

6504

The Huntsville Historical Review

Winter-Spring 2008

Volume 33

Number 1



Sarah Huff Fisk
1915 – 2006

Published by The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

**OFFICERS OF THE
HUNTSVILLE-MADISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

PRESIDENT

Bob Adams

1st Vice President (Programs).....Nancy Rohr
2nd Vice President (Membership).....Linda Wright Riley
Recording Secretary.....Sharon Lang
Corresponding Secretary.....Dorothy Prince Luke*
Treasurer.....Wayne Smith

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jack Burwell

Jim Lee*

Jeanne Hand Henry*

George A. Mahoney, Jr.*

James E. Davis Jr.

David Millam*

Joyce Smith*

Dr. John Rison Jones*

Virginia Kobler*

Dr. Clarence Toomer

* Denotes Past Presidents

Editor, *The Huntsville Historical Review*
Jacquelyn Procter Reeves

The Huntsville Historical Review

Winter-Spring 2008



Sarah Huff Fisk
1915 – 2006

Published by The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society
© 2008

Sarah Huff Fisk was a descendant of early families in Madison County and a lifelong resident of Huntsville. After her marriage in 1940 to Burke S. Fisk, she was employed by the Probate Judge of Madison County where her acquaintance with the early records of the county fostered her interest in local history. In 1942, she began to work for the Huntsville Manufacturing Company and there served as the accountant for 35 years.

Years of research into the history of Huntsville not only involved Mrs. Fisk in local preservation efforts but also became the subject matter of most of her writings and drawings. Her honors and publications include:

Honors

First Honorary Membership awarded by Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association in recognition of research contributing to the formation of Twickenham Historic Preservation District, July 12, 1965.

Certificate of Commendation awarded Huntsville Historical Society by the American Association for State and Local History for publication of *A New Map of Huntsville, Alabama, 1819*, under the guidance of Sarah Huff Fisk, organizer of material and artist, September 21, 1970.

Individual Award of Merit for 1975 from the Alabama Historical Commission for significant research and services to the State Historical Commission resulting in Alabama additions to the National Register of Historic Places.

Resolution of Appreciation from Huntsville City Council for services as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee for Constitution Hall Park, July, 1980.

Nominated by Historic Huntsville Foundation for the 1997 Virginia Hammill Simms Memorial Award for outstanding volunteer work to promote local arts, April 20, 1997.

Distinguished Member Award from Historic Huntsville Foundation for lifelong dedication to researching and publishing the social and architectural history of Huntsville, April 17, 2001.

Author

1955 *The History of Huntsville Manufacturing Company, 1900-1955*

1962 *Shadows on the Wall: The Life and Works of Howard Weeden* (with Frances Roberts)

1997 *Civilization Comes to the Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823*

1997 *Found Among the Fragments, A Story of Love and Courage*

2001 *Built Upon the Fragments, In 1880's Huntsville, Alabama*

2005 *Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as "Flake White"* (with Linda Wright Riley)

Artist and Illustrator

1957 *Alabama History for Schools*, Charles G. Summersell (maps)

1958 *A History of the First Methodist Church*, Ruth Sykes Ford

1964 *Long Ago in Madison County*, Allie Norris Kenney

1974 *The Public Square and Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823*

The Huntsville Historical Review

Volume 33

No. 1

Winter – Spring 2008

Table of Contents

President's Page.....	5
Editor's Page.....	6
Remembering Sarah Huff Fisk..... Linda Wright Riley	7
Early Huntsville: 1805-1825..... Sarah Huff Fisk	15
Mapping 1819 Huntsville in Retrospect..... Sarah Huff Fisk	21
1819 Huntsville as a Trading Center..... Sarah Huff Fisk	28
Madison County's First Courthouse..... Sarah Huff Fisk	31
The Triumph of the Note-card: The Sarah Huff Fisk System..... B. Susanna Leberman	37
Huntsville's Indian Creek Canal..... Sarah Huff Fisk	43
Howard Weeden, Artist and Poet..... Sarah Huff Fisk	55
My Memories of Elizabeth Fraser Price..... Sarah Huff Fisk	69
Merrimack Mill History..... Sarah Huff Fisk and Debra Jenkins	75

Growing Up in Huntsville.....85
 Sarah Huff Fisk

Administration.....91

An Invitation to Membership.....93



Sarah Huff Fisk (*top*, circa 1940s; *bottom*, 1996)

President's Page

The Huntsville Historical Society is pleased to devote this issue of the *Review* to Sarah Huff Fisk, a pioneering historian whose research on early Huntsville led to many significant preservation projects and publications.

In preparation for Alabama's Sesquicentennial, Mrs. Fisk served as the Chairman of the Research Committee of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, then its President, from 1964 to 1969. During this time she led an effort to document the buildings and businesses that existed on and near the Huntsville Public Square in the year 1819. Her committee's findings relevant to our state's birthplace prompted the Society to advocate the creation of a living history museum upon the site of Alabama's first Constitutional Convention. Alabama Constitution Village is today visited by thousands of school children every year.

Mrs. Fisk's legacy also includes her ground-breaking work on such topics as Maria Howard Weeden, the Indian Creek Canal and Merrimack Mill—topics of historical interest to many Huntsvillians and visitors.

We hope you find our tribute to Sarah Huff Fisk well-deserved and a joy to read.

Bob Adams
President

Editor's Notes

Years ago, I called Mrs. Fisk to ask her about her ancestor, A. A. Baker. I was preparing a story about local stonemasons and she was thrilled to answer my questions. She was gracious, congenial and generous with her information. When the story was published, she made me feel like a genius and said she wished she had thought of those very words herself.

The truth is, Mrs. Fisk could write circles around most of us, but her humility was even more spectacular than her artistry with words or charcoal pencil. Mrs. Fisk was, what we call, a real class act.

This issue of *The Huntsville Historical Review* will bring many new fans to the works of the late Sarah Huff Fisk. We are very fortunate to showcase the work of one of Mrs. Fisk's biggest supporters, Linda Wright Riley, who did an incredible job of finding just the right words to describe one of Huntsville's most outstanding historians. Through these pages, our readers will understand the magic that drew these two remarkable writers together.

Jacquelyn Procter Reeves
Editor

Remembering Sarah Huff Fisk

LINDA WRIGHT RILEY

“Beyond research there is knowing, which comes from an empathy with the past.”

—Carol Kammen, *The Pursuit of Local History*¹

When I first met Sarah Huff Fisk in 1995, I did not know that she was a founding member of the Alabama Constitution Village, or that she was the first honorary member of the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association, or that she'd written and illustrated many articles and books about early Huntsville. I knew her simply as a charming lady whose family, the O. C. Huffs, had resided long ago in the “Vaught House,” a two-story Victorian home on the northeast corner of Ward Avenue and Andrew Jackson Way (then Fifth Street). In 1995, I had moved into this house myself with my husband and daughter. Seeking to learn more about the “past life” of the house, I invited Mrs. Fisk to come to her former home to share her memories. She came with her niece, Emily Pinkerton Saile, the daughter of her late sister, Martha Lee Huff Pinkerton. Mrs. Fisk also brought an illustrated book, *In The Style of Our Childhood*, that she and her sister had written about growing up in Huntsville during the 1920s and 30s.²

As they entered, Sarah's eye's sparkled with delight, “Home!” She smiled, “I feel as though I've stepped back in time.” I asked her to lead the way as my beacon to the past.

“We moved here in 1919, when I was just 4 years old,” she began.



“We met our guests in this reception room.” She smiled and pointed to the pocket door separating the two front parlors. “Does this still work?” As we pulled the old beveled door out from its track, Sarah’s hands came together playfully. “This is where Martha Lee and I gave our first ‘Punch and Judy’ shows—just like the ones we saw at Chautauqua. We practiced on our family, then invited the whole neighborhood—and charged ten cents admission.”



When she entered the kitchen, she said, “This is where Aunt Innie filled the oil lamps—before we had electricity.”



Peering into the bathroom, she recognized the old ball and claw bathtub. “That’s the very one! What an improvement that was from washing in a zinc tub.”



As we explored the upstairs outdoor porch, Sarah identified the “best hiding places” on the adjacent gable roof, under the water oak tree. “Sister and I had the best time here.”



I marveled at the drawings in Mrs. Fisk’s book. Their warmth brought to life another time, full of the mirth and wonder of two little girls whose imaginations knew no boundaries.

Beyond her own memories, Sarah told me that we could find more history about the house and era in the Huntsville Public Library's Heritage Room. So we went together. We confirmed that the house was built in 1900 and that its first owner was Judge Charles N. Vaught, the son of "master builder" Nathan Vaught of Columbia, Tennessee. We even found a portrait of the Judge (a justice of the peace) and his handsome family, including his wife Robena, sons William and Dale, and daughter Laura. Sarah pointed to the daughter. "In 1919, my mother, Nellie Baker Huff, bought the house from Laura Vaught." Sarah showed me a copy of the deed from Nellie's own records.

Not too many days after our library visit, I received a surprise in the mail from Sarah. It was a 1921 Sanford Fire Insurance map of east Huntsville that she'd obtained from the archives of the City Planning Department.

"I consider this find a near miracle! It shows outlines of the houses existing in 1921," Sarah wrote, "so I've penciled in the names of the residents that I found in the City Directory. Now we have the 1921 neighborhood!" As a newcomer to this kind of research, I was dazzled by Mrs. Fisk's use of old maps, deeds, censuses and directories. She'd extracted and harmonized all her facts with such precision and care. "Isn't this fun?" she asked. I agreed—this was fun. I was caught up in "history" before I knew it and walking through time with someone who clearly knew the way.

Soon, Mrs. Fisk and I found another shared interest. We both enjoyed the works of Miss Howard Weeden, Huntsville's nineteenth century artist and writer. Sarah said, "You know, there's more to learn about Howard. She wrote under the pen name 'Flake White'—which is a pigment of paint." Howard Weeden had a pseudonym? This called for a new search.

We went back to the library and within a short time we became like children on a treasure hunt, looking for any mention of Howard Weeden—or "Flake White"—in the local periodicals of her day. Our frequent trips became our expeditions, with every new find a cause for joy. Mrs. Fisk took short-hand notes and I took photographs. We both kept ledgers of facts that filled notebooks. We had cast a wide net as we traveled up and down hundreds of columns in old newspapers, in pursuit of our subject. Where our finds would lead us, we weren't sure, but they would add up, we had no doubt. They even led us to libraries in other cities. For five years, we gathered and studied our material. In 2005, we finally published a compilation of over 40 articles by Howard Weeden,

written under her pen name, “Flake White.”³ These writings, we believed, would provide new insight into the early life of Howard Weeden.⁴

Mrs. Fisk had a sharp sense of perspective. As much as she loved discovering details, she never forgot the big picture. While working on our project, I especially remember two of our discoveries from the old newspapers and her reactions to them. One was a letter from a *Tribune* correspondent that was re-published in the *Huntsville Advocate* on August 3, 1869. The writer described his visit to the “beautiful city of Huntsville,” where he had toured the Huntsville Female Seminary, “one of the best institutes for the thorough education of young ladies in the South.” He wrote, “The Drawing and Painting Department has for its head, Miss Howard Weeden, a lady well known in the South as one of the most talented *artistes* and beautiful fair ones...”

“This is a new fact!” Sarah beamed. “1869! So soon after the War—and only 23 years old—Howard’s gift as an artist is recognized—and remunerated by the Huntsville Female Seminary. A wonderful find!”

Our other discovery involved Weeden’s own letter to the editor of the *Christian Observer*, a national Presbyterian family newspaper. In it, Weeden defends the apostolic ways of Sam Jones, a revivalist who had captured the attention of many Huntsvillians in February, 1885.⁵

“Sam Jones?” Mrs. Fisk stated her surprise. “My grandmother owned his book!” Mrs. Fisk took me to her house where she pulled from her shelf a thick, brown embossed volume of sermons by Samuel Porter Jones, entitled *Quit Your Meanness*.⁶ “Let’s read him,” she said, “Howard Weeden enjoyed this preacher. Let’s find out why.”

This is how Mrs. Fisk immersed herself in history. She made small discoveries then searched for their larger connection and significance. Often, what she found became compelling knowledge for others as well.

During our work together, Mrs. Fisk was frequently busy with other projects, usually at her community’s request. Would she agree to being filmed in an interview about the history of Merrimack Mill? Yes, Mrs. Fisk had written a publication about that in 1955, when she was an accountant for the Huntsville Manufacturing Company.⁷ Would she provide the historical significance of the Fletcher-Lowe House to assist the Lowe House Dependency Preservation Planning Study?⁸ Yes, Mrs. Fisk had those notes filed in her 1965 work with the Research Committee of the Huntsville Historical Society. Would she come to the Early Works Museum and demonstrate to a group of Brownie Scouts how pioneers made candles? Yes, Mrs. Fisk had participated in the groundbreaking for

this museum, and had illustrated candle-making in her school textbook, *Long Ago in Madison County*.⁹ And, she loved children.



The requests continued. Could she furnish any remembrances from the Chautauqua shows that toured her hometown? Yes, she gladly went to a Chautauqua re-enactment at East Clinton Grammar School where she demonstrated marionettes like the ones she and her sister had seen there in the 1920s. Would she represent her ancestral family, the A. A. Bakers, in the first Maple Hill Cemetery Stroll? Yes, she dressed in costume and brought photographs to show the many fine stone monuments carved by her great-great uncle Albert Baker (1828-1901). Would she support the Huntsville Historical Society's History Fair, held at downtown's Big Spring? Yes, undaunted by a cold and windy day, she displayed her books and drawings near the Indian Creek Canal (which is bordered by stone walls designed by her same forebear, Albert Baker). Would she supply her publications to Alabama Constitution Village, The Weeden House Museum, Burritt Museum, Harrison Brothers, Shaver's Books and others? Yes, while in her eighties, Mrs. Fisk wrote and published 3 new books, all based on her research of Huntsville's past.¹⁰ Would she have a conversation with Bill Easterling of the *Huntsville Times*? Yes. After their meeting, the columnist titled his article, "Diminutive Dynamo Buzzes With Creativity."¹¹ In it, he described Mrs. Fisk's "tall" talents as an historian, writer and artist.

Mrs. Fisk was as gracious as she was creative. She shared the history she gathered, and invited everyone she met to cherish it along with her. She worked on innumerable history preservation projects shoulder-to-shoulder with professionals and amateurs alike, often deferring any credit for herself. "Many good ideas," she once said, "are conceived by a number of people at about the same time."

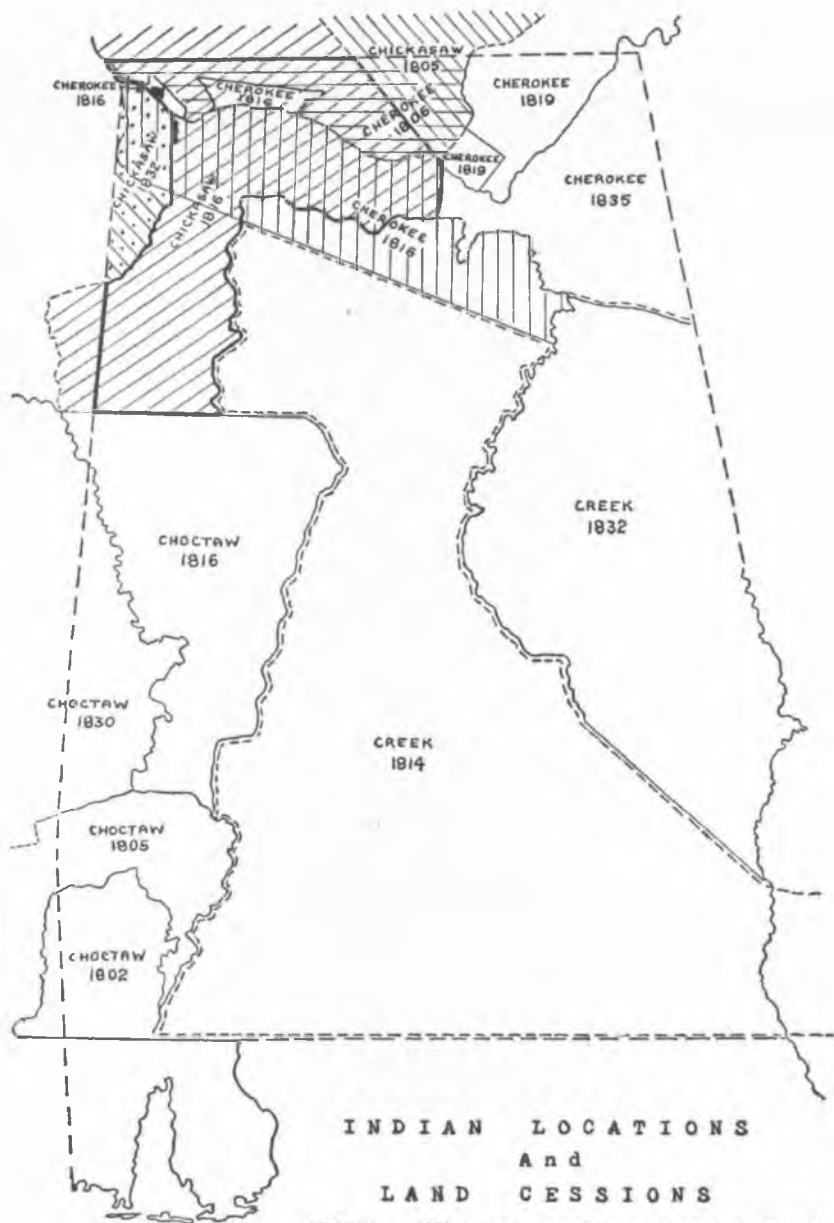
Sarah preferred to give credit to those who assisted her joyful digs through dusty library shelves and fragile documents to unearth treasures from our city's past. She spoke generously of her every comrade, and wrote thank you notes as passionately as she wrote her articles and books. Beyond her contributions to Huntsville's history, Sarah Huff Fisk leaves us an example of what it is to be a community's historian.



Sarah Huff Fisk 1915-2006

End Notes

1. Carol Kammen, *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice* (Walnut Creek: American Association for State and Local History, 1996), 237.
2. Sarah Huff Fisk and Martha Lee Huff Pinkerton, *In the Style of Our Childhood* (Huntsville: manuscript, 1986), <www.pinhookpublishingcompany.com>.
3. Sarah Huff Fisk and Linda Wright Riley, *Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as "Flake White"* (Huntsville: Big Spring Press, 2005).
4. Sara S. Frear, "Book Review: *Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as 'Flake White,'*" *The Alabama Review*, April 2007, 146-8.
5. *Christian Observer*, Feb. 18, 1885; *Huntsville Independent*, Feb. 26, 1885.
6. Sam P. Jones, *Quit Your Meanness* (Chicago: Cranston and Stowe, 1886).
7. Sarah Huff Fisk, *Huntsville Parker Historical Edition*, September 1955 (Huntsville: Huntsville Manufacturing Company, 1955).
8. Sarah Huff Fisk, "Early Days on Williams Street," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Spring/Summer 2004, 11-12; Sarah Huff Fisk and Joyce Smith, "The Williams Street Area in the Early 1800s," *Huntsville Historical Review*, January 1971, 18-33.
9. Allie Norris Kenny and Sarah Huff Fisk (illustrator), *Long Ago in Madison County* (Huntsville: Madison County Board of Education, 1964). A Bicentennial Edition to be published in 2008 by Pinhook Publishing Company <www.pinhookpublishingcompany.com>.
10. *Civilization Comes to the Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823; Found Among the Fragments, A Story of Love and Courage; Built Upon the Fragments, In 1880's Huntsville, Alabama.* <www.pinhookpublishingcompany.com>.
11. Bill Easterling, "Diminutive Dynamo Buzzes With Creativity," *Huntsville Times*, July 1, 2000.



INDIAN LOCATIONS
And
LAND CESSIONS

ACCORDING TO 18TH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY

Drawing by Sarah Huff Fisk
Alabama History for Schools
 Charles Grayson Summersell
 Colonial Press: Birmingham, AL
 1957, p 162.

Early Huntsville: 1805-1825

SARAH HUFF FISK

This article is the text of a talk made by Sarah Huff Fisk to the American Association of University Women on May 10, 1968 at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The talk preceded their tour of antebellum homes in the Twickenham Historic District.

Before 1805, the rich lands in the Great Bend of the Tennessee River were claimed by the two Indian tribes, the Chickasaws and Cherokees. The Chickasaw land claims reached to the westward and into Mississippi; the Cherokees claimed to the eastward.

Ownership of the land where Madison County now is became a point of rivalry to the two tribes and this very rivalry was the opening wedge by which agents of the federal government were finally able to force the Indians to relinquish their rights to a triangular area in the Great Bend. These Indian cessions came in 1805 and 1807 and represented the first land relinquished by these two great civilized Indian tribes within the area that is now Alabama.

In 1804, even before the first Indian cession, two white men had explored the northeast section of what was to become Madison County. Isaac and Joseph Criner explored, liked what they saw, and stayed. They built a cabin on the Mountain Fork of Flint River and planted a crop.

The Criners were soon followed by a man, who though already past his middle years, had never conquered his urge to explore and settle new lands. John Hunt had helped to settle Tazewell, Tennessee and possibly other Tennessee towns, but he continued to move on toward new frontiers. His was certainly a wise and experienced eye, when he selected his new home in the land that was to become Madison County. His cabin site was near a majestic spring that flowed from beneath a great bluff—and this spring was soon to be known as Hunt's Spring.

Though the Criners and Hunt were probably the first to come, they were closely followed by many others. When the Indians gave up the land, it was as if the doors were thrown open to the people in the hilly country of eastern and central Tennessee and western Georgia. These people had already heard of the rich lands in the Great Bend of the Tennessee and were ready and waiting for their chance. They came across the border as frontiersmen, having no title to the land, but hopefully and bravely bringing their families. They chose a homesite, built a cabin, a barn, perhaps, and began to clear fields that they hoped one day to be able to buy. These first settlers were hardy pioneers who

understood the trials and promise of settlement in a new land. They expected to work and to help each other. Many of the men had fought in the American Revolution and in expeditions against the Indians. These pioneers were not wealthy men; they were freedom-loving, hard-working, experienced in frontier life and within three years, they had cleared hundreds of acres of land and established seven villages about the area.

In 1808, 300 of these squatters' families applied to the federal government to buy their homesteads, as soon as the sale of lands was opened. (There was no homestead act at this time to guarantee the right to buy lands they had cleared and lived on for a specified length of time.)

On December 13, 1808, Madison County was created as a part of the Mississippi Territory. By August, 1809, the lands in the county had been surveyed and on the seventh day of that month a Public Land Office was opened in Nashville to handle the sale of Madison County lands. Settlers in the county who hoped to buy had to make the long trip by horseback to Nashville and wait until their section came up for sale. Then they had to compete by bid for its purchase. Sales were made to the highest bidder and many of the settlers who had cleared lands were unable to buy their homesteads.

Long before the land sale began, word of the richness of Madison County lands had reached into the older states of the Union, where there were planters with capital, who were looking for new rich lands, and other men, with large sums of money to invest, who were looking for land to buy on a speculative basis. These planters and speculators were able to buy the best land.

By 1809, quite a settlement had grown up around Hunt's Spring. Being almost in the center of the county, it seemed the logical place for the county seat, so bidding for the quarter section on which the spring was located, went very high. It was secured by LeRoy Pope, a wealthy planter of Petersburg, Georgia, and his associates of Nashville, Tennessee, who paid \$23.50 an acre for 160 acres. This investment paid off, for Hunt's Spring was chosen as the county seat. At the suggestion of LeRoy Pope, the name of the town was changed to Twickenham, after the English home of Alexander Pope.

The original plan of Twickenham consisted of twenty square blocks, with four half-acre lots to the block. This area was bounded by Holmes Street on the north, Lincoln on the east, Williams on the south, and Henry Street (now Gallatin) on the west. Pope and his associates sold most of the southeastern half of the town area, around 38 lots, to the town commissioners so that they could realize from the sale of lots to individuals enough to erect the public buildings—a courthouse and a jail.

On November 25, 1811, the town was incorporated, with the name changed again—to Huntsville. That year, the land office was moved here from Nashville. For the next eight years, this land office did a fantastic business. People poured in from all areas of the nation to invest in town sites and farms in the Tennessee Valley. Much of the land in southern Alabama and northern Mississippi was also sold at the Huntsville Land Office.

I think we might pause here to emphasize that the important attraction to Madison County was the rich agricultural lands in the valley and their proximity to the rivers, especially the great Tennessee River, for transportation of the agricultural product. The land here was well suited to the production of cotton, and after the invention of the cotton gin, this was the money-making crop. One reason for this—which we often forget in this day of fast transportation—was the fact that cotton did not deteriorate as did many other agricultural crops. After it was picked and ginned, it was baled (in bags or bales of about 300 lbs.) and loaded on wagons and hauled down the Flint River to the Tennessee, where only a large barge, enough water to float the barge across the Muscle Shoals, an honest boatman and crew, and a fair amount of good luck were required to deliver the cotton to the New Orleans market and to bring the proceeds back to Huntsville over the dangerous Natchez Trace or some other over-land route.

In 1819, within 10 years after the creation of Madison County, the statistical census showed the 69,638 acres of land had been cleared, and the total population of the county was 19,501 persons. During that year 17,795 bales of cotton were produced in the county and ginned in the 149 gins and presses located in various parts of the county. And though the route of cotton from the field to the New Orleans market seems a torturous and uncertain one, it was profitable and it was this profit, that in many cases was responsible for the beautiful old homes that you are about to visit.

Many of these homes were built by planters who could easily afford a home in town; some were built by men who made their money by speculation in cotton lands; others were built by merchants and professional men, who indirectly profited from the cotton economy. Whoever built them, these proud old homes were designed with style and grace and were built to endure. Today they stand in mute testimony of the kind of community that Huntsville had been from the beginning.

Here at an early date were found all the institutions that made a well rounded and complete community, many of them rarely to be found in a frontier town. You are, of course, familiar with many of the “firsts” of which Huntsville boasts, but I might mention a few. Huntsville had a

newspaper in 1811, the second in the state; the first Library, in 1819, was located on the east side of Madison Street, in the middle of the block south of the square. In this same year, the Huntsville Book Store advertised for sale a great variety of books. There were a number of churches here very early. I might mention that the First Presbyterian Church, this year observing its 150th anniversary, is one of them. The town, by 1819, had a musical group, called the Haydn Society, an active and successful theatrical corps, several professional artists, a public schoolhouse and a number of private schools. The profusion and variety of merchandise offered in the stores here was perhaps not to be found anywhere else in a frontier town of this size. Due to the influx of land purchasers, the inns here did a thriving business very early. The Huntsville Inn, a three-story brick building erected on the east side of the square before 1817, was able to prepare on a few hours notice a seated dinner for 100 community leaders to honor the President of the United States, James Monroe, who made an unexpected visit to Huntsville in August of 1819.

It can readily be seen that men of the caliber to create such a community within a period of less than ten years could easily assume important political leadership. Madison County representatives were the most influential group in the Mississippi and Alabama Territorial Assemblies. When statehood for Alabama was contemplated in 1819, they were able to bring the Constitutional Convention to Huntsville. Here met the First Legislature of the new state and William Wyatt Bibb, the state's first governor was inaugurated. Next year, 1969, will be the 150th anniversary of these important events.

Some of the men who were politically prominent built homes that you will visit on your tour. In one area alone, the six blocks bordering Williams Street, these lived before 1850:

- 2 Governors of Alabama
- 1 Member of the Mississippi Territorial Legislature
- 3 Members of the First Constitutional Convention
- 2 United States Senators
- 2 Members of the U. S. House of Representatives
- 6 Alabama Supreme Court Justices
- 6 Members of the Alabama House of Representatives
- 1 Member of the Alabama Senate
- 1 Circuit Court Judge
- The Registrar for the Public Land Office
- The Receiver of Monies for the Land Office
- The President of the first bank in the state of Alabama
- The First Secretary of War of the Confederate States

The area of Huntsville, in which is concentrated the largest number of antebellum structures, is that area we call the Twickenham District, northeast of the Public Square, where an impressive 20% of the existing structures are antebellum. There are also many beautiful Victorian houses in this lovely unspoiled residential section.

I would like to call to your attention to an enlargement of an 1861 map of this area. I made this enlargement to the scale of the present city map so that in placing one over the other, it could be determined which houses were the same on both maps. This was helpful in authenticating the antebellum structures, which are marked on the map.

If you have specific questions about the map, the history of the houses, or the town, we will hope to hear them during our panel discussion later this evening. Time does not permit our discussing more recent eras now, but I would like to close by reminding you that since the days of Huntsville's founding there have always been among its citizens men and women who were willing to work beyond the call of duty to contribute economically, politically, and socially to its well-being and as long as that is true, our good community life will endure as have our beautiful homes.

Huntsville Historical Society, Inc.
Huntsville, Alabama
June 13, 1970

The Honorable Albert P. Brewer
Governor of Alabama
State Capitol
Montgomery, Alabama 36104

Dear Governor Brewer:

It is our understanding that considerable funds are now available under the Parks and Playgrounds Program. We recommend and urge you to consider apportioning part of these funds for the creation of a park in Huntsville on the historic site where the State of Alabama was organized.

We refer to the spot where in 1819 Alabama's Constitutional Convention met in a building at the northwest corner of Gates and Franklin Streets, one block south of the Public Square. Also on this historic half-block was located the office of the newspaper *Alabama Republican*, which printed Alabama's 1819 Constitution and the laws passed by the first Legislature; the Huntsville Library, first in the state; the law office of Alabama's illustrious governor and senator, Clement Comer Clay; the United States Surveyor's office and the Huntsville Post Office.

None of these historic buildings remain today. The site now lies vacant, except for one small unoccupied building. Recent intent has been to erect a parking garage on this property. However, the present owner, Huntsville Housing Authority, is willing and anxious to make the site available for preservation and development in a manner appropriate to its great historical significance.

Various efforts were made last year to find funds to acquire the property and to reconstruct and furnish the historic buildings as a memorial to Alabama's Sesquicentennial of Statehood. Although these efforts were unsuccessful, the project drew enthusiastic endorsement by: Huntsville City Council, Madison County Board of Commissioners, Huntsville Housing Authority, Central City Association, Alabama Historical Commission, Alabama Sesquicentennial Committee, Madison County Sesquicentennial Committee, Alabama Historical Association, Madison County Historical Survey Team, The Arts Council, Inc. (Huntsville), and many organizations.

With the possibility of available funds, we wish again to bring forward the proposal to save the Constitution Hall site, so precious and significant to the State of Alabama, and to create thereon a park with buildings and exhibits to be maintained as a historic shrine commemorating the founding of our great State.

We ask you to give this proposal your earnest consideration and creative thought.

Yours very truly,
HUNTSVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
Mrs. Burke S. Fisk, President 1966-1969

Committee:

Dr. Frances Roberts, President, Alabama Historical Association, 1969
Dr. William M. McKissack, President, Huntsville Historical Association, 1970-1971
Mr. Patrick Richardson, Member of Advisory Committee, Ala. Historical Commission
Mrs. Thomas W. Rosborough, Board of Governors, Hsv. Historical Society, Inc.

Mapping 1819 Huntsville in Retrospect

SARAH HUFF FISK

From a talk given by Sarah Huff Fisk at the opening of Constitution Hall Park (now Alabama Constitution Village) on May 1, 1982.

If you are wondering how a retrospective map of Huntsville in 1819 came about, it was this way.

About four years before Alabama was to celebrate her sesquicentennial, which was in 1969, the Huntsville Historical Society began to prepare for the event, one that would center in Huntsville since it was the site of the founding of the State. A group of members of the Society, in thinking of what could be done by way of celebration, wondered what Huntsville looked like in 1819. No map existed to show us and no document to describe the town as a whole. Curiosity finally led to the formation of a Research Committee (whose names you will find on the lower right hand corner of the map data) and this committee went to work, delving into old deeds, newspapers and records of the period. We soon found it to be a very complicated procedure.

For example, the description on a deed might read, "Part of Lot 42, fronting 20 ft. on the public square and extending from Bradford's general store to Young's drug store," and about all we knew for sure was that the property was on Lot 42. But we finally devised a system for putting our information together—a most exhaustive one. We copied all deeds to property in the original 16 blocks and some on adjoining blocks from the beginning of the town, and all newspaper ads dating as far back as 1817. Then we made copies on index cards for each item, filing them under every name mentioned therein and under lot numbers and subject matter, such as "merchants" or "lawyers."

The project took four years of research in the Madison County Courthouse Archives, the Huntsville Public Library and in the Montgomery Department of Archives, but we finally produced the 1819 map in time to dedicate it to the Sesquicentennial. In 1970 the American Association of State and Local History gave the map national recognition by awarding the Huntsville Historical Society their Certificate of Commendation.

While researching for "place" is only a minor aspect of historical research, in this particular instance it yielded unexpected results, regarding the block south of the public square (with the N prefixes on the map). We had known since 1910, when the DAR marked the site, that the building in which the Alabama Constitution was adopted stood on the

southeast corner of Lot 52 (which is the northwest corner of Franklin and Gates Streets). But we did not know, prior to our research, that so many other buildings important in the early history of Alabama and Huntsville were located near the Constitution Hall building in 1819, or on the lot adjoining on the west. Our discoveries include the following sites on the map:

N1 Constitution Hall

The building which housed the historic meeting of the 1819 Constitutional Convention was of [two-story] frame construction, about thirty by sixty feet in size. It was erected by Walker Allen, a cabinet maker, for his shop and warehouse. After his death in 1818, the building was often rented as an assembly hall and theater, for which its ample size made it suitable.

In 1819, the first performance of the Huntsville Thespian Society was held in this hall. The building was taken down in 1821 and replaced by a larger building designed especially for a theater, but which burned before it was ever used.

N2 Clement Comer Clay's Law Office

Here stood a brick building erected before 1816 by Clement Comer Clay, one of Huntsville's early lawyers, who served as a representative from Madison County in the 1819 Constitutional Convention and chaired the Committee of Fifteen that drafted the document. Clay later became United States Senator from Alabama and eighth Governor of Alabama.

This building also housed the Huntsville Post Office and the office of the United States Surveyors, who surveyed and mapped thousands of acres of land in North Alabama prior to its sale by the federal government.

N3 Newspaper Office of the *Alabama Republican*

One of Alabama Territory's early newspapers, widely read throughout the South, was printed in a building which stood here in 1819. John Boardman, editor and publisher of the *Alabama Republican*, printed the official Journal of the 1819 Constitutional Convention, and, on August 3, 1819, issued the first complete printing of the Constitution of the State of Alabama, as adopted on August 2, 1819. This newspaper also printed the Laws of the State, as passed in 1819 by the First

Legislative Assembly, meeting in Huntsville, temporary Capital.

N4 Huntsville Library, First Library in Alabama

In a small frame building here, which housed the law office of John N. S. Jones, the books of the Huntsville Library were opened in October 1819, and made available to the subscribers to this library. The Huntsville Library Company, organized in 1818 and incorporated by legislative act on November 27, 1819, was the first library in the State of Alabama.

N5 Residence of Stephen Neal, Huntsville's First Sheriff

This was the home of Stephen Neal, who was appointed by the Mississippi Territorial Legislature to serve as Sheriff of Madison County, on its creation, December 13, 1808. From Neal's residence, on November 9, 1821, was held the funeral of his close friend, Thomas Freeman, Principal United States Deputy for the Survey of the Alabama District, who made the original survey of Madison County.

It was with this new information in mind that the idea was conceived to restore the main buildings on the half-block—which in 1969 was vacant and destined for a parking garage—and to create a memorial park to the founding of the state. The Historical Society led the effort and was soon joined by many groups and individuals. Through the cooperation of the Huntsville Housing Authority the land was released for sale to the state and through efforts of various people the state bought it and Governor Wallace appropriated \$500,000 of revenue sharing funds to begin the buildings. Recently, as you know, the city has obtained an economic development grant to complete the buildings. And last, but far from least, we are trying to raise funds from gifts by the public to pay for furnishings and exhibits for the Park.

Further Reading

Research notes on 1819 Huntsville and documents on the founding of Constitution Hall Park are located in the Sarah Huff Fisk Collection in the Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

Huntsville Historical Society
Huntsville, Alabama
January 30, 1967

Mr. James Record, Chairman
Madison County Commissioners
Huntsville, Alabama

Dear James:

You are certainly to be complimented on the facilities and arrangement of the new Probate Record Room. It is a joy to go in there to work—so spacious, convenient, and light. I understand that the History Record Room in the basement is splendid, too, but haven't had a chance to see it yet.

Is there any possible way that could be arranged for our Research Committee to have admission to the Record Room (third floor) on one Saturday each month? I know you have a problem in this big building about keeping valuable records locked up and protected when no one is there to supervise. And, of course, no group is more interested and anxious to see the records preserved than we are.

For the past two years our Research Committee has been going to the temporary courthouse each Wednesday evening—doing research for markers and also for the 1819 map of Huntsville that we are making. We are determined to complete this map in time for our 1969 Sesquicentennial of Statehood; however, we can not do so without access to the old deed records. It will show inns, stores, public buildings, shops, offices, dwellings, etc. and will give a very good idea of what Huntsville was like when it was Alabama's first (temporary) capital.

I truly hesitate to make this request, James, because I know you have to have definite rules, but since most of our committee members (including myself) are working during all the hours the room is open to the public, we are really handicapped on this project. I have been coming up during my lunch hours lately, but have accomplished very little in that few minutes time....

Thanks for your cooperation and interest.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs. Burke S. Fisk,
President

The efforts of the Research Committee chaired by Mrs. Fisk from 1964-1969 proved successful in creating a retrospective map of Huntsville, Alabama, 1819 (duplicated on the next page). In 1970 the American Association of State and Local History gave the map national recognition by awarding the Huntsville Historical Society their Certificate of Commendation.

Among Buildings and Sites on Map,
Following Are Specially Noted—

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA 1819

E1—Bell Tavern, a large two-story inn, known as Cheatham's Tavern, 1816-17, Turner's Tavern, 1818.

F1—Northwest Side of Square, called "Cheapsides." Here, in 1819, were located three tailors, a bakery, two druggists, barber shop, silversmith, soap and candle maker, two attorneys, and five general stores.

G1—Vaughn's House for Accommodation of Travelers.

G2—Store and dwelling of Henry Cook, merchant, cotton factor, and Clerk of the Corporation.

G3—Blacksmith Shop of Jared I. Sample.

I1—Planters and Merchants Bank of Huntsville, first bank in Alabama, chartered December 11, 1816 by Mississippi Territorial Legislature. Two-story brick building.

I2—The Big Spring, valuable source of pure water.

I3—"Bank Row," described stores along Spring Bluff.

J1—Madison County's First Courthouse, a two-story brick building, faced southeast. Alabama's First Legislative Assembly held many sessions here. In downstairs courtroom, on November 9, 1819, William Wyatt Bibb was inaugurated as first Governor of Alabama. Religious services were held in the courthouse.

K1—Huntsville Inn, a three-story brick structure, built before 1817. A public dinner here, June 2, 1819, honored President James Monroe. First Alabama Legislature convened in this inn on October 25, 1819.

K2—Huntsville Land Office, where U. S. Government sold thousands of acres of land in North Alabama.

K3—"Brick Row" housed four of Huntsville's 31, or more, merchants. Stocks carried were often elaborate.

M1—John Bunch's "Old Tavern," built before 1810.

M2—Two-story log cabin, occupied by Hugh McVay in 1817.

M3—Allen Cooper's Boarding House, two-story brick house built by John Read before 1815.

M4—Home of Dr. David Moore, planter, civic leader, Surgeon General under Jackson in Creek Indian War.

N1—Constitution Hall. The Convention met here on July 5, 1819 to organize the State of Alabama. The Constitution was signed on August 3, 1819 by 44 delegates from 22 counties of the Alabama Territory. Building used as a theater and assembly hall in 1819.

N2—Clement Comer Clay's Law Office, erected before 1816, brick construction. Housed U. S. Government Surveyor's office and Huntsville Post Office, 1819.

N3—Newspaper office and printing shop of "Alabama Republican," John Boardman, editor and publisher. On August 3, 1819, this weekly paper issued first complete printing of the Constitution. Laws passed by the 1819 Legislature were also printed here.

N4—Huntsville Library, first in Alabama, organized October, 1818, incorporated November 27, 1819. Opened here on October 29, 1819 in law office of John N. S. Jones.

N5—Home of Stephen Neal, Sheriff of Madison County.

N6—Commercial Row, facing Square on southeast, was town's busiest block in 1819, with 13 general stores. Several buildings had two stories, eight were brick.

O1—Young Ladies Academy, Joab Watson, Preceptor. Advertised opening date June 8, 1818, L. Morgan's white framed house, capacity over sixty students.

O2—Dr. Alexander Erskine and Dr. Edmund Irby. At least a dozen physicians practiced in Huntsville, 1819.

O3—Book Store and Auction House of A. D. Veitch.

Q1—Bake House, James and William Badlun.

R1—J. S. Rawling's Tavern, large white framed house. In 1820, this inn was known as "Planter's Hotel."

R2—Home of Stokely Hutchings, first Postmaster.

R3—Public House, operated by William E. Phillips.

S1—Brahan-Goldsmith Home. Built 1818. Phillip A. Foote, merchant, occupied house, 1819. Gen. John Brahan resided here in 1820's. (See photographs.)

T1—Weeden-Stockton Home. Built in 1818 by Henry Bradford, merchant, who occupied it in 1819. Noted as home of Miss Howard Weeden, Huntsville's artist-poet, 1847-1905. (See photograph on reverse side.)

X1—Fearn-Richardson Home. Site of house (not on map) purchased by Dr. Thomas Fearn, 1819. House completed, 1820. Fearn was physician and surgeon who pioneered in use of quinine. (See photographs.)

X2—Bassett-Young Home, built 1819-1823 by Samuel Cruse, merchant. This house (not on map, but see photograph) has been property of Dr. John Young Bassett or his descendants since 1828.

X3—Home of John Read, Register of the Land Office.

X4—Home of Henry Minor, one of Madison County's eight delegates to the 1819 Convention.

X5—Home of John M. Taylor, one of Madison County's delegates to 1819 Convention. Purchased in 1821 by Gov. Thomas Bibb, who built present mansion in 1837.

Y1—Perkins-Orgain Home, built prior to 1816 by Col. Peter Perkins, first Clerk Madison County Superior Court, 1810. House owned by Arthur F. Hopkins, 1819, occupied by Clement Comer Clay. (See photographs.)

Y2—Pope-Watts Home, built prior to 1815, by LeRoy Pope, original purchaser of acreage on which town was laid out in 1810. By 1819, Pope could look from his mansion on the bluff across the thriving city of Huntsville, temporary capital of the new State of Alabama. (See photograph.)

Map shows buildings known to have existed in 1819 on 56 of original 72 lots, also in area south and east of the corporate limits. Future research may establish location of other buildings.

Research Committee: Mrs. Burke S. Fisk, chairman, Mr. and Mrs. Donald H. Shenk, Mrs. W. F. Sparkman, Mrs. Wayne L. Smith, Mrs. J. T. Deaton.

Published by Huntsville Historical Society.



A NEW MAP
of
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA
1819



MADISON COUNTY'S FIRST COURTHOUSE

1811-1837 • DRAWN BY C. E. MONROE, JR.

Prepared in retrospect
through archival research

by

Research Committee
Huntsville Historical Society

Published in 1969 as a contribution
to

ALABAMA'S SESQUICENTENNIAL

© 1969 Huntsville Historical Society

Price 25 cents



BASSETT-YOUNG, 600 Franklin St.



FEARN-RICHARDSON, 517 Franklin St.



WEEDEN-STOCKTON, 301 Gates Ave.



POPE-WATTS, 403 Echols Ave.



PERKINS-ORGAIN, 401 Lincoln Ave.



BRAHAN-GOLDSMITH, 206 Gates Ave.

A Brief History of Huntsville to 1819

By 1819 Huntsville had become a thriving city in the heart of the Tennessee Valley although it had been only fourteen years since its earliest settler, John Hunt, arrived to make his home near the "Big Spring" in 1805. Events moved rapidly after the creation of Madison County by proclamation of Governor Robert Williams of the Mississippi Territory on December 13, 1808.

A survey of the public lands was completed in April of 1809, and in August of the same year they were offered for sale at a public auction by the Federal Land Office in Nashville, Tennessee, which had been created for the purpose of disposing of lands in Madison County. At this time, LeRoy Pope, a Georgia planter, bought much of the land surrounding the "Big Spring" for \$23.50 an acre. On July 5, 1810, the "Big Spring" area which had been platted by John Coffee only a month earlier was chosen as the county seat by a special commission named in an act of the Mississippi Territorial Legislature for this purpose. Although originally the town had been called Huntsville, the act provided that the county seat should be named Twickenham. According to tradition, LeRoy Pope chose to name the town Twickenham after the English home of Alexander Pope, one of his ancestors. Later the name was changed by special act of the territorial legislature on November 25, 1811, to Huntsville in honor of its first settler and incorporated on December 9, 1811.

When first laid out, the town contained sixty acres in blocks of two acres each subdivided into four lots. Half of the lots were sold to the commissioners at \$23.50 an acre, and the remaining portion of the town was retained for sale by LeRoy Pope and his associates. The commissioners then sold their holdings at auction, and the proceeds were used to construct a courthouse and jail on the public square.

So rapid was the influx of people into the area that the federal land office was moved from Nashville to Huntsville in 1811. A newspaper entitled the *Madison Gazette* was established a year later; the *Planters and Merchants Bank* was chartered in 1816; and a wide variety of business firms were established in the community to lend support to a thriving agricultural economy. A number of young lawyers and doctors also migrated to the community to begin their careers.

By 1819 Huntsville's social institutions were well developed. Provisions had been made for education, religious worship, a library, and theatrical and music performances. There was also a thriving Masonic Lodge which had been organized as early as 1811.

With such a background, it is not unusual that Huntsville should be chosen as the temporary capital during the period when Alabama made its transition from territorial status to statehood in 1819. It was here that Alabama's first constitution was drafted between July 5 and August 2; the first governor of the State of Alabama was inaugurated on November 9; and the first session of the state legislature was held from October 25 to December 17. Huntsville furnished many of the state's early political leaders including the president of the first Constitutional Convention, the chairman of the committee which drafted the constitution, the first chief justice of the State Supreme Court, and one of the first two senators from Alabama.

Frances C. Roberts



(Above) In 1969, the marker for the 1819 Alabama Constitutional Convention was erected in front of the First National Bank Building downtown. (Below) In 1982, the marker was relocated to its present site at Alabama Constitution Village on Gates Avenue.



1819 Huntsville as a Trading Center

SARAH HUFF FISK

By 1819, a flourishing agricultural economy existed in Madison County and the surrounding area, with Huntsville as the principal trading center. Since cash was scarce and the value of bank notes uncertain, cotton and other crops often served as the mediums of exchange. Many merchants accepted the purchaser's note, secured only by the signatures of the maker's friends or by a crop yet unproduced. This credit system was a risky one for all parties concerned.

Storekeepers also faced the awesome problem of getting merchandise from the market centers of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Usually, they had to make the buying trip in person, returning overland with their goods in wagons, or coming round the long way by sea to New Orleans, up the Mississippi, and down the Tennessee. Under these conditions, merchandise was not always "seasonable" when it reached Huntsville.

In spite of these difficulties—and others, trading in Huntsville was brisk and competitive. Included in the area mapped are more than 31 stores and shops that have been authenticated as existing in 1819 and located as to site. Along Commercial Row, on the southeast side of the Square, were 13 stores—about the same number as are there today. Stores and shops fronted the Square on all sides, with few vacant lots. A surprising number of the buildings were brick, and many had two stories, with the merchant dwelling in part of the store, or elsewhere on the lot.

Most merchants carried a large and general assortment of goods, which included not only the common staple needs of the large plantations, small farmers, and tradespeople, but the more exotic and elegant items demanded by the many affluent families who lived in or near the town.

On February 9, 1819, Samuel Hazard & Co., whose two-story brick storehouse stood on Commercial Row, advertised: Irish Linens, Pink Italian and White French Crepe, Elegant Fancy Head Dresses, Lace Ball Dresses, Leghorn Hats and Umbrellas, Ladies Beaver Gloves and Hats, Cologne Water, and Flasks and Tumblers for the convenience of hunters. On June 12, this merchant offered: a few elegant dress silk hats and bonnets of the very first quality and latest fashion superior to any ever offered to the Ladies of Huntsville and vicinity, direct from New York. On June 30, the same merchant had for sale: Citron, Liquorice, Soft Shelled Almonds, Cream Nuts and a general assortment of Stoneware.

Henry Cook, whose store was located at number G2, on the northeast corner of the Square, offered: Feathers, Shoes, and Rye Whiskey, Kentucky Linsey Socks, a few barrels of “new” flour, and a choice lot of Foreign Spirits, in trade for cotton during the season at its value. He reminded his creditors as follows: “Those in arrearages for last year will recollect my best efforts were requisite to indulge them, now in return theirs is looked for.” William and Samuel Cruse, also on Commercial Row, advertised: Elegant half handkerchiefs, Patent School and Desk Locks, Weeding Hoes, Sheet Iron, Window Glass, and Prime Chewing Tobacco. Phelan and Dillon, on Lot 28, candlemakers, paid the highest market prices for “tallow” in cash, and offered new candles, old whiskey, and Draught Porter, which is neither old or new, just in its prime.

A. D. Veitch’s Book Store and Auction House, at number O3 on the map, had for sale on October 30, 1819, a valuable collection of Books and Stationery; “fresh” garden seeds, various utensils used in husbandry, together with the Kalender; a neat assortment of drugs and medicines, among which are many of the most celebrated Patents. There were at least six silversmiths and watchmakers in Huntsville in 1819. Thomas Cain, whose stand was on the northwest side of the Square, had for sale: Gentlemen’s Gold and Patent Lever Watches, fine gold chains, Ladies Ear and Finger Rings, Breast Pins, and first rate Apple Vinegar. Cain warned those indebted to him to “pay up in ten or fifteen days, or they would find their accounts in the hands of an officer for collection.”

There were Coach and Harness Makers, Wagon Makers, Blacksmiths and Saddlers. Mudd & Long, on Washington Street, advertised on July 21, 1819, “Patent Elastic Saddles, which for easy riding and safety to the horse are far superior (as will be found upon trial) to the common Saddles generally used.” They also offered Saddle-bags, Bridles, and Velices.

James Lynch, cabinet maker, had for sale “elegant Cherry Bedsteads,” on accommodating terms for cash, corn, and cotton. W. T. Crenshaw advertised: Elegant Cabinet Furniture, Ladies Sewing and Dressing tables, Curtain and Low Post Bedsteads, China Presses, Sideboards of First Quality, Book-cases, and cherry and mahogany Secretary’s desks.

While this is only a brief listing of some of the items for sale in Huntsville one hundred fifty years ago, it seems to bear out the claim often made by local merchants of that day, when they advertised “the most elaborate assortment of merchandise offered anywhere in the western country.”

From a talk by Sarah Huff Fisk to the Alabama Historical Association, May 2, 1969.



Sarah Huff Fisk

Madison County's First Courthouse (detail)

The above depiction of Madison County's first courthouse is a detail from a larger perspective drawing by Sarah Huff Fisk, *The Public Square and Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823*. It is based on archival research on the downtown area and features the activities of daily life at that time. It was drawn in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Huntsville Water Works.¹ The drawing, now in the private collection of Wayne and Joyce Smith, was originally exhibited in the Huntsville Utilities Building, then later at the Burritt Museum and the Huntsville Museum of Art.

In 1997, Mrs. Fisk published the book *Civilization Comes to the Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823* in which the buildings around the town square are correlated to her drawing, and their businesses and occupants are described. This study also impressively demonstrates the use of research to follow the transformation of a settlement into a city. The following article is an excerpt from Mrs. Fisk's book.²

Madison County's First Courthouse

SARAH HUFF FISK

The Mississippi Territorial statute that created Madison County on December 13, 1808 had named a commission to choose the county seat, to purchase a limited acreage for it and by reselling realize enough profit to erect the necessary county buildings on the Public Square. This all took time. No contract has been found for erection of the courthouse; however, the fall term of Superior Court met there in 1811, although the upper story of the building was unfinished.

The following case recorded in the Superior Court Record of November Term, 1815, Madison County, Miss. Territory, probably reveals the builders' names:

Case No. 158: Wm. Ingram vs John Lowry; July 1812; "John Lowry resides out of the County and Territory" 31 March 1812. "On 6 March 1811 made contract with Lowry, Ingram to do all carpenter work to be done in and about the courthouse in Town of Twickenham for which Lowry was the undertaker."

It was not until June 10, 1817 that William Watkins and John H. Hickman were given the contract to complete the building by the first Monday in November. This contract, recorded in Deed Book D, 22, gives a detailed description of the work to be done, including casing and panes for the upper story windows, repair of the cornice molding, and roofing the entire building with new heart-of-poplar shingles. The remainder of the contract specified in great detail the work to be done on the elaborate cupola that topped the building, including:

...to put on top of the cupola a new and neat twined block dressed off with gold lines and a new spere and twin blocks dressed off with gilt and crown the whole with a neat gilt Eagle no less than three ft. across... the Eagle was either to be wood-carved or made of sheet copper...

This first courthouse stood on the highest point of the Public Square on about a ten foot elevation and faced southeast. According to the

chronicler of *Later History of Madison County*, Chapter VI, published on March 6, 1884 in the Huntsville newspaper *The Independent*:

...The old square yellow brick courthouse that stood a little east of the present building and which had been finished about the year 1817, though a large and imposing edifice for that time for a new county, began to get out of repair, and was deemed by many unsafe on account of the size of the rooms and the want of sufficient thickness of the walls...

The above account, written some forty-seven years after the first courthouse was torn down in 1837, may not be entirely accurate, but all of these bits of information taken together offer some idea of the appearance of the building. Apparently the size of at least one room was adequate, if barely so, for the holding of church services until the various religious congregations represented in Huntsville could raise funds to erect their own places of worship. The following "Communication" to the *Alabama Republican* on July 14, 1820 refers to these assemblages. The item is couched in the flowery terms of the day and signed "A Stranger," but may have been composed by some local person, or even the editor himself:

Mr. Editor: Having been resident of this city but a short time, it was only on last Sabbath that I had an opportunity of attending Divine services in Huntsville. Gratified as I was at witnessing the very respectable assemblage of both sexes present, and having my attention forcibly arrested by the excellence of the discourse delivered, I could not but be struck at the manifest and glaring unpoliteness, not to say rudeness, of a large portion of the male congregation. I allude to their appropriation of the most agreeable and convenient seats in your Courthouse (used occasionally as a Church it appears). The lawyers and one of the jury boxes were nearly filled by gentlemen; who very ungallantly, in my opinion, kept their seats, notwithstanding the presence of a number of ladies, who were forced to the disagreeable alternative of either standing, sitting in the sun, or going away.

It is most certainly not my intention or wish to accuse the gentlemen of Huntsville of general unpoliteness; but on the particular occasion alluded to their conduct was of a nature

so entirely different from the common forms either of politeness or decency (I hope they will excuse the harshness of the terms) that fearing other strangers may witness a similar derogation in them, and from thence draw erroneous conclusions of Alabama Society in general, I have taken upon myself to call your attention to the subject, under the hope your better and more practiced judgment may devise means for the prevention, in future, of conduct so utterly unworthy of your truly polite and refined society. I remain your ob't servant. A STRANGER

Besides the frequent meetings of religious congregations, the courthouse was the scene of many other gatherings. Reference to some of these follow:

Huntsville Republican, Nov. 4, 1817: Pay Your Taxes...at the courthouse in Huntsville on Mon., Tues., and Wed. in time of court, commencing on the second Monday in Nov....all persons yet in arrears are earnestly solicited to come forward and settle their public dues, as no longer indulgence can be given...J. M. Taylor, T.C..

Huntsville Republican, Dec. 1, 1817: Notice...Trustees of Green(e) Academy are requested to meet at the courthouse in Huntsville on Saturday, the 13th inst....by order of the president...John Brahan, Sec..

Alabama Republican, May 2, 1818: Musical School...Mr. Leech offers his services as teacher of vocal music. Those willing to promote a music school may attend at the courthouse on tomorrow at 4 o'clock to hear Mr. Leech singing and making a school.

Alabama Republican, June 20, 1818: Huntsville Bible Society...This day a number of respectable citizens of Madison County assembled at the courthouse in Huntsville for the purpose of forming a Bible Society, when John Adams, Esq. was called to the chair and the Rev. John P. Horton appointed secretary....

Alabama Republican, Nov. 14, 1818: Public Library...The subscribers to the Public Library in Huntsville are desired to attend at Mr. Minor's office in the courthouse on Friday

evening the 20th inst. to adopt a Constitution and By-Laws...John Boardman, Secy..

Alabama Republican, Dec. 19, 1818: A Masonic Oration will be delivered at the courthouse in this place on the 2nd inst. precisely at 12 o'clock by the Rev. Mr. Streeter.

Alabama Republican, April 24, 1819: Sale of strays ...Saturday, May 29 is appointed for the sale of strays for Madison County at the courthouse in Huntsville...John Boardman, Ranger.

Alabama Republican, May 8, 1819: Notice...An election will be held at the courthouse in Huntsville on the fourth Monday in May next to elect 8 members for the Territorial Legislature...S. Neal, Sheriff.

Alabama Republican, May 19, 1820: Assessor's Notice ...That those persons who have failed to report their lists of Taxable property may yet have the opportunity to do so within the time prescribed by law, I shall attend at the courthouse in Huntsville on Monday the 5th of June, and the four succeeding days, where lists will be received and exhibited at the courthouse door as the law directs....James Bibb, assessor Madison County.

Alabama Republican, Jan. 26, 1821: Notice...On the first Monday in February next an election will be holden at the courthouse in Huntsville for the purpose of choosing five Trustees for said Town for the ensuing year...H. Cook, Secty..

Alabama Republican, April 6, 1821: State of Alabama...To the Sheriff of Madison County, GREETINGS: Whereas the Legislature of the State of Alabama has passed an Act requiring you to hold and superintend elections for military officers, you are here commanded to hold an election at the Court House in the town of Huntsville on Monday the 16th day of April next for a Captain, Lt., and Ensign, in a volunteer company of Artillery to be entitled the Huntsville Guards, of which you will give due notice and make the

return as directed by law...D. M. Bradford, Lt. Col., 3rd Reg. A.M..

Alabama Republican, April 19, 1822: Editorial...On Monday night the 16th inst., the courthouse in this place was struck by lightning, but without doing any material injury to the building. The lightning struck one of the chimneys, entered one of the upper rooms, where two gentlemen were sleeping, and passed off on the outside, shattering the window panes on the upper and lower stories.

Alabama Republican, Oct. 17, 1823: Lightning...On the morning of the 15th inst., the courthouse in this place was struck by lightning, which did some damage to the roof and cupola and other parts of the building. No injury was sustained from the shock by any in the house. This is the second time the building has been struck by lightning, without setting it on fire or doing any material injury.

End Notes

1. The drawing of "Huntsville 1823" by Sarah Huff Fisk was requested by Frank B. Wilson, then Director of Customer Relations for City Utilities. He desired a perspective drawing of the town's center with special attention to the Big Spring to commemorate the sesquicentennial in 1973 of Huntsville Water Works, the nation's oldest water system west of the Appalachian Mountains.
2. Sarah Huff Fisk, *Civilization Comes to the Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823* (Huntsville: Pinhook Publishing Company, 1997). Second Printing, 2008, 138-141. Used with permission.

Further Reading

John Rison Jones, "Book Review: *Civilization Comes to the Big Spring: Huntsville, Alabama 1823*," *The Alabama Review*, January 2000, 57.

Ranee G. Pruitt, *Eden of the South: A Chronology of Huntsville, Alabama 1805-2005* (Huntsville: Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, 2005).



(Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)

Sarah Huff Fisk's note-card collection is a primary resource for information about early downtown Huntsville.

The Triumph of the Note-Card: The Sarah Huff Fisk System

B. SUSANNA LEBERMAN

Alabama celebrated one hundred and fifty years of statehood in 1969; and to commemorate the signing of Alabama's constitution in 1819 at Constitution Hall, located in downtown Huntsville, Mrs. Sarah Huff Fisk chaired a research committee from 1965-1969 to prepare for this anniversary. The task was to assemble enough information from early nineteenth century title deeds and newspapers to re-create downtown Huntsville, the birthplace of Alabama. Mrs. Fisk was responsible for the newspaper search and created a swan song project, worthy of emulation in personal or professional research. After Mrs. Fisk presented her findings in 1969 to the Alabama Historical Association, she continued to go through early Huntsville newspapers abstracting and indexing information from advertisements through the 1820s to the 1860s. The information collected stands as a testament of determination and scholarly integrity. Note-card methodology is a dying form in a modern world where taking notes from sources, for many, involves alternative techniques having little to do with pencil and paper, and more to do with computers, photocopies, and online resources. Careful and thorough research provides a cornerstone with which to grow, and Mrs. Fisk's method provides an excellent model in its simplicity, functionality, and adaptability.

Sarah Fisk's system for organizing this massive project is simplistic, having developed from basic principles of taking notes from sources. The fact that the note-card is easy to use and transportable are advantages of the note-card system; all a researcher needs is an index card and a pencil. Disadvantages to note-cards might include a limited amount of area for the information, and having to divide it up onto several cards, which increases the chance for particulars to be lost or misplaced. Overcoming these disadvantages and maximizing the strengths of note-cards is what transforms Mrs. Fisk's simple task of taking notes into a flawless simplistic system. How did she develop and refine her own personal technique for information gathering and use it to build an assignment as large as indexing all the ads from over a hundred years of early Huntsville newspapers?

After the project was determined, Mrs. Fisk began solidifying her research routine, which found her spending time reading each page of the

various newspapers on a microfiche reader in the old Fountain Circle Library. She took her notes in shorthand on a notepad then typed her translations onto index cards which would be filed and cross-referenced under different headings. A standard note-card formula consists of the author's name or brief title followed by a categorical notation at the top; then the body of the card would be comprised of the recorded information, with source notations such as page number at the bottom right of the card. Mrs. Fisk took this standard and applied it to her newspaper advertisements, a simple but effective plan that worked.¹

Not only was Mrs. Fisk's approach to organizing her vast amount of notes simplistic, it was functional. At its very root, the word functional means having a practical application or serving a useful purpose. The purpose of Mrs. Fisk's project was to answer questions pertaining to uses of the downtown buildings in 1819 at the time of the constitutional convention and to satisfy the curiosity about where things were. "Where was the land office that sold so much land in North Alabama? Where were the newspaper offices located...the schools, the inns and the post office? Was Huntsville really like the description given by (early visitor to Huntsville) Ann Royal?"² These were the questions she wanted to answer. The functionality of the note-card system that ensued made the answering of the various questions easy and the information searchable.

Mrs. Fisk's system functioned to allow information to be found in several ways. There was a box of cross-references, all matching the title headings on the individual cards. First listing the advertisements alphabetically, she then broke them down further to include: early merchants, early cemeteries, early cotton gins, census and voting areas, early canals, early churches, early corn-flour and textile mills, early distilleries, early inns, and reports of general 1819 conditions. There is also a special section for ads referenced under city records. These records include ads having to do with early public buildings, hospitals, market hours, land office, jail, post office, and the pillory. The pillory was the place of public punishment. Ads having to do with the pillory were also cross-referenced under a "customs" heading. Other city record headings are of equal interest—having to do with the city's precious water supply, water system, and pump making.

In addition to being cross-referenced under various headings, Mrs. Fisk also took the time to map the early city, identifying businesses not by address but by lot numbers, streets, and sections. These lots are listed

¹ Robert Perrin, *Handbook for College Research*, 3rd ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 112-113.

² Sarah Huff Fisk, Speech to the DAR, 1969.

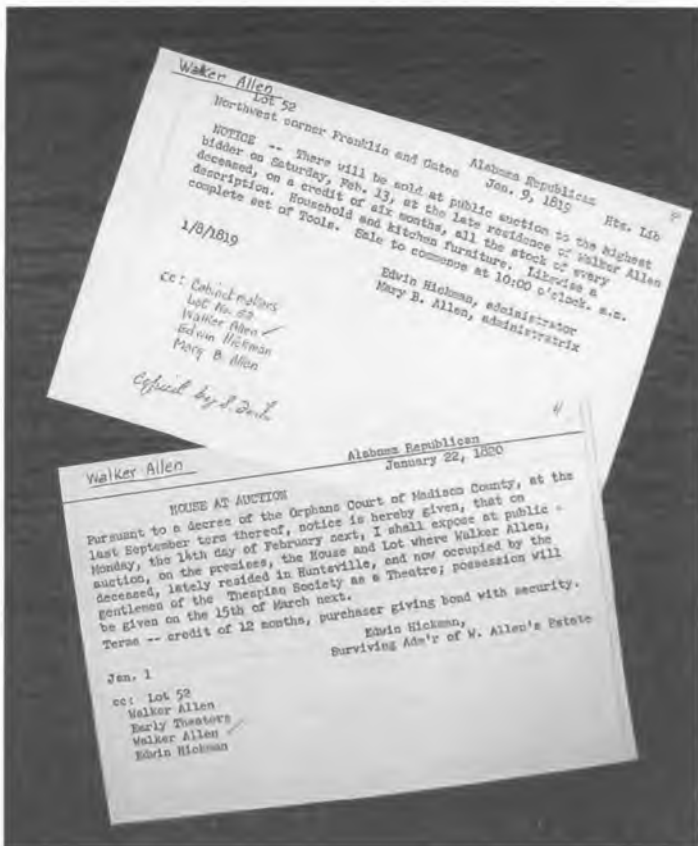
As Mrs. Fisk's note-cards keep hundreds of newspaper articles from being scattered and useless through their simple and functional grouping, they also create an extremely adaptable body of evidence. If a person wanted to survey the activities of merchants, the business that private citizens wanted to be made public, customs and culture, or the movements of businesses as leases were broken and made, it is all there waiting to be explored. Researchers with imagination and curiosity could certainly use this collection and have no problem figuring out how to track the information. Years after Mrs. Fisk's death, the newspaper ads in her index collection will remain as a primary source for those who need data in areas such as: public history, business history, history of the growth of the south, early settlers or their customs. The adaptability of information from a newspaper ads index is limitless, especially when the ad is not abstracted but recorded in its entirety. This eliminates having to go read microfilm. All a researcher needs to create a personal database with which to organize research is an index card. They do not require electricity, battery power, or Internet connections. It is portable and cheap. Note-cards travel well and may be put into different groupings accordingly. They adapt, so nothing is wasted.

Note-card methodology is a dying form in a modern world where information is at the tip of a finger, but approach the Internet and ask it about milliners, tanners, and corn-flour mills in the early 1800s and you are likely to get a dictionary answer. Thumb through the Sarah Huff Fisk note-card collection and you will find every public ad transaction for 100 years, cross-referenced four or five times with subject headings, names, and dates—hard facts in a system put together and stored quite simply, in a highly functional and adaptable way. There is still room for the lowly note-card in the twenty-first century, so get out there and take some notes to leave to posterity. As Sarah Huff Fisk's collection illustrates, there is much knowledge gained from leftover information. Find the system that works for you. Make your personal research have life-long adaptability. Information shared is information gained, and when it is brought together as a collection, it is truly amazing. Housed at the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, the Sarah Huff Fisk collection continues to be a valid and reusable resource to Huntsville's community.

Further Reading

Fisk, Sarah Huff. *Speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution*, 1969. Sarah Huff Fisk Collection, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.

Perrin, Robert. *Handbook for College Research*, 3rd ed. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005.



(Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)

Note-cards from the Sarah Huff Fisk Collection

The historic meeting of 44 delegates to Alabama's first Constitutional Convention, July 5-August 2, 1819, was housed in the two-story building owned by Walker Allen, a deceased cabinet maker. Note-card research reveals that the property was on auction, both before and after the convention.

Huntsville's Indian Creek Canal

SARAH HUFF FISK

Before roads were opened through the unsettled areas of Alabama, farmers in Madison County were fortunate indeed to have at their doorstep a ready waterway to market. The Tennessee River, with its connection to the Ohio and thence to the Mississippi, offered cheap and reasonably safe transportation, once the hazards of the Muscle Shoals were passed.

By 1820, only fifteen years after the first settlers came into the county, one-fifth of the area had been opened to cultivation. Although grains, vegetables, and fruits were grown in considerable variety, cotton was the money-making crop, the only one that could be counted on to pay its own way to market. While most agricultural products were perishable in varying degrees, cotton could be stored without deterioration until early spring, when the high rise of water on the Tennessee permitted boats to pass over the treacherous Shoals. Once over, a flatboat loaded with four or five hundred bales could generally float downstream without mishap until it was cabled to the levee in New Orleans, export center for shipment to the mills of England.

In 1819, Madison County produced nearly 18,000 bales of cotton, averaging 250 pounds each. Moving this heavy, bulky crop to market was the common problem faced by farmer, merchant and speculator alike.

Even with the river at their doorstep, shippers were plagued with an internal transportation problem. In 1820, the roads within the county were so bad that one traveler was moved to comment, "I am always apprehensive of breaking my horse's leg, or losing my own life as I approach the principal town of Alabama, where the roads are infinitely worse than in any other part of the state." In his estimation, the Great Meridian Road, over which most of the valuable products of the county were transported, was the worst in it.

The bad state of the roads doubtless contributed to high rates charged for hauling cotton. Wagonage from Huntsville to Ditto's Landing, a distance of only ten miles on the Meridian Road, was around 87¢ per bale, or nearly one-third of the cost of river shipment from Ditto's Landing all the way to New Orleans.

Between bad roads and high wagon rates, many farmers were prompted to turn to the creek nearest their home as a cheap route to the river. Madison County has several such natural arteries. The eastern fork of Indian Creek, which takes a southerly course through Huntsville, seemed to offer a convenient waterway with great development possibilities. The flow of water on this creek was described in 1827 by a landowner near its source as "sufficient to turn machinery of any description during three-fourths of the year and during the dryest season, there is plenty of excellent water for family purposes." As the creek passes through the western edge of Huntsville it is considerably swelled by the flow of water from the Big Spring. It then flows south for six miles and west for four miles to its junction with Hurricane, or Price's Fork. Thus enlarged, the stream takes a circuitous course through swampy land until it empties into the Tennessee River below the bluff on which Triana is located.

In the early days, Indian Creek was wide and deep enough, at least when augmented by rising waters from the Tennessee, to admit the passage of river boats from Triana all the way up to the junction of its forks, a distance of about four miles. At the forks, a dam and mill was erected in pioneer days. When the land in the area was sold by the government in 1818, John W. Looney purchased the site. By 1827, he had constructed warehouses for the storage of cotton, and Looney's Landing was a regular calling point for shippers plying the Tennessee.

The development of Indian Creek as a waterway was considered as early as March 24, 1818, when the citizens of Huntsville gathered at a small town meeting and subscribed \$7,200 to clear the creek and make it navigable from Huntsville to the river. A committee was appointed to study the practicability of the project, but nearly three years passed before any real action was taken.

Meanwhile, the town of Triana, located at the mouth of Indian Creek, was incorporated on November 13, 1819. Plans for its development into a great river port on the Tennessee excited the hopes of some of the most wealthy and able men in the county. These enterprising promoters could foresee that upon the establishment of successful navigation from Huntsville by Indian Creek, Triana would become the point of transfer of a large amount of the cotton and goods for the greater portion of the county.

On December 21, 1820, the General Assembly of Alabama passed an Act to incorporate the Indian Creek Navigation Company. LeRoy Pope, Thomas Fearn, Stephen S. Ewing, Henry Cook and Samuel Hazard were appointed commissioners with power to receive subscription of stock in shares of \$50 each. When \$10,000 could be raised, the

subscribers were empowered to elect five directors, who would select one of their number as president.

The corporation was given authority to open and improve the navigation of Indian Creek from the Spring at Huntsville to Triana, by removing obstructions, opening canals, or in any other way, provided no improvements were made on the property of others without written consent of the owner. However, the corporation could institute condemnation proceedings before the County Court.

The Act provided that whenever the creek should be rendered navigable for boats drawing ten inches of water, and so long as it should be kept thus navigable, the corporation could collect toll of \$2.00 per ton of freight.

Books for subscription of stock were opened on April 23, 1821. It was estimated by the commissioners that \$25,000 or \$30,000 would cover the expense of the undertaking.

According to a plat produced by two competent surveyors, Ferdinand Sannoner and James Weakly, it appeared that in a distance of between four or five miles no deep digging or high embankment would be necessary and that a canal of three feet of water would not require an average of three feet digging. From the termination of this contemplated canal, it was thought practical only to deepen, straighten, and remove logs from the bed of the creek in order to render it navigable at all seasons.

An estimate of the annual amount of produce, such as cotton, salt, flour, lumber, whiskey, cider, apples, etc., transported between Huntsville and Ditto's Landing ranged from two to three thousand tons. It was calculated that the expense of wagonage for this amount of produce would not fall short of \$10,000 to \$12,000, so that the opening of Indian Creek would bring a clear saving of at least half this amount, after paying the toll of \$2.00 per ton. The canal's promoters also cited the convenience of supplying the town with fuel and other articles from along the course of the creek and the use of surplus water for mills. The subscription announcement closed with the dire prediction that so many towns were rising upon the Tennessee River with such vastly superior natural advantages that Huntsville might soon find her pre-eminence seriously threatened.

Three days after subscription opened, the commissioners announced that a meeting of stockholders would be held on May 16 for the election of five trustees. Payment of \$25 per share was required by June 20.

On July 18, Dr. David Moore, secretary, advertised for fifty to one hundred laborers accustomed to ditching or working on canals. He

invited contractors to look at the plans and bid on all or any part of the work.

The Huntsville newspaper *Alabama Republican* took this occasion to editorialize the venture at great length as a novel and unprecedented improvement in so new a country. The editorial cited the accomplishments of the State of New York in constructing 400 miles of canals in a space of ten years and inferred that canals were constructed with ease and cheapness, compared with their public utility. In referring to Indian Creek Canal, the *Republican* speculated that it would be in use for the transportation of cotton the following season. How mistaken this prediction was, time alone would reveal.

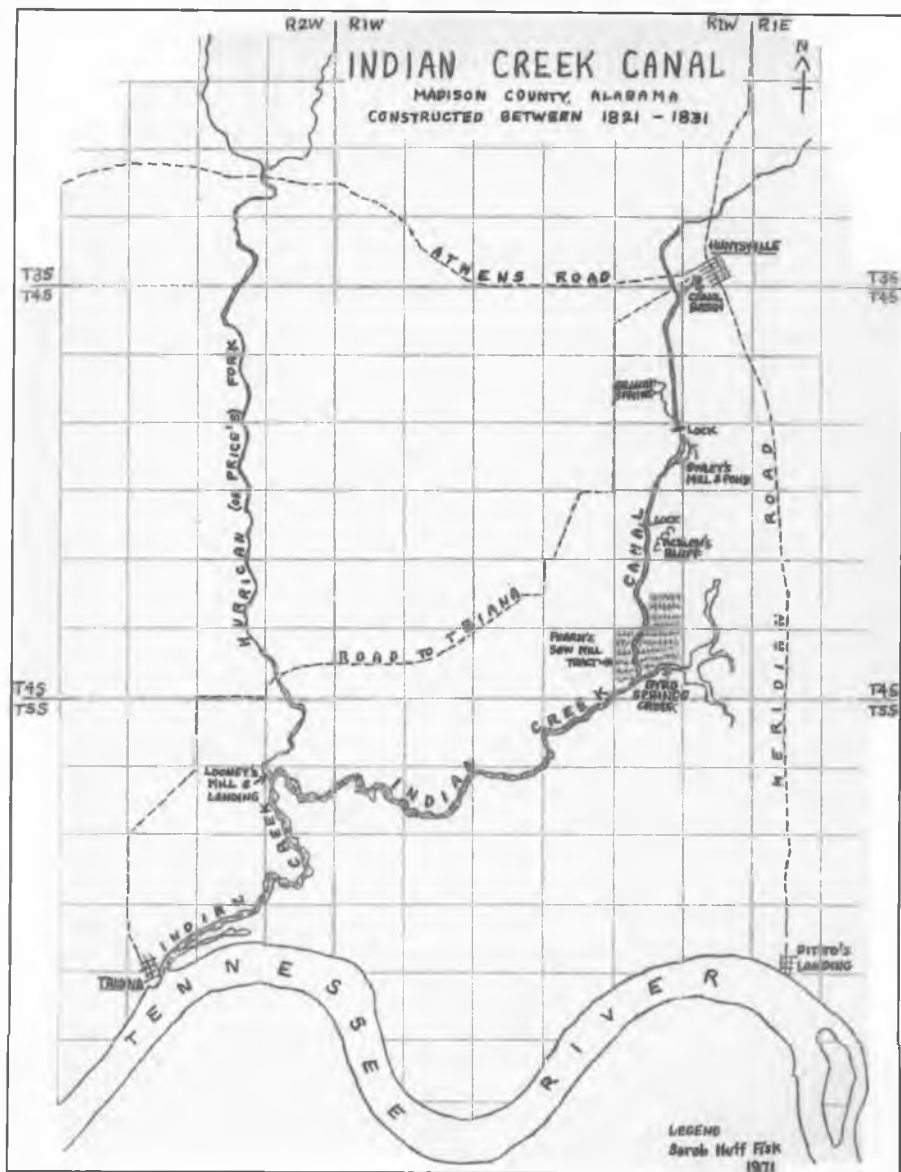
The initial phase of the work probably was centered in the winding section of creek from above the forks at Looney's Mill to the mouth of Byrd Springs Creek, a distance of five or six miles. Here it was thought necessary only to deepen and straighten the channel and remove logs. Only in this part of the creek could progress have been so rapid as to give rise to the prediction of an early completion date.

With the four-mile section of creek from the mouth of Byrd's Springs Creek north to Sively's Mill, the problems of development assumed their true proportion. Here it was necessary to compensate for a lack of downgrade by the construction of locks, five in number.

While the old locks are gone now, information recorded in deeds to land along the watercourse gives some indication of their location. The first lock was at a point about three miles south of Huntsville and just above Sively's Mill. Here, the canal company erected a dam with a flood gate lower down and Sively granted permission for the canal boats to pass through his large mill pond, which covered around ten acres.

Another lock was located northwest of Acklen's Bluff at a point where the canal company purchased two acres of land from John Turner. This purchase also included a half-mile stretch of creek to the north of the lock site, with 23 feet of land along the east bank and 16 along the west. The canal company agreed to construct a ford across the channel for Turner's use and to allow him as much water as could be discharged through a two-inch circular hole for the operation of a distillery.

On April 23, 1822, proposals were invited for completing all the portion of the canal below Sively's Mill. But progress on the work was so slow as to discourage even the press from reporting on it. After nearly two years had passed, it became abundantly clear that the enterprise had bogged down for lack of money. A popular, but often unsuccessful, fundraising method of the times was finally resorted to.



Indian Creek Canal Lottery for Internal Navigation was announced on February 6, 1825. The scheme offered for sale 4,060 tickets at \$5 each, of which 1,160 would draw prizes, ranging from a first prize of \$4,000 downward to 1,500 prizes of \$6 each. All prizes were to be discounted at the rate of 15%, the portion allotted by State law to the holder of the lottery. Thus, success of the lottery would benefit the canal

company by \$3,000. But ticket sales lagged, with less than one-half sold by July 9. Finally, on December 31, failure was admitted and participants were requested to return their tickets for a refund.

It must have been at this point that the strength and determination of Dr. Thomas Fearn, president and leading spirit of the canal enterprise, became most apparent. Dr. Fearn was a truly remarkable person, talented, public-spirited, and energetic. He was one of the eminent physicians of the South and pioneered in the use of Quinine for the treatment of fever. He served three terms in the Alabama House of Representatives, was a member of the Board of Directors of the Planters & Merchants Bank of Huntsville and the Huntsville Branch of the State Bank of Alabama. In 1836, he and his brother, George, an attorney, merchant, and commission broker, took over operation of the Huntsville Water Works. Dr. Fearn's interest in internal improvements and commerce continued over a long period of years and was by no means limited to Madison County. He was an incorporator of the Muscle Shoals Canal in 1827. Between the years 1845 and 1855, he actively participated in four of the great Commercial Conventions held in various cities of the South.

Thomas and George Fearn did not allow the Indian Creek Canal project to languish for lack of funds, but invested their own money to the extent that the enterprise soon became popularly known as "Fearn's Canal." Although a rise in the price of cotton in 1825 must have greatly encouraged the investors in their undertaking, still another year passed before even a measure of success could be claimed.

Finally, on January 10, 1827, over five years from the start of construction, the following modest announcement appeared in the *Southern Advocate*:

The Canal and other improvements on Indian Creek, having been so far completed as to admit of the passage of boats from Sively's Mill (three miles below Huntsville) the subscribers have constructed a good shed at that place, where they will receive cotton, and deliver the same, without delay at Looney's Mill, thence into his warehouse, or to such freighter, as may have boats there, according to instructions. The charge for receiving freight, etc. will be twenty-five cents per bale.

The editor of the *Advocate* praised the Fearn's, "who have at their own expense persevered in the undertaking through so many discouraging circumstances." The canal was proclaimed to be "the first in the State and first to be rendered navigable in the western country."

Citizens who had never been upon a canal were invited to witness the novel spectacle of boats heavily laden with cotton on their passage through a lock, as they descend several feet in as many minutes, without the least risk or damage.

By the time the canal opened, a sharp decline in the price of cotton had set in. On December 14, 1827, the staple was quoted as low as six to seven cents per pound. At this rate, a bale would only bring around \$15, which would hardly defray the expense of growing and shipping it. Nevertheless, according to an early chronicler of Madison County history, the Fearn did a good business and during the winter of 1826-27 about 4,000 bales of cotton were shipped down the canal.

This statement is borne out by the fact that the Fearn continued their efforts to complete the project. In the final phase of construction, the three miles between Huntsville and Sively's Mill, it was necessary to depart from the creek bed and dig a canal for part, if not all, of the way. This took nearly three more years. Finally, on April 9, 1831, ten years after the canal was started, the *Advocate* hailed the project as completed:

FEARN'S CANAL OPEN -- The citizens of our town were greeted on Tuesday afternoon last, with a sight as novel as it is gratifying, viz, the arrival through the canal of two Keel Boats, one of which was from the Tennessee River, loaded with lumber, potatoes, etc. These boats are about 20 tons burthen, and will carry from 80 to 100 bales of cotton with ease. They went off on Thursday afternoon in fine style, under three volleys of musketry from a detachment of the Huntsville Guards, and carrying full cargoes of cotton, together with about 50 passengers who proceeded with the boats to the first lock at Sively's Mill. The lock was passed in safety, and the passengers returned highly delighted with the excursion. The present price of freight for cotton is 37½ cents per bale, which is less than one half of the ordinary prices of the wagoners.

The editor of *The Advocate* predicted that the opening of the canal would bring a reduction in the prices of hauling both to and from Ditto's Landing and declared that produce from along the Tennessee, such as cedar posts, flour, corn, potatoes, whiskey, etc., combined with the inexhaustible supply of wood on or near the banks of the canal, would at all times present a valuable upstream freight. It was calculated that the

cotton production of the county would supply a steady downstream freight on the canal for six months out of the year.

On December 20, 1831, the Fearn announced a reduction in the canal rate to 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ ¢ per bale, including tolls, and stated that a warehouse was provided free of charge in Huntsville for the storage of cotton intended to be sent by the canal. At Looney's Landing storage to await arrival of river boats could be had for 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ per bale. The size of the locks was specified as 10 feet wide and 70 feet long, so that all boats under these dimensions could ply the canal.

About this time, the Fearn began the acquisition of around 650 acres of timber land along the canal in the area northwest of the mouth of Byrd's Spring Creek. They established a Grist Mill and Saw Mill on their tract and shipped timber and firewood to Huntsville.

An excessive amount of snow in the mountains of East Tennessee during the winter of 1831-32 caused the Tennessee River to flood. While this brought the much desired "long tide" over the Muscle Shoals, it also backed water up Indian Creek and over hundreds of acres of low lands through which the canal passed. After such a flood, silt and debris had to be cleared from the channel and levees repaired.

In spite of these and other difficulties, the Fearn continued their efforts to improve the Canal. On October 28, 1833, they advertised for good hands at 75¢ per day to throw up embankments and excavate "the basin," located at the head of the canal and directly west of the Big Spring in Huntsville. A warehouse and landing were erected on the north side of the Basin.

On November 11, 1833, George Fearn entered into partnership with Michael Erskine in a cotton freighting business. They offered shipment from Huntsville all the way to New Orleans at the customary rates charged from landings right on the river--the owners paying the canal toll of 20 cents per bale.

Late in 1834, the Fearn, in partnership with Alfred Howell and Thomas Patteson, purchased Looney's property at the Forks of Indian Creek, including the mill, machinery, warehouses and all improvements. Within a few months, they offered the property for sale or lease, with the privilege of diverting a portion of the water of the creek, should it be required for a canal to the Tennessee.

On February 16, 1835, the public was reminded that the canal was open for all who wished to use it at the established rate or toll, as far as Looney's Mill, but a rise of the Tennessee was required to pass that point. It was suggested that several more boats would meet with profitable employment in the trade.

The canal received national attention with the publication in 1835 of *Mitchell's Compendium of the Internal Improvements of the United States*. It was the only canal listed in Alabama, although mention was made of the proposed 37-mile passage around the Muscle Shoals.

On June 29, 1835, at a time when the mounting price of cotton indicated prosperity ahead, the Fearn suddenly revealed elaborate plans for the organization of a new enterprise, to be called the Huntsville Canal Company. Under a new liberal and perpetual charter granted by the Legislature, they hoped to raise \$150,000 for the purpose of constructing from Huntsville directly to the river a canal large enough to admit barges and river boats, and hopefully, even large steam boats all the way up to the town. If only \$75,000 could be raised, an alternate plan was proposed. Terms were to be worked out whereby holders of stock in the Indian Creek Navigation Company could associate themselves with the new company. The Fearn asserted that should the new undertaking fail from lack of support, they would use their own limited funds to enlarge and improve the present canal and extend it through to the river.

Despite the hopes entertained by the promoters of the proposed new Huntsville Canal, it was too late to attract the public to their venture. Shippers were turning to more modern improvements for the transport of cotton and other products. A McAdamized Turnpike under construction along the Meridian Road from Green Bottom Inn through Huntsville to Ditto's Landing promised fine hauling conditions. The new steam railway in operation between Decatur and Tusculumbia had fired the public interest.

While the bright prospects of the Railroad Age served to stun the hopes of the canal's promoters, the financial panic of 1837 surely rendered the death blow to the enterprise. George Fearn was among many who suffered severe financial losses. He was forced to mortgage his property, including his interest in the canal company and the Huntsville Water Works.

It is doubtful if the canal operated to much extent after 1837. In a deed executed in 1839 for the sale of excess land along the watercourse, Thomas Fearn and the trustees of George Fearn, reserved full rights to the canal, embankments, and roadway along the bank, but made it plain that the purchaser would be free to make all repairs neglected by the canal company. Other deeds of this period mention "crumbling dams and levees" along the watercourse. So swift was the decline of the canal that by 1859, the author of the Huntsville *Directory, City Guide and Business Mirror* stated it had been abandoned within a few years and "is now antiquated and useless."

In 1969, an Alabama Historical Association marker was erected at the site of the canal's basin on Gallatin Street in the Heart of Huntsville to serve as a permanent reminder that Indian Creek Canal once contributed to the continuing effort for the improvement of commerce in Madison County.

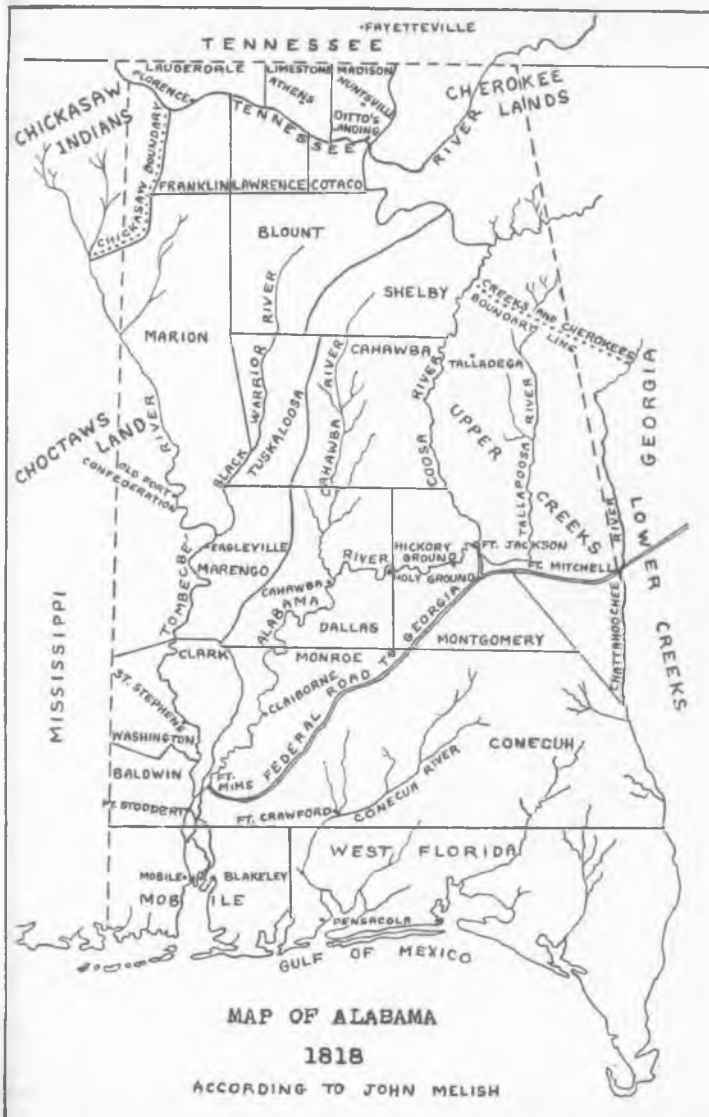
Sarah Huff Fisk presented this paper to the Alabama Historical Association on April 23, 1971.



Northern Terminus
INDIAN CREEK CANAL
First Canal In Alabama
Incorporated 1820
Completed 1831

This canal was constructed to the Tennessee River to facilitate the transportation of cotton to market. Developers were: Thomas Fearn, LeRoy Pope, Stephen S. Ewing, Henry Cook, and Samuel Hazard.

Alabama Historical Association marker in Big Spring Park, Huntsville



Drawing by Sarah Huff Fisk
Alabama History for Schools
 Charles Grayson Summersell
 Colonial Press: Birmingham, AL
 1957, p 161.

Further Reading

Research notes for this paper may be found in the Sarah Huff Fisk Collection located in the Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library.



(Courtesy Burritt Museum)

“Saint Bartley Harris” of Huntsville, Alabama

This watercolor portrait by Miss Howard Weeden, considered one of her best, was exhibited in Berlin, Germany in 1896 at the gallery of Edward Schulte.

“Bartley Harris, a famous old Hard-shell Baptist preacher,” was described by Weeden’s friend, Elizabeth Price, as having “baptized more than 3,000 members into the Primitive Baptist Church and they say he made a picturesque and commanding figure as he stood in the waters of the Spring Branch, his tall figure enveloped in a long linen duster, his head bound with a white turban.” (*Southern Woman’s Magazine*, August 1916.)

Howard Weeden, Artist and Poet¹

SARAH HUFF FISK

Shortly before Christmas, 1898 the Boston publishing firm of D. Appleton & Company released 1,200 copies of a slender book of paintings and poetry, *Shadows on the Wall*, by Howard Weeden.² This brief volume, with only thirty pages between its hard covers and selling for \$1.00, became an overnight sensation in the worlds of art and literature. Customers stood in line for it at bookstores; the first edition was spoken for before it left the press. From critics came such lavish words of praise as "brilliant," "exquisite," and "unique."³



Portraits from *Shadows on the Wall*, 1898

Shadows on the Wall contains eleven beautifully executed portraits—all of Negroes familiar to the plantations of the South before the Civil War. So vital and moving are these portraits that the kindly, loyal, proud hearts of the old slaves seem fairly to glow in their expressive faces. Each Negro head has its own dialect verse on the page opposite; together, portrait and poem make a truly touching character study. The *New York Times* acclaimed the book "the revelation of a race." Joel Chandler Harris, originator of "Uncle Remus," declared its creations "more real than life itself."⁴ Southerners saw their memories revived and resurrected on its pages. Others, perhaps less fully appreciative of its message, still marveled at the power and feeling of the brilliant work of this artist-poet, Howard Weeden, a virtual unknown in the world of belles-lettres. Into her home town of Huntsville, Alabama streamed

floods of praise and inquiry. Newspapers, magazines, and individuals wanted to know about "Mr. Howard Weeden," as many of them called the new star on the literary horizon.⁵



(Courtesy The Weeden House Museum)

Maria Howard Weeden
1846 - 1905

The artist-poet, however, was not a man. She was a tiny, frail maiden lady of fifty-one years who wore high-boned collars and gentle curls across her forehead in the fashion of her girlhood. Fame found her shy and sweet, so overawed by her own success that to most inquiries she simply replied:

Requests for facts of interest in my life keep me in a perpetual state of embarrassment, seeing that my life has been so without incident that I find it difficult to gather anything worth repeating.

Happy women have no histories it is said—and perhaps it is because I have been so happy that I have nothing to tell you. I live in the old house in which I was born, here in the loveliest old town in the world, with my friends, my books and my pictures, and this is my history.⁶

The "old house," in which Miss Weeden was born on July 7, 1846 and in which she lived until her death,⁷ was the Weeden family's town house, Aspen Place, at the corner of Gates, Greene and Williams streets, two blocks from the Madison County courthouse.⁸

The artist found her ancestry a matter of interest and pride, as evidenced by her frequent references to "a long line of romantic Scottish ancestry which may have lent to temperament its tinge of old-world sentiment" and to her immediate forefathers as "planters and slave-owners, so I came into the world with southern instincts."⁹

The Scottish ancestry came through her maternal grandfather, David Urquhart, born in County Ross in 1779. The Urquhart family once owned Hilton Castle in the wild mountain country of Cromarty on the border of Loch Ness. David came to America as a young man and settled

near Augusta, Georgia, where he became wealthy in land and slaves and built a home which he named "Hilton" after the Scottish castle. He married Catherine Brooks McGehee, born in Prince Edward County, Virginia, a descendant of Lord Brooks. These were Howard Weeden's grandparents. Jane Eliza Brooks Urquhart, their second daughter, was her mother. This lady was first married to James Watkins of Elbert County, Georgia. After his early death she married Dr. William Donalson Weeden, a native of Baltimore who had also lived in Virginia—Miss Weeden described him as "a Virginian."¹⁰ He had come to Huntsville very early, around 1812, and settled on Weeden's Mountain (now part of the Redstone Arsenal Reservation).¹¹ When he married Mrs. Watkins some twenty years later, he was a widower with two sons and three daughters.

Over the years Dr. Weeden became very prosperous, acquiring several plantations besides his Weeden Mountain property. It was not until March, 1845, however, that he purchased the house in town from M. C. Betts. Construction of this large square-styled brick residence had been started about 1819, but in 1845 it was still unfinished.¹² Dr. Weeden lost no time in completing and occupying the house. He and his second wife now had five children and cared for one son of his first marriage. The slave quarters of the new home housed several adult slaves and about seven children.



(Courtesy The Weeden House Museum)

The Weeden House Museum, 300 Gates Avenue

This fine new residence was enjoyed only briefly by Dr. Weeden, himself. On January 13, 1846, after several weeks of illness, he died at his Huntsville home. His will, filed for probate March 22, 1847, divided \$10,000 and some property among the five children of his first marriage. His second wife and five children received the remainder of his estate: two plantations in Madison County, one in Marshall, the house in Huntsville, and a large plantation west of Buzzard's Creek in Marengo County. Some fifty slaves were located on this last-named plantation.¹³

The five children of Dr. Weeden's second marriage, as named in his will, were Jane Urquhart, Catherine Louisa, William (he also had a son named William by his first marriage), John David, and Henry Vernon. Howard—Maria Howard—was not provided for by name, for she was not born until some six months after her father's death.

Howard Weeden grew up in sheltered surroundings of ease and refinement. As the youngest of a large family of fatherless children, and one who was always frail, she surely received such tender care and attention from the household servants as to implant on her young mind a fond relationship, never to be lost.

In this attentive home atmosphere her artistic talent was recognized early. "I cannot remember when I did not draw and paint," she stated.¹⁴ Even before she was ten years old, she was having instructions in art from William Frye, listed in *Williams Directory of Huntsville, 1859* as a "Portrait Painter" who was widely recognized in the North Alabama area.¹⁵

Though Mr. Frye surely instructed his little pupil in the dainty copy work popular with young ladies of the day, he may also have inspired her rather unusual interest in drawing faces, figures, and flowers from real life. Of the artist's works surviving from this earliest period is a tiny picture painted on silk, titled "The Sea of Galilee." This painting shows the marvelous quality of her miniature-like work, even at so early an age.¹⁶

Howard was fifteen when the Civil War shattered the comfortable life of the Weeden family. Her three brothers promptly enlisted in the Confederate Army; and as her oldest sister, Jane, Mrs. William T. Reed, was then living in Tuskegee, Alabama, only Mrs. Weeden, Kate, Howard, and the Negro servants were left at home to face the Union forces that seized Huntsville on April 11, 1862.¹⁷

Early in the occupation of the city the Weeden home, being large and conveniently located to the heart of town, was requisitioned by the United States Army. Mrs. Weeden and her daughters were forced to live in the slave quarters. Finally, life became so miserable that they fled, servants and all, to take refuge with Jane in Tuskegee. They remained there for the duration of the war.¹⁸

The Weedens found Tuskegee quiet after their trying experiences in the North Alabama war zone, and they were determined to take up their lives in normal channels. Young Howard was enrolled in the Tuskegee Female Methodist College, which the young president and Methodist minister, Dr. George W. F. Price, had managed to keep going in spite of the war. There she received art instruction in the class of Miss Julia Spear, who found her young pupil, though fragile and slender in body,

possessed of a great desire to learn, ambitious, alert and willing to work.¹⁹

After the war the Weeden family returned to Huntsville to face a dark and uncertain future. Their properties had been stripped and plundered; their town house was little more than a shell. Nevertheless, they had one great cause for rejoicing: the safe return of all three of Howard's brothers—the two oldest with commissions, William as a captain, John David a colonel.²⁰

In the midst of these desperate times Mrs. Weeden continued her effort to divide the family properties, now so tragically depleted. In 1866 she deeded the town house to the two unmarried daughters, Kate and Howard.²¹

Howard was nineteen that year. Her school days, brief and sketchy as they had been, were over, and she turned toward helping the family fortunes. The only way that she was at all equipped to help was through art and literature. Her belief in her abilities in these fields seems to have been firm and vigorous, quite in contrast to her shyness in some other aspects of life. It was this strong belief, coupled with her natural optimism, that set her to work and kept her working for the rest of her life, in the face of innumerable difficulties.

Before examining Miss Weeden's artistic and literary undertakings ("vagaries" or "wild notions" was the way she described most of her efforts), it is only fair to consider some of the difficulties she faced and their probable effect upon her life and work.

Certainly, Howard was too frail for much physical labor. Her health was extremely delicate. As she grew older, her inability to throw off infection increased until she finally contracted tuberculosis from which she died. She never yielded to her weak health, however, and in her letters she was seldom "becoming ill" but usually "feeling better" or "getting up after several weeks in bed." However, she had another physical defect, poor eyesight, which probably annoyed her even more than her poor health. The Nashville eye specialist who treated her declared that she had the most extreme case of near-sightedness he had ever encountered.²² "My eyes are troubling me again," she mentioned over and over in her letters. Despite the suffering this condition caused her, there is no doubt but that it enriched her painting, enabling her to do the most delicate brush work. Using a brush with only three hairs, she produced a photographic fineness of line in her portraits that is near perfection.

It is hard to examine Miss Weeden's masterpieces and believe that she had such little training in art, so few advantages. Many precious hours were lost to her through the necessity for experimenting in

methods and technique. But even this lack of technical knowledge—such a trial to the artist—was at least partly responsible for the charm and originality which glow in her work.

Miss Weeden nourished a life-long desire to travel, to visit the world's great museums, to mingle with people who spoke the language of art and literature. Circumstances denied her these joys and, in so doing, perhaps caused her to choose "from her own backyard" the subject that was to make her famous.

Among the artist's earliest efforts to help the family finances was the holding of art classes for little girls. These groups met in the Weeden's back parlor, off and on for a number of years.²³ Mrs. Ben Matthews, one of the pupils, recalled that their teacher, in her sweet gentle way, used to touch up their wooden little drawings and admonish them—if they made a smudge, "just to paint a butterfly over it," as she had put butterflies over many things in her own life, making beauty out of smudges.

One of Miss Weeden's first literary undertakings, begun in the years between girlhood and womanhood, was the writing of short stories and little poems. These were frequently published in the *Christian Observer*, a Presbyterian paper (the Weedens were Presbyterians). Instead of her own name, the author used the pseudonym "Flake White."²⁴

A type of art work that Miss Weeden found generally saleable was hand-painted cards for special occasions. On many of these she painted flowers for she loved flowers and the outdoors. One spring she went day after day to the mountainside, until she had completed paintings of 208 varieties of wild flowers in their natural setting.²⁵

Perhaps the artist's favorite occupation was "illuminating poems." This, she declared, gave her "unending pleasure because it had a literary flavor." Her method was to copy short poems in her delicate printing, illustrate them in water colors, and bind the sheets in decorated covers. It was this work that led directly to one of her earliest, possibly her very first, painting of a Negro portrait. She described the attempt thus:

In looking about for poems for my purpose, short and pointed, I stumbled one day upon that beautiful 'De Massa ob de Sheepfol,' which I still think the best negro poem that has been written. I transcribed it and illustrated it in water colors with pastures and sheep galore and then in afterthought, to indicate that it was a negro poem, put on the cover an old negro head.²⁶

"De Massa ob de Sheepfol" was written by Sarah Pratt McLean Greene and first published in her *Towhead* in 1884. Miss Weeden's discovery and illumination of this inspirational verse was indeed fortunate, for she showed it to some visitors of much travel and culture, who happened to be in Huntsville, and their comment was truly a guidepost on the road of

success for the artist. "Your negro head is so good," they said, "that you should throw away all your colors except brown!"²⁷

From then on most of the artist's brushes were "dipped in brown," as she painted one Negro head after the other. Many years later she said:

There was a time when I painted everything indiscriminately, like a misled amateur, until I woke one day to the fact that there was right around me a subject of supreme artistic interest, the old southern ex-slave, who with his black weather-beaten face and picturesque figure was rapidly slipping away. Once comprehended, the subject was one to absorb anybody who could use a brush loaded with Brown Madder.²⁸

Most of her friends and neighbors had a beloved old mammy, cook, or coachman, whose picture they wanted Miss Howard to paint. As her delicate brush strokes committed to paper the likeness, the very character of the old Negroes—many of whom the artist had known since childhood—she liked to talk to them. Their native sense of humor, patience in misfortune, courage and philosophic acceptance of life impressed her deeply. Their words stayed in her mind until they became verses: "Too Late," "Beaten Biscuit," "The Old Boatman," and "Mother and Mammy" were written in that order.

As the months and years passed, these Negro heads and verses accumulated in a portfolio, much admired by visitors.²⁹ Some of the paintings were framed and added to the gallery of the artist's work that literally lined the parlor walls. Occasionally, the artist copied one of the heads for someone, charging no more than \$3.00, often less.³⁰



(Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)

The Weeden Parlor

In September, 1893 Howard Weeden accompanied some Huntsville friends on a visit to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where she had a modest exhibit, some illustrations from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.³¹ While

there, she saw the work of two other artists who painted Negroes: E. W. Kemble, creator of "Kemble's Coons," and A. B. Frost, illustrator of the "Uncle Remus" stories. Both of these men portrayed their subjects in the comical "minstrel show" manner then generally accepted for depicting Negroes. Miss Weeden must have realized that her own sincere, sympathetic studies were superior in every way, for she returned home full of enthusiasm, anxious to get to work on a number of orders she had received in Chicago, and concerned about copyright privileges. Her remarks on this latter subject are characteristic of her wit and humor:

I have been thinking I ought to have my booklets of negro heads and verses copyrighted, but the two copies each, required, is too much. I wrote the Librarian of Congress and asked him if it would protect me at all to copyright the *words* simply, and he again sent me the same old printed forms—like a deaf-mute, which answered every question alike. When we women get to holding office, we won't need printed forms, as Mrs. Pryor said, 'Thank God, we can always find words for what we need to say!'³²

When Howard Weeden wrote those words, she obviously did not dream that her paintings and poems would ever be copyrighted through publication in book form. Had she dreamed such a dream, it would have been a pleasant one, for she loved books and much of her inspiration came from them. Especially was she impressed by a group of Southern writers: Thomas Nelson Page, Harry Stillwell Edwards, John Trotwood Moore, James Lane Allen, and Joel Chandler Harris—all prominent in the late 1800s for their sympathetic stories of plantation days. Their stories, such as "Meh Lady" and "Unc Edinburg's Drowndin'" from Page's *In Ole Virginia*, inspired many of her paintings.³³

Eventually, Miss Weeden's work led her to correspond with and to meet most of these famous writers. Several of the meetings were arranged by the Huntsville artist's close friend, Miss Elizabeth Price of Nashville.



(Courtesy The Weeden House Museum)

Elizabeth Fraser Price, 1866-1958

Miss Price was the daughter of Dr. George W. F. Price, who had been president of the Tuskegee College when Howard Weeden attended there and who later was the fourth president of the Huntsville Female College. Elizabeth Price was a small girl in Huntsville when she first met the artist. Despite the difference of some twenty years in their ages, a fond friendship developed and grew—even after the Prices moved to Nashville in 1880, where Dr. Price founded the Nashville College for Young Ladies.

By the time she was in her early twenties Elizabeth Price was probably Miss Weeden's most ardent spokesman. The walls of her Nashville music studio displayed a number of paintings the artist had given her; she loved to show these to the prominent people who visited her father's school. She often sold paintings, arranged orders, and always—in her bright vivacious way—gave much-needed love and encouragement to the artist.³⁴



Portraits from *Bandanna Ballads*, 1899

In 1895 Miss Price went to Germany to study music. She took with her seven of Miss Weeden's best Negro heads and in April, 1896 placed these on exhibit in Berlin's most fashionable picture bazaar, the Gallery of Edward Schulte. They were enthusiastically received. Miss Price wrote glowing reports of this exhibit to the Tennessee and Alabama

papers and forwarded the artist an avalanche of orders.³⁵ Miss Weeden was quite overcome—"sore and tender and feel like crying" was the way she expressed herself to her distant benefactor.³⁶

The fame which the artist's work brought her in Berlin and later in Paris, through her dear friend's efforts, was, however, only a dim foretaste of that which she was to attain through the kindness of a gentleman she scarcely knew. William O. Allison, a New Yorker visiting in Huntsville, was so impressed by the artist-poet's brilliant work that he asked to take the paintings and poems back to New York and publish them in book form.³⁷ At long last the portfolio of masterpieces was to be opened for the world to admire.

The artist's joy in the publication of her work was marred by one disappointment. Efforts to make color plates from her paintings proved unsuccessful; the rich brown tones of her portraits had to be reproduced in black and white. But even in this simple dress, the paintings glittered like diamonds, drawing the attention of art lovers everywhere to the unknown genius from the South. "In a moment," Howard Weeden declared later, "I seemed to stand in a flood of light and love and letters—such letters! One enthusiastic writer (distant and unknown) sent me a hundred dollars in honor of the first copy she had just bought—and all kinds of beautiful things happened."³⁸

Sadly enough, there was also one misfortune. The second edition of *Shadows on the Wall* was hardly off the press, when the printing plant burned, destroying the plates of the book.³⁹ Though this was a real financial loss to Miss Weeden, it undoubtedly hastened the passing of her work from the semi-private circulation under Mr. Allison's sponsorship to the hands of a regular publishing firm.

Doubleday, McClure & Company undertook the next edition, in 1899, titled *Bandanna Ballads* and containing the works in the original book merged with eight new paintings and poems. This new edition was graced with a flattering foreword by Joel Chandler Harris, who had requested the privilege of thus praising an unknown artist and poet, "who," he declared, "has surpassed us all!"

With publication of her work, the life of the frail artist fell into an almost frantic tempo. Demands for her paintings came from everywhere. The Nashville Art Club and other groups tendered receptions in her honor.⁴⁰ The well-known composer, Sidney Homer, set several of her poems to music.⁴¹ She was urged to prepare paintings for various exhibitions. There were letters to be answered, unfamiliar business matters relating to her books, and, in the midst of everything, more material to be prepared for publication.

Under great stress, her health rapidly failing, Miss Weeden managed to complete two more volumes, *Songs of the Old South*, published in 1901, and *Old Voices*, her most elaborate book, in 1904.⁴²

Howard Weeden died April 12, 1905. Her passing at the very height of her career shocked the literary world and saddened her many friends who knew her as a tender lovable woman, as well as famous artist and poet. Immediate survivors were her sisters, Miss Kate Weeden, at home, and Mrs. William T. Reed, Mobile; and brothers, Col. John D. Weeden, Florence, and Dr. Henry V. Weeden, Selma.⁴³

In May, 1910 the Twickenham Town Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution marked the Weeden home with a bronze plaque.⁴⁴ This tribute still identifies the house, only slightly changed from the days when Miss Howard sat before her easel in the big east front room, painstakingly creating the masterpieces that were to become the most beautiful and unique of all memorials to the Negro slave of the Old South.

Miss Weeden's original works are now widely scattered. A few of her heads are prized by Huntsville families. Until her death in 1958, Miss Elizabeth Price, possessor of the largest of all collections, traveled widely, displaying her treasured paintings and recalling memories of the great artist.⁴⁵ It was through the interest of Miss Price and the efforts of the Huntsville Culture Club that the City of Huntsville became, in June, 1959, the proud possessor of a group of original Weeden paintings. The works, representing the entire collection of the Nashville Museum of Art, were a priceless gift from that institution to the artist's home town. They were placed on display at the city-owned Burritt Museum atop Monte Sano, where they are marveled at by a generation scarcely more familiar with the name "Howard Weeden" than was the generation that acclaimed her in 1898.⁴⁶

End Notes

¹ The text of this article was originally published in *The Alabama Review*, Volume XIV, April 1961, pages 124-137. Copyright 1961 Alabama Historical Association; reprinted with permission. The Association, founded in 1947, is the oldest statewide historical society in Alabama. More information is available at <<http://www.archives.state.al.us/aha/aha.html>>.

² This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Alabama Historical Association, Selma, April 23, 1960.

³ The biographical notes on Howard Weeden, in the handwriting of her close friend, Miss Elizabeth Price of Nashville, TN (hereinafter Price Notes) are in the Weeden Collection, Huntsville (AL) Madison County Public Library.

- ⁴ Introduction to Howard Weeden, *Bandanna Ballads* (New York, 1899), xiii.
- ⁵ Price Notes, Weeden Collection.
- ⁶ Howard Weeden to Miss Arrington, March 16, 1904, Weeden Collection.
- ⁷ Mary Weeden Bibb, great-niece of Miss Weeden, to Henry B. Chase, president, Huntsville Historical Society, June 20, 1953, on occasion of the nomination of the artist-poet for the Alabama Hall of Fame (in Weeden Collection). Howard Weeden's birthdate was established by estate papers of her father William D. Weeden who died Jan. 13, 1846.
- ⁸ See Howard Weeden "From an Old Garden" (poem in Price Notes), Weeden Collection.
- ⁹ Howard Weeden to Sal Marcassen, a New York reporter, Oct. 3, 1900, Weeden Collection.
- ¹⁰ James E. Saunders, *Early Settlers of Alabama* (New Orleans, 1899), 252, 362, 423, 454-455.
- ¹¹ Mary Weeden Bibb to Henry B. Chase, June 20, 1953, Weeden Collection.
- ¹² Robert P. Weeden to Lawrence Cooper, Aug. 5, 1930, Weeden Collection.
- ¹³ Madison County Book of Wills, XII, 272 (in Probate Records Room, Madison County Courthouse); Madison County Deed Book W, 354 (in Madison County Records Center, Huntsville, AL). Dr. Weeden's obituaries: *Huntsville Democrat*, Jan. 14, 1846; *Southern Advocate*, Jan. 16, 1846.
- ¹⁴ Birmingham (AL) *Age-Herald*, Sept. 16, 1902, Weeden Collection.
- ¹⁵ Price Notes, Weeden Collection.
- ¹⁶ Nashville (TN) *Banner*, May, 1912, Weeden Collection.
- ¹⁷ Price Notes, Weeden Collection.
- ¹⁸ Mrs. William D. Chadick, "Civil War Days in Huntsville, Ala.," *Huntsville Times*, Sept. 11-15, 1955. Also see Nancy M. Rohr, *Incidents of the War: The Civil War Journal of Mary Jane Chadick*, (Huntsville, 2005), 261.
- ¹⁹ Price Notes, Weeden Collection. Also see Rhoda Coleman Ellison, *History of Huntingdon College: 1854-1954* (Montgomery, 2004) 10-32.
- ²⁰ Marie B. Owen, *The Story of Alabama* (New York, 1949), II, 272.
- ²¹ Madison County Deed Book EE, 520 (in Madison County Records Center, Huntsville, AL).
- ²² *Huntsville Weekly Mercury*, Apr. 19, 1905.
- ²³ Price Notes, Weeden Collection.
- ²⁴ See "A Christmas Card," *Christian Observer*, Dec., 1885 (clipping in Price Notes). Also see Sarah Huff Fisk and Linda Wright Riley, *Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as "Flake White,"* (Huntsville, 2005).
- ²⁵ Elizabeth H. Chapman, "Huntsville Life in the 'Gay 90's,'" *Huntsville Times*, Nov. 4, 1934.
- ²⁶ Howard Weeden to Sal Marcassen, Oct. 3, 1900, Weeden Collection.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Howard Weeden to Miss Arrington, March 16, 1904, Weeden Collection.
- ²⁹ Howard Weeden to Sal Marcassen, Oct. 3, 1900, Weeden Collection.
- ³⁰ Howard Weeden to Elizabeth Price, Oct. ?, 1894, Weeden Collection.
- ³¹ *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, Sept. 20, 1893, Weeden Collection.
- ³² Howard Weeden to Elizabeth Price, [Sept. ?], 1893, Weeden Collection.

³³ Price Notes; Howard Weeden to Elizabeth Price, June 25, 1897; Apr. 30, 1898; May 8, 1898, Weeden Collection.

³⁴ Interview with Elizabeth Price, Sept., 1956.

³⁵ Huntsville *Weekly Mercury*, Apr. 22, 1896, Weeden Collection.

³⁶ Howard Weeden to Elizabeth Price, Apr. 22, 1896, Weeden Collection.

³⁷ Howard Weeden to Sal Marcassen, Oct. 3, 1900, Weeden Collection.

³⁸ Howard Weeden to Elizabeth Price, fragment of undated letter, Weeden Collection.

³⁹ Elizabeth H. Chapman, "Huntsville Life in the Gay '90's," *Huntsville Times*, Nov. 4, 1934.

⁴⁰ Huntsville *Weekly Mercury*, Apr. 19, 1905, Weeden Collection.

⁴¹ Nashville (TN) *Banner*, Dec. 10, 1933, Weeden Collection.

⁴² Nashville (TN) *American*, July, 1904.

⁴³ Huntsville *Weekly Mercury*, Apr. 12, 1905, Weeden Collection.

⁴⁴ Huntsville *Times*, May 20, 1910.

⁴⁵ Bedford County *Times* (Shelbyville, TN), Sept. 18, 1936.

⁴⁶ Huntsville *Times*, June 14, 1959.

Further Reading

Books by Howard Weeden: *Shadows on the Wall* (New York: privately printed, 1898); *Bandanna Ballads* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899); *Songs of the Old South* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1901); *Old Voices* (New York: Doubleday & McClure Co., 1904).

Frances C. Roberts and Sarah Huff Fisk, *Shadows on the Wall: The Life and Works of Howard Weeden* (Huntsville: Colonial Press, 1962).

Sarah Huff Fisk and Linda Wright Riley, *Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as "Flake White"* (Huntsville: Big Spring Press, 2005).

Sarah Huff Fisk, "The Maria Howard Weeden House: The Gardens," *Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*, Vol. 8 (Fall, 1981), 18-21.

Alabama Women's Hall of Fame, "Maria Howard Weeden (1846-1905)," <<http://www.awhf.org/weeden.html>> a website of Judson College, Marion, Alabama.

Original works of art by Howard Weeden are in the permanent collections of:

1. The Weeden House Museum <<http://www.weedenhousemuseum.com>>.
2. Burritt on the Mountain <<http://www.burrittonthemountain.com>>.
3. The Huntsville Museum of Art <<http://www.hsvmuseum.org>>.



Works of Howard Weeden Return to Huntsville

In 1959, a collection of paintings and poems by Howard Weeden were presented to the Burritt Museum by the Nashville Museum of Art through the influence of Miss Elizabeth Price and the Huntsville Culture Club. Pictured above (left to right) are: Malvern Griffin, Burritt Museum board member; Miss Jessie Hopper of the Huntsville Culture Club; Mrs. Anna Rosborough, member of the art committee for Burritt Museum and Mrs. Jessie Woods, of the Culture Club. (*Huntsville Times*, June 14, 1959)

In 1979, Miss Elizabeth Price's own personal collection of approximately 20 works by Weeden, done in oils, charcoals, watercolors and pastels, were purchased from Miss Florence P. Adams (niece of Elizabeth Price) by the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association for display in the Weeden House Museum. (*Huntsville Times*, September 10, 1979.)

My Memories of Elizabeth Fraser Price

SARAH HUFF FISK

The first time I saw Miss Elizabeth Price was at my home in the late 1940s. The occasion was a meeting of the Huntsville Culture Club, which I had joined the year before. I was very glad to be a member of this fine organization for I was a good deal younger than most of the members. Founded in 1911, the club was joined by invitation only. Mrs. J. B. Clopton had proposed my name.

By custom, the members of The Culture Club met in each others' homes and served on its programs. That is, they prepared and gave the programs themselves, or on some rare occasions invited a guest speaker. On the day that I first entertained a meeting in my home, I was very proud and somewhat nervous. My mother, Nellie B. Huff, and my aunt, Emily A. Baker, both of whom lived with my husband and me, were guests at the meeting and assisted me in receiving and in serving refreshments.

That day we were to have a guest speaker, all the way from Nashville. Miss Elizabeth Price was very warmly welcomed for she was to speak on her friend, the late Miss Howard Weeden, Huntsville's own famous artist and poet, in whom the Culture Club members had a deep and continuing interest.

Miss Price was short in stature, very slender, and had a lively manner that made her a persuasive speaker. She brought with her a number of Miss Weeden's paintings which the artist had given her. These were passed around. I happened to be seated next to Miss Price and was the first to be handed a drawing, and when my eyes fell on the exquisitely rendered likeness of an old Negro servant of post Civil War days I nearly fainted with delight. Here was true genius! I had been trying to draw and paint for most of my life and could recognize the works of a true artist. From that moment on I was a devotee of Maria Howard Weeden, who had died April 12, 1905.

In her vivacious voice and natural Southern accent, Miss Price read some of the poems that the artist had written to accompany the paintings. Many of these were already known by Culture Club members who owned or had read some of the four books Miss Weeden published during her lifetime. These books had not been in print for many years and were highly prized.

Miss Price held us spellbound as she told about her long friendship with Miss Weeden. The artist had attended Tuskegee Female College during the Civil War and while Dr. George W. F. Price had been its president. He had recognized her promise and a warm friendship blossomed to be continued a few years later in 1872 when Dr. Price and his family moved to Huntsville, to become President of the flourishing Huntsville Female College. Elizabeth Price was only a few years old when the Prices moved to Huntsville. So Miss Weeden was her elder by some twenty years, and Elizabeth grew up admiring and loving the warm-hearted artist-poet.

That day at my home Miss Price told how after ten years in Huntsville, her father moved his family on to Nashville to start a school, and how correspondence and return visits kept her in touch with Miss Weeden whose work was becoming more admired and sought after as the years passed.

During those years, Miss Price received a fine musical education in Nashville and was well on her way to a career as a sought-after teacher of piano. With a studio established in her own home where prominent Nashvillians sent their daughters, Miss Price gradually found herself showing Miss Weeden's work and even taking orders for the artist. For a time their correspondence dealt largely with these orders.

Miss Price very proudly told how, when she had the opportunity to go to Berlin, Germany, to study music, she took along some of Miss Weeden's best work to show in that city of culture. Exhibits held in Berlin and Paris brought excellent reviews and some orders.

The Culture Club members were so inspired by Miss Price's talk that day at my home that they began to talk seriously of making an effort as a club to acquire at least a few of Miss Weeden's paintings for the City of Huntsville with the hope of adding to these. It seemed sad that Huntsville, the artist's native city, had none of her work. Two members of the Club were particularly interested in this project: Miss Jessie Hopper and Mrs. T. L. Woods, both teachers. They kept in touch with Miss Price.

In 1956 the Culture Club made the decision to try to get together what they could about Howard Weeden and asked Miss Price for her

help. A committee was appointed to go to Nashville and see if they could find out what Miss Price had and what she might be willing to lend or to give toward a collection here in Huntsville. As best I can remember the committee included Miss Hopper, Mrs. Woods, Miss Dorothy Webb and myself. I was probably included because I could take notes in shorthand.

On our first trip up we were welcomed by Miss Price, who was by then considerably advanced in years but still her same cordial, vivacious self. We met in her music studio which was a long double room with one end raised higher than the other. On the high end stood her grand piano.

We were shown around the room where many of Miss Weeden's paintings hung on the walls. Then we were seated and Miss Price began to speak of her memories of the artist-poet. I took notes as fast as I could but despaired of getting it all down.

After we had talked for a while Miss Price brought out a kind of scrapbook and many loose papers. Among the papers were letters Miss Weeden had written to Miss Price. These were given to me with the understanding that I would make typed copies and then place the originals in the Huntsville Public Library for safe keeping.

Not until I returned home and examined the letters more closely did I realize the difficulty I faced. The letters were on thin paper in Miss Weeden's fine hand, very hard to read. Besides, lines were written across the page then it had been turned and other lines written up and down the sheet thus crossing over the first lines. Two or three of the letters were triple crossed.

I sat at my typewriter and very, very slowly typed a letter, leaving space to fill in the words I could not read. Then my mother, Aunt Emily and Aunt Edna, who was visiting us at the time, all worked together to fill in the blank spaces. We got most of them. I put the fragile original letters in plastic covers. I then retyped the original typewritten letters where we had filled in words, making a carbon copy. With the typewritten sets filled in notebooks, I thought I was through.

Because of the press of work at my office I didn't get to make the next trip to Nashville with the committee, but Miss Price wrote a charming letter telling me of the visit and how sorry she was that I was not in the party. In this trip I think the committee visited the Nashville Museum of Art to view the Weeden paintings in their collection.

Written to Price while
 she was in Berlin.
 April 22^d 1896
 My dearest Lizabeth Ann
 I just wonder now as I make
 a fresh start on a letter to you if its
 ever going to be finished, or will it
 get a start, & an interruption, and be
 thrown away because the date gets
 too old to add to and to send, like others.
 I really think you must have felt
 some of these efforts to talk to you,
 and in your sweet way perhaps
 have accepted them as sort of letters.

An excerpt from one of twenty-six handwritten letters
 from Howard Weeden to Elizabeth Price, transcribed
 by Sarah Huff Fisk:

Huntsville, Alabama
 April 22^d, 1896

My dearest 'Lizabeth Ann!

I just wonder now as I make a fresh start on a letter
 to you if its ever going to be finished, or will it get a
 start and an interruption, and be thrown away because
 the date gets too old to add to and to send, like others. I
 really think you must have felt some of these efforts to
 talk to you, and in your sweet way perhaps accepted
 them as sort of letters.

Miss Elizabeth F. Price
207 Twenty-First Avenue, North
Nashville, Tennessee

September 18, 1956

My dear Mrs. Fisk,

I just cannot tell you how much I missed you Monday. I had looked forward to seeing you again, and it was a great disappointment that you could not be with us. I trust that pleasure may be mine at some future time.

I appreciate your kind letter very deeply, and both my cousin Florence Adams and I, myself, think your beautiful folder is an artistic masterpiece. It, she wishes me to tell you, would be a credit to any commercial artist and is certainly most beautifully executed and shows your gift in designing.

I love the appreciation you express for my dear friend, Miss Howard Weeden's artistic creations. In sending her personal letters to myself, I hope I have not exceeded good taste, but they are so expressive of her own heart and soul, and so revealing of her kind spirit. They are to be kept for the Library.

Our meeting Monday was most delightful, lacking only your presence, and I thoroughly enjoyed being with my two new Huntsville friends. We had a most delicious repast at the Allen Hotel and my cousin and I felt we had had a very beautiful time.

I still have other papers I am looking through and expect to prepare for our Huntsville Weeden collection. With our best wishes and prayers for God's richest blessing for "Youall"—

Yours sincerely,
Elizabeth F. Price

By the time we made the third trip, I had obtained a tape recorder and we lugged that along. It was a heavy one, the kind used in radio stations. We got that set up to record our meeting.

Miss Price also gave us some more letters, not from Miss Weeden, but pertaining to her four books published during her lifetime and out of print for many years.

This was the last time I saw Miss Price. I think she was a quite remarkable woman. She had loved Miss Weeden and treasured her collection of memories as well as the paintings the artist gave her and every bit of information she had obtained. I'll always remember how generously she shared her information with the Culture Club.

Frances Roberts went along on this last trip and I think was probably responsible for my being asked by the Alabama Historical Association to deliver a talk on Howard Weeden before that group, of which I was a member. The information Miss Price had furnished was invaluable in writing my talk, which was given in Selma, where I was assisted by my sister, Martha Lee Pinkerton, who read some of Miss Weeden's poems in a characteristic Southern manner. This talk was published in the *Alabama Review* XIV (April, 1961) and was titled "Howard Weeden, Artist and Poet."

This talk also formed the basis for Maria Howard Weeden's biography in the book *Shadows on the Wall: The Life and Works of Howard Weeden*, by Frances C. Roberts and Sarah Huff Fisk. This book contained reprints of Miss Weeden's first 3 books. It was published by Burritt Museum and copyrighted in 1962 and 1996 and is now in its fourth printing.

Howard Weeden's original letters and all of the information Miss Price furnished is now in the Heritage Room of the Huntsville-Madison County Library in a specially protected collection.

These memories of Miss Price are written many years after they happened and are recorded here as best as I can recall them.

(December 11, 2004)



(Courtesy The Weeden House Museum)

Elizabeth Fraser Price

Merrimack Mill History

SARAH HUFF FISK
DEBRA JENKINS

In the year 1898, about two miles beyond Huntsville, along a winding dirt road leading west by way of the one bridge which spanned Pinhook Creek, lay the small suburban community of West Huntsville. Triana Pike passed south through this community and wound toward the town of Triana, some ten miles away on the Tennessee River. The West Huntsville area was home to a furniture factory that operated periodically and the West Huntsville Cotton Mill and warehouses. Mr. Tracy W. Pratt, owner of the West Huntsville Cotton Mill was a man of vision and enterprise. He saw Huntsville as the ideal location for industrial investment—especially investments in textile enterprises—and he knew men in the east who had capital to invest. He had the creative imagination to visualize Huntsville—quiet little center of a cotton-raising area—as a thriving textile city, manufacturing the cotton into cloth. Mr. Pratt also had the courage and the wisdom to set about making his dream for Huntsville come true.

Mr. Pratt enjoyed traveling around Huntsville and its suburbs, looking for possible industrial sites. He knew that a textile mill would require a large tract of level land with plenty of access to water for powering the industrial plant. Within one mile of his own plant, he found two large plantations, a half-mile from Brahan Springs, that he thought would be ideal locations for a cotton mill. In early 1898, Mr. Pratt heard that the Merrimack Manufacturing Company, of Lowell, Massachusetts, was interested in locating a plant in the south. Mr. Pratt knew Merrimack Manufacturing to be one of the oldest and most well-established textile companies in the country and he wasted no time in writing to them to describe the benefits of the West Huntsville/Brahan Springs tracts he had located. Merrimack officials immediately expressed interest in Huntsville and asked Mr. Pratt to secure a quote on a sales price from the owners of the two pieces of adjacent land. Once Mr. Pratt secured the sales offer from the two plantation owners, Merrimack Mills notified him that representatives would be arriving promptly in Huntsville to inspect their prospective plant site.

As luck would have it, the night before the Merrimack officials' arrival, the city suffered one of the worst rain storms and flooding in its history. Mr. Pratt escorted the guests through the flooded streets of Huntsville to a plantation home where they could have the best view of the Brahan Springs land. The officials were said to have asked Mr. Pratt,

“Did you think we wanted to locate our plant in the middle of a lake?” The entire Brahan Springs area was completely under water and appeared to be a useless swamp. In spite of Mr. Pratt’s assurances that a flood like this one had never happened in Huntsville before, the Merrimack officials left town in disgust, thinking their trip south had been a waste of their time.

Mr. Pratt refused to be deterred and set out on a campaign to convince the Merrimack Mills to take a second look at Huntsville. He secured letters from the city mayor, an Episcopal priest and a local judge, certifying that the recent extreme flooding in Huntsville had never occurred before in any of their lifetimes. Mr. Pratt took the train to Boston, where he presented himself at the Merrimack headquarters and begged for another visit. He was able to convince them to return, and on their second trip they found the acreage, the spring and the adjoining plantations to be just what Mr. Pratt had described.

On February 22, 1899, the Huntsville weekly *Democrat* reported, “There will soon be erected by the Merrimack Manufacturing Company of Lowell, Massachusetts, on the Fennell place, an immense cotton factory.” The Huntsville factory would make “grey cloth,” or cloth that is not dyed. The cloth manufactured in Huntsville would be subsequently shipped by train to Rock Island, South Carolina, where Merrimack Mills’ dye plant was located. The final sale included tracts of land from several owners totaling 1,385 acres.

July 4, 1899 was an exciting day for Huntsville. The ground breaking for Merrimack Mills was held in West Huntsville at the same time that ground was being broken around the square for streetcar lines. The streetcar lines, which were to operate in town and serve the three manufacturing plants in the suburbs, promised to be a great convenience to Huntsville’s citizens. Huntsville was on the cusp of a period of tremendous expansion and growth.

At about the same time as the construction of the mill began, work was begun by the Merrimack Mill Company on houses for its employees. Merrimack Mills planned to recruit most of their employees from other towns and outlying areas and knew that housing would entice a large work force. Most of these first houses were two-story, two-family dwellings, with five or six rooms to the side. Houses were set on lots large enough to allow space for outbuildings for the stabling of cows or horses, and the mill also provided a pasture (located where Milton Frank Stadium now stands) for employees’ cattle to graze on. Near the pasture was a pigpen for those employees who could afford to have a hog. Rent for the village houses was \$.50 - \$.75 per week, depending on the size of the house, and was deducted directly from the worker’s pay. Toilet paper

was delivered once a week by the mill to each village house's outhouse. The mill provided a communal garden area as well, so that employees could grow their own produce. On January 6, 1900, the *Huntsville Republican* carried the following enthusiastic and far-sighted editorial:

As the Merrimack Mills nears completion, the attention of the public is attracted to West Huntsville, and it appears that there will soon be a lively little town out that way. Last week, we made notice of the fact that a gentleman had begun the erection of a building to locate a steam bakery. There are also good prospects of locating a bank, meat market, grocery, and a general store. All of this shows that our recent prediction that West Huntsville was going to be one of the best suburbs to our city is getting more prominent every day. We would advise investors to keep their eye on West Huntsville.

When the mill began operations on July 9, 1900, there were approximately 60 houses completed and occupied by some of the 750 initial mill employees. The mill was operated by steam, and required a four man boiler crew to shovel coal into the boiler at all times. A typical shift was from 6:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. and until World War I, wages were paid in gold coins.

Prior to the mandatory school law passage, children were allowed to work in the mill as spinners or sweepers. Children were given their own wooden boxes to stand on so that they could reach the spinning machines. Initial regulations on mandatory school only required children to attend class six weeks a year. Until the Child Labor Law was placed into effect, children were allowed to work in the mill year round, reporting for their shift at the end of their school day during their required six weeks of class time.

Almost immediately after opening their first mill, Merrimack Mills began preparations for the construction of a second mill. While the first announcement of a second mill appeared in the *Huntsville Republican* on August 25, 1900, it was not until February 25, 1903, that construction actually began. During this three year period, Huntsville's growth continued, with more than 500 new homes built in the area and the population increasing to an estimated 8,000. Mr. Pratt's dream of Huntsville becoming the center of the textile industry in the south had been realized. An article in the *Huntsville Republican* reported in 1901:

This city has won such fame in handling the new cotton mills that the eastern capitalists who desire such investments first inquire if they can be accommodated with a site here before maturing their plans for organization. Several more mill

enterprises are seeking sites in and around Huntsville and it is likely they can get what they are looking for without going further.



(Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)

Merrimack Mill Employees, 1905

From 1900 until 1913, there were several businesses established in the Merrimack Mill Village. The first company store was opened in 1902 in an existing wood frame building, and in 1913 the company acquired the frame building for their store that would later become Merrimack Hall. The downstairs of this building was home to the company store and the upstairs was used as a classroom for the mill employees' children to attend their mandatory six weeks of school per year. There was also a bicycle shop, a photographic studio and two barbershops located in the village during this time.

On June 24, 1905, Joe Bradley became the agent for Merrimack Mills and began several initiatives that improved the quality of life for the mill workers and the amenities of the mill village. One of his first projects was the construction of a small hospital at 337 South Broad with a resident physician and two nurses. According to the 1923 "Bradleyean" (Joe Bradley School's yearbook):

The Merrimack Hospital was established by Mr. Joe J. Bradley for the benefit of the employees of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company. No one but those who are employed by the company is admitted into the hospital. The hospital is equipped and maintained by the company. A minimum charge is made for the use of the operating room and for board, but all

dressings are done free of charge. An up-to-date operating room was built in 1921 and a high class electric sterilizer was installed with other necessary fixtures and conveniences. There are accommodations for four patients. Two nurses are employed by the company, who have charge of the hospital and who visit the mill employees and their families to advise and help them in any way they can. The nurses not only look after employees, but also the welfare of the school children.

Mr. Bradley also established a landscaping and beautification program for the mill grounds and for the community proper and in 1914, began construction of the school named in his honor, Joe Bradley School.

During 1920, Merrimack Mills made the change from steam power to electricity and started a 30,000 square foot expansion of mill #1. That year the mill also constructed sidewalks, curbs, gutters and a sanitary sewer system throughout the village. In 1922, all the mill village houses were wired for electricity and by 1925 there were 279 homes in the Merrimack Mill Village.



(Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)

Merrimack Mill Village, 1923

On September 18, 1920, the company began construction of Merrimack Hall, incorporating the existing wood frame building housing the company store. When it opened, Merrimack Hall's 25,000 square feet housed a gymnasium, two community rooms, the company store, the company drug store, a café and a barbershop. The company store was run for many years by a man named Searcey McClure and many residents of the village referred to the store as Searcey's. The company store also included a meat market, where meat was cut to the buyer's specifications. On Fridays, when pay was distributed to the workers,

their first stop was Searcey's, where they could pay their bill for the week.

Merrimack Hall became the central hub of the village, providing a place for socialization and recreation to all of the village's residents. The 1922 "Bradleyean" reported:

Merrimack Hall is a beautiful work of architecture that has filled a long felt need in Merrimack. On the first floor are to be found two mercantile stores, a barber shop, a meat market and a modern café. The second story contains places of recreation including a gymnasium, library, scout meeting room, lodge room and auditorium. The spacious gymnasium, modern in every respect, is in constant use.

The gymnasium was used during the day for the physical education classes for the students at Joe Bradley School, and many recreational basketball leagues played in the gym in the evenings. There were many organizations who called Merrimack Hall their home, such as the Woodmen of the World, The Boys Scouts, The Girl Scouts, the Home Demonstration Club, the Allied Youth Club and others.



(Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)

Merrimack Hall, 1925

Originally, Merrimack Hall's gymnasium housed a black box stage, where many productions and programs were held. In 1928, Joe Bradley School was expanded to include a large auditorium, and sometime after that the stage was removed from Merrimack Hall to enlarge the gymnasium. Two productions at Merrimack Hall are documented in photographs and reviews in the "Bradleyean"—1921's production of "Cinderella in Fairyland" and 1923's production of "The Gypsy Rover." Both of these productions included large casts, elaborate costumes, sets and musical numbers.

If the 1920s were years of growth, expansion and improvement in Merrimack Village, the 1930s were years of challenge, difficulty and sacrifice. As the Great Depression took hold of the country, workers at the mill struggled to live on an average wage of \$3.00 a week. There were at least half a dozen strikes by the workers and the mill was closed by a strike from late 1937 throughout the entire year of 1938. Families helped each other by sharing what little resources they had with their neighbors. When the mill was working, conditions for the workers were difficult and dangerous. The plant was insufferably hot in the spring and summer, visibility was limited by great clouds of lint in the air, and the work itself was grinding manual labor.

Village residents found relief from the constant demands of their hard life in the social and community activities offered by Merrimack Hall. Basketball games were held at Merrimack Hall at least three nights a week, with both boys and girls playing, and movies were shown in one of the meeting rooms twice a week. The meeting room on the north side of Merrimack Hall was designated for men over the age of 16, and was outfitted with pool tables, dominoes and other types of activities. The south meeting room was used for Scout troop activities, lectures and other meetings. There were many community fairs held in Merrimack Hall's gymnasium, where village residents brought their home-made items to sell or share. Dances were held in the gymnasium regularly, with different themes adding variety and excitement to the evenings.

As early as 1903, the mill sponsored a baseball team, and attending these games was a must for village residents. The baseball field, located across the street from Merrimack Hall, was home to games for the mill's team, as well as the Joe Bradley School team and youth teams. Joe Bradley School's football team, organized in 1921, was closely followed by mill residents as well. One of the most recounted sports events at Joe Bradley School was its defeat over cross-town rival Huntsville High School in 1947, in front of a crowd of 5,000 spectators at Goldsmith-Schiffman Field. This was the only time in the school's history that it defeated Huntsville High School.

By 1942, the mills were operating at top output, producing cloth that was used to make garments for the military. Some time before 1945, rumors began to circulate that the Merrimack Mill Company would either sell or liquidate its Huntsville plant. During the War, most of the mill's production had gone to supplying textiles for the armed forces. Peace-time production dropped to record low numbers, the age of the mill was starting to show, and the machinery was in need of many repairs which would require an immense amount of capital investment to bring the mill back to a competitive position. It was no surprise when, on

November 25, 1945, it was announced that M. Lowenstein and Company of New York City had purchased the Merrimack Mill Company's plants. The equipment at the plant at the time included 110,000 spinning spindles and 2,500 Draper automatic looms. The mills had a normal production capacity of 50,000,000 yards of print cloth per year. At the time of the sale, Merrimack Mills employed "800-odd" employees, and M. Lowenstein and Company announced its plans to increase the workforce to about 1,100.

January 13, 1946, was the last day of operation in Huntsville by the Merrimack Mill Company. On January 14, 1946, employees entered the plant gates under a banner bearing the words "Welcome To The Huntsville Manufacturing Company." M. Lowenstein and Company immediately set out on a \$1,700,000 renovation of the mills, with a long range plan for the investment of many millions more to renovate and expand the operations. By the end of 1946, Huntsville Manufacturing Company had increased the operation of the mill from one and one-half shifts to three full shifts a day, with approximately 1500 employees. In September 1947, M. Lowenstein and Company was judged by the Financial World Annual Report Survey as "Best in the Textile Industry" and received the "Oscar of Industry" trophy.

In 1947, Merrimack Hall was "redecorated, with new lights and additional seats added to the gymnasium," according to the "Bradleyean." Also in 1947, a program called "Teen Canteen" was started in the south meeting room at Merrimack Hall which included weekly dances and refreshments for teenagers. Sometime in the 1940s, the showing of movies moved to the school auditorium, followed by dances at Merrimack Hall. In 1940, Joe Bradley School began publishing "The Merrimacker," a school newsletter that was provided to all village residents and included information about all the activities in the community as well as the "happenings" at Merrimack Hall. The name of the newsletter was changed to "The Huntsville Parker" in 1946. Some time in the 1940s, four bowling lanes were added to the "men's only" room at Merrimack Hall and a removable boxing ring was added to the gymnasium, increasing the variety of activities at Merrimack Hall.

In 1949, Huntsville Manufacturing Company began selling 269 of the village houses to its employees. Prices for the houses ranged from \$1,725.00 for a three room house, to \$4,900.00 for a 12 room house. Terms of the sales included a ten-percent down payment, monthly payments, and payment of all closing costs by the mill. Many renovations and expansions continued into the 1950s, including the construction of a three story, air-conditioned building connecting mill #1 and mill #2, that was used to house one of the finest yarn preparation

departments existing at the time in any modern mill. The basement of mill #1 was excavated, air-conditioned, and fitted 420 new Draper looms. By 1955, both mills had been completely modernized, air-conditioned and renovated, and at its height of production, Huntsville Manufacturing Company employed 1,600 workers who worked three shifts, six days a week, manning 3,437 looms, making it the largest textile mill in the southeast. The operation refined 43,000 bales of cotton per year, and produced 95,000,000 yards of cloth annually.



(Courtesy Huntsville-Madison County Public Library)

Huntsville Manufacturing Company, Mills 1 and 2

As the mill expanded and modernized, so did the mill village and Merrimack Hall. From 1949 until 1955, more than half of the village houses, now owned by mill employees, had been renovated and remodeled. The gym at Merrimack Hall was outfitted with a new scoreboard, the floors were refinished, and the bleachers, which had been installed in 1946, were rebuilt in 1950. Basketball continued to be played at Merrimack Hall about four nights a week, and the Teen Canteen continued to be the central gathering spot for the neighborhood young people. Various businesses occupied the lower floor of Merrimack Hall over the years, all of which were patronized by the residents of the mill village. Halloween parties, Spring Flings, community fairs and other social events were held in Merrimack Hall's gym and meeting spaces throughout the 1950s.

In 1951, the streets in the mill village were paved for the first time in its history. The county had graded and graveled the streets many times, but had never before paved them. In 1950, Huntsville Manufacturing Company deeded its water and sewage distribution systems to the city of Huntsville. On Friday, November 30, 1951, Huntsville Manufacturing Company deeded Joe Bradley School and all

of its facilities and assets to the Madison County School System. Beginning in 1952, high school students in the mill village were zoned to Butler High School, with Joe Bradley School housing grades 1-8. Joe Bradley School continued to operate until the late 1970s when the school was torn down.

By the early 1980s, the textile industry began to dwindle in parts of the United States, with industry officials blaming the downturn on less expensive foreign imports. Governmental regulations and restrictions placed on textile industries in the late 1970s and early 1980s accounted for huge capital improvements and expenditures, which put companies in the red for many years. In 1988, M. Lowenstein and Company sold Huntsville Manufacturing Company to Springs Industries. In 1989, Springs Industries announced the closing of the Huntsville plant. After nearly 100 years of operation, the Merrimack Mills were demolished in 1992. Today, the mill village houses and Merrimack Hall are all that remain of this important part of Huntsville's history.

In May 2006, Merrimack Hall was purchased by Alan and Debra Jenkins and renovated to become a performing arts center providing educational programs and performance opportunities to both established and emerging performers in the areas of dance, drama and music. It is operated as a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.



(Courtesy Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center)

Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center, 2007

Further Reading

This article was paraphrased and rewritten from a longer publication, *The History of Huntsville Manufacturing Company, 1900-1955*, by Sarah Huff Fisk, who was the company's accountant for 35 years.

Other sources include photographs, interviews with mill employees, "The Merrimacker" company newsletter, The "Bradleyean" school yearbook, and other documents in the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives.

www.merrimackhall.com/history.html

Growing Up In Huntsville

SARAH HUFF FISK



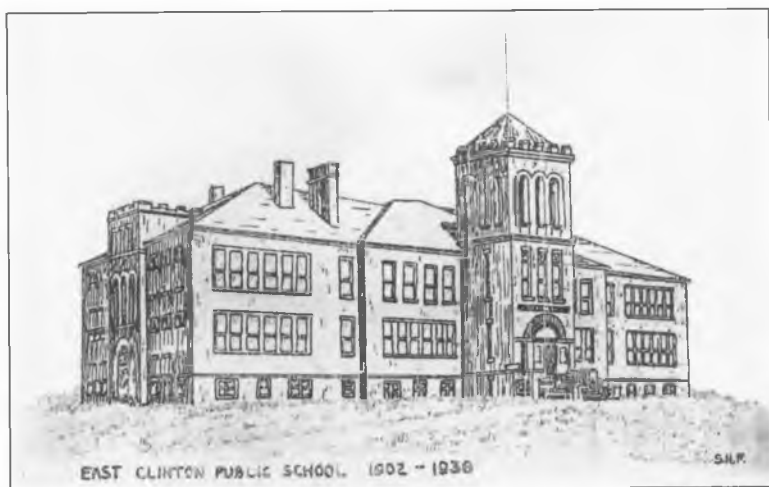
Sarah Huff Fisk

The Vaught House at Ward Ave. and Fifth St. (now Andrew Jackson Way) was the residence for the Huff family, 1919 to 1938.

When my sister and I were growing up in the twenties and early thirties, the local newspapers tooted the phrase "Boost Huntsville" more often than they printed stories of the town's long history. In our own home, though, there was plenty of good conversation about days gone by.

Old houses, some very large, were everywhere along the streets. Ours, a roomy Victorian with attics and nooks tucked neatly under the gables, had cold halls in winter and a roof determined to leak. But we all loved it anyway.

We attended the town's only grammar school, which stood on East Clinton street on the site of old Green Academy. The building, an imposing three-story brick of 1902 vintage, had a heavy roof of slates that were prone to slide off and crash to the ground below.



East Clinton Public School 1902-1939

Sarah Huff Fisk

In the twenties the words "fire trap" were often applied to this structure. By way of quick solution, the city fathers had metal tube-like escapes attached to the third story. When the fire alarm rang for drills, we were thrust willy-nilly into these tubes, took a quick scoot down, and an undignified exit.

The education offered in this building was worth every cent of our city taxes invested in it. We were taught the basics, with the addition of a little music and art, marched to chapel every day, and given few frills. "Study!" our teachers said, and meant it. In 1928 a new high school was erected on Randolph Street. In this handsome, capacious building we were prepared well for college.

The city limits of our day only enclosed three and one-half square miles plus the addition in 1925 of one-hundred acres on the east. Population of the incorporated area ranged from eight to ten thousand.

As children, we walked everywhere safely. Many trees bordered the streets. In summer our favorite walk across town to the Carnegie Library was shady all the way.

A great uncle of ours wrote longingly in his Civil War diary for, "just one more sight of my Huntsville neighbors, dressed in their best, walking together to Sunday services!" Such scenes could be witnessed

every Sunday during our childhood. At least twelve churches were open for worship in the downtown area alone.

School classes often hiked up the western slope of Monte Sano Mountain as far as Fagan's Hollow. We saw the remains of the old "dummy line" that in the late 1880s was used to convey wealthy northern visitors from the depot downtown up the mountainside to the fashionable resort hotel on top.

A favorite picnic spot, Three Forks of Flint, several miles east of town, offered exciting wading in the rocky shoals. We also liked the lake and shady grove at Brahan Spring. Few places, however, could beat our own Big Spring right downtown. Its unceasing flow (said to measure around twenty-four million gallons a day) was more than ample for the town's needs, while its grounds in their lovely natural bowl below the Square were Huntsville's prized beauty spot.



Sarah Huff Fisk

Playing at Big Spring

On May Day schoolchildren were driven out to Kildare by invitation of the estate's owner, Miss Virginia McCormick, a generous contributor to the welfare of the town's young people. In our stiff crepe-paper costumes we struggled mightily to skip correctly around maypoles set up on the wide lawn. But whatever the outcome of our skipping, we knew ice cream would follow.

There were two picture shows downtown that had "cowboy" films on Saturdays for children. We also enjoyed the Madison County and an occasional visiting circus. But little in the estimation of our family could top the traveling Chautauqua, which each summer pitched its big tent on the school grounds and offered seven days of wonderful programs.

De Luxe

REDPATH CHAUTAUQUA

7 Big Days

Huntsville, Ala.
June 9 to 16
Season Ticket \$3.00

1925



America's Best-Loved Comic Opera
"ROBIN HOOD"
 Principals - Chorus - Orchestra

Program

<p>FIRST DAY</p> <p>FIRST AFTERNOON Introductory Exercises Popular Concert College Singing Circle Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>FIRST NIGHT Concert - College Singing Circle Lecture - "The Responsibility of Leadership" - Former Governor Nathan of North Dakota Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>SECOND DAY</p> <p>SECOND AFTERNOON Grand Concert Adamic Male Quartet Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>SECOND NIGHT Concert - Adamic Male Quartet Lecture - "Entertainment - Uncle Sam's Satirist" - "Uncle Sam's Satirist" (satirists) Waverly Hall Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>THIRD DAY</p> <p>THIRD MORNING Children's Entertainment - "Miracle and Magic" Admission 2c - Children 1c</p> <p>THIRD AFTERNOON Studies - Entertainment - "Shakespeare and Life" Lecture - "Shakespeare and Life" Lecture - "Shakespeare and Life" Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>THIRD NIGHT "Aids and Eyes" Great American Grand A New York Unit Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>FOURTH DAY</p> <p>FOURTH MORNING Children's Entertainment Adamic Male Quartet Admission 2c - Children 1c</p>	<p>FOURTH AFTERNOON Concert - To Be Announced Lecture - "The Basis of Liberty" Frank Preston Johnson Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>FOURTH NIGHT Artistic Recital - Both Ford and Amusing Artists Admission \$1.00 - Children 50c</p> <p>FIFTH DAY</p> <p>FIFTH MORNING Children's Entertainment Middletons' Mankins Admission 2c - Children 1c</p> <p>FIFTH AFTERNOON Concert - Middletons' Mankins Lecture - "The Middletons' Mankins" Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>FIFTH NIGHT "Robin Hood" Adamic Male Quartet Presented by May Valentine Opera Company Admission \$1.50 - Children 50c</p> <p>SIXTH DAY</p> <p>SIXTH MORNING Children's Entertainment Lecture - To Be Announced Admission 2c - Children 1c</p> <p>SIXTH AFTERNOON Grand Concert Lecture - "The Middletons' Mankins" Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>SIXTH NIGHT Concert - Adamic Male Quartet Lecture - "The Middletons' Mankins" Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>SEVENTH DAY</p> <p>SEVENTH AFTERNOON Grand Concert Lecture - "The Middletons' Mankins" Admission 5c - Children 2c</p> <p>SEVENTH NIGHT Grand Concert Lecture - "The Middletons' Mankins" Admission 5c - Children 2c</p>
---	---

Huntsville had good hotels from its earliest days. Sadly, all the historic ones were targeted by fire. The old McGee Hotel on Jefferson Street, last to go, lit up the night sky in a frightening scene one Christmas Eve during our childhood.

The county's third courthouse, built in 1914, graced the center of the Square surrounded by two and three-story brick buildings. Several ancient structures, known as "Cotton Row" stood with their backs on the bluff. Here was traded the money-making crop that had bolstered Madison County's economy for more than a hundred years. On fall days we would often see the Square crowded with mule-drawn wagons piled high with bales of cotton. Not only was cotton "king" in agriculture, but

the staple was essential to the operation of the textile mills (nine at one time) that northern entrepreneurs with capital had brought to Huntsville, beginning in the 1880s.

During our childhood there were at least four large mills still operating: Dallas and Lincoln, adjoining Huntsville on the north and Lowe and Merrimack, a little west of town. Each had its own village of houses for workers, its school, churches, a baseball team, and at least three had a brass band. Regular streetcar service connected these villages and town.



Sarah Huff Fisk

Boarding the Merrimack Streetcar at Ward and 6th Street

In the early thirties, the Great Depression descended with a vengeance. Shoppers who once crowded most downtown streets on Saturdays now turned for cheaper prices to the four dime stores along Washington Street. Local mill workers, disenchanted with the low wages paid under the paternalistic system that controlled their lives, joined the Textile Workers Union in droves. On July 17, 1934 they struck all the mills. Few mills survived for long afterward. Only Merrimack lasted into the present decade.

When World War II threatened to involve the United States, Huntsville was called on for her share. I was grown and working in the courthouse when on July 3, 1941 announcement of a forty-million dollar chemical plant to be built west of town ushered in a completely different era for the city.

Today, the old buildings in Huntsville are fiercely protected and its rich history cherished. But the quiet, pleasant way of life we once enjoyed is gone. Whenever we glimpse it now, it is likely to be through the warm glow that nostalgia sheds over our memories.



Sarah and her father, O. C. Huff, 1924



Sarah and her sister, Martha Lee Huff with "George" the marionette, 1938

End Note

The text of this article was published in the *Alabama Historical Association Newsletter*, March 1, 1996. Photographs and illustrations used with permission from Pinhook Publishing Company.

Further Reading

Sarah Huff Fisk and Martha Lee Huff Pinkerton, *In the Style of Our Childhood* (Huntsville: manuscript, 1986) <www.pinhookpublishingcompany.com>.

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.

The Huntsville Historical Review is published twice a year, and is provided to all current members of the Society. Annual membership dues are \$15.00 for individuals and \$25.00 for families. Libraries and organizations may receive the *Review* on a subscription basis for \$15.00 per year. Single issues may be purchased for \$5.00 each.

Editorial Policy

The *Review* welcomes articles on all aspects of the history of Huntsville and Madison County. Articles concerning other sections of Alabama will be considered if they relate in some way to Madison County.

Statements of fact or opinion appearing in the *Review* are solely those of the authors and do not imply endorsement by the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, the Publications Committee, or the Editor. Questions or comments concerning articles appearing in the journal should be addressed to the Editor, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804.

Notice to Contributors

Manuscripts, editorial comments, or book reviews should be directed to the Publications Committee, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804. All copy, including footnotes, should be double spaced. Authors should submit two copies of manuscripts, as well as a MS Word for Windows version of the article on disc. Manuscripts should clearly identify the author and provide contact details. The *Review* follows the style and format conventions of the Chicago Manual of Style, 14th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), and follows conventional American spelling. The Publications Committee and the Editor do not accept responsibility for any damage to or loss of manuscripts during shipping.

An Invitation to Membership

The purpose of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society is to provide an agency for expression among those having a common interest in collecting, preserving, and recording the history of Huntsville and Madison County—an area rich in historically important people and events from early territorial days to modern space ventures. One aim is to encourage increased interest in the history of the community and to help preserve the tangible remains of the area as a cultural center of the old south.

The Society holds four meetings a year, each one featuring a speaker of local or regional note. At the annual meeting each summer (at dues-paying time) the Society sponsors the *Frances C. Roberts Lecture*, showcasing a speaker and topic of special interest.

Committees within the organization work on a variety of projects. Historic markers have long been one of these, and members are at work selecting sites, designing markers, and refurbishing old ones that have fallen into disrepair. A book containing maps to locate each marker, photographs, complete text of each marker, additional references, and a full index is now available for sale.

The organization publishes a scholarly journal—two issues per year—and your membership dues include a subscription to this publication. If you are interested in becoming a member, clip the coupon, write a check, and send it to us at P. O. Box 666, Huntsville, AL 35804.

Membership Application to the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____

Dues for Individual: \$15 per year Dues for Family: \$25 per year



**Huntsville-Madison County
Historical Society**

Box 666
Huntsville, Alabama 35804

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
HUNTSVILLE, AL
PERMIT NO. 148