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Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY



The Age of Elegance

On summer days during the waning years of the 19th century, some of the wealthiest and most influential people in the nation could be seen getting off incoming trains at the Memphis & Charleston depot in Huntsville.

These travelers had names like Vanderbilt, Astor, and Gould, and were highly placed in their respective fields in both the public and private sector.

But they were not coming to Huntsville on business; rather, they were only passing through on their way to one of the country's foremost upper-crust playgrounds – the Monte Sano Hotel.

That period of time would forever be remembered in Huntsville's history as the age of elegance.

Also in this issue: **Six Dead Husbands**

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The Age of Elegance

by Jack Harwell

On summer days during the waning years of the 19th century, some of the wealthiest and most influential people in the nation could be seen getting off incoming trains at the Memphis & Charleston depot in Huntsville. These travelers had names like Vanderbilt, Astor, and Gould, and were highly placed in their respective fields in both the public and private sector. But they were not coming to Huntsville on business; rather, they were only passing through on their way to one of the country's foremost and well-known upper-crust playgrounds – the Monte Sano Hotel.

It was an imposing place, stretching more than 300 feet along the mountain's western rim. Its three stories contained over 200 rooms, each of which was furnished as luxuriously as the finest hostleries of New York and Philadelphia. Perched only 100 yards from the bluff, it would have been visible from Huntsville, three miles away and a thousand feet below. Pedestrians on the city's streets could look up and see it, though it was

beyond the means of most of them. At times they could hear a train whistle as the Monte Sano Railway shuttled visitors up and down the mountain.

The attraction of the hotel, and the reason for its construction, was the presence of a number of mineral springs on the mountain. In the days before now-benign diseases were brought under control by antibiotics, the healing effects of mineral waters were seen as the means to a long and healthy life. The springs on Monte Sano had long been known for their restorative powers. Dr. Thomas Fearn may have been the first to use water from the springs for the treatment of disease, and is believed to have given the mountain its name – Monte Sano, the mountain of health.

By 1833, Dr. Fearn had established a health colony on the mountain. Around this colony was organized the town of Viduta, which had an inn, a female seminary and a number of fine homes. But the mountain top's remoteness kept the area from developing any further. The seminary closed after only three years, and what little activity was left around Viduta was swept away by the Civil War. Little happened on the mountain during the Reconstruction years.

The area's revival began in



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1873 when Michael O'Shaughnessy came to town. O'Shaughnessy was one of a number of outsiders who came in the postwar years, to exploit the South's untapped industrial potential. A true entrepreneur rather than a carpetbagger, he had opened a cottonseed oil plant in Nashville soon after the war ended, and within a few years was so successful that he decided to expand into Huntsville. Michael was soon joined in north Alabama by his brother James and several investors from Nebraska. In order to pursue their goal of building up industry in Huntsville in an organized manner, they formed the North Alabama Improvement Company in 1886.

The Improvement Company also saw potential in the mountain to the east of the city. James had bought a home there, along with 362 acres of land, in 1885. Monte Sano, it was decided, would be the perfect place for a hotel, but not just any hotel. The Monte Sano Hotel would be as grand and as lavish as the finest inns in the great cities of the northeast. It would be just the sort of place that would cater to the well-heeled people who would surely be coming to the area now that Huntsville was becoming a major industrial center.

The project began with the

purchase of 3,000 acres on the western slopes, as well as the old turnpike that had been built up the side of the mountain in the 1850s. On February 16, 1886, a building site was selected adjacent to the old town of Viduta, one hundred yards from the edge of the mountain top. Within a week, sixteen teams of mule skinnners had been hired to begin carting building supplies up to the construction site. Some thought was given to erecting a saw mill to facilitate the work on the hotel, but this plan was ultimately abandoned because of the costs involved. Lumber was freighted in from Chattanooga and Montgomery, although James O'Shaughnessy saw to it that local companies got the first bid on building materials.

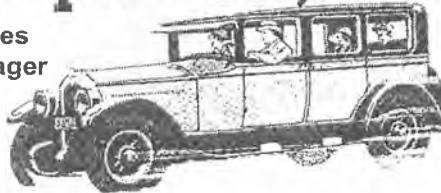
The North Alabama Improvement Company determined that the Monte Sano Hotel would be the equal of the finest such establishments anywhere in the country. John Rea, the architect, had designed a structure in the popular Queen Anne style that was stately without being gaudy. When completed, the three-story struc-

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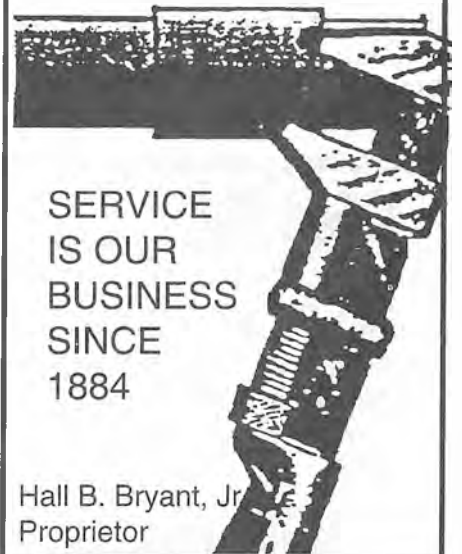
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The Veterans Memorial Museum welcomes the participation of military and veterans' groups and individuals in making the Museum a valued educational and memorial attraction in North Alabama. If you would like to volunteer exhibits, sponsorship, time, or funds, please contact us. We have a particular need for volunteers to sponsor vehicles and wall displays. Any donations of your time, memorabilia, building improvements, or funds go directly toward making the Museum an asset to the City of Huntsville and the State of Alabama.

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ture would be 308 feet long and 200 feet wide. A wrap-around porch would enclose the ground floor on three sides. Rising above the third floor would be a double-decked, bell-roofed observatory. Water would be piped up the mountain's side from Big Spring; drinking water would be piped from Cold Spring. The grounds would be illuminated by gaslight. Setting off the hotel grounds would be the magnificent landscaping work of Major Schrimshaw, one of the finest landscape artists in New York.

Architect Rea had predicted that the hotel would be opened by June, but various delays pushed the opening date back a full year. Nevertheless, the work continued, and by the spring of 1887 furniture was being carted up the mountain as the finishing touches were placed on the hotel.

The great day finally arrived as the Monte Sano Hotel welcomed its first guests on June 1, 1887. The following night, a grand ball was held to celebrate the hotel's opening. To say that this was the social event of the season would be an understatement. A crowd of 400, some from as far away as Pennsylvania and New York, arrived for the festivities. Trains arriving at the depot in Huntsville were packed. The hotel's opening exceeded Michael O'Shaughnessy's wildest dreams.

Entertainment for the grand opening ball was provided by a

string band from Nashville. The 40 by 60 foot ballroom was filled with people dancing, laughing, and enjoying the music. Those who needed fresh air could go outside and walk around the gas-illuminated hotel grounds. Gas for the lights was generated by a plant that was part of the hotel complex. At midnight, refreshments were served and the partygoers moved into the large dining room.

At the table, guests ate their food using china and flatware engraved with the words "Monte Sano." The motto of the hotel's manager, S. E. Bates, was, "The kitchen is the foundation of every good hotel." That night, Bates outdid himself. A newspaper story a few weeks later would talk of Bates' "unsurpassed dining room laden with everything to tempt the appetite."

The success of opening night set the tone for the hotel's first season. Day after day, anxious visitors arrived in Huntsville from all over the country. Hotel guests arriving at the depot were shuttled to the top of the mountain in a carriage drawn by six horses. Along the way, the carriage would stop to allow passengers to view the valley below. Once the carriage had arrived

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in the hotel's circular driveway, visitors would stroll along walkways lined with shrubs and flowers to the main entrance, where the double doors were inlaid with colored glass.

Everything about the hotel was designed to provide the maximum comfort for its guests. The lobby featured a series of pigeonholes for mail, which was delivered and picked up twice daily. After registering, guests would be led by uniformed attendants down the long carpeted hallways to their rooms. There were no inside rooms at the Monte Sano; each of the hotel's 225 rooms opened to the outside. Plush furniture was everywhere, but no two rooms were furnished identically.

The hotel was built in the shape of a cross, with the top pointing north. The long south wing contained baths, a barber shop, a pool room, and a saloon. An adjacent building contained two bowling alleys. Nearby stood an 80 foot water tower which was filled by pumps bringing water up the mountain side from Big Spring. Drinking water was piped from Cold Spring,

northeast of the hotel. Other buildings held servants' quarters and a laundry.

Those who grew tired of the hotel's luxurious accommodations could go outside and stroll the boardwalk which overlooked the bluff. Bowling, croquet, and tennis were offered for those who were interested in games. There were also more than twenty miles of hiking and bridle trails which led to such attractions as the natural well, then called the "bottomless well." The trails also led to the numerous springs which were the reason for the hotel's construction. The hotel manager conducted guided tours to the springs daily.

By the time the hotel's first season ended in August, over a thousand guests had registered and the hotel showed a profit. The North Alabama Improvement Company was delighted and began plans for the second

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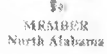
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phase of the mountain's development -- a rail line linking the resort with the city. The members of the improvement company realized that the railroad was the logical next step if the hotel was to be successful. The four-hour carriage ride from the train station was an ordeal which was sure to dampen the enthusiasm of those who came to experience Monte Sano's luxurious accommodations. More people would be encouraged to come to the hotel if they could get there in the comfort of a railroad coach.

Unfortunately, the success of the hotel did not translate into smooth sailing for the railroad. Ground was broken for the road on July 6, 1888, and no sooner had construction begun when it was halted by a strike, probably the first such action in Huntsville history. Management responded by bringing in 500 workers from Birmingham, effectively ending the strike after one week.

More bad luck dogged the railroad. Newspaper stories reported rather unwisely that the line would be completed by the middle of August. From the depot, it would run eastward up Clinton Street (now Clinton Avenue) and reach the foot of the mountain near Maple Hill Cemetery. The tracks had not yet reached Calhoun Street (now the site of East Clinton Elementary School) by August 4, by which time the railroad's Baldwin locomotive and three coaches had arrived.

By early September, three miles of track had been laid -- one third of the way to the hotel -- and workmen and supplies were

being carried to the construction site via rail in a boxcar.

On September 6, a work crew boarded the car after a lunch break and began the trip up the mountain. One of the men, a 26-year-old black worker from Eutaw named Frank Barker, was riding on the brake wheel on top of the car. In the days before pneumatic brakes, brakemen would ride on top of the cars and set the brakes by turning large wheels by hand -- a dangerous and exhausting job. As the train approached Lincoln Street, it passed beneath an overhead telephone line that had been placed by a private individual at less-than-regulation height. The wire caught Barker by the neck and toppled him to the ground. Before he could move to safety, he was run over by the boxcar's wheels. The other workers quickly ran to his aid, but it



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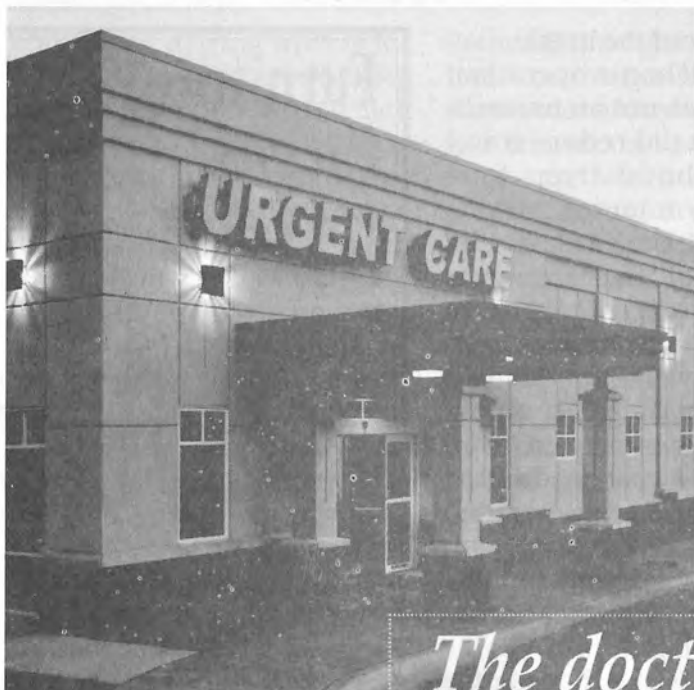
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was too late. Barker died before he could receive medical attention.

The tragic death of Frank Barker was the worst incident associated with the railroad's construction, but it was by no means the only misfortune that affected the enterprise. It was becoming clear that the railroad would generate no revenue in 1888, and its creditors were becoming nervous. Some even went to court to try to get liens placed against the line. As the litigation went on, the railroad continued its glacial pace up the side of Monte Sano. The last eight and one-half tortuous miles would require ten months to complete; the steel rails finally arrived on the mountain top on August 7, 1889. There, a station named Laura's View was constructed to receive passengers

going to and from the hotel.

Even after it began operation, the railroad was not an immediate success. It did reduce travel time to the hotel from four hours to thirty minutes, but the trip was not without its hazards. From the depot, the train traveled through the center of town on existing trolley tracks, and shopkeepers were not thrilled with the idea of a huge, smoking, clanking steam train coming down the street. A dummy trolley car shell had to be fitted over the locomotive to keep from frightening the horses, and the train was known thereafter as the "dummy" line.

Not long after it began, the train experienced its first operational accident. In those days locomotives were fitted with sand pipes, which were operated from the cab and dumped sand

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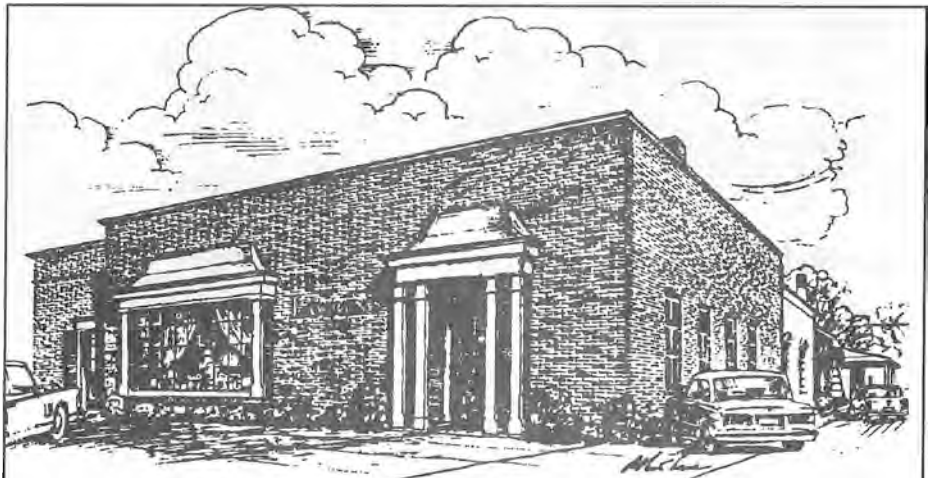
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in front of the driving wheels for added traction when needed. But if the sand became moist, which frequently happened, it would not flow through the pipes. Apparently the sand pipes on the Monte Sano locomotive clogged as it came down the mountain one day; the engineer was unable to reduce his speed and the train jumped the tracks. Fortunately, there were no injuries and the train was quickly put back into service. The nervous railroad manager took out a newspaper advertisement reassuring the public of the railroad's safety and reminding them that more injuries had come from mishaps involving horse-drawn wagons on the turnpike than on the train.

In spite of all the difficulties with its construction, the railroad was successful in increasing the number of visitors to the hotel and the 1890 season was a good one. The hotel, now managed by Harvey S. Denison, began publishing its own newspaper, the *Monte Sano Breeze*. The *Breeze* contained informative articles about the mountain, testimonial letters extolling the hotel's delights, and a good number of advertisements. Also, in 1890,

James O'Shaughnessy built a new home on the mountain top about a mile east of the hotel. The house was enormous - perhaps 200 feet long - and was built in the same Queen Anne style the hotel sported. Out back of the house was a lily pond and a gazebo. A footpath, known as "Flirtation Path," circled the pond. The pond was very popular with hotel visitors.

The first visitors to the hotel had carried home tales of its comforts and attractions, and the place now enjoyed a national reputation, attracting tourists from all over the country. They rarely left disappointed, and some of their words of praise were printed in the *Breeze*. One such letter, written by the editor of the *New York Sun*, described a typical reaction to the hotel's finery: "The hotel is elegantly furnished, kept in first-class style, and in all the appointments is a model of convenience, comfort, and luxury ... Neither money nor pains is spared in securing the best service, and in having [the hotel] kept in a style nowhere excelled in the United States."

The early 1890s were the Monte Sano Hotel's best years. Wealthy people continued to come to the hotel for the comforts it provided, touring the mountain's various attractions and strolling the path around O'Shaughnessy's lily pond. But the horizon which had seemed so

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bright in 1887 began to cloud just six years later. In June, 1893, it was announced that the Monte Sano Railroad would not operate that season. The stated reason was the expected drop in attendance at the hotel due to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago that year. In fact, the railroad was in serious financial trouble. Its construction and operation had overextended the North Alabama Improvement Company's assets, and various court actions had restricted the line's ability to operate. The hotel was also beginning to operate at a loss.

It was becoming obvious that the hotel and railroad would rise and fall together. Trains began to run again in 1894, but it would be for the last time. Mounting debts forced the closing of both the rail line and the hotel in 1895. The courts ordered the Monte Sano Railroad sold in 1896, and the rails which had been so laboriously laid just eight years earlier, were lifted the following year for scrap.

But the Monte Sano Hotel was not finished yet. It reopened under new management in 1897, and for a while it appeared the hotel would weather its financial difficulties. The Spanish-American War provided a brief boost for the mountain top retreat. Military balls held there were quite popular with the thousands of troops stationed at Huntsville for the war.

A mountain resident, Sydney Mayhew, deeded property for a nondenominational church for hotel guests. Management felt confident enough in the future to have electric lights installed on the grounds.

It was no use. Within two years the hotel had fallen victim to a poor economy and a change in popular tastes. Medical science was beginning to find cures for yellow fever and other feared diseases, and people were no longer so willing to make long journeys by train and horse-drawn carriage to high-priced resorts so they could soak in mineral springs for their health. The hotel closed for good after the 1900 season.

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Six (6) Large, Fresh, Sea Diver Scallops, Pan-Seared in a Lemon Roasted Garlic Infused Virgin Olive Oil, served with Lemon Butter Broccoli

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were grazing on the grounds so lovingly planned by Major Scrimshaw, where elegantly dressed ladies and bowler-hatted gentlemen had once strolled. The hotel stood empty and forlorn. It appeared its time had passed.

During the next few years, plans were put forth by different parties for reopening Monte Sano's resort hotel. In August 1904, the Huntsville *Mercury* announced an effort by some local residents to build an electric railway up the mountain. Plans for the rail line simmered for four years, until late 1908, when the newspaper announced an auction to raise funds for the line, at the same time encouraging readers to buy their tickets for the railroad right away.

In April 1909, word came that the line would be completed by July. Edward L. Pulley, general manager of the Huntsville Railway, Power and Light Company, which was charged with building the railway, then said that efforts were underway to convert

the hotel into a tuberculosis sanitarium, which would circulate \$400,000 annually into the city's economy. But just as it appeared that the hotel might actually be reopened, the building and 27 acres of land were sold.

For a short while, the old hotel bore the distinction of being one of the largest private residences in America when Lena Garth bought the hotel to use as a summer home for her ailing and elderly father, Horace. But Horace Garth died in 1911, and the structure was vacated once more.

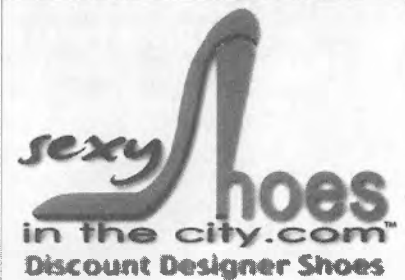
In 1916, yet another attempt was made to reopen the hotel. Jemison Real Estate of Birmingham announced plans to convert the resort to an exclusive country club, with a golf course and tennis courts. The club's

activities would also include bowling, billiards, fishing, horseback riding, and fox hunting. It was further suggested that the hotel might also be used as a convention center. Opening was set for January 1, 1917, but when the date ar-

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rived, repairs were still being made on plumbing and electrical wiring. From then until May, newspaper advertisements declared that the facility would be opening soon.

The country club did finally open, on a limited basis, on June 24, 1917. Facilities for the outdoor activities were still incomplete, but the club's manager, Harvey Hughes, promised music and dancing every afternoon and evening. But by this time, America was involved in the Great War, and light lunches and dancing at a made-over resort from the gilded age did not fit the national mood. Jemison was forced to sell the property back to the Garths. Thereafter, the hotel was opened once a year for a public ball; the rest of the time it sat empty.

The mountain around the abandoned hotel was changing, however. In 1926 a group of developers bought 200 acres on the top of the mountain with the idea of building a recreational community of summer homes. Those plans were soon done in by the onset of the Great Depression. Monte Sano Boulevard opened on Independence Day, 1927, and for the first time it was possible to drive up the mountain in an automobile. Attentive motorists on the mountain might catch a glimpse of the abandoned hotel

through the windows of their Packards and Chevrolets.

In the summer of 1935, construction began on Monte Sano State Park. Much of this work was performed by the young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps. In addition to building the cabins and other structures in the park, the CCCs made a number of improvements to the mountain's roads; these included the paving of Monte Sano Boulevard and the old road to Cold Spring, from whence drinking water had once been piped to

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Monte Sano Hotel. This latter road was renamed Fearn Street, in honor of the doctor who had been the first to realize the healthful benefits of mountain living.

By now the hotel had been empty for over 20 years. Through wars and depression, good times and bad, this old relic of a simpler time waited for a re-awakening which would never come. The long carpeted hallways and lavishly furnished rooms remained silent.

On March 9, 1944, as war raged around the globe, the Huntsville Times placed a local interest story below the front page headlines: *Monte Sano Hotel Sold; Buildings to Come*

A man could live twice as long if he didn't spend the first half of his life acquiring habits that shorten the other half.

Down. The hotel, as well as the remaining furnishings within, had been sold to the Mazer Lumber and Supply Company of Birmingham. The hotel would be dismantled and the furnishings sold. The razing of the building, the story said, would begin immediately.

There is no way of knowing the identity of the last person to walk the hotel's hallways on its last day. Whoever it was would have found the structure in a remarkable state of repair for all the neglect it had suffered. The newspaper article noted that "practically all lumber in the buildings is in remarkably good condition and the interior of the hotel, with the exception of cracked plastering, shows little effects of the passage of years."

The interior of the building would have been recognizable to the Astors, the Vanderbilts, and all the other captains of industry who had once walked its halls. If our

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unknown last visitor had a sense of history, he might have paused for a moment and listened for the sounds of music and of laughter of young men and women who had once passed that way.

Having ascertained that no vagrants had taken shelter in the old building, the person, most likely an employee of the lumber company, left the building, and the process of demolition began. Little by little the grand old structure was reduced until all that was left was one three-story chimney. Somehow, thankfully, this chimney survived.

Gradually, all the structures associated with the hotel fell victim to the passage of time. The O'Shaughnessy house was torn down in the 1920s, disappearing so completely that its exact location was unknown until discovered in the mid-1990s. The lily pond and remnants of "Flirtation Walk" survive, as do traces of the gazebo's foundation.

After the railroad tracks were salvaged, the cross ties were left in stacks, which eventually vanished. The Monte Sano Union Chapel was demolished in 1968. The site of the long-disappeared Laura's View station is now private property on Shelby Avenue.

But the Monte Sano Hotel is not gone from us completely. The staircase and some of the doors and lanterns were purchased by Aaron Fleming, whose home on Whitesburg Pike had been damaged by fire about the time the hotel was being salvaged. These items were incorporated into the Fleming house and are there still.

It is likely that many of the hotel's fixtures were sold to builders by the Birmingham company and found their way into new homes all over Alabama where they may survive to this day.

Today, the old chimney on Old Chimney Road, the railroad embankments, and some old grainy photographs are the only tangible evidence we have that the Monte Sano Hotel ever existed.

Only in our imaginations can we stroll the artfully manicured grounds or ride the rails up the mountain.

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Heard On the Street

by *Cathey Carney*

We had a winner for the December Photo of the Month! **Lewis Rasmussen** recognized the picture of the little boy as that of **Cecil Ashburn**, whose road off Bailey Cove is now legendary due to the conflict over Christmas trees. For you newcomers, several years ago people began decorating the wild trees that grow along the roadside before Christmas along Cecil Ashburn Drive, down to the Hampton Cove area. It was all done in secret, and suddenly there were hundreds of decorated trees! Huntsville residents loved it (with a few exceptions) and each year the number of decorated trees grew. It became a problem for the city in regards to cleanup after the holidays. So several groups of citizens volunteered to clean up, but the city asked the residents to stop decorating. Stay tuned - we think it will continue!

John Henegar's annual Christmas party at Lee Ann's Bar & Restaurant was packed with people there to watch **Tony Mason** perform along with a special guest, **Jeff Cook** of the legendary band "Alabama." Some of the folks we saw there were **Louie & Jane Tippett, Glenn Watson, Jim Vaughn,** and



Doris Tucker. Marie Hewett was there, **Becky & Danny Loggins, Mr. & Mrs. Scott McClain** and **Robert Patterson. Lynwood Smith** and his wife **Missy** were rocking out to the great music, along with hundreds of others - it was the best party ever!

City Councilman **Bill Kling** and his pretty wife **Tanji** were there as well, and it's always great to catch up with them.

Speaking of Tanji, she is so proud of her beautiful Mom **Elizabeth Lyon** who will be 81 in February. Elizabeth is a life-long resident of Madison County and raised 4 kids! She's the best.

I met the sweetest young lady recently at lunch at Weatherly Heights Elementary School. Her name is **Isabel Okinedo**, and she is a third-grader in **Mrs. Beard's** class. I was there having lunch with my granddaughter **Hannah Troup**, who is also a third-grader in **Mrs. Bougher's** class. Anyway, Isabel knows exactly what she wants to do when she gets older,

she wants to be a dermatologist. When asked why, she said she wanted to help people with their skin problems, but most of all she wants to follow in the footsteps of her Dad, who is also a doctor. He is **Dr. Clement Okinedo**, owner of Zoe Medical Care. His wife, **Lisa**, and Isabel's mom, works as manager at the office there. Isabel has a sister, **Michelle**, and brother, **Denzel**. She was just a delightful young person to speak with, and says that since she has a March 16 birthday, she is so looking forward to spring!

The **Veterans Memorial Museum** is something everyone should go to visit. It's located off Airport Road west of Parkway, and is packed with military vehicles and other displays. **Chuck Owens** (a WWII and Korean vet) recently visited with his great grandson **Evan Troup** and they were fascinated by the displays.

The day of the **Channel 31 Christmas Parade** downtown was cold and dreary, but that didn't keep hundreds of parade-watchers home. The bands were

Photo of The Month

The first person to correctly identify the youngster below wins a 1-year complimentary subscription to "Old Huntsville" magazine.

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Hint: This little boy spends his time between his business and a very old house.



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great (Love the **A&M band**, I could listen to them all day), and one of the highlights was **Bill Miller** in his 1929 yellow Ford auto!

Cecil and **Margaret Ashburn's** grandson **Jeremy Farber**, son of **Jennifer Gillespie**, is getting married in the spring and currently lives in Washington DC. Jeremy's fiance is **Michelle Powers**, a nutritionist from there.

Pat Keefer and her son **Levi** will also be going for the wedding which will be held in a historical plantation in the area called Raspberry Plains in Virginia.

Audra Wilson owns Salon Bella on Church St. & has the worst possible day for a birthday. It was on December 27, but we hope it was a fun day for you!

The **Winter Wine Event** is held annually to benefit the Huntsville Museum of Art. This year on Jan. 29 there will be a wine tasting as well as a Silent Auction with delicious food offered. (starts at 6:30 pm) On Jan. 30 there will be a Wine Dinner and Live Auction starting in the evening. This event is being presented by the Women's Guild of the Huntsville Museum of Art. For more info call 535-4350 ext. 217.

Happy Birthday to **Heather Bzdell**. She is the sweet daughter of proud Dad **John Bzdell**, who owns Marathon Painting.

We keep hearing about people leaving their valuables & purses in their cars, in full sight of anyone looking in. It is too much of a temptation for some people if they see that in view. The smartest thing to do, if you HAVE to leave your purse in your car, is to put it in the trunk or hide it somehow. Also, when you are leaving any store or mall, don't be afraid to ask a mall representative to escort you to your car if you feel uneasy. If someone seems to be following you to your car, just turn around and go back into the

store. Be aware of everything going on around you, including people. Finally, when you do get in your car, immediately lock your doors. Oftentimes crooks will wait for a victim to get in the car, knowing it's going to be a few minutes before you leave.

As much of this theft involves injury, to say nothing of the mental trauma you'll go through, it's just smart to protect yourself. Don't be an easy target for anyone.

You sure don't hear "Happy 92nd Birthday" too often, but I'm especially happy to wish my Dad, **Chuck Owens**, a happy birthday January 15. He and mom, **Annelie Owens**, have lived at Redstone Village for the past 5 years and really like it there. Happy Birthday, Dad, I'm so very proud of you.

We keep hearing stories about the **Historic Lowry House** and the spirits that may still be there! The home alarm goes off for no reason at all, glasses come flying off the mantle at the fireplace, faces are seen looking out of the windows. Who knows - there may be a movie in the future about the events going on here!

February 6 is the date for the **Divine Performing Arts Chinese Spectacular**, which last year was very memorable. It will be held at the Von Braun Civic Center and is well worth the price of a ticket.

Al & Rebecca Temple (owner of Rebecca's in 5 Points) recently spent time in San Antonio visiting their son **Jason** and his family. They are very proud of their son, who is in the Navy.

Joyce Russell, of New York Life, certainly has alot of gifts to buy in December! Her daughter **Megan Mack** had a birthday Dec. 16, while grandson **Trenton Dyer-Keefer** has a December 19 birthday. Grandson **Nathan Dyer-Keefer** turned a year older on Dec. 4. Mom and dad to the boys are **Wendy and Wyatt Keefer**.

Much colder weather is soon coming up, so be sure and keep an eye on your older friends and neighbors.

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RECIPES

For your Sweet Tooth

Tipsy Cake

- 4 egg yolks
- 1/4 c. sugar
- Dash salt
- 2 c. scalded milk
- 1/2 t. vanilla
- 1 pkg. Lady fingers
- Apricot jam
- 1/2 c. whiskey
- Toasted almonds
- Whipped cream

Beat yolks and stir in the sugar and salt. Stir milk in gradually and cook over hot water, stir constantly til mixture coats your spoon. Chill, flavor with vanilla.

Split the lady fingers and spread with the jam. Put a layer in a glass bowl and pour whiskey over it, let the cake soak up the liquor. Cover with half of the custard, repeat layer of lady fingers sprinkled with whiskey and pour over remaining custard. In a mixing bowl beat the cream

cheese and sugar til creamy, add peanut butter and milk. Beat slowly til smooth, 3 minutes. Blend in the topping til no streaks appear, pour into pie shell and freeze. When you serve, this is good with a topping of whipped cream and a drizzle of chocolate syrup, with a light sprinkling of crushed toasted peanuts.

Chocolate Popcorn

- 1 1/2 c. sugar
- 1 T. butter
- 1 square unsweetened chocolate

late
3 qrts. freshly popped plain popcorn

- 3 T. water

Boil your sugar, butter, chocolate and water til mixture spins a long thread. Pour hot over popped corn and stir til all kernels are coated. Delicious!!

Date Pecan Candy

- 2 c. sugar
- 1 c. milk
- 2 T. butter
- 1 c. pitted dates, chopped
- 1 c. chopped pecans

Cook the sugar and milk to soft ball stage. Add the butter, stir. Add dates and cook slowly, stirring all the while til dates are dissolved. Remove from heat and beat til mixture stiffens. Add the pecans, stir and pour on thin, damp clean cloth. Roll into a long loaf, let cook and slice thin.

Hot Pineapple Casserole

- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 c. sugar
- 2 c. crushed pineapple
- 1/4 c. milk
- 4 c. cubed bread

Open can of pineapple but don't drain. Take the crusts off

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the bread, mix together all ingredients. Bake in buttered pan at 350 degrees for about 55 minutes.

Chocolate Puffs

- 1/2 c. Crisco oil
- 4 sq. unsweetened chocolate - melted
- 2 c. sugar
- 4 eggs
- 2 t. vanilla
- 2 c. self-rising flour
- 1 c. confectioners sugar

Mix the oil, chocolate and granulated sugar. Blend in the eggs one at a time, add vanilla. Stir flour into the mixture, chill for 2 hours. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Drop the dough by teaspoons into a bowl of confectioners sugar. Roll in the sugar, making balls. Place 2 inches apart on greased cookie sheet. Bake 10-12 minutes.

Amaretto Nut Fudge

- 4 c. sugar
- 2/3 c. Amaretto liqueur
- 2 c. half and half or light cream
- 1 c. chopped pecans

In a large sauce pan combine all the ingredients and brush sides of pan with butter. Stir over

moderate heat til your sugar is dissolved, bring to a boil and cook without stirring til it reaches 238 degrees on a candy thermometer, or when a drop of the mixture forms a soft ball in cold water.

Remove from heat and stir in the nuts. Let stand til temperature drops to 140 degrees. Beat with a spoon til mixture begins to thicken slightly, then pour quickly into a foil-lined 8-inch pan. A Pyrex container, buttered, will work as well. Let it stand til hard and cool.

Cream Cheese Delights

- 16 oz. cream cheese
- 1/2 c. sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 T. lemon juice
- sugar wafers
- Foil baking cups
- 1 can Cherry or Strawberry pie filling

Soften the cream cheese and mix together the rest of the ingredients. Put a wafer in the bottom of each foil cup, spoon 2 tablespoons of the filling mixture into the cups on top of the wafer. Bake for 10 minutes at 350 degrees. Cool, then top with cherry or strawberry pie filling (1 tablespoon each).



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"April 11, 1862: On the morning of April 11, General Mitchel's division took possession of Huntsville. There was no opposition, only a few sick and wounded Confederates in town. They entered at daybreak, first taking possession of the railroad. The Southern was just coming in, having on board 150 Confederate soldiers, some wounded, going home on leave. The train endeavored to make its escape but was fired on by two cannons. All aboard were taken prisoner. The well soldiers were confined to the depot house and the wounded remained in the railroad cars."

This is how Jane Chadwick, writing in her diary, described the events of that day, thus marking the beginning of one of the strangest legends in Huntsville's colorful history.

Emily McClung was at the depot that morning when the cannons opened fire on the train. Her fiance had been wounded at the battle of Vicksburg and was coming home to recuperate when the train was captured that morning. She watched with terror as the blue-coated invaders herded John and the other prisoners to the depot at the points of bayonets.

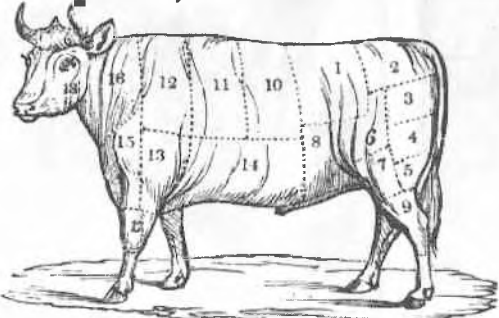
John and Emily had been childhood sweethearts for as long as anyone could remember. People used to tease their families that if John ever got lost, all they had to do was to find Emily; John was sure to be close by. As the winds of war swept across the valley, John enlisted into the Confederate army, postponing their plans for marriage. When Emily received word that John had been wounded and was coming home, she immediately started making plans for their wedding.



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Years later, people would talk about how sad it was to watch Emily standing off at a distance, staring at the depot with tears in her eyes while John would stand in the window helplessly looking back at his love.

The other prisoners, upon learning of John and Emily's plight, began conspiring to help John escape. Word was passed to Emily that she should be waiting across the road from the depot at the stroke of midnight.

Late that night, John put on a Yankee officer's uniform, and while the other prisoners created a loud commotion, he walked boldly out the front door. Walking slowly at first in order not to draw attention to himself, he made his way across the road.

According to legend, when John saw Emily standing at the side of the road, he began running toward her with his arms spread. A Union guard seeing what he thought was a fleeing prisoner ordered John to halt. When John continued to run, the guard opened fire. After firing the first round, the guard noticed another figure across the road. The gun roared again, leaving both Emily and John lying in the road, dead.

The Union soldiers placed their bodies in an empty railroad car until they could make arrangements to bury them. The next morning, a burial detail went to remove the bodies but they were gone. A guard had been posted all night and it would have been impossible for anyone to approach the railroad car without being seen.

An alert was sounded, but the bodies were never found.

1884—People waiting to buy tickets at the depot told of seeing a young couple walking and holding hands late one night. The man was dressed in an old-fashioned Federal uniform. When the couple were approached, they disappeared.

1890—A man by the name of Dilworth buys the property and builds a lumber supply

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store. While building the store he experiences problems with his horses. Regardless of how well they are fenced in, the horses refuse to spend the night on the property. Every morning, upon arriving at work, he would find the fences torn down with the horses standing across the road trembling as if in terror.

1909—Police are called to the lumber yard. Neighbors had called and complained of a loud party, with people dressed in Confederate uniforms. One man was supposed to have been dressed in blue, escorting a beautiful young lady. The police could not find any signs of a party.

1933—Mr. Dilworth is called to the lumber yard early one morning. It had been snowing the night before and the night watchman had found fresh footprints in the snow. Mr. Dilworth and the guard followed the prints to where they disappeared into the side of his warehouse. After a complete search, they were still at a loss to explain the strange trail that led to nowhere.

No one has ever been able to offer an explanation for the curious events surrounding this legend. Maybe there is no answer.

My formula for complete success is to rise early, work late, and strike oil.

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from 1836 Huntsville paper

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Notice to be given, and names to be enclosed in a letter, addressed to William E. Phillips, Esq., Huntsville, Ala., within six months time - half forfeit.

I furthermore will meet any man that lives in Europe at the Valley of Washington, and will run for from 5000 to 50,000 dollars.

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An Honest Mayor

from 1912 newspaper

Huntsville Mayor R. E. Smith, who engaged in a fight with J. E. Pierce, editor of *The Huntsville Times*, sat on his own case in the police court this morning. The case of Pierce was called first, and the defendant was discharged although he entered a plea of guilty. The mayor next called his own case and entered a fine of \$10 against himself because of the fact that he was the aggressor in the affray.

Horse Thief

from 1827 newspaper

On the 23 of October last, a man who called his name J. Wilbond sold me a Horse, and said he was going back to Huntsville, from which place he came here; I paid him, he then took the stage, went a few miles, whereupon the driver said he got out and went into the woods. That night my stable was broken open, and the horse I bought off him stolen out, with a new saddle and bridle.

As said Wilbond has not been heard of since, no doubt but he returned that night and stole my horse. Wilbond is a large man, blue eyes and fair complexion, and says but little, wore a black cloak, and black cloth coat.

He limps on one leg and speaks with an educated voice. He is around 25 years of age with a heavy black beard.

I will pay \$50 for the delivery of said Wilbond and the horse to me, living at the Bell Tavern in Winchester, Tennessee, and for the horse alone, \$25. Wm. Rankins.

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Memories of the War

In the early 1900's Marshall C. Wilson wrote of growing up in the Tennessee Valley during the Civil War. His memoirs are remarkable for the insight they give of the hardships the people of the valley had to face during the war.

Gen. Mitchell's troops swept the valley clean, and we had little food left. Alabama had never been a cattle country, but depended for meat mainly upon the sheep and hog. The grain was loaded and sent away to the army.

The horses and mules were seized on but ours were left, as we thought, but one morning we woke up to find that about 25 of our Negroes, most men and well-grown boys, had slipped away in the night, taking with them every horse and mule in the stables.

This was a staggering blow, but we soon saw there was some comfort in the loss of slaves. It had become serious problem to provide their food and clothing. The slaves remaining on the place recognized the responsibility, too.

There was no more thought of planting cotton; the energies of everyone on the place were bent on one purpose of getting food and clothes. My father at this time organized all his forces - everybody was put to work, even the small

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children. The women were cutting, sewing, and knitting from early morning till late bedtime. The Negro women were spinning and weaving and some helping in the fields, the old men and little boys were cultivating the fields with hoes. A large crop of cowpeas was planted for food.

My father got some medical books to read and he learned to make some of the simple medicines. He went from place to place to see the sick and prescribe for them as though he were a physician. You know that in those days blisters were thought to be indispensable for inflammations, pneumonia, etc. There were no drugstores to furnish supplies - we could not even buy a mustard plaster. My father had been experimenting

with plants, trying to find a blistering agent. One day it was reported to him that the lightning bugs were eating all the leaves from the potato plants. We were growing potatoes on a large scale because it was a food that could be easily concealed in case of a raid.

He found that some rows, at least were swarming with a bug that looked like the firefly, and he ordered the boys to knock them into the water. This was done, but some of the boys reported that their hands blistered. Then these bugs were gathered up, dried, pulverized, mixed with lard, and the mixture proved a fine blistering agent and was sent far and wide for this purpose. The bugs had never appeared before and never

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Jerry Downs, age 8

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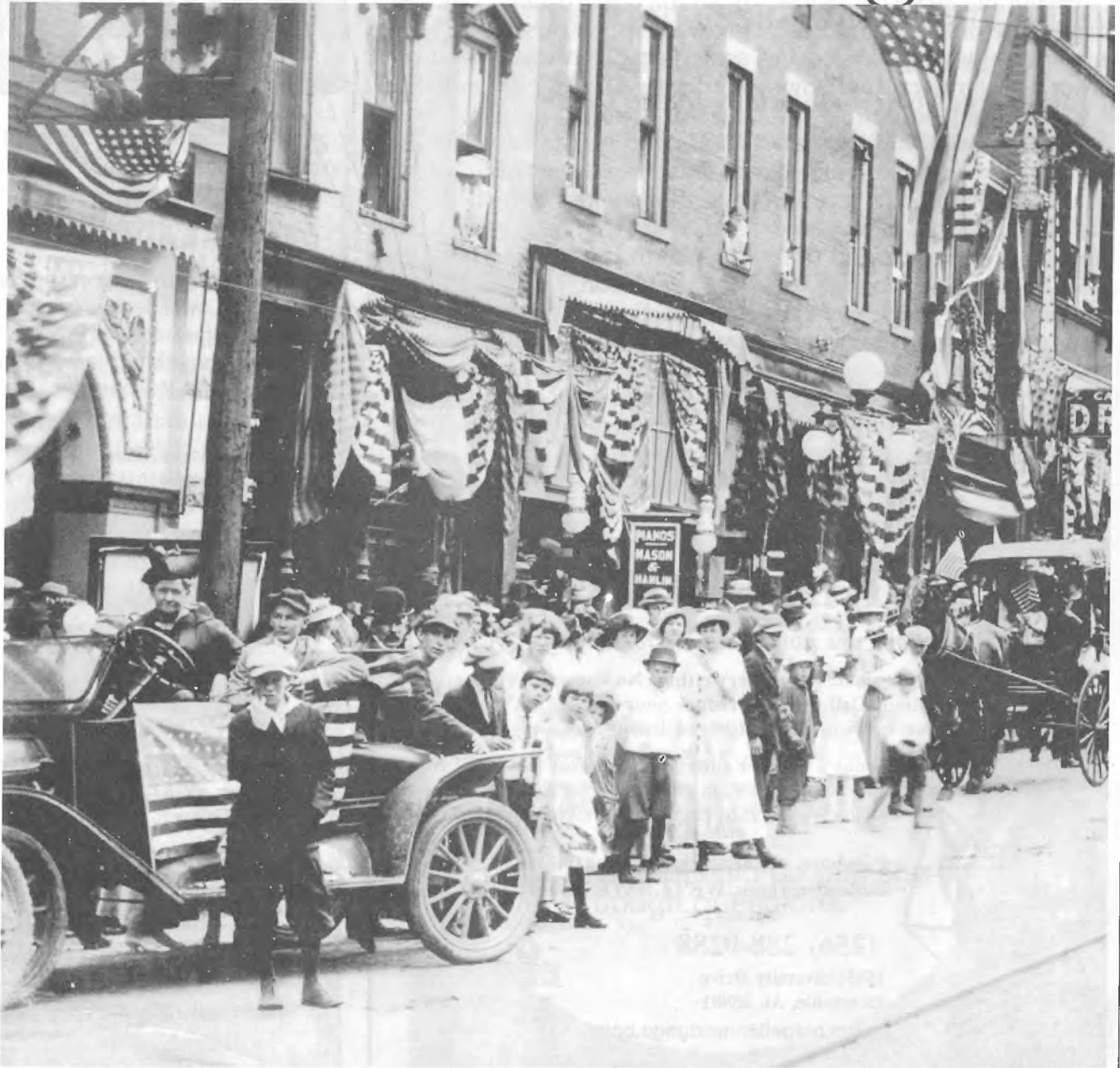
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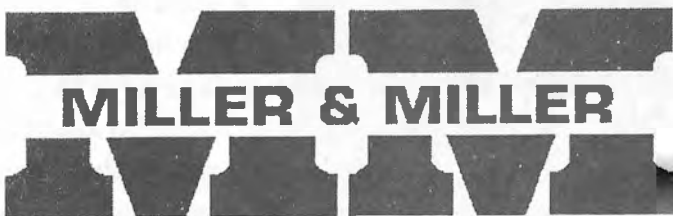
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Times Have Changed



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came again. Long afterward, we learned that they were the real Spanish fly.

Singularly enough, one of the most precious of articles at this time was common salt. Now salt was needed to season food, but it was absolutely necessary to preserve meat, and the plantation depended for its meat supply on salt pork.

On the plantations there were large smoke-houses where, winter after winter, many slaughtered porkers would be salted down and much salt wasted on the dirt floors, so this floor was dug up to the depth of two feet and the earth leached with water and the water evaporated off. We got bushels and bushels of salt this way.

There was no soda, but we made a substitute for the lye of wood ashes. Parched rye was used as a substitute for coffee-it tasted something like the modern postum. For sugar, we cultivated the sorghum cane and made many barrels of molasses, and when this molasses was all out of the barrel, we usually found a few pounds of sugar.

Our writing paper gave out very early and at first we tore out the blank leaves from father's old ledgers, and when these were exhausted, we moistened the wallpaper on the walls, tore it off in strips and used the blank side.

Sometimes letters went off, decorated on one side with a picture of George Washington crossing the Delaware, or with a wreath of roses. There were no pencils, but we learned to make very good ink from oak balls and copperas, and any boy with a pocket knife could make a perfectly good pen from a goose quill.

My own tasks in this new economy were varied and were shared for the most part by my

little Negro playmate. (We were about seven years old.) We went back and forth to carry leather to the shoemakers and then to bring the shoes home (there were some forty people on the place to shoe). It seemed to me the shoemaker was always drunk when we called, and never had the work done.

Then we were sent all around the neighborhood to exchange garden seed; to borrow a tool or lend one; to carry news or gather it, and to do errands generally.

I think our gala days came when we were put to melting up tallow and molding it into candles, or to bringing up pails of lye for the soap kettle and keeping the fire going. I believe we were fairly happy, but even we children had our anxious moments and talked of what we would do

if the Yankees came upon us while away from home. Once we were tested and ignominiously hid under the floor of an old house by the roadside.

The war wore wearily on - reverses in arms now alternated with victory; we were becoming poorer and poorer. Still we had no

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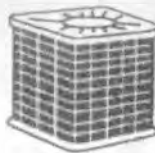
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thought of giving up and worked all the harder. I remember working all day for days scraping lint from old linen tablecloths and sheets and tearing off bandages to be sent to the nearest hospital.

I could not possibly make anyone understand the isolation in which communities lived. The railroads were torn up, the steamboats burned; the roads mostly impassable. Our heavy old carriage could hardly have gone over them, even if there had been horses to draw them.

One day we had a merry surprise over the arrival of a stately old lady who lived five miles away. All of her horses and mules had been taken; she wanted to visit us but couldn't walk the five miles. Old Ben, her carriage driver, was called in and asked if he could hitch two yoke of oxen to her carriage.

He said he would try; so about noon we heard loud cries of "Gee! Wah! Come! Get up!" and then we saw Mrs. Harris' big carriage slowly coming up the hill while she was leaning out the window, waving gaily.

But most of the times were terribly serious. There was far more weeping than laughter. Women sometimes grew white-headed worrying for news of their sons. By this time, there were no mails, no newspapers. The only news we got filtered in as rumors caught from carriers bearing dispatches. We often hear a rumor of a great battle, and then wait days and weeks in sus-

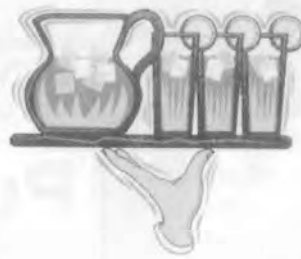
pense before knowing anything. Sometimes, if the front were not too far away, my brothers would send their servant, George, on horseback with their letters and some gathered up from their friends.

We were always on the lookout for George, though he came only a few times a year; and then we dreaded to ask him questions, or to open the letters. Every time there would be heavy tidings for some of the neighbors and my father would go as comforter to the house of mourning to read over and over his son's letters telling how this boy or that had died fighting for his country.



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- For Rent - two furnished rooms for light housekeeping. Mrs. S. R Metcalfe, Phone 131

- Left by mistake at Mrs. T. W. Pratt's residence - one serge skirt. Owner can have skirt by describing same.

- Bargain - 4 room house in good condition; \$500 or will trade for livestock. 80 acres of land \$800. Contact A.J. Hewell at the Market.

Esslinger Arrested for Bigamy

from 1907 newspaper

There was much commotion in our city yesterday when Buck Esslinger, a farmer of Owens Cross Roads, and his wife Mollie Esslinger, were arrested yesterday and brought to Huntsville, the former on a charge of living in adultery and the latter on a charge of bigamy.

Warrants for the arrest of the couple were sworn out by John Roan who claims to be the first and present husband of the woman. Roan claims that the woman has a suit for divorce pending in the chancery court and that although a decree of divorce has never been rendered, his wife married Esslinger and has since lived with him.

The defendants were arrested by Deputy Constable Ferguson. They were arraigned before Justice Vaught who fixed their bonds at \$250 in the case of Esslinger and \$1,000 in the woman's case. Both succeeded in finding sureties.

Both are of good character and the charges are expected to be dismissed. Roan however is a shady character who is suspected of attempted blackmail.

The Naked Truth

from 1911 newspaper

Seven people, three men and four women, were arrested and placed in jail here by Deputy Sheriffs Pierce and Robinson on charges of enjoying the charms of the Big Spring while unclothed in their natural attire. A mad scramble ensued as several of the town's gentry rushed forward to volunteer their efforts in the arrest of the comely lasses.

The parties are members of a naturalist society.

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Bits of Huntsville History

1808 - The first record of deed by the City of Huntsville is deeded to Martin Beatty for "one thousand acres in a square and including the Huntsville Spring," the consideration being one thousand dollars.

1812 - Inflation has driven the price of Whiskey to an astonishing price of five cents a shot.

1832 - Lemuel Jackson successfully bids on two slaves being auctioned in front of the courthouse. Mr. Jackson, a local business owner, is black.

1876 - Faced with a budget

deficit, Madison County is forced to sell the County Poor House. An outraged citizen, Donald Finney, suggested it might make more sense to sell the City Hall, as it was responsible for the deficit.

1885 - A religious revival takes Huntsville by storm. Before the end of the revival, over six hundred people would be baptized in the Big Spring.

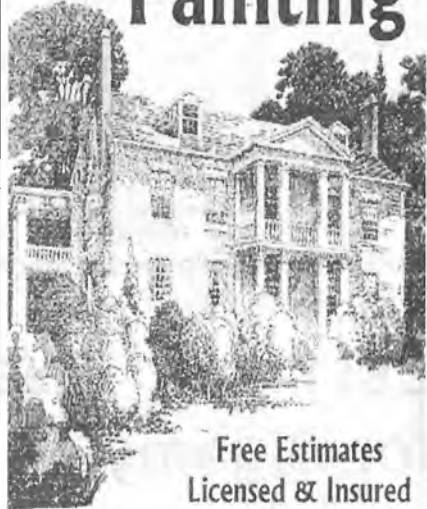
1890 - The Columbus Buggy Co. is doing a brisk business at the corner of Green & Lincoln Streets.

1895 - The Milligan Sluggers wins the Madison County Championship. The Sluggers were one of Huntsville's first baseball teams.

1897 - Captain Frank Gurley sells the Paint Rock Railroad. Over fourteen miles of it had been graded.

1901 - A turtle weighing 73 pounds was caught on Flint River by Andrew Mobly. It was said he put up a very valiant struggle but Mobly was the winner.

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Electric Lights in Country Houses

from 1873 newspaper

It is stated on what is thought to be good authority that within a few years electric lighting by means of windmills will be common in all country districts. The windmill has great possibilities if properly arranged.

It is suggested that water may be pumped to a reservoir and then utilized as a power. The objection to the windmill is there that are many times when there is no breeze, and of course the windmill is stationary.

This would be certain to occur when it is most needed, and might cause great inconveniences. A well filled tank or reservoir with a good pressure would, on the contrary, be always in working order, of course, accidents being allowed for.

The best reservoir would be made of pipe standing upright and closed in with suitable masonry, spaces being allowed for air chambers to prevent freezing.

The waterpipes could be laid underground and in this way a tank from ten to thirty feet high might be filled by suitable pumping apparatus. An extremely small stream would be sufficient to operate a dynamo, and every house could have its independent electric plant.

The advantage of electric lights all around one's garden and farm buildings will be readily understood by the average farmer.



Real Estate Bargains from 1910

\$1,575.00 - A dandy four room house on East Clinton. Includes wood house and garden.

\$1,100.00 - Good four room house on Pratt Avenue. Almost new.

\$3,500.00 - A fine antebellum residence near Hazel Green. 18 acres with barn, all year creek and quarters.

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Life At The Tollgate House

by Betty Williams Gordon

I am sitting in the sunroom of my brother's house on Tollgate Road, looking out the window and watching the chipmunk running around storing his food for the winter months ahead. If you look close you will see the squirrels and birds coming out of the woods to the feeders. Late in the evening the old gray fox appears, looking to see if it's OK to come out of the woods. I know now why Mama loved this place.

This house belonged to Mama and Papa Williams (Tom & Josie) and it stood behind the old tollgate house.

We were sharecroppers living in the country, Papa decided to move us to the city of Huntsville. He rented a small house on 8th Avenue on the west side; Mama did not like the west side. The houses were so close together there was no privacy at all.

While living on the west side I met and fell in love with a neighborhood boy. Mama did not approve of our relationship; she said I was too young to be serious with him. The more she disapproved the more I loved him. He knew Mama didn't approve of our relationship. He would walk down the street at night whistling our favorite tune (Tipping End). I would climb out my bedroom window and meet him. My sister Stacie always was going to tell Mama, but she never did.

Papa and my brothers bought the old tollgate house and three acres of land in 1929

from the Penny Family. Mama was so happy she could not wait to get moved.

The old house was built close to the road and a window was used to collect the toll to cross the mountain. Tollgate Road was the only road going over the mountain at that time. It was a gravel road that washed out any time we had bad weather. The old Tollgate House had only three rooms; a rock

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fireplace was built in the center. The room at the front of the house, with the large window, was where the gate keeper worked, leaning out the window to collect tolls from the travelers. My sister Stacie and I shared it for our bedroom.

The cars coming up the gravel road at night looked just like they were coming in the window. The old house was spooky; it would creek and snap at night and sometimes the wind would blow so strong it was like a hurricane.

My brother Carl (Spud) slept in the kitchen by the table. It was so cold the dipper would be frozen in the water buckets in the morning. My older brother B.W. (Dub) built in the small porch and he slept out there. He would get up in the morning and come by the fireplace trying to get warm. He claimed he was so cold that his ears were frozen and he could not move them.

There was no bathroom in the old house. We had the outdoor toilet in the woods behind

the house. At night when we had to go, we would hear foxes and raccoons. We would run back to the house scared to death. We often heard tales that there was money or some sort of treasure buried on the property.

In the fall we use to go hunting in the woods down the old gravel road. The foliage from the trees was beautiful that time of the year. In the wintertime the rain would sometimes freeze on the trees and the icicles would sparkle like chandeliers.

My brother B.W. (Dub) decided to go to trade school and become a barber. He went to live in Gadsden while he was in school. I moved into his room on the porch. At night I would dream of an old ghost sitting on the side of my bed, laughing and moaning. I would wake up scared to death, calling for my brother, Carl. The ghost would visit my room often; I always thought he wanted the buried money.

My westside boyfriend finally married someone else and my heart was broken. Mama said I would get over him, and after much crying, I did.

Later when I got married and had Jeff, my first son, we brought him home to the old tollgate house. He is now forty-nine years old and he still loves to go home to the old tollgate place.

We tore the old house down in 1952 and a lot of good memories disappeared. The

lumber was used to build another house where we moved. Papa died March 22, 1961; he was ninety-one. Mama stayed in the new house until she died in 1975.

My sister Stacie got married and moved away. My brother, B.W., worked in the local barbershop where he is known to

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everyone as Dub. He lives across from the old tollgate place. My other brother, Carl, went into country music, the thing he loved best. Everyone in Huntsville knows him as Spud, the music man.

The Williams family is a very close family. We still get together once a year in October for a family reunion.

As I sit here looking out the window, the old walnut tree still loads the yard with walnuts. The hickory nut tree still stands; it still attracts lots of squirrels. If I didn't know better, I would think the old groundhog is still there, it looks like him but I guess it is one of his ancestors.

Our family loves the old place and the memories it brings. There is no place like home.

Blind Justice

from 1901 newspaper

There were little doings in the courts today.

The jury in the case of Walker versus Langford. for \$1000.00, awarded the plaintiff \$250.00.

The judge, as is his habit, fell asleep at the beginning of the trial but awakened in time to render the verdict.

Off Limits

from 1872 newspaper

An unruly incident took place this week past at the Spring Saloon when soldiers of the 7th Indiana Regiment began casting disparaging remarks about the late war.

The patrons promptly left the establishment, went home, donned their old gray uniforms, whereas they returned and made short work of the northern visitors.

The bar has been placed off limits.

Just So You Will Know

from 1903 newspaper

On Tuesday of week past I returned home to find my wife had forsaken her marriage vows. She is thought to be in the company of a man by the name of Howard who abandoned his own wife and children.

If anyone has knowledge to her whereabouts please wish her godspeed that she may leave this place and never return. I write this just so people will know the truth.

- Franklin Cox

You know it's going to be a bad day when you go to put on the clothes you wore home from the party and they aren't yours.

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A Baffling Dilemma

from 1897 newspaper

Last week a widow lady, residing near Hazel Green, put her house up at a raffle and very soon disposed of the tickets - all feeling disposed to assist her.

The evening arrived, and the house was won by a gentleman who thought himself most fortunate in obtaining a homestead so cheaply.

The next day he asked for a title to the property. What was his surprise when he was coolly informed that it was unnecessary to give any written title to the house - that there it was, and to take it; and - the sooner the better, as she was anxious to build another on the spot where it stood. The winner discovered

that he had drawn a house, but no lot.

Upon applying to the authorities for relief he was turned away with the understanding the raffle was legal and he had no recourse.

The gentleman, deciding to make the best of a bad situation, moved into the house with it still standing on the lady's piece of land.

The lady then applied to the authorities for relief but was told that she too had no recourse; she had not specified the house had to be moved.

There has not been a final outcome to the baffling dilemma yet.

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Six Dead Husbands

The mysterious happenings that took place in a home near Hazel Green may have been accidental, or may have been violently purposeful. The only sign left of Elizabeth's six husbands was an old hat rack upon which hung six hats - one for each. For some curious reason known only to her, she kept the hat rack in the foyer of her home, in plain view, perhaps as a morbid reminder, or maybe as a warning to the next unfortunate lover.

The antebellum home, recently burned to the ground, was built on the site of an Indian mound about a mile east of Hazel Green. The original log cabin was erected in 1817 in the heart of a 500-acre by Alexander Jeffries, an early Madison County settler. He was an older man who met and immediately became infatuated with the young widow.

They married in 1837, and unfortunately for him, Mr. Jeffries died the same year. By this time Elizabeth had experience in burying husbands. As a young girl she had met and married twice in short succession. Her first husband was a Mr. Gibbons. They were married for only a couple of months when he died suddenly, and mysteriously.

Shortly afterwards, she set her sights on Mr. Flannigan, whom she also married. Mr. Flannigan lasted only three months before he also died of unexplained circumstances. He was in his grave before the neighbors were even informed of the tragedy.

By this time the young widow

was well on her way to becoming a wealthy landowner in Madison County. Not wishing to marry beneath her newfound status in life, she decided to try her hand at politics.

Her next husband was Robert A. High, from Limestone County, who was a State Legislator for the state of Alabama. He probably spent much time away from home, as it was almost two years before he also expired suddenly and mysteriously at their home.

Having tried politics and plantation life, Elizabeth decided to next marry a merchant. Absalom Brown was a wealthy merchant from New Market. After spending most of his fortune on his new wife, he died as well. This came as a shock to everyone, as Mr. Brown was a very

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healthy and virile man. The unknown ailments he was stricken with caused his body to swell so badly that it was necessary to bury him immediately after his death. None of the neighbors ever saw the body.

Not believing in long spells of mourning, Miss Elizabeth Flannigan Gibbons Jeffries High Brown roused herself out of her depression long enough to marry Willis Routt, her sixth husband. He died amazingly just like the others in a short time.

At about this same time Elizabeth, or Mrs. Routt, became involved in a controversy with a neighbor, Abner Tate, over loose livestock and other matters.

Tate was completely blind to her beauty, which infuriated her, and had been observing the home and its occupants for many years. He openly charged her with murder. He backed up his suspicions with the hat rack in the parlor that was in open sight, on which hung old hats - the blatant proof of Tate's accusations.

Maybe Abner Tate should have been forewarned of crossing the notorious widow, for shortly afterwards he was wounded by a shotgun blast. Though proof was lacking, gossip had it that Mrs. Routt had hired one of Tate's slaves to do him in. The slave, not having the courage to do the dirty deed himself, in turn hired another man, who allegedly pulled the trigger. Mr. Tate, shortly afterwards, sold all of his slaves.

By this time Tate was furious with his neighbor and determined to see justice done. When he went to the authorities he was informed that "noth-

ing could be done unless you can find some evidence. Maybe all of her husbands did die natural deaths. Maybe the slave did shoot you by accident. Maybe it's just all coincidence. There's nothing we can do."

Beside himself with rage, Tate was determined



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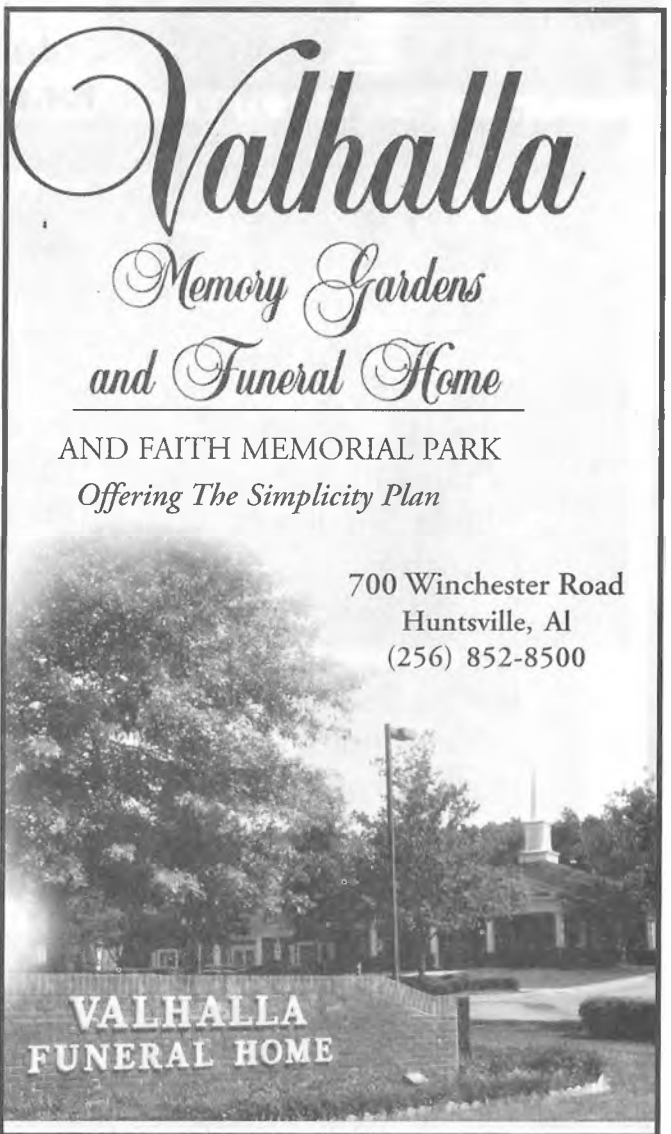
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that his neighbor would not get away with her dastardly deeds. He began writing a book in which he described the mysterious happenings at the antebellum home. He wrote about how the succession of husbands made her prosperous and wealthy; how she would treat them all with disdain, once she had captured them. He noted how the intervals between weddings and deaths became shorter and shorter, as she acquired "more experience and practice."

When the book was published, it created a scandalous sensation in Madison County. Half of the county believed she was guilty, while the other half swore to her innocence. Regardless of opinion, the book was the major topic of discussion any place people gathered.

Needless to say, the merry widow was not a pleasant lady to be around when she heard news of the book. She immediately drove her buggy into Huntsville where she consulted an attorney and brought charges against Abner Tate for defamation of character.

When the case finally came to trial late that fall, the courtroom was packed. The courtroom became a battleground, with plaintiff and defendant hurling insult after insult at each other.

Accusations followed from each of the attorneys, while the judge rapped repeatedly for order.

The crowd of onlookers became so large that it overflowed onto the courthouse grounds. It was said a tavern in town was taking bets as to how the trial would end.

The judge, after listening to as much as he could stand, continued the case, hoping both parties would calm down enough to be rational.

After a short while Mrs. Routt dropped the charges. Even today, the debate goes on in Madison County. Why did she drop the charges? Was it because she was tired of constantly being the topic of gossip, or was worried about some new information that Tate's attorney had recently uncovered?

Shortly afterwards Mrs. Routt and her son moved to Mississippi. She never again returned to Madison County.

No one knows why she moved, but the day of her departure, witnesses swear that they saw her in a carpenter's shop, getting a seventh peg added to her hat rack.



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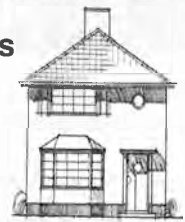
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A Letter

Woodville, Al.
July, 1862

The infernal slave order is enough to make one curse the government that allowed it to be issued. A few days ago a rebel came here with an order to take away his slaves. The order was given by General (illegible) who now commands the division. I was away from camp at the time but the captain in command allowed the master to take his slave away.

Today, a notorious rebel lawyer came here wishing to search through the camp for his slave, but I refused to allow him to do so, and told him if the slave were in camp, he should not have him, if as I supposed, we had recieved information from him.

He told me he had been assured he could go through our lines and into our camps to find his property.

I assured him he could not go through mine. He will go to Huntsville and probably report me and I may be arrested. I will give that rebel (illegible) crew a fight. I will appeal to the president If not arrested, I will resign rather than disobey orders.

Poor Miles, who was so badly wounded about three

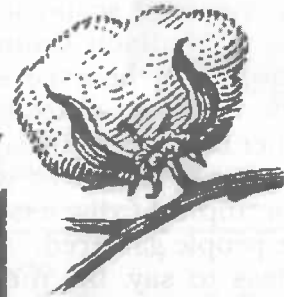
weeks ago, died day before yesterday. One of the gang that killed him and Capt. Moore, whom we arrested and sent to Huntsville, was released by Gen. (illegible). Oh, such conduct makes my blood boil!

(signed) J.M.

"When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot, hang on and swing!"

Jean McIntosh

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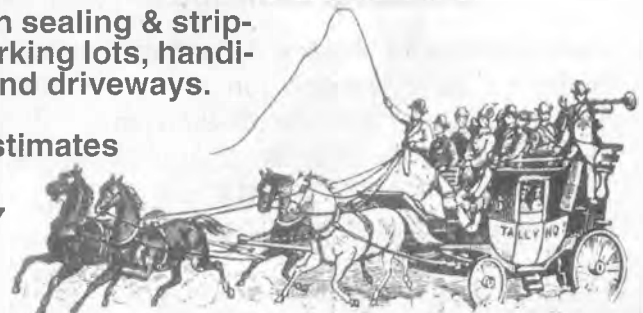
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A Letter

September 20, 1891

Mrs. Sally Sandlin

Dear Daughter:

I seat myself this beautiful Sabbath morning to answer your letter that I got from you some-time ago. I was glad to hear from you and to no that you was well and doing well. Sally, I have nothing to rite to you that would interest you, no more than we are all well, hoping that this will find you and Len both well.

Well, Sally I have got your picture and Len's lying by me, thee look pleasing and it looks like they both want to say something to me. What to rite. Well, I recon that you think that I mite rote to you sooner. I could have rote a letter a long time ago, but I was just hoping you would rite. That is the only reason that I have for not riting sooner. Well, Sally if you will excuse me for not riting no sooner, I will try to rite you a letter once a month.

Dear Daughter, if I could see you with your glossy black hair & rosy cheeks, loving smiles, tender words & kind heart with them lilly white hands clasp my one, that would been briter to me than the britest star that ever shone. Sally there ant many days that passes but what I think of you.

Sally, I recon you would like to no something about how times is here. They are very hard times here. Money for horses & cattle & hogs cheap, corn & wheat is a very fair price. Sally I recon you would like to no what sort of a crop we have got. We made 60 bushels of wheat, a few oats & I have got about 2 acers of cotton. We have

got a fine corn crop. We ant tending much of our land in corn. The land that we rented will make 10 barrels per acer. I have got a fine sweet potato patch made rite smart of arch potatoes. No cabbis, no garden, no chickens, hardley heap of ducks. Sally we had squirrel and chicken for breakfast this morning, two big possomes for dinner. I dont no what for supper

yet. I must close for this time. Sally you & Len write to me just as soon as you get this so no more. I remain your affectionate father over till death.

Letter written by Henry Rutledge to Sally & Len Sandlin. Submitted by Nell Rutledge.

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"Always tell your wife she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck."

Marriage advice from a Madison 10 year-old

News From the Year 1914

News From Huntsville and Around The World

Europe On Brink Of War

Austria-Hungary is eager and ready to invade Serbia and as the sending of his passports to the Serbian minister is a virtual declaration of war, hostilities will begin probably within the next day or two. Serbia had acceded to most of Austria's demands and nothing but an entire surrender on its part could now avert war. While the war-like attitude of Austria-Hungary has been precipitated by the assassination of the Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand, about two weeks ago, a Slavic propaganda against Austria has been in progress for some time.

But the moment Austria starts a war with Serbia, Russia will take up the fight and aid its little Slavic neighbor to the full extent of its military resources. Germany would join Austria. The German people are in a frenzy of war. France and possibly England would be

drawn into the conflict. The only certainty is that the United States will mind her own business and stay out of the fracas.

Europe has been long preparing for such a war as this which is threatened, but although it seems inevitable, all peace-loving people will pray that some way out of it will yet be found.

Skyscraper in Huntsville

Ground breaking was held today for the Twickenham Hotel, a project expected to cost \$100,000. The hotel is being built on the site of the old market house which was purchased by the city for a reported \$15,000. A crowd of some three thousand people attended the ground breaking.

With the completion of the

six story hotel, Huntsville will be able to boast of having the tallest skyscraper in the Tennessee Valley.

No More Deer

County officials today announced that they would no longer permit deer in the courthouse yard. The announcement was met with hoots of derision by people who have grown attached to the pet deer. Supporters of the deer have vowed to go to court to prevent the county from removing the animals.

Women & cats do as they please, and men & dogs should relax and get used to that idea.
- Cheryl Tribble

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Local Man In Jail After Drowning Death

Vassar Vest, residence 121 Washington Street, Decatur was drowned in the Tennessee River this morning about ten o'clock. At a point several hundred yards below the bridge, a boat occupied by Vest and a young man named Jim Breedlove turned over according to Breedlove's story, throwing the two out.

Breedlove has been arrested and placed in the county jail. Breedlove, when seen in the county jail this afternoon, told the following story to a reporter: "Vest and I were crossing the river to fish and had reached the other side when the boat turned over, but I do not know what caused it. I grabbed the side and saved myself. I got the boat turned right side up when I had gotten about 50 yards from this side, after having looked for the body of Vest. I came on to land and got the family of Vest and went back across the river. I was sitting on the bank over there when Deputy Sheriff McCulloch arrested me."

Breedlove does not appear to

have a criminal face, but there appear to be several details of the drowning which he doesn't seem to be quite familiar with. He stated that he didn't know what caused the boat to turn over, dumping the men in the water, though he said that Vest had been teasing him about not being able to swim and had been rocking the boat in an effort to aggravate him.

Heir to Austrian Throne Dead

Shockwaves were felt all over Europe today as a Serbian nationalist assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife, the Duchess of Hohenberg. They were both gunned down in cold blood as their motorcar was passing through the streets of Sarajevo, in Bosnia.

The assassin, identified as Gavrilo Princip, is a 19-year-old Bosnian student. He fired seven shots from his pistol. One bullet struck the duchess in the stomach. Another hit the archduke in the neck. He died almost immediately.

The duchess died as she was being rushed to a hospital.

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My Heroes and Roll Models

By Malcolm W. Miller

My third eldest brother, James Curtis Miller, Sr., was born as was his two brothers before him, Robert and Joe, on the Robert Spragins farm in the area that is now known as Fagan Hollow in southeast Huntsville. The family lived there for some time until the work became more than Papa could handle alone.

After leaving the Spragins farm the family moved several more times. Once to what was known as the Moore Quarter located at the eastern foot of Chapman Mountain where Papa worked with Will Andrews in the logging business.

Finally the family ended up in the Ryland community, renting land for a share of the crops raised or in some cases renting a farm for money. The family was living near the banks of Flint River when James Curtis decided that he had had enough of the cotton patch with the hard work and no money. He tried unsuccessfully to join the Navy but they would not let him in because he was too tall. Finally in October 1936 he gave up on joining the Navy and joined the Army.

The Army life was much better than the farm life. The Government paid him twenty-one dollar a month, gave him good clothes and shoes to wear and plenty to eat.

I was only nine years old when he left for the Army. He was stationed at Fort McClellan and would come home on some weekends. I remember every weekend I would sit on a limb of the big oak tree at the end of our porch and watch for him to come walking down the red dirt road that led to our house.

I will now back up here and explain something to the folks that knew James Curtis Miller growing up because they may not know whom I am talking about. The story goes this way. When he started school the teacher asked him his name and he replied James Miller, at that instant his cousin, William Miller, jumped up and said, "No, his name is Gibbus Buntin." That was what Mom called him. After this episode the name has



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been shortened to Gib. That is what he was known by and always will be known by his siblings, nieces, nephews and friends.

Gib learned to be a soldier in the old brown boot army aptly described in James Jones classic "From Here To Eternity." I remember him wearing the old woolen wrapped leggings and riding pants. Later on it was much better when the Army went to combat boots.

When Gib was in the Army I always wrote him letters like the following: "Dear Gib, How are you? We are fine. Please send money. Malcolm." Remember, I was only nine years old and times were not easy.

In 1942 Gib married Miss Bertha J. Martin, a pretty Georgia girl. The wedding was in

North Augusta, South Carolina. That marriage has lasted sixty-two years and is still going strong. They have two sons, Howard, who is an arts writer for the Huntsville Times, and Jimmy, who lives in Florida and works for the Navy Department.

Gib was in the first wave on Utah beach at the Normandy landing on June 6. Our brother, Louis, was right behind him. He went ashore with the infantry before the rest of the Fourth Division, probably about 6:30 a.m., and then he fought back and forth through the hedgerows.

In July, at St. Lo, just outside

of Cherbourg, Gib turned on his radio and the Germans picked up the signal and began shelling his position. Gib was seriously wounded and had it not been for a medic close by he never would have made it out alive. He spent many months recuperating at various army hospitals until he could finally return to duty.

Gib still has shrapnel on his spine that they cannot remove, however it does not slow him down much. He turned ninety-one years old this year and still raises a garden and gets around fairly well for a man that fell and broke his hip last year.

Gib knew General Omar Bra-

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A S S I S T E D L I V I N G

dley and operated a radio for General Patton. Ernest Hemmingway was a war correspondent in his outfit.

There has been a member of our family wearing a military uniform without a break since Gib started the tradition in 1936. Our great nephew, Christopher Miller, is a Navy Lieutenant carrying on that tradition even today.

In Gib's long Army career he served in two wars and rose to the rank of Chief Warrant Officer. He was a soldier's soldier, looked the part, and could have played a soldier in a war movie. I know Gib would not like me writing this about him because he is a very private person, however he has truly been a hero and a great roll model for me.

Gib went on a long journey from the cotton patches of Madison County to the battlefields of Europe and Korea. I can truly say that Gib is a member of the greatest generation that Tom Brocaw wrote about in his book.

Huntsville to add 12th Grade to Schools

from 1924 newspaper

After heated arguments on both sides it was decided last night that Huntsville schools would implement a 12th grade into its present educational system.

Many people argued against the proposal, saying that an additional year of schooling was foolish and would deprive parents of much needed labor. "You can't learn nothing in 12 years that you can't learn in 11," one person was heard saying

It is doubtful that many students will agree to another year.

Digging for Gold in Sublett Garden

by Garland Sublett

Born sometime around 1813, Andrew Monroe Sublett grew up in Warren County, Kentucky. He left his old Kentucky home probably in the late 1820's, and found his way to a small valley in Madison County, Alabama where two mountains (Lick Skillet and Chestnut Knob) meet.

Climbing to the top of "Lick Skillet", he met, fell in love with, and married a young lady named Mary Ann (Polly) Moon, whose family had already settled in the area, and who loaned their name to the community now known as Moontown.


Moving to the bottom of the mountain, Andrew and Polly built the Sublett home, which still stands today, in 1834, and began raising the Sublett family.

As time passed and the 1860's rolled around, Andrew and Polly found their family swallowed up in the events and consequences

Old is when you're cautioned to slow down by your doctor, instead of the police.

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of a war that marked one of our country's stormiest periods; the war between the North and South. On one occasion, hearing that there was a company of union soldiers in the area, and fearing that if they should show up at the farm, they would loot or take anything of value that they could find, Andrew and the oldest boys began to herd all the larger farm animals (mules, cows) into the mountain and hide them in a large cave.

That was about all they had of any value except for a handful of five dollar gold coins which they kept in a cannister on a mantle over the kitchen stove. Along side it was another identical cannister in which they kept their used cooking grease.

Grease (lard) was a valued commodity in those days. You didn't throw it away, but saved it to be used again. While hiding the farm animals, they happened to

think about the gold coins on the mantle. So, they quickly grabbed the cannister and ran out to the garden where it was buried.

As it happened a few soldiers did show up at the house. They took some chickens and meat from the smoke house, and a few small items. After they had gone, Andrew went to the garden and dug up his gold. To his surprise, it wasn't gold at all, but grease.

In their haste, they buried the wrong cannister. The gold cannister was still on the mantle untouched and unnoticed by the union soldiers.

If you think health care is expensive now, just wait until you see what it costs when it's free.

P. J. O'Rourke

News from Madison

from 1898 newspaper

Ben Jennings split his foot open while cutting firewood.

A negro under the employ of Henry Fletcher was bitten by a six foot rattlesnake while picking cotton in the lower field.

Aunt Bessie Myers died after a short illness attributed to the consumption of spirits. She was ninety-six.

The body of an unidentified person was found, hanging from a tree, by George Willis while he was hunting ginseng. It is supposed he was either murdered or took his own life.

Horace Jolly is building a new home after the last one blew away in the storm last month.

Nothing else is happening.

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January 26	6:30	Robert Patterson	Criminal Law
	7:40	Perry Shuttlesworth	Leading Edge of the Law
February 2	6:30	Deleine Mountain & Clint Mountain	Tort Law Concepts
	7:40	Ed Gentle	To be Announced
February 9	6:30	Larry Morris	Justice in America
	7:40	Kerri Riley	Employment Law
February 16	6:30	Ron Sykatus & Amy Tanner	Bankruptcy Law & Security Clearances
	7:40	Phil Price	D.U.I. Law
February 23	6:30	Robert Presto	Divorce Law
	7:40	George Moore	Worker's Compensation Law
March 2	6:30	Robert Roden	Medicine & Law (Oil & Water)
	7:40	Mike Wisner	Wills, Estates and Tax Law
March 9	6:30	Mayor Tommy Battle	City Government
	7:40	Charles Boyd	Social Security Law
March 23	6:30	Bob Prince & Paul Clemons	Products Liability Law
	7:40	Connie Glass	Elder Law
March 30	6:30	Matt Glover	Roll On 18 Wheel
	7:40	Barton Warren & Derek Simpson	Trial Techniques
April 6	6:30	Mike Timberlake	Nursing Home Law
	7:40	Hall Bryant & Allen Brinkley	Corporation Law
	8:40	Graduation	

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An Expensive Cow

from 1919 newspaper


There is a man in Huntsville who pays \$18,000 a year for the privilege of keeping a cow. He is a sane man, a business man, a man of family and generally respected in the community. His poor relatives declare him a freak, and his neighbors shrug their shoulders and murmur things about rich men's whims.

The way of it is that he possesses a valuable building lot in a choice residence portion of the city, and having nothing else to do with it, he put a nice little fence around it and quartered therein his pet Jersey cow. The cow was an artistic cow and harmonized well with the green turf and little bushes, so people rather admired the arrangement.

One day a man came along from Paint Rock who thought he would like to build on that particular lot, so he hunted up the owner and made him a spot cash offer of \$430,000 for the land. His offer was refused, politely and decisively. "But," remonstrated a relative aghast, "that would pay you \$18,000 a year! Why did you refuse it?"

The rich man lit a cigar and turned a protesting face on his accuser. "Yes," he assented in a puzzled way, "but what would I have done with my cow?"

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The Mystery of the Upside-Down Hill

by John Crow

The year was 1959. Fidel Castro became the Prime Minister of Cuba, "Tom Dooley" was a popular song, and I had come to Huntsville. My father and I were staying in a boarding house on Adams Street until he could close on a home and bring my mother and sisters down from Ohio. I had come down that summer with Dad to get squared away at Huntsville High for my pending junior year and to try out for the football team.

That summer I learned that Southern boys take their football seriously, that I resented being called a "Yankee" (I had lived most of my young life out West or in Tennessee), and through the auspices of my soon-to-be best friend, discovered what surely must be one of the all time great mysteries

of the universe.

"Minus" Mullins was the football team manager. We called him "Minus" because at that time he was so small. His real name was Bob and he had sort of an impish, con-man

quality about him. He was always cooking up some scheme or another designed to make a quick buck. Well one day after practice we were sitting around at Gibson's Barbeque drinking iced tea. I forget how the conversation got started but I was telling Bob about some of the wonders I had seen in my travels out West.

Bob got this sort of far away look in his eye, hunkered over closer to me, and in a low, seri-

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ous voice said, "John, I bet you a dollar that I can show you a wonder right here in Huntsville, Alabama that you'll have to agree is the greatest wonder you've ever seen." I'll have to admit I was pretty leery of what was taking shape but I could tell Bob was serious and that look in his eye was downright scary. I figured I couldn't lose and besides I was awfully curious.

"OK, show me," I said, a little smugly. We got in his '58 Chevy and headed north on the Parkway and took a right on Governor's Drive. We headed toward the mountain and then veered left onto Big Cove Road. Now you have to remember that back then the area around the Big Cove turnoff was mostly rolling, sloping, grass-covered hills, and the traffic wasn't anything like it is now. We traveled up Big Cove just a little way, it seems, then Bob started to slow down. He began looking from side to side then stopped, backed up a little, then stopped again. He put the car in neutral and with his foot still on the brake said, "We're on a hill going up, right?"

Well we were definitely on a hill, granted the spot where we were at was not a particularly steep grade, but it was definitely a hill.

"Bob, you know darn well we're on a hill."

"OK," he said, "When I let my foot off the brake we'll start to roll back down the hill, right?"

"Right," I said, not hiding my disgust. Bob let his foot off the brake, and I swear, instead of rolling backwards down the hill, the car rolled up the hill for a short distance, then came to a stop. "Whoa, do that again!" I said. Bob put the Chevy in gear

and backed up (down) the hill a short distance, then repeated the performance.

"Bob, that's the strangest thing I've ever experienced."

"Yeah, it's weird alright. Let me show you something." He reached over and opened the glove compartment and pulled out a folded piece of paper. "Read that," he said. I unfolded what appeared to be a piece of an old comic strip section from a Sunday newspaper. Someone had written a date on it that now was very faded, nineteen fifty something. When I read it I could feel the hair on the back of my neck start to rise.

It was an old "Ripley's Believe it or Not" strip. You



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remember when it was in color in the Sunday comics. Well it showed this car on a hill and a man scratching his head and little question marks coming from his head and said something about the upside-down hill in Huntsville, Alabama. "Bob," I said, "This is really something. Imagine, we're on a spot in Ripley's." "Yeah," Bob answered, "Don't it beat all you've ever seen?" "It sure does," I replied.

Then I saw his eyes light up and he said, "John, you owe me a buck." Well, I begrudgingly paid Bob and, armed with a marble and a carpenter's level, all that summer I'd go back and try to unravel the mystery of the upside-down hill. I never could figure it out. I do know that the level would show "down" but the marble would roll "up."

I had forgotten about this incident until a couple of weeks ago when I was thinking about my old friend. Bob's been dead over twenty years now. Little did we know that summer would be one of the few left when we still had our adolescent innocence. The sixties, Nam, the seventies, careers, family, all the changes and stresses of adulthood, almost caused me to forget that first summer in Huntsville.

I guess in memory of old Bob "Minus" Mullins I tried to find that spot on Big Cove the other day. I can tell you this, if you try to stop your car on Big Cove Road today the odds are you'll get run over, and to walk around there with a marble in your hand is just plain suicide. I've never found that spot again where down is up.

Did You Know...

Of all the presidents to have visited Huntsville, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, received the biggest welcome. Over seventy percent of the city's population turned out to greet him.



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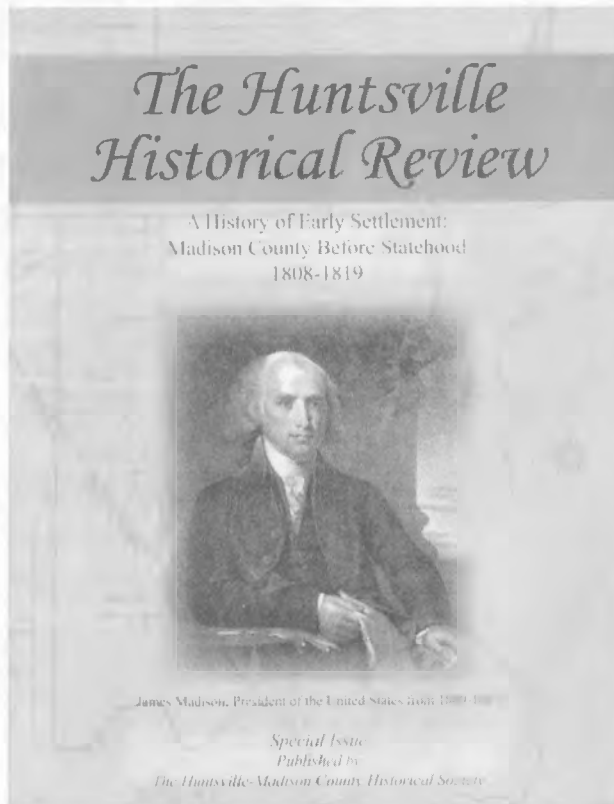
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