

# *The Huntsville Historical Review*

*Fall 2019 - Winter 2019*

*Volume 44*

*Number 2*

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## **From the President Happy birthday, Alabama!**

After literally years of build-up, the Bicentennial is here! The last two years have marked a non-stop celebration of Alabama's history – her people, her places, her stories – as they've never been celebrated before, and now the actual 200th anniversary of Alabama's statehood is upon us.

Which raises the important question – so, now what?

You don't have to answer today. Celebrate first. Stop, breathe, recover second. But then it's time to stop looking backward and begin to look forward. Or, since we're still talking history, it's time to look forward to future looking backward.

During my tenure as Historical Society president, I have tried to keep two dates in my head in everything I do – 1819 and 2055.

1819, of course, is the thing we just celebrated, the creation of the State of Alabama 200 years ago. The Bicentennial has very heavily colored my tenure as HMCHS president for the last two years.

2055 is the next time we do this. The next occasion for which this community will see this level of celebration of history will be the 250th anniversary of the settling of Huntsville in 1805.

And when I say the next time "we" will do this, I don't mean us. By the time of that anniversary 36 years from now, the duty of planning and executing that celebration will fall to others.

Our duty, then, is the here and now. Our duty is the things that must be done today, and tomorrow, to equip those who will carry that torch onward.

Our duty is stewardship.

We have inherited our history from those who preserved it before us, and owe an obligation to preserve it for those who come after us.

The volume in your hands is one way we do that. The Society itself is another.

As I conclude my tenure as president, I encourage and challenge you to continue to celebrate our history, but to celebrate the past with an eye toward the future.

Best regards,

David Hitt



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# **Proceedings of The First Alabama Congressional Delegation: 16th Congress of The United States 1819 To 1821**

*By Henry S. Marks and Richard A. White*

Alabama was admitted to the Union on December 14, 1819 as the 22nd state, and after much effort, the new state's first congressional delegation was selected. John Williams Walker and William Rufus King were named to the Senate and John Crowell was elected to the House of Representatives.

As was to be expected, Madison County played an important role in the selection of Walker and King and the election of Crowell. It may even be argued that Madison County was the 'kingmaker' in the selection of our first two senators.

On the surface, it seemed that the two senators were chosen by the State Legislature rather amiably. There was an understanding that one senator was to come from north Alabama and one from the southern region of the state. The choice of the Tennessee

Valley was Walker; the Alabama and Tombigbee region chose King. Beneath the surface, however, two men were to offer opposition to the selection of Walker and King; Charles Tait and William H. Crawford, both Georgians. Crawford had become the Secretary of the Treasury in the Monroe Administration and considered Alabama part of his territorial imperative as far as patronage was concerned. Our first territorial and state governor, William Wyatt Bibb, was a close friend of Crawford, and it was probably through the latter's influence that Bibb was appointed governor of the Alabama Territory. Tait, Georgian and friend of Bibb

and Crawford, became involved with Alabama as early as 1802 when he notified the federal Senate of the state of Georgia's consent to a division of the Mississippi Territory. Later he was a chief architect of the final bill which provided for division of the Territory in 1817.<sup>5</sup> Tait resented being overlooked as a Senator, but was in a political and geographical dilemma. Walker was set to represent north Alabama and could not help his friend Tait. Neither could Crawford, although he certainly tried. Crawford offered a land office receivership to King as an inducement to get him to allow Tait to be chosen from the southern section of the state.<sup>6</sup> But King could not be persuaded to step aside and Walker, once he became a senator, was able to obtain for Tait the federal judgeship in Alabama, at the expense of Harry Toulmin, who had been federal judge for the Alabama Territory.<sup>7</sup> Thus it was Walker and King who served as our first senators.

Walker took his seat first, on December 14, 1819, his term to expire, as determined by lot, on March 3, 1825. On Tuesday, December 16, six days before King took his seat, Walker was appointed to two standing committees, the Committee on the

Militia and the Committee on Naval Affairs.<sup>8</sup> King took his seat on December 22, 1819, his term to expire as determined by lot, on March 3, 1823. According to Albert James Pickett, in his *History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, From the Earliest Period*, King learned of his selection as a senator only while in Georgia on his way back to Alabama from a trip to his former residence in North Carolina to dispose of his holdings there. On reaching Milledgeville he received a letter from Governor Bibb informing him of his selection. Although, in Pickett's words, "this was the first intimation that Colonel King

had heard that his name even had been presented to the Legislature for that high honor...,"<sup>9</sup> King immediately accepted the position retraced his steps and arrived in Washington a few days before the meeting of Congress, Walker having arrived before him.

On January 3, 1820, two additional standing committees were created by the Senate and the following day King was appointed to one of them, the Committee on Indian Affairs.

The senators, then, began their service in the 16th Congress, which met from March 4, 1819 to March 3, 1821, including the first session from December 6, 1819 to May 15, 1820, and the second from November 13, 1820 to March 3, 1821.

John Walker had the more illustrious career of the two up to this time. A native of Amelia County, Virginia, he moved with his father to Elbert County, Georgia, during childhood. He received an excellent education, first in a private academy in Georgia and then at what is now Princeton University, graduating from this institution in 1806. H Walker then studied law, was admitted to the bar, began practice in Petersburg, Georgia in 1810 and married Matilda, the daughter of LeRoy Pope of that town. In the same year Walker moved to Huntsville with his father-in-law and several of his neighbors and began his law practice. He served as a member of the Territorial House of Representatives in 1817, being selected its speaker. He was president of the state constitutional convention of 1819, and the same year declined the appointment of district judge, tendered him by President Monroe. Unfortunately, ill health forced him to resign his seat in the Senate on November 21, 1823 and he died on April 23, 1823. According to Pickett, Walker was a tall,



slender man, with "manners and address, mild, graceful and prepossessing."<sup>12</sup> William King, unlike Walker, was to serve Alabama for a much longer period of time, finally passing away on his plantation, "King's Bend," on April 18, 1853.<sup>13</sup> a native of North Carolina, and a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, King, like Walker turned to the practice of law and to a life of political service. He served in the North Carolina house from 1807 to 1809, and was a federal Congressman from 1811 to 1816. For the following two years he served as secretary of the American legations at Naples and St. Petersburg. He returned to the United States and moved his residence to Alabama during the winter of 1818-1819. He took an active part in the development of statehood, being a prominent member of the Constitutional Convention. King was placed on the committee appointed to draft the Alabama Constitution and was one of three members chosen to put it in its final form.

The selection of King as Senator from Alabama was actually the beginning of his national political prominence, for he was to serve as Senator continuously from 1819 to April 15, 1844, when he resigned from that august body. From 1844 to 1846 he served as Minister to France and again served in the Senate from July 1, 1848, until his resignation on December 20, 1852. His political career culminated in his being elected Vice President of the United States in 1852. Thus, unlike Walker, when he was first selected as senator in 1819, his political future largely lay ahead of him. According to Pickett the senator was about six feet tall, and "remarkably erect in figure." He also possessed, according to the same source, "fine colloquial powers." The only representative to the

federal congress actually to be directly elected by the people of

Alabama was John Crowell. He was born in Halifax County, North Carolina, about 1785. In 1815 he came to Alabama as the Indian agent of the federal government according to Thomas McAdory Owen, to the "Muscogees." It is known that in 1817 he had a temporary residence in St. Stephens, and that a John Crowell was listed in the 1820 census of Dallas County as single and owning seven slaves. Crowell served only one term as Congressman, being appointed agent in 1821, on the removal of D. B. Mitchell, who had served as Governor of Georgia at one time. He served in this capacity until the Indians were moved to the Indian Territory in 1836. He died ten years later, in Fort Mitchell, Alabama. Crowell was opposed for the seat in Congress by Henry H. Chambers, who represented Madison County and most of the Tennessee Valley. Chambers was defeated for the house seat at this time, but was to become a United States Senator from Alabama before his untimely death in January, 1826 at the age of 35, while on the way to the federal capital to claim his seat for the first time (having been selected by the state legislature for the term which began in December, 1825).<sup>18</sup> Madison County voted solidly for Chambers, giving him 2,382 votes for Crowell's 215.<sup>1</sup> Limestone County was even more favorable to Chambers: he received over 1,000 votes to a mere 12 for his opponent. But central and south Alabama did Chambers in. The Alabama Republican on October 2, 1819 made the comment that "We are now most apprehensive that our fellow citizen Doc Chambers is not elected to Congress ... His majority in the Tennessee Valley is between four and five thousand ...." Two weeks later the Huntsville Weekly

announced that "...We have received sufficient returns from the election to satisfy us that Mr. Crowell /is elected/ Representative to Congress.

"20 Madison County and Huntsville lost its bid to control Alabama's only seat in the federal House of Representatives. Crowell took his seat in Congress on the 14th of December, 1819. Yet they had a more than able senatorial representative in John Walker. Seldom has a state's first congressional delegation had a greater impact upon the fortunes of our country.

The year 1819 was a crucial one in United States history.

Domestic problems dealing with financial chaos and the question of slavery and westward expansion had to be faced by the American people. Expansion to the south involved possible conflict with Spain over the avowed intention of some members of the federal government (and considerably more outside it) to obtain the Florida's at all cost. Walker and King, and to a much lesser extent, Crowell, took advantage of the possibility of joining in debates and action in and out of the Congress concerning these problems and at least Walker was able to influence final decisions on these matters.

Probably the most lasting influence of the first Alabama congressional delegation was in the area of public land policy and the relationship of this policy with the Panic of 1819 and its aftermath. Walker had previously taken public positions on the question of the sale of public lands by the federal government before Alabama became a state, and, according to Hugh Bailey, his positions had "increased his popular esteem and further endeared him to his fellow Georgia men. "22 Bailey also asserts that "Walker became the

advocate of a most liberal land policy" by the creation of the Alabama Territory.

Well he might, for he was most certainly involved in business relations with land purchases and speculators in the Territory, centering about the Huntsville area.

Far too much land had been sold by the federal government, in fact, and, along with poor banking practices on the part of state banks, particularly in the west, had helped to precipitate the Panic of 1819. Far too much land had been sold in Alabama in particular, for over fifty percent of funds due the United States Public Land Office in 1820 was due from the new state of Alabama alone. 3

For a number of reasons, especially in an effort to encourage rapid settlement of western lands, the federal land laws of 1800 and 1803 basically allowed for an over extension of credit to the purchaser.

With the advent of the Panic of 1819 it was obvious that most of the recently sold lands of the federal domain would revert to the government. The land speculator as well as the average settler would have to forfeit, losing most, if not all, their possessions. The results would be catastrophic.

It was obvious the land laws would have to be altered. In 1820 Walker and King were unsuccessful in gaining surcease for the people who had already purchased land. In January of this year Walker had submitted to the Senate a motion, "that the Committee on Public Lands be instructed to inquire into the expediency of protecting any occupant in his possession, when the land on which he shall have settled shall be sold, after the month of March in any year, until he shall have and gathered his crop."

However, the motion was defeated. Walker then proposed an amendment to the proposed new land bill the Senate was considering: 25

"And be it further enacted, that purchaser of public lands, which shall have been sold prior to the \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_ next, shall be permitted to forfeit and surrender the same before the day of final payment by delivering their certificates to the register, and endorsing thereon their consent that the land therein described shall be resold: whereupon, the said certificates shall be considered as cancelled, and the lands shall be deemed and taken to have reverted to the United States, and shall be disposed of, in all respects like other reverted or forfeited lands, according to the provisions of the forth section of this act: but if such lands shall sell for more than one dollar and \_\_\_ cents per acre, the excess shall be paid over to the former certificate holder: provided that such excess shall not be greater than the amount previously paid on such certificate."

This, too, was defeated, even though King fully supported Walker. King made an eloquent speech on the floor of the Senate, reminding the members they should "take into consideration the condition of those who had purchased lands from the government."

King emphasized "that those who had purchased under the old system would be in a worse condition than those who will purchase under the new one." 26  
By the 1820 Act credit was abolished and the minimum price of the public land was reduced to \$1.25 per acre.

In January, 1821 Walker tried again. On January 15, he presented a petition signed by a number of Alabamians stating the new law operated unfairly against them and that they may be permitted to apply

payments already made by them "to such positions of their entries as such payments will cover at two dollars per acre? ..." This petition was the first of many attempts of Walker and King to amend fundamentally the Act of 1820. Walker reintroduced his 1820 amendment with little actual change and met with much better success, so much success that Hugh Bailey, in his biography of Walker, calls him the father of the Land Law of 1821. Walker delivered the longest speech of his career, on January 22nd, in support of his beliefs and, together with King, cast the deciding votes to prevent substituting 25 for 37<sup>^</sup> per cent as the discount rate offered for immediate payment.

The debt question was uppermost in his mind and Walker concluded his January 22nd speech with the following words: 28

It is for you now to determine whether they shall be stifled by the horrible incubus of this debt, which presses upon their vitals, paralyzing their energies, and arresting the wholesome play of their organs: whether they shall be crushed by this gigantic Colossus, which bestrides the vast and fertile region of the West, with one foot in the Gulf of Mexico, and the other known not where-on the shores of the lakes, on the summit of the Stony Mountains, under whose "huge legs" your fellow citizens in that quarter "must peep about" to find the grave of their hopes and fortunes.'

The Land Act of 1821 probably did more than anything else to make Walker a hero in Alabama, yet he, as with King, was against "easy" bankruptcy laws passed these two years. What Alabamians wanted was financial solvency, the ability to pay off their debts and not go into bankruptcy. This Walker and King (to a lesser extent) provided them. In a speech before the

Senate in March, 1820, King stated he was in favor of a bankruptcy law "if confined to the trading part of the community,"<sup>29</sup> and not extended to all classes. It was King's belief that "it would be extremely injurious, if not ruinous, to the planters and farmers to be subjected to the operation of such a system..." of bankruptcy for all classes and groups of people.

Walker was for continued sale of public lands and he even offered a motion in the Senate in January, 1820, that two additional land offices be established on in Alabama, at Tuscaloosa and Conecuh Courthouse.

The Alabama senatorial delegation was interested not only in aiding those who had already purchased lands but in continuing the sale of lands in Alabama and elsewhere, in an endeavor to restore prosperity. Walker attempted to aid the ill-fated "vine and olive or French colony, by presenting in the Senate a petition to amend the original federal act creating the colony. This was not enough, however, to save the colony. Prosperity was to be only an illusion for many, many people in Alabama.

Settlement of the western territories had forced the burning issue of slavery to override even the problem of land sales, as far as most of the American people and Congress were concerned. When King and Wallace were selected to the Congress the struggle over slavery was in its second year of debate in this country, centered over how Missouri would be admitted to the Union. Naturally, as representatives of a southern state, King and Walker opposed the restriction of slavery in Missouri as elsewhere. <sup>32</sup> Both were satisfied with the famous Missouri Compromise <sup>33</sup> and generally the people of Alabama applauded their attempts to keep slavery from being excluded from Missouri.

Another aspect of the expansion of the country was the acquisition of the Floridas by the United States, in the Adams-Onis Treaty.<sup>34</sup> Alabamians had long coveted the section east of the Mobile area, claiming this part of west Florida to be a geographical and physiological part of the state. Walker tried to obtain this area for Alabama when he introduced in the Senate on February 22, 1821, a memorial asking that the "country lately ceded by Spain as lies west of the Appalachicola River..." be annexed to Alabama.

This move, of course came to naught.

The final effect of expansion of the country upon the Alabama delegation to be discussed here was the question of federal aid for development of canals and roads in the west. Walker can again be used as an example of what many Alabamians felt. In January, 1821, there was prolonged discussion in the Senate as to whether or not the federal government should aid in construction of a canal between "the navigable waters of the Ohio to Lake Erie." The bill in question would provide for the appointment of commissioners to "lay out" the route of the Ohio and Erie Canal. On January 11, 1821 Walker declared on the floor of the Senate that "such a work ought not to be undertaken unless as part of a great system of internal improvement This antedates Jackson's veto of the Maysville Road bill by quite a few years.

## **CONCLUSION**

Alabama was fortunate to have King and Walker as its senatorial representatives. Together they accomplished a great deal, Walker in particular for his activity in the Senate as well as for his role in the development of the Land Act of 1821. Crowell, however, is another matter. In the perusal of the



Annals of Congress for the period of the 16th Congress Crowell is very rarely mentioned.

Evidently, he accomplished very little. Little is known about him, either, and it is my opinion that Alabama would have been far better served in the federal house by Chambers, the man Crowell defeated. Huntsville and Madison County have made notable contributions to Alabama history. John Williams Walker is a part of this heritage.



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## **An 1819 Snapshot of Huntsville**

*By Jacquelyn Procter Reeves*

In late spring of 1819, residents of Huntsville were preparing to host the upcoming constitutional convention, the final step to statehood. A surprise visitor, impending statehood, and prosperity were reasons to celebrate, but it would soon be revealed that the economic foundation of the area was built on shifting sand.

As the hot sun rose on the morning of Tuesday, June 1, 1819, the residents of Huntsville began their day as they had on so many mornings. Cows were milked, eggs gathered, and biscuits baked for breakfast before the fields were worked. But this day soon proved different as a rumor spread quickly through the streets of the village. The President of the United States was a few miles away, en route to Huntsville. President James Monroe had stopped at John Williams Walker's Oakland Plantation near Meridianville to pay his respects before continuing south. His visit was unannounced, though he claimed he came to see how well the South was fortified against potentially hostile Indians and Europeans. With the Creek Indian Wars only five years in the past and still fresh in memory, President Monroe planned to visit forts to determine if more were necessary.<sup>1</sup>

The excitement in Huntsville paralleled a sense of panic. A proper celebration, fit for the president, had to be hastily thrown together. Huntsville's residents would represent the entire territory, and they were eager to make a first-class impression.

At 4 p.m. the following day, Claiborne Clay, LeRoy Pope, Irby Jones, and Henry Minor presided over the celebration on the southwest corner of Franklin Street

and Gates Street in a large frame building<sup>2</sup> where more than one hundred “respectable citizens” had gathered.<sup>3</sup> A cannon fired in salute, and twenty-one toasts were offered, including those “to the President, to the Constitution of the United States, to national heroes and celebrities, to the army and navy, to the late treaty with Spain, to the women, to Alabama, to the people west of the Mississippi, to the friends of freedom in South America, and to public sentiment.”<sup>4</sup>

Andrew Jackson, hero of the War of 1812 and the Creek Indian Wars was remembered in a toast, as well as those who had fallen in battle. Glasses were raised to “the heroes and sages of the Revolution. Many ‘have gone to the abodes of more than mortal freedom,’ the survivors will be sustained, in their declining years, by a grateful country.” The president offered a toast of his own to the Territory of Alabama: “May her speedy admission into the Union advance her happiness, and augment the national strength and prosperity.”<sup>5</sup>

By the time the president’s horse was saddled the following day for his departure, there was no doubt the residents of the Alabama Territory would be enthusiastic citizens of the Union, if given the chance. Monroe rode off to Nashville, escorted a portion of the way by some of Huntsville’s leading men.<sup>6</sup>

It seemed to make sense that President Monroe would come to Huntsville, the temporary state capital since November of the preceding year, and the largest community in the Tennessee Valley.<sup>7</sup> After all, the largest population of the Alabama Territory was in Madison County, and Huntsville was the county seat.<sup>8</sup> The actual number of settlers was a constantly moving target. The 1809 census taker complained that he could not accurately report how many people lived in the county because “more families are coming in

daily!”<sup>9</sup> Property boundaries, in those early days, were established in ways that severely complicated future ownership issues. A parcel of land may have been described as “beginning at a white oak and Spanish oak, thence east 40 chains to a hickory, thence north 60 chains to a sweet gum....”<sup>10</sup> A tangled legal mess was sure to follow if and when the trees were no longer standing.

By coming to the Mississippi/Alabama Territory, those early settlers traded the comfort of a predictable life for either a shot at true prosperity or the heartbreak of devastating loss. Most residents hastily built log cabins for shelter so they could get to the fields to plant their crops. Many preferred two log rooms separated by a covered passageway, called a dog trot, which became common among Alabama’s earliest settlers. On each end of the log cabins were fireplaces for heating or cooking. Some homes had a puncheon floor, made of split logs turned so the flat side was up. Others made do with a temporary dirt floor.<sup>11</sup> As crude as it may seem by today’s standards, many were still inhabited even at the end of World War I.<sup>12</sup>

After nightfall, families gathered about the fire and listened as veterans of the Indian Wars, the War of 1812, and even the American Revolution swapped stories about the battles won and friends lost. Off in the distance, catamounts screamed and wolves howled, mingling with the summer songs of crickets and cicadas. Fireflies and twinkling stars danced in the darkness of the summer night.

After the 1813 Ft. Mims Massacre near Mobile, uneasy residents remained wary of the potential for Indian attacks. In wooded areas, armed white men who came together to talk stood back to back to watch

for Indians who might surprise them. Despite at least one rumor of an impending attack, there are no recorded incidents of deadly encounters. Prior to the influx of settlers during the period we refer to as Alabama Fever, the Chickasaws and Cherokees hunted in the Tennessee Valley. The abundance of discarded arrowheads still found today is proof there was once a strong Indian presence.

From the time pioneer John Hunt arrived in 1805, the quality and size of family homes had changed considerably. In time, and as fortunes increased, home owners added rooms and/or a second story to the original structure, and in some cases, they encased the original log cabin with clapboard, plastered the interior walls, and installed glass windows and fancy trims.<sup>15</sup> It was not unusual for the original log structure to become engulfed by a substantially larger and grander home, leaving remnants of the original log cabin to be uncovered decades later.

Progress came swiftly to the residents of Huntsville. John Reed built the first brick home in 1810.<sup>16</sup> With the arrival of brothers Thomas and William Brandon from Virginia, the look of the village slowly transformed. The Brandons considered themselves brick masons, but they were so much more. Their brickyard provided materials to construct public buildings and private homes. Historian Edward Chambers Betts wrote, "Thomas and William Brandon, who came into the community in 1810, with nothing but their mason's tools, and in these few years had transformed the crude log hut settlement into the brick and mortar metropolis of the territory...."<sup>17</sup>

Anne Newport Royall, a frequent visitor to North Alabama from various places up North, aptly described Huntsville in a letter to a friend on January 1, 1818:

“You will expect something of this flourishing town....The land around Huntsville, and the whole of Madison county, of which it is the capital, is rich and beautiful as you can imagine; and the appearance of wealth would baffle belief....It contains about 260 houses, principally built of brick; has a bank, a court house, and market house. There is a large square in the centre of the town, like the towns in Ohio, and facing this are the stores, twelve in number.... The workmanship is the best I have seen in all the states; and several of the houses are three stories high, and very large. There is no church. The people assemble in the Court House to worship.... The citizens are gay, polite, and hospitable, and live in great splendor. Nothing like it in our country.”<sup>18</sup>

Land and lot prices began to soar. A vacant lot on Williams Street sold for \$50 in 1816 to Alexander Wasson. Two years later, John Jones purchased it for \$350. In 1819, the same lot sold for \$700 to Henry Bradford.<sup>19</sup> Today, Bradford’s 1819 home serves as a museum that honors a later resident, Maria Howard Weeden.

By 1819, one third of the 60,000 acres under cultivation in Madison County was planted in cotton. Nearly 4.5 million pounds of cotton were shipped out, processed by 149 gins.<sup>22</sup> Anne Royall described her first glimpse of a cotton field when she arrived in Huntsville: “...These are astonishingly large; from four to five hundred acres in a field! – It is without a parallel! ...Although the land is level, you cannot see the end of the fields either way. To a stranger, coming suddenly amongst these fields, it has the appearance of magic....”<sup>23</sup> When it was time to pick cotton, all who were able were needed to work the fields. Some stalks grew as tall as six feet, six inches.<sup>24</sup>



The west side of the courthouse square became unofficially known as Cotton Row for the many cotton brokers whose offices stood there. After the fall harvest, farmers brought samples of their crops to have them graded and assessed for sale.<sup>25</sup> In the winter of 1817-1818, cotton was selling for as much as thirty cents per pound, encouraging planters to clear more land for planting, which in turn brought about an increased need for slave labor.

Between 1816 and 1820, the population of slaves grew from 4,200 to 9,255, an increase to 47% of the total population of Madison County.<sup>26</sup> The average price paid for a slave in 1819 was just under five hundred dollars, depending on a number of factors. Was the man, woman, or child crippled? Did he or she have a drinking problem; was he or she known to be a runaway? Did he or she have a skill, and how many more years could each be expected to work? Five hundred dollars in 1819 is the equivalent of nearly ten thousand dollars today.

In some cases, after the slave had finished tasks for the owner, he or she was allowed to work elsewhere for their own wages, and eventually even buy their own freedom. It was legal, in early Alabama, to petition the state legislature to emancipate slaves. In 1820, there were forty-six free black men, women, and children living in Madison County. Seventeen slaves were freed during the first legislative session in 1819.

Huntsville's Thomas Fearn, who owned slaves, referred to slavery as "that foulest blot in our national character, that damning curse entailed on us by our forefathers...."<sup>37</sup> The hows, whens, and whys of emancipation of slaves had been discussed at length for decades, but no conclusion could be agreed upon.

Forty-five years would pass before that process was accomplished.

Progress brought law and order, crime and punishment. Court was held only twice every year, in the spring and in the fall. A new jail replaced the wood structure that had been located on the northeast corner of the courthouse square.<sup>28</sup> A public pillory, located on the northwest corner of the courthouse, was constructed in early 1819 for public punishment. Thieves had their right hands branded with the letter "T" along with an appropriate number of lashes with a whip. Before Stephen Neal was hired as sheriff in 1809, a vigilante group known only as "Captain Slick's Company" warned counterfeiters and thieves, in a most menacing way, that their presence was no longer welcomed in Huntsville. They were given a certain amount of time to put their affairs in order and clear out, and if they chose to remain, the punishment was harsh.<sup>29</sup>

While work kept residents busy, they still found time for entertainment. A Nashville theater company occasionally came to Huntsville to perform in the building where the constitutional convention convened. "Speed the Plough" was performed in November 1819, and a concert at the Huntsville Inn raised money for a fire engine when the first fire department was officially organized on December 10, 1819.<sup>30</sup> The Masonic Lodge, a benevolent fraternal organization, was established in 1811 as Madison #21, the first and oldest Masonic Lodge in the State of Alabama and the forerunner of today's Helion Lodge #1. Among the charter members were John Williams Walker, Sheriff Stephen Neal, Marmaduke Williams, and Huntsville's namesake, John Hunt.<sup>31</sup>

The newspaper advertised items for sale, unfamiliar and unusual to us today. John M. Tilford's establishment sold baize, bombasetts, manchester, levantine, and mantua silks (different kinds of cloth), elegant lace pilerines (lace-up ballet flats), a variety of ribbands (ribbons), violins and violin strings, plain and brass mounted military fifes (musical instruments), gentlemen's and ladies' riding whips, ruffs (starched ruffle worn around a lady's neck) and spencers (short jackets for men and women).<sup>32</sup>

In order to become and remain a successful community, a system of educating young people was put into place. Sons and daughters of wealthy citizens were sent to boarding schools up North, or were taught basics by imported teachers. Both were costly. By 1819, the boys' Green Academy, the first state chartered school in Madison County, had been educating Huntsville's future leaders for seven years.<sup>32</sup>

Culture and refinement can neither survive nor thrive without books. In July 1818, Dr. Thomas Fearn wrote a letter to persuade Clement Clay of the need for a library, observing "How pleasing it would be to see the hours lost at the card table, with the dice box, or even those more innocently thrown away in idle chitchat, exchanged for profitable employment."<sup>34</sup> Within a few months, his dream came to fruition. A meeting was held to discuss the establishment of a public library in Huntsville. It was the first in the Alabama Territory. The newspaper reported that a total of "between 2 and 3,000 dollars was subscribed in a few hours for this highly laudable purpose."<sup>35</sup> The library, for gentlemen only, was located in the Madison Street law office of John Nelson Spotswood Jones and opened on Tuesdays and Thursdays while Jones was out to lunch.<sup>36</sup>

Members of local churches as well as members of the “genteel sex” – wives, mothers, and sisters – did all they could to discourage uncouth and immoral behavior. The Madison County Bible Society was created in 1818 to shed residents of the “torrent of vice and immorality” in the community.<sup>38</sup> Wives pressured their husbands to stop gambling and drinking and become active in church leadership, while local dram shops welcomed the sinners with everything from homemade hootch to fine imported rum.

Circuit riding preachers representing Cumberland Presbyterians, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists came to the territory soon after the arrival of settlers. Cumberland Presbyterian minister Robert Bell, thought to be the first to come into North Alabama as early as 1807, preached from John Hunt’s cabin. His cousin, Robert Donnell, held the first camp meeting in early 1809 at the area now known as Brahan’s Spring. Camp meetings took place over a period of several days and attendees camped on site, cooking over open fires,<sup>39</sup> and absorbing religion in large doses. Depending on the time of year, the women became the founders, organizers, and backbone of the churches as the men toiled night and day to get the crops in from the fields. Ministering to the needs of Indians fell under the direction of the church’s foreign missions societies. Money was raised by the ladies of the church for that purpose. By 1820, Rev. Robert Bell established a boarding school for Chickasaw children in Mississippi.<sup>40</sup>

Illness and death were ever-present. The newspaper reported that bilious typhoid fever, a common ailment, hit hardest between late June and early October,<sup>41</sup> indicating that it may have actually been malaria, unknown to them that it was spread by mosquitoes. At

that time, it was surmised that most illnesses were contagious or caused by miasmas (bad air). Wealthy families fled the city for sparsely populated areas to avoid getting sick.

One of the deadliest illnesses was smallpox, a highly contagious disease with a mortality rate as high as 35% during severe epidemics. Smallpox caused huge losses in the American Indian population as well as the Colonial Army during the Revolution. An 1817 smallpox outbreak in Huntsville brought an urgent need to prevent another. Doctors Thomas Fearn and David Moore placed an ad in the *Alabama Republican*, announcing they would provide free smallpox vaccinations – a controversial treatment that sometimes caused death.<sup>42</sup>

Jarvis Milam of the non-extant community of Hickory Flat advertised that he had a stone that would cure rabies as well as the bite of any snake or poisonous reptile. He claimed that the stone, when applied to the bite, would extract the poison.<sup>43</sup> There was no offer, however, of a money-back guarantee. And just in case his cure failed, the town cemetery, at that time, was located where present-day Holmes Street intersects with Greene Street.<sup>44</sup>

The mail system in 1817 was haphazard, at best. Mail was delivered every other Saturday, but for a period in 1816, no mail was delivered for six months. Indians sometimes stole the mail carrier's horse, which delayed the mail even more. New mail routes were established and additional mail carriers were hired. Newspaper advertisements specified that mail carriers could not be drunkards, and the smaller (lighter) they were, the better. Tardiness on account of darkness was unacceptable, and they were required to control their tempers, especially around Indians. If they were

on time, they *might* even earn a bonus of \$1 - \$2 per quarter.<sup>45</sup>

In early 1819, the *Alabama Republican* announced that incoming mail would arrive every Thursday morning, giving the recipient time to answer letters before going out again at 3 p.m. If the recipient failed to pick up his or her mail within three months, it went into the dead letter file. As a reminder, the recipient's name would be published in the newspaper up to three times.<sup>46</sup>

Affluent early settlers brought with them silver and cut glass, carpets and fine linens. LeRoy Pope, whose mansion sat atop the highest hill overlooking Huntsville, rode about town in a four-wheeled carriage, as did John Taylor, Thomas Bibb, and James Manning.<sup>47</sup> Others rode in two-wheeled carriages while most walked or rode horseback. Pope's pretentious lifestyle, as well as others in his circle, did not gain him favor among the lower classes. Many of the affluent, natives of Virginia, came to North Alabama after several years in Petersburg, Georgia. They were referred to as the Royal Party, or the Georgia Nabob.

One member of the Royal Party seemed to be accepted among members of every class. John Williams Walker, Pope's son-in-law, stood out as a man with exceptional character and honesty.<sup>48</sup> It was no surprise that President Monroe stopped at Walker's Meridianville plantation before pressing on into Huntsville. Walker was unanimously elected to preside over the constitutional convention which convened on July 5, 1819 to write Alabama's constitution. When the document was finished on August 2, it was considered one of the most liberal and progressive of any ever written.<sup>49</sup>

Plans for the future were falling into place in preparation for statehood. On November 9, 1819, William Wyatt Bibb, the territorial governor, was inaugurated in Huntsville as the first state governor.<sup>51</sup> Andrew Jackson, a frequent and popular visitor to Huntsville, attended the meeting of the state legislature on December 13, 1819 and was given the “privileges of the floor,”<sup>52</sup> in spite of not being a resident or Alabama politician. On that day, Jackson County, Alabama was named in his honor. The following day, December 14, 1819, Alabama was granted statehood. On December 17, 1819, John W. Walker was appointed as Alabama’s first United States Senator.<sup>50</sup>

Even as the excitement of statehood buoyed local residents, far-reaching financial problems were simmering below the surface. An 1818 letter from New York in the *Alabama Republican* stated: “We regret to say that the quality of nearly all your cotton is so terribly bad that we have not been able to obtain an offer for it. There has never been so much trash together in this market as we have received this year from Huntsville....Prime Huntsville Cotton (of which we have received none this season) would command 33 cts....Letters from Liverpool have been received which state that the Cotton is but little better if any better than the common India Cotton!! And we find that those who have shipped it once will not buy it a second time.”<sup>53</sup>

The price of cotton plummeted to a low of twelve cents per pound in late June, 1819.<sup>54</sup> The ripple effect extended across every realm of the economy. Within a few months, cotton had fallen to less than ten cents per pound. Those who sought to multiply their

fortunes through land and cotton speculation were shocked by the financial collapse.

Many of Huntsville's residents had relied on a barter system and bought merchandise on credit, with the promise that debts would be paid when the fall's cotton crop was harvested. They loaned money and sold goods to each other as well, so when one man felt his financial belt tightening, he went to those who owed him money to pay off his own debts, only to find others were in the same financial grip. Some avoided going into town for fear they would be approached to settle their debt. Public sales and auctions were held to liquidate assets in order to pay off debts, but in many cases, even that wasn't enough. Merchants across the country who had bought cotton at high prices felt the devastation of the Panic of 1819 as well. In addition, loans were taken out with high interest rates and many banks suspended specie payments.<sup>55</sup>

An additional wrinkle in the dilemma was that some had signed notes backing others in their financial endeavors. Willis Pope, who owned a mercantile house, was deeply in debt and on the verge of losing everything. His loans had been endorsed by his father, LeRoy Pope, as well as both brothers-in-law, John Williams Walker and Thomas Percy. With his own precarious finances compounded by the possible collapse of Willis Pope's business, Walker admitted to a friend, "Here lies my greatest danger."<sup>56</sup>

The early rush to buy land had negative consequences. The minimum tract of land one could buy was 160 acres and the lowest price one could pay was \$2.00 per acre. One fourth of that total amount was required in cash, and one fourth had to be paid each year for the following three years.<sup>57</sup> The financial panic of 1819 was devastating in that many people



who could not afford their installment lost everything. A year later, Congress reduced the minimum number of purchased acres to eighty at a minimum cost of \$1.25 in cash<sup>58</sup> – too little, too late.

The financial collapse brought stress, pressure and depression. Lewellen Jones, a veteran of the American Revolution, had just bought a tract of land from Irby Jones (no relation) for \$18,742. Irby Jones owed Lewellen Jones \$8,000 and Lewellen was afraid Irby would default on what was owed him. By buying Irby Jones's property, Lewellen Jones would then owe Irby Jones \$10,742. Inside his unfinished new home of only three weeks, Lewellen Jones hanged himself on the rafter.<sup>59</sup> He had put himself in deeper financial debt and could see no resolution. His sons were able to maintain the bulk of their father's Avalon estate while many others lost their land, their homes, as well as their hopes and dreams. For so many men, status was tied to their wealth. The worries of the women were more immediate and realistic – how to get food on the table for the next meal.

The rapid expansion of wealth, prosperity, and growth in Madison County had come to a complete and utter halt by the end of 1819. All had hoped the financial storm would soon pass, but many threw in the towel and continued west to Mississippi.

While Huntsville survived and eventually regained lost ground, other communities, now lost to the soft black of the past, hoped to emulate Huntsville's success. The October 17, 1818 edition of the *Alabama Republican* reported that \$27,000 worth of land had just sold for the establishment of the town of Marathon, which would be "laid out by government at the place called Melton's Bluff near the head of the Shoals in Tennessee river."<sup>60</sup> Land sales in Huntsville

promoted Havannah, a town to be located in Lauderdale County, nine miles from Florence. It was one of forty-two townships where land sales brought a combined total of five million dollars into the government coffers.<sup>61</sup> Monroe, located twenty miles from Huntsville, was established on the south side of the Tennessee River in Cotaco County near Burleson's Ferry. It too has disappeared from memory. Hillsborough Town, sixteen miles from Huntsville, was located on what was then known as the Post Road to Knoxville.<sup>62</sup> These are just a few of the towns that no longer exist.

Why did Huntsville succeed while other villages did not? Perhaps the residents, stewards of land, prosperity, and pride in their community, are the key. Huntsville has proven to have a knack of reinventing herself when the need arises, conforming to a changing world but able to recognize the importance of our Southern roots.

Two hundred years later, Huntsville continues to be a thriving community, albeit quite different from that described by Anne Newport Royall. At one time, Madison County boasted the cultivation of 1,000 pounds of cotton per acre.<sup>64</sup> Over the years, the vast fields of cotton have been devoured by crops of asphalt and subdivisions. Progress requires a heavy price.

Today's courthouse, the fourth on that spot, remains the center of city government. One can't help but wonder if those men and women who welcomed President Monroe in the summer of 1819 could have envisioned celebrations of the future. On that same soil, Federal soldiers celebrated the end of the Civil War and military parades circled the square before and after world wars. Well into the next century, loud and impromptu celebrations were held after successful

milestones in the space program. Huntsville residents, who helped America reach far into space, had a special reason to rejoice at the courthouse square.

Did our ancestors look up into the black night sky and imagine that one day, space pioneers of the future would walk the same streets? Did they imagine those same people would look back and wonder about life in 1819? We will never know the answer to that question, but we can be assured that the richness of the beauty that surrounded our ancestors and that same pioneering spirit is with us today.

### **Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> G.W. McGinty, "Alabama Makes Her Debut into the Union," *Huntsville Historical Review*, 2:1 (January 1972): p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Chambers Betts, *Historic Huntsville from Early History of Huntsville, Alabama 1804 to 1870* (Birmingham: Southern University Press, reprinted 1966 from original printed 1909), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Rane'e G. Pruitt, *Eden of the South, A Chronology of Huntsville, Alabama 1805-2005* (Huntsville, Alabama: Huntsville-Madison County Public Library, 2005) p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> McGinty, *Huntsville Historical Review*, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> *Alabama Republican*, Huntsville, Alabama, June 5, 1819, p. 2.  
digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/ref/collection/voices/id/7257, page 2, top of 3<sup>rd</sup> column.

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

<sup>7</sup> James Record, *A Dream Come True, The Story of Madison County and Incidentally of Alabama and the United States, Vol. 1*, (Huntsville, Alabama: John Hicklin Printing Company, 1970), p. 57.

- <sup>8</sup> Daniel Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier, Madison County, 1800-1840* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), p. 38.
- <sup>9</sup> *Huntsville Times, Huntsville's Sesquicentennial*, September 11-17, 1955.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> McGinty, *Huntsville Historical Review*, p. 39.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Gamble, *Historic Architecture in Alabama, A Guide to Styles and Types, 1810-1930* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1990) p. 24.
- <sup>13</sup> Betts, *Historic Huntsville from Early History of Huntsville* p. 9.
- <sup>14</sup> *Huntsville Times, Huntsville's Sesquicentennial*, September 11-17, 1955.
- <sup>15</sup> Gamble, *Historic Architecture*, p. 24-26.
- <sup>16</sup> Pruitt, *Eden of the South*, p. 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Betts, *Historic Huntsville from Early History of Huntsville* p. 30.
- <sup>18</sup> Anne Newport Royall, *Letters from Alabama, 1817-1822*, edited and annotated by Lucille Griffith (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1919) p. 118-119.
- <sup>19</sup> Sarah Huff Fisk, "The Williams Street Area in the Early 1800s," *Huntsville Historical Review* 1:1, January 1971, p. 19.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 20.
- <sup>21</sup> Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier*, p. 44.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 39.
- <sup>23</sup> Royall, *Letters from Alabama*, p. 114-115.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 139.
- <sup>25</sup> Madison County History  
([madisoncountyal.gov/government/about-your-county/history](http://madisoncountyal.gov/government/about-your-county/history))
- <sup>26</sup> Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier*, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Record, *A Dream Come True*, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Betts, *Historic Huntsville from Early History of Huntsville*, p. 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> helionlodge.org.

<sup>31</sup> *Alabama Republican*, Huntsville, Alabama, October 31, 1818, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> O.C. Skipper, "Huntsville's Green Academy 1812-1862" *Huntsville Historical Review*, 2:4, (October 1972): p. 16-17.

<sup>33</sup> *Huntsville Times, Huntsville's Sesquicentennial*, September 11-17, 1955.

<sup>34</sup>

[http://huntsvillehistorycollection.org/hh/index.php=Person:Dr. Thomas Fearn](http://huntsvillehistorycollection.org/hh/index.php=Person:Dr._Thomas_Fearn)

<sup>35</sup> *Alabama Republican*, Huntsville, Alabama, October 24, 1818, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Pruitt, *Eden of the South*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier* p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> *Huntsville Times, Huntsville's Sesquicentennial*, September 11-17, 1955. Also, [alabamapioneers.com/Presbyterian-history-alabama-10068/](http://alabamapioneers.com/Presbyterian-history-alabama-10068/) by Donna Causey, see "First Camp-meeting Held in Huntsville

<sup>40</sup> websites for First Methodist Church, First Cumberland Presbyterian Church, First Baptist Church, and First Presbyterian Church.

<sup>41</sup> *Huntsville Times, Huntsville's Sesquicentennial*, September 11-17, 1955.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *Alabama Republican*, Huntsville, Alabama, August 5, 1817.

- <sup>44</sup> *Huntsville Times, Huntsville's Sesquicentennial*, September 11-17, 1955.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier* p. 82.
- <sup>48</sup> Jacquelyn Procter Reeves "Fare Thee Well – From the Papers of John Williams Walker," *Historic Huntsville Review* 30:1 (Fall-Winter 2004-2005): p. 61.
- <sup>49</sup> Record, *A Dream Come True* p. 58.
- <sup>50</sup> Record, *A Dream Come True* p. 59.
- <sup>51</sup> Betts, *Historic Huntsville From Early History of Huntsville*, p. 37.
- <sup>52</sup> Henry Marks, "Andrew Jackson's Activities in the Tennessee Valley," *Historic Huntsville Review* 3:2 (April 1973), p. 32-33.
- <sup>53</sup> *Alabama Republican*, Huntsville, Alabama, October 17, 1818, p. 2.  
<http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/cdm/compoundobject/collection/voices/id/7340/rec/16>
- <sup>54</sup> Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier* p. 50.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 76.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 54.
- <sup>57</sup> McGinty, p. 35.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier* p. 57.
- <sup>60</sup> *Alabama Republican*, Huntsville, Alabama, October 17, 1818, p. 2.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 3.
- <sup>62</sup> Record, *A Dream Come True* p. 56.
- <sup>63</sup> *Alabama Republican*, Huntsville, Alabama, October 24, 1818, p. 4.
- <sup>64</sup> [www.madisoncountyal.gov/government/about-our-county/history](http://www.madisoncountyal.gov/government/about-our-county/history)

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# **Alabama's Struggles During Their Centennial**

*By Marjorie Reeves*

Alabama has shared many experiences with the world including war, famine, financial crises and disease. The 1918 Spanish Influenza was devastating to Alabamians as well as populations all over the world. By 1919, people were not only afraid of strangers, but also their friends and neighbors, even family. Nine members in one family died. Who would be next to succumb to influenza? While celebrating the state centennial, our relatives were fighting for their lives here in Alabama. The war to end all wars was forgotten as the home folks were fighting to survive another year.

The Huntsville Commission wrote a letter to the state legislature requesting to organize the state centennial since the state government started in Huntsville. They requested \$50,000 from the state for the celebration. Marie Bankhead Owen wrote plays for schools to use on Alabama Day and programs for meetings and events. Montgomery organized a Centennial and Exposition Committee. Cities around the state planned an event to celebrate but as planning for a commemoration developed, the leaders also had to be concerned about people gathering and spreading the flu.

Madison County was the first to report the flu in Alabama. The first encounter was in Hazel Green where an Army soldier had just returned from the shipyards in Philadelphia where it was already killing. It spread like a sage fire in a week. As it spread, people died from "cytokine storm," an overreaction of the immune system. First the infected would have a



chill, then fever, their lungs would seem to liquify, they would turn blue, and die. Healthy people would have a stronger overreaction and die faster. To this day the medical community has not tracked down where it started. Some theories are it started in Kansas or France, yet the Spanish Flu is used as its nickname.

Alabama State Board of Health refused to talk about the epidemic thinking it was overrated and they could avoid a panic. Days after the State Board of Health said not to worry, they reported that the disease was in every county of the state and was spreading in epidemic proportions. The poor, black and white, were hardest hit due to living in unsanitary conditions.

Governor Charles Henderson was paying attention to all the activities, and “*issued a proclamation calling for all county and municipal authorities to ban public gatherings, and close schools, churches, theatres, picture shows, and other places as long as the disease exists.*” Birmingham closed events and businesses first, then Montgomery, with Mobile following but was already hit hard by the disease because of being a shipping lane and open to incoming illnesses.

Schools were closed in October for two weeks and when they reopened, the flu spiked again. The Board was afraid to close the schools again because they were concerned the students would go out and get a job not returning to the classroom. The doctors disagreed with the Board and sent out a statement advising parents to keep their children at home.

In the rural areas, it was up to the neighbors to help each other. They brought food to the ones that were bedridden, most of the time neighbors just left food and other items on the porch for the infected to come out to retrieve. And, neighbors often risked exposure to nurse a sick friend. The healthy ones would wear

gauze bandages around their faces while tending to the sick.

Druggist Young became ill and closed his pharmacy. Charlie Lane, who became sheriff later, opened the drug store and operated it so prescriptions could be filled.

People were begging for doctors. Dr. Grote Sr. was a young man just starting out in the medical field in Madison County during the influenza and managed to not become sick with it during the period it was running rapid. Local doctors England, Thomas, and Allen died taking care of the ones with the flu and as doctors and nurses became ill, cities would wire for help to other cities. A Red Cross nurse went to the Lincoln village to nurse the inflicted and died within the week. Six Army physicians from a Chattanooga post contributed their help to Madison County.

The neighbors buried the dead in their communities as the daily death toll climbed as high as 31 a day in October 1918. Dr. Grote stated caskets were set on porches to await the undertaker, every cemetery was busy every day. No funerals were held indoors because few would have attended. Garbage collectors were called off Huntsville streets to dig graves. In the Birmingham News, it was stated, "Undertakers seemed to be the only group to profit during the epidemic." Dr. Grote said it was the saddest situation because there was no treatment and he estimated *"that every woman who gave birth while she had the flu, died in delivery. We saved many babies, but the mothers always died."*

The disease followed the railroad lines and shipping lanes where a larger populous were more transitory. The disease was first reported in the spring of 1918 being more of a bother than a killer. Then it returned

in September as deadly, decimating communities. In most cases, the disease developed into difficulty breathing within hours. If the flu did not kill, pneumonia which followed did. The third wave of the flu pandemic in 1919 killed 185,440 across the country. With the flu effecting the work force, people were moving to where the jobs could be had.

The war brought Federal money to Alabama bringing in thousands of new workers. There were two nitrate plants, the Wilson Dam was built, and the Mobile ship yards expanded. The war stimulated an increase in industries production, cotton prices and military bases helped to lift the economy.

Yet when the war was over, the women of Alabama still did not receive the right to vote from the state even though it had passed through Congress. Black leaders who lead the black involvement in the war found the usual segregation and inequality on the soldiers returning from the war. Strikes developed across the country for more wages, the largest strike with Seattle's ship builders. Race riots dotted the landscape, largest raged in Chicago.

Events in 1919 includes downtown Boston, MA., experiencing a clean up of a tank of molasses that burst, flooding the streets killing 21 and injuring 150; the beginning of Nazism by the German's Workers Party; the American government adopted German's Daylight Savings Time system; Communism, growing in Russia, attracted Americans to organize membership. Here in the states, Babe Ruth hit his 26<sup>th</sup> home run and the Chicago White Sox allowed the Cincinnati Reds to win the World Series that developed into a baseball scandal still not forgotten.

No time is purely bad, some of the good news of 1919 was Oscar Micheaux became the first Negro

producer and director of motion pictures. The Kiwanis Club organized. WWI provided 96 Alabama soldiers who received the Distinguished Service Cross and 19 others that received the Distinguished Service Medal. Enterprise became the only county that erected a monument to a pest, the Boll Weevil that had migrated from Mexico eating cotton crops making the farmers learn to alternate their crops. The Treaty of Versailles ending WWI established the League of Nations. President Woodrow Wilson won the Nobel Peace Prize. Act 459 passed by the 1919 Legislature approved daily Bible reading in schools and there were no shootings in educational institutes during that time.



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## **Three Visits To Huntsville Before The Civil War**

*By Robert S. Davis*

John Hunt moved his family to Big Spring in 1806, some months after he had located it in 1805. In time, Hunt's Spring became the settlement of Twickenham that the state legislature renamed as Huntsville in 1811. For information on the beginnings of the city that became Huntsville see Edward Chambers Betts, *Historic Huntsville from Early History of Huntsville 1804-1870* (1909); Daniel S. Dupree, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840* (1997); Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, *A History of Early Settlement: Madison County Before Statehood 1808-1819* (2008) and *Madison County 1817-1819: from Territory to Statehood Alabama at 200* (2017); and Raneé G. Pruitt, *Eden of the South: a Chronology of Huntsville, Alabama 1805-2005* (2005).

Reproduced below are three accounts of visits to Huntsville before 1861 and the coming of the Civil War. Together these accounts give a colorful firsthand account of the growth of Madison County during the antebellum years. Prominent travel writer Anne Royall also visited the thriving community in 1818 and later published an account of what she witnessed in her well-known *Letters from Alabama on Various Subjects* (1830), pp. 43-46, 151-54. It is available on the internet.

Westchester County, New York born and Yale educated Congregational minister Elias Cornelius (1794-1832) kept a dairy as he passed through the South in his efforts to establish schools for converting to Christianity the Southern Indians. He worked on

behalf of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. From his later travels, he wrote the first account of a visit to the Etowah Indian mounds. Colonel Elias Cornelius Boudinot, named for Elias Cornelius, became a prominent Cherokee Confederate leader. The Rubenstein Library of Duke University today has the Elias Cornelius Papers, 1816-1832, in which the following appears:

Tuesday-11 [November 1817] this day continued my journey & took breakfast at Col Davidsons 6 mi and made on through the civil & beautiful country of Franklin to the house of Esq Miller in the edge of Madison Co. Alabama Ter[ritory] this country contains a population of about 16,000 souls-nearly half of them are blacks. It formerly belonged to Miss[issippi] Terr. But has recently been annexed to the Territory of Alabama [on March 3, 1817] at Esq Millers I tarried all night and was happy to meet with a man who appeared to be pious—when he understood that I was a clergyman he proposed to a mans belonging to the house that ~~would be agreeable to~~ I should perform family worship to which he replied "that praying was a thing not allowed in that house" & alleged as a reason the prejudice of Esq Miller against the clergy men with whom he had been acquainted. Having said thus much it was no longer urged. Mr Jones who had made the request, and who had long resided in the western country remarked that it was the first house he had ever met with in which social prayer was forbidden,

In the course of day, I rode thirty miles crossed several creeks and rode over a corner of the Cherokee Land. I notice this because its appearance was to me very irregular. It was upland and yet previously had the appearance of a river bottom. The trees and grape vines were very large[.] A Poplar tree I measured which

was a few inches over six feet in diameter & 20 feet in circumferences. It had been cut down and proved to be perfectly solid. From the number of growth which I counted on another tree, this must have had 600 of those circles representing its age to be 600 years. It was seventy feet to the first limb [?] a grape vine I measured which was 22 inches in circumference. This corner of land was six miles in extent & for that whole distance appeared to be of the richest kind of soil—at present not a soul worked it [Wednesday November 12, 1817] This day left Esqr Miller's in company of strangers—crossed the forks of the Flint River—distant from each other 3 miles and very deep.

Arrived at Huntsville a few minutes before eleven having rode twenty miles on my arrival I found that several gentlemen had left the place for New Orleans only fifteen minutes before. As I was an entire stranger to the rode [sic, road] to Natchez and know it in a bad condition for traveling, I resolved to fall into their company. I immediately rode after them & soon overtook them—made known my wishes & received their approbation. As I had business in Huntsville I was compelled to return—at the same time informing them I would endeavor to reach them the following night.

Huntsville is a flourishing town the capital of Madison County in the New territory of Alabama and although settled but 10 or 12 years contains 40 stores of different kinds and a large number of dwelling houses—arranged in several streets. The town stands upon a small hill of lime stone rock—covered superficially with earth & terminating on one side in a perpendicular bluff of 80 or more feet in height beneath its base a large stream of water, brings forth to view & widens below so as to form the appearance



of a small pond. The water is very clear & fine & furnishes the whole town with water of a most excellent quality. I have been told that this great spring of water was the circumstance, which gave the preference to this place as seat of a town.

Huntsville presents an appearance of great business. The grand staple of the county of Madison is Cotton. This is brought in large quantities to Huntsville in the seed, and is here picked, cleaned & baled for market. It is next shipped upon the Tennessee & sent to New Orleans. There are however numerous places in other parts of the county in which cotton gins are erected for the purpose of cleaning and baling cotton. The people are becoming rich with astonishing rapidity. One crop of cotton is worth more than the plantation upon which it is raised. The people seemed to me to almost infatuate with the prospect of making money. There is however a serious subtraction to be made from their prosperity sickness and vice—find in this region a most congenial & luxuriant soil Slaves are in great demand & will probably ere long constitute the principal part of the population of the country. The high demand for slaves made by the cotton planters holds out a most powerful ~~inducement~~ encouragement to the prosecution of that great abominable traffic in human flesh in the southern country are engaged in. The miserable objects of this traffic are brought up in the old states and driven like cattle to the western market when they are sold & bought with as little computation [?] of conscience as if they were so many hogs or sheep.

One of these sales I witnessed myself at Huntsville, during the short stay I made there—a number of Africans were taken to the center of the public square & soon a crowd of spectators & purchasers assembled.

The scene to my feelings was shocking to the last degree I had never witnessed such a spectacle before. One woman was pregnant. Her age & history was demanded and whether she had ever had a child to which she replied in the negative. In consideration of the prospect she presented one man, bid for her 750 dollars while other females of a similar age but not pregnant would not be bid up so high within 100 to 150 dollars. I stood and beheld as long as I could. I was ready to cry out with indignation & weep over the miserable wretches who had been brought from afar & exposed in this manner at an interval of silence. I exclaimed well did Mr. Jefferson remark on such a subject as this "I tremble when I think that God is Just" and immediately left them.

This dreadful traffic with the evils of slavery generally upon moral & political welfare of the southern country I am resolved to delineate in writing—in another place

In Huntsville I tarried 3 hours and never felt gloomier in any place in my life—I did not want for company. There were hundreds in the Town. But the love money appeared to me to be engraved on every door & on every heart. No temple to the living God met the pious eye. A Noble courthouse built of Brick occupied a conspicuous place in the center square which was the only public edifice I could see. I did not understand that any clergyman lived within the town—and from the awful profanity which I heard in every place I entered I concluded that a minister of the Gospel had but few companions there.

I left there intending to make fuller enquires concerning them on my return in the spring & if the Lord should give me opportunity to declare the council of his will to them.

Inventor and traveling mercantile agent Augustus René Moen (born Paris, France September 1, 1799, died Samford, Connecticut August 24, 1867) toured the Tennessee River Valley of Alabama in 1831, selling axes for Collins Company of Canton, Connecticut. The excerpt below comes from his letter to Collins Company of June 16, 1831, A. S. Williams III Americana Collection, University of Alabama Libraries, Tuscaloosa.<sup>i</sup>

The Counties of Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison, Morgan, Lawrence and part of Franklin contain some of the best lands, wealthiest merchants, and planters in the state of Alabama and Morgan most particularly Huntsville its County seat [sic, Huntsville is the county seat of Madison County] is a town outranked by no other in the state but Mobile. Its merchants are in the highest degree wealthy and responsible, the amt. of goods sold there last year was exceeding at retail \$350,000 and Florence \$100,000. It labours however under the disadvantages of an interrupted navigation and a remote location from the principal wholesale markets. In high water however they ship their cotton (the great staple) to Florence or Waterloo by flat bottomed boats. The most of the merchants up and down the Valley of the Tennessee purchased their goods mostly in Pha. [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] Their hardware particularly-and wagon them to Pittsburg at \$1.75 or 2.00 per. Cost then by boat to Florence \$2.00 and to this place \$1.00 or 75 cts. or ship to N. Orleans by that route to this place amounts to \$3.75 or \$4.00 by the time our axes arrive here they will cost them \$1.75 to \$1.81 this will operate unfortunately [?]. Yet at the even the axes when fairly tested and well known can be sold here at a profit in considerable quantities altho the Country is much

cleared. The country made axes are poor course and clumsy and sell from \$2.50 to 3.00 it is with such only that ours at present will have to compete. Our axes as Yet are but little known at Huntsville and but one of the principal merchants has kept them (F. T. Mastin & Co.) and they had bot [bought] but one box K large eye [axes]. Hays & Wyatt and W. H. Powers (the first small dry goods Merchants, the latter a grocer) had each one box R. S. E. [axes] in good order. The first in Phild at \$18 the latter in N Orleans of Puech & Bein at \$20. Neither had sold more than One or two ax at \$3.00 or \$2.50 each. I spent the whole day at this place among the principal merchants 1<sup>st</sup> Patton Donegan & Co, 2<sup>nd</sup> F. T. Mastin & Co., 3<sup>rd</sup> B. M. Lowe, 4<sup>th</sup> Andrews & Brothers (Jews have a house in Tuscaloosa and deal in Pha. With an Importer who (they say) supplies Hand S & Bird [axes] and others (They sell Andrews & Brothers for cash only and last year sold for \$30,000) and 5<sup>th</sup> Yeatman & Kent. Now all these merchants are said to be as good as the Bk of England—deal in NYk [New York City?] and Pha. The 1<sup>st</sup> with Hand S. & Bird, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Rogers & Brothers (both write this day to their partners now in the city to purchase several doz of our best R.S.E.) The 3<sup>rd</sup> deals with Jeffer & Chase NYk and Yeatman & Kent with Rogers & Brothers. If I had found Brooks as fresh in the memories of the merchts. here as at Florence I should have left early this morning. He was hardly remembered by any but W. H. Powers and B. M. Lowe's clerks who forgot to enter our axes on Lowe's memorandum who is also in NYk purchasing and may not think of them. Mr. Brooks views of this place may differ from mine or he would have scoured it more effectively. I consider it more important than Florence at present and the new

purchase of the Chickasaw country may enable Florence to sell more axes in time.

On the eve of the Civil War, Connecticut born artist and engraver John Warner Barber (1798-1885) visited Alabama for illustrations to use in his monumental work *Our Whole Country* (1861). Connecticut born writer Henry Howe (1816-1893) composed the text for the book that included the following about Huntsville:

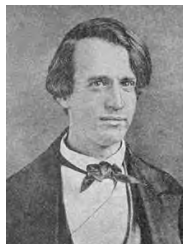
...HUNTSVILLE, the shire town of Madison county, one of the most beautiful and well built places in the southern states, is on the line of the Charleston and Memphis railroad, about 10 miles N. of the Tennessee River, 217 N. from Montgomery, and 211 from Memphis, Tenn. The court house is of Grecian architecture, erected at an expense of \$45,000, the banking house is of hewn stone, with an Ionic portico, built at a cost of \$80,000. It has several churches and academies, three female seminaries, and many handsome private dwellings. The inhabitants are supplied with pure and cold water from a spring which breaks out at the foot of a rock, a few feet distant from the Northern Bank, with a power sufficient to move a forcing pump for elevating and distributing it to all dwellings. This place presents many attractions for a permanent residence. One of the best collections of paintings and statuary in the United States is here, in the possession of Dr. Colhoun [Meredith Colhoun/Calhoun].<sup>ii</sup> Population about 5,000.

Huntsville received its name from Capt. John Hunt, a revolutionary soldier, the first settler, who located himself near the spring which supplies the city. The plot comprising the town was sold by the government, in 1809, to Leroy Pope, in his honor or that of his namesake in England, who wrote the *Essay on Man*, it was called Twickenham, the place of Pope's residence,

near London. It was, however, changed back to Huntsville, at the next session of the legislature. The Presbyterians and Methodists organized the first religious societies. Rev. Dr. Blackburn at first preached in the court house, and organized the first Presbyterian society. Among the first settlers, Gov. Clement C. Clay, father of the senator in congress of the same name; Gen. John Braham, receiver of public moneys; Col. John Read, merchant and register of the U. S. land office; Dr. Henry Chambers, a representative in congress; Gen. Benjamin Paterson, U. S. Marshal; Richard W. Anderson, an extensive land dealer; Stephen Neal, first sheriff of Madison county; Capt. Francis T. Mastin, merchant; James Clemens, father of Senator Clemens; James J. Donegan, president of the Northern Bank; Capt. Wm. Hale; Dr. Alex'r Erskine; Dr. Edmund Irby; Wm. Patton, merchant; Capt. Wm. Wyatt; Jesse S. Searcy; Lewis and William H. Winston; Benj. S. Pope; Saml. and Wm. O. Cruse; Alex. Gilbreath; John P. Hickman; T. G. Percy; Irby and Edwin Jones; Thomas and Wm. Brandon. [The article concludes with the inscriptions on the tombstones of Rev. John Allen, D. D.; Dr. David Moore; a monument placed in memory of John Anderson by Richard W. Anderson; Thomas and Pamela Bibb; and John Williams Walker.]



*Eias Coernelius*  
(Library of Congress)

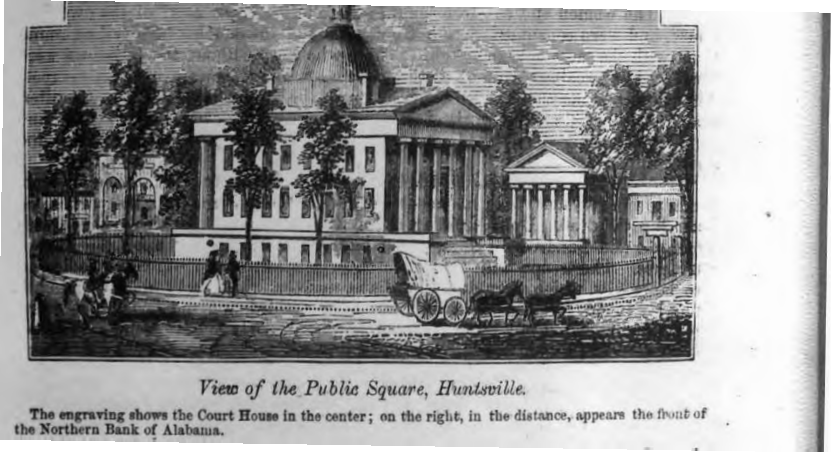


*John Warner Barber*  
(from *Our Whole Country*)



*Mr. Henry Howe*  
(Library of Congress)

Below: The square in Huntsville from John Warner Barber and Henry Howe, *Our Whole Country or the Past and Present of the United States Historical and Descriptive* 2 vols. (1861): 2: 820.



# Flames Along the Tennessee River

*By Barbara J. Snow*

As events in the Civil War moved rapidly to a close, a three-pronged set of military forces converged on Marshall County, Alabama, in January 1865. The outcome of their interaction ultimately saw massive property loss and emotional trauma for many people who lived at Manchester, Warrenton, and Guntersville. In fact, according to historian and native Marshall Countian John Allan Wyeth in his essay “Devastation of the Town,” the village of Guntersville “disappeared” with the exception of a few structures.

In late 1864, General Hylan P. Lyon with a brigade of General Bedford Forrest’s cavalry raided through Kentucky. Called the “Court House Burning Raid,” Lyon and his troops burned eight court houses, destroyed several strategic railroad bridges, and damaged/looted a number of Federal supply warehouses. After learning that General John Bell Hood’s Army of the Tennessee had withdrawn toward Corinth, Mississippi, Lyon and approximately 300 cavalymen proceeded south through Tennessee until arriving at Scottsboro, Alabama. On January 8, 1865, the Confederate force engaged in a firefight with 101<sup>st</sup> and 110<sup>th</sup> Colored U. S. Army Troops who were garrisoning the town, guarding a railroad trestle, and protecting water tanks used to supply the steam locomotives. Although Lyon’s cavalry overcame and scattered the guards assigned to protect the town and railway, the general realized that Federal reinforcements would quickly arrive by train from nearby Huntsville. Prudently, Lyon moved toward the Tennessee River with the idea of crossing to the south



side since the Federal troops controlled all of the territory north of the river. He anticipated finding locals friendly to the cause since Confederates held the regions south of the river including the town of Guntersville, valued for its harbor. Unfortunately, the river was at flood stage so maneuvering to cross was difficult. According to journalist Caius (C. G.) Fennell, a boy in 1865 whose family lived near Ft. Deposit (Manchester), Lyon successfully crossed the Tennessee River at Law's Landing about ten miles east of Guntersville. Lyon wrote that he used canoes to move his force although it is unknown how many vessels and/or trips were needed. To accomplish the task, he had the troops dismantle, then re-assemble his cannon.

After negotiating the hazards of the flooded Tennessee River, Lyon ordered his two field pieces, 12-pound Howitzers, to be placed atop Beard's Bluff (now Street's Bluff) to harass the Federal gunboats that plied the river from Decatur to Whitesburg to Guntersville. (Ferry landings also existed at Clarksville between the Flint and Paint Rock Rivers; Hollowell's Landing on Bean Rock Creek across from the Paint Rock River; Fearn's Landing near the current location of Guntersville Dam; and Law's Landing near Columbus City). When he had expended all of the artillery shells, Lyon ordered one of the guns destroyed. Taking the other field piece, Lyon and his unit moved south from Warrenton toward Red Hill, located near the southern boundary line separating Marshall and Blount Counties, with a plan to camp and rest both exhausted men and weary horses.

In the meantime, the second part of the trilogy, the 15<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Calvary, had reached Huntsville on January 10 after an arduous journey from

southeastern Tennessee in which 400 miles were covered in only nine days. On January 11, 1865, the Federals led by Colonel William J. Palmer and guided by Ben Harris received orders to pursue and engage General Lyon's cavalry. Hired by the day or week, Harris, sometimes partisan, but often renegade, dressed as a Federal soldier but had no proven affiliation; however, he did have a reputation for attacking and murdering in the tragedy called the Buck Island Massacre near Claysville. With only little time to rest or re-supply, Palmer mustered about 200 Federals out of the complement of 600 troops who departed Huntsville about 10:00 P.M. on January 14, 1865, and trekked all night. Some twelve hours later, they arrived at Clarksville Landing west of the Paint Rock River. There, the gunboats *USS General Thomas* and *USS General Grant* transported the men, horses, and equipment to the south side of the Tennessee River. After a brief rest with time to feed their horses, the Federals swung into action marching toward Warrenton to find General Lyon's Confederate cavalry.

Convinced that the Confederates would camp at Red Hill, Colonel Palmer forged forward until 11:00 P.M. when he finally called for a rest stop for food. He gave his men only three hours until the morning of January 15, 1865, at 1:00 A.M. Dividing his force into two columns, he ordered one unit to make a rapid march to Summit in Blount County to circle behind the Confederates. Taking command of the other half of the force, Palmer determined that the two segments meet at Red Hill at 4:00 A.M. with an attack at 5:30 A.M.

Indeed, the plan Colonel Palmer devised proved successful. At daybreak the Federals rushed the Confederate camp near the home of Thomas Noble at

Red Hill. Since no sentries had been posted, the Confederates had either been secure of their safety or unaware of the Federal pursuers. Out of the roughly 300 Confederates, the Federals captured two captains, four lieutenants, and over 100 enlisted personnel. Furthermore, an abundance of supplies and more than 100 horses were taken.

At the Noble home, Sgt. Arthur Lyon (no relation to General Lyon) of the 15<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania sought to search the farm house and apprehend any officers inside. Without hesitation he immediately galloped to the house, strove into the dwelling, and surprised General Lyon dressed in his nightwear. Captured, the general requested permission to don his uniform. While arranging his clothing, he retrieved a pistol from his belongings. General Lyon turned, fired, and killed Sgt. Lyon with a shot to the head. Grapping his uniform, the general departed through a window to escape into the cold morning.

Although those rooting for the Confederate general may have sighed relief, the saga had only just begun. When news of the death of popular Sgt. Lyon passed through the Federal troops, feelings of indignation, anger, and rage consumed the soldiers. The body of the sergeant was removed with them in a wagon as the column marched back toward Warrenton, Manchester, and Guntersville. In retaliation for his death, the Federals torched plantation houses, farm buildings including smoke houses which held cured meat, slave cabins, and other dwellings in their path. In later years, Caius (C. G.) Fennell reflected that Sherman's method of scorched earth warfare came to the Tennessee Valley. Although many structures were destroyed in the countryside, special mention should be made about the homes of Col. James Sheffield at

Warrenton, Major Arthur Beard at Beard's Bluff, Thomas Atkins Street near Beard's Bluff; a mercantile store; and even a Methodist church, Mt. Olivet Church at Manchester. The town of Warrenton was spared because some of the families held allegiance to the United States. At Manchester, the Dr. James Fennell home was spared since one of the boat pilots, Jim Johnson, argued against its destruction and because Matilda Fennell prepared food for the hungry soldiers. Her daughter, Catharine (Cassie), reported in a diary that her mother had four women working to prepare food for the soldiers. Cassie complained that the



*Example of a Federal Gunboat circa 1865 (open access picture from Internet)*

Federals fed their horses on the family's saved corn and consumed most of their meat. Very near the Tennessee River, the Fennell plantation became a headquarters for the Federals.

The last one of the three-pronged military task force was the U. S. Navy

and its gunboats that maneuvered daily on the Tennessee River. Part of the Mississippi Squadron, the flotilla of gunboats included the *USS General Grant*, *USS General Sherman*, *USS General Thomas*, and *USS General Burnside* along with a support vehicle named *Stone's River* and other smaller supply ships. When the Federal troops reached Ft. Deposit, news of the death of the cavalry sergeant spread quickly among the crews of the gunboats. A squad from the *USS*

*General Grant* went ashore near Beard's Bluff and destroyed several houses/buildings.

In most of the accounts telling of the incidents of burning, statements included allegations of outrage over the death of Sgt. Lyon and hinted that the Federal troops acted indiscriminately. Although this may have been partially true, one source reported that at least one Federal officer indicated his orders included setting fire to a residence. Julia Ann Beard, the daughter of Major Arthur C. Beard, wrote a poem titled "The Burning of Our Home" grieving over her family's experience on January 15, 1865. The following extract from the poem quoted the unnamed officer:

*The officer who held command  
Did then his men array,  
And, with a firm and steady voice,  
At once began to say:  
"My orders are to burn your house  
It is not that I wish to burn  
Your house upon this day.  
But war with all its horrors*

*You've brought upon your  
land,  
And to restore the Union  
I lend a helping hand."*



*Thomas Noble House at Red Hill; Marshall County Archives, Picture taken before structure was razed in the 1990s.*

The event correlated to the gunboat squad having been detailed to Beard's Bluff. This literary expression certainly contradicted reports that the destruction and burning were generated from the ranks.

Around noon on January 15, 1865, the *USS Grant* sailed to Guntersville and detached 40 marines with orders to torch the town. In an attempt to litigate the ensuing destruction a delegation of prominent members of the community met the squadron.

Although some of the names are lost to history, known members of the committee included Dr. L. D. Lusk, Judge Montgomery Gilbreath, and Alex Wiggs. Appealing for the sake of “humanity,” the city’s champions found little empathy. After some negotiation, certain buildings were designated to be saved. Rumor had it that some of the structures housed sick and injured while the Masonic Lodge was spared because some of the Federals belonged to other chapters of that organization. By 4:00 P.M. on January 15, Guntersville lay in ruin, and according to the naval records, had almost totally been erased except for ashes and standing chimneys. Some debate exists about which structures survived. In her diary Cassie Fennell said at the time that the Federals “burned all the houses in Guntersville except nine.” However, most historians report that seven buildings remained—the courthouse, the Guntersville Hotel, the city’s jail, one school, the Masonic Lodge, and two homes. The two dwellings were the Montgomery Gilbreath home on Blount Avenue, now the site of the Guntersville Historical Society, and the Nickels’ home on Hill Avenue.

The next day on January 16, 1865, the *USS Grant* departed Guntersville with 98 men of the 15<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Cavalry and 91 prisoners. Near Fearn’s Landing, the gunboat put the cavalry ashore with 1000 pounds of hard bread, 80 pounds of coffee, and 160 pounds of sugar. After off-loading the mounted troops, the gunboat took the prisoners to Huntsville

where they were dispersed to various prisoner-of-war camps.

Years later in 1891, Willis M. Hatch, a member of the 40-man squad responsible for burning Guntersville, exchanged letters with Caius (C. G.) Fennell, editor of the Guntersville *Democrat*. In part, Hatch explained that during the war “each tried to do his duty as God gave him to see his duty.” In looking back to that chaotic time, he asked veterans of both armies, Confederate and Union, to reflect without regret but to “honor and respect” the sacrifices each soldier made “with malice toward none but charity for all.” Hatch further remarked that he lived in Decatur, Georgia, but still had contact with men in Pennsylvania with whom he had served. He and fellow comrades had sorrowed “more than the injured” over the events of January 1865 and commented “remember young man thy sins will find you out.” Having visited Guntersville in a time previous to the letter and having attended the Presbyterian Church there, Hatch remarked on a conversation with a woman who said the people of Guntersville “have forgiven us all.” In his conclusion, he had comforted his old comrades that they were considered “friends, not enemies” and that the people of Guntersville offered love and an invitation to visit.

When the extensive loss of property, Guntersville and surrounding locales faced hardships and the difficult task of rebuilding. In a lengthy reconstruction, Guntersville and its neighbors did revive! One lady commented that the community “builded (sic) better than she knew.” Looking at the lovely lake country and reflecting on the thousands of tourists who visit yearly, locals can reflect that they have been the witnesses of a Phoenix from the ashes and the

beneficiaries of the sacrifices of citizens who lived during these events.



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# **The Civil Rights Movement in Huntsville**

*By Kelly Hamlin Fisk*

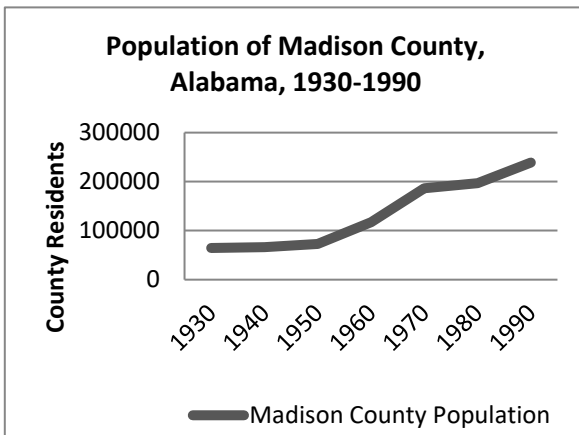
*In the 2019 Volume 44 of the Huntsville Historical Review the timeline of activities related to the historic movement was published. This is the narrative Ms. Fisk provided as a portion of her Master's Thesis that supports the timeline. The Editor*

## **CHAPTER II HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Economic prosperity, federal investment, and racial change came to Huntsville in the 1960s. Civil rights organizers in the city recognized the interdependent nature of these three factors, and their approach to reform meant that the civil rights movement would be received more peacefully in Huntsville in many other Alabama cities. Huntsville experienced the civil rights movement under a unique set of circumstances, including Huntsville's geographic location in north Alabama and its traditional resistance to George Wallace's racist rhetoric; the vocal and persistent protests of the grassroots Community Service Committee who struck fear into the hearts of local boosters; pressure from the federal level through Marshall Space Flight Center, Redstone Arsenal and their affiliated contractors; and the cooperation of the community through business coalitions, biracial commissions, and earnest efforts by both black and white leadership to maintain peace in the city. These factors were significant in making Huntsville a leader in desegregation for the state, but it is important to

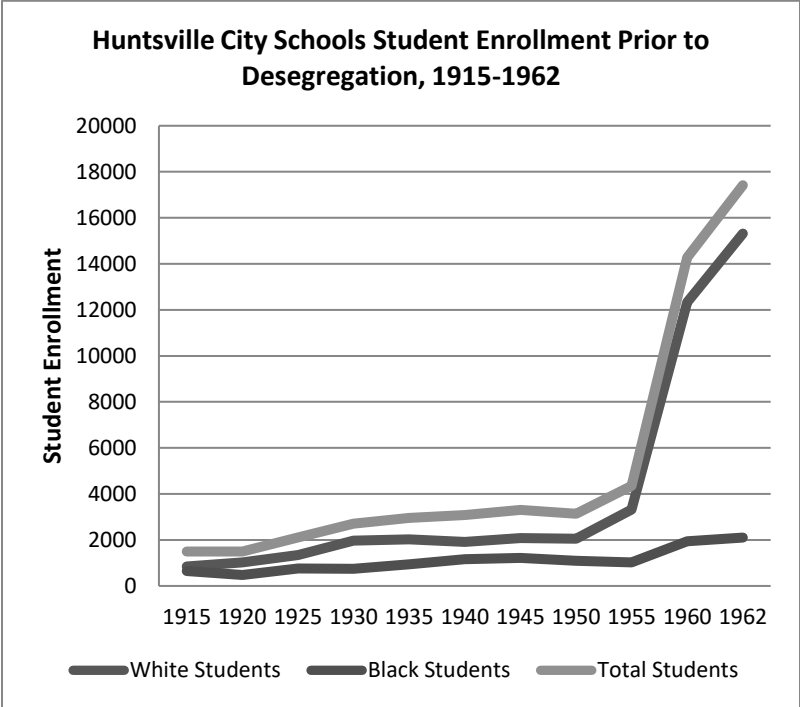
consider the nuances of this history beyond any triumphal claims about the city’s position as a leader in accepting racial equality.

Huntsville has embraced its identity as a progressive Alabama city, reaping the benefits of federal funding and population growth that accompanied the city’s space boom. Its title as first in the state to desegregate continues to be a point of pride. Contemporary explanations credited the city’s large population of racially moderate non-native Alabamans and reasonable community leadership, along with the city’s “economic ties to Washington rather than Montgomery” to explain the peaceful acceptance of changes in racial practices. Huntsville was profoundly influenced by federal dollars and outside investment due to the presence of the NASA’s space program at MSFC and the military at Redstone Arsenal, prompting city leaders to assess their priorities when faced with the possibility of negative press. As explained in a history of the NASA installation, “the Gospel of Wealth had more disciples in Huntsville than did the Gospel of White Supremacy.”<sup>iii</sup>



*Population of Madison County, Alabama, 1930-1990*

The accomplishments of civil rights activists in Huntsville shine most brightly when considered in comparison to the rest of the state. Thanks to national headlines about unrest and violence in Birmingham, Anniston, and Selma, Alabama gained a reputation for its dedication to white supremacy. Governor George Wallace’s 1963 inaugural pledge to defend “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” had echoes in local civil rights struggles across the country. Activists across the state put their lives at risk when they spoke out about racial inequalities, and the horror of Anniston’s violent reaction to the Freedom Rides illustrated that Alabama



**Huntsville City Schools Student Enrollment Prior to Desegregation, 1911-1962.<sup>1</sup>**

had just as much hatred toward outsiders trying to lead the state into a future of racial equality. Despite the very real threat of violence against themselves and their families, dozens of activists committed themselves to change in Huntsville.

Huntsville saw explosive population growth in the 1960s. As shown in table left Madison County, of which Huntsville is the county seat, jumped from a population of 72,903 in 1950 to 117,348 in 1960 and 186,540 in 1970. This population boom had impacts on the demographics of the city's schools as illustrated in Table 2.2, which shows changes in student enrollment divided by race. This data illustrates that the overwhelming majority of new students in the city schools were white, reinforcing the concentration of city resources in white communities.

Given these circumstances, the various social groups in Huntsville approached the civil rights movement in understandably different ways. Although many considered the city to be less segregated than some southern communities, its black and white residents lived in completely different versions of Huntsville. The African-American community was not only socially but also geographically distinct from the white community in its neighborhoods, shopping districts, and schools. The most significant black business district, known as The Grove, was demolished during the period of urban renewal to make way for Huntsville's modern downtown. White areas had whites-only establishments. The black district had businesses serving black customers: laundromats, movie theaters, lawyers, dentists, doctors, and restaurants, to name a few. As federal money came into the city, its trickle-down benefits went directly to the white community through salaries, booming residential developments,

and increased spending money in white business districts and schools. The black community, on the other hand, experienced little to no change in their everyday lives as a result of the space boom and influx of federal spending. Luckily, African-American business and community leaders realized the impact this spending was having on the lives of white Huntsville and made it a critical factor in their activism as they launched the Community Service Committee (CSC) in early 1962 to serve the black community. White stakeholders wanted to preserve the gains they saw coming from federal investment in the city and would soon realize that their federal paycheck was only secure if the white community capitulated on its segregationist ways.<sup>iv</sup>

### **1962: Struggles and Successes**

Organized action for civil rights first began in Huntsville in January of 1962, when Hank Thomas, a field secretary for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), arrived in Huntsville and met with Alabama A&M College students to brief them on the practices of peaceful protest. On January 3 1962, the students held the city's first sit-ins at the lunch counters at W.T. Grant Co., H & H Walgreens, the Trailways bus station, F.W. Woolworth & Co., Big Boy, and Sears & Roebuck. At each of these locations they were ignored and left quietly after waiting for service. Later that evening, black students in four cars attempted to purchase movie tickets at the whites-only Parkway Drive-In Theater (Figure 2.1) and Woodey's Drive-In Theater but were turned away. Sit-ins continued in increasing numbers despite these rebukes. Led by Dr. John L. Cashin Jr., a delegation of six leaders from the black community met with Mayor R.B. Searcy on

January 5 but were disappointed to hear they mayor reassure them that “there were no problems in Huntsville” and “the Negroes and the white people had always gotten along well together.” Three days later, on January 8, a mass meeting of the African-American community at First Baptist Church resulted in the formation of the Community Service Committee (CSC) to provide support to civil rights protestors. Given that Alabama had banned the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from the state just weeks before, local organizers feared the same fate would befall CORE and saw the need for locally organized action. The CSC became the most significant group leading the civil rights movement in Huntsville, and its peaceful yet forceful approach would ensure the moderate course of desegregation for the city.<sup>v</sup>



*The Parkway Drive-In Theater, a whites-only establishment.<sup>1</sup>*

A look at how *The Huntsville Times* covered the events of the civil rights movement gives a clue into how white Huntsville initially perceived blacks' requests for rights. Continuing its tradition of refusing to report news from the African-American community, consistently underreported the numbers in attendance at CSC events. In their reporting on the first sit-ins in Huntsville in January of 1962, the *Times* was suspicious of the protestors' intentions and wrote that they “serve no purpose other than to



endanger the good relations between the white and colored citizens of our community. We cannot believe that anything like a majority of the responsible colored citizens here either endorse or support the tactics used” or that they “have any desire to go into places where they are not welcome.” After only one week of sit-ins the editorial page printed the headline, “It’s Time to Call a Halt,” applauding the patience of Huntsville’s “harassed merchants” and questioning the activists: “What possibly can be gained by violating the legal rights of the owners...of a private business? How does a sit-in movement against a merchant fit in to any logical pattern of an attack against segregation?” Clearly the white community was not willing to compromise with blacks asking for change. *The Huntsville Times* expressed the white community’s disregard for “agitators [who] thrive on violence and its attendant publicity” and cautioned Huntsville residents against “those who seek to provoke us into rash and foolish acts. As the CSC continued its sit-ins and began poster-walking and letter-writing campaigns, the white community took notice and thought immediately of what was at stake: “Such demonstrations serve one purpose. They harm Huntsville’s position in the high competitive race for industrial and intellectual development. [...] Those who are promoting these demonstrations are not considering the over-all community needs or the community future.” As the media voice of the city’s white community, *The Huntsville Times* blamed the protestors, the victims of racial discrimination, rather than addressing the root problem of Jim Crow’s incompatibility with federal policies on racial equality. The newspaper’s position illustrates that the city placed priority on the continued prosperity of

those who had already benefited from the city's boom, rather than on the just distribution of that prosperity to the city's "second-class" citizens.<sup>vi</sup>



*Students prepare to sit in at Woolworth's  
January 31 1962.<sup>1</sup>*

Demonstrators also faced more violent opposition to their demands. Bomb threats were not uncommon at sit-in venues, but some faced harsher retribution from the community. On January 14, two weeks in to Huntsville's sit-ins, Hank Thomas of CORE was participating in a sit-in at the Parkway City shopping center when someone covered his car seat with the severe irritant oil of mustard. Thomas had to be hospitalized that night with severe irritation and burning due to the effects of the caustic oil on his skin. The *Huntsville Times* gave the incident minimal

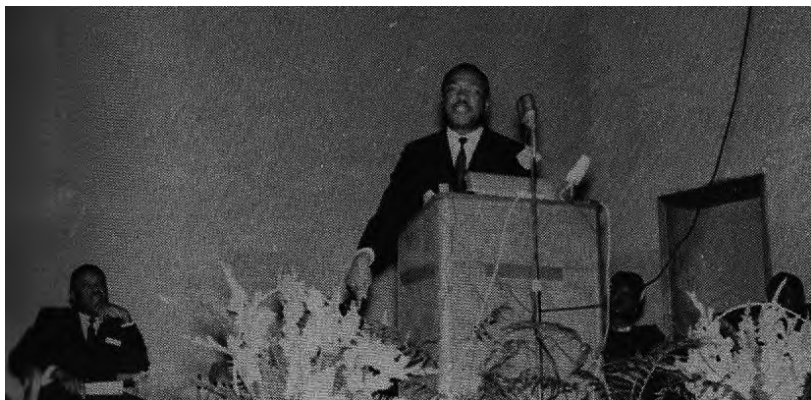
attention with a vaguely worded statement from the hospital about Thomas's injury. One week later, a second incident shook those participating in the movement. Marshall Keith, a white employee at Redstone Arsenal, had recently joined in several sit-ins at local drug store counters. At 1:00 a.m. on the night of January 21 1962, Keith was forced from his home at gunpoint, blindfolded, and driven out of the city where he was told to take off his clothes and then was sprayed with a chemical later found to be oil of mustard. He was then struck and abandoned by his abductors. Keith got help at a nearby home and recovered at the hospital, moving out of state shortly thereafter. His experience illustrates that despite its moderate reputation, Huntsville still had its share of fanatical Alabama racists who were willing to go to great lengths to prove their point.<sup>vii</sup>

After weeks of sit-ins, the Mayor continued to resist the CSC's requests for a biracial committee, illustrating the attitudes of the white community by claiming that he could never find enough whites willing to serve in such a group. Faced with this opposition, the CSC developed further methods of protest. Their tactics were targeted at two of the major interests of the white community: economic success for local businesses and the security of the space program. Boycotts were a powerful force against local businesses, but in 1921 the Alabama state legislature had made it illegal to boycott or to advocate for a boycott. CSC executive committee member Raymond Blackwell, a professor of political science at Alabama A&M, suggested that the committee print small cards with a question for the black community: "Are you shopping for freedom or buying segregation?" When a black family was spotted shopping at an establishment

with discriminatory policies, a CSC member could silently hand them a card with this question, rather than directly asking them to boycott. Mrs. Marian Caudle, in her oral history interview, recalls a childhood memory of shopping with her mother at W.T. Grant in downtown Huntsville and being handed one of these cards to signal the need for their support in the boycott. This simple question, without any mention of boycotting, encouraged members of the black community to send a message to Huntsville's businesses with their shopping dollars.<sup>viii</sup>

In poster walks along the city's busy white business district and the courthouse square, protestors targeted Huntsville's weak spot with posters that read "This is Rocket City U.S.A., Let Freedom Begin Here," "Khrushchev can eat here but I can't," "I ordered a hamburger and they served me a warrant," and "Worried about freedom in Laos and Berlin? We want freedom here!" Following one civil rights rally on the courthouse square, supporters released balloons carrying harsh messages about the ironies of racial inequality in a city "where millions of tax dollars are spent each day to build up Free World defenses."<sup>ix</sup>

Realizing that they needed to reenergize the black community after months of sit-ins and boycotts, the CSC arranged for Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak in Huntsville on March 19 1962. Thanks to fundraising from across the black community, Dr. King spoke to a packed house at the First Baptist Church on Church Street and again to a crowd of 2,000 at Oakwood College (Figure 2.3). King's visit galvanized the community and prepared them for the continued struggle they faced in Huntsville.<sup>x</sup>



*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks at the First Baptist Church.<sup>xi</sup>*

April of 1962 was a flurry of activity for the CSC as its members-maintained sit-ins, boycotts, and poster walks and intensified pressure on the city with new tactics. Faced with *The Huntsville Times's* news blackout of civil rights events, the CSC engineered a situation sure to grab headlines. On April 10, Martha Hereford, who was six months pregnant, and Joan Cashin with her four-month-old daughter Sheryll, sat in at H&H Walgreens with every intention of being arrested for refusing to leave. They were accompanied by CSC president Revered Ezekiel Bell, Reverend S.F. Lacey, and student activist Frances Sims. As expected, the sit-inners were arrested, baby Sheryll in tow. There, the men were released under a \$300 bond but the three women refused to ask for an appeal bond, much to the dismay of Police Chief Grover Pylant who hoped to avoid an uproar over the situation. He resolved to release the three women "on their own recognizance" that day. The next week, as *Jet* magazine published a photo of Joan Cashin being arrested with her infant in arms, the three women arrived for their arraignment and again refused to post

bond. This left the court with no choice but to send Martha Hereford, Joan Cashin, and Frances Sims back to jail, this time without baby Sheryll. At the Madison County Jail, the women faced inhospitable conditions as the jailers tried to convince them to post bond and leave, but with the support of the CSC and the black community they held fast to their principles. Supporters brought the women three meals a day, and organized a telephone committee of people calling the jail and the mayor to inquire, "Is it true you have mothers in jail, you have a pregnant woman in jail?" An exasperated Mayor R.B. Searcy called Dr. John Cashin, urging him to post bond for his wife. After thirty-three hours in the Madison County jail, the three women finally relented and posted bond for themselves after *The Huntsville Times* published news of the event and national news outlets picked up the dramatic story of protests in the Rocket City.<sup>xii</sup>

To reinforce the city-wide boycott of department stores with segregated lunch counters, Easter of 1962 was declared "Blue Jeans Sunday" in the black community. Traditionally, Huntsville businesses enjoyed a seasonal boom in business when black and white families would shop for new dresses and suits in preparation for Easter church services and celebrations. In an act of protest against the discriminatory policies of department stores with segregated lunch counters, African-Americans boycotted clothing stores in Huntsville and instead shopped in neighboring cities such as Fayetteville, Decatur, and Athens. In a show of solidarity, participants wore plain, cheap blue jeans on Easter Sunday instead of expensive new sets of "Sunday best" clothing. With the statewide ban on boycotts in mind, the CSC engineered a clever disguise for this show of

# Don't Invest In Huntsville, Ala.

## It's Bad Business

Demonstrations (sit-ins, picketing, and prayer marches) began in Huntsville, Alabama, January 3rd and continue down to this very hour. Numerous jailings and assaults have taken place. At one point three Turkish soldiers, in Huntsville to study the federal rocket program were taken into custody. Each day many visitors go in and out, yet, city officials still ignore the many local, national, and international ramifications of present policies.

Huntsville has grown faster than any other city in America. This growth has come as a result of federal government expenditures and the entry of many large corporations, among them Chrysler, IBM, Raytheon and Thiokol Chemical.

The Rocket Capital of the Free World must not become involved in riotous racial conflict.

Write Mayor R. B. Searcy and ask him for an early democratic solution. Write President Kennedy ask him to lend his aid and influence.

Please don't delay - Negro citizens are still being jailed if they seek service at lunch counters or try to challenge the status quo.

*Can Democratic Defenses Be  
Built in an Undemocratic City?*

Figure 2.5 Flyer handed out at New York Stock Exchange.<sup>1</sup>

activism. In the week leading to Easter Sunday, CSC volunteers distributed

"Lenten Self Denial Folders"

(Figure 2.4) across the city's black neighborhoods

urging residents to pray for social justice in the Lenten season

and to "decide here and now to deny yourself as

Christ did. Say with us, nothing new for Easter." In

a less veiled suggestion, they also told readers to "stay out of

town, the Mall, Parkway Shopping Center."

As footage from Dr. Hereford's

documentary *A Civil Rights Journey*

illustrates, the boycott was a resounding

success economic shock for Huntsville businesses, who for among the black community. This boycott was an years had relied on the Easter boost to their sales.<sup>xiii</sup>

The CSC was persistent, using a variety of approaches to insist that the white community address racial issues, beginning with sit-ins in January of 1962 and soon adjusting with the understanding that the city's white institutions would require a more powerful push toward change. The CSC's protestors also surprised Huntsville's leaders with a protest on the national level. In the spring of 1962, current and former Huntsville residents along with Alabama A&M alumni picketed in among the black community. This boycott was an years had front of both the New York Stock Exchange and the Midwest Stock Exchange in Chicago, passing out handbills with messages such as "Don't Invest In Huntsville Ala.: It's Bad Business," "Can Democratic Defenses Be Built in an Undemocratic City?" and "To invest in Huntsville, Alabama is to invest in segregation" (Figure 2.5).<sup>xiv</sup>



# LENTEN

## SELF DENIAL FOLDER



### INSTRUCTION FOR USE OF THIS SELF DENIAL FOLDER

As we enter the latter days of the Lenten season thinking of the causes for which Christ died your attention is called to the fact that within the past two years students all over the south have with their sit-in demonstrations tried to advance the cause of brotherhood and social justice. We have succeeded in more than one hundred and fifty cities. Success will be ours in Huntsville.

We as students are praying, we offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Many of us have already been jailed in this Godly crusade. Will you pray with us?

We give this self denial folder to you and ask you to do the following:

1. Read the 6th Chapter of St. Mathew, contained here, for the truth it tells.
2. Daily pray with us earnestly the three prayers that are contained here. The first two have been prayed by Christian for more than one hundred years.
3. Decide here and now to deny your self as Christ did. Say with us, nothing new for Easter.
4. Stay out of town, the Mall, Parkway Shopping Center.

*Lenten Self-Denial Folder to promote Blue Jeans Sunday.<sup>1</sup>*

Thanks to months of pressure from the CSC, in late April of 1962 Mayor Searcy agreed to establish a biracial committee to address the concerns of the African-American community. Three local white businessmen, wholesale grocer Will Halsey, real estate baron Harry Rhett Jr., and James Johnston of Johnston Concrete, agreed to participate under the condition that their involvement would be discreet. Ultimately the city resolved to have a trial period of desegregation of eight lunch counters in July, prearranged with business owners, the police department, the CSC and the mayor. To deter organized opposition by any white groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the date was kept a secret from the general public. On the first day of integrated dining in Huntsville, there was no violence and not a single protest.<sup>xv</sup>

While the CSC's tactics forced the cooperation of white leadership and the peaceful desegregation of businesses, the course of the movement in Huntsville is also attributed to the city's political climate. Like much of northern Alabama, Huntsville had a reputation for being more moderate on race issues than the rest of the state. Governor George Wallace's style of racism found little support in Huntsville. Both times Wallace ran for governor, in 1962 and 1966, Madison County gave Wallace a smaller percentage of the vote than did any other Alabama county. Wallace's extreme stance set the tone for resistance to racial equality across the state, but Huntsville leaders tried to minimize the local impact of Wallace's rhetoric and politics. While 1962 saw Huntsville begrudgingly accept the first steps of desegregation, the city's response to Governor Wallace's interferences in 1963

would prove that the city was tied more closely to Washington than to Montgomery.<sup>xvi</sup>

Huntsville's early successes seem remarkable in comparison to the violent and protracted battle that proceeded in Birmingham, so a comparison of the two Alabama cities can be fruitful. The frustrations of Birmingham civil rights organizers were embodied in Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor, who embraced a public identity devoted to maintaining separation of the races. Huntsville, on the other hand, had no single staunch figure such as Connor to serve as a figurehead and rallying point for segregationists. Bull Connor also served an important role for civil rights organizers, as his violent and impetuous style ensured that any conflict with him would make headlines across the country. In Huntsville organizers struggled to make it into the newspaper at all, particularly in the local *Huntsville Times*, and were never presented with the opportunity to face such a foe as Connor. Huntsville's white leadership did not rely on the fear of violence to keep protesters at bay, but rather took the approach used in Albany, Georgia, with a police force so dedicated to matching nonviolence with nonviolence that they dutifully arrested dozens of protestors at one sit-in after another. As Huntsville's protestors were peacefully arrested from all-white lunch counters and quietly taken to jail, the CSC had to concoct its own ways to create headlines, such as the planned arrest and imprisonment of two well-to-do black mothers, one pregnant and one with an infant in arms, over their desire to eat at a segregated lunch counter. While Huntsville's civil rights leaders couldn't always count on stirring up headlines with their protests, they did take note of some of the most successful campaigns in

other cities, such as Nashville's Easter Sunday shopping boycott that was replicated in Huntsville as Blue Jeans Sunday. Birmingham's deep racial tensions coupled with a white supremacist figurehead in Bull Connor to create a powder keg that wouldn't be found in Huntsville. Instead, the CSC had to think closely about what tactics would pinpoint Huntsville's particular interests and develop targeted protest techniques to hit the city's weak points.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **1963: Battling Against the Governor**

After the successes of 1962, Huntsville prepared for another battle as Governor Wallace challenged the admission of Dave McGlathery and Marvin Carroll to the University of Alabama at Huntsville in June of 1963. CSC committee member Dr. John Cashin recruited these two black professionals involved in missile research at Redstone Arsenal to apply for continuing education credits from the university. The press, the Attorney General's office, and the FBI speculated over whether Wallace would make his stand against desegregation in Huntsville. The 169<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineering Group of the National Guard was even federalized in anticipation of a standoff in Huntsville. When the time came to admit the students in June, Wallace did interfere by changing the registration days for several state universities at the last minute, ostensibly to allow for movement of state troopers between the universities. Fortunately for Huntsville, the governor chose to make his "stand in the schoolhouse door" on June 11 in Tuscaloosa rather than the Rocket City, much to the relief of McGlathery as he enrolled at UAH without any problems on June 14 1963 (Figure 2.6). Ironically enough, the state's university color barrier had been

broken quietly on the Alabama A&M College campus in Huntsville two days earlier, as on June 11 a white man named Robert Muckel enrolled at the traditionally black college with no attention from Governor Wallace. Muckel, a science teacher from Nebraska, did not know that Alabama A&M was a historically black school when he enrolled in the school's summer institute for teachers, and was surprised to learn that he was in fact breaking new ground in the fight for racial equality in the state.<sup>xviii</sup>



David McGlathery enrolls at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.<sup>xix</sup>

Huntsville would not be able to avoid intervention from the governor as it prepared for the court-ordered desegregation of four of its public schools. This battle began on the coattails of the successes of 1962, as the CSC recruited several African-American families who were willing to file a lawsuit demanding the right to enroll in all-white schools despite serious intimidation and threats of violence from the white community. Judge H.H. Grooms of the U.S. District Court in

Birmingham ruled on August 13 1963 that Huntsville had to begin integration that fall. On Tuesday September 3, the first scheduled day of school, four African-American students prepared to be the first to integrate Alabama's public schools: Sonnie W. Hereford III at Fifth Avenue School, Victoria Pearson at Rison Junior High, John Brewton at East Clinton School, and David Piggee at Terry Heights School.<sup>xx</sup>

As these families and others made their way to schools across the city, Governor Wallace dispatched state troopers to block students and faculty from entering the four schools to be integrated. Wallace unexpectedly ordered the Huntsville Board of Education delay the opening of all city schools until Friday September 6, apparently in exchange for a promise not to interfere in Huntsville's schools in any other way. As they were turned away from their schools and returned to their homes, families were disappointed at this obstruction and hoped that Wallace's intervention would stop there (Figure 2.7). That day the Huntsville Citizens' Committee for Better Schools sent a telegram to Wallace in which they urged him "to reconsider any action you may contemplate that would interfere with the orderly and peaceable conduct of free public education in Huntsville." Huntsville Mayor R.B. Searcy told the *New York Times* that he wished Wallace had not closed the schools "since we are getting along all right here. And I didn't see any reason for not opening our schools. We would not have had any trouble."<sup>xxi</sup>



*Sonnie Hereford IV and Dr. Sonnie Hereford III leave Fifth Avenue School.<sup>1</sup>*

At 6:20 a.m. on Friday September 6, parents were disappointed to hear Wallace's state troopers announce over local radio that the four schools to be desegregated would be closed again until Monday September 9. The Board of Education "quickly issued a statement saying that as far as it was concerned, the schools were open." State troopers blocked the doors to the schools and faced crowds of almost

200 parents who "made it plain that they resented what many of

them called an 'invasion' by the governor's forces." Some families pushed their way through the line of troopers, while others confronted or stared silently at the men carrying out the governor's orders (Figure 2.8). *The New York Times* reported that one mother, upon being told by a state trooper that the governor had closed the schools that day, fumed, "Well if that's the way Governor Wallace does things, he ought to be hanged."<sup>xxiii</sup>



*Unhappy Huntsville mother at Fifth Avenue School.  
XXXII*

Much of Huntsville's white leadership clearly resented Wallace's involvement and would have preferred to proceed in desegregation without his attention. Huntsville Chief of Police Chris Spurlock described the governor's actions to the *New York Times* as "a tyrannical use of power" and noted that the city would have preferred to handle desegregation on its own: "The police department didn't invite them [the troopers] here and didn't want them here." He continued: "If it isn't evident to all the world today that that the executive head of our [state] government is a sick man, then by God, none of us are discerning enough to read the facts. To say I'm disappointed is to try to be kind." These strong words from the chief of police illustrate an important difference between Huntsville and other Alabama cities where law enforcement actively opposed desegregation, such as



Bull Connor's Birmingham police force and Jim Clark's deputies in Selma.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Huntsville Mayor R.B. Searcy told the *New York Times* that he wished Wallace had not closed the schools "since we are getting along all right here. And I didn't see any reason for not opening our schools. We would not have had any trouble." He indicted Wallace for his hypocrisy on the matter, telling the *New York Times* that the governor "sits down and out of one side of his mouth he criticizes the President of the United States [Kennedy] for interfering with states' rights, and at the same time he's doing the same thing himself with cities' rights."<sup>xxiv</sup>

In a sharp contrast to their initial reactions to the civil rights movement in town, *The Huntsville Times* lambasted Wallace and fumed that Huntsville's school children had been "used as pawns" in the governor's "long-standing feud with the federal authorities." An editorial seethed at the governor: "Apparently, he places his own political ambitions above the welfare of the school children he has pledged to aid." The newspaper urged, "All Huntsville should let the governor know that this community bitterly resents the senseless and shameful actions of the day."<sup>xxv</sup>



Governor reads "Huntsville Defies Wallace" in *The Birmingham News*.<sup>1</sup>

Huntsville residents took that advice to heart and did not hold back their fury with Wallace. On Monday September 9, the new date set for the start of classes, the governor was served with a restraining order against any further interference in school desegregation in Huntsville, to include any “failure to maintain peace and order within and around the schools.” The CSC, with the assistance of NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund associate counsel Constance Baker Motley, had filed the restraining order in Birmingham’s District Court on Friday after Wallace’s second attempt to block integration in Huntsville. Faced with the restraining order, Wallace did not offer any further resistance to Huntsville’s desegregation. Instead, he sent state troopers to block students from integrating schools in Mobile, Birmingham, and Tuskegee. Monday in Huntsville found just a few local policemen to monitor the schools, and four Huntsville city public schools became the first in the state to desegregate.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### **The Struggle Continues**

The CSC gave momentum to the movement, but the presence and influence of Marshall Space Flight Center and Redstone Arsenal undeniably affected the way Huntsville negotiated the civil rights movement of the 1960s. These federal installations affiliated with NASA and the U.S. Army brought welcome federal money into the area, attracted a new population of educated whites from outside the South, and led to the direct involvement of the federal government in Huntsville’s racial affairs. Washington’s investment in Huntsville via MSFC and Redstone Arsenal was fundamental to the city’s success and economic boom in the 1950s through 1970s. Correspondingly, most

understood that the federal interest in Huntsville made it critical that the city stay far from the type of racism that characterized many headlines coming from Alabama.

Huntsville leaders weighed their options but knew that it would be difficult or impossible to uphold both white supremacy and federal investment in the city. In a 1963 letter to Alabama's segregationist Governor George Wallace, J.A. Barclay of Northrop Space Laboratories, a federal contractor in Huntsville, explained that on the day after Governor Wallace's infamous "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" inaugural speech, "two engineers with graduate degrees who had agreed to move to Huntsville [from Los Angeles] changed their minds with the explanation that 'they didn't want to get into a racial mess.'" Barclay's experience illustrated the worst fears of Huntsville's contractors and business leaders, as well as many others who had profited from the growth which federal investment brought to the city.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Although organized local civil rights demonstrations began in early 1962, Marshall administrators were not concerned with race in Huntsville until headlines from Birmingham in 1963 brought Alabama national attention for its opposition to desegregation. Soon NASA Administrator James Webb was investigating equal employment opportunity for blacks in Huntsville on behalf of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Some in the city thought their fears had materialized in 1964 when the *New York Times* reported Webb's warning that "some research work would have to be switched from Huntsville to New Orleans because the space agency

found it difficult to attract seasoned executives to Alabama.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

Webb’s investigation of federal employment practices at MSFC spurred attempts to rectify some of the racial inequalities there. Marshall established an affirmative action program in 1963 and soon began working closely with Alabama A&M College and Oakwood College, historically black colleges in the city, to improve their engineering education programs. MSFC also offered internships and other incentives for educated blacks entering the Marshall workforce, and worked closely with the city’s contractors to create equal employment opportunity for blacks. The biggest challenge to equal employment was the lack of adequate scientific and technical education available to many African-Americans, and Marshall would continue to struggle with the issue into the next decade.<sup>xxix</sup>

Marshall Space Flight Center and Redstone Arsenal were federally mandated to make steps toward racial equality, but Huntsville’s federal contractors joined the effort at the suggestion of James Webb, NASA Administrator. Webb explicitly requested that area contractors organize to work for progress in race relations; as a result, the Association of Huntsville Area Contractors (AHAC) formed in the summer of 1963. Huntsville’s federal connection meant many lucrative contracts for these businessmen, and they began efforts to shrink the disparity between the races in the city. AHAC pledged to increase minority employment, provide financial aid to black public schools and colleges, and press for equal facilities and opportunities for both races. The city’s industrial expansion committee, headed by local businessmen, pursued a course that put “the city’s economic

boom...ahead of segregationist feelings” and “[made] it plain that they are not going to allow their boom to be jeopardized by a poor racial reputation.”<sup>xxx</sup>

This examination of the course of the civil rights movement brings to light the interplay of state and federal government in Huntsville. The city’s leaders worked hard to maintain Huntsville’s position as the recipient of much federal attention and money. Understandably, the city’s allegiances may have swayed toward Washington as an increasing number of Huntsville paychecks came from the government pocketbook. Governor George Wallace made few friends in the city when he brought his brand of racism to Huntsville and further reminded the city that it looked to Washington rather than Montgomery for leadership. Wallace’s own battle against federal authorities and President Kennedy was fresh in peoples’ minds as the governor imposed his authority upon Huntsville schools, and many recognized Wallace’s hypocrisy on the matter of intervention in local affairs.

Huntsville experienced the civil rights movement in a unique way due to the combination of federal involvement, savvy and determined grassroots organization, and a population eager to move into a future of progress and expansion for north Alabama. Despite its boom and transformation, Huntsville was still at heart a town run by whites in one of the most virulently racist states in the union. For decades African Americans in Huntsville faced the harsh and degrading realities of life in a segregated society. Although it was hard to turn away from entrenched southern racism, Huntsville’s leadership adopted a moderate stance on race after the CSC forced them to consider what was at stake for the city. For many

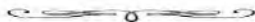
years, however, the city continued to struggle with employment inequalities between the races. Marshall and Redstone were especially troubled by this problem as they were expected to conform to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requirements. *Science* recognized Huntsville's unique position in 1967, writing that despite the city's progress, "Alabama's reputation in the race relations field still bears the imprint of George Wallace and of Jim Clark. [Sheriff in Selma, AL] The pervasiveness of the image created by the ultrasegregationists does an injustice to Huntsville and the rest of Alabama's Tennessee Valley area."<sup>xxxix</sup>

Huntsville's experiences illustrate a lesson in the real depth of racial inequality in cities across the country. Although it accomplished school desegregation in 1963, the city has been struggling for fifty years to accomplish a unified school system without severe racial imbalances. As explained by U.S. District Court Judge Madeline Haikala who oversaw the recent review of the case against Huntsville City Schools, "the fact that the district integrated the student bodies of many of its schools in the early 1970s does not automatically lead to the conclusion that the district does not currently operate a dual system." Even after the *de jure* equality that the gains of 1963 afforded, the city struggled terribly to overcome the *de facto* segregation that still exists across the city's neighborhoods and communities.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Huntsville proceeded slowly into school desegregation, enrolling only a handful of black students into any given school in the years following the successes of 1963. By 1964 the District Court was unsatisfied with Huntsville's steps toward integration. Pressure continued to mount throughout the decade

and then intensified as the Justice Department intervened in April of 1966, beginning a decades-long dialogue with the city. Huntsville struggled to design a school desegregation plan that would be amenable both to the city's citizens and to the Justice Department, shattering the hopes of white leadership that their early and token desegregation would help them avoid unwelcome attention and pressure from the federal level. White leaders at MSFC, Redstone, and the city's federal contractors would also be disappointed to find themselves tasked with solving the long and difficult problem of racially unequal school and college curriculums in order to bring more racial equality in their hiring practices. Huntsville's black and white leadership saw important successes in the early 1960s, but both were disappointed and stymied by the deeper problems that would continue to impede true racial equality for the city.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The trajectory of the civil rights movement in Huntsville might seem to lend itself to claims of victory for all involved. African-Americans saw Huntsville lead the state in desegregation of public facilities and schools, and the city's white leadership could claim Huntsville's progressive identity led them to support these changes. However, a more somber evaluation would conclude that the movement resulted in both victories and defeats for most players in this drama. Huntsville, like cities across the country, would soon realize that the realities of *de facto* segregation posed a much more difficult problem than did establishing *de jure* equality. While the African-American community saw tangible gains in their ability to vote in elections, dine across the city, or enroll in previously all-white schools, they would see progress slow as the 1960s progressed into the 1970s.



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### **Meet the Author:**

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**Editor apologies please;** in Volume 44, Number 1,  
there are corrections:

- On page 61, the photo is NOT Clement Claiborne Clay. We are not certain but it is more likely his brother.

- On page 66, the photo is NOT Jefferson Davis but rather it is CC Clay Jr.
- The photos were misidentified at the source and is not the fault of the author of the article.

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