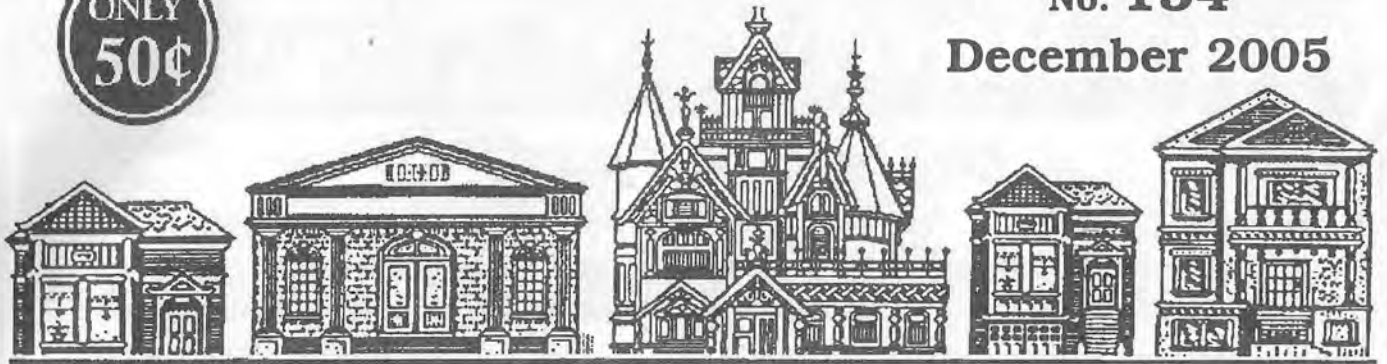


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No. 154
December 2005



Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY



A Mother's Love

I remember that we didn't have a Christmas that year. Sometime during the night one of the neighbors brought word that Aunt Maggie had died. I remember waking up during the night and hearing a strange type of silence. Our home was always quiet at night, but this was a different kind.

It was a sad silence.

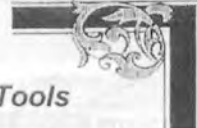
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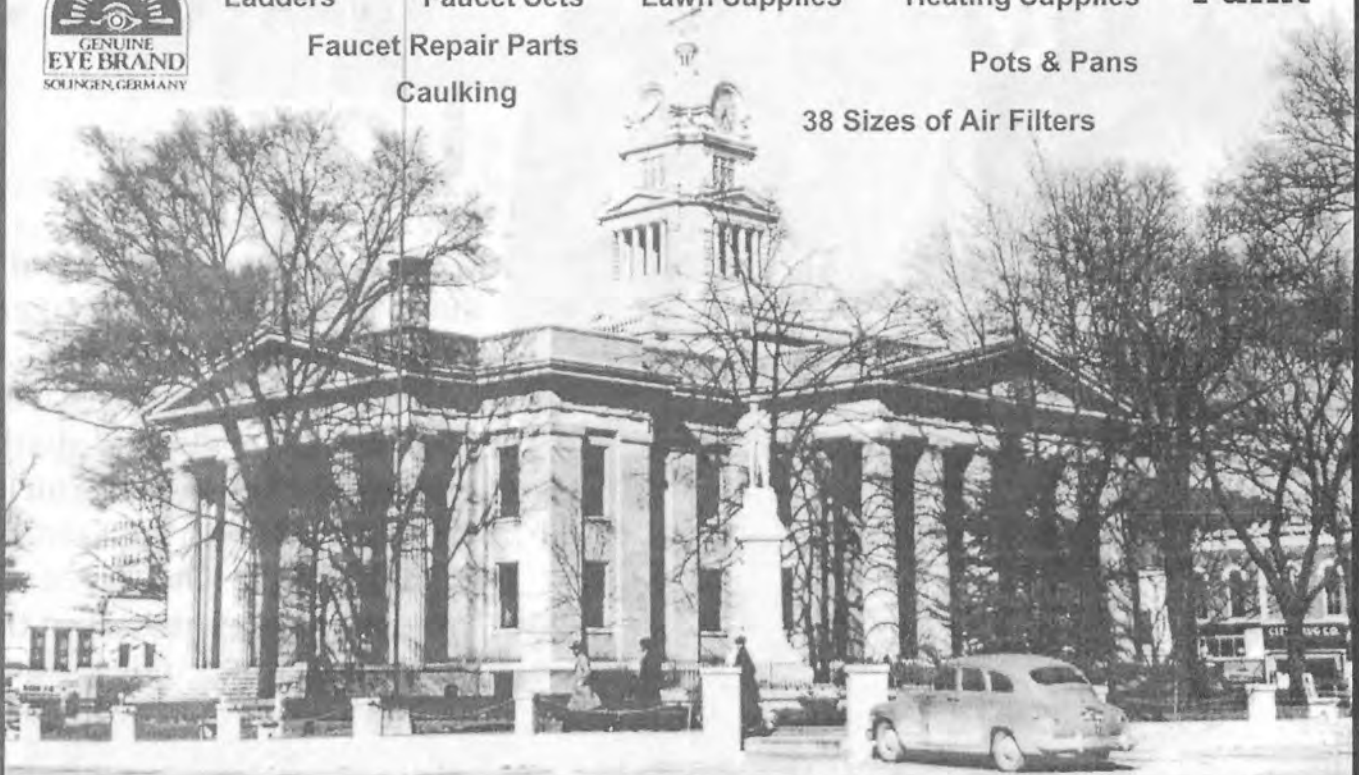
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A Mother's Love

This story was originally printed in Old Huntsville in 1992. Since then we have had so many requests for it we have decided to run it again as our Christmas feature. It is printed just as we received it except that the elderly author's name has been withheld.

There was a hint of snow in the air as we sat in the car outside the bus station trying to stay warm. It was Christmas Eve and the station was crowded with people going home for the holidays. As the bus from Chicago pulled into the Huntsville station and began disgorging its passengers, I watched eagerly, trying to pick out my Aunt Maggie from the hordes of travelers.

The last passenger finally emerged from the bus and there was no sign of her. Uncle Mil, Aunt Rose and I sat there silent for a long time until finally Uncle Mil started the car and we

slowly made our way home.

For a boy of 13 it was devastating. I could not imagine Christmas without Aunt Maggie.

My parents, I had been told, died when I was just a baby. Uncle Mil and Aunt Rose, not having any children, took me to raise as their own.

Huntsville, like the rest of the country, was still suffering from the Great Depression. Uncle Mil worked part time at a sawmill and whenever he was laid off, delivered firewood door-to-door in Huntsville. Often people would not have the money to pay him and would pay him with used clothes, chickens and other items that we could use.

I learned later in life that my aunt and uncle depended largely on money sent by Aunt Maggie from Chicago for their needs.

Aunt Maggie had lived in Chicago for as long as I could remember. I never knew the details at the time except that she had gotten in some kind of trouble and left Huntsville. I never questioned it or even cared to. For me, she was my Aunt Maggie, the most marvelous person in the world.

We used to receive a letter from her every Tuesday. Before I learned how to read and write, Aunt Rose would sit me down at the kitchen table and labori-



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ously, with her limited ability, slowly read the words that Aunt Maggie had written. There were always two letters in the envelope; one for Uncle Mil and Aunt Rose and another, the long one, for me. Her letters were always full of stories and adventures about people she knew and things she had done. Many times they would include photographs or postcards showing the sights of Chicago.

After I started school, Aunt Rose would make me write Aunt Maggie a letter every week. Often I resented the fact that I had to sit and write the letters while my friends were out playing.

A birthday or holiday never went by without Aunt Maggie sending me a present. Even in the fall, when it was time to go back to school, she would send money for my school clothes.

It was no wonder that I began to think of Aunt Maggie as being rich. Though we lived in a little three room tar-paper house, the fact that I had a rich aunt up in Chicago seemed to make me the equal of anyone.

Aunt Maggie always came home for Christmas. Uncle Mil and I would take the axe on the day before Christmas and search until we found the perfect Christmas tree. It was normally a scrawny little cedar bush, but to me it was always the grandest tree in the world. In the evening we would drive to

Huntsville to pick up Aunt Maggie at the bus depot. It was always a thrill to see her get off the bus. She would be dressed in the latest clothes with her hair done up beautifully and carrying large bags full of Christmas presents.

One year when I was about eight or nine we were making Christmas ornaments at school. I remember I made a little wooden Christmas tree and painted it green. I had a photograph of Aunt Maggie that I thought was the most beautiful in the world and after carefully cutting her head out of the picture, I pasted it on the ornament.

That year when Aunt Maggie came home I proudly showed her my handiwork. She had a real funny look on her face and then she started crying. Aunt Rose and Uncle Mil never said anything.

I was 13 the last time we went to get Aunt Maggie at the depot. Aunt Rose had already told me that Aunt Maggie might not be able to come home that Christmas, but in my youthful enthusiasm I refused to listen. I insisted that we go to the bus station just in case.

Aunt Rose and Uncle Mil were silent on the drive home while I sat in the back seat feeling sorry for myself. I just couldn't imagine my Aunt Maggie not coming home for Christmas.

We did not have a Christmas

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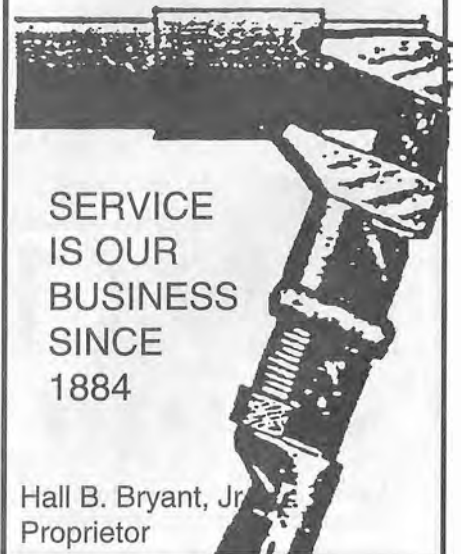
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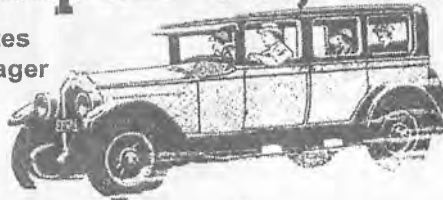
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that year. Sometime during the night one of the neighbors brought word that Aunt Maggie had died. I remember waking up during the night and hearing a strange type of silence. Our home was always quiet at night, but this was a different kind. It was a sad silence.

Uncle Mil and Aunt Rose and I embarked on the long drive to Chicago. I remember hearing them talk about cancer and making arrangements and what to do with her things.

Later that day we stopped in Indiana to eat the biscuits and ham that Aunt Rose had packed. Then she and I got out of the car to stretch while Uncle Mil stayed and listened to the radio.

Aunt Rose had always been a strong woman but when she heard the Christmas carols they were playing on the radio she started to cry. Uncle Mil made me ride in the front seat with him for the rest of the trip and Aunt Rose lay in the back.

When we finally reached Chicago I was not prepared for the rundown, shabby tenement that Aunt Maggie had called home. It was a two-room efficiency with dirty walls and torn wallpaper hanging from the ceiling. It had hardly any furniture.

The only bright spot in the room was a small Christmas tree in the corner with presents piled around in bright festive wrappings. The tree was decorated with pieces of tinfoil, a few pieces of fake holly and a single

ornament.

The ornament was the small green wooden Christmas tree with Aunt Maggie's picture on it.

All the presents under the tree, with the exception of one each for Aunt Rose and Uncle Mil, were for me.

Uncle Mil left to go somewhere and see about burial arrangements while Aunt Rose and I stayed to pack her belongings. I remember she had what seemed like hundreds of photographs of me. There were pictures of me on my first day at school, playing baseball, fishing and even one of me shooting marbles.

Aunt Maggie was buried the next day in a small cemetery in Chicago. The only people there were Uncle Mil, Aunt Rose, Aunt Maggie's landlady and me. There was no tombstone. There was no money for one.

Though it sounds strange, life improved for Uncle Mil and Aunt Rose after Aunt Maggie died. She had left an insurance policy and Uncle Mil was able to buy a small house in West Huntsville. Soon he got hired at Merrimac Mills where he was, for the first time in his life, able to earn a comfortable living.

I received my draft notice in 1942 and was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, when I received word that Uncle Mil had died. Aunt Rose had died the year before and since I was the last of the family, I was granted a brief furlough.

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The day after the funeral I began to go through Uncle Mil's papers. He had saved almost every letter he had ever received and among them was a box containing letters from Aunt Maggie. With a nostalgic feeling I began to read the words my Aunt had written about me many years earlier.

The nostalgic feeling quickly turned into one of disbelief as I read further, as Maggie described her love for a young son she had treasured. Then the incredible truth became shockingly clear - Aunt Maggie, the woman who had written me so many letters and sent me so many presents, was my mother! For a moment I could not move, overcome with conflicting emotions.

In disbelief, I grabbed the small stack of letters and raced next door to see Mr. Kiles, one of Uncle Mil's oldest fiends. Even after confronting him with the facts, he was still reluctant to say anything.

Finally after seeing my determination Mr. Kites said, "Son, don't hold it against your mother. She really thought you would have a better life this way. She did the best she could. She loved you so

much."

I returned to Fort Bliss with a heavy heart. All of my childhood memories were destroyed. Every time one of my army buddies would make a crack about an illegitimate child or a loose woman I would cringe inside. I refused to talk to anyone about my family.

When I got married in 1956 my wife, sensing a reluctance on my part to talk about it, never asked about my family. The first Christmas we spent together was hard for me. Every time I looked at the Christmas tree I was haunted by memories of another Christmas tree in a cold water flat in Chicago; of an aunt who was really my mother.

We started attending church when my wife learned she was pregnant. I had never been much of a churchgoer but I wanted our child to be raised in a proper environment.

J. Otis King was the preacher and, though I admired him, I rarely listened to his sermons, preferring to daydream about other matters. One day we were sitting in church and I was thinking about cutting grass or whatever when Brother J. Otis

began to preach about love. He used a parable about the man who had given up everything so that his children might have a better life. Though I tried to return to my daydreams, his words kept coming

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back to haunt me.

"There is no greater love," the preacher said, "than that of a mother for her children."

"How many mothers," he asked, "have done without so that their children might have something?"

Every time he raised his finger to point at something it seemed as if it was pointed straight at me.

My wife could tell that I was upset when we left the church, but she never said anything at the time. That evening after dinner I told her about Maggie and the shame I had felt when I learned the truth.

My wife sat silent for a long time. Finally she said, "Your mother must have loved you very much."

That was the first time she ever saw me cry.

The following year I went to Chicago on a business trip and my wife accompanied me. While there, we placed a tombstone on Maggie's grave.

And every year we hang a special memento on our Christmas tree; a small wooden ornament, timeworn and aged, on which is pasted a yellowing picture of a proud and elegant lady, my mother.

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- 1 1/2 cups fresh cranberries
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup margarine, melted

Grease a 9" pie plate and spread the cranberries on the bottom. Mix the nuts and brown sugar and sprinkle this over the cranberries. Beat the egg til thick, gradually add sugar and beat til thoroughly mixed. Stir in the flour and melted margarine. Blend well. Pour this mixture over the cranberries and bake in a preheated 325 oven for 45 minutes. Serve with either whipped topping mixed with a little almond flavoring, or try vanilla ice cream.

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2. *Eden of the South* by Huntsville/Madison County Public Library, edited by Raneë Pruitt \$29.95

3. *Dr. Space: The Life of Wernher von Braun* by Bob Ward \$29.95

4. *Through the Garden Gate: The Gardens of Historic Huntsville* by Donna Castellano \$30.00

5. *Alabama's Canyons: The Bankhead National Forest* by Charles Seifried & Jim Felder \$29.95

6. *Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as "Flake White"*. Compiled by Sarah Fisk and Linda Riley \$22.95

7. *Tales of Huntsville Caves* by Huntsville Grotto, National Speleological Society \$12.95

8. *Why is it Named That? 250 Place Names in Huntsville/Madison County* (new edition with a few corrections) by Dex Nilsson \$13.95

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Boy Held as Slave on Island in Tennessee River

from 1906 newspaper

Adam Greene, the negro boy of Limestone County, who has obtained a judgment for \$1,500 against C.N. Robinson & Co., of that county, for services rendered during a year and a half of involuntary detention on an island in the Tennessee River, has only one more move between him and his money, that of an application to the supreme court for a rehearing of the case. This application has been made and the court will go over it in a few days.

The story of the treatment of this negro boy, as shown by the records of the court, is one of great interest. It appears that he was sent to the island for some cattle and then kept there a year and a half and forced to work whether he would or not, the allegation being made that he was imprisoned in an old shanty and the

boats kept locked so he could not get away. The river is too wide to swim, and he was a virtual prisoner all the time.

It is alleged that he was given practically no food or substance and that he nearly starved to death. His gaunt and fragile condition upon observation is proof of this fact.

The lower court gave a verdict for \$1,500 which was sustained by the supreme court in an especially able opinion by Justice Haralson. It is regarded as not unlikely that the United States court may take up the case and prosecute on the criminal charge of peonage.

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Christmas Cheer

Earl Frazier and J. B. Webb had a strange relationship. They were good friends and spent much time in each another's company. They shared the same friends and had even once talked about opening up a garage together. Unfortunately, J. B. Webb was a bootlegger and Earl Frazier was a deputy sheriff.

Needless to say, Huntsville in the 1950s and '60s was a much different place than today. It was still a small rural community where everyone knew everyone and a man's word was his bond.

J. B. Webb's bootlegging enterprise operated out of an old frame house off of Monroe Street. It was reported that he began the first "curb service" in Huntsville. A customer could pull into an alley next to J. B.'s house, blow his horn and someone would take his order. Webb stocked a wide variety of beers, whiskeys and an occasional jar of moonshine, all of which found a ready market among

Huntsville's citizens.

Webb and Frazier had been friends for years when Webb heard the new sheriff was looking for another deputy. Immediately he sent word to the sheriff, recommending Frazier for the position. Earl Frazier was well qualified for the job. He was honest, a native of Huntsville and above all, a man whose physical size demanded instant respect from any would-be law breakers.

Soon after being sworn in as Madison County's newest deputy, Earl stopped by to express his thanks to J. B.

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After exchanging greetings, the two men sat down at the kitchen table to enjoy a drink and talk of old times, much in the same manner they had done for years.

Their conversation was interrupted, however, by the loud blowing of a car horn in the alley next door. Webb disappeared outside, took the order and then came back in the house to get the merchandise.

"I wish you hadn't done that," drawled the deputy as he watched Webb retrieve two bottles of whiskey from the cupboard.

"Why?" Replied Webb, not really paying attention. "Cause now I got to arrest you for selling."

Strange as it may seem to people today, Frazier had sworn to uphold the law regardless of his personal friendships. Even stranger was the fact that J. B. respected him for it.

Periodically, just before elections or holidays, Huntsville's finest would stage raids on the community's bootleggers. Though it was a nuisance, J. B. Webb accepted it as the cost of doing business.

One time, however, he received a tip about an impending raid that worried him. He had just received three cases of an expensive Scotch, part of his Christmas stock and he could not afford to have it confiscated.

Hurriedly placing the liquor in the back of his pink convertible, he drove to Earl's house where he hid it inside a shed behind the house.

Just like clockwork, the police arrived the next week and raided the premises. After they left, Webb sat down at the table to have a drink when Earl walked in carrying a package.

"J. B.," he said, "I just wanted to come by early and give you your Christmas present."

The old bootlegger, after expressing his thanks, opened the package to reveal a bottle of expensive, aged Scotch.

Touched by his friend's generosity, Webb asked, "Where did you ever find such good Scotch?"

"Oh, it's nothing," the deputy replied. "I was cleaning out my woodshed the other day and I found a few cases I must have forgot about, so I figured I'd give them for Christmas presents."

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A Christmas Eve Letter

Editors Note: This letter was written by A. R. Wiggs of the Madison Rifles of Huntsville, Ala. on Christmas Eve, 1861.

Bowling Green, Ky.
Dec. 24, 1861.

Dear Jack: I would write you a letter, if I felt like it, but, as the spirit does not move me to write today, I will content myself with sending you an apology, merely to inform you that the 7th Alabama Regiment is now in its wanted position - facing the enemy. When I wrote you last, we were basking in the sunshine of peace away up in East Tennessee, where the clouds of war could only be seen in the dim distance. Now, we are immediately under the cloud, and a daily expectation of bursting upon us. And, when it does burst, there will be the storm, such as has never before been known on the American continent.

Fabulous hordes of Yankees are advancing upon us, "many ten thousands" of them having crossed Green River, some forty miles north of us. Our army stands ready, waiting and impatient for the shock.

The two armies are so near to each other, that pickets meet almost every day and exchange shots. Our boys, especially the

Texas Rangers, seem to take delight in picking off the Hessian outposts. As to our Regiment, we feel at home more being in a position to do our country some service before our time of service expires, and to shake off the disgrace of having been detailed to guard the bridges in East Tennessee, for you must know that before coming here our regiment was divided into detachments and sent to different points along the railroad. The detachment to which your correspondent was attached, was stationed at Loudon, at which place we gave ourselves up to luxury and ease, and dream like ambition. Being well quartered and believing that we were stationary for the winter, we donned our Sunday clothes, took board at the hotels, cultivated the acquaintance of the ladies, and began to feel very like

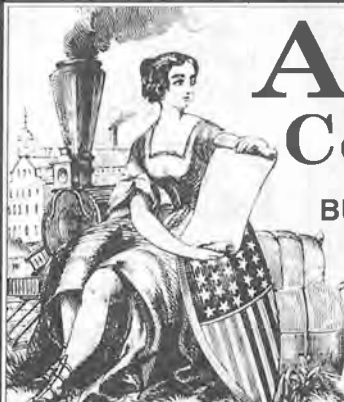
Mule Thieves In New Hope

from 1893 newspaper

John W. Buford, a planter from the New Hope neighborhood, reported to the police late yesterday afternoon that two of his tenants stole from his place two fine mules and when last heard of were coming in the direction of the city.

According to the description furnished by Buford, the thieves are notoriously shifty and not known for their mental prowess. When last seen they were both under the influence of whiskey.


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civilians, nor cared for the hardship of our fellow soldiers at other posts. But in the midst of our ease and enjoyment, word came that we were wanted at Bowling Green: that the Northern vandals were pressing our people hard at this point.

The news aroused us. We bade adieu to inglorious ease, put on the soldier again, and came forth as eager to conquer or die for our country; nor shall we properly rest until we do service worthy of Alabamians! The 7th stands high here, and is recognized by Gen. Hardee, the best drilled regiment in the army - a compliment indeed when we consider the great number of regiments in the field. We are ambitious to sustain our reputation for good drilling, and to make one for good fighting.

But I did not sit down to write a letter, but simply to let you and the friends of the army know we are still in the field, ready and anxious to do our duty. Letter writing in our camp is no easy business, or I might write more. That you may know the difficulties under which I labor at this time, I will as near as I can, draw the picture that surrounds me.

I will introduce you to our tent, and let you see for yourself. You see, the tent is circular in shape, and large enough to contain twelve men, with a squeeze. In the centre is a hole in the ground, about eighteen inches square and one foot deep, and in it some smoldering sticks of wood, making a vigorous effort to burn,

(for the day is chilly).

From this excavation is a subterranean flue extending to the outside of the tent, designed but woefully failing to draw the smoke from the interior of the tent.

An impromptu chimney, made of two upright flour barrels, one on top of the other just outside, fails to render the necessary assistance. The smoke persistently refuses to be drawn, preferring to lounge and eddy about within the tent, causing discomfort when we try to breathe.

Now, in this smoke, on twelve pallets of straw, lie or sit twelve men, radiating out from the centre like the spokes of a wheel, wiping their red eyes and endeavoring most strenuously to be jolly. One is singing, "Do they

miss me at home," another "Dixie," a third is mending his pants, a fourth is telling to two or three listeners a marvelous yarn, a fifth is reading aloud the newspaper comments on the Mason and Slidell affair. The rest are discussing Christmas, which will be upon us tomorrow - while your correspondent, in the midst of this clamor and confusion, sits and writes upon his knee. Do you wonder at the dullness of this letter? Or would you wonder if I did write at all?

Wishing you and all my friends a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

I remain, A.R. Wiggs





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Sometimes Nothing Else Will Do!

A Present From The Bank

by Billy Joe Cooley

We were dirt poor and didn't know it. Money was in short supply in our rural Tennessee home during those Great Depression days of the 1930s. My uncle James was 14 and I was 7, the only males in our household. Dad and mama had divorced when I was a year old so I lived with my widowed grandmother Looney and two teen-aged aunts, both schoolgirls (and Uncle James), while mama worked hundreds of miles away in the hosiery mills of Hickory, North Carolina. Uncle James had quit school at age 12 to work on Gonce's Farm and help support us.

While our family was loaded with love and had strong Presbyterian faith, that was about all we had. The 1938 season was the first Christmas I can recall. I was old enough to realize that we had no money for gifts, but there were oranges, nuts and hard candy given out by "Old Santa" as he came down the aisle during the Christmas Eve church service. I didn't torture myself with foolish optimism about Christmas morning. I'd be grateful for the church

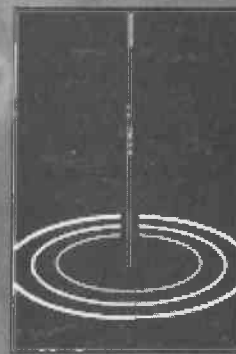
goodies and for having mama home for a week.

Christmas Day started with the same daily prayer that I have continued to this day: "Thank you Jesus for waking me up this morning. You didn't have to do it, but you did." My young aunts quickly fixed a breakfast of grits, fried pork fatback, cornflakes and grapefruit, all of which were government commodities we had gotten off the monthly relief truck. It was a fine breakfast, nonetheless.

Mama got us all into the living room and Uncle James handed out our presents, there was one per person. Mine was a pair of long handle underwear. Grandma Looney got a new kerosene lamp (we didn't have electricity at our house).

Then all eyes focused on me, the only kid in the family, and five smiling faces watched as mama handed me a second present. Gosh! I sure felt special. She had bought for me an orange colored gasoline trans-

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port truck, 18 inches long and with a "Good Gulf" decal on the side. That was my favorite toy for years afterward.

Then grandma and the girls went into the kitchen and started fixing Christmas dinner, the dessert for which was vinegar pie, a deliciously tart concoction of sugar, vinegar and stuff, with a few pinches of love and magic. It was the grandest Christmas of my young life.

The next day we were visited by Mr. Nelson Van Hoosier who worked at South Pittsburg's First National Bank. He handed Grandma Looney an envelope. I hoped it was money. Grandma couldn't read English, so mama read the enclosed letter to her. It was a notice of foreclosure on our house.

Merry Christmas

New Theatre Opens In Huntsville

from 1914 newspaper

W.L. Humphrey has taken a lease on the store room in the Struve Building on Washington Street, and will establish there a first class amusement to be known as the "Theatre." A stage will be erected to be used by vaudeville performers who will be brought here for regular dates and opera chairs will be raised, so that a clear view of the stage can be had. The seating capacity of the auditorium will be 100.

A picture machine will show the latest in the moving picture line. Picture slot machines will be installed as well as other devices for the amusement of the public. Many novelties will be provided that have never been seen in Huntsville before.

Gone To Texas

My wife has left my bed, my dog has died. The bank is taking my farm and I am gone to Texas. For sale cheap: four rooms of seasoned furniture, assorted farm tools and one brood mare. The goods can be seen at Lawson's livery the Friday next at noon. All sales are for cash money only

*Taken from 1874
publication*

**Seat belts are not nearly
as confining as
wheel chairs.**

Who's Going To Pay Your Bills?

A recent survey showed that 3 out of 4 people will need long term care at some point in their lives. One stay in a nursing facility has the potential to completely wipe out your 401K, savings or retirement.

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Tips From Liz

* The holiday season is prime time for certain types of people to prey on older citizens. **If you don't read anything else in this magazine, read this.** Don't EVER give out your credit card number to anyone who calls you. If someone tells you they've found money and will split it with you if you give them money first, DON'T DO IT - it's a scam and it fools so many people every year.

And **don't ever** pull your wallet out in a parking lot if someone asks you for money. Don't be so trustful, they are out to hurt you and to take your money. Always watch your surroundings. Remember this!

*If you have a large family of adults, think about choosing names to exchange gifts with. Then get the kids whatever you want. In the rush of opening presents, no one will notice there are a few less gifts.

* Sober up someone who is a bit tipsy by massaging the tip of his/her nose.

* If you get a bad paper cut, dip your finger in lemon juice, then in powdered cloves. Cloves act as a mild anesthetic and the pain will be gone in seconds.

* Try eating strawberries next time you have a headache. They contain organic salicylates, which are like the active ingredients in aspirin.

* Cherries are great for arthritis relief. Eat any kind - sweet or sour, fresh canned or frozen - eat

a handful then follow it up with a glass of cherry juice, with minimal sugar. You'll see the difference in just a few days.

* This is a good time to visit your favorite plant nursery, like Bennett's or Earth Touch. The crowds are low, and you can browse their cold weather plants. Also, pick out bulbs for spring.

* If you're looking for a pretty winter arrangement for your window boxes, why not try centering a small boxwood in the middle and adding some sprigs of ivy & holly for color?

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Heard On The Street

by *Cathey Carney*



That little girl with the beautiful eyes in last month's Photo of the Month was (as many of you identified) **Marie Hewett**, who owns the Pama Agency. But only the first correct caller wins, and that person was **Dale Rhoades**, a very popular teacher who taught at **Randolph School** over 30 years ago.

It was great to catch up with that great bartender at Judge Craters, **Kevin Weil**. He was taking good care of lots of folks the night we saw him, including **Louie & Jane Tippett** and **Pat Edwards**.

We neighbored with **Hilda Stutzman** and **Ron English** recently, at MAB Paints. They have each worked there, in that location, for 32 years! Ron is an amazing musician who used to play with **Jerry Lee Lewis**, **Charlie Rich**, **George Jones** and other greats. And Hilda is the sweet lady who greets everyone who does business with them.

Don Howie was a wonderful man to know. He died at age 47 after battling cancer. Our love goes to the family and many friends, who will miss him so much.

Emily Faith Tallant turns one year old Dec. 7, and her parents

Pam Halcome and **Bruce Lee Tallant** are so proud of her. Her Nana and Pappa are **Joan & Stacy Hatfield**. Happy Birthday Emily!

Cheryl Tribble, of Atlanta, and her mom **Barbara Fortner**, from California, recently visited Huntsville on their annual trek to our city. Barbara, not from the south, is truly Scarlett in her heart, and they both love Huntsville and its people. Cheryl recently retired from **Hewlett-Packard Co.** and we are trying to convince her she needs to take it easy for a while!

It was good to see **Seg & Anita Parks** recently. Anita is a gorgeous lady! Their daughter **Sheila** is married to **Glenn Brooks**, and we heard that Glenn's sister **Barbara Moyers** has good news - her sister **Becky Foster** and hubby **Jake Foster** are moving here from Daphne, Al. Welcome!

Ann Speck, of Huntsville, recently told me that in the Mississippi coastal areas devastated by Katrina the two items that women

are asking for is (1) a **Bible**, and (2) a **cookbook**. These people lost everything in the disaster and feel that if they had these two items they could start up again. So Ann is taking cookbooks down to many folks down there. It's amazing what people ask for, when they have lost everything. Ann's leading an effort to get people to donate used or new cookbooks, and more information about this will be in the news soon.

Happy birthday to J. M. O'Neal of Paint Rock! That handsome man just turned 85! Come see us!

Judy Kitchen, of Huntsville, told us that her cousin **Frank Osborne** recently lost his wife **Glenna**. They had been married 52 years. We want to send our sympathy to Frank, a sweet guy.

Jere Miller Murphy, Sr. recently died at 82, and he left so many people who loved and remember him. Brother-in-law **Cecil Ashburn** said that he'll never forget him.

Krisa Gurley is a sixth-grader at Chapman Middle School and

Photo of The Month

The first person to correctly identify the youngster below wins a full one-year subscription to "Old Huntsville" magazine.

Call (256) 534-3355.

Hint: This little country boy spends a lot of his time in Montgomery.



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recently turned 13, which is a milestone. Dad **Tom Gurley** and stepmom **Donna Gurley** are so proud of her.

It was really good to meet **Frank White** at Starfish recently. He is Creative Services Director at Fox 54 WZDX-TV, and we sure enjoyed talking with him.

Harry and Gloria Pennington are sure proud of their son **Tom Parker**. He is State Supreme Court Judge in Montgomery, married to **Dottie**, a niece of Fob James. Harry is well-known in Huntsville and is a retired judge.

Pam DeLozier is everywhere these days. She works as a realtor at Ritch Realty and it seems like everywhere we go, we see her! She's a great lady.

We recently ran across our good friend **George Wallace, Jr.** That man looks more like his father every year that goes by.

We talked with **Bob Riley** recently at a party and he sure can mesmerize an audience. He looks so much better in person than he does on TV. **Glenn Watson**, city councilman was there, along with **Charlie Cox, Perry Hooper, Jr., Joe Whisenant, John Glenn, Joyce Russell,** and **Dick Richardson**, with many others.

At this party was the best BBQ chicken, baked beans and fixings, and we found out that **Blake Dorning**, Sheriff of Madison County and also attending the event, had cooked it all! Who knew that he was such a great cook?!

It was so good to see our friend **Kim Davis** recently. Her husband **Terry Davis** is such a sweet guy and is running for Madison County School Superintendent. Kim is Marketing Director at **Redstone Village**, and the folks there absolutely love seeing her everyday!

Tyler Deshon Holman is the new feisty son of proud mom **Laquanda Marie Ford**. He was born weighing only 3 pounds, 7 ounces but is gaining weight and doing real well. Congratulations!

Grandma **Liz Ford** loves him!

G a n n Bryan, New York Life Ins. Co. agent, and his sweet wife **Katie** celebrated his 40th birthday recently. His 9-month old son **Jack** was partying right along with them!

It was good to see our friend **Jeanne Herrin** recently. She sure is proud of her two teenage sons, **Blake**, and **Chad**, both football players.

A special Happy Holidays to the "LEGS" security detail at Madison Courthouse!

Have a safe and wonderful Christmas!



New Arrivals!

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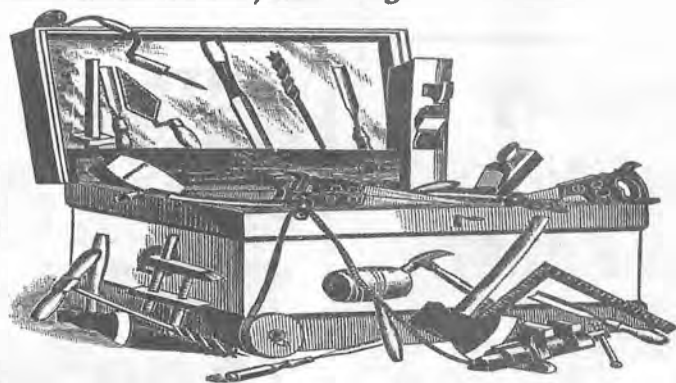
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Hazelnut Butter Crunch

- 1/2 c. all-purpose flour
- 1/3 c. chopped hazelnuts
- 1/4 c. packed brown sugar
- 1/4 c. butter

Mix all til crumbly - distribute evenly in ungreased 13 x 9 inch pan. Bake at 400 degrees til golden brown, 7 to 10 minutes. Stir & cool, store in covered container or give as a gift.

Chocolate Nut Truffles

- 1 c. Eagle Brand condensed milk

- 4 oz. chocolate chips
- 2 1/2 c. powdered sugar
- 1 t. vanilla
- 1 c. chopped pecans

Melt chocolate in top of a double boiler. Add the condensed milk, let it cook 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, add sugar, blending thoroughly. Add vanilla and nuts, shape as desired. Dip in melted chocolate or roll in coconut or cocoa powder.

Grandma's Lace Cookies

- 2 sticks butter, softened
- 3 c. brown sugar, packed
- 1 egg
- 1/4 t. salt
- 1 t. vanilla or almond extract
- 4 c. quick rolled oats

With your mixer, blend the butter and sugar. Add egg, vanilla salt and blend in oats. Spray a

light coating of oil on a cookie sheet. make small balls on the sheet, two inches apart, and don't overcook. Bake at 325 degrees for 8 minutes. Cool completely before removing them from cookie pan or they'll stick together.

Coconut Meringues

- 4 egg whites
- 1 1/4 c. sugar
- 2 1/2 c. coconut, shredded
- 1/2 t. vanilla
- 1/4 t. salt

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Lightly grease a cookie sheet. Beat your egg whites in a deep glass bowl til foamy, beat in sugar, continue beating until stiff and glossy. Do not underbeat. Fold in remaining ingredients, drop mixture by heaping teaspoonfuls about 2 inches apart onto your cookie sheet.

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Toasted Almond Brittle

2 c. sugar
1 c. almonds, slivered & toasted
3 T. butter
Pinch soda

Cook sugar in an iron skillet over low heat, stirring constantly til it forms a syrup.

Remove from stove and stir in the almonds. Add butter and soda, pour onto greased cookie sheet to cool, break into pieces when cool and store.

Macaroons

1 16-oz. pkg. angel food cake mix (1 step)
1/2 c. water
1 1/2 t. almond extract
2 c. flaked coconut

In a bowl beat the cake mix, water and extract, use low speed for 30 seconds. Scrape, beat on medium speed for another minute. Fold in the coconut, stir. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto a parchment paper-lined baking

sheet.

Bake at 350 degrees for 10-12 minutes, remove paper with cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

Best Dark Fudge

3 c. chocolate chips, semi-sweet
1 dash salt
1 1/2 t. vanilla extract
1 can Eagle Brand sweetened condensed milk
2 c. walnuts or pecans, chopped

In a heavy saucepan over low heat, melt the chips with the Eagle Brand and salt. Remove from heat, stir in the nuts and vanilla. Spread evenly over wax-paper-lined 9 x 13" pan, quickly because it will harden. Cover and chill overnight - next day turn fudge onto cutting board and remove wax paper, cut into small squares, store in refrigerator.

Forgotten Crispies

2 1/2 c. powdered sugar
4 egg whites
1 t. cream of tartar
1 t. vanilla
1 c. chopped pecans
Beat all ingredients except

nuts for 15 minutes, then add nuts and drop by teaspoonfuls onto greased cookie sheet.

Bake at 225 degrees for an hour, turn heat off, leave in oven til cool.



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Growing Up In Huntsville

by **Barbara Lauster-Scott**

As director of the Weeden House Museum, I am blessed with the job of reliving history day after day, not only to locals, but to people from all over the world. Being a native, it's a joy to go back in time and share stories of my childhood and how it was in Huntsville and Gurley in the 1950's. My first recollection was about age six and being always brave and independent, I would often slip off from my grandmother and explore the city. In those days, children were often seen playing about and many times unattended. I had several usual stops and many favorites. Usually my first visit would be to the Bon Aire restaurant where I would hop up on the stool and look pitiful and someone would always feed me. Then I would often knock on the back door of the Grand or Lyric theatre and some nice person would open the door and let me watch the movie. My grandfather, William Elmore, would take me to the old National Guard Armory

where we would watch the wrestling matches. Well, he would watch and I would hide outside the wrestler's dressing rooms and when they would emerge, I would pull the hair on their legs. We often got thrown out of there.

Then one day we relocated across town and I had new territory to explore and that I did. We moved near Ninth Avenue and I loved the railroad track so much that each day I would walk it until I got to Huntsville Roofing, located on Triana Boulevard. I would run up and down the aisles of lumber calling for my great-grandfather, Richard Elmore, and when I would locate him, beg for a nickel. Most times if he was not there, some kind soul would provide me with that nickel and even other times I would end up with several. This provided me enough to go across the street to Mr. Brown's grocery and climb up on his stool and get three large cookies out of the old timey jars and all for a nickel. Sometimes I would have enough left over to go to the Center theatre for a movie for a dime.

Then we relocated once again, far from the city to a place called Keel Mountain. My grandpa and I must have looked funny traveling out highway 72 in horse and wagon carrying our worldly belongings. We moved

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4440 Hwy. 72, #A - 3 BRs, 2 BAs, 3 years old. French doors in master, FP with blower, kitchen island. Will need to be moved. (62-4440H)



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Happy Holidays
from **Our Family to Yours!**

into a log cabin in the woods that had holes between the logs, goats in the yard and an old ice-box on the back porch. No electricity and no bathrooms didn't keep me from being happy. Our beds were feathered mattresses and it was fun when all the cousins came to visit and we all sunk into the middle and laughed our heads off. Being the experienced explorer I was, it didn't take me long to visit every family on that mountain and soon knew everyone in their families. To this day, I think of all those wonderful families and how much they mean to me and what lessons they taught me about life.

We were poor but everyone seemed to be. Picking berries among the snakes was a way of life, as well as exploring caves and old wagon trails. I can remember when they first tarred the road and in the summer I loved going barefoot (well, I had to, for shoes were just for school) and one of my favorite activities was popping the tar bubbles with my toes. Boy did my grandmother whip me for that. We used a lot of turpentine in those days and mostly on my toes. In fact, I was in trouble so much that often I would have to go get my own switch so my grandma or grandpa could whip me. Once my grandma said I started planting those switches and they sometimes grew. I deserved

those whippings but I didn't realize they hurt them more than they hurt me. I loved going on roofing jobs with my grandfather and while he was on the roof, I would open the packs of roofing and pull out enough to carry and take it to him up that ladder. He taught me so many lessons about life; never to meet

a stranger and to always be myself. Then my world changed and he was taken from me, dying in my arms from a massive heart attack. I was twelve years old and I felt my world had ended too. But one of the lessons I had learned, you do what you have to do and I set out to do just that. One day I asked



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***Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year!***

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for a ride with a teacher from Gurley School and let her drop me off at Aunt Eunice's on Andrew Jackson and I asked for a job. She obliged and since she was open at nights, I would ride with that teacher and then hitch-hike back to Gurley and walk up Keel Mountain. I earned forty dollars a week, enough to help buy groceries and buy us a load of coal. I grew up pretty fast in those days. But after awhile, I came to the position I was going to have to quit school and education was very important to me so I chose other avenues. But I will never forget Aunt Eunice and how good she was to me and the many lessons she also taught me. Many years later when I returned to Huntsville, I visited her and when I walked into the restaurant, I will never forget her words after 30 years of not seeing me,,,,,"well, Barbara Elmore, where have you bee

Growing up poor in the South, but with loving grandparents and friends and neighbors, I grew up strong and proud of the way I was raised. I met and married a yankee and was married 32 years when he passed away seven years ago. One son and two grandchildren later, I have once again been blessed with a new marriage. And for that I tribute people like my

grandpa and Aunt Eunice for helping me to make decisions that have brought much happiness to me. I am so fortunate to have lived in a community that has always stood tall and strong and each day when visitors come to the museum, I am so happy to share.

A Serious Accident

from 1902 newspaper

On June 10 as Mr. James Jones was returning home from the city with his wagon, out on the pike some one dashed by him on a bicycle which caused fright to his mules and caused them to run away.

Mrs. Jones was in the buggy just ahead, the mules ran into the buggy and the tongue of the wagon struck Mrs. Jones in the side injuring her seriously. She was in the act of jumping out, or it would have killed her.

We are pleased to state that at this time she is some better and will soon be out again.

There ought to be a law prohibiting persons riding their bicycles fast when passing or meeting vehicles with horses or mules attached.

**"At intersections
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*Burma Shave ads seen on
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Aunt Eunice and Unisys

by Bill Wilson

As a long-time Eunice's fan, I think I should pass on to the larger crowd of her fans an interesting bit of Aunt Eunice memorabilia regarding an unfortunate confusion that arose between the corporate name UNISYS (when it first emerged) and Eunice's (the designation of our late Aunt Eunice's popular Restaurant on Andrew Jackson Way).

The corporate name UNISYS was formed in 1986 by the merger of Sperry Univac corporation with the Burroughs corporation (both computer companies), whereas Eunice's Restaurant at that time had already been a Huntsville mainstay for decades.

In fact, as so many Huntsvillians fondly recall, there's never been a better biscuit served anywhere on the planet — not to mention her

five-star country ham which she got from somewhere up in Tennessee.

Right after the merger, suspecting there might be trouble afoot on the matter of nomenclature, I obtained a big company poster with the legend WE ARE NOW UNISYS on it and gave it Aunt Eunice telling here that "We now have the same name - even though it's spelled differently" and, for a while, it occupied a place on her Wall of Fame by the door.

At first, she seemed skeptical that any real problems would arise from such a trivial matter. Later, though, she admitted that the name confusion was sometimes a problem since many people calling information for the UNISYS phone number were given Eunice's number instead.

By the same token, our secretary received Eunice's calls from time to time asking, such things as "Are y'all open on Sunday?" or "May I speak to Aunt Eunice?" or "Is Billy Joe (Cooley) there?, etc. etc. Eventually the phone company finally

got it right, the poster was retired and things went back to normal — not forgetting for a moment that normal at Eunice's was anything but ordinary and meant, as always, great camaraderie and the best breakfast this side of the Pearly Gates.



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A Christmas in West Huntsville in the 1920s

by Newman Ward

I remember that people were happy in the 1920s. Before the depression it was easy to get work at all the mills and factories running. A group of men had come to Huntsville from the Dakotas to start the West Huntsville Cotton Mill, the Huntsville Hardwood Manufacturing Company, and a fertilizer factory that also sold seed and feed.

Preston Cothran, a genuine dwarf, moved into our community about that time. He was able to get around by becoming adept at roller skating. He skated "better than somewhat and very good indeed."

Preston, called "Shorty" by everyone, became the star of a YMCA annual affair hailed as the Great Barn Door-Bale Hay Circus. The idea was to make it sound like a Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey extravaganza. Shorty would stand on the end of a spring board, take a little jump, raise his feet high into the air, and sit down hard on the end of the board. Then he would rebound into a standing position. Even though there were other gymnasts, the crowd thought Shorty's act was the hit of the show.

Coach Andy Boyd did a rou-

tine on the pommel horse, and three or four of the high school girls turned cartwheels and did back bends. They performed a routine that looked a lot like Swinging Statues, where they would spin each other around and throw each other into gymnastic positions. One girl landed on her hands in a handstand. Two brothers rode bikes no-hands and stood on their seats for a few feet before they started to fall off. The school didn't have a band, but six people got together around the old YMCA piano with a trumpet and fiddles and a drum for this lucky occasion. There were no animal tricks, of course, but the townsfolk put on a lively show. Shorty later became a watch repairman on Madison Street, just off the square.

On Christmas, most of us would get a bag containing a tangerine and pecans or walnuts. I relished getting special tropical edibles instead of the usual mashed potatoes, green

beans, cornbread, and canned tomatoes. Still, when I smell a tangerine, my mouth waters thinking about long-ago Christmases. We raised our own chickens, so we had one for dinner along with Waldorf salad, chocolate pie, coconut cake, and boiled custard. My favorite was black walnut cake, when we had been able to get enough walnuts to crack for the batter.

The girls received books of paper dolls and fancy paper clothes or sometimes a rubber dolly whose eyes opened and

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closed and who wet, because her mouth had a little hole for a baby bottle and a tube that required diapers.

After seeing Shorty's popularity in the circus, we local kids, boys and girls alike, wished we had skates. Naturally they were what my sister Earleen and I asked Santa for, for Christmas, and as it turned out, so did most of the other kids. Sure enough, on Christmas morning, we woke up early to see if we had gotten anything. There they sat under the tree, with metal wheels and clamps to fasten them to our shoes. We ran out the door early to learn to keep our balance by going around and around the YMCA block, which luckily had concrete sidewalks.

I was so happy skating that I volunteered to go to the store for Mama. Once coming back home with my hip pocket full of a box of matches, I tripped

and fell hard. The matches burst into flames from the impact. I looked like a circus act for sure. I probably made the quickest moves of my life getting that box out of my pants.

Earleen went skating down the hall of our house before she had learned how to stop. She got up steam so that by the time she reached the back door, all she could do was put out her hand. She ran her arm right through the glass panel. Everybody was worried, but fortunately she didn't cut herself.

Harold "Slick" Tipps became the star skater. He could spin around and jump a little bit. But we all did very well, it seems, because even though we raced each other around and around the YMCA, we came through the skating season with no broken bones.

The contrast between then and now makes me think of "the good ole days" with nostalgia.

Were we really as happy as I remember with a bag off goodies and one precious present? I like to think so.

Merry Christmas.



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The R.C. Cola Show

by Ben Wilbourne

Thursday mornings, during the school summer break, kids would come from all over Huntsville and the surrounding area, to the downtown Martin Movie Theatre. The ideal way to spend a hot summers morning! Air conditioned comfort, good friends, great live music and a wonderful movie! All for the small price of 25 cents or 6 R.C. Cola bottle caps. The R.C Cola Show. I'm not sure who came up with the idea, but, it was a good one!

Mr. Brown and his staff always had the cold drinks, popcorn and candy ready. The live music was provided by a local group of young musicians who used to call themselves "The Emotions". The group consisted of guitarist Eddie Lones and Benny Wilbourn, bass guitarist Tommy Miller and later Thurman (Duke) Dunson and on drums, Tony Randolph and later Wayne Perry. On those wonderful Thursday mornings,

Life Was Good!

The years have gone by quickly, kids have grown into adults. We've all gone our separate ways. Maybe you're one of the lucky ones who spent just one of those Thursday mornings with your friends at the Martin Theatre.

Well, I think this sums it up best! Great childhood memories, and all for the small price of 6 bottle caps!

Sweet Potato Souffle

- 2 c. mashed, cooked sweet potatoes
- 1/3 c. sugar
- 2 T. butter
- 1/4 c. hot milk
- 1/8 t. salt
- 1 t. vanilla
- 2 eggs

Mix all ingredients well. Bake in buttered glass dish (1 1/2 quart) at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes. Remove from oven and sprinkle 1/2 cup chopped pecans over potatoes, then top with miniature marshmallows and back in oven for 10 minutes and marshmallows are browned and bubbly.

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Fireworks for Christmas

by **Walt Terry**

I must have been destined to become a rocket engineer. At an early age I became enamored with fireworks. In those times, fireworks were part of the Christmas celebration. I was hired to help sell them at stands on or near the courthouse square. I earned the grand salary of fifty cents an hour, in front of the Hutchens Hardware store and at a stand across Washington St. on the Northwest corner of the square. This stand belonged to George Culps, our Tax Collector at the time. I would have gladly worked at the stand for free, but I never told him that.

I loved fireworks, the shape and feel and smell of them, as well as the tantalizing thoughts of exactly what would happen when you lit the fuse.

I remember one Christmas, during the Great Depression in the 30's, my father was working as traveling salesman to keep us alive, but in sympathy with my passion, he asked me if I'd like the two of us to order ten dollars worth of fireworks from a catalogue. He might as well have asked if I'd like a pirate's treasure chest of gold coins. We picked out a wonderful assortment. My mother, who was a teacher at \$60 a month in those days, was shocked that we had chosen to "burn up ten dollars". But she wound up going along with it with as much good grace as she could mus-

ter. On Christmas morning when I saw the box by the hearth, I was almost out of my mind with joy and excitement. At first, I wanted only to look at the fascinating shapes of rockets and cones and vertical cylinders with little wooden bases. I sorted them, marveled at them, drew pictures of them - even took some of the aerial launchers apart to see how they were made, then put them back together. They promised to do all kinds of wonderful things and they exploded in different ways. The torpedos came packed in 2 packs, in boxes of sawdust, little hard cardboard balls that exploded on impact and could be shot against wells with a sling shot ("flips" we called them). They had captivating names like "Whistling Storm Kings", and "Crazy Crackers." The Storm Kings scooted wildly on the street, screaming, and then exploding violently. Jimmy Burnam's police dog could not stop chasing them, but he sure

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Seen in local church bulletin

A Real Neighborhood Coffee Shop

paid for it with a scorched and sometimes bloody muzzle.

The Crazy Crackers were the diameter of a silver dollar and were wrapped in red paper. When rubbed against a rough surface they would pop and smoke. As one unlucky school prankster found out, once you got a Crazy Cracker started, stomping on it only made it angrier and more uproarious, and woefully disruptive in the classroom.

He paid the price with a week's suspension from school. I'll never forget Miss Annie Merts, our teacher, tapping her foot with hands on her hips, watching him suffer.

The Christmas fireworks were a memorable part of my young life, lasting through New Year's Eve and on to the 4th of July. You might wonder, why fireworks at Christmas? Well, we celebrate the birth of our nation with fireworks, why not do the same with the birth of our Savior?

Kudzu Comes To Huntsville

from 1932 newspaper

Huntsville: Crowds began forming early this morning at the Public Market as officials began giving out free seedlings of the famed Kudzu plant.

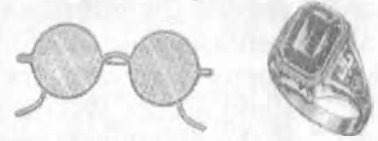
Kudzu is highly prized in the Orient as a food and livestock fodder. More importantly for the farmers in this region is its ability to stop and control erosion on lands depleted by continuous growing of cotton.

Kudzu is reputed to be able to grow and thrive in any type of soil and under the most adverse weather conditions.

The plant with its plush foliage is considered very attractive and several farmers have announced their intentions of planting the vine next to buildings and utility poles to decorate the roadside.

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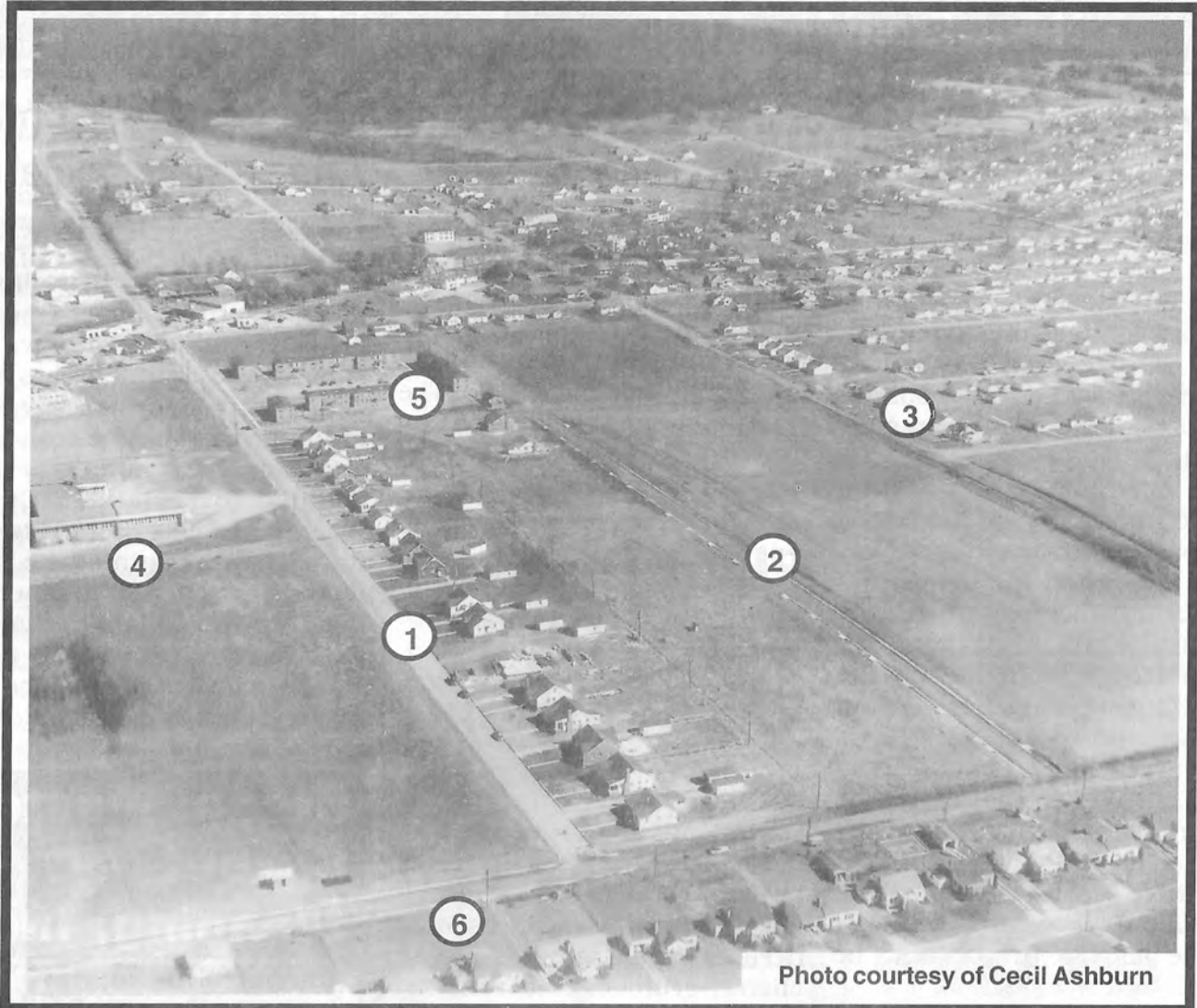


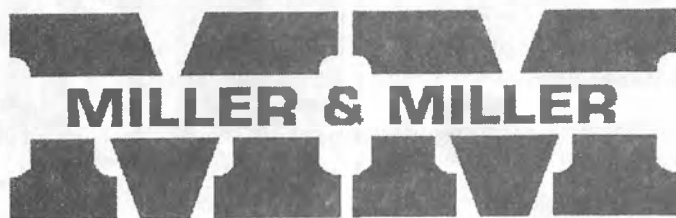
Photo courtesy of Cecil Ashburn

Looking East on Longwood in 1949

1 - Longwood Ave.
2 - Rhett Ave.

3 - Marsheutz Ave
4 - Fifth Avenue school

5 - Longwood apts.
6 - Harvard Road



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News From The Year 1925

News From Huntsville and Around The World

William Jennings Bryan Dead

William Jennings Bryan died today in Dayton, Tennessee, just days after scoring a final victory with the conviction of John T. Scopes for teaching evolution. The noted lawyer, orator and three-time Democratic nominee for president had been resting at the home of a friend in the little mountain town since the end of the emotionally draining Scopes trial five days ago. Doctors attributed his death to a cerebral hemorrhage.

Bryan, 65 years old, appeared to have come through the trial in good shape, aside from losing a bit of weight. Friends had urged him to take a vacation but he refused, saying he planned a speaking tour of the nation to urge laws to protect the Bible against the teaching of evolution in schools. "We must strike while the iron is hot," he said.

It was just such a law, passed earlier this year by the Tennessee Legislature, that Scopes, a

high school science teacher, was accused of breaking. At one point during the trial, Bryan took the witness stand and espoused the Biblical account of man's creation. Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100. The trial was characterized by Clarence Darrow, defense attorney, as "ridiculous".

Fight Breaks Out At Civil War Reunion

Atlanta: A wild melee broke out among aged Civil war veterans attending a reunion in Atlanta, Georgia when one grey haired veteran called his former adversaries "a bunch of scoundrels." Within minutes wheelchairs, crutches and artificial limbs were flying through the air. Police were called to break up the fight.

Man Returns Home After Being Declared Dead 27 Years Ago

Chattanooga: In an almost unbelievable saga, George Kenney returned home after being declared dead 27 years ago. Kenney served in the army during the Spanish-American War and after the fighting was over decided to remain in Cuba. When he failed to return to his unit it was assumed he was missing in action. It is expected that the Army will press charges for desertion.

His wife has long since remarried and is not at all anxious to see him.

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Traffic Lights Downtown

Huntsville: In a highly controversial move, the city of Huntsville has installed traffic lights at the corners of Jefferson and Clinton, Holmes and Washington, Washington and Clinton and Randolph, Greene and Holmes.

Merchants are outraged at the novel experiment and have vowed to form a coalition to remove them. Their anger comes from the fear that drivers will spend less time looking at the window displays of the various stores.

"The streets will be filled with Zombies." Mr. L.D. Carruthers said, "waiting in lines and staring at the lights."

A citizens group has joined in the merchants protest claiming that red and green lights will be confusing to everyone.

Among the various proposals the city considered before deciding on the lights were whistles, electric gates and crossing police. The first accident occurred only minutes after the first light was installed.

Klan Marches in Washington

White-robed Klansmen, more than 40,000 strong, paraded through the streets of the nation's capital today. It was the largest display of Ku Klux Klan power in history, witnessed by over 200,000 spectators, many of them astonished at the size of parade line.

While robed, the members of the Klan were not wearing the hooded masks behind which they so often hide their identities. As the last of the marchers reached the foot of the Washington Monument, darkness had set in and a heavy rain was falling, resulting in cancellation of plans to hold a massive ceremony.

"As the days go by, I think of how lucky I am, That you're not here to ruin it for me."

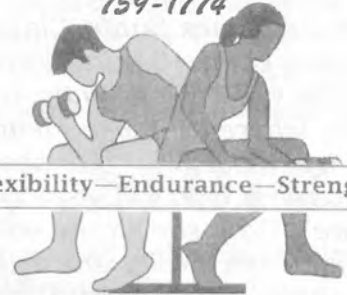
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Christmas with the Flemings

by Sally Fleming Walker

*Here comes Santa Claus,
Here comes Santa Claus ...*

"Oh no, I'm on Whitesburg Drive where all those Fleming children live. Well, this should lighten my load Let's see now: There's Gay, she'll take everything. Then Sally, she'll take anything. Brother Pete, a BB gun, and Diane and Priscilla, how `bout dolls and a buggy. And there's little Aaron, a wagon or trike. Oops! I almost forgot baby Mary Jane. Let's see what I have in my sleigh for her? This big teddy bear will be perfect. Let's not forget Momma and Daddy, Martha and Walton. They would like sommmmmmmme ... REST! What about those St. Bernard dogs in the living room? Why, they're big enough to eat me alive!"

**Christmas morning
6 a.m.**

Lots of running and screaming through the house. We're not supposed to go into the living room where Santa has visited until Mr. Bryson the photographer gets here at 7 a.m to take home movies of us running and screaming into the living room.

6:02 a.m.

To heck with Mr. Bryson and

Do you realize that in about 40 years, we'll have thousands of old ladies running around with tattoos?

John Smithey, Decatur

his Christmas movies ... CHARGE!!!!

6:20 a.m. Room destroyed. Papers everywhere, the little children are crying. They're not sure which toys are theirs. The dogs have ribbons stuck on or tied on. Really a big old fun mess. Close to 7 a.m.

Momma and Daddy make us clean up the living room, then we all have to go out and comb our hair and put our nice little robes on, and when Mr. Bryson gets there, we have to go running and screaming back into the living room like it was the first time. (I'm sure you're won-

dering why a photographer was coming to our house on Christmas morning. Mother and Daddy used to take the home movies, and we never had heads. Enough said?")

When I was growing up, my daddy farmed on Whitesburg, along with his two brothers, Uncle Joe and Uncle Billy, and their daddy, Mr. Aaron. At Christmas time it was a tradition that the farm hands would start down at Uncle Joe's house and have a drink of whiskey and good cheer, go on to Papa's for a drink of whiskey and good cheer, then on to Uncle Billy's

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for a drink of whiskey and good cheer. By the time they got to our house, they were snockered. My mother was a teetotaler (this has the makings of a country song) and she wouldn't let Daddy give them whiskey. She gave them **BOILED CUSTARD**. Did you know that boiled custard can kill a bush? That's right. Kill a bush.

About 11 a.m.

It's on to Grandmother and Papa's for Christmas lunch and to open more presents with the extended family. (My family always went places in two cars because there were so many of us.) One year, when we get to their house, we all pile out of the cars and run in and Grandmother is hugging us all, and then shortly she asks, "Where is Mary Jane?" The fingers start pointing. "I thought she was in your car." "No, she was supposed to be in your car." You know how it goes. Anyway, someone goes back to our house to look for her. She was just standing in her crib waiting.

Unfortunately, this sort of thing happened frequently in the Fleming family. We've even been left at camp by accident. Momma would get a few miles from camp, and someone would say, "Hey, where's Diane?" So back to Skyline. Gay and Pete were both left, by accident, for two months at camp.

11:30 a.m.

Grandmother has a huge cedar tree cut from the farm. It's all silver and blue balls with blue lights, and it's flocked with snow - Lux soap flakes made into suds that she put on the tree. Oh, I thought that tree was so pretty. Finally we get to open the presents, and when everybody gets at least three presents,

you have a lot of wrapping paper. Big mistake here. Papa has given each of his three daughters-in-law an envelope with \$\$\$\$\$ inside. Well, after all the paper is thrown out, Momma can't find her envelope. We can't have lunch until we find money. Momma's crying; Daddy's upset (mad) that she hasn't put it up when she got it. After a lot of squalling, we found the envelope ... and, got Christmas lunch.

3 p.m. and after

The adults have had it and all the children want to go home and play with Santa stuff. I'm in the car with Momma going home, and she keeps saying, "I'm so tired ... If I could only have a nap ... If I could just go to bed for a little while." When we get home and out of the car, Momma heads for a tree and breaks a switch off and walks



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in the house and announces that she is going to lie down with this switch and if anybody comes in her bedroom she's going to USE it! Momma goes to bed, and the little ones sit outside her bedroom door until they think she's asleep, and then one by one they go into the bedroom and crawl up in bed with her. Of course, they don't get switched for that, but they did get a lot of cuddling. It's late afternoon by now and Daddy, Gay, Pete and myself have been outside doing a little target practice with Pete's new BB gun and a shotgun Daddy had gotten for Christmas.

Soon, everybody is up from their naps and everybody is in the house, and Christmas Day is coming to an end. When it's bedtime, Momma goes around to the different bedrooms and

reads Bible stories to all of us, and we pray.

Later that night when things have gotten quiet, we hear Daddy's voice calling for Gay and me, "Hey, I'm hungry. Which one of you will make me a sandwich and a BIG glass of ice water?" Off to the kitchen ... we take him his sandwich and hand it to him, and we're standing there with this huge glass of ice water, and we look at him, and he looks at us, and with this silly grin, he says, "YOU BETTER NOT!!" With that, we throw the glass of water on him and run like crazy, with him right behind us, yelling and laughing. Then all the little ones are back up running, too.

Daddy catches some of us and pulls us down on the floor, and whoever is left standing jumps on his back and tries to

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wrestle him. Momma and the dogs get in on the fun by trying to pull the kids off Daddy. So much for sleeping.

The best Christmas we ever had was when Mary Jane, our youngest sister, was born on Dec. 24. She would have been 50 this year. She's been in heaven 16 years now. Every Christmas Eve I think of what Mary Jane would always say about her birthday: "I NEVER get a good birthday present, because y'all say you're giving me a real good Christmas and birthday present COMBINED. That's not fair!"

Every year, when Gay and I finally went to bed, we'd talk about how Christmas had gone by much too fast. And then I'd say, "Hey, Gay, we did pretty good this year ... what are we gonna ask for next year? I can't wait!

How to Keep the Honeymoon in your Marriage

from 1911 newspaper

- Secrets - have no secrets that you keep from your companion. A third party is always disturbing.

- Neglect of your Companion - do not assume a right to neglect your companion more after marriage than you did before.

- Don't both get Angry at the same Time - remember, it takes two to quarrel. Continue your courtship. Treat your partner as you want to be treated

- Keep Step in Mental Development - a tree that grows for forty years may take all the sunlight from a tree that stops growing at twenty.

- Above all - tell your spouse "I love you" every day



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from 1889 newspaper

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News From The Year 1923

- Whether because of an accident or an attempted joke, street cars on Holmes Avenue were unable to make their schedules for an hour or two yesterday because of a veritable lake of molasses on the right of way in that section. The sticky substance had to be shoveled up and placed in carts and a liberal supply of sand placed on the tracks before traffic could be resumed. A reward of \$500 is being offered for the apprehension of the party who placed the molasses on the track. If caught and the act found to have been committed as a joke, the joker will be prosecuted.

- Mrs. C. T. Greaves, of Dallas, Tx., one of the most seriously injured in the wreck of the Southern passenger train near Scottsboro last week, is still at the Huntsville infirmary, where she was taken immediately following the accident. Mrs. Greaves is, however, reported to be doing well. She is the only one of the several brought here

who have not returned to their homes.

- Two boys, Lonnie Jones 16 and Warren Sanders, 14 will be held in Huntsville for the arrival of their parents this week. They said they lived near Scottsboro and were taken in charge by Chief Hackworth. Their parents had telephoned the chief to notify him that the boys had traveled to Huntsville, after telling them that they "wanted to see the world." They were without money and seemed quite ready to return home after seeing enough of the world and its hardness.

- While riding his bicycle on Walker Street Sunday, Howard Larkin, a small boy, was run into and knocked from his wheel by an automobile driven by Henry Thomas. Young Larkin was jolted but not seriously

injured.

- Messrs. James McGill and Lee Guy have perfected a new automobile light which they intend to apply for a patent for. The light will contain a revolving fan on one end and colored lights on the other, the lights being generated from a dry battery and being operated by the car. The gentlemen have tried out their light with complete success. Investors are encouraged to contact the gentlemen.

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My Grandparents Home

by Jonathan Bradshaw

My most memorable times while my brother and I were growing up took place at my grandparents' home in Huntsville, Alabama. When we would hear the news that we were going to visit my Grandma and Grandpa, my brother and I would cheer endlessly. In the tree covered mountains of Northern Alabama stood "Grandma's Mountain". I named it "Grandma's Mountain" because I couldn't pronounce the real name.

The family room was actually a very dynamic place. While my Grandpa napped, this is the room where my brother and I would have wrestling matches and other brawling activities until we would hear the bell that my grandma would ring which signaled that it was dinner time.

After dinner was over, we would all settle down in the family room for ice cream and pie.

In the basement was a large closet that was filled with many toys from my father's childhood. My brother and I would spend many hours constructing and running my Dad's old train set.

The backyard is another place close and dear to my heart. An acre and a half was covered with rich green grass and my grandparents' flower and rock gardens.

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There were also enormous boulders and rocks. There was a squirrel trap that my Grandpa and I would set every morning to catch the annoying chipmunks that would dig around in the garden and get into the attic. If we ever caught any, we would release them a couple of miles away from the house. We had wonderful magical Christmases on "Grandma's Mountain". The days before Christmas were full of great anticipation. There were wonderful decorations all through the house. The tree would twinkle with lights dancing off the ornaments—many of the ornaments were from my father's childhood. There was a special ornament celebrating my brother's birth and another with my name and birth date. Then Grandma, my mother and my dad would say the magic words, "Okay, boys, come on down!" We would race down the stairs in our pajamas and my brother and I would help pass out presents. Grandpa would get up and pour eggnog for all the adults and Grandma would make hot chocolate with marshmallows for my brother and me. Christmas breakfast was always special - my Grandma called it "breakfast pizza", but later I learned that its real name was egg strata. One Christmas I remember white flakes pouring down out of the sky and I didn't know what it was; my grandpa told me it was snow. We drove up Monte Sano and had a snow ball fight!

I'll never forget these memories of my Grandparents' home. I certainly will share these memorable times with my own kids. I will surely miss my Grandma's house and all those special times we had there.

Unusual Display at Lyric Theatre

There is an unusual and exceedingly interesting display in the lobby of the beautiful Lyric Theatre during the "Daughters of the Rich" screening, the first to attract attention being a big cake of ice at the top of which appears the sign reading "The Coolest Place in Town", an electric fan playing from behind the big ice cake inside of which is frozen a patriotic display of the American flag, a horse shoe and a beautiful wreath of flowers.

Immediately behind the patriotic cake of ice is a display of the latest in women's dressing, dresses up to the minute in design, millinery, hosiery and other ladies ready to war apparel, all encased in a bower made up of streamers of pink and pale blue, a striking display that cannot fail to attract the feminine eye as they pass by the Lyric.

from 1923 newspaper

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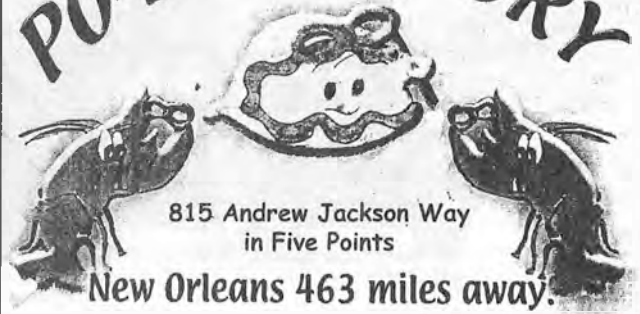
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Doctor Thrown in Jail for Threatening Dallas Residents

from 1907 newspaper

Dr. B. J. Duckett, a practicing physician of Dallas Village, was arrested today and lodged in jail on warrants charging him with threatening the lives of two residents of Dallas and resisting arrest. His trial will come up this afternoon.

Complaints against Dr. Duckett were made by John Taylor and Robert Nichols, who charge that he had threatened to kill them. Papers were made out and it was the intention of the court to have the doctor brought in on peace proceedings. The papers were placed in the hands of Deputy Sheriff Robinson. The deputy saw the man he was seeking driving along Washington Street today and when he started toward him, Dr. Duckett

whipped up his horse. There was a lively chase up the street and Deputy Miller joined in on the square. The prisoner offered resistance and the scene attracted a large crowd on the street.

Old Huntsville Trivia

1908 - Madison County becomes the first county in the state to use gas-powered buggies and motorcycles to deliver mail.

1921 - Huntsville's first supermarket, Piggly Wiggly, opens with J.S. Comer as the manager.

1950 - Residents of Terry Heights subdivision vote to become part of Huntsville

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Virginia Tunstall, better known as Virginia Clay, was born in Nash County, North Carolina on January 17, 1825. Three years later her mother died and her father moved to Alabama, where Virginia was placed in the care of an aunt. The aunt assumed the task of raising Virginia to be a proper Southern lady, a task no doubt

made harder by the young girl's vivacious and often inquisitive mind. At the tender age of fourteen Virginia was sent to a Nashville female academy to "complete" her education.

Virginia instantly became the toast of Nashville's society, with many eligible bachelors competing for her favors. At one point she became engaged to Alexander McClung, a native of Huntsville, but broke it off when she became infatuated with Clement Claiborne Clay, also of Huntsville.

Clement Clay was the epitome of Southern gentry. His father had been Governor of Alabama, a member of Congress and was also a wealthy planter owning numerous plantations and slaves. Clement, besides working as a private secretary to his father, had also opened a law practice in Huntsville. For a young girl like Virginia, who never had a real family, it must have been a dream come true. She would often refer to her marriage, in 1843 at the age of 17, as "crossing the Rubicon of life."

The next few years were probably the happiest the couple spent together. Virginia fit eas-





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ily into Huntsville's sophisticated social scene where her youth and vivacity endeared her to the patriarchs of the plantation society. Clement's family, too, was won over by the young girl and she soon found herself helping manage the Clays' vast plantation holdings.

If there was a dark side to this period it was possibly the fact that Virginia began to understand her husband. Clement was typical of much of the aristocratic South in that he depended solely on his family name to advance himself in life. A hopeless hypochondriac and weak by nature, Clay soon began to look upon Virginia more as a mother figure rather than the wife she wanted to be.

Clement Comer Clay, Clement's father, possibly saw something in Virginia that he knew was lacking in his son. Within a short while Virginia had become a trusted confidant and valued advisor to the senior Clay.

Two years after their marriage, Virginia and Clement began a life-style of sporadic separations that would continue for the next thirty-nine years. As a cure for his "continued illnesses," Clement, in the company of male companions, would often leave home for months at a time touring the countryside by horseback. Virginia also began a life-long habit of spending much of her time away from home, visiting relatives in Tuscaloosa, or friends in other cities.

During these separations, Clay often expressed fear of losing Virginia. In one of his letters he wrote, "...I fear some fellow will

forget you are married and make love to you." One has to wonder if he was more worried about his marriage or his social prestige.

Although odd by today's standards, such marriages in the pre-Civil War period were common in the South. Divorce was unheard of and many people actually had no basis to judge a marriage on except for their parents who were often times also involved in hapless marriages.

In 1853, Clement Clay was elected to the United States Senate. Washington, D.C., at that time, was a place where a man was judged as much by a wife's social graces as he was by political acumen. It was into this arena that Virginia would appear and reign over for the next decade.

The Southern culture and graces that had been instilled in Virginia since birth quickly made her one of the most popular hostesses in the nation's capital. President Pierce and his wife became admirers of her as did most of Washington's elite. Her life became a constant stream of parties, concerts and teas. Conscious of her role as part of the Southern aristocracy, she made regular trips to New York where she would shop for the fine clothes she thought befitted her position. At one point she "complained" to a friend of having purchased over two hundred pairs of shoes.

Of all the people that Virginia met in Washington, it was a young senator from Mississippi who was to

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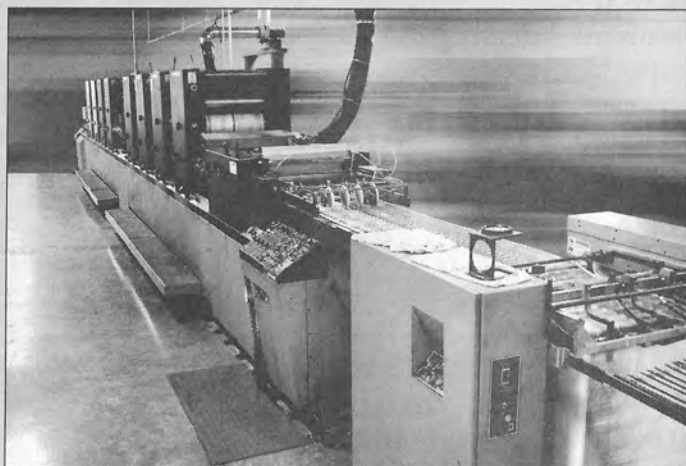
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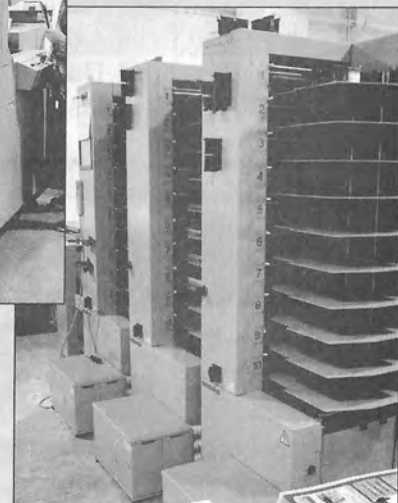
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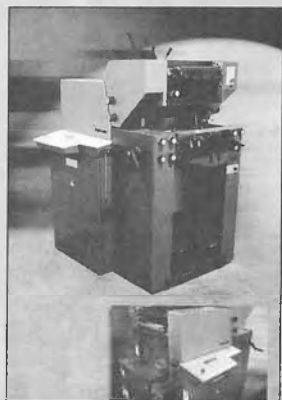
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have the biggest effect on her life.

His name was Jefferson Davis.

Virginia Clay and Jefferson Davis had much in common. They were both ardent believers in Southern rights and both enjoyed the whirlwind of the capital's social life.

By all historical accounts, Davis' marriage had also begun to falter.

Varina Davis, Jefferson's wife, detested the Washington social scene. Often pleading headaches and illness, she rarely attended any but the most important events. She realized however, how vital it was for her husband to be seen at these affairs and when Virginia would agree to accompany him, Varina was happy to give her blessing. Although there are few accounts of what Clay did during these times, one has to surmise that he stayed home, possibly working on the many Congressional bills he was involved with.

The two couples became good friends. They spent much time together at one another's homes discussing politics and Washington gossip. Though Clay and Davis were both senators and worked together every day, it was Virginia and Davis who developed the closest

relationship. When Davis took sick while his wife was out of town, it was Virginia who spent days at his bedside, wiping his brow and reading him the poetry he so much admired.

There is not much doubt that Virginia was enamored of Davis at this time. He was a handsome, wealthy and extremely powerful political figure, and Virginia was well known for her flirtatious and captivating manner.

In addition, Virginia surely was frustrated by her husband who seemed to be preoccupied with his health most of the time. Though still professing his love for her, he was rarely seen at

her side. In one of his letters he actually seemed to be encouraging Virginia by writing, "...you have more fun without me."

Jefferson Davis often invited Virginia to accompany him on trips to inspect nearby military installations. One of these trips was to Fort Monroe, an installation just outside Washington that would become very familiar to both of them in the coming years.

If there was to be anything else besides an innocent flirtation, it was soon ended by events culminating in the Civil War. In 1861 both Davis and Clay resigned their senate seats to return South. A short time



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after Clay reached Huntsville he was elected as a senator of the newly formed Confederate States of America Congress. Jefferson Davis, rather than remaining at his Mississippi plantation as he wished, was elected President of the Confederate States.

Shortly afterwards, Davis offered Clay the position of Secretary of War. Clay was experiencing another bout of his sickness and declined, recommending LeRoy Pope Walker of Huntsville in his place.

When the new Confederate government convened in Richmond it was almost a repeat of the old Washington days. Many of the same people Virginia had known before were now holding office in Richmond. The parties and social gatherings that had once been a hallmark of the old capital were now transferred to the new one, with Virginia Clay once again taking the lead.

Despite the unnerving news coming over the telegraph wires daily, or perhaps because of it, Davis once again began to seek Virginia's company. The relationship caused a whispering cam-

paign that has endured to this day.

The condition of Virginia's marriage was no secret to the residents of Richmond. Adding fuel to the rumors was the fact that many of the Richmond ladies openly despised Varina Davis.

Clement Clay's relationship with Davis had also become strained, partially because of the ineptitude of LeRoy Pope Walker, whom he had recommended. In a letter to Virginia, Clay actually pleaded with her to intercede on his behalf with the president.

In the spring of 1864, Clay was asked to go to Canada on a secret peace mission. The war had been dragging on for nearly three years and many people believed the best way to end it was by negotiation. After settling into a Canadian hotel, Clay began a voluminous correspondence. Much of it dealt with secondhand gossip which he passed on to Richmond as intelligence. The most interesting letters were addressed to a Virginia Tribble, a native of New York who also spent much time in Canada.

Containing such phrases as, "I long to lay my head on your bosom again as I hold your hand

in mine," the letters leave no doubt that Clay had forsaken his marriage vows.

Meanwhile, events in the Confederacy had deteriorated to the point where Virginia Clay was forced to leave Richmond and

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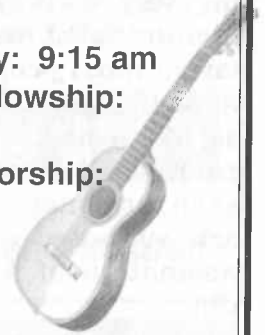
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On April 3, 1865 General Robert E. Lee was forced to retreat, beginning a march that would end at Appomattox and leaving the way open for the Federal army to march into Richmond. Hastily, the Confederate government made preparations to evacuate. Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet fled the already burning city in a railway car with no destination in mind except for "South."

Clement Clay returned from Canada and joined his wife in May of 1865 in Georgia, amidst the crumbling remnants of a nation they had once held so dear. Defeated troops were clogging every roadway and the Confederate dollar was worthless, leaving most people penniless. Worse though, were the rumors that all members of the Confederate government were to be taken prisoner and hung for their supposed role in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Some reports state that Clay briefly considered fleeing to Texas, while others claim he was in a listless mood, unable to decide what to do.

The decision was made for the couple when several days later they learned of Davis' capture by Federal troops in Georgia.

Again accounts of the actual events vary with some saying that

Clay proposed surrendering himself to the authorities, while another account quotes Virginia as saying, "We must join the President."

Regardless of how and why, a few days later the Clays joined Jefferson and Varina as prisoners of the Federal Government.

In Macon, Georgia they were placed aboard a train where they

found Davis in a somber mood. Seeing Virginia enter the car, the ex president immediately rose to embrace her while saying, "This is a sad day, Jinnie."

Virginia sat next to Davis while Clement took a seat next to Varina. Throughout the night they rode in silence, their thoughts only interrupted when the train stopped at a station and

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Union soldiers gathered to taunt and jeer the captives. At Augusta, Georgia they were removed from the train and transported to a waiting boat. Throughout the journey, Virginia remained at Davis' side, often bathing his temples with eau de cologne when he would complain of headaches and engaging him in small talk in an effort to take his mind off the ordeal ahead.

Clement Clay remained morose and refused to take part in any conversation. Varina Davis virtually ignored the other prisoners.

On May 22, the journey came to an end. The final destination of Jefferson Davis and Clement Clay was to be Fort Monroe, the dark, dank prison that Davis and Virginia had visited years earlier under much happier circumstances.

When Davis and Clay were transferred from the ship to the fort, Varina broke down and began sobbing uncontrollably. Virginia, watching the men being escorted from the ship, clenched her teeth and proclaimed, "I should die before they should see me shed tears."

Several days later Virginia was released from custody and returned home to Huntsville. The scene she returned to was far different from the Huntsville she had left years earlier. The plantations were almost bankrupt and the former slaves had fled, leaving no one to tend the fields. Even their property on the courthouse square, which had brought in a small rent every month, had been confiscated and was being used as an office by the Freedman's Bureau.

While most of her fellow Southerners had given up all hope, Virginia refused to accept defeat. Immediately, she began a letter writing campaign on behalf of her husband and Jefferson Davis. Borrowing money from

a local merchant she purchased material for a new dress and made preparations to go to Washington.

It was later reported that Virginia lobbied everyone of any importance on the prisoners' behalf. Often sitting in waiting rooms for days at a time, she would refuse to leave until she gained an audience with the person she sought. General Grant, after listening to Virginia's appeals, recommended Clement Clay be released.

Carrying the note from Grant and accompanied by the widow of Stephen Douglas, Virginia went to see President Johnson at the White House. When Virginia began an emotional appeal, Mrs. Douglas dropped to her knees begging the President to release the men. Virginia remained aloof, refusing to kneel before a man she considered a traitor.

Finally after repeated appeals, Virginia was able to get Johnson's word that the prisoners would be released from mili-

tary custody.

Clement returned to Huntsville as a hero to the throngs who gathered to welcome him home. The exultation over his freedom



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was short-lived however as he and Virginia surveyed the financial wreckage left by the war. The Clays reluctantly realized the life they had once known was gone forever.

Many times adversity helps to bring a couple together, but in the Clay's case, it only served to widen the gulf. Clement moved to a cottage on the family farm in Gurley where he unsuccessfully experimented with being a farmer. Virginia refused to live with Clement and took an apartment in town where she spent most of her time.

Clement withdrew from the public eye, often seeking solace in alcohol. The fact that he was heavily in debt and virtually living on loans added to the already heavy weight on his shoulders.

In 1867 Jefferson Davis was released from prison after almost eighteen months imprisonment. On Davis' first trip to Alabama, he stopped in Huntsville to visit Virginia. If their friendship in the past had been merely an innocent flirtation, it was soon to take another course. Probably driven by memories of a happier time, Virginia seemed to be irresistibly drawn to the ex president. For the next six years she would be almost a constant companion of Davis.

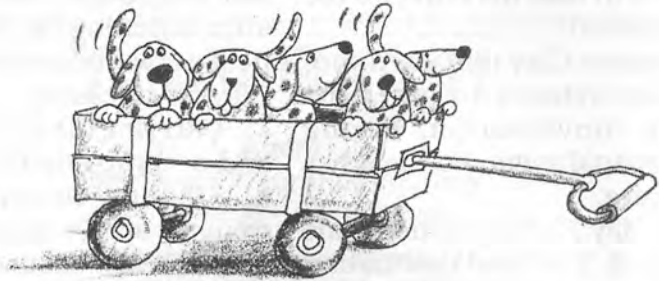
Virginia began spending much of her time traveling, meeting Davis in Niagara Falls, Memphis,

Sewanee and Charleston. Even when they were apart, they carried on a lively correspondence.

After one trip to Huntsville, Davis wrote Virginia, "The hours dragged by wearily after you left me at the station for the contrast with your sweet home

was a sweet one... let me hear from you as freely as your convenience will allow... put on the envelope, 'Personal.'"

On Valentine's Day, 1871, Davis wrote, "It has been so long since I have heard from you. It seems so strange to be



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so near and yet so far apart.”

Varina Davis almost certainly knew of the relationship between Virginia and her husband. Though she had never been particularly fond of Virginia, she now refused to allow Virginia's name spoken in her presence. As if following Clement Clay's example, Varina also withdrew into seclusion, spending much of her time in Europe, leaving Davis to live by himself in Memphis. In one nineteen month period they spent a total of sixteen days in one another's company.

The fact that the ex president of the Confederacy was possibly having an affair of the heart was impossible to keep a secret. Tantalizing innuendoes began appearing in the gossip columns. A Memphis newspaper chastised them for staying in the same hotel and a Cincinnati newspaper "wondered about the ex Senator from Alabama whose wife no longer felt bound by vows of fidelity."

Possibly the rumors would have died down if it had not been for an unfortunate incident on a Pullman car. Late one evening, after the passengers had retired to their individual sleeping berths, the conductor saw a shadowy form emerge from one berth and enter another. Alarmed, possibly thinking it was a sneak thief, the conductor hurried to investigate. According to an article on the front page of the Louisville Commercial, July 15, 1871, the conductor discovered the ex president of the Confederacy "occupying the berth with the married lady under his chivalrous protection."

When Davis refused to leave the berth, the conductor called his superior who "sternly ordered Davis to take another berth at once." Then, according to the Louisville Commercial, Davis "retired

with deep disgust, and elevated his venerable form (in shirt and drawers) to the upper bunk."

The story created a sensation throughout the country. In Memphis, hundreds of extra copies had to be printed at the request of news dealers. Davis never made any attempt to deny the stories.

Possibly because of the publicity, or maybe because of Varina's return from Europe, their relationship seemed to end shortly afterwards. No

longer were there endearing letters waiting in the mailbox and Virginias trips to Memphis stopped altogether.

Virginia remained in Huntsville where in 1882 her husband Clement, died. She waited five years before remarrying. Her new

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husband was Judge David Clopton, an old friend and member of the Alabama Supreme Court. After Clopton died in 1892, Virginia moved to Gurley, to the farm cottage she had once refused to live in.

Virginia Clay Clopton, as she was now known, became a leader in the cause of woman's suffrage, traveling the country making speeches. She also was active in helping organize the Confederate Veterans organizations. Her greatest tribute came when she was named honorary life president of the Daughters of the Confederacy.

In 1886, Jefferson Davis was invited to Montgomery, Alabama to lay the cornerstone of a monument to the Confederate dead. He stayed in the same rooms he had used twenty-five years earlier when he was sworn in as President. Throngs of people once again flocked to the hotel to greet him and express their admiration for their wartime chief.

Sitting on a sofa, receiving guests, Davis looked up to see Virginia standing in the doorway. In a scene oddly reminiscent of another age, he once again motioned her to take a seat next to him as he continued to greet well wishers. These were to be the last

moments Jefferson Davis and Virginia Clay ever spent together. Two years later Davis died.

Whatever feelings they both once shared were now consigned to history.

In 1904, Virginia published a book of her recollections under the title *A Belle Of The Fifties*. She was aided in this endeavor by diaries and scrapbooks she had been collecting for over a half century. She made no mention of her alleged romance with Jefferson Davis.

Her diaries and scrapbooks, which found their way into the archives of a promi-

nent university library, provided more puzzles than answers for modern historians. Portions of her penciled-in diary, especially the dates of her trips after the war, had been meticulously erased. The diary for 1871, when the alleged Pullman car incident was supposed to have happened, was missing altogether.

In 1915, Virginia Clay Clopton died at the age of 90.

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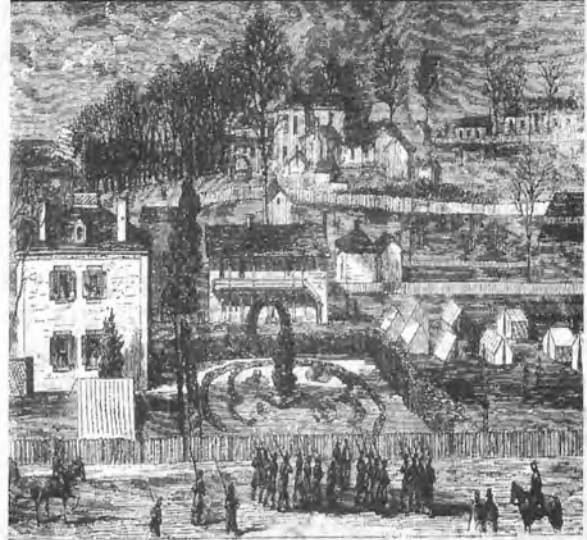
The Civil War diary of Mary Jane Chadick of Huntsville, Alabama, has been a popular source for historians since it first appeared in serial form in the Huntsville Times in 1937. Soon after this, it was printed in a small book, and in 1947 was reprinted in the Alabama Historical Quarterly, a selection so popular that surplus copies were quickly depleted. Chadick's witty observations of life under military occupation and the social and cultural tensions of southern women living in a wartime world are quoted by writers of many books about the Civil War. **Nancy Rohr's edition is the first attempt to place the diary in context and interpret Mrs. Chadick and the wartime world in which she lived.** Rohr's extensive annotations make this new edition an even more valuable primary source on women, northern Alabama and the Civil War.

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Ask anyone who's grown up in Huntsville and they'll be able to tell you all about the time that Jesse James and his gang staged a daring robbery on the First National Bank downtown and, upon being cornered, spurred his horse off the bluff and into the Big Spring, galloping away to freedom and into local legend.

It was the stuff of legend. But a legend is all it was. As far as any historian knows, Jesse James never set foot in Huntsville. But like all legends, this one has an element of truth. And the truth is much more interesting than the legend.

On a cold day in March 1881, three masked men on horseback, brandishing revolvers, held up an army paymaster on the banks of the Tennessee River near Muscle Shoals. The paymaster was on his way with the payroll to pay the construction workers digging a canal near Muscle Shoals. The masked men kidnapped the unlucky paymaster and took him into the woods where they relieved him of the payroll, his horse, and even his gold pocket watch he'd inherited from his deceased father. They then released him to a long walk home and disappeared into the dark woods, over \$5,000 richer.

One wonders if it occurred to the bandits, celebrating their easy job, that their career as outlaws was almost over. For one of them had a weakness for liquor and that weakness became their undoing.

Making his way north to Kentucky, Bill Ryan rode into the tiny crossroads of White's Creek Tennessee, a few miles north of

Nashville, and took refuge in a saloon from a gathering thunderstorm. A few shots of whiskey later, he was drunk and disorderly and running his mouth about being an "outlaw against state, county, and the United States Government!"

One local barfly had the temerity to question his outlaw credentials and Ryan pulled his pistols and made a scene. At gunpoint, he extracted an apology for the offense, but his luck, and ultimately that of the James Gang, had finally run out. The bartender just happened to be an off-duty Sheriff's deputy.

After a vigorous scuffle, Ryan was disarmed and under arrest. He was carried off to the Nashville jail where his identity was soon revealed and he was asked to explain how he came into possession of a large portion of that army payroll.

Jesse James, and his brother Frank, were soon implicated in the robbery and warrants were issued

for their arrest. Feeling the closeness of the long arm of the law, they would stage yet another getaway. But not for long. The heady adventures of the notorious Frank and Jesse James were about to be a thing of the past.

The chain of events that ended nearly two decades of outlawry that included numerous bank robberies, train robberies, and even taking the box office of the Kansas City Exposition, were set in motion in north-

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ern Alabama on that cold day in March 1881.

Within a year, Jesse would be dead, shot in the back of the head by Bob Ford in an attempt to earn clemency from the government for his own crimes and collect a hefty reward offered by the governor of Missouri.

During the following year, Bill Ryan would be sentenced to a long prison term, Frank would surrender to the Missouri authorities, the rest would scatter, and the infamous James Gang would be retired for good.

With Frank now in custody, it was time for him to face justice. A Huntsville grand jury indicted Frank and he was charged with armed robbery and brought to Huntsville to stand trial. It was

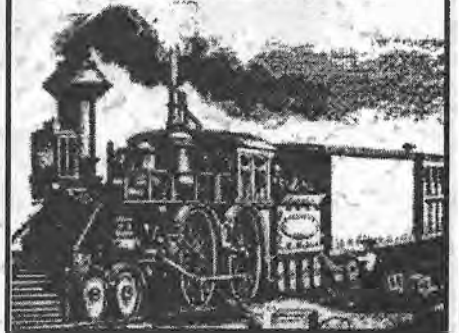
the trial of the century. The Nineteenth century.

By this time, the James Gang's exploits were already the stuff of legend. A whole entertainment industry had been built around their adventures. Dime stores across America carried pulp novels and magazines that thrilled their readers with the gang's daring exploits. Frank was a celebrity and he received a celebrity trial.

Just like the O.J. Simpson and Michael Jackson trials, Frank James' trial in Huntsville became a media circus. A large cheering crowd greeted his train as it arrived at the Huntsville depot. Newspaper reporters from far and wide descended on what was then the tiny town of Huntsville, filled the hotels and boarding houses, and filed sensational reports on the latest developments in the case. Huntsville itself, for a time, but not the last time, was in the national spotlight.

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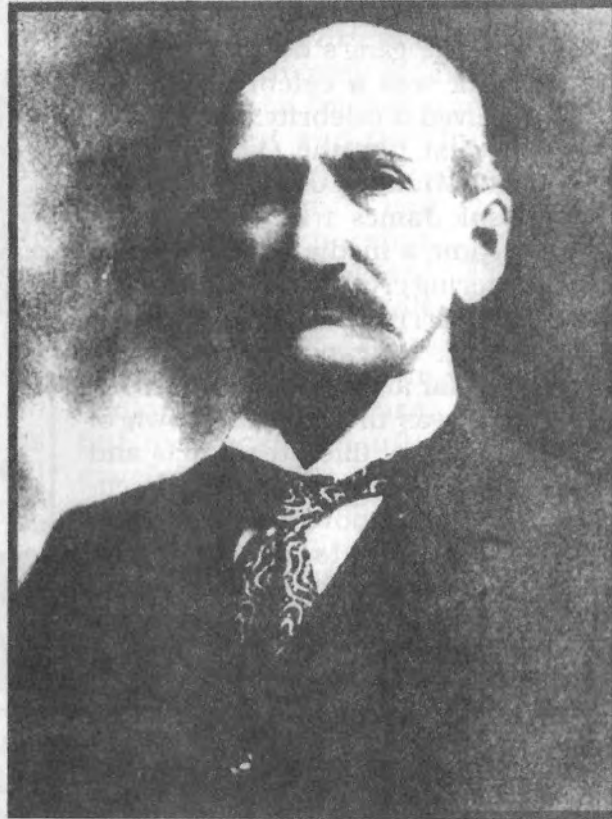
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On April 17, 1884, the trial began. Frank entered the courtroom accompanied by his wife, young son, and an all-star legal team headed by veteran Huntsville lawyer, Leroy Pope Walker who also happened to be the former Secretary of War for the Confederacy. The prosecution was headed up by the formidable William H. Smith, US Attorney, scalawag, and a former governor of Alabama during Reconstruction.

The reporters in the courtroom soon realized they were in the right place as the two lead attorneys sparred and jostled in front of a jury made up largely of Civil War veterans. Leroy Pope Walker well understood his jury. He emphasized in his opening statement that Frank had also fought for the Cause, having served with the Missouri irregulars under William Clarke Quantrill during the closing days of the war.

Governor Smith countered with the facts of the case. He brought out witnesses who identified Frank as one of the robbers. Under withering cross examination, Walker got each to recant their claim. As his case looked increasingly lost, Governor Smith saved his ace in the hole for last.

James Andrew Liddel had been a loyal member of the James Gang for many years. He was the one who discovered Ryan had been arrested and even helped Frank and Jesse make their getaway. But like Bill Ryan, he also had a weakness. Liddel's weakness was for women.

Sometime after they fled Nashville, Liddel became involved with an attractive widow

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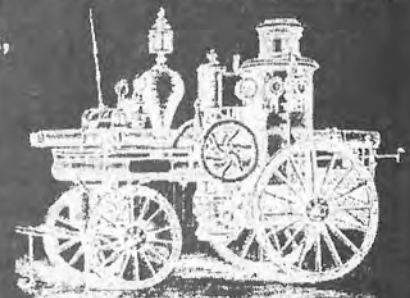
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who had also caught the eye of Woodson Hite, a cousin of the James brothers. An argument over money turned violent and Liddel shot Woodson Hite to death. He was subsequently captured by the law and, realizing the fix he was now in, decided to cooperate with the authorities. Governor Smith made him his star witness against Frank, his former comrade and employer.

Liddel surely regretted his decision to come to Huntsville, for Leroy Pope Walker saved his most brutal cross examination for the government's star witness. Liddel was portrayed as a liar and career criminal, who was destroying the character and reputation of an upright man like Frank, so he could avoid going to the gallows for murder.

Governor Smith could see his case slipping away. He tried on redirect to reestablish some of Liddel's credibility, but in the end it did no good. After a parade of witnesses by the defense who swore that they saw Frank in Nashville on the day of the robbery and a brilliant final summation by Leroy Pope Walker, the jury reached its verdict.

Frank James was acquitted of all charges. He walked out of that Huntsville courthouse a free man. He returned to Missouri and, for the most part, lived a quiet life. The James Gang was no more. He lived out the rest of his days as a living legend while the myth of the James Gang grew. He died peacefully, an old man, at his boyhood home in 1915.

He came to Huntsville as an accused criminal. He left as a national hero.



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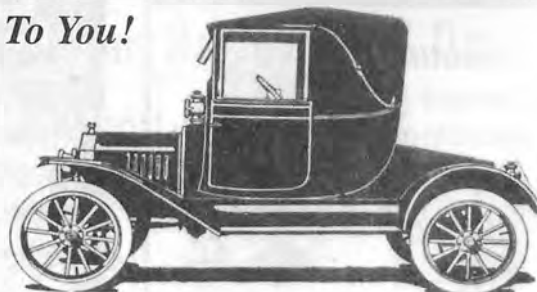
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The Cole's Plantation

by Murray Geron Walker

Many people in North Alabama have been to the Coles plantation site. They just do not know it. The plantation has been sold and gone for many years. The federal government bought it in the early 1900's. This was during the Great Depression. Many parks and dams were constructed during this time. It gave people jobs and kept them from being idle.

The result was the TVA Dam in Guntersville. It can be entered from highway 431. This used to be the main driveway into the Coles plantation. The main house and docks were located on the Tennessee River. This is where the dam stands today. I take my family to fish there from time to time.

This is not the first time members of our family have stood there. My family used to own this plantation a long time ago. Courtships were started here and family names died out too. It could be

a place of safety and of great danger. These stories are seldom heard.

I am the 9th generation of the Coles family. Elizabeth Lee Coles married my great great grandfather, Colonel Robert Fearn Jr. in 1858. Her great great grandfather was Walter Coles who died in Dublin, Ireland in 1740. Major John Coles was her great grandfather who brought her family to America. He was in the English Army. Ironically, his son Colonel Isaac Coles fought the English as part of the colonial army! He fought under General George Washington and was his friend. He kept in touch, and after the Revolutionary War he visited Washington at the capital. I will write about Colonel Isaac Coles at another time.

Dr. Robert Thompson Coles was Elizabeth Lee Coles father. He moved his family from Pennsylvania County, Virginia to Marshall County, Alabama. There he built the Coles plantation. His daughter then married Robert Fearn Jr. in Huntsville, Alabama. Mr. Fearn already owned a house downtown in the city, and he also had one on Montesano Mountain. To this day the only way up the back side of the Moun-

tain is up Bankhead Parkway and then on Fearn Drive. This used to be the road to their Monte Sano home!

Elizabeth Lee Coles new husband became a Colonel during the Civil War. It is interesting that the military men in her family have all served in many different armies! They included the English, Colonial, and Confederate Armies. There were many military men in her family.

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As the Civil War progressed her husband had to stay in Huntsville due to illness. In 1862 the union troops came to Huntsville. He did what he could to stop them. He was very outspoken, and was placed under house arrest. A Guard was stationed in front of their house to keep him inside! When the war ended confederate money was worthless. Many southerners were required to pay heavy taxes on what they owned. The house downtown was sold to pay the taxes on the mountain home and the plantation.

Colonel Fearn and Elizabeth Coles moved to the Monte Sano house which had a spring. His illness got worse and gradually kept him in the bed. Family stories tell of union troops making unwanted visits to people's homes. The union troops felt free to take what they wanted during the Reconstruction Period. On one visit they were after the family silver. They stuck their own bayonets into the mattress Colonel Fearn was lying on! With great luck the family silver had left the day before. It was hidden in a wagon bound for Morgan County. After a period of time it was returned to the plantation.

In 1873 Colonel Fearn died and was buried in Huntsville at Maple Hill Cemetery. After this Elizabeth Coles moved her fam-

ily back to her mother's plantation. Her father had died in 1850. She brought her children with her including her two sons. These boys were the last two descendants that could pass on the Fearn name. Our relative Dr. Thomas Fearn was also in Huntsville but had only daughters.

The plantation was located on a bend of the river. The current made swimming difficult. Even an experienced swimmer could find himself in trouble if he was not careful. There were no life vests back then and you had to swim at your own risk. This set the stage for tragedy.

It was a hot day and a perfect time for a cool swim. Jumping off the plantation dock was a favorite past time. The boys had done it so many times that it was second nature. The boys were age 9 and 10 at the time. This day would be different.

The youngest boy jumped in and began to swim. All of a sudden the current began to pull him under. He cried for help and his brother dove in to try to save him. The current pulled them both under and they drowned. With this the Fearn family name died out forever. The safe haven of the plantation had given into the dangers of the Tennessee River.

My grandfather, Gayle Figures Geron, courted my grandmother Mary Lee Murray at the

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plantation. This story will have to be left for another time. Family members lived and died there, but they also had fun too. Nearly a century later we are relatives that still go back to visit and have fun fishing.



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While our prices have gone up slightly and we have a few more employees, we still provide the same quality service our fore-fathers insisted on. We are the same family, doing the same business in the same location. Stop by and visit with us.

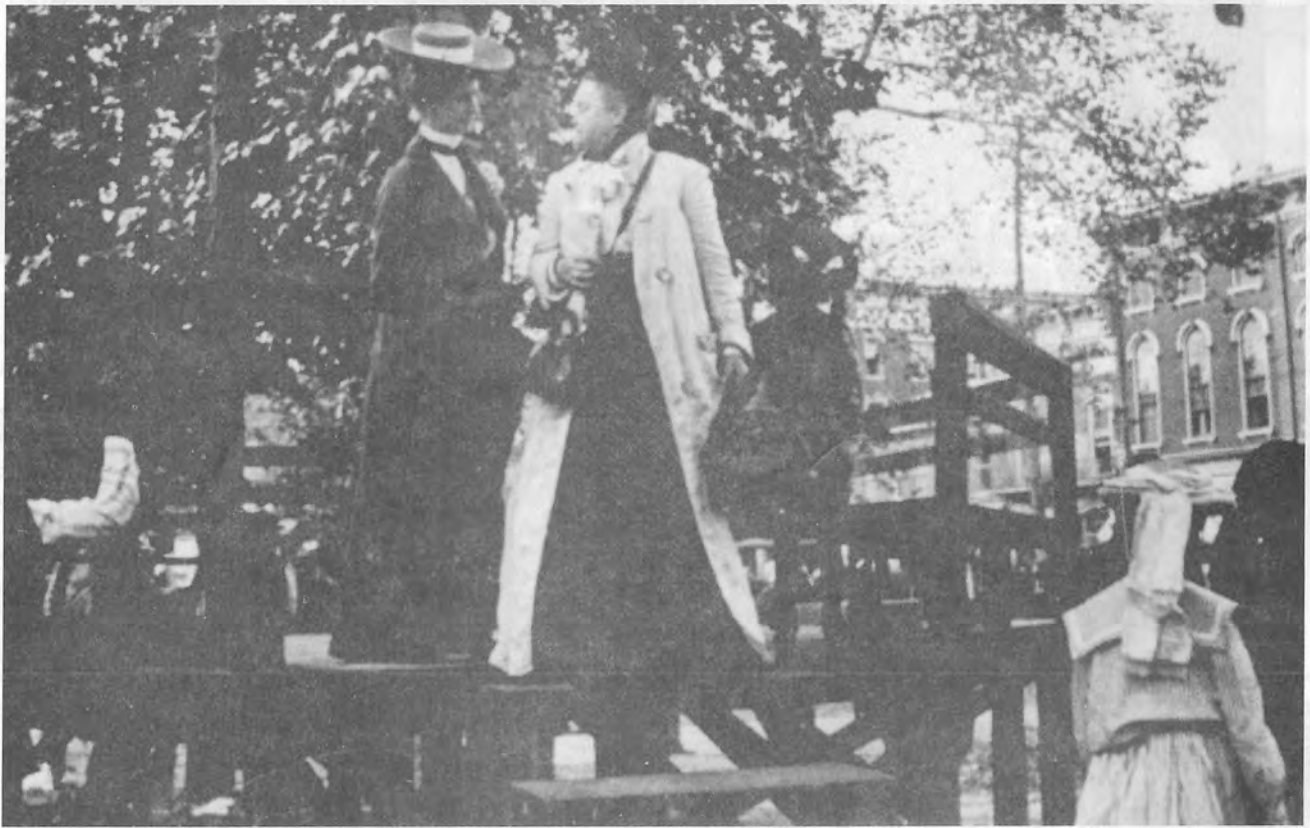
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Ice sold for 25 cents for a hundred pounds and eggs were ten cents a dozen. A beer in one of Huntsville's saloons could be had for ten cents and a room in the Huntsville Hotel was two dollars a night.

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