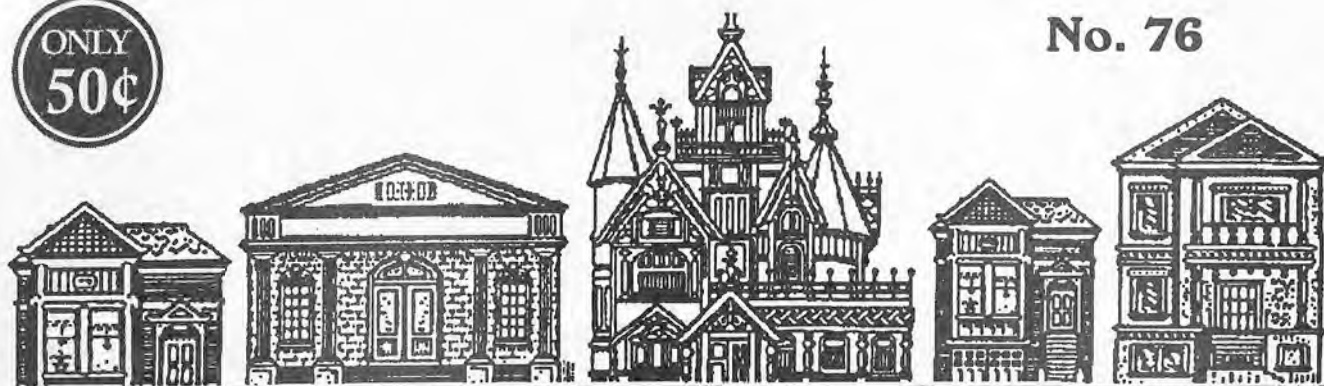


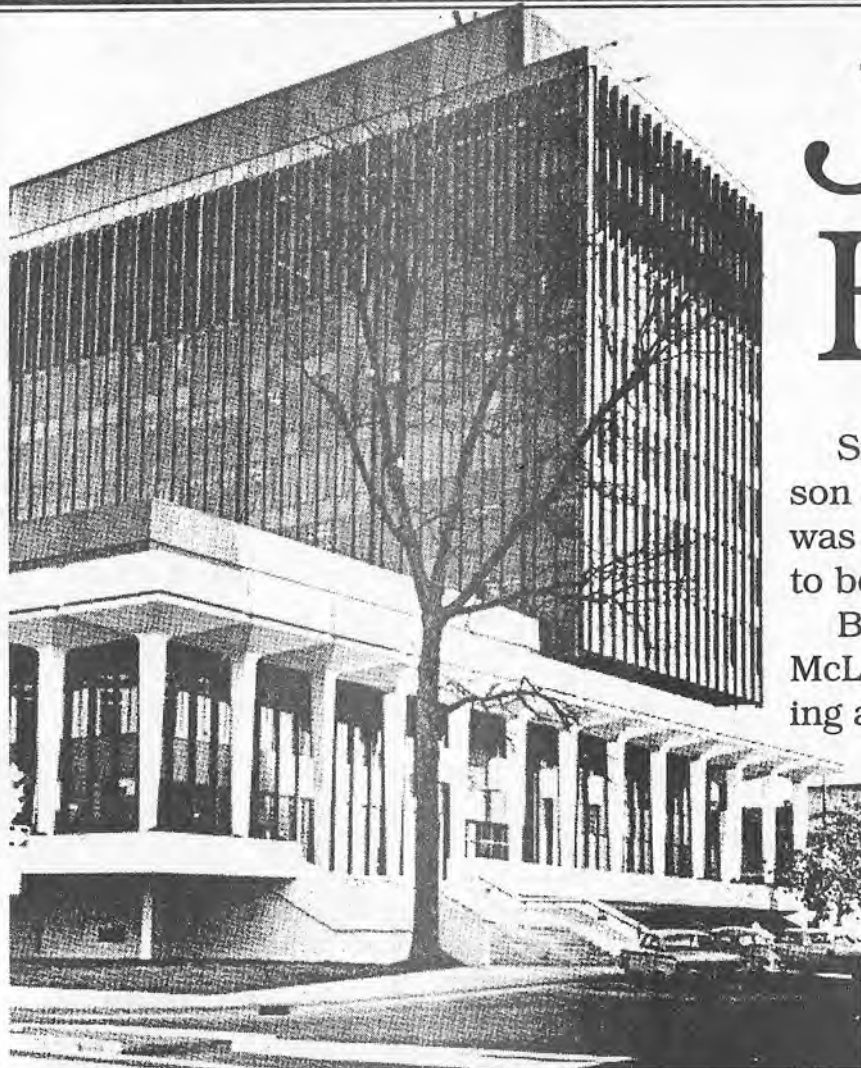
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No. 76



Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY



Jail Break

Situated high atop the Madison County Courthouse, the jail was considered by most experts to be escape proof.

But most experts, unlike Craig McLarin in 1976, were not serving a life sentence for murder.

McLarin's cell mates thought he was crazy. He proposed to evade the guards, cut through solid steel and then climb down nine floors.

All in broad daylight!

Also in this issue: Courtmartial of Col. John Nickerson

Jail Break!

When the Madison County Courthouse was built in 1966, officials boasted that by placing the jail on the top floors it was virtually impossible for any prisoner to break out. The jail had been planned as a model of efficiency and security with the only access being an elevator and staircase that was tightly guarded at all times. Security within the lockup itself was provided by jailors who constantly patrolled the catwalks in front of the cells watching for anything out of the normal.

If Craig McLarin had heard the boasts, he could not help but suppress a grin as he carefully fitted the hacksaw blade into a tiny crack in his cell's steel ceiling. With one of his cell mates keeping a careful lookout McLarin once again began the ritual of slowly drawing the blade back and forth across the hard metal. Though only a week had passed since he first began sawing, already the rough outline of a circle was beginning to take shape.

Suddenly a sharp whistle from a prisoner at the end of the cell block alerted McLarin of an approaching deputy. Jumping down from his perch of rolled up mattresses, he quickly grabbed a large pinup poster and taped it over the hacksaw cut. By the time the deputy reached his cell, McLarin was lying on his bunk, blankly staring at the picture of the curvaceous pinup taped to his ceiling.

The deputy paused for a sec-

ond, contemplating the prisoner. "Boy, you can spend all the time you want looking at that picture but she ain't going to help you none!"

"Don't bet on it," replied McLarin almost nonchalantly. "She's gonna get me out of here someday."

Shaking his head, the deputy continued his rounds, leaving McLarin lying on his bunk thinking about the events that had placed him in his present situation.

Three years earlier, in 1974, McLarin had been at the courthouse purchasing car tags when, as he started to leave, he noticed another man about his own age who was wearing a military jacket with a division patch on the shoulder. McLarin was well familiar with the patch; he had been assigned to the same division during his tour of Viet Nam.

After brief introductions the two men began the timeless ritual of comparing dates of service and exchanging war stories. Invariably, the conversation turned to drugs, and when the stranger said he had some good "smoke," McLarin invited him to his house.

Anyone watching the two men sitting around McLarin's kitchen that evening, drinking beer and smoking, would have agreed the pair made an odd couple. McLarin was 25 years old, white, and had recently been discharged from the Army. When his wife, who was also in the military, was transferred to Redstone Arsenal, McLarin followed and began working a series of low paying menial jobs. The other man, Eugene Bonner, was black, a college graduate, married and had two young children.

As the two men talked and



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got to know one another, the conversation turned to money. McLarin began boasting about powerful people he knew in the mob and how easily they made money. "Just one job," he said, "could put both of us in high cotton."

When Bonner expressed a mild interest, McLarin began spelling out the plan he had been thinking about for weeks.

"You've seen those homes in Twickenham," he stated. "Those people have fortunes tucked

away in bank accounts. All we gotta do is grab one of those old women, have her telephone her husband and make him pay \$40-50,000 ransom. Real fast and real easy and we're on easy street."

Several days later, late in the afternoon of September 6, 1974, McLarin picked Bonner up in his red Karman Ghia. McLarin had brought with him a .38 revolver and a military style K-Bar knife which he described as being "the same kind he used on

missions in Viet Nam." After first stopping at a hardware store on Madison Street to purchase a pair of rubber gloves the men then drove into the Twickenham neighborhood.

Neither man knew anyone who lived in the upper class neighborhood. Their plan was simply to find a house that looked as if wealthy people lived there.

Slowly cruising down Franklin Street, the two men decided on a large white house

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whose occupants appeared to be affluent. Bonner waited in the car as McLarin approached house and knocked on the door. Despite repeated knocking, however, it soon became apparent no one was at home. McLarin thought briefly of breaking in and burglarizing the home but quickly abandoned the idea as his thoughts returned to the original plan.

Returning to the car to get Bonner, both men then approached the home of Mr. and Mrs. Traylor. It had a new Cadillac parked in the driveway, which to both men, was a sure sign of wealth. McLarin knocked on the door and when a lady answered, he asked if she needed her grass cut. She said no, and shut the door.

While Bonner watched, McLarin made his way to the rear of the house where he found an unlocked door. Seconds later, after hearing loud screams, Bonner entered the home and found McLarin standing over Mrs. Traylor's bruised and battered body.

McLarin was visibly upset at the way his plan had gone awry. He had meant to simply kidnap the woman but when she resisted he beat her brutally with the butt of his pistol. Now it was impossible for her to call with the ransom demand.

Thinking quickly, McLarin searched the woman's purse for her car keys and ordered Bonner to help him put the woman in the back seat of the Cadillac. With Bonner driving and McLarin giving directions, the men drove to Monte Sano Mountain where they turned off onto a dirt road near one of the television towers. While Bonner watched, McLarin pulled Mrs. Traylor from the car and

stabbed her repeatedly with his knife, all the time mumbling about "can't leave witnesses."

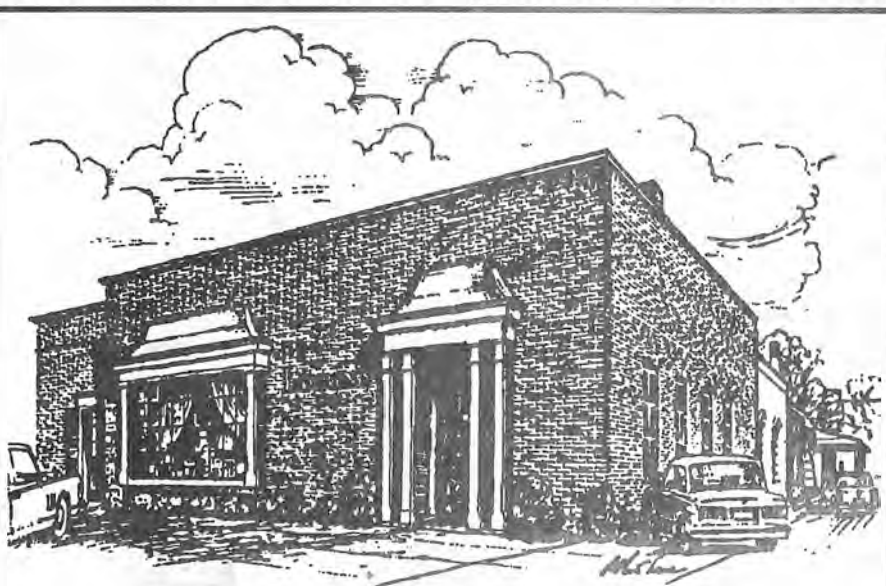
Satisfied that Mrs. Traylor was dead, McLarin and Bonner then drove the Cadillac to a field near Automatic Electric where they abandoned it before walking to McLarin's home nearby.

The discovery of Mrs. Traylor's body by a group of hikers sent shock waves throughout Huntsville. The Traylor's were among Huntsville's most prominent citizens and well liked by almost everyone. Within hours

police were combing Monte Sano Mountain looking for evidence as well as questioning Twickenham residents about any suspicious people seen in the neighborhood.

At first it seemed as if the case would be solved quickly. Neighbors recalled seeing a red Karman Ghia parked near the house and several people told of seeing two "hoodlums," one black and one white, in the area at about the time of the murder.

As the police dragnet spread across Huntsville, officers began questioning everyone who owned



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a Karman Ghia automobile. McLarin was stopped and questioned twice by the police. Even though a large military type knife was found in his car, the officers had no evidence linking him to the crime and were forced to let him go.

In an almost perverse way, McLarin seemed to glory in being the secret center of attention. He collected every word written in the newspapers about the case and often approached police officers asking about "how the case was going." Perhaps seeking to be closer to the investigation, several weeks after the murder he actually applied for, and got, a job at Traylor Island Music Company helping move pianos!

When several months had passed with no new leads the case seemed to be at a dead end. McLarin, perhaps tiring of the game, had reenlisted in the Army and after a short period of training was sent to Italy.

Even if other people were willing to forget about the murder, Mr. Traylor, the victim's husband, had other ideas. On October 3, 1974, he placed a large ad in the newspaper offering a \$5000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the murderers.

Unfortunately for Bonner, he had made a mistake common to most criminals. He had confided in a friend, a woman, and now spurred by visions of making easy money herself, she called the police.

When arrested and faced with the prospect of the electric chair, Bonner readily gave McLarin up in a plea bargain.

McLarin was brought back from Italy and on May 13, 1976 was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Bonner, on the other hand, had been granted

immunity and was never charged!

Normally, after sentencing a prisoner would be transferred to a state prison, but in 1975 a United States District Judge had ruled that state prisons could not accept any more inmates until overcrowded conditions were relieved. Although this helped conditions in the prisons it also created overcrowding in the county jails. Many prisoners, like McLarin, were still sitting in the county jail a year after sentencing, waiting to be transferred.

For McLarin, however, this was an ideal situation. He had no intention of spending the rest of his life behind bars but he realized once he was transferred there would be almost no chance of escape.

By talking to other prisoners and spending hours watching the movements of the guards, McLarin began to narrow his possibilities. Escape through the elevator or stairwell was impossible; it was too well guarded. Going on sick call and possibly escaping from the hospital was quickly ruled out when he noticed the prisoners were heavily manacled whenever they left the jail.

In January of 1977 eight prisoners escaped by crawling through ventilation pipes and lowering themselves to the sixth floor where they escaped down an unguarded stairwell. All of the escapees were quickly captured and if McLarin had any hope of using the same method, his hopes were quickly dashed when heavy metal grates were welded over the ventilation pipes.

Three months later a prisoner by the name of William Cordova attempted the impossible. By tying bed sheets together he descended to a lower

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floor from where he made his escape. Like the other prisoners who had attempted to break out, Cordova was quickly captured, too. Jail security was greatly increased with jailors patrolling the cell blocks on a constant basis and, in case other prisoners had the same idea, the bed sheets were collected each morning.

McLarin watched Cordova's attempted escape with fascination. Regardless of the odds, McLarin realized this method was his best chance to ever get out of jail. But first, he had to get out of a solid steel cell, escape the guards' attention, get to a window, find something to lower himself with and then get away.

Most people would have considered the odds impossible, but most people weren't serving life sentences for murder!

McLarin's first opportunity came when, lying on his cot one day, he noticed a little crack in the metal ceiling. By rolling his mattress up and standing on it, he was able to examine it more closely. The crack was tiny, but maybe, just maybe, a hacksaw blade could fit in it! Calling his two cell mates into a tight huddle, he explained his discovery.

His cell mates, Raymond Moore and Terry Baker, were only too happy to participate. Moore was awaiting extradition to North Carolina where he faced a long prison sentence and Baker was serving a lengthy term for the 1975 arson of the Diplomat Club here in Huntsville.

One of the cell mates owned a relatively new car which was still parked at a friend's house. Word was spread through the jail grapevine that the car could be traded for a hacksaw blade and

two hundred dollars. Finally one prisoner was found who was about to be released and who agreed to the trade. A bill of sale for the car was made out and two weeks later a visitor to the jail delivered a bible to the cell mates.

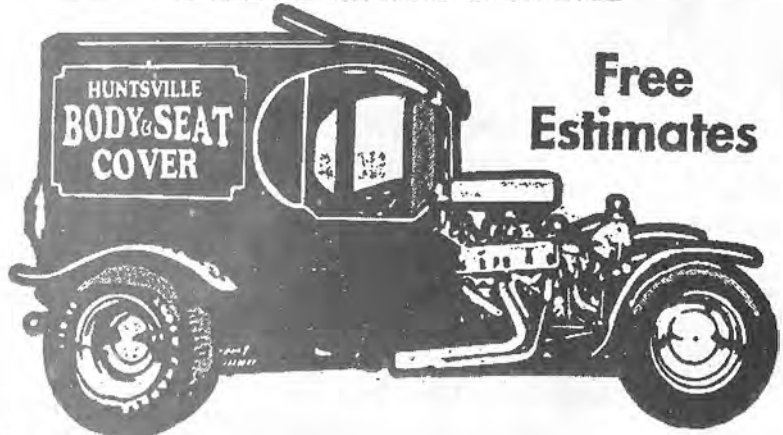
Hidden in the spine of the

bible was a 6 inch hacksaw blade and two twenty dollar bills. Evidently the "friend" had decided that McLarin was in no position to argue about the rest of the money.

It was impossible to do anything in a cell block without every prisoner knowing about it,

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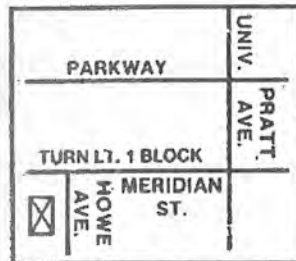
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and though many of them preferred to simply serve their time, they were not adverse to helping someone else's escape plans. If for no other reason, it provided a welcome break from the everyday boredom of being in jail. McLarin was aware of this and soon gained the cooperation of many of the inmates.

Occupants of the cell next to McLarin provided the large poster used to cover the saw marks.

Whenever a jailor entered the cell block a loud whistle from those nearest the door would alert McLarin and his cronies, giving them time to hide the hacksaw blade and cover the cut with a poster. When the jailor left the floor, another whistle would signal the all clear. Another prisoner passed on the information that electrical cable, being used in the renovation of a part of the jail, was stored in a room next to the cell block.

McLarin realized a crucial part of his plan depended on the jailers' attention being diverted. He had noticed for sometime, that due to the overcrowded conditions, the jailors were busiest on visiting days. Unfortunately visiting hours were on Sundays, and if an escape was made then it would be daylight outside with people coming and going on the streets below.

When McLarin broached his plan to his cell mates there was instant ridicule. "You expect us to climb down the side of the courthouse in broad daylight without anyone seeing us? You're crazy!"

"That's the beautiful part of it," argued McLarin, "Because it's daylight no one will be looking for us!"

Reluctantly, and possibly after considering the alternatives,

both men agreed to the plan. After a somewhat hasty discussion, the following Sunday, May 22, was picked as the date of the break out.

On the appointed day visitors were heavier than usual and the guards, already overworked, were kept busy simply monitoring the visitors. At a few minutes before three in the afternoon, a prisoner at the end of the block sounded a sharp whistle signaling all clear and McLarin decided it was time.

Working rapidly the three men piled their mattresses into a heap in the middle of the floor. Climbing on top of the bedding McLarin ripped the poster from the ceiling and gave a hard shove against the metal, exposing a round jagged hole. McLarin went first, squeezing his body through the narrow opening and scraping raw flesh from his arms. Next went Baker, who was much smaller and had an easier time fitting through the hole.

Suddenly, just as Moore

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reached for the hole, a sharp whistle warned of an approaching guard. With no time to do anything else, and sure that he was about to be caught, Moore simply set down on top of the mattresses and waited. Almost unbelievably, the guard walked right by the cell without even giving it a glance. In a matter of seconds Moore was through the hole and had joined his companions.

Silently the trio crawled across the top of the cell and lowered themselves onto the catwalk. From there they made their way to an adjoining room that was undergoing construction. All types of building material were scattered throughout the room but the only thing that caught McLarin's attention was the roll of electrical cable that another inmate had told him about. After breaking the glass McLarin began playing the cable out the window and down the side of the courthouse. The plan was to climb down 5 floors onto the roof ledge of the fourth floor and then break a window to gain entry to the courthouse itself. If everything went right, then it

would be a simple matter to exit through the elevator or staircase.

Baker was first out the window. Climbing down, hand over hand, he paused at one point to look at the people coming and going out of the courthouse. As McLarin had predicted, no one seemed aware of the drama unfolding a hundred feet above their heads.

Next out the window was McLarin. Earlier he had noticed a group of people standing on a corner across from the courthouse. When he saw them waving, he automatically assumed they were waving at friends or loved ones in jail but as McLarin began the descent, to his horror, he realized they were waving at him! Clutching the cable with one hand, he frantically motioned for the people to leave. The people, evidently not realizing they were witnessing a jailbreak, turned and continued walking down the street.

Suddenly, while still about twenty feet to go, McLarin's hand slipped on the cable caus-

ing him to fall in a crumpled heap onto the roof of the fourth floor. Limping badly with an injured leg he joined Baker who was searching for something to break a window with.

By the time they found a piece of metal pipe and broke the window, Moore was halfway down when he too slipped and fell, severely injuring his back and legs. This posed a dilemma for McLarin. The original plan had been to go to a friend's house who would provide them with clothes and transportation but now, McLarin realized Moore was in serious need of medical care and it would just be a matter of time until the police caught him and made him reveal the whole plan.

McLarin solved the problem by telling Moore, "You're on your own, pal! We'll help you get out of the building but then you are history!"

After breaking a window leading to the Grand Jury room the escapees cautiously made their way to the elevator, with McLarin and Moore both leaving a trail of blood behind them. Once on the

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first floor McLarin abandoned Moore, telling him he was on his own.

Motioning Baker to follow him, McLarin then picked up a couple of brooms and a garbage can before walking casually out the door as if he was on a work detail. As they approached the street corner opposite the courthouse, McLarin paused and looked upwards at the jail he had just broken out of. Grinning broadly he waved at the prisoners watching from the ninth floor.

Earlier there had been total silence in the cell block as the other prisoners followed the escapees' progress. Suddenly, when they saw McLarin wave, pandemonium broke loose with every inmate trying to outdo the others in seeing who could make the most noise.

Minutes later, after someone reported the broken windows, the escape was discovered. Much to no ones surprise, none of the inmates in the cell block had seen anything.

Moore was recaptured within

minutes when deputies followed a trail of blood to a house on Walker Avenue where they found him hiding on a back porch. Despite all efforts of the police, however, McLarin seemed to have disappeared into thin air. Descriptions of McLarin and Baker were immediately broadcast on radio and TV, but to no avail.

"How," everyone wondered, "could two prisoners get away while still wearing their prison uniforms?" When several hours passed with no results, most people assumed an accomplice had provided them with clothes and a ride out of town.

It is often said that, "Truth is often stranger than fiction," but in this instance, it proved to be an understatement. For while police were spreading their dragnet across Huntsville, searching every nook and cranny, McLarin and Baker, still dressed in their prison uniforms, were sitting at the bus station casually drinking coffee and waiting for the next

bus.

Though Baker was recaptured a week later in South Carolina, McLarin remained free for almost a year and a half. During this time, attempts to capture him proved to be almost a comedy of errors.

He checked himself into a Veterans Administration hospital and though his records showed "serving life imprisonment for murder" he was still admitted and no attempts were made to contact the authorities. He applied for, and received a new drivers license un-

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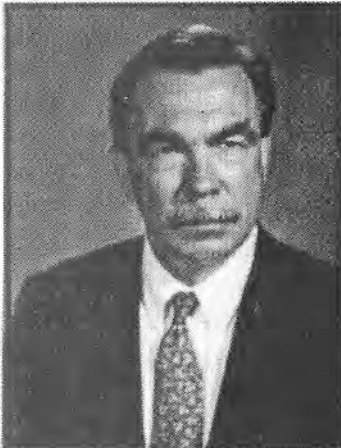
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der his own name and at one point even visited a friend in the penitentiary! Though he was stopped at least three times by the police, no effort was ever made to run a "check" on him.

In the end Craig McLarin met the same fate as many other criminals. He was turned in by a woman.

While most people remember McLarin for the cold blooded murder he committed here in Huntsville, criminals serving time in jail remember him in a different light. Even today when talk turns to escape, they call it "pulling a McLarin."

Craig McLarin is currently serving a life sentence in Holman Prison. All bibles are carefully checked before being allowed in the cell block.



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If you drink wine regularly you may be eroding the enamel on your teeth. Brush twice a day and see your dentist if you partake often.

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A baldness treatment is ineffective if it's not nimoxidil or finasteride, the only two drugs scientists agree reverse hair loss effectively, according to "Vitality" magazine. Also be suspicious if a company says its product is a secret formula. A product wouldn't be a secret if it really worked.

Limit the number of files in

your office. It's easier and faster to look through one file with 20 pieces of paper than 10 files with 2 pieces of paper in each.

Patients with coronary heart disease have a better chance of long-term survival if they believe their family and friends will help them do daily tasks, such as taking medications and bathing, etc.

Starting your meal with a low-fat soup or salad will help fill you up.

Melted butter is not a good substitute for softened butter when the recipe calls for a creaming step. Let the butter soften and then cream the ingredients well. Melted butter makes soggy cakes.

Diplomacy is the art of saying "Nice Doggie" until you can find a rock.
Will Rogers



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Slim-ply Delicious

Grilled Onions

2 large onions, sliced 1 inch thick

Soy Sauce

Sprinkle onions with soy sauce and marinate for several hours or overnight. Grill until tendercrisp and brown on both sides, turning carefully with a spatula.

Crispy Onion Chicken

1 1/4 lbs. chicken parts, boned and skinned

2 T. plus

2 t. light mayonnaise

3 T. dry bread crumbs

2 T. minced onion flakes

1 packet instant beef flavored broth mix

Wash the chicken well. Pre-heat your oven to 350 degrees. Place the chicken in a shallow baking pan that has been sprayed with a nonstick cooking spray. Spread mayonnaise evenly over chicken. In a small bowl, combine remaining ingredients, mixing well. Sprinkle evenly over the chicken. Press the mixture down gently into the mayonnaise. Bake, uncovered, for 45 minutes.

Salmon Potato Patties

9 oz. drained, canned salmon, flaked

6 oz. potatoes, cooked, peeled and mashed

2 eggs, slightly beaten

2 T. grated onion

1 T. lemon juice

1 t. Worcestershire sauce

1 oz. grated parmesan cheese

1 t. garlic powder

1/2 t. grated lemon peel

Salt and pepper to taste

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients, mixing well. Shape into 8 patties. Preheat a nonstick griddle or skillet over medium heat. Spray lightly with a nonstick cooking spray. Cook patties until lightly browned on both sides, turning carefully.

Almond Macaroons

1 egg white

1/4 c. sugar

1 t. almond extract

1/4 c. wheat germ

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

In a deep bowl, beat the egg white on low speed of an electric mixer til frothy. Beat on high speed til stiff. Gradually beat in sugar and then almond extract. Fold in the wheat germ. Drop mixture by 1/2 teaspoonfuls onto a cookie sheet that has been sprayed with a nonstick cooking spray and dusted lightly with flour.

Put the cookies in the oven and immediately reduce the temperature to 200 degrees. Bake for an hour, turn off the heat and leave cookies in the oven to cool.



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Crunchy Granola

1 1/2 c. rolled oats, not instant

1/2 oz. slivered almonds

1 1/2 t. ground cinnamon

2 T. honey or maple syrup

1/2 t. almond extract

1/2 t. coconut extract

1 t. vanilla extract

2 T. vegetable oil

1/4 c. apple juice (unsweetened)

Preheat your oven to 300 degrees. In a large bowl, combine the oats, almonds and cinnamon. Mix well. In a small bowl combine the remaining ingredients. Drizzle the mixture over the oats, mix well til all ingredients are moistened. Spread the mixture in a 10 x 15 inch baking pan that has been sprayed with a nonstick cooking spray. Bake for 20 minutes. Stir the granola and return to oven for another 10 minutes. Stir well and back in oven for 10 minutes. Cool in pan, stirring occasionally, store in an airtight container.

Curried Rice with Spinach

1 10 oz. package frozen, chopped spinach, thawed and drained well

1/4 c. finely chopped onions

1/2 t. garlic powder

1 t. curry powder

Salt and pepper to taste

1/2 c. skim milk

1 egg, beaten

3 c. cooked brown rice

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients, mixing well. Spoon mixture into a casserole dish that has been sprayed with a nonstick cooking spray. Bake, uncovered, for 30 minutes or until set.

Applesauce Wheat Bars

1 c. whole wheat flour

1 t. baking soda

1 t. ground cinnamon

1/4 t. ground cloves

1/4 t. ground allspice

1/2 t. ground nutmeg

2 T. skim milk

1 egg

1 c. applesauce, unsweetened

3 T. plus 1 t. vegetable oil

2 t. vanilla extract

3 T. plus 1 t. sugar

1/4 c. plus 2 T. raisins

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Mix your dry ingredients together in a large bowl. In a blender combine remaining ingredients, except the raisins. Blend til smooth. Add the applesauce mixture and raisins to dry ingredients. Mix til all ingredients are moistened. Pour the batter in a 6 x 10 inch glass baking pan that has been sprayed with a nonstick cooking spray. Bake for 30 min-

utes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Strawberry Fruit Sherbet

1 c. frozen strawberries unsweetened (Don't thaw)

1/2 medium ripe banana

1/4 c. orange juice, unsweetened

1 t. honey

Combine all ingredients in a blender blend til smooth, stopping the blender several times to stir the mixture. Spoon into sherbet glasses and enjoy. If you want to make a drink out of this, just add more juice.



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Absurd News

Mrs. Henry Stanton of Great Neck, N.Y., had been promising herself a vacation for a long time, and in the spring of 1936 she decided finally to take it.

As she prepared for a trip to visit friends in Cape Cod, she asked her sister, Mrs. Dyett, to look after her little house in her absence. Her dutiful sibling came the next day to water the plants and feed Fluffy the cat, but the cat was nowhere to be found.

When Mrs. Stanton unpacked the neatly folded articles from her trunk four days later, she found a neatly folded cat! Fluffy was hungry, thirsty and a little stiff, but otherwise none the worse for wear.

District Attorney Alvin R.

Isenberg was furious when, after parking his car in front of the courthouse, came out to find it gone.

Earlier that day, a suspected car thief had been tried in that very same courthouse and acquitted of the charges, and Isenberg was shocked that this man would have the audacity to steal the District Attorney's own car in bright daylight!

After swearing out a warrant and completing the necessary paperwork to have the shameless thief rearrested, the indignant Mr. Isenberg went home and found his car parked in the driveway. Mrs. Isenberg had been shopping downtown, and when her bundles proved too heavy to carry, she spotted her husband's car across the street. "What are you so upset about?" She asked, "I just borrowed it, that's all!"

The District Attorney declined to press charges.

Back in 1898, Colonel F.W. Wamsley of Charleston, South Carolina, donated \$200,000 to the Philadelphia Zoo. In appreciation, he received a lifetime pass. He used the pass for the first time in 1927, when he and his wife went to Philadelphia to visit the zoo.

The pass saved him 50¢.

In 1931, Joe "Mule" Sprinz of the Cleveland Indians caught a baseball tossed from 800 feet in the air.

Sprinz handled the ball flawlessly, receiving it in an over-

stuffed catcher's mitt, but the impact sent a shock wave through his body that broke his jaw.

Two farmers in Iowa sued neighbor Henry Bockman for letting his bull break loose and wander through their pastures where, they claim, it impregnated forty-three purebred Holstein heifers in a single afternoon.

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It's Gotta Be Against The Law!



The following ordinances were still on the books in 1936.

- * Newark, New Jersey forbids the sale of ice after 6 p.m., without a doctor's prescription.
- * A Taylorville, Illinois ordinance forbids anyone to feed razor blades to hogs.
- * In Norfolk, Virginia it is unlawful to fly a kite within the city limits.
- * A Utah statute forbids women to wear heels more than 1 1/2" high.
- * It is against the law in New Haven, Connecticut to steal a neighbor's bees.
- * Unrestrained giggling on the streets is forbidden in Helena, Montana.
- * The laws of Alabama prohibit you from playing dominoes on Sunday.
- * Franklin, Tennessee has an ordinance prohibiting the sale of watermelons.

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Huntsville Coffee Talk

by Aunt Eunice

With pearls of wisdom contributed by the Liar's Table



Well folks, if anyone had any doubts about how popular **Sheriff Joe Whisante** is they should have been at his campaign kickoff. An estimated 3000 people showed up to wish him well.

Boy, did the folks show turn out for the breakfast I gave for **Mary Jane Caylor!** Mary Jane is a good lady and if all of her friends vote, there is no way she can lose.

You can tell it's an election year and a good year for women! My first political breakfast was for **Sandra Rhodes**, who is running for County Superintendent of Education. She's going to be a good super!

Wonder if **Eddie LeVick** and **Lincoln Smith** will break any bones while they are out in Colorado skiing with their group from **Twickenham Church of Christ**. By the way, the church has lots

of good family orientated programs coming up soon.

Hugh McInnish has entered the Republican primary for the State Senate. He's running against **Chris Watson** and **Wayne Reynolds** and the winner will face **Tom Butler** this fall. This will be a good race to watch.

My good friend **Cynthia Parsons** brought a very special guest from New York, **Caroline Owens**, of Adelson Gallery to breakfast. The way she put away the biscuits you'd think they don't feed people much up north!

Congratulations to the **Huntsville Police Department** on receiving a million dollar grant to hire extra officers. We have one of the best police forces in the country and we all need to support them.

Our sympathy goes out to my

good friend **John Roper** on the loss of his father. We'll remember him in our prayers.

Rumor has it that **James Asquith** is going to give **Howard Sanderford** a run for his money in his effort to seek the District 20 House seat. They are both Republicans and no Democrat has qualified for the race.

Jeff Enfinger is becoming the greatest coffee pourer I have ever seen. The way he handles that coffee pot you'd think he was a natural born politician!

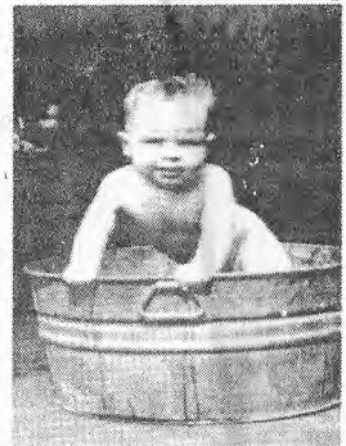
One piece of advice for all you folks running for public office: Be careful about sending **E-mail** and talking on **chat** lines.

Gil Aust is already heating up his campaign to unseat **Congressman Bud Cramer**. We predict this race will become known as the "war of the words."

Photo of The Month

The first person to identify the little boy in the picture below wins a breakfast at Eunice's Country Kitchen. So stop by and tell Aunt Eunice who you think it is!

Hint: well known attorney



Last month's picture was **John Malone**

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I sure am proud of the **Senior Crime Prevention Academy** class this spring. We have around 52 signed up and it is held at the Senior Center.

Well folks, it's official (kind of). **John Cockerham**, the Downtown terror on roller skates has set his sights on the city council job currently held by **Mark Hall**. This will be the most entertaining race of the year!

By the way, John Cockerham is sponsoring "**Rock Around The Square**" this July 4th weekend. Way to go, John!

All you golfers need to call the **Senior Center** to play in their golf tournament on April 11 at Valley Hill Country Club. This year's honoree is **W.F. Sanders** and lots of great prizes will be given away. Call 880-7080 ext. 222.

Speaking of city councilmen - **Bill Kling** has been awful quiet lately. Maybe he's thinking of the miles to walk and the hands to shake before the next election.

World famous playwright and director **David McGillivray** will be coming from London to direct plays at **Theater Around the Corner**, April 17 - May 9. If you've never been to one of their plays you are really missing something!

My buddy, **Susan Kirkland**, was real excited about her daughter and grandson coming home for a visit recently. Chris, the grandson, walks on water according to Susan.

Ms. Mayor really knows how to show her thanks for a job well done. This month she is treating the **Fire Department** to breakfast. Those boys deserve it!

What do you folks think about **Don Siegleman's** proposal for a state lottery? You can tell him what you think about it at the ballot box in November. He's making a run for Governor.

As we grow older and look back over the years we realize the most important things in life are our family and friends. I have been blessed with both, especially with my granddaughter **Donna** for she has been everything a grandmother could ever hope for. But even granddaughters grow up and recently she and **Todd Whetstone** announced their engagement and plans for an August wedding.

Honey, I'm proud of you. Cook that boy biscuits and he'll make you a fine man!

That's all for this month but just remember, I love you.

Donna Siegleman

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One Customer
at a time.



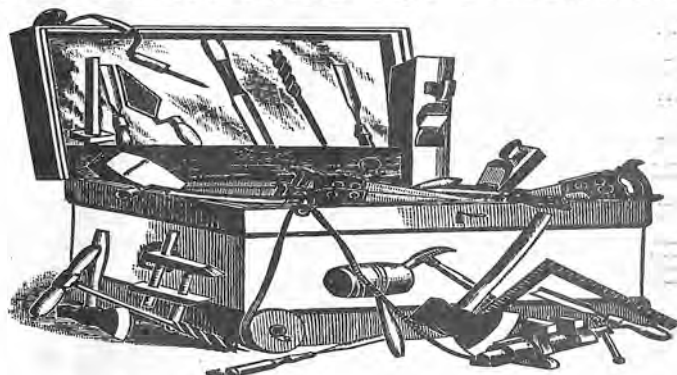
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A Sad Case Of Mistaken Identity

*Her eldest son, mourned
as dead, is found alive!*

from a 1923 newspaper



Clarence Peters, of Gadsden, Ala., after being buried in the family lot of a Gadsden cemetery and grieved as dead by a sorrowing mother, is not dead at all but very much alive.

A strange story, but true. It was in 1917 that Peters, alias Jim Holloway, was caught in Morgan County as a member of a gang of thieves, operating in Decatur, and it was Peters who shielded his two comrades who were also captured, while five others of the "gang" escaped—and it was Peters who took a fifteen year sentence, refusing to squeal on his pals, and they went free.

Peters, still known only by the name of Holloway, began his prison sentence while still under the age of 20.

It was in 1918 that he escaped from the state prison and stayed at his mother's home in Gadsden three weeks before leaving for the West. His mother and brothers never knew that he was going under the name of Holloway.

It was only a short time after he escaped from prison that he was captured in a western state and returned to Alabama where prison bars were waiting for him, but relatives never learned of his fate.

During the latter part of the year 1919, a message was received from a small town in Iowa by Mrs. Peters, Clarence's mother, informing her that a young man answering her son's description had been killed in a freight wreck and that letters taken from the pockets of the body bore the name "Clarence Peters, Gadsden, Alabama."

The body was sent to Mrs. Peters at Gadsden and grieved over by the mother and sons. The head and face were so badly mutilated that close identification was impossible. The size of the body and the color of the hair fitted the description of Clarence.

A small tombstone, purchased by the mourning mother and brothers, was erected at the head of the grave in Clayton Cemetery and Clarence, meanwhile never knowing of the cruel joke played on him, served on in the penitentiary. He steadfastly refused to convey the news of his recapture to his mother and the incident was forgotten in Gadsden except to those dear ones.

In 1922, Peters could no longer refrain from writing

home and, under the name of Jim Holloway, he wrote his mother, inquiring of her son's whereabouts and feigning friendship with young Peters.

In the best way that a mother could she wrote thanking him for the interest he had manifested in her dead son, telling him of the calamity and encouraging him to turn his own life around so that he might have a bright future.

The tender words of the sorrowing mother touched Clarence so, and yet overwhelmed him with surprise over his believed death, that he immediately wrote the whole truth to his mother, and Mrs. Peters was soon clasping her son to her bosom at Banner prison.

Since that time Peters has made his seventh attempt at escape, and was captured just before he made good in his efforts to gain freedom and to try again his fortunes in a free world.

He is in a sad plight at the prison, marked for bad conduct, and is scheduled for the long route of the sentence.

Peters is still a young man, hardly 25.

In the meantime there is a grave in Etowah, containing the mortal remains of some mother's son who has been wept for most bitterly by the Peters family even though his own loved one are doubtless looking and longing for his familiar voice and footfalls, which they will never hear again.



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Dr. Durant the Dentist

By Helen Miller

I knew the Good Book said to "fear the Lord and keep His commandments," but I feared Dr. Durant a lot more and his commands were a lot harder to keep. "Open your mouth," "sit still," "close your mouth" were just a few.

I was sure the holy men of old had him in mind when they wrote about the man down yonder with the horns and pitchfork. His office was in a small brown building downtown next to the post office and on occasion I had to be all but dragged down there.

I couldn't have cared less how my mouth looked but apparently Mama had other ideas. Perhaps she was planning to challenge a friend who had said that I could never be a silent screen star because I could never be silent. I already knew I was the ugliest kid on my side of town with my face a total mass of freckles, ears that poked straight out from my head, fine straight hair that wouldn't hold a curl and legs that were much too fat, so getting one snagged tooth fixed wasn't going to help much.

Dr. Durant's reception room was bare and boring. No receptionist or telephone just a few straight chairs and a potbellied stove with a kettle on top. It had a strange medicinal odor that hit you right in nostrils soon as you opened the door and heard the little bell jingle. I never smelled anything like it anywhere else, and if I had been kidnapped, blindfolded, and carried there, I would have known exactly where I was, how to get out, which way to turn, and the quickest route home. Dr. Durant would hear the bell and

open the door from the small room where he kept the crucifixion chair. Looking over his glasses he always greeted Mama and there began a thirty-minute inquiry about the health and welfare of every member of the Harrelson clan.

I wished to goodness he knew the Dukes and Mounagers of South Georgia, there would not have been any time left for me. Once inside the small back room he came at me with a buzz saw in one hand and a little mirror on a stick in the other. Every time he hit a nerve, over-

board I would jump, for by then I was all alone in the middle of a storm at sea with the wind in my face and whitecaps forty feet high. I was after sessions like this that I welcomed his most comforting command of all, "Now take a sip of water and SPIT!"

You know you're getting old when "tying one on" means fastening your MedicAlert bracelet.

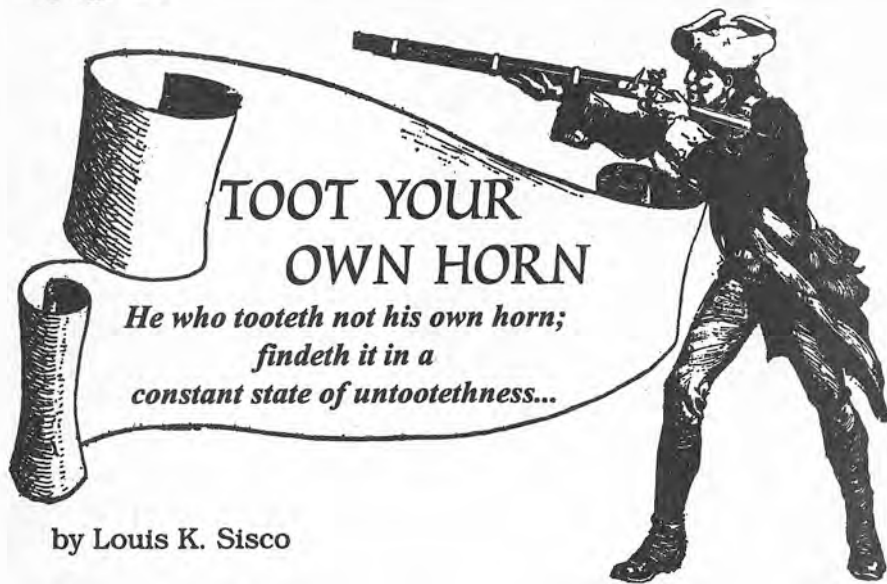


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TOOT YOUR OWN HORN

*He who tooteth not his own horn;
findeth it in a
constant state of untootethness...*

by Louis K. Sisco

Someone recently said to me, "At your age, if you don't hurry and tell, the world will never know what you did." Although I was never one to brag, I decided to reveal a few things:

As the 21st civilian hired by the Ordnance Corps at Redstone Arsenal, I supervised the unloading of the first shipment of high explosive components, Percussion Primers Model: MIBIA1, from Picatinny Arsenal. They were not labeled "Explosive" which resulted in an investigation by the FBI. I also delivered the truck load of samples from the first lot of ammunition produced at Redstone to the Jefferson Proving Ground at Madison, Indiana.

The closest I came to losing my life in W.W. II while stationed 12,000 miles from home in the jungles of Burma, was not due to enemy action, but due to a

faulty igniter manufactured in my home town at the Huntsville Arsenal. We had 16 napalm bombs and 64 500 lb., general purpose bombs loaded on 8 trailers parked side by side. A P-38 airplane was parked

nearby. We made our own bombs by filling 75 gallon auxiliary gas tanks with 100 octane gasoline and napalm. White phosphorus was exuding where the detonator was screwed into the igniter and the phosphorus was running down the side of the napalm bomb on which it was mounted. All it takes to ignite white phosphorus is oxygen. It was 130 degrees that day and fumes could be seen rising 50 to 75 feet above the trailers. After knocking the igniter off the tank I proceeded to scrape the burning phosphorus that had run 6 to 8 inches down the side, with my pocket knife. I finally got a CO2 extinguisher put on it which quelled it, but as soon as the extinguisher was stopped it would flame up again. Every time I scraped, the oxygen would get in behind it and

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flame up. After alternating for some 5 to 10 minutes, I finally got it all. Someone suggested a medal, but our bemedaled Colonel said "in line of duty." After all, I was only an enlisted man.

Percy Matter and I (T & E Div., and R & D Dir.) were the first to honor our secretary on National Secretaries Day at Redstone. We gave her a vase of flowers. It caused such a commotion the Director called a hurried staff meeting. It was decided to send two people into town and buy flowers for every secretary in the building (Bldg. 781), approximately 20 to 30! As a result, the first chapter of the Secretaries Society was formed in Huntsville and our secretary, Eulene Taylor, was the first President.

As a member of the Jaycees, I was on the committee that went before the City Council and proposed a Civic Center be built in Huntsville.

As Chief of the Standardization Office, I established the Standardization Program and the Federal Cataloging Programs at the

Army Missile Command and a year later at ABMA, now Marshall Space Flight Center, NASA. (As directed by Public Law 436.)

I was a member of the Department of Defense Committee (representing the Army Missile Command) that met in Washington and made the decision to convert military hardware components to the Metric measurement system. This was to be limited to those weapons subject to the Foreign Exchange Lend-Lease Program with allied nations, and certainly NOT to highway markings and Coke bottles!

The Veterans Day Parade (Nov. 11) was my idea back in the sixties. When I was Commander of the D.A.V., I proposed that we have a parade and named a committee to contact the other veteran organizations. We formed a Veterans Committee, held meetings with city and county officials, and put on the first parade.

These are just some -- as to the remainder -- the world will never know. I do not like to brag.

Why Some People Are Poor

From 1875 Newspaper

Silver spoons are used to scrape kettles. Coffee, spices and pepper are left to stand open and lose the strength.

Potatoes in the cellar grow and the sprouts are not removed until the potatoes become worthless.

Brooms are never hung up and are soon spoiled.

Bits of meat, vegetables, bread and cold puddings are thrown away when they might be warmed, steamed and served as good as new.

The flour is sifted in a wasteful manner and the breadpan is left with the dough sticking to it.

Tubs and barrels are left in the sun to dry and fall apart.

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TRIPLE HANGING AT SCOTTSBORO



by W. Jerry Gist

from his book, *"The Story of Scottsboro, Alabama,"* and
reprinted with his permission

In 1856 Henry Porter and family moved from New England to Alabama. Mr. Porter, a victim of a lingering disease, came to the mountains of Jackson County to spend the last years of his life in quiet solitude. After a few months stay in "High Jackson," Porter's condition began to improve, and he gained new lease on life. He and Mrs. Porter purchased a tract of land and built a beautiful home overlooking the Tennessee River, not far from Bridgeport on Sand Mountain, now known as Porter's Bluff. Here, Mr. and Mrs. Porter, Miss Sue Standish, Mrs. Porter's sister, a Mrs. Chubbuck, and two small girls, Hattie Large and Mary Ramsey, whom they were raising and educating, were living a quiet and peaceful life, beloved and respected by all that knew them.

On Monday evening, March 25, 1883, the occupants of the Porter home were startled at sharp gunfire just outside their house. Looking outside they saw three or four men emerge from the thick pines and walk toward the house. The men continued firing; one shot passed through the front door and was quickly followed by other shots. The men entered the Porter home and de-

manded five hundred dollars from Mr. Porter. When he was unable to meet the demand the men became enraged. They refused to let the Porters, the ladies or the little girls leave the house and then set it on fire by igniting a bed saturated with coal oil. Some of the occupants of the house tried to get trunks containing valuable family belongings out of the burning house. One of the little girls started out of the house with a few of her belongings when Asbury Hughes threw a stone at her, made her drop her bundle and attempted to drive her back into the burning house. The following article was taken from the *Scottsboro Citizen*, March 27, 1883, concerning the Porter house burning. As the reader will discover, the "Power of the pen" has been drastically liberalized.

AN OUTRAGE

"Last Monday night four masked men went to the residence of Mr. Porter, who lives on Porter's Bluff, near Carpenter, and presented revolvers at the inmates of the house demanding money which they thought Mr. Porter had. On failing to get any money, the house was fired

by two of the scoundrels, and everything, including the wearing apparel was burned. The miscreants then became frightened and left. This is the most dastardly act ever perpetrated in Jackson County, and it is to be hoped the rascals will be caught.

Mr. Porter, we learn, keeps his money in the bank and never had any in the house to amount to anything. We learn that the people of Carpenter are thoroughly aroused and are searching the country with bloodhounds. Mr. Porter has the sympathy of every person in Jackson County, and every effort will be made to capture the den of thieves who are said to be prowling around in that end of the country. We are opposed to lynch law on the general principles, but the brutish fiends

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who committed this diabolical deed should, if captured, receive the severest penalty of the law."

Shortly after the Porter's home was destroyed, Colonel A. Snodgrass, editor of the *Jackson County Herald*, started the "Porter Fund," to which Jackson County citizens gave freely to aid the Porter family.

On or about the second day after the crime was committed, Captain Bill Glover arrested John Grayson, George and Asbury Hughes and sent them to Scottsboro to be held on suspicion of the Porter house burning. Grayson was captured at Bass, and the Hughes brothers were captured under a house at Shellmound. Grayson, age thirty-nine, was the stepfather of the Hughes brothers. The three men admitted stealing some of Mr. Porter's stored meat from the

meat house a few nights before the burning, but emphatically denied burning the house.

On April 9 and 10, 1883 John Grayson, George and Asbury Hughes were called for a preliminary trial in Bridgeport, Alabama. All three of the men we convicted of arson in the first degree. Three of the residents of the Porter home positively identified Asbury Hughes as being one of the men who entered their home. They could not make a positive identification of the other two, but felt satisfied they were present during the burning. A large crowd was present in Bridgeport during this trial and much excitement prevailed throughout its entirety. The trial was conducted before Esquires M.P. Brown and Thomas Scruggs. Tuesday night immediately following the trial the prisoners were brought back to Scottsboro jail in default of

\$5,000 bond.

George Smith was a native of Jackson County about twenty-nine years old and was the last to be captured on suspicion of the Porter house burning. He was shot and apprehended near Carpenter, Alabama on April 27, 1883, and was immediately delivered to authorities in Dade County, Georgia, where there was a reward of \$500 offered for him by the state of Georgia for the murder of Lum Street which had occurred about two years before. At this time the state of Tennessee had issued a warrant for Smith's arrest in connection with the murder of a revenue officer in that state. Smith later escaped the Trenton jail with outside help but was shortly recaptured in Jasper. Smith, knowing that capture was inevitable because of the extensive manhunt being launched for him, married a

cont. on page 29

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The Court Martial Of Colonel John Nickerson

The first hint of anything wrong came on the morning of Tuesday, January 7, 1957 when several people noticed a photograph of Colonel John Nickerson missing from the corridor walls of the Army Ballistic Missile Agency at Redstone Arsenal.

That in itself was not unusual as personnel were routinely transferred at the agency, but Colonel Nickerson was a highly popular officer and people were wondering why nothing had been said if he was simply being transferred.

A phone call to Headquarters produced an equally puzzling response.

"Any information about Colonel Nickerson will have to come from the Pentagon."

The Washington bureau of the Associated Press was quickly alerted and began digging into the story. Late that evening a teletype came across the wires stating that Colonel Nickerson had been relieved from duty pending a possible court martial. Unnamed sources at the Pentagon confirmed that Nickerson stood accused of espionage and distribution of classified material.

The news hit Huntsville like a bombshell. Nickerson was a West point graduate and a highly decorated front line officer during World War II. More importantly for Huntsville was the fact

that he was one of the key people involved in the Army's Jupiter rocket program at Redstone Arsenal.

The Jupiter rocket program was literally Huntsville's life blood. From a small rural community of 16,437 people in



1950, Huntsville had grown to an astonishing population of over 50,000 people in 1955. Most of this growth was a direct result of rocket research and development being carried out at the Arsenal. Huntsville civic leaders were confidently predicting the prosperity would continue as the United States pushed its missile program forward.

Unfortunately, powerful forces in Washington were determined that Huntsville, Ala-

bama would not be a part of the space program.

The missile program at Redstone Arsenal, under Wernher von Braun, had been patterned after the highly successful German effort at Peenemunde; with all the research and development being done "in house." The German scientists had advocated this system as being the most efficient.

Major defense contractors around the country were incensed at this "in house" concept. The space program promised to be worth billions of dollars in government contracts and if Huntsville got the nod for the first satellite, many of these contractors would be left out in the cold.

Quite simply, the defense contractors wanted to disband the rocket team at Redstone and let private industry take on their roles.

The first salvo in the battle for government contracts was fired in February of 1956 when defense contractors leaked to the press information about the secret operation, *Paperclip*. The Army had

begun the operation shortly after WW II as a secret program to bring German scientists to America. Although the vast majority of the Germans were of sterling character, a few possessed dubious backgrounds; a fact the defense contractors were only too happy to point out. Dossiers were compiled on many of the scientists, accompanied by lurid accusations of their Nazi past, and distributed to influential politicians in Washington in an attempt to discredit the Ger-

man influence on the fledgling rocket program.

The defense contractors had hoped that once *Paperclip* was exposed many of the Germans, not wanting publicity, would flee their Army jobs and enter private industry, in effect crippling the Jupiter program. Although a few of the scientists succumbed to the offers of lucrative employment, the vast majority chose to remain where they were.

Undaunted, the defense contractors next took aim at the Jupiter program itself.

Unlike the Army's missile program, the Air Force and Navy depended wholly on defense contractors for their research and development. The fact that their programs were riddled with delays and failures had no bearing on the lobbyists who descended on Washington like a plague of locusts.

On July 29, 1956, James C. Hagerty, Press Secretary for President Eisenhower, announced that the Navy's Vanguard rocket would be used to launch America's first satellite. Experts in the rocket program were outraged at the decision that was clearly made by people with close ties to the defense contractors. Not only was the Vanguard \$100,000,000 over budget, it was not capable of launching a satellite and no one had any idea when it would be able to, if ever.

On the other hand, the Jupiter rocket at Redstone was already capable of entering orbit, a fact the Defense Department was only too well aware of. On September 20, when Secretary of Defense, Charles Wilson learned that von Braun was going to launch a Jupiter rocket at Cape Canaveral, he angrily

ordered General Medaris, commander at Redstone, to personally inspect the fourth stage of the rocket to make sure it was not operational. Even without the fourth stage, however, the missile still climbed to an altitude of 682 miles. It proved easily powerful enough to have entered orbit if permission had been given.

Although von Braun and his team were pleased with the results, certain people in Washington were not. Contracts had already been issued and if word of the Jupiter's successful launch leaked out, it could prove to be a public relations nightmare. The problem was easily solved however by classifying the launch as "Secret" and forbidding anyone to talk about it. Wernher von Braun's team was also ordered to cease any further work on the project.

Adding insult to injury was an order that Wilson issued on November 26, 1956. The Air force and the Navy were given jurisdiction for most of the rocket programs while the Army, possessing the most powerful rocket in the world, was ordered to limit their rocket's range to 200 miles!

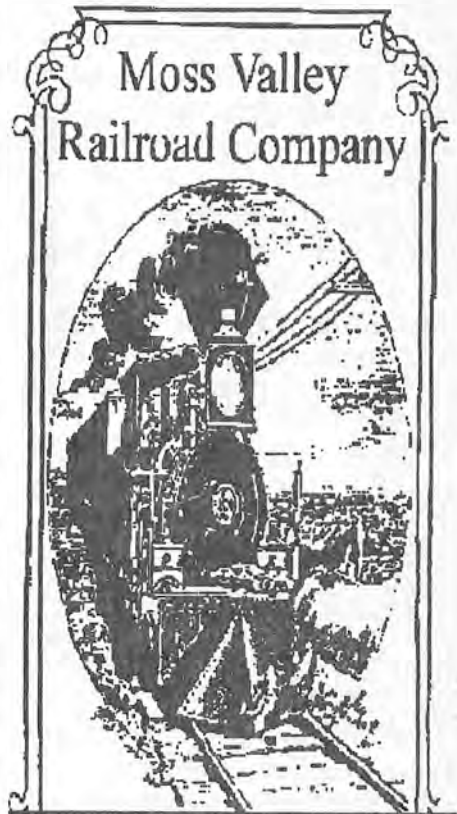
Again, well aware of the public's outrage if it was to learn the facts, the Secretary of Defense ordered the memorandum, as well as any information about Redstone's Jupiter rocket, to be kept secret.

In a sense, the Jupiter program was simply erased from the books by declaring it classified.

For Colonel John Nickerson this posed an insurmountable dilemma. Part of his responsibilities involved briefing Congressional leaders and gaining their support for further work

at Redstone. Now he was in a position where he was forbidden to talk about the Jupiter program, but could not gain support unless he did.

Frustrated at all levels of the bureaucracy, Nickerson compiled a memorandum outlining the duplicity of the defense contractors and the Defense Department. In it, he accused Generals and Admirals at the Pentagon of supporting the defense contractors in exchange for lucrative positions when they retired. Even more damaging was documentation he



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enclosed showing the true cost and performance of the Navy rocket versus the Jupiter project. He also outlined the "Secret" orders that had prevented the public from knowing of the duplicity.

Copies of the memorandum was sent to influential backers of the space program with Nickerson requesting the source of the documents be kept confidential.

Among the people receiving copies was Drew Pearson, a noted columnist for *The New York Times* who immediately realized the explosive potential of the memorandum. Seeking confirmation of the story, Pearson confronted the Secretary of Defense with the documents. After hastily scanning the papers Wilson angrily denied the accusations. When Pearson asked for the papers back, however, Wilson refused to release them, saying they were, "Secret."

When Pearson pointed out that none of the papers were stamped confidential, Wilson immediately pulled a rubber stamp from a desk drawer and stamped everyone of the documents with the large red letters "SECRET."

Within days the memorandums were traced back to Colonel Nickerson at Redstone Arsenal. On January 2, 1957, Army investigators descended on Nickerson's quarters and after a prolonged search discovered several secret documents connecting him to the leaked material.

Nickerson was promptly relieved from duty pending court martial proceedings.

The court martial itself was almost a nonevent. Investigators, spurred by an inquisitive press, soon discovered Nickerson's allegations to be true. Technically,

the information he had leaked was classified but as the press pointed out, "The public's right to know of corruption in the Defense Department far outweighed any criminal penalties that might be imposed."

Confronted by the public's outrage the Army was forced to drop the espionage charges. Undoubtedly, the Army would have preferred to drop all the charges and sweep the matter under the rug, but as Nickerson had already pled guilty to breaching security regulations, the court martial board had no choice but to proceed. On June 29, 1957, Colonel Nickerson was found guilty and received the relatively light sentence of loss of rank for one year and a \$1500 fine.

In the aftermath of the court martial the Secretary of Defense, Charles Wilson, as well as six Admirals and Generals were forced to resign and a special review board was set up by President Eisenhower to review all defense contracts.

Four months after the court martial, Russia launched the

first man made satellite, *Sputnik*, into orbit. With worldwide attention now focused on the United States, the Army literally wiped the dust off a Jupiter rocket mothballed at Redstone Arsenal and three months later used it to blast *Explorer*, America's first satellite, into orbit.

The hardware used to launch the satellite was literally the same hardware that had been laying on the shelf, unused, for years.

One year after his court martial the Army restored full security clearance to Colonel John Nickerson.

On March 4, 1964, Nickerson and his wife were killed in an automobile accident near Alamagordo, New Mexico.

The Doctor told my wife to start walking five miles a day, for her health. Last I heard, she was in Arizona.

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Triple Hanging

cont. from page 25

young girl to keep her from being a witness against him. It was ironic that Smith's recapture came when he was having his marriage legally recorded in Jasper.

Grayson, the Hughes brothers, and George Smith were indicted on charges of arson and ordered to stand trial on June 14, 1883.

On the first day of the trial after a jury had already been impaneled by the state and defense, Solicitor Jones began to read the indictment against the four men and, to his surprise, especially since he had written it, an important word was missing which rendered the indictment defective. The prisoners were then carried back to the Scottsboro jail to await an indictment by the next grand jury.

In June, 1884, Grayson, George and Asbury Hughes and George Smith went on trial at the spring term of the circuit court of Jackson County on indictments of arson. The counsel for the defense were General L.P. Walker of Huntsville, Mr. Allen of Rhea County, Tennessee, Judge Haralson of DeKalb County, R.C. Hunt and Judge Coulson of Scottsboro. The state was represented by Hon. J.E. Brown of Scottsboro, Capt. L.W. Day of Huntsville, and Solicitor Jones. Hon. H.C. Speake served as the trial judge. All four of the accused men protested their innocence throughout the trial.

The jury returned a verdict of guilty for all four of the accused. Judge Speake formally pronounced the death penalty upon George Smith and George and Asbury Hughes by hanging and set August 1, 1884 as the execu-

tion date. The jury requested leniency toward John Grayson and he was sentenced to life imprisonment. When the verdict was read Judge Speake polled the jury and called up each prisoner separately to sentence him. The defendants exhibited a marked degree of indifference and all made denials of the whole matter.

When George Hughes was asked why sentence should not be pronounced he said, "The whole Porter layout has lied," then turned to the judge and said, "go on with your talk."

Just as Asbury Hughes was leaving the courtroom, he turned to Judge Speake and said, "Judge, I am going to be hung now and I don't get enough to eat. I want you to see that I get enough before I die."

The defendants took an appeal to the Alabama Supreme Court, which affirmed the decision of the lower court and notified the sheriff by telegraph. The conviction of the four men drew great interest and excitement from the citizens of Scottsboro and Jackson County and in many instances trouble was nar-

rowly averted.

People began gathering in Scottsboro days before the execution, and they continued to arrive until the last hour. On the date of execution an estimated 3,000 persons had surrounded the jail forcing Sheriff Thomas J. Robinson to call in 150 well armed men to quell any disturbance that might occur. Mixed



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feelings were prevalent in Scottsboro and tempers flared. Some people believed the tree men guilty and their sentences justified. Some believed them innocent, and many others thought their sentences too severe. Many of the citizens expected Governor O'Neal to grant a short respite and postpone the hanging because of the extreme youth of George and Asbury Hughes, about twenty and twenty-one years old, respectively. The last resort was taken by the Hon. J.E. Brown, one of the prosecutors of the four men. He wired the governor and asked him to grant a stay of execution. The governor refused the stay and the three began to make preparations for death.

All three condemned men requested to be baptized by immersion, so at 11 o'clock that morning the Rev. J.J. Beeson, of the Baptist church in Scottsboro, immersed them all in a bathtub in a room adjoining the cells: Smith first, George Hughes second and Asbury Hughes last. The Hughes brothers showed very little change of feeling, and in a few moments asked for a chew of tobacco and a cigar. At the request of the prisoners the sacraments were administered at noon. This was the only time Asbury Hughes showed any feeling. He wept bitterly but said nothing.

While these scenes were going on in the jail, the crowd out-

side became very restless and made frequent demands to permit the prisoners to speak. The sheriff first brought George Hughes to the window. He spoke to the crowd with great earnestness, saying: "Gentlemen, I want to call your attention to some facts. I have been treated badly. I have been convicted and am innocent. If you hang me, you hang an innocent man. I was a quarter of a mile below Shellmound the night of the burning. I hope the people of Jackson County will never hang another innocent man. I hope you all will meet me in heaven."

George Smith spoke next and said: "I want to say that I have got to die today but am innocent. I have done some things but didn't do this. You must live religiously and do right. Good-bye." Asbury Hughes said: "Gentlemen, I am going to die, but I will tell the truth and God is my witness. I am innocent of the Porter house burning. I advise all young men to stay home and not go out at night. This is all I have to say."

In an interview with a reporter from the *Weekly Iron Age*, a Birmingham newspaper, Smith said, "I am glad to see you, I want you to tell the world I am innocent. I want you to tell all I ever did. I killed Lum Street in Georgia, but it was in self defense. I never stole anything in my life except watermelons. I was accused of helping to kill revenue officer Davis, but I was not in

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Tennessee at the time."

All three of the men were to be hanged on one gallows with three cross beams. The gallows was located adjoining the wall of the county jail and was enclosed inside a fence sixteen feet high in order for the hanging to be entirely private.

At 12:30 p.m., the procession formed outside the jail for the walk to the gallows. Two Scottsboro ministers went on the scaffold first, followed by members of the press. Sheriff Robinson came next, followed by the prisoners, each between two deputies.

All were seated on benches, when the Rev. F.J. Tyler read the 51st Psalm; then at the prisoners' request the 221st Hymn was sung, commencing with "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood." Smith wept bitterly during the singing.

The Hughes brothers were a little nervous, but looked on with stolid indifference. Rev. C.B. Sanders then offered a prayer. The crowd around the jail was becoming restless. Many of them surged up to the fence and yelled, "Tear down the enclosure; we

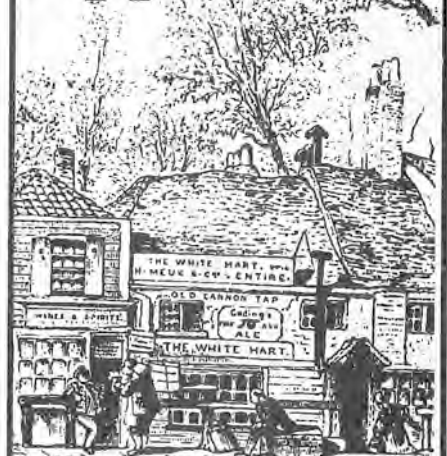
want to see the law carried out." The guards formed in line with guns presented. The prisoners' faces became radiant with hope, and George Hughes jumped up from the bench and attempted to get off the scaffold. A witness to the scene wrote, "It seemed for ten minutes as if the guards would have to fire or be overpowered. Some of the mob wanted to see the hanging and others wanted to see the prisoners." Rev. L.F. White and Judge John B. Tally, two of Scottsboro's most prominent men, addressed the crowd. Judge Tally reminded the people that by Alabama law hangings were to be conducted in private. About this time Smith's wife rushed upon the scaffold and threw her arms around her husband. She was immediately led away by a guard and the nooses were adjusted. Smith seemed badly scared but said nothing. The Hughes brothers were both stolidly calm. Asbury said, "You ought to turn Grayson loose. He was not there." They would say nothing more and deputy Sheriff John C. Johnson cut the rope at 1:08 p.m. Dr. Rorex pronounced

Smith dead at 1:08 p.m.; Dr. Horton, Asbury Hughes at 1:21 p.m.; and Dr. Mahals, George Hughes at 1:22 p.m.

This is the first instance of white men being executed for arson in Alabama. The trial and hanging showed its influence in the next general election in the county and, as a result, the regular Democratic ticket was defeated by the Independents.



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The Creek

by Chip Knight

We called it "the creek" and the maps usually called it "Peter Fagan Creek," but I'm not sure that our parents thought of it by quite so grand a term. In any case, it ran through a pasture which was a few hundred feet from my house (actually, it was my parents' house, but a kid has to live somewhere and to feel like he belongs somewhere). It went nearly dry in the summer and sometimes got ice around the edges during the winter if we had a real cold spell. The topographic maps of the day showed it as an "intermittent stream", shown by a little blue line, not solid, but broken up with a solid segment then several little dots. Real streams which ran all year long were shown with solid lines. I wonder what has happened to the art of map making, I looked at the Topo sheet the other day and "the creek" was shown with a solid blue line, just as big as you please. I went by to check that out, and there it was, just as intermittent as it could be, with a few wet patches and a lot of bare concrete. Spare me, I said the "C" word, and that's not for "c"reek. Excuse me, I got off into left field with that one. It would be better if I were as intolerant of my own errors of both omission and commission as I am of those committed by others.

The creek began somewhere

up on Monte Sano Mountain and was joined by several other little streams on its way to "my" pasture. By the time it arrived in my neighborhood, it had cut about six feet into the ground and was generally fifteen to twenty feet wide and just meandered around all over the place, each larger curve being made up of numerous little wiggles as streams are prone to do. The creek, and the pasture it wandered through, and the herd of black Angus cattle which drank from it and cooled themselves in it were a part of my classroom each summer.

Summer in Huntsville is usually a rather dry season, and it was no different then. The creek slowly shrank from a full flowing stream to a series of pools which were unconnected except following a summer thunderstorm. The pools ran from those about two feet deep on the large side, to the tiny ones, which were enough to keep the underside of the rocks wet. The amazing thing was the variety and the sheer amount of life that each of them held. Where water was deep enough for swimming, there were minnows - not like those you use for fish bait, but little, about the size of a guppy. They were so clear that you could see some of their skeletons just looking at them. And tadpoles of many sizes, from little black ones about as big around as a pencil up to bullfrog tadpoles, which were about as large as a nickel. The bullfrog tadpoles were really interesting, if you looked at their



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undersides, their little bellies were clear, and you could see their intestines all curled up inside.

The shallow areas, where the undersides of the rocks were wet, were home to crawfish, or crawdads, as we called them. They were not very large, but when you picked up a rock, one might shoot out, scampering for other cover. Sometimes it would really startle us, for we had the idea that if we weren't careful, they would grab a finger with their pincers, rather painfully. I think, though, that they were much too small for that.

Anyway, we learned to be careful picking up rocks, because we didn't want to either get our fingers pinched or jump and drop the rock and squash the crawdad.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about all the summertime life in the creek was that it survived the summer thunderstorms which would fill the creek nearly to the tops of the banks and sweep everything downstream. After a storm the creek would go down for several days until it was back down to pools - wet rocks and a few really dry areas—and there would be the minnows, tadpoles and crawdads, just as if the storm had not happened.

The creek was also a good place to play, at least if you were a kid. Our parents pretty well trusted us not to go out and get ourselves killed, and for the most part, they were right, as most of us are still here today.

In about 1955 Huntsville's first TV cable system was built, and the wire used to go from the main cable into the houses was hollow, with a wire on each side. It was a tube, sort of like a tiny hosepipe. When the installers

finished, they just left excess wire on the ground, I suppose to be picked up later. Well, we found the wire, and it was easy to get twenty, thirty feet or more. We knew we had a new toy, but didn't know what to do with it. Finally, an idea came. We found an old can, usually a juice can with just a couple of holes punched in it, and we stuck one end of a piece of this wire into one of the holes and then put the can in one of the deeper pools in the creek. The can floated, but if you sucked on the wire, you sucked water into the can, and it sank. A submarine! When you blew the water out, the can would come to the top again, and this would also push it, sort of like a little jet. We killed a little time with that one.

The creek's personality changed if you followed it upstream to the foot of Monte Sano. It was steeper, and water would flow through a series of little

pools and waterfalls and the creek bed was cutting into the limestone. There was one area, just up from the end of Owens Drive, where a fossil coral bed was being worn out of the surrounding rock. Here, there was a lot of shade, ferns grew along the edges not really banks anymore as the whole creek bed was no more than a foot or eighteen inches deep. The bed itself was largely covered with mosses or lichens, and it was treacherous to try to hike in it—you tended to fall down, which not only hurt, but usually got you a good soaking. In later years, I tried to take a motorcycle up there, and it fell down too. That one really hurt.

I never really followed the creek well up onto the mountain. It just became smaller and smaller until you wondered where all the water could possibly have come from.

Huntsville was growing, and the more it grew and the more

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houses were built and the more streets were paved, the more water ran into the creek—quickly—after each real gullywasher of a thunderstorm or after days on end of nothing but rain. The creek, through no fault of its own, was becoming a giant storm drain.

The granddaddy of them all, at least in my experience, came in March of 1973. It began to rain, and it continued to rain until Noah's Ark began to seem like a pretty good idea. You can still see pictures of it—Big Spring Lagoon flooded over Gallatin Street up to City Hall. The buildings at the intersection of the Parkway and Governors Drive had

water about four or five feet deep. Basements along east Holmes Avenue flooded, not from rain, but from rising groundwater. I know. I had to turn off the gas which was bubbling up through the drowned furnace and find a pump to drain the basement so that I dared go in and replace the electric sump

pump which had been overwhelmed by the water.

We had a proper flood, of the sort I have read and heard that Huntsville used to have back before dams were built along the Tennessee River. That river had a reputation of flooding badly.

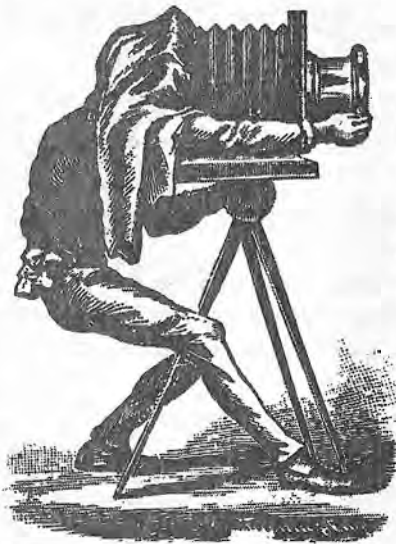
The creek—my creek—and the other creeks in Huntsville, Pinhook, Aldridge, et cetera, just could not drain all that water into the Tennessee, never mind that the Tennessee itself came into flood a little later, which pretty well stopped the creeks from flowing into it.

Nevertheless, the powers that be decided that our little creeks, with their dirt banks and all their little crooks and kinks and minnows and tadpoles, were not efficient in draining the city of Huntsville. So, many of the creeks were "re-engineered", which means that the little crooks and kinks were to be straightened out, and that the rocks and dirt which had lined the creeks were to be replaced with smooth concrete so that

water could flow more smoothly and quickly on its way out of Huntsville and into the Tennessee where it would go on downstream and be somebody else's problem.

That should be the end of the story—the creeks were paved in concrete by 1974 or so. But Mother Nature is still at work. Silt still builds up in the new concrete creeks. Grass and even trees, grow in it, and the silt along with the grass and trees are still there after the creeks fill up with water following a heavy rain. My best guess is that if I were not too lazy to go look, I would still find minnows and tadpoles and crawdads in some of the stuff that has built up in the new concrete creeks.

A few weeks ago I saw a drag line being used to clean the stuff out of a nice, otherwise new looking concrete creek. I think Mother Nature is still a step ahead of us.



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Old Huntsville Trivia

1808 Madison County is formed. There are 2,555 people living in the County at the time.

1815 Dr. William H. Glasgow founds the town of Manchester about half mile above the three forks of Flint River. The town later becomes a ghost town as people move away. Today it's cotton fields.

1817 The first church in Huntsville is built. No records exist as to what denomination it was.

1817 Physicians gather at Talbots Inn on the East Side of the Square to discuss an outbreak of smallpox.

Among measures talked about was the proposal to place armed guards on roads leading into town to prohibit strangers from bringing the disease to Huntsville.

1821 The first mail robbery in Madison County occurs when the carrier to Bennett's store is

robbed. Among the items stolen were the carrier's shoes.

1861 Vigilante committees are formed to help protect Huntsville in wartime.

1874 Six newspapers are being printed in Huntsville at the same time.

1876 New rates are posted for city supplied water. The rates were \$8 for a family of less than 3, \$1 for a family of 3 to 5, and if you had a private bath, it would cost you an additional \$6.

1919 The last County Fair is held downtown on the Courthouse Square. The same year the Tennessee Valley Fair Association purchased land of their own on Church Street.

1937 The first State liquor store opens on Jefferson street in the Hutchens Building. Two year old Red Brook straight bourbon whiskey sells for \$1.30 a quart.

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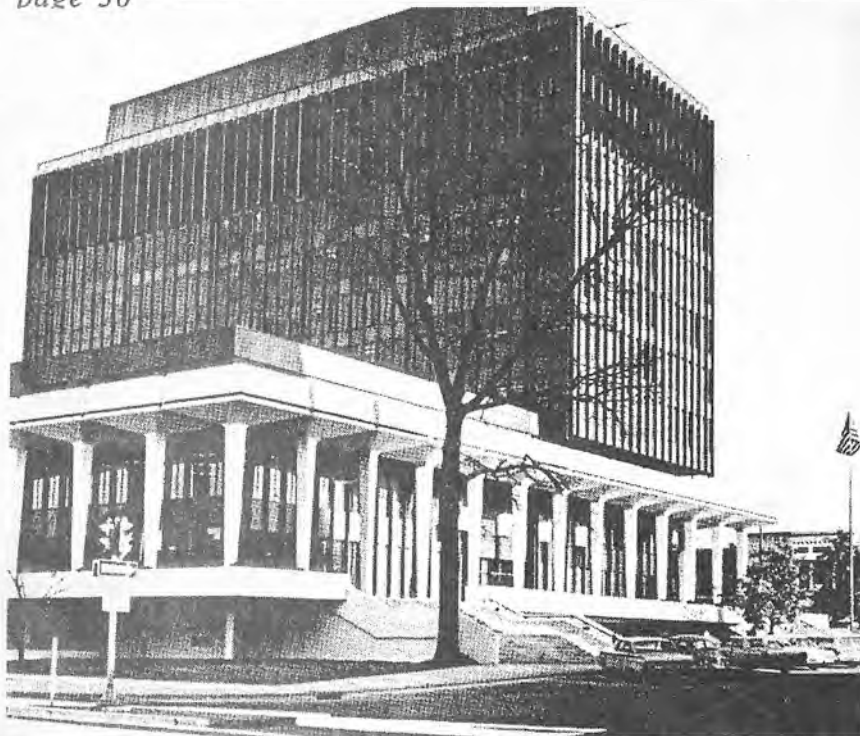
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Buried Treasure Under The Courthouse Square?

by Pat Carpenter

We've all heard the story of the daring Huntsville bank robbery by none other than the infamous Jessie James. How he robbed the bank atop the cliff at the Big Spring in downtown

Huntsville, then, in order to successfully make his getaway, how he spurred his horse over the cliff and into the great spring itself! Truly, a story worthy of the legend of Jessie James. The only problem with this tale is that it never happened. Now, it's true that Jessie's brother Frank was tried and acquitted in Huntsville in 1884 for an earlier Muscle Shoals robbery, but from all historical accounts, Jessie never set

foot in the lovely Tennessee Valley town of Huntsville, Alabama.

Well, there's another tale (tall?) of robbery and daring that too was set in Huntsville. Yet there's been no mystical legend built up around it and hardly anyone remembers or knows anything about it.

It was the spring of 1966. April to be exact. Huntsville was no longer a sleepy Southern town, but it was still a fairly small city of, say 50,000 people. The Space Industry in Huntsville was a little more than three years away from its greatest glory; when Neil Armstrong and company would blast to the moon aboard Huntsville's own version of home cooking, the most powerful rocket ever made, the Saturn V. It was also a time when the old Madison County Courthouse was being torn down to be replaced by a new modern facility that the architects said would be the envy of every other courthouse in the land. In addition, a new Mall had just been constructed in an old pasture at University Drive and Memorial Parkway. For many years this pasture had been a favorite place for kids to go rabbit hunting. Now, it would be a favorite place to go "hang out."

This modern mall would be a boon to Huntsville and North



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Alabama for years to come. Its two anchor stores, Loveman's and J.C. Penney's, brought patrons in by the thousands daily. Business was good for the retailers and the citizens were so happy to have this wonderful place to come and shop.

It was also, apparently, a place someone else was very happy to have around: A professional safe cracker!

In the late night hours of Sunday, April 10, 1966 burglars chopped a hole in the roof of Penney's. Dropping 20 feet to the floor of the room housing the heating and cooling equipment, the burglars then broke through a wooden door leading to the accounting department. The intruders then went to the main floor of the store and availed themselves of a J.C. Penney brand electric drill, sledgehammer and other fine Penney tools which they used to open a large vault.

The desperados must have cased the joint well because they next entered a small second-floor employee dining room and chopped a hole through a wall, directly into the room containing the vault. Using their own cutting torch, the burglars burned a foot square hole in the bottom right corner of the vault door. The thieves took their cutting torch with them but left the other tools behind. Huntsville Police dusted for fingerprints Monday morning, but it looked like the bandits wore gloves and

left no trace of their identity.

A second, smaller safe was left intact inside the larger vault. Police said it contained only a few hundred dollars of office money.

In estimating the loss, a store official said the vault contained about \$20,000 in cash and \$20,000 in checks and credit purchases. The scoundrels took only the cash in the main vault and left the checks and credit purchases scattered about the office and hallway.

Pointing out that the burglars were highly professional, detectives said that upon entering the store, they went immediately to the door through which they eventually escaped and cut off a heavy padlock in order to insure an emergency exit if they were discovered.

Huntsville police worked diligently on the case for many months but no new evidence or leads were ever discovered. The daring burglary was destined to go down in history as unsolved and the perpetrators anonymous masters of their craft -- textbook professionalism at its insidious best. ...

It was a little over four years later and a curious tale began to make the rounds in North Alabama.

It was June, 1970 and an Athens, Alabama man was in Westminster, Maryland. He asked the local police where he could find a room to bed down. They sent him to the local Rescue Mission where he stayed for

two days. While there he met an ex-convict who had done time in the Maryland State Penitentiary.

This ex-convict, upon hearing the man was from North Alabama, told him that he had met another convict in the Maryland State Pen who was, "one of the best safe men in Alabama." This "safe man" told the ex-con that he had burglarized "either a Penney's or Loveman's store" several years earlier in Huntsville.

After he had cracked the safe, the man took his share, which he said was \$12,000 and hid it

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in the construction site of the Madison County Courthouse.

When he went back to get his money a couple of days later, concrete had been poured over the place where it was hidden and he was never able to recover it.

The safe man supposedly had two accomplices.

The Maryland ex-con did not know the date of the burglary but Huntsville Police records show that Penney's in The Mall was broken into the weekend of Easter, April 10, 1966, after the store had closed at 10:15 p.m.

Huntsville Police Department detectives, informed of this curious tale, were, of course, unable to confirm the whereabouts of the money, but did note that the story fit with the known facts of the case.

Pictures of the various stages of the construction in the corridors of the courthouse show that at the time of the break-in the cement columns around the ground floor of the building were

bring poured.

Is this story true? No one can be sure, but it does seem highly possible. We'll probably never find out, at least that is until the time comes when a new courthouse is needed to replace that "marvel of the 1960s."

Then, who knows, maybe the successful bidder for new construction will discover an extra \$12,000 bonus hidden in the bowels of the courthouse square.

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Mama's Garden

Elwanda Hallman

*Come, Friends, into her garden.
She liked to show to all
Each plant in all its glory
From Springtime into Fall.*

*But in the midst of flowers
Vegetables are growing also
Mama was a useful person
See there her spade and hoe.*

*When flowers bloom in Springtime
And in Autumn leaves turn gold
In my own love for beauty
Memories of childhood unfold*

*See in that quiet garden
There's something of her heart,
Not just formal elegance
Nor sophisticated art.*

*A heart of love for others
A face worn from lifelong toil
A soul that reached to Heaven
While hands worked in the soil.*

*She lived through Spring and Summer
The Fall and Winter of life also
Now to a new kind of season
From old age we've seen her go.*

*Will there be seasons up there?
I ask in my questioning mind,
As I think of Mama in a brand new season
Of joyful eternal Springtime!*

(Editor's note: "Mama's" garden was on Pratt Avenue, in Huntsville, where she lived for over 60 years)



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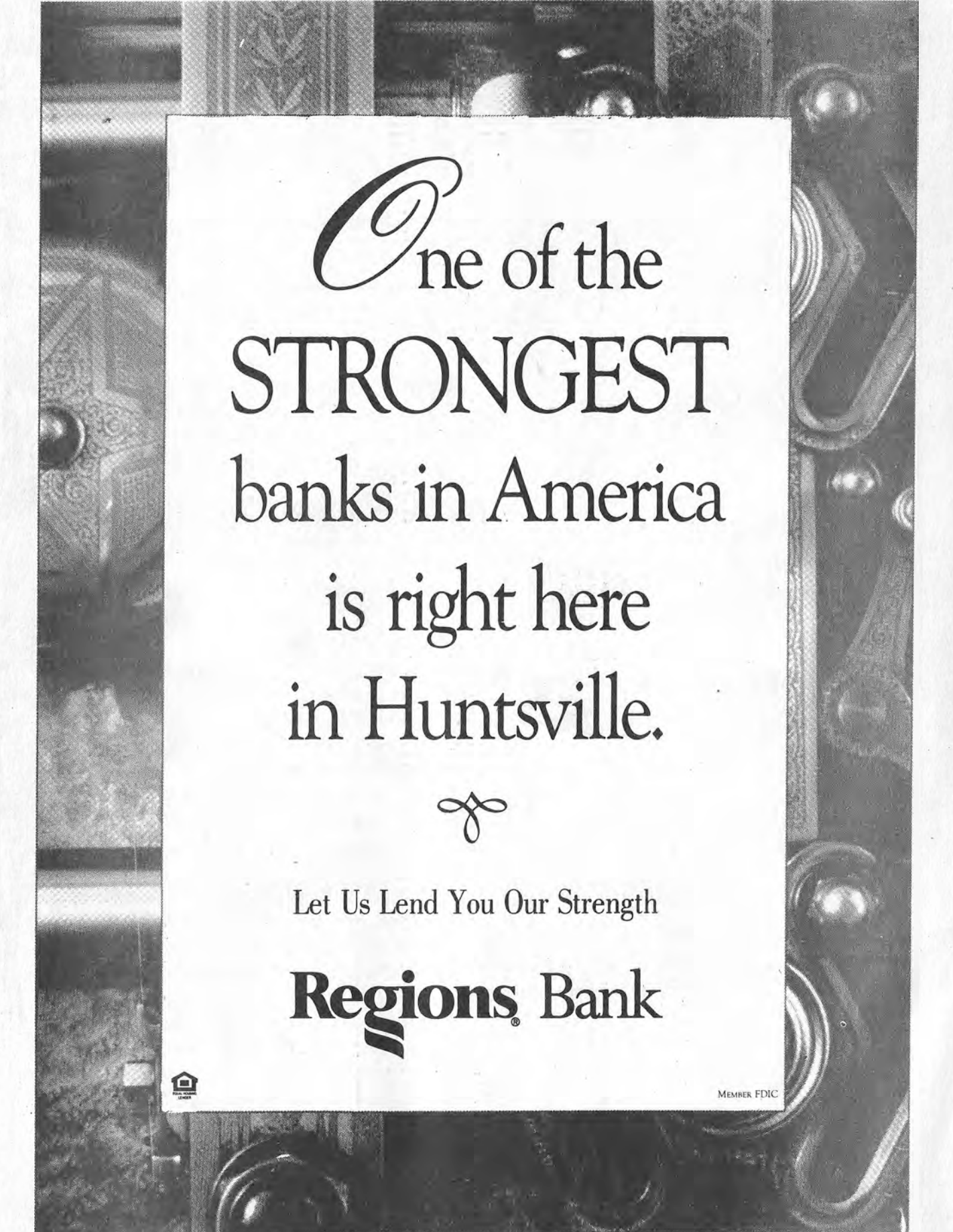
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