sup>

The obituary notice of Capt. Richard Harris offered, “We do not say he was without fault, but we do say that few men have lived as long as he did with as few censurers and with as few enemies. He closed his earthly warfare as he closed the Revolutionary War, in triumph and glory.” Among other bills against his estate at the time of his death was an item for “one and a half dozen gilt knee buttons,” one for a “metallic case” for the undertaker of \$61.25, a bill from the printer for “funeral tickets,” and one for “tombstones for Richard Harris and wife.” The inscription, “In memory of Captain Richard Harris, Soldier of the Revolution and of the Cross, born Nov. 20, 1758, died Jan. 2, 1853.” For his wife, “In memory of Judith W., wife of Richard Harris, born Mar. 24, 1775, died Nov. 18, 1837.” Maintaining the old ways, even in the backwoods of frontier Madison County, Harris must have been quite a sight. “It is said that Richard Harris never adopted the ‘new style’ of long trousers, but wore his breeches and knee buckles until his death.”<sup>lvii</sup>

\* \* \*

These sisters, Laura Wharton Plummer and Mary Jane Wharton Bruckner, were ladies of their times, raised to be dependent and waited upon. The upheaval of the Civil War forced them into unaccustomed roles as they faced the harsh realities of a different life. Although they did not run the plantation, nurse wounded soldiers, act as spies, or flee south, they stayed with family and home. Through severe shortages and fear of disease, starvation, and the violence that threatened their town and their very lives, these women survived. That they were able to succeed perhaps reflects how well their upbringing had served them after all. Their feelings about the strength of forbearers, church, family, and one’s duty demonstrate the role of women through these years, unrecognized heroes, all of them.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Actually, although the tension and anxiety lasted longer, the Civil War lasted only four years.

<sup>ii</sup> Here, Mrs. Plummer acknowledged the illusion, held onto for two years into the War. So far fighting had missed northern Alabama, but after one year as the Yankees came closer, the future looked grim.

<sup>iii</sup> A wound was packed with lint before the bandage was applied.

<sup>iv</sup> John C. Breckinridge formerly had served as Buchanan's vice president. He had run for president against Lincoln and then was a U.S. Senator. Now a brigadier general, he served under A.S. Johnston, CSA.

Mrs. Plummer speaks dramatically of the heat of summer, but Breckinridge had been in Huntsville in retreat from Murfreesboro on his way to Corinth in a cold and rainy season of late February or early March of 1862. (Thank you, Brian Hogan.) Although flowers would have been sparse in that season for the lapels of the soldiers, the men and their horses always needed water.

<sup>v</sup> The Southern saying "Use it up, wear it out; make do or do without" may well have originated during these times. President Davis urged Southern women to use their skills and produce homespun while manufactured fabrics were being allocated for the uniforms and blankets of soldiers. These women really did "make-do." Fabrics were recycled. Coffee and tea could often be made with local natural plants, but the loss of salt to flavor and preserve the meat was the most devastating shortage. Smokehouse floors were scraped and eventually women were urged to save their urine to be made into salt. Shortages of food occurred in town and countryside alike.

<sup>vi</sup> On the morning of April 11, 1862, Huntsville awoke to find their village of 4000 surrounded by 8000 Yankee soldiers, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, Army of the Ohio under the command of Gen. Ormsby M. Mitchel. There are no other accounts to suggest General Mitchel sent a telegraph signed by a Confed-

erate general to confound the enemy. General Mitchel had no need to trick the citizens, and no other version mentioned Yankees flying the Confederate flag. About 200 Rebels were also captured at the depot, not 18 or 20 railroad cars full, and they were not sent north immediately. (For other accounts of the occupation of town, see Nancy M. Rohr, *Incidents of the War: The Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick*.)

<sup>vii</sup> Several times those in command of the Federal forces arrested leading civilians hoping to lessen the action of bushwhackers in the countryside.

<sup>viii</sup> Reverend Plummer may have told his wife this story, but it really seems unlikely that stern General Mitchel would have released anyone he really wanted to retain.

<sup>ix</sup> Apparently the Plummer household was assigned a Federal guard to protect them from marauders.

<sup>x</sup> Laura Plummer could have walked to church, but her family's carriage came for her. Perhaps her parents were coming into town to attend church anyway, but a woman of her background would not have cared to be seen walking to church.

<sup>xi</sup> Bell Factory, located about 10 miles northeast of town on the Flint River, was one of the largest and earliest textile mills in Alabama.

<sup>xii</sup> The Yankees generally felt these acts of suppression would force the locals into submission, and as a result the bushwhacker attacks would be stopped. As it was, no meal could be ground at any mill, and citizens could not travel in or out of town without taking the oath to the United States. Giving one's pledge was a serious matter of honor in the South, and this action was deeply resented.

<sup>xiii</sup> Dr. Francis H. Newman (1801-1863) who had arrived in Huntsville in 1828 to practice medicine, assisted Dr. Wharton. Newman married a local girl, Mary Powers, and they raised 11 children. Dr. Newman led a group of businessmen who had just supplied the public square, and private homes, with gaslights. His obituary noted he was "as a physician, tender, sympathizing, and devoted to his patients." (Jewell S. Goldsmith and Helen D.

Fulton, *Medicine Bags and Bumpy Roads* (Huntsville: Valley Publishing, 1985, 117-119.)

<sup>xiv</sup> Isaiah 11:1 “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.”

<sup>xv</sup> The first Federal occupation lasted from April of 1862 until August of that year. Confederate troops returned, but during the summer of 1863 the Yankees were amassed as close as Brownsboro and to the dismay of citizens the soldiers made forays into town for supplies and to impress slaves. Huntsville was taken again in November of 1863 and became a garrison town until the end of the War and through Reconstruction.

<sup>xvi</sup> General Nathan B. Forrest was a dashing hero to the South. He and his men received credit for any raiding parties as citizens also waited for him to chase the Yankees away. It is unlikely Forrest captured any government stores on either of the two occasions he was known to be in Huntsville. The more memorable time for local citizens was in May of 1863. The citizens of Huntsville presented General Forrest with an elegant bay hose of the best Virginia stock, after he delivered north Alabama from further invasion of the Yankees by pursuing and tricking General Streight.

<sup>xvii</sup> David C. Kelly was more than a friend. The former minister of the First Methodist Church had first commanded a local cavalry company, Kelley’s Rangers, and was now a Lt. Colonel under Gen. Forrest.

<sup>xviii</sup> Katherine Merle Plummer, born November 12, 1864, joined her sister, Dora, now six, and half-sister, Lou, who was thirteen.

<sup>xix</sup> Dr. John G. Wilson had assumed the president’s role of the Huntsville Female College when Reverend Alexander Erwin died in 1860. Wilson, his wife, Martha, a teaching staff of ten, and one housekeeper watched over to as many as 200 day and boarding students. Perhaps Reverend Wilson was becoming used to being arrested. According to Mary Jane Chadick, he had been arrested in April of 1862 for not giving information to the Federal authorities, and had been jailed again in May of that year with other leaders of the town. He and Reverend Lay had been put in solitary

confinement on this occasion. Like the other ministers in town who spoke their minds, they were jailed or sent out of the Federal lines at the whim of the commanding officer or because of their own pulpit politics. But now in late 1864, Mrs. Wilson and the College, though with many fewer students, were in need of help, and the Plummers were called.

<sup>xx</sup> This gentleman that Laura recalled by his act of kindness, Gen. John A. Logan (1826-1886), helped establish a national Memorial Day in 1868 in remembrance of those lives lost to the Civil War. General Logan later was a U.S. Senator and ran for vice president with James G. Blaine in the 1884 presidential campaign. Logan's fine equestrian statue is in Grant Park on Michigan Avenue, Chicago, where Laura must have been visiting.

<sup>xxi</sup> Mary Jane Chadick recounted the adventures of many citizens of Huntsville in her journal entry for September 30, 1864. Laura Plummer confirms the angst and adds a few more details to that dreadful day and night.

<sup>xxii</sup> Although the terror was real, the attack by Forrest was not. Forrest himself left General Buford to intimidate the garrison at Huntsville, while General Forrest and his men left to raid middle Tennessee. It may have seemed like it to the inhabitants, but the cannon were not fired "all that day and night" into town.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Reverend John Edmondson remains unidentified, but Lieutenant John T. Bruckner was Acting Assistant Adjutant-General "who fell nobly doing his duty." (*Official Records*, Vol. XXXVII/3, p. 775.) Bruckner was Adjutant under John G. Coltart with the 26/50<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Alabama Infantry. These men had fought at Shiloh, Murfreesboro, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, the retreat from Dalton, and then at the outskirts of Atlanta. They would go on to the fearful loss at Franklin, Tennessee, and the Carolinas – without John Bruckner. It is possible, but unlikely, that Bruckner was in command of the regiment, but certainly not a brigade as she recalled. Mary Jane Chadick also reported on August 21, 1864 that Captain J. J. Ward and John Bruckner had been killed. Laura's sister had already lost baby George Wharton Bruckner in early 1861 at the age of six. (Diane Robey, Dorothy Scott Johnson, John Rison Jones, Jr. and Francis C. Roberts, *Maple Hill Cemetery, Phase One* (The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, 1995), 56.)

<sup>xxiv</sup> Mrs. Chadick wrote on Nov. 12, 1864 that the College was to be taken for a hospital. Mrs. Wilson would have to make arrangement for storage of her personal furniture with friends about town. The girls remaining at school and five or six families would have to go elsewhere.

<sup>xxv</sup> Concerned about the dangers of fire, on January 4, 1864 Reverend Plummer and other leaders of the church consulted with Federal General Stanley to ask that Yankee soldiers not be allowed to use fires in the basement of the First Methodist Church. The men had been making use of campfires to cook their food and to keep warm during the coldest winter in years. Their meeting was to no avail, the campfires continued in the basement, and just two days later, the church burned to the ground.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Dr. John Slaughter, about, 40, with his wife, Mary, and three young children had evacuated south. Their home on the southwest corner of Eustis and Lincoln Streets was now available and Laura would learn to cook at the open hearth.

<sup>xxvii</sup> With great distress, everyone worked to make ends meet. The reverend offered classes from their borrowed home and preached at the borrowed old Episcopal church building.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Laura's source is Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but over grievous words stir up anger." Many soldiers' journals mention visiting local churches on Sunday. These were young men raised-up in the churches of their childhood still missing the folks back home and the sense of place – just like the "rough soldier" who earlier came to visit the Plummer daughter, reminding him of his own child.

<sup>xxix</sup> The violence between bushwhackers and the army had escalated even into the very streets and homes within the Federal lines. Reverend Plummer, at least, was able to offer solace to the family of the slain soldier.

<sup>xxx</sup> Indeed the family of Meredith Calhoun owned the entire city block bounded by Eustis, Lincoln, Randolph, and Greene Streets. Although Mr. Calhoun was able to slip within the lines on one occasion, the Calhoun family remained in France during the years of the War. (See Nancy M.

Rohr, *An Alabama School Girl in Paris, The Letters of Mary Fenwick Lewis and Her Family.*)

<sup>xxxii</sup> The unfortunate cousin, Mary Spotswood, and her husband Edwin lived with three children probably near Madison.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Mrs. Chadick noted on April 15<sup>th</sup> that the Provost, Captain Moore, predicted Lincoln's assassination would be a worse event for the South than the War. General Granger issued orders the next day that all persons "exhalting" would be summarily punished.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> In January of 1865 Gen. William T. Sherman issued a special field order setting aside large tracts of land along Georgia's Sea Islands for black settlement – each family was allotted 40 acres and an army mule. The news spread quickly, and former bondsmen saw all this apparent abandoned land around them, too. The bad news was that President Johnson in late 1865 issued special pardons to ex-Confederates, restoring their land to them. Discontent really set in now, and with few restraints in place, violence overtook Southern lands in a kind of second civil war.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The Plummers, thus, saw their Huntsville home burned and his Florida property gone with the last train out of town going south, unfortunately, for them, to reach its destination carrying the deed to his Florida property, sold by them for worthless Confederate money.

<sup>xxxv</sup> One assumes this event with the Klan occurred while the family was in Murfreesboro.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Much of the story by Mary Wharton Bruckner has already been included with the material of her sister, Laura Wharton Plummer. This reference to William and Mary is murky. However, she certainly has her grandfather, Richard Harris identified. The story about the youths shot at during the surrender of Cornwallis has not been confirmed. Recognizing that the world was out of kilter, the British band is supposed to have played, "The World Turned Upside-down."

xxxvii Small pox, or “camp distemper,” killed more of Revolutionary War soldiers than bullets did. Primitive inoculation stations were set up at the Trenton Barracks, Valley Forge, and other sites.

xxxviii In North Alabama, Jeremiah Clemens and other leaders were outspoken in their criticism of Secession. However when the choice was made, many chose their state over their nation. Jere Clemens, after supporting the South initially, moved to Philadelphia and was vocal for reunification of the two sides.

xxxix In 1859 Abolitionist John Brown and his band of 21 men captured the US Armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. US Marines, led by Robert E. Lee, attacked the group, killing 10 of the men and capturing Brown. He was later hanged for treason. Now, John Brown, a’ moldering in his grave, became an Abolitionist hero.

<sup>xi</sup> Here are perhaps the best and the worst kinds of Yankees. The champion of the Whartons’ that day may have been Capt. M.D. Williams. He was certainly aware of the villain, Ben Harris, who had become the terror of local citizens. Mrs. Chadick describes some of his misdeeds on Dec. 16, 1864. This story is Mrs. Bruckner’s longest account, and the reader must recall that the loss of Dr. Wharton would have left these six women and the babies without protection from anyone who chose to abuse them or their property.

<sup>xli</sup> This “safe guard” was a soldier posted by the Federals for protection of life and property, a common practice as lawlessness became rampant particularly throughout the countryside.

<sup>xlii</sup> The sick young lady could well have been Laura Wharton Plummer who, as we know, was convalescing at her parents’ plantation.

<sup>xliii</sup> Although the boys were in disguise with the sheets, the use of the word disguised here implies they had been drinking and were at the least tipsy.

<sup>xliv</sup> Plutarch, *Ye Training of Children*.

<sup>xlv</sup> Sarah Huff Fisk, *Civilization Comes to the Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823* (Huntsville: Pinhook Publishing Co., 1997), 70, 104; Pauline Jones Gandrud, *Marriage, Death and Legal Notices from Early Alabama Newspapers, 1819-1893* (Easley, SC, Southern Historical Press, 1981), 454.

<sup>xlvi</sup> U.S. Federal Census; Gandrud, 477; Plummer Vertical Files, Huntsville Public Library.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Sue F. Dromgoole Mooney, *My Moving Tent*, (Nashville: M.E. Church South, 1903), 76,77.

<sup>xlviii</sup> *Williams Huntsville Directory, City Guide, and Business Mirror* (Huntsville, rpt. Strode 1972), 43; Pauline Myra Jones and Kathleen Paul Jones, *Genealogy of the Harris and Allied Families* (Huntsville: np. 1983), 81.

<sup>xlix</sup> Gandrud and Jones, 575; Ruth Sykes Ford, *History of the First United Methodist Church of Huntsville, Alabama, 1808-1983* (Huntsville: First United Methodist Church, 1984), 43.

<sup>l</sup> Diana Stankus of Philadelphia, who had not known previously about the existence of these memoirs, generously shared all the extensive genealogical work about the Wharton families.

<sup>li</sup> Stankus research; Ford, 50.

<sup>lii</sup> John C. Spence, *Annals of Rutherford County* [Tennessee] Vol. II, (Murfreesboro, Rutherford County Historical Society, 1991), 106; John C. Spence, *Annals of Rutherford County* Vol. I, 189, 190.

<sup>liii</sup> *Catalogue and Announcement of Clarksville Female Academy, 1878* (Clarksville, Tenn., 1878).

<sup>liv</sup> Mooney, 77.



<sup>lv</sup> Dorothy Scott Johnson, *Cemeteries of Madison County, Alabama*, Vol. I, (Huntsville: Johnson Historical Publications, 1971), 167.

<sup>lvi</sup> Gandrud and Jones, 16, 22, 75-77.

<sup>lvii</sup> *Southern Advocate*, Feb. 9, 1853; Harris 74,75.

# 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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