

# THE HUNTSVILLE HISTORICAL REVIEW

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Numbers 3 & 4

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IN ANTEBELLUM DAYS:*

*PEOPLE,  
PLACES  
THINGS*

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Huntsville, Alabama



*Early Senator Henry*  
**SKETCHES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY**  
*as they were*  
**IN ANTEBELLUM DAYS:**

**PEOPLE,**  
**PLACES**  
**THINGS**

These short articles first appeared in the Huntsville Times during 1976 as a bi-weekly series under the heading of "The Tennessee Valley & Early America." They were meant to be a local contribution to our Bicentennial and are reprinted here in an endeavor to continue the publication of the Quarterly.

THE EDITOR



THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF BOSTON

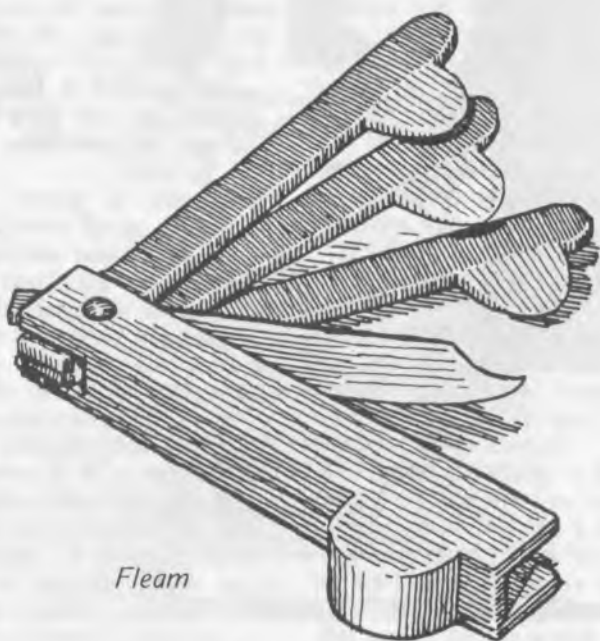
1822

1823

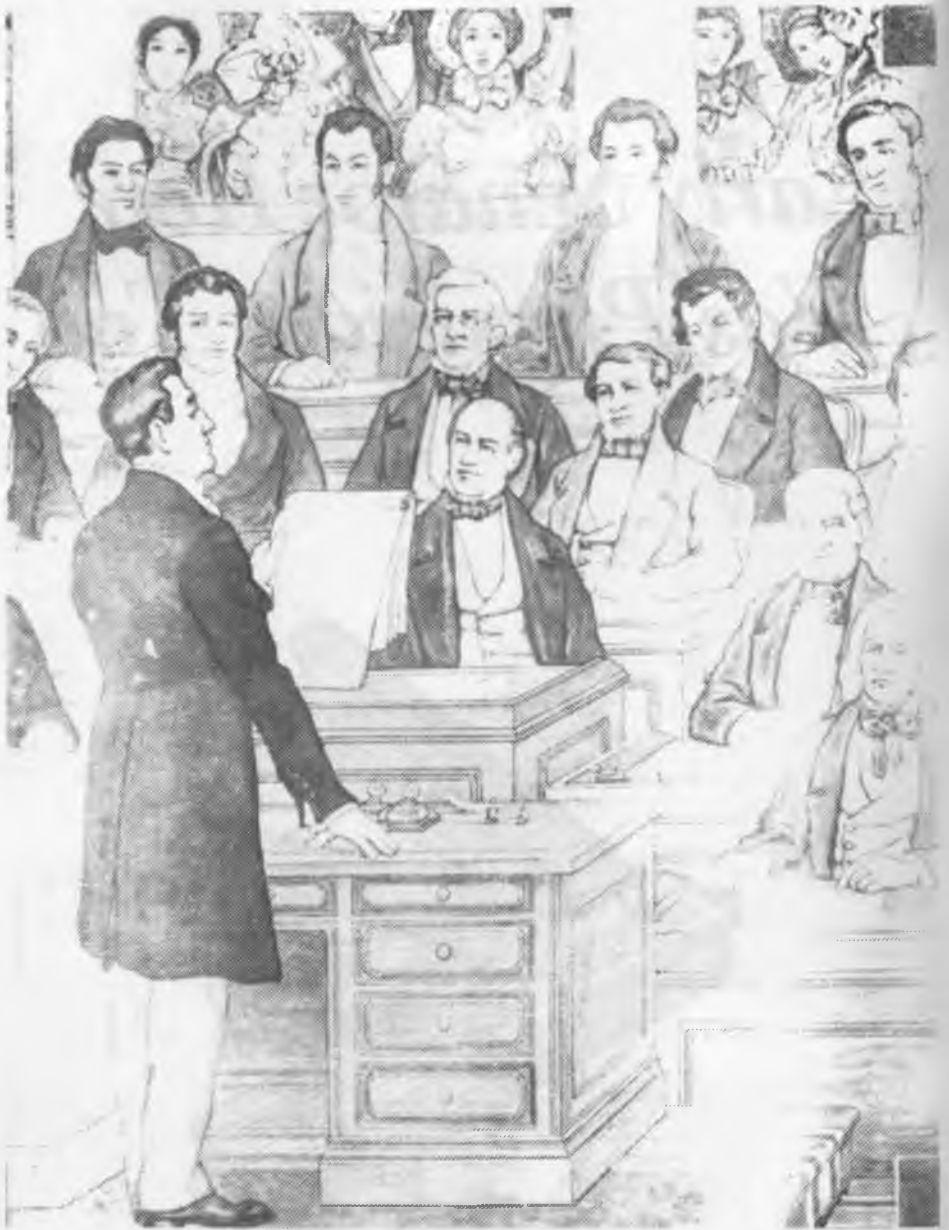
1824



# *Early Senator Here Was Physician, Too*



*Fleam*



(From Painting in Capitol at Montgomery)  
**FIRST STATE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION IN HUNTSVILLE**  
City's Dr. Henry Chambers Was Among Delegates in 1819



One of Huntsville's earliest U.S. senators had sought federal office for years before finally gaining it in 1825 — only to die in office less than a year later.

He was Henry H. Chambers, a doctor and one of Alabama's most distinguished leaders during the territorial period and the early days of statehood.

Born near Kenbridge, in Lunenburg County, Va., on Oct. 1, 1790, he was a graduate of William and Mary College in Williamsburg in 1808. He left his native state to study medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, graduating with his medical degree in 1811.

The following year he moved to Madison, Ala., where he engaged in the practice of medicine. After serving as a surgeon on the staff of General Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812, he moved to Huntsville, and established his practice here.

As a leading citizen of this area, Chambers was naturally drawn into politics. His first important position was as a member of the first state constitutional convention, held in Huntsville in 1819.

At this time he discovered a roadblock to his obtaining office in the federal government in the person of William H. Crawford, who was secretary of the Treasury in the administration of President James Monroe. T. P. Abernethy, in his "The Formative Period In Alabama, 1815-1828," states that Crawford "enjoyed a practical monopoly of federal patronage" and that he "put his friends into office whenever he could."

When the first General Assembly of Alabama met in Huntsville, one of its most important duties was to select its two senators to Congress (it was not until 1913 that senators would be popularly elected to office). There was an understanding that one would come from northern Alabama, while the other would represent the southern part of the state.

John W. Walker of Huntsville, representing the north of course, was selected, along with William R. King, who represented the Alabama and Tombigbee rivers section of the state.

But Secretary Crawford had attempted to interfere with the selection of King, wishing to replace him with Charles Tait, who had moved to Alabama from Georgia in 1819. This interference created lasting antagonism between northern and southern Alabama. Those who sided with Crawford were labeled as the "Georgia faction" and Chambers was considered to be one of this group. Indeed, those opposing the Georgia faction considered the good doctor to be one of the foremost leaders of the group.

This was to cost Chambers his first effort at winning a federal office. Crawford had intensified what undoubtedly would have been rivalry between the northern and southern portions of Alabama. Chambers decided to run for the U.S. House of Representatives. He was opposed by John Crowell, who had been the first and only delegate to Congress from the Alabama Territory and who was from the southern part of the state. Chambers was solidly supported in the Tennessee Valley.

The Alabama Republican, Huntsville's first newspaper, gave the election returns on Oct. 2, 1819— on its second page. Madison County overwhelmingly went for Chambers: 2,382 for the doctor, 215 for his opponent. Limestone County was even more in favor of Chambers, 1,119 to only 12 votes cast for Crowell.

The paper also stated in that issue that Chambers' "majority in the Tennessee Valley is between 4 and 5,000 . . ." The following week the Republican stated that "we are inclined to believe Dr. Chambers is also elected to Congress. . ."

But on Oct. 16, the weekly reported that Crowell was elected to Congress.

In 1820 Chambers was successful in attaining public office; he became a member of the Alabama House of Representatives. However, he failed twice to win the governorship, in 1821 and 1823. In 1821 he opposed Israel Pickens, who had written a letter just two years previously

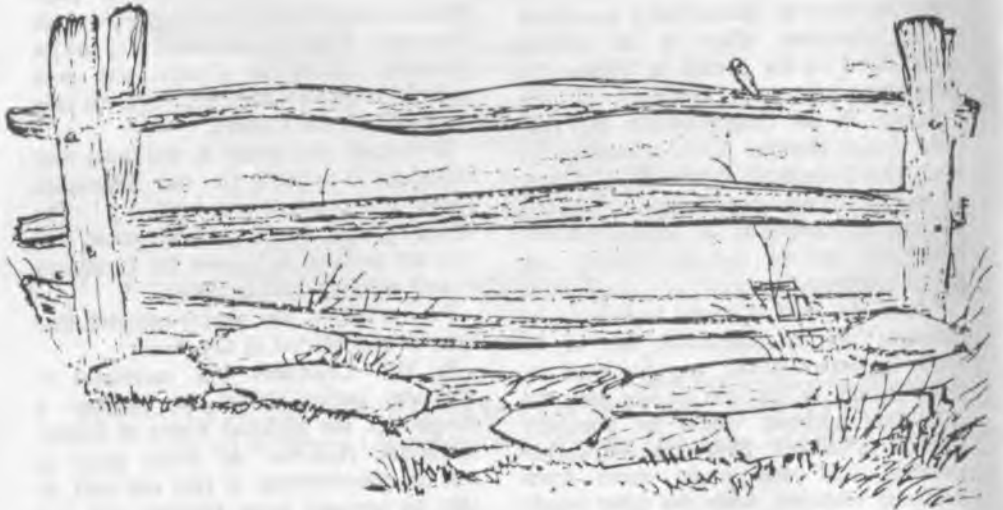


endorsing him in his campaign against Crowell. Chambers proved to be a weak candidate, carrying only a few counties in the Tennessee Valley area. Yet in 1824 he was a Democratic presidential elector on the Jackson ticket.

Chambers finally achieved federal office in 1825, when he was elected to the U.S. Senate. He defeated William Kelly, who had been chosen in 1823 to fill the unexpired term of John W. Walker and had then stood for re-appointment against Chambers.

Chambers served in the Senate from March 4, 1825, until his death near Kenbridge, his birthplace, on Feb. 24, 1826. He died en route to Washington to attend the opening session of the 27th Congress, and his remains were interred in the family burial ground near Kenbridge. The vacancy caused by his death was filled by the appointment of Israel Pickens, himself forced by ill health to resign later the same year.

So death prematurely ended the life of Henry Chambers, one of Huntsville's most noted early public figures. Largely forgotten today, he nonetheless remains an important figure in the heritage of Alabama.





**Andy Jackson's**

**Tall Shadow**

**Fell Across**

**Tennessee Valley**



Most of us learned early about one of the most illustrious patriots in our history, the man Andrew Jackson, who was born in Waxhaw, S. C., and who became the seventh president of the United States.

Most Americans do not know, however, that Andrew Jackson was a prominent figure in the early history of the Tennessee Valley region of Alabama, almost as soon as he became prominent in his adopted state of Tennessee.



As soon as the Fort Mims massacre in South Alabama became known in Tennessee during the late summer and fall of

1813, Jackson became the chief architect of retaliation against the "red sticks" faction of the Creek Nation, led by William Weatherford. All of Alabama, even Mobile, was regarded at the point of extermination.

At the time, Jackson was recovering from almost fatal wounds suffered in a melee. When Gov. Willie Blount of Tennessee was given the authority Sept. 25 to call 3,500 volunteers in addition to the 1,500 men already enrolled there in the service of the United States, Jackson was still extremely worn and debilitated. Nevertheless, on the 25th he began to move his forces into the field.

The next day he sent his friend and partner, Col. John Coffee, to Huntsville to restore confidence to the frontier, to enlist military volunteers and to obtain supplies.

Soon Coffee's forces had increased to nearly 1,300 men. The colonel continued to visit Huntsville in November and December and wrote many letters to Jackson reporting his activities.

Meanwhile, Jackson left his advance base at Fayetteville, Tenn., and marched non-stop the 32 miles to Huntsville on Oct. 11, 1813. Huntsville was Jackson's first stop in Alabama, then part of the Mississippi Territory.

Next, Jackson moved to Ditto's Landing south of Huntsville on the Tennessee River

where he joined Coffee and then moved about 24 miles along the river and erected Fort Deposit, designed as his major supply base. The depot was finished Oct. 24, and Jackson stated in a letter written on that date that the depot "is well situated to receive supplies from Holston, and from Madison County, and I am determined to push forward if I live upon acorns."

Jackson then moved across Raccoon Mountain, to which he referred as "the American Alps," reaching the Coosa River. There he erected his major supply base, Fort Strother, about 50 miles from Fort Deposit.

Thus, Huntsville and the surrounding area were of large importance to Jackson in the Creek War, which culminated in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

This was but the first of Jackson's many involvements with the Tennessee Valley region of Alabama. Many of those who served with him against the Creeks saw the opportunity for the economic growth of the Valley. Jackson and Coffee were among those who purchased extensive holdings in what was to become part of Alabama.

Coffee and others created the Cypress Land Company, which bought a sizable tract of land below the Muscle Shoals of the Tennessee River. The company, of which Jackson owned eight shares then valued at \$430, created Florence.

More important, Jackson was allowed to buy considerable acreage at the minimum government price of \$2 an acre. By prior arrangement, no one bid against him.

Part of Jackson's holdings fronted on the Tennessee River at Melton's Bluff. This property, at the head of Elk River Shoals on the south bank of the Tennessee, was purchased from John Melton. But Jackson evidently did not profit from his investment here. In 1822 he sold part of this property for cost plus \$1,000 for improvements.

Jackson did continue to own and operate the gin located on or near this property. The remaining property at Melton's Bluff was sold in 1827, the year before Jackson was first elected president.

In addition to his own holdings, the general directed the affairs of the Huntsville plantation of Andrew Jackson Hutchins. When the latter was 6, his father, John Hutchins, a former partner of

Jackson, had died and Jackson vowed at the father's deathbed to care for the boy.

Jackson, who frequently called the boy "my little ward" in his letters, raised Hutchins as a member of his household. He placed overseers in charge of the plantation, although many times he visited to direct its activities. In April, 1833, when young Hutchins attained his majority, Jackson relinquished operation of the plantation to him.

Jackson was well aware of another facet of life in the Tennessee Valley and Huntsville. A famed sportsman, he long enjoyed the hospitality of the Green Bottom Inn, erected in 1815 on what is today part of the campus of Alabama A&M University in Huntsville. The inn was constructed by John Connelly, like Jackson a lover of race horses, and several times Jackson raced at the track constructed on the grounds of the inn.

The general was in Huntsville when Alabama entered the Union Dec. 14, 1819. Jackson had been invited to attend the meeting of the state legislature here and was given all the "privileges of the floor." He stayed at the inn for several days and brought along some of his racehorses and fighting roosters.

The President-to-be did not ignore politics during the visit, as indicated by this resolution proposed at the first session of the Alabama General Assembly after an effort to censure Jackson had been made in Congress:

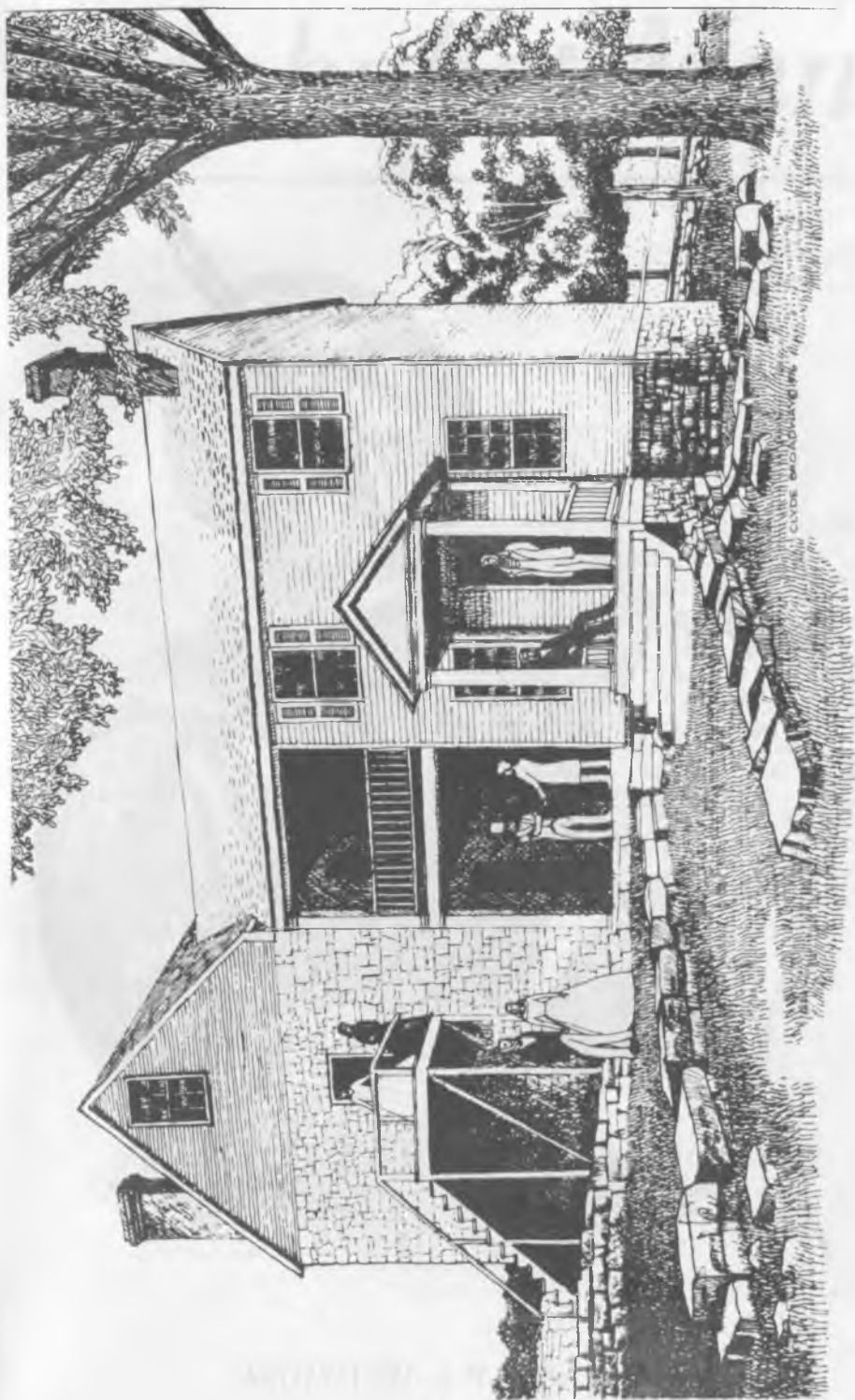
"And be it further resolved that this General Assembly do highly disapprove of the late attempt made by some members of the Congress of the United States at the last session to censure the military course of this inestimable officer from motives (as we believe) other than patriotic."

The resolution was approved, 27 to 21. Those who did not support Jackson through this measure in effect signed their political death warrants in Alabama.

Jackson's presence also influenced the naming of Jackson County for him. Created on Dec. 13, 1819, the county's boundaries were so vaguely set that the lines have since been changed six times.

Clearly, the general was a familiar figure to the Tennessee Valley. There were close ties between Tennessee and North Alabama — economic, social, sporting — and Andrew Jackson naturally availed himself of the opportunities afforded by the area.





Green Bottom Inn





# *Alphabet Man*



*SEQUOYAH: A MAN OF LETTERS*

Alabama was of course not always the province of the white man. Once the Cherokees controlled much of this region, along with the Creeks to the south and east. But the Cherokees were special — and the pioneers knew it.

As the *Missionary Herald* so aptly put it in a January 1844 issue:



"This is the first of our aboriginal tribes which has introduced at its own expense the printing press; the first to establish and sustain a system of free schools; and the only people, for thousands of years, that has invented for its own use, an alphabet."

That alphabet, the basis of the Cherokee civilization, was developed primarily due to the intelligence and efforts of Sequoyah.

He was born in the Cherokee village of Tuskegee, in Tennessee, near Fort Loudon on the Tennessee River. His date of birth is not definitely known but was some years before the American Revolution, possibly in 1770. He died in an area of Mexico (now Texas) in 1843 while on an expedition to find a fabled lost tribe of Cherokees

Sequoyah's English name was George Guess, the name of his white father, who evidently was an itinerant peddler. In childhood or, young manhood he moved to Will's town in what is now Alabama. Will's town (known later as Williston) was located either on an upper branch of the Coosa River near Gadsden, or in Northeast Alabama, above Raccoon Mountain and Wills Creek. It was an important Cherokee establishment and was named for a half-breed called Red-headed Will.

In early life Sequoyah was a craftsman in silver work, as well as a farmer. He

was a cripple but served in the War of 1812 with Andrew Jackson in his Creek campaign culminating in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.

Later he became a leader of the Western Cherokees (those who had been moved to the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi by the federal government during the 1830s). In the Act of the Union of July 12, 1840, uniting the Western and Eastern branches of the Cherokees, Guess is referred to as the "President of the Western Cherokees." Also, the Constitution of the Cherokee Nation, promulgated at the same time as the Act of the Union, bore Guess's signature.

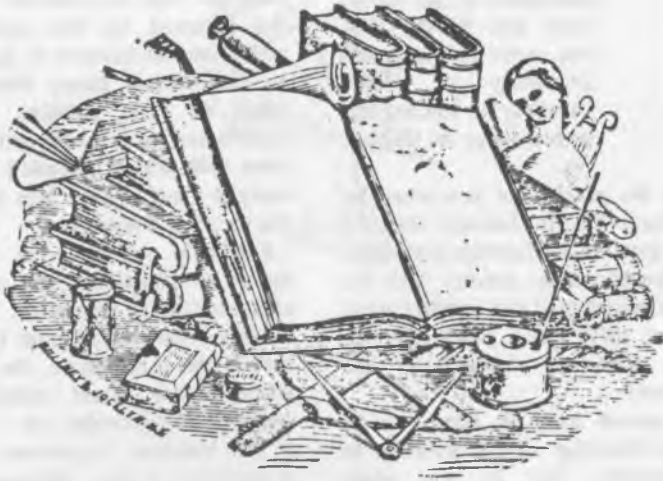
Years earlier — circa 1809 — Guess began formulating a written language by devising an alphabet or syllabus, his most noted accomplishment, which he completed sometime in the early 1820s. Guess had moved to the Arkansas Territory in 1818, but returned east in 1821. Back in Will's town, he convinced George Lowery, half-breed chief of the Will's town Cherokees, that his phonetic syllabus of 85 symbols was feasible. Guess convinced Lowery of this by teaching the new alphabet to him in just one week.

According to a number of Jackson County historians, including Claude Thornhill, Sequoyah also announced his alphabet to a group of Indian leaders at Sauta. Established in 1784 and later the first county seat of Jackson County, Sauta was located below where North Sauta Creek enters the Tennessee River, some miles south of Larkinsville.

The National Cherokee Council officially adopted the alphabet, and there is ample testimony to its almost instantaneous success in the Cherokee Nation. History records statements such as the observation that "those men who came to him (Guess) to learn the system were able within three days to read and write."

Alabama has just claim to George Guess — the famed Sequoyah — and reason to be proud of the fact that much of the development of the Cherokee alphabet occurred in the Tennessee Valley.

# *Meet Arthur Hopkins*



Among the many Virginians who came to North Alabama in the early 1800s to make their marks was Arthur Francis Hopkins. And what a mark he made, becoming a member of the first state constitutional convention, member of the Alabama Senate, and a justice of the State Supreme Court.



Hopkins was born Oct. 18, 1794, near Danville, Va. He was educated in what were then called the common schools of his area, and in two academies in his native state and North Carolina. After attending the University of North Carolina, he studied law with a judge in Halifax, Va.

He began the practice of law when he moved to Huntsville. In January 1819, he moved his practice to Lawrence County. He soon entered public service with his election as a member of the constitutional convention of 1819. Three years later he represented Lawrence County in the Alabama Senate.

Hopkins moved back to Huntsville in 1825, at first devoting all his attention to his law practice. But he was again involved in state politics by the early 1830s and was elected to the Alabama Legislature as a representative from Madison County in 1833.

In 1834 he was elected to the State Supreme Court, residing on the bench until he resigned in 1836.

There is evidently some historical confusion regarding the major events of his life from the early 1830s until the latter 1840s. The late Thomas McAdory Owen, former director of the State Department of Archives and History, in his monumental 1921 "History of Alabama And Dictionary of Alabama Biography" was mistaken on many highlights of Hopkins' life. Owen wrote that Hopkins was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1836, and again in 1844, 1847 and 1849, and that he was made chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court in 1836. But

Hopkins was neither a U.S. senator nor a chief justice.

Hopkins never became a U.S. senator evidently because of his political beliefs and refused to deviate from them. William Garrett stated in his "Reminiscences of Public Men in Alabama, For Thirty Years," published in 1872, that "Hopkins was a Federalist of the Alexander Hamilton school" and that "He was too honest and independent in his character ever to yield an opinion for the sake of expediency." Hopkins became an avowed Whig, and suffered politically for it.

After resigning from the state Supreme Court in 1836, he returned to Huntsville and resumed his law practice. But he maintained an interest in politics and was on the William Henry Harrison electoral ticket in 1840. Hopkins was a major contributor to a pamphlet published in June 1840, which defended Harrison from charges made against him by Martin Van Buren, then President.

Evidently sometime in 1843 Hopkins moved to Tuscaloosa and never returned as a resident of Huntsville. The next year he was defeated by Dixon H. Lewis for a seat in the U.S. Senate. (In 1844 — many years before direct election of U.S. senators was provided for — both houses of the Alabama Legislature met to elect a successor to Sen. William Rufus King, who had served as senator since the formation of the state in 1819, but who had resigned in 1844 to become minister to France. Hopkins had been chosen to oppose Lewis evidently with no hope of his winning but in recognition of his being regarded by the Whig party as the ablest of its members in Alabama.)

Always known as "the Judge," Hopkins moved to Mobile where he lived for the rest of his life. In 1856 he retired from his law practice and in 1857 became president of the Mobile Ohio Railroad. During the Civil War he served as a state agent for Alabama hospitals, and he died in Mobile shortly after the war.

Hopkins, then, a noted resident of Alabama during the ante-bellum period, first resided in the Tennessee Valley and was here at the creation of the state. In

all, for almost a quarter of a century the Valley benefitted from his legal knowledge, political comprehension and zeal for the things he believed right.



1870  
The first of the year  
was a very dry one  
and the crops were  
very poor.

The second of the year  
was a very wet one  
and the crops were  
very good.

The third of the year  
was a very dry one  
and the crops were  
very poor.

The fourth of the year  
was a very wet one  
and the crops were  
very good.

The fifth of the year  
was a very dry one  
and the crops were  
very poor.

The sixth of the year  
was a very wet one  
and the crops were  
very good.

The seventh of the year  
was a very dry one  
and the crops were  
very poor.

The eighth of the year  
was a very wet one  
and the crops were  
very good.

The ninth of the year  
was a very dry one  
and the crops were  
very poor.

The tenth of the year  
was a very wet one  
and the crops were  
very good.

*William Irvin Adair,*

*Early Lawyer*



Many of the early pioneers of the Tennessee Valley were born in Virginia, North Carolina or Georgia, but William Irvin Adair came from Kentucky. A nephew of General John Adair, governor of Kentucky from 1820 to 1824, he served in the War of 1812 as a captain in a regiment from his native state and was transferred to the regular army after the war.

Adair came to Alabama in 1818 after resigning his commission. He first tried farming but soon began the study of law. In those days one did not go to law school to study, even in relatively populous Madison County. According to the Alabama Republican,

Huntsville's first newspaper, Madison County in the early 1820s had the largest population of any in the state: 22,066 in 1824. Limestone County was next, with 11,893; Tuscaloosa County ranked third, with 10,183 inhabitants.

Instead of going to college for an education, most people had to study in their home community. The best chance for material success in life was to study with someone who was well accepted in the community. Doctors or lawyers were good bets. They were generally respected and usually did well financially. So Adair turned to the legal profession.

He established his practice in Huntsville. Soon successful, he began to have political aspirations — nothing unusual for lawyers of his day.

Adair's political career began as a representative of Madison County to the state legislature in 1822. The next year he was elected speaker — quite a distinction for Alabama had become a state just four years before.

The biggest issue then before the

legislature was the question of the creation of a state bank, an issue which of course involved lawmaker Adair.

The State Banking Act of 1821 had been passed by the legislature but vetoed by Gov. Israel Pickens. The governor was in favor of the establishment of a state bank, but not under the terms of the 1821 act.

After Pickens' re-election in the gubernatorial race of 1823, he got the provisions he wanted in a new bank charter bill. The state bank was created and opened its doors in Cahaba, the state capital, in 1824.

The Alabama Republican, in its issue of Nov. 12, 1824, reprinted a long article from a recent issue of the Cahaba Press discussing in detail the development of the bank and in terms very optimistic about its future.

Alas, the paper was not a good prognosticator, and the bank remained a political and economic issue until its liquidation during the administration of Gov. Joshua Martin (1845-1847).

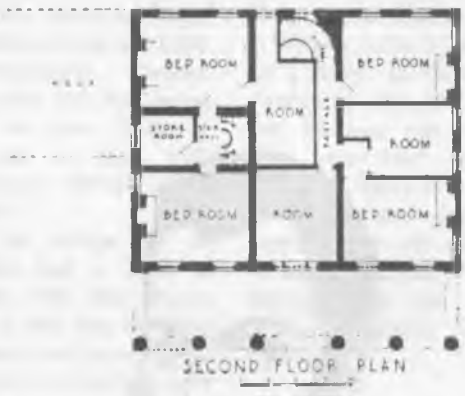
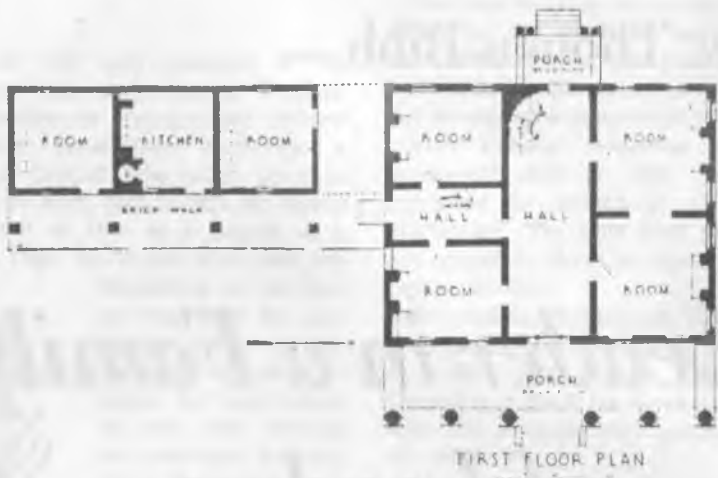
William Adair's last public service was as a jurist. In November, 1832, he was elected to the fifth circuit court bench, and he held this office until his death three years later. So ended the life of a man who today is a little-known figure of early Alabama history, yet who was prominent in his time and an important factor in Tennessee Valley life not many decades after the American Revolution being celebrated in this Bicentennial observance.



Gov. Thomas Bibb —

*Leader in a Family  
of Leaders*





BELLE MINA

The Bibb family stands pre-eminent in early Alabama history. Six of eight brothers settled in Alabama. Two became governors, the first and second chief executives of Alabama; a third was a prominent lawyer and judge of the criminal court of Montgomery, while a fourth served in the Alabama Legislature before moving to Mississippi.

Thomas Bibb, the second governor of Alabama, was born in Amelia County, Va., in 1784. He moved to Egbert County, Ga., with his parents. When he was 12 his father died, leaving the widow to raise Thomas and seven other children. That she did a remarkable job is attested by the success of her children.

Thomas received his education in Egbert County, an education considered to be more than adequate according to the times. He became a planter and merchant.

In 1811 he moved to Alabama, then part of the Mississippi Territory. Thomas settled near Huntsville and built "Belle Mina," one of the great ante-bellum mansions of Alabama. It was located northeast of Decatur and southwest of Huntsville, and became part of the southeastern corner of Limestone County when the latter was created by act of the territorial legislature in 1818. The town of Belle Mina slowly began to develop around the Bibb plantation.

Later Thomas designed a home for his daughter, Mrs. Adaline Bibb Bradley. Constructed between 1824 and 1832 on Williams Street in Huntsville, it is the present home of Miss Eleanor Hutchens. The structure has exterior walls 20 inches thick and three-foot partitions between the two front rooms and hallway. Patterned after Belle Mina, it has been called a "worthy example of the finest work of classic revival period in Alabama."

Thomas Bibb soon became involved in political and financial matters. His elder

brother, William Wyatt Bibb, had been appointed governor of the Territory of Alabama by President James Monroe in September, 1817. The following April he began his duties, but the population of the territory developed so rapidly that statehood was soon applied for. In 1819, Alabama became a state. William Wyatt Bibb was elected the state's first governor, defeating Marmaduke Williams by 1200 votes. Thomas was a major influence in the election of his brother to the governorship.

Thomas Bibb was one of the three delegates from Limestone County to the State Constitutional Convention held in Huntsville in 1819. He was elected to the first Alabama Senate and, partly through the aid and endorsement of his brother, was elected president of the Senate.

Thomas' election as president of the Senate was important, for during the summer William was thrown from a horse during a thunderstorm, and he died from injuries received in the fall on July 9, 1820. As president of the Senate, Thomas succeeded his brother as governor.

During Thomas' incumbency several events of note occurred. The legislature passed an act providing for the establishment of the University of Alabama; presidential electors cast the first electoral vote in the state; and the first special session of the legislature was called by the governor.

Thomas Bibb chose not to run for governor after finishing out his brother's term. However, he did not withdraw from political life, for he was a member of the convention of 1825, called to amend the constitution of 1819, and he served again in the state legislature. Thomas served two terms in the House, from 1828 to 1830.

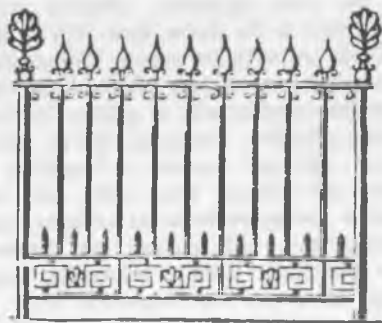
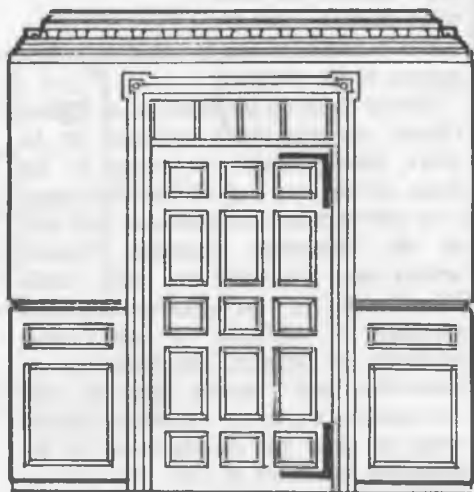
Quite probably the reason Thomas Bibb never returned to high office in the state was the development of political division within Alabama. Georgians, led by LeRoy Pope, who had moved to Huntsville in 1810, and William Wyatt Bibb, who had built a plantation home at Coosada, near Montgomery, had founded the Planters' and Merchants' Bank in Huntsville. Popularly known as the Huntsville Bank, it began operations in October, 1817. Those associated with the bank were simply known as Georgians or associated with the "Georgia" party. Those opposed to this



private bank wanted to create a state bank. The opposition had its way, and, led by Israel Pickens, the third governor of Alabama, closed the Huntsville Bank on Feb. 1, 1825.

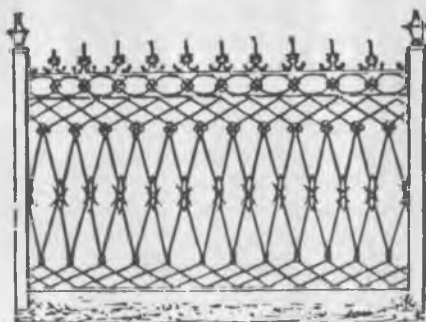
Later the Georgians were given the name Royalists, or those of the Royal Party. As William Brantley so aptly puts it in his "Banking In Alabama," there came a time when to be identified as a member of the Royal party was the "kiss of death" at the polls. Thomas Bibb was once a director of the Huntsville Bank, thus his political fortunes waned state-wide.

Thomas Bibb subsequently devoted his time largely to economic interests. He died in Huntsville on Sept. 30, 1839. He was buried in the family cemetery on the plantation, but his remains were transferred some 20 years later to the Bibb plot in Maple Hill Cemetery in Huntsville.



Architect George Steele —

*He Designed, Built  
City's Early Edifices*





*A GEORGE STEELE 1835 DESIGN:*

*HUNTSVILLE'S FIRST ALABAMA BANK BUILDING*

For a man who became the most important architect in Huntsville during ante-bellum days, relatively little is known about George Gilliam Steele.

Steele's legacy to Huntsville and the Tennessee Valley are the buildings he designed and built that play a prominent role in the architectural history of Huntsville.

Born in Virginia in the late 1790s, he came to Alabama in his youth and settled in Huntsville. He was accompanied here by William Brandon, who later collaborated with him on many architectural projects.

Evidently almost immediately upon arriving in Huntsville, Steele established a building and architectural firm. He constructed brick kilns which furnished a considerable portion of the brick used in the construction of his buildings, and he later operated a cotton mill in the city.

By far the most important commercial building designed and built by Steele is the **First Alabama Bank of Huntsville, formerly the First National Bank, erected on the Courthouse Square in 1835.**

In February of that year the first meeting of the president and directors of the state's newest branch bank was held in Huntsville, an organizational meeting that led to the selection of Steele as the builder of the bank's new quarters. In October the committee for the erection of the building advertised in a local newspaper that the "building is to be 53 feet in width and 77 feet in length, with a plain Ionic portico at one end, which with two fronts including the cornice will be of polished stone, the remainder of brick."

Like most of Steele's commercial buildings, it is a classic revival structure with a six-column Ionic portico and high

entablature. Materials used in the structure are both imported and local: Stone slabs from local quarries were used for the foundation; the columns, capitals and shafts were made in Baltimore and shipped to Huntsville via river, canal and ox cart.

The entrance doors are almost 15 feet high and were originally hung on hinges. The window construction would be considered unusual today, for their shutters are double-hinged and fold into compartments on each side. Also unusual because of its high cost is the use of copper to cover the roof.

The total cost of building topped \$76,000, a considerable sum for the day.

Steele also designed the second **Madison County Courthouse, which stood from 1840 until 1914. Like his bank building, it was a classic revival structure, also with six-columned Ionic porticoes.**

The commissioner's court, predecessor of the Madison County Commission, had asked Steele, in association with Thomas and William Brandon, to submit plans for the design of a new courthouse. On Aug. 29, 1835, the court adopted the plans drawn by Steele.

It was not until April, 1838, that Steele was appointed superintendent of the courthouse construction. He was to be paid \$1,500 for his services, provided the building was completed by Jan. 1, 1840. It was not finished by this date, so Steele was paid an additional \$500. The structure was finally completed early in 1842.

It was a two-story building of stone and brick, with a full basement and a dome. In 1839 the commissioner's court voted to cover the dome with copper. This metal, purchased in Baltimore, cost the county almost \$4,000 more.

Steele, who died in 1855 at the age of 56 and was buried in Maple Hill Cemetery, designed many homes in the Huntsville area, but of all of them "Oaks Place" was evidently his favorite. About 1840 he designed and built a home that reflected his personal tastes and needs. When



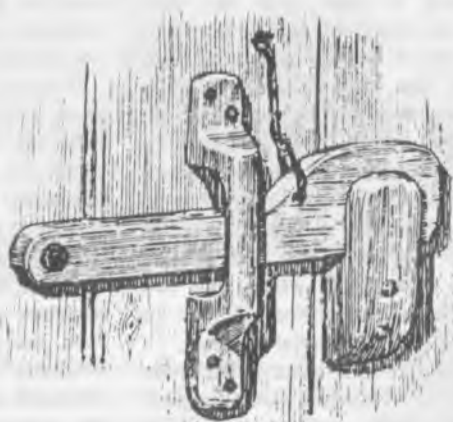
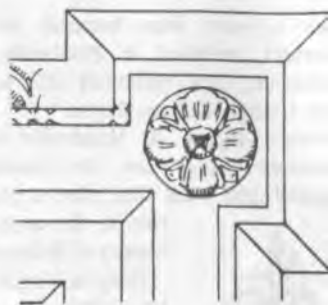
constructed it lay east of Huntsville, between the town and Monte Sano.

The main house was surrounded by all the accoutrements of a plantation. It consisted of 11 rooms, unusual in that a large, 28 by 30-foot bedroom on the second floor was designed to be a young man's dormitory. This room was segregated from the rest of the house, as were the quarters for the women. This was to eliminate any cause for scandal when lavish entertainments were provided by the Steeles.

Steele and his wife were famed for their social gatherings. Their most noted assembly occurred when James K. Polk was elected president of the United States in 1844. In celebration a prized ox was barbecued, along with numerous lambs and hogs, and a cake baked in Nashville was carried by one of the Steele wagons to the plantation.

Every male attending the feast and party was given a souvenir cane, most of them made from hickory gathered from Monte Sano and some capped with silver for the more prominent guests.

Such extravaganzas, while unusual, reflect the economic development and prominence of Huntsville in Alabama and the South during the ante-bellum period.





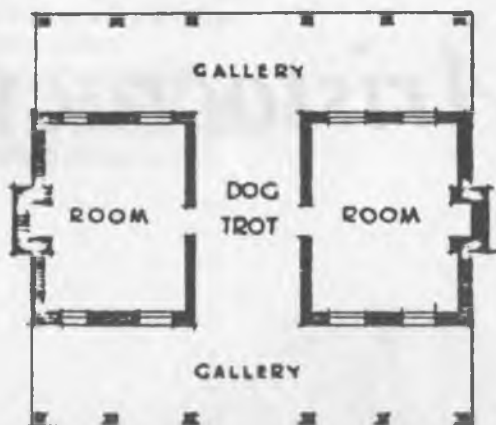
*Early Athens:*

*Log Cabin*

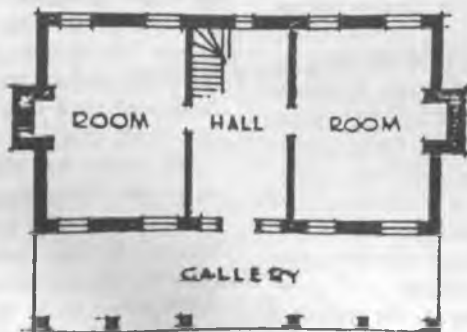
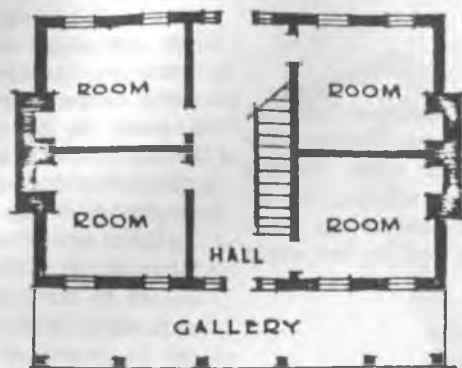
*Aristocracy*



CABIN



DOG-TROT HOUSE



Frontier life in the Tennessee Valley in the early 1800s was for most people a life of drudgery and hard times. Formal education was for the affluent. In the beginning a home not made of logs was a rarity which only the wealthy few could afford.

Why log cabins?

Squatter's rights did not exist then. Nor was staying on land for free and having the right to buy it first if it came to sale — known as preemption — allowed. So if a settler stayed on land he had not legally acquired, he was regarded merely as an interloper and had to move when the land was acquired by others. And any habitation he had constructed would be lost.

So logs had to do then, for a number of reasons: availability, simplicity of construction, ruggedness, and cheapness.

Thus, most of the original settlers of Athens, in Limestone County, are referred to as the "log cabin aristocracy." Almost all these pioneers, regardless of how much money or prestige they or their families were later to acquire, were born or raised in log cabins. These cabins were constructed quickly: There are pioneer recollections of sturdy ones being constructed within a week — including window frames and floors.

There were no sawmills in the area, so the logs were merely trimmed. Generally they were not notched (this process came later in North Alabama and Tennessee).

Most houses were of only one story. When a pioneer wrote a series of articles about early life in Athens for the Athens Post in 1876, he was always careful to note if a structure was two stories.

Double log construction — the type used commonly in this area — was the erection



of two structures, usually consisting of only one room, connected by a covered breezeway. The breezeway was used as a center of family activity in good weather, a haven in bad weather for animals belonging to the family.

Public buildings of early Athens were all constructed of logs.

Athens was chosen the county seat of Limestone in 1819 by five commissioners elected by the people of the county and empowered by the legislature to select the site.

The first courthouse was completed in 1820, probably constructed of the same logs that were cut from the land on which the building was erected. It was of two floors, with chimneys at both ends. The front side had an entrance and eight windows, four on each floor.

It was a typical log structure, plain in all respects. No fancy door, no shutters for the windows.

In 1825 it was torn down and replaced by a brick structure. But this was poorly constructed, began to fall apart, and was torn down in 1834. A third courthouse was constructed in 1834-35, and stood until it was burned during the Civil War.

The first schoolhouse in Athens was also constructed of logs. It had no glass in the windows, leaving the students and the teachers subject to the whims of the weather.

Entertainment in early Athens was enjoyed in the open air near the Big Springs (early towns invariably developed by water resources) or in log structures that served as "the" theater and "the" tavern. The theater occasionally attracted traveling performers. Edwin Forrest, a famous actor of that period, performed in this crude structure.

The tavern was one of Athens' original structures, constructed in 1808 on the south side of what became the courthouse square. It was known far and wide, evidently for a number of reasons. A bell, supposedly capped with silver, gave it the name of Bell Tavern. When rung it could

be heard for miles around.

Taverns in those days provided not only food, drinks and entertainment, but lodging as well. The Athenian describing the early life of his town in the Post in 1876 may have been an abstainer or opposed to the tavern's operation for other reasons, for he stated that "many a poor unsuspecting fly lost its wings and legs by walking into the parlor of the vile old spider."

Those getting in trouble, in the tavern or elsewhere, sometimes wound up in the jail. It was quite a busy place, for debtors were placed in jail during those days to work out their debts.

The Athens jail structure was divided into two compartments. One was called the "Debtor's Room," the other, less comfortable, the "Dungeon."

Sentences in those days often included hours in the pillory, which was used in Athens until 1840, and 39 lashes on the bare back. Our Athens Post correspondent wrote a hundred years ago that he had seen blood and flesh of men "fly from their backs under the cruel lash."

Students were frequently whipped. The correspondent noted that an early teacher "flogged without regard to age, size or previous condition."

Frontier life? Hardly the good old days we like to imagine, but a hard life with few material comforts.





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