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Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

Alton Delmore



“We were divinely innocent.”

That was Alton Delmore’s late-life summary of the Delmore Brothers’ rise to the top of the country / hillbilly music world in the nineteen thirties and forties, and the hard plunge back to reality in Huntsville, Alabama, where the jagged pieces of shattered dreams and disillusion couldn’t be confined in a bottle.

They knew all about the music, but they knew nothing about the music business, a cut-throat world of no quarter, where the pickers made all the music and sang like angels, and the businessmen made all the money like the devils they were.

Also in this issue: Mafia Witness

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Domie Lewter
Mac Lewter

Alton Delmore

by Rick Carter

It was bitterly cold in Oklahoma City, and it was Thanksgiving Day,

Alton Delmore had the bad head. He wore most of the clothes he owned, but still shivered. He could see his breath in the air. Condensation was frozen on the inside of the window. There was snow on the ground. As a boy back in Alabama, snow was rare, and a treat. Snow in a cold town far from home just makes it seem colder. He huddled closer to the small space heater. It was over-matched in the drafty, wrong-side-of-the-tracks motel room. The tinny radio put out almost as much heat. He turned it on and waited for some music. It wasn't quite noon and the preachers still owned the air-waves and raved for the saved and the sinners.

Alton shook his head and remembered the last song the Delmore Brothers sang on the Grand Ol' Opry back in '39; "What Would You Give In Exchange For Your Soul." He didn't have much left to give. He had

pawned, drank and eaten most of his possessions. There was the little round dialed Zenith, and his guitar, but the radio would be pawned soon. His shaking hand rasped across three days of gray-ing beard.

Alton knew that all over the country families were gathered, giving thanks for the groaning tables loaded with turkey and dressing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, hot buttered rolls, mince meat and pumpkin pies.

He licked his lips and studied his Thanksgiving dinner.

It was a mayonnaise sandwich.

There are sounds the poor and hungry know that the rich never hear. One is the unmistakable clanking of a metal knife inside an apparently empty glass jar. Alton was able to scrape just enough mayo from the streaks on the jar's sides and bottom to spread a thin white layer between a couple of Wonder bread heels. The bread was past stale, but still edible after he pinched the blue-green hairy stuff from the edges.

Yesterday's ketchup sandwich was better, but the ketchup was gone, too.

He tried to give thanks to a Lord gone deaf for what he did have. He knew all too well that others had less. There was an old saying in the south: "You can't



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get no poorer than dead.”

By that measure, his brother, Rabon, was much poorer than him.

His aching head was as full as his stomach was empty. Memories pooled behind his eyes and a bit of one trickled down his cheek when he thought about home, and the meals his mama used to put on the table. It was poor people food, simple country food, and often there wasn't much of it. But he'd love to have a small plate of it now.

What he really used to look forward to after church was Sunday dinners at his Uncle Merritt Compton's house, over in Elkmont. The Comptons were his mother's people and they were a little better off than the Delmore clan and were really good to them. Sunday was the one day of the week he used to feel full in all ways.

A tall, thin man when well fed, Alton was gaunt and hungry as he eyed his Thanksgiving feast on that empty Thursday morning.

His mouth watered and he could almost smell the fried green tomatoes, okra, sweet creamed corn, crispy fried chicken, cornbread. He wished he had a tinkling glass of that sweet iced tea with a big slice of lemon floating on top.

Wishing won't make it so.

What he had was a jelly glass full of rusty water from the banging pipes in the nasty little bathroom's sink.

Another reason he liked Sunday at the Compton's was that their house was next to the L&N Railroad tracks. The trestle at Decatur was the only rail bridge over the Tennessee River in that part of Alabama. All the north and southbound rail traffic passed their back door in Limestone county. He never forgot the thrill, awe and wonder of the huge, roaring locomotives as they belched smoke, steam and cinders. Like long black dragons they crawled down the tracks and tried to gain enough speed to fly.

He even loved the sulfurous smell of the black smoke. Mama said that was the smell of the brimstone in hell, and would be the first thing a sinner smelled when he woke up dead. Trains had always fed his wanderlust. For all their plaintive, lonesome sound in a distant lifetime, train whistles were the sound of someone going somewhere.

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Jeremy Frazier, Arab

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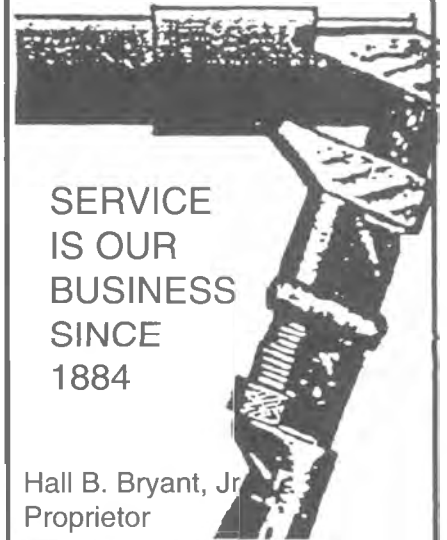
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Just as the radio quit preaching and started to sing, the noon-time Norfolk Southern drowned it out. The rattling, clanging beast shook the little table until his water danced over the jelly jar rim. The steel wheels screeched and made a ka-click-a-clack rhythm as they passed over the joints in the rails. The train shook everything in the room, including Alton, down to the marrow and his soul.

Right on time, the engineer loosed a blast of the whistle for the downtown crossing, Alton knew this train whistle was the sound of him going nowhere — unless the brimstone odor that wafted through the drafty room was a clue.

After the train passed, he heard a familiar tune on the radio. It was Rosemary Clooney's new hit song, "Beautiful, Beautiful Brown Eyes," a song Alton had co-written with Arthur Smith. Besides Clooney's version, numerous other top artists of the day had a hit with it. It should have been the answer to Delmore's financial problems. The royalties would have been enormous. But Delmore's publishing company and Smith's different publishing company engaged in a legal battle that kept the royalties tied up for years.

Needing money really badly then, Alton had sold his rights for a small amount of money, some say it was only fifteen dollars, and that was long gone.

He looked at his guitar and knew he would have to get a

couple of jobs and stay away from the corner store long enough to save enough money to get to the bus station and buy a ticket to ride a big dog home.

For all the thousands of times the Delmore Brothers had sung "The Brown's Ferry Blues," Alton had them now worse than ever before in his life. His brother Rabon's death from cancer in December of 1952 left Alton depressed and with a loss of interest in music.

That pine box in the cold, red clay of the City Cemetery in Athens, Alabama held more than a man. Though Rabon was but half their act, the whole of the Delmore Brothers was buried there.

* * * *

"We were divinely innocent."

That was Alton Delmore's late-life summary of the Delmore Brothers' rise to the top of the country / hillbilly music world in the nineteen thirties and forties, and the hard plunge back to reality in Huntsville, Alabama, where the jagged pieces of shattered dreams and disillusion couldn't be confined in a bottle.

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work job, the Delmore Brothers became the sons of sharecroppers, a couple of hard-scrabble country boys from Limestone County, Alabama who liked to play their guitars and sing. It was all about the music. With the really talented ones, it always is.

The first song Alton co-wrote was a gospel number written with his mother. After his brother, Rabon learned to play the tenor guitar — a small, four-stringed instrument rarely seen in those days, or now — the boys discovered that they had a unique way of harmonizing.

They had no way of knowing just how unique they were and how far-reaching their influence would eventually become. Their close harmonies and guitar picking helped shape the world of country music, and eventually rockabilly and even rock and roll.

Early on, they learned to play the folk songs their granddaddy's family brought with them from the hills of the Carolinas, and imitated what they heard played on WSM Radio's Grand Ol' Opry, broadcast live every Saturday night from Nash-

ville.

In the night, WSM's powerful AM signal radiated the Opry's music through the air like magic to the far reaches of the south's isolated hills and hollers.

After it was too dark to plow, the mules were fed, and their suppers eaten, families and neighbors gathered around radios wherever anyone was lucky enough to own them. Things were shared back in those days. The Opry was something people looked forward to all week. They ate smoky flavored popcorn from fireplaces and drank lemonade. The menfolk sometimes slipped outside for a sip or two of the devil's 'shine, squeezed by his fire from sour corn mash in thumping stills in the hills by the creeks.

Liquor and music have always mixed together easily, if not well.

The boys continued to practice, but hadn't played publicly except in front of friends and family. By this time, they had moved from Elkmont down to a place near the Brown's Ferry Crossing,

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In his biography, "Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity," Alton Delmore wrote, "The very first place we played in a fiddler's convention was over in Western Limestone County at Clements High School, near the Elk River. There was a good crowd there and those people know fine music when they hear it."

Alton said, "People knew the pay for the winners of the fiddlers' convention was extraordinary at Clements High School. Some of the bands came from as far away as Huntsville, Alabama, and even from the Southern part of Tennessee. There in fine tune and ready to go. They were (some of them) real finished musicians and made you dig for the prize money if you were to win it.

"In my heart today I am sincerely proud Clements High School was the first place we ever played. I am grateful for all the good music lovers who live down there in that part of the country. We took the second prize. I've forgotten what it was. Some money, though, and in those days we could use it."

The brothers continued to polish their craft and won a number of fiddler conventions in the next couple of years. Alton repeatedly wrote letters to record companies hoping to land them a recording deal, but no one was interested.

That Rabon and Alton were ages ten and eighteen when they started performing must have been a factor. With no demo tapes for the record companies to hear, their ages may have ruled them out from the start.

That changed quickly about 1930, after they won the prestigious Fiddler's Convention at Athens' Agricultural School. They received an offer to come "try out" for a record company in Atlanta.

The trip to Atlanta was made with their cousin in his car, who drove, and a friend went along for the ride. Car travel in those days was always an adventure, and fixing flats was just part of the deal. They carried a hand air pump, glue, various tools and materials like shoe leather, rubber, even cloth to use for "boots" to repair the tires.

The boys had heard horror stories about people getting food poisoning in roadside restaurants and weren't about to trust them. Before they left, Alton packed a number of sack lunches and loaded up on "trail food," canned Vienna sausages, pork and beans, sardines, cheese, bread, bologna and crackers.

They were a couple of good ol' boys from the town of Elkmont. Athens was a city to them - and they didn't like all the tall build-



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ings there. Decatur was worse. The buildings were even taller. It was just way too big. The people weren't very friendly. Years later, Alton would add. "I still don't like Decatur."

Atlanta was unbelievable; they just *thought* they had seen tall buildings before. Their necks hurt from looking up so much. It was a major case of "country comes to town." They couldn't stand the noise, the traffic, honking horns, hurried people, and the strange smells.

They might have to be in Atlanta to record, but they didn't have to sleep there. All those buildings blocked the sun in the daytime, and all the lights made the night into day.

They drove out in the Georgia countryside and took backwoods roads, not knowing exactly what they were looking for until they found a sawmill. The pine sawdust smelled like home. It also sounded like home. The crickets and cicadas provided the dinner music as they ate their pork and bean supper. They wal-

lowed out shallow depressions in the warm sawdust, snuggled in, and slept well. They were up before sunrise, before the sawmill hands came to work, and went back to the dreaded city to audition and record their first records.

Years later, Alton reportedly admitted there was a little more to the sawmill story; one big reason they didn't want to sleep in a motel was they had no idea how much it might cost, and no clue how to go about registering and checking into one. They didn't want to ask anyone, for the fear that somebody might think they were "country."

That they showed up at their first recording session in sleep-rumpled clothes and smelling of pine sawdust probably gave them away anyway. If it didn't, I'm sure it was known after they didn't know what the "little round can

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thing" was that they placed in front of them during the audition.

It was a microphone, the first one they'd ever seen.

Amplified sound proved a boon for the soft-singing brothers and they were smart enough to adapt their music to the medium of radio, something that propelled them to the top of the country music world of the 1930's and 40's.

They returned home to Brown's Ferry, heroes to the locals. They had "made good" as far as their friends and neighbors were concerned. They were recording stars and everywhere they went, people knew who they were.

Their first record was released a few months later. It was "Alabama Lullaby," and "Kansas City Blues" It was 1931, and the Great Depression hurt record sales everywhere. Still, the Delmores' first recording sold a respectable 500 copies.

They also received a warning from a songwriter from the 1920's, Hugh Cross who had been taken badly. They were told (sic) "Keep up with your business or some of these people will beat you out of your money." They

heeded it, but the future proved they didn't heed it well enough.

Alton had sent letters and their recordings to WSM in Nashville, and less than a year after they returned from Atlanta they were invited to try out for the Grand Ol' Opry.

They were accepted. Less than a year after the 15 and 23 year-old brothers first left Brown's Ferry for Atlanta, they had reached the pinnacle. They were performers on a show heard across the land. The home folks gathered around their radios to hear them.

People assumed everyone who performed on the Opry made big money for their appearances. Not so: the Opry management made big money, but the performers hardly made gas and food money. The Delmore brothers traveled back and forth to Nashville weekly for five dollars each, and never made more than that for the entire eight years they played there.

For the eight years the Delmore Brothers played on the Grand Ol' Opry, they often outsold the biggest stars there, including the immortal Hank Williams Sr.

They had the love of the people, but the managers of theaters and other venues where they should have been booked didn't want them. They didn't make a personal appearance for more

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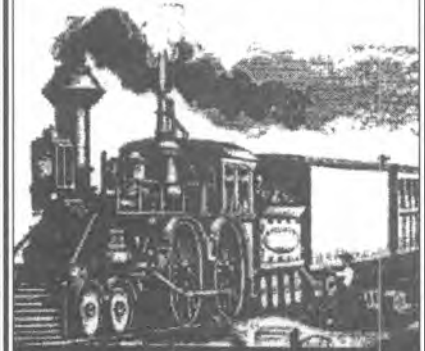
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than a year after they got the Opry gig. They were "too country," a label they fought their entire career.

They left the Opry after they were given the ultimatum that if they didn't sign over all the rights to their music, they would be kicked off the show. They left. WLS offered them a deal, but after they got to Chicago, they found out it was no different than Nashville. They wanted all the song rights, too.

Royalties were small to non-existent for record sales — one-half to one cent per record.

The Delmores consistently ended up on the short end of the stick in almost every business venture they entered into.

Alton co-founded King Records with the agreement he'd own ten-percent, but never saw ten cents, much less his ten percent.

The Delmores got Roy Acuff, the King of Country Music, his first job on the Grand Ol' Opry. Acuff is but one of the many stars they helped establish who went on to riches for their work while the Delmores always struggled.

Alton Delmore authored and co-wrote a thousand songs, and had hit records, including "The Brown's Ferry Blues," "Blues Stay Away From Me," and "Mockingbird," but had little to show for it.

It is small wonder Alton became a bitter, depressed man after his brother's death. He quit

music for the most part, moved here to Huntsville and did odd jobs just to survive, including a paper route, and giving guitar lessons. He spent an increasing amount of time at The R&R Bar on Clinton Street.

He died in Huntsville on June 9th, 1964 from complications from liver disease. He never knew that the immortal Bob Dylan credited the Delmores with being one of his big influences. The Everly brothers freely admitted they copied the Delmore Brothers' harmonies for their own sound.

Why the Delmores were never given their due respect for their originality, talent, and influence on contemporary music remains something of a mystery. Some think it's because America loves tragedy in its stars, and Hank Williams' death in the back seat of his lime green 1953 Eldorado Cadillac on the road on New Years Eve, 1952 (he was not "officially" pronounced dead until 12:30 Am, 1953) fit the tragedy formula per-

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fectly.

Hank Williams was the first Elvis, the first Michael Jackson sudden-death-of-an-entertainment-icon story of its kind, the talented hero felled quickly, tragically, far too young.

Perhaps part of the triumph-to-tragedy, rags-to-fame-to-rags story of the Delmore's has been ignored because it played out over a larger number of years. They died with a whimper, not a bang.

These local boys have never received anywhere near the attention and credit they merit. When the real story becomes more widely known, there's little doubt they will finally receive more and more of the acclaim they so richly deserve.



New Enterprise

There is a brand new manufacturing enterprise locating in our city. It is a cigar factory, to be located on Franklin Street, below the post office.

The proprietor, J. B. Dierke of Cincinnati, wisely decided on Huntsville after surveying several other cities. He informs us that he will use only the finest of goods, and his work will be handmade.

So we will be seeing cigars made of only purest of tobacco, without the use of cabbage leaves, old rusty pieces of nails and leather.

from 1888 newspaper

Heard on the Street in 1923

- For sale - Cheap. Hogs and pigs. If you want pigs or hogs come to see me. D. B. Jett, Brownsboro, Route 1

- Wanted: Good cook. Phone 629 or see Mrs. June Martin, Lowe Avenue

- For Sale - one flat top mahogany finished desk. Call and see. 427 White Street.

- 119 arrests were made by the Huntsville police department during this month. Arrests for violating the Sanitary laws, 21, lead the list. Stock at large coming next with 16 and drunks, 14 coming in third on the list. There were 12 arrests for traffic law violations and eleven for affrays, the balance were scattered among a large number of other causes.

The total fines assessed amounted to \$1,398.25, collections being \$1,053.25. Fines worked out totaled \$300.

- Mrs. W. I. Thompson has been appointed truant officer of Huntsville, succeeding Mrs. T. A. Rankin who recently resigned the position. Her duties will be to see that no child of educatable age is kept out of school for other

Good friends are like stars - you don't always see them, but you know they're always there.

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than valid reasons.

- Chris Sterit, one of the best known farmers of this county, lost control of his car here this morning, plunging into an excavated lot and turning over with the driver pinned under the wreck. Sterit was rushed to a hospital and the attending physician says he is probably fatally injured.

- During the heavy electrical storm of Wednesday night a barn belonging to James Bryce, New Hope, was struck by lightning and destroyed together with its contents of feedstuffs and farm machinery. The damage will reach approximately \$2500 with no insurance.

- In Florence, Ala Keeton, an 18-year old boy, was struck on the head with a pick handle by Morris Nickols, age 16 at Wilson dam last night and died at a local infirmary today. The two boys were employed on the night shift at the dam. The fracas that resulted in the death of Keeton arose over an attempt on his part to throw water on the younger boy, according to a statement of the foreman in the

adjoining section.

- Daniel Healy, young man of Scottsboro, coughed up a bullet that has been lodged in his throat for 3 months. It was badly needed as evidence in the trial of Peter McLean for murder. Physicians had feared to operate but now won't have to.

- Colonel Lee Fearn Irwin, 83, Confederate veteran, former assistant postmaster and for many years commercial editor of the Mobile Register, died here in Huntsville Tuesday. He was active in his newspaper duties up to a

month ago.

- A woman here claimed in court that her husband left her for another woman. He left her with seven children, and told her that he had found the love of his life in Decatur, Alabama. The newest love is a widow and has 6 girls and 4 boys. It seems the husband enjoys being a father, but the latest news out of Montgomery claims that this same gentleman has 4 other wives, all thinking that he is faithful to the one. Men in Huntsville are shaking their heads at such a folly.

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Commodities

by Austin Miller

Recently, in the grocery store, I got behind an attractive, well-dressed young lady in the checkout lane that paid with food stamps. I couldn't help but take notice that she had items that most people would not consider a necessity and I fought back an urge to be judgmental. My negative thoughts were ameliorated somewhat when I thought back to the mid fifties when my family got commodities.

Commodities were surplus United States Department of Agriculture food that the government gave out to families in need. The handouts consisted of dried beans, rice, lard, butter, canned meat, flour and cheese.

There may have been other staples that I have forgotten. The two items that people enjoyed the most was the canned meat

and cheese. The meat was very tasty but some people wouldn't eat it because they thought it was horse meat. The cheese was the best. It came un-refrigerated in a rectangular box about a foot long and about five inches high. It was given out in huge quantities and was shared with many people that didn't get commodities.

The food was distributed once a month at various locations in the community. Ryland people, at first, got their free food at Shiloh Methodist Church but the location was later changed to Central School. To qualify all you had to do was go to the district Madison County Shed at Maysville and declare a low income and say that you didn't have money in the bank. The man at the county shed

"To see the old is to find the new."

Confucius

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took your word and put your name on the commodities distribution list.

There was no requirement to check identity and no follow up to verify income. Of course as far as identity was concerned, everybody from all directions knew each other.

The year 1954 was one of the driest and hottest years on record in Madison County. As a result we had a total cotton crop failure. At the end of the year we had no money to live on. Traditionally it was our family practice to go to town in the fall twice a year. The first trip was to buy school clothes.

The second trip was for Christmas shopping. In the fall of 1954 we were able to buy only the barest of necessities. We mostly had to make do for another year with what we had. I did get a new pair of shoes because the ones I was wearing were too little and completely worn out. But not getting to buy very much didn't concern me, what bothered me was that we received commodities.

There was a stigma attached that I did not like. It bothered me a lot that our family and one other were the only families at Shiloh Church that got the handouts. I would not have gone to church during those years if my parents hadn't forcefully insisted.

In hindsight what we already had to eat was much better. Mama and Daddy raised a huge garden each year and canned enough vegetables each summer to last at least three years. Nineteen Fifty Four was no different. Also, we had a milk cow, killed two hogs, ground our own meal and had over a hundred chickens running around in the yard. Our problem was lack of cash money.

The blessing was that Mama could make the least amount of money go further than anybody I ever knew. Not only could she stretch a dollar, she could always manage to save some of what she made. By selling milk, butter and eggs she managed to get us through that desperate year. Somehow she always had money for our school lunches, paid our electric bill, bought our coal and purchased most of the few cooking ingredients that we could not grow. Any emergency repair to the house was fixed by Daddy with scrap materials or if money was needed it went un-repaired. I don't know what we would have done if any of us had gotten sick enough to require a doctor or hospitalization.

No family ever worked harder and managed better than mine but the rewards were not commensurate with the work and times were often lean. But even in the leanest times we should have never signed up for commodities.



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Heard On the Street

by *Cathey Carney*

Tommy Gipson was the sharp-eyed reader who called first with the correct guess for Photo of the Month for September. The handsome boy was **Harvey Cotten**, who gives us great gardening & plant information each Saturday in the Huntsville Times. He also works really hard at the Botanical Gardens. Tommy is a carpenter and residential contractor who loves Huntsville's history - congratulations to you!

Many were so disappointed last spring when the **Maple Hill Cemetery Stroll** had to be cancelled due to heavy rains. Well, you're in luck because it has been rescheduled for October 18, a Sunday from 2-4:30 and is FREE to the public. Any donations received go to the cemetery for its maintenance and upkeep. Mark your calendars - and if you've never been, it's a fascinating look back at Huntsville's history, with actors standing on selected graves to tell visitors about their lives.

We were so saddened to hear of the death of **Ralph Butler**. He was the beloved big brother of



Joyce Russell of Huntsville. We send our deepest sympathy to his many friends and family.

Happy Birthday to our good friend **Darryl Goldman!** We hope you and sweet wife **Linda** did something really fun! Darryl is the handsome interim pastor at First Presbyterian Church.

Hall Bryant, Jr. looks really good to be 125 years old! No, seriously, it's his company that is celebrating its anniversary, having been founded in 1884 and still going strong. **H. C. Blake** installed the first indoor plumbing at **Harrison Brothers** downtown, and a book could probably be written on all the events that have taken place over the last 100+ years. Congratulations to Hall and his employees at H.C. Blake!

Colonial Bank on Church Street (now BB&T) employs some

really hard-working ladies, but two of the sweetest ones are **Thelma Schaefer** and **Kristyn Towers**. They are celebrating birthdays in October, Thelma's is Oct. 20 and Kristyn's is Oct. 23.

John Bzdell and **Margaret Watson** went to Louisville, KY recently and supported a local fellow school teacher at Challenger. **Barry Leshinsky**, who's 49 years old, had trained for this event for over a year. He completed an Ironman competition which is a 2.5 mile swim in the river, then a 112 mile bike race, then ran a 26.2 mile marathon, all with no breaks. It took him a little over 15.5 hours of non-stop effort, and his girlfriend **Susan Cox** was there supporting him the whole time!

Mickey Moore and **Robert Staggs** are two of the graduates of **Huntsville High's class of 1959** who will be here celebrating their 50th. anniversary! There were a lot of characters in that class and they will all be in Huntsville on Oct. 2 and 3 for the fun event at Huntsville Depot and Earlyworks. The popular band

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 is one of five in the city.



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Reunion will be performing Oct. 3rd - for more information call Mickey at (256) 541-1430.

Lynn Turton celebrated her 65th birthday recently, and her good friend **Gale Nichols** says, "Happy birthday, you ole heifer!"

A beautiful baby boy named **Wyatt Daniel Hollingsworth** was born Sep. 1 to proud parents **Adam** and **Mary Hollingsworth**. Big sister **Jade** was there to welcome the baby boy. Grandparents are **Larry** and **Barbara Hollingsworth** of Gurley, and **Danny** and **Kathy Dolberry** of Woodville. Congratulations!!

So many people were saddened to hear that **Susie Hudson** had passed away, at the young age of 68. She was the businesswoman who was known for her love of downtown Huntsville and is credited with revitalizing downtown restaurants, condo's and the entertainment scene here. In 2000 Susie and her husband **Jim Hudson** co-founded Cityscapes, which bought old buildings and transformed them into beautiful apartments, condo's and restaurants. Susie was a kind and gentle lady who made people feel good just by being close to her. She will be terribly missed by her many friends and family.

Kerry and **Carolyn Pinkerton** are so proud of their baby granddaughter **Kennedy**. She has the biggest brown eyes you've ever seen, and looks exactly like her grandma Carolyn!

Many restaurant patrons know **Lisa Cook**, who has waited on many Huntsville folks at the Little Diner. She is now working at Dee's Diner, located on Oakwood and No. Parkway, and her customers are definitely following her to her new location!

It's hard to believe that **Marie Hewett** is retiring from the business she founded, PAMA (Professional Academy of Modeling & Acting). She's way too young! The business will continue, however. A fun wine & cheese party was

held in late August to honor Marie.

It was great to see **Ellen Holder** walking along the Green Mountain Nature Trail recently with her daughter-in-law **Tamra Holder** and granddaughter **Noelle**. Noelle turns 14 in October and is as beautiful as her mom. Tamra and Noelle live in Covington, GA and were here for a visit. Tamra's Mom and Dad are **Steve** and **Kathy Cotney**.

Terese Stevens, owner of Cloud Nine, made an interesting trip recently. She traveled to Michigan for a family reunion, stopped in Cleveland to tour the Rock & Roll museum and ended up in Tennessee for a **BMW motorcycle rally** with "8,900 of her closest friends", to camp for the rest of the weekend. She did all of this on her Motoguzzi motorcycle and did it solo! 1,841 miles in 10 days! Way to go, girl!

Lots of new folks are moving to the Huntsville area as a result of BRAC, but two we met recently are **Cynthia Cindric** and **Mike Connor**. They have only been here a short time but already love Huntsville. Having moved from the Washington, DC area they LOVE our lack of traffic and beautiful weather. Welcome!

We were so sorry to hear of the death of **Shirley Winter**, who resided at Redstone Village. She was an active member of Temple

B'nai Shalom Sisterhood, and the loving wife for 59 years to **Ret. Col. Leonard Winter**. We send our deepest condolences to Shirley's many friends and family who will miss her so much.

Have a safe & fun October & watch over your neighbors!

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Carol Christopher's Grill Favorites

All of these recipes are to be cooked on your outdoor grill! Carol says, "To me, there is no better time of the year for grilling, than in the fall. And it's fun to experiment!"

Hickory Cheese Loaf

- 1 loaf French bread
- 1/2 c. soft butter
- 1 c. shredded natural sharp cheddar cheese (4 oz.)
- 1 T. snipped parsley
- 1/2 t. hickory smoked salt
- 2 t. Worcestershire sauce

Cut bread diagonally into 1-inch slices. Mix all remaining ingredients, spread on slices. Re-assemble your loaf, wrap securely in 28x18" piece of heavy duty aluminum foil. Place on grill 4 inches from medium coals. Heat loaf 15 to 20 minutes, turning once. This can also be cooked in your oven at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. This is a crusty hot bread that is really different and looks great!

Big Ole Mess

- 1 lb. smoked sausage, cut into chunks
- 3 jalapeno peppers, sliced
- 1 green pepper, cut into chunks
- 1 sweet onion, cut into chunks
- 1 foil cooking bag
- 1/4 c. Tabasco sauce
- 1 10-oz. jar sweet & sour sauce

Place sausage, peppers and onion in foil bag. Mix Tabasco with sweet & sour sauce in small bowl and pour over the mixture in foil bag; seal edge tightly. Place foil bag on grill; cook for about 45 minutes, turning every 15 minutes. Slit open and serve right out of the bag.

Makes 6-8 appetizer servings.

BBQ Pizza

- 1 lb. ready-made pizza dough, at room temperature
- 2 T. olive oil
- 1/2 lb. cooked sausage, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
- 1 c. assorted grilled veges; peppers, onions, zucchini, mushrooms)
- 6 oz. shredded Colby jack cheese
- 1 t. basil
- 1/4 t. dry red pepper flakes

Preheat grill to medium-high heat. Oil grill rack. Roll out dough to a 12"x15" rectangle. Brush top with olive oil. Place dough, oil side down on grill rack. Cover and grill 3 minutes and bottom is light brown. Punch down air bubbles if needed. Brush top with olive oil

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and turn over. Immediately top evenly with remaining ingredients. Cover and cook 3 minutes or until cheese is melted.

Potatoes & Corn

4 large potatoes, cut into wedges

2 ears of corn, cleaned and cut in half

2 medium onions, peeled and sliced

1 c. hickory-flavored BBQ sauce

1/2 c. butter, cut in 8 slices

1/4 c. Tabasco green jalapeno sauce

4 cloves garlic, peeled, sliced

1 lrg. foil cooking bag

Preheat grill to med-high heat. Combine all ingredients in large bowl, stir to coat. Pour all into foil bag and seal edge tightly. Place on grill and cover, turning every 10 minutes. Remove when potatoes are soft, about 20 minutes. Serve with more jalapeno and BBQ sauce if desired.

Apple Cannonballs

1/4 c. light brown sugar

1/2 c. raisins

2 T. chopped nuts

1/2 t. ground cinnamon

4 large baking apples (such as Granny Smith, Rome or

Macintosh)

2 T. butter, cut into quarters

Combine brown sugar, raisins, nuts and cinnamon in a small bowl; set aside. Core apple and place on individual sheets of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Spoon mixture evenly into center of each apple. Top with butter and wrap tightly in foil. Place on preheated grill and cover. Cook til tender, about 20 minutes. For something quicker, stuff small candy bar, like Snickers, down into the center and grill.

Hot Strawberry Shortcake

Sarah Lee pound cake

Spray butter

Disposable bowl

Frozen strawberries in syrup

Cool Whip or ice cream

Preheat grill on low heat. If you have a side burner, put strawberries in a sauce pan and warm over low heat on side burner. If you do not have a side burner, warm in pan on cook top.

Slice pound cake into 1/2" slices. Spray butter on both sides, toast right on grill for about 1 minute on each side. Place in disposable bowl, pour warm strawberries over the top and finish with a scoop of Cool Whip or vanilla ice cream.



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Grandpa's Strange Trip

by Tom Baker

In the 1950's grandpa owned a forty acre farm in the Hobbs Island, Ala. community. His farm was located a half mile off Hobbs Island road, and a few hundred yards from the Flint River. A dusty dirt road led back to the farm. Grandpa had no motorized equipment, no electricity, no running water. He farmed as his father and his father's father had farmed. He plowed his fields with stubborn mules, who got several tongue lashings from grandpa over the years.

Grandpa's only mode of transportation was by mule and wagon. He did most of his business with Butler Bros. store located in New Hope, Ala. Whenever he needed supplies he would hitch the mules to the wagon, and start on the long journey which would consume just about a day's round trip. On one of these trips grandpa's cousin Gordon went along.

Gordon and his family lived in an old house on the property and helped grandpa with the farm. They hitched the mules to the wagon and off they went down the road. After getting the supplies they needed, headed back toward home. On the outskirts of New Hope, they met a man walking on the roadside with crutches. He was a fairly young man back from the Korean war and drawing a government pension for his disability. Almost everyone in the community knew the poor fellow.

Many were accusing him of faking his disability to draw the pension. When the wagon came even with the man, grandpa and Gordon threw up their hands and spoke, the man returned the greet-

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ing. As they passed him by, grandpa turned to Gordon and said, "They say he's faking injury to draw that big government check". Gordon replied, "That's what I've heard too, I bet if you put him in a pasture with an angry bull, he would throw those crutches down and jump a ten rail fence." They both chuckled.

A few seconds later, the wagon began to bump each time the left rear wheel made a revolution. The bump was so hard that it threw grandpa and Gordon together on the wagon seat. Grandpa turned to Gordon and asked, "What's on that rear wheel Gordon?" Gordon turned and looked, "I don't see a thing". "The hell you don't", grandpa replied. Grandpa later said with every rotation of the wheel it would bump as if there was a huge knot on it. Grandpa said to Gordon, "Must be a busted casing". Down the road grandpa pulled off to the roadside. He got out, walked around the wagon inspecting each wheel, nothing. Scratching his head, got back in the wagon. "Damnedest thing I've ever seen," he said to Gordon.

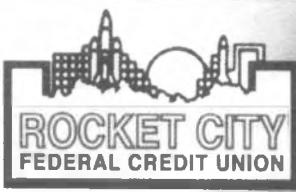
The wagon continued to bump all the way back to the farm. Grandpa pulled the wagon into the barnyard, unhitched the mules. He and Gordon jacked up the back of the wagon and pulled the wheel off. The inside of the wheel was as smooth as it could be, no busted casing, nothing. They put the wheel back on, hitched the mules to the wagon, made several circles around the barn, no bumps. Grandpa said it never bumped again.

A few days later grandpa was talking with Gordon about the strange trip they had. Grandpa said to Gordon. "Gordon you know why that wagon wheel was bumping. "No, Why?," Gordon replied. "It was because of what we said about that fellow with crutches on the roadside," grandpa replied. Gordon with mouth wide open said, "That's right."

A month or so later grandpa was back in New Hope on a trip

"The only way I'll drop ten pounds is if I go shopping in England."

Maxine



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and ran into the man on crutches.

Grandpa told him the whole story of what had happened that day, and apologized for the cruel remarks they had made about him.

The man was not bitter. He told grandpa that he was aware of the rumors about him. Said he wished those who were saying these things could experience one day in his shoes.

Grandpa and Gordon never again spoke a bad word about a person with a disability. They were taught a divine lesson on their bumpy trip from New Hope that summer day.

News from 1890

- W. W. Darwin, one of Madison's best citizens and a Republican of the first water, was in the city Wednesday.

- Mr. Wm. Erskine, who for the past year has presided at the desk in the office of the Huntsville Hotel, has resigned and can now be found in the office of the McGee House.

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- While toying with a revolver last Monday night, the carriage driver of Mr. A. Campbell accidentally discharged it, the ball striking the cook, inflicting a

dangerous and maybe a fatal wound. The ball entered the left breast, passed through the left lung and lodged in the shoulder. At last report the woman was resting easy.

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from 1888 newspaper

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His experience lately has been quite varied. He is a youth about 20 years old, and has been employed for some time by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad Company. About six weeks ago, as the train on which he rode was crossing the river, he was knocked from the side of the caboose as he was climbing up the ladder. He fell into the water and swam to shore, where he fell insensible.

The train stopped and took him to Huntsville, where he remained lingering between life and death for three weeks. He was then taken to the Nashville infirmary and had just recovered and gone to work where he fell from the car at Cunningham, bruised and cut his head and sprained his knee.

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Huntsville in the 30's

By Elwanda Henley Hallman

Four months ago I moved back to Huntsville after sixty-three years in Birmingham. Huntsville is a very changed city, an unusually beautiful city, and every day brings back memories of friends and family and of a very simple life back many years ago.

One place I wanted to visit was the Huntsville Library because it meant so much to me in my early life. I remember Miss Frances Jones, whom we children loved dearly in the old library. I can still remember checking out books and reading, walking the long walk home to Pratt Avenue, and reading "Heidi" as I walked. Huntsville had a bad polio outbreak back then and Mama wouldn't let us go anywhere except to walk to the library and get books.

I like to go to School Street and remember the blocks we walked to get to East Clinton Elementary School. I used to love the wild violets that grew along the side of the streets there.

We went to Junior high school a few blocks from the old Huntsville High school. I remember one day being called to the office. They said I had a telephone call but it turned out they got the names

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mixed up and the call was for another girl. It scared me though because I had never spoken on a phone before, in my life.

Huntsville High school had some great teachers, my two favorites were Miss Annie Mertz and Miss Annie Dix. Most of us walked to school in those days and it got pretty cold walking in the winter. I still remember more than 60 years later how motherly and kind Miss Dix was to a cold and wet 15 year-old girl. Miss Annie Mertz was very strict but she was always fair, always had integrity and it made such an impression on me. Through my life I kept a journal and wrote down the names of people who had an impact on my life, like these two ladies, even though they probably never real-

ized it.

I remember one day in the mid afternoon, years ago, the world suddenly turned dark. That was the day a destructive tornado went through Paint Rock Valley. Many were injured and many homes were destroyed.

One day we all heard the rumor that the court house in Huntsville was sitting on a lake. All the children were convinced that the entire city would cave in. It's funny what stays with you, after all these years.

Our special times were very simple. Mama loved to walk up the mountain with us kids (she had 5) to Fagan's Hollow. There used to be a Toll Gate on upper Wells Avenue. My Daddy would take us fishing and nearly every

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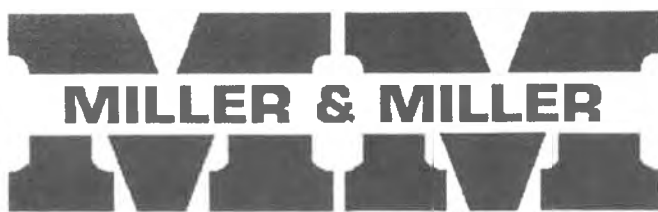
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Sunday we'd all go to Big Spring Park. On many of those Sundays, we'd witness baptizing of people in the Spring.

I didn't realized the importance of it at the time, all I remembered was how pretty the girls looked who got baptized, with their beautiful colored hair bows.

Before Christmas we'd go on a community bus to our Mayor's celebration with the Senior citizens followed by a ride through the botanical gardens. The decorations were so beautiful and I remembered how Daddy drove us around when there weren't so many as there are now. Coca Cola was always decorated, and a huge star could be seen shining up on Monte Sano.

I still expect to see Dunnivant's where people bought more stylish clothes back then, and I remember Kress and Belk Hudson stores downtown.

Of course I remember when we had to kiss our brothers and sweethearts and husbands goodbye as they went off to war. I still remember one woman saying,

scornfully, "Some of them cry like theirs is the only one leaving!" I couldn't believe she would say that.

I cried the day our country dropped the atomic bomb over Iwa Jima. My friends thought I was being unpatriotic. Today I still hate wars of any kind. I pray for the leaders and the men and women who go to war and put their lives on the line for us.

I remember the glorious day the soldiers came home. My sister's husband was killed, we missed him so much. My brother came home and married a girl we all loved.

My husband came home and we were so thankful to just be together again. Jobs weren't easy to find back then, but we all made

it somehow.

When you have good memories, you have roses that bloom in January!

"You know you're getting older when your joints are actually more accurate than the National Weather Service."

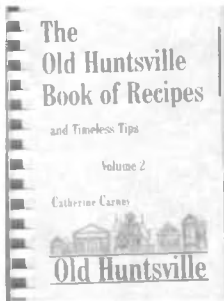
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School Lunches

By Malcolm Miller

A few weeks ago my twin grandsons, Crayton and Phillip Miller spent the night with me and I am always thrilled when they come for a visit. They are seventeen year old juniors at Buckhorn High School and they were telling me the best thing about getting back to school is the great hot breakfasts and hot lunches they enjoy in the school lunch room. They shared with me some of the menu items they particularly enjoy.

Things have definitely changed since I was in school. We never had a lunch room the whole time I was in school and I usually didn't have anything to

take to school for lunch except when we were lucky enough to have flour I would take biscuits and what ever meat we had on them. I started out with ham then later on ended up with sow belly in my biscuits, then when we ran out of flour sometimes I would take corn bread sliced open with sorghum molasses poured in it.

The worst part of it was there was always two or three what I called rich kids in the class and they would always make fun of my biscuits or whatever I brought for lunch so I finally stopped taking anything to eat to school. I used to hear those rich kids talking about pimento cheese sandwiches and I promised myself that when I got older I would buy all the pimento cheese I could find and find out how it tasted, and till this day when I eat pimento cheese sandwiches I think back on those days when I was eating

sow belly and watching those kids eat those delicious looking sandwiches.

I had a buddy who was in about the same fix I was and on occasion he would bring biscuits with fried potatoes in them. His name was Malcolm "Craw Dad" Warren and he didn't care what anyone thought about what he brought for lunch. Some days he would give me one of those fried potato biscuits and they tasted mighty fine. When you are hungry you

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feel that fried potato biscuits are a feast indeed. I can't help but wonder if my grandsons would eat fried potato biscuits for lunch.

Since I refused to carry the lunch to school that my Mama fixed she did the next best thing. Every day when I came home from school there would be a big black pot full of pinto beans setting in the middle of the table along with a pone of cold corn bread and of course a big onion when available. My six brothers and I would all be so very hungry and this meal was a great relief as well as being a wonderful stomach filler for seven hungry boys.

Even after I was going to High School at Hazel Green and playing basket ball I still didn't take a lunch to school, however on occasion I had enough money to go up to Atlas Carrigers' store and buy myself a pint of milk and that would keep me going till I got home.

I can still recall the time

when I was in the tenth grade. I went with the team to play in the district basketball tournament and I thought I had enough money to eat on but the last day in Cullman I ordered lunch and lacked a dollar having enough to pay for it.

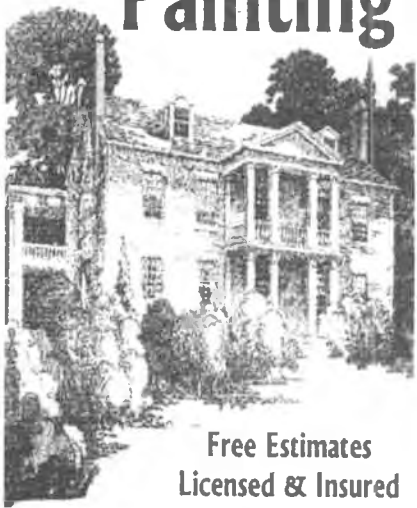
Vernon Scott was the team manager and he and I roomed together with some of Big Jim Folsom's relatives. Vernon was eating with me that day and he loaned me a dollar and got me out of an embarrassing situation.

I will never forget what Vernon did for me that day and believe you me since that day in Cullman I have always made sure that I had the money to pay before ordering food.

We all talk about the "good ole days"; however I believe my grandchildren have it quite a bit better now than many of us had it in the "good ole days."



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Mafia Witness

Ever since the early 1960s, after the failed Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba, Huntsville has been a haven for people seeking a new identity and a new life. The CIA, the FBI and the Federal Marshal's Service all used Huntsville as a place to relocate subjects who might possess sensitive information or whose lives might be in danger if their whereabouts were known.

The vast majority of these people were thankful for the opportunity to start a new life. At one time a high ranking defector from the Chinese military owned a successful restaurant in Huntsville. A prominent member of South Viet Nam's ruling family was smuggled out of the country hours before it fell to communist control and was brought here where he enrolled in college. After completing his degree he moved to Washington, DC where he became a successful businessman.

Other people, members of organized crime, were relocated here under the Federal Witness Protection Program. Most of these people had become federal informants against their former associates and were given new identities in exchange for their testimony.

One of these people was Peter Aver, also known as Peter Abate, Peter Abbott and Peter Blassi.

He was born in 1944, a product of

Boston's notorious South Side where the Mafia ruled with an iron fist. Loan sharking, organized gambling, bribery and murder were accepted as the price of doing business. Aver's stepfather, Angelo Blassi, was reported to be a notorious enforcer for the Boston Mafia, serving under the New England crime boss, Raymond Patriarca. He was also alleged to

have served as a "collection point" for the money used to bribe and pay off elected officials.

Blassi owned a number of restaurants which were thought to be fronts for the mob. Aver seemed to follow in his stepfather's footsteps when he too opened restaurants in Boston, Randolph and Lynfield, Mass. These restaurants

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were also widely suspected of being fronts for the mob's loan sharking and drug business. Aver appeared to be a successful entrepreneur but much of his business was conducted in secrecy. While gambling, fencing stolen goods and drugs were the mainstay for most of his associates, Aver apparently developed a reputation as an "arsonist for hire." At one point he charged a close associate of a national politician \$5000 to torch a business in order to collect insurance.

Aver's underworld activities were becoming a focus of Boston's organized crime unit, who were beginning to close in. Like most mobsters, he probably thought his lawyers could take care of his troubles, but events of June 1978 changed everything.

Blackfriar's Pub was a well known mob hangout operated by Mafia associate Vincent Solomonte. According to one source, Solomonte owed the mob over two hundred thousand dollars over a failed drug deal and the Mafia leadership was furious when he refused to pay.

Late one evening, when the bar was getting ready to close, three gunmen walked in. Solomonte and four others were led to the basement where they were murdered in a hail of gunfire in what was to become known as the Blackfriar's Massacre. Among the people murdered was Jack Kelly, a well known former television news reporter. His death created a furor in the community.

Aver's connection to the massacre has never been made clear by the authorities. According to Aver and law enforcement authorities, he was present and witnessed the murders. He said he knew the gunmen as well as the victims.

All the witnesses, however, according to many sources, had been slain, leading one

to question his role in the murders.

Whatever his role, it became a moot question when he agreed to turn informer against the mob in exchange for immunity for his criminal activities.

After being debriefed by the organized crime units and told he would have to be a witness in future trials, Aver was turned over to the Federal Witness

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Protection Program. He was given a new name, Peter Abate (rhymes with rabbit), as well as a new background in case anyone asked. In addition, he was provided with money to start his life anew in an undisclosed location under the supervision of the U.S. Marshal's Service.

The Witness Protection Program was designed to protect people whose lives might be in danger for testifying against individuals whom the government was prosecuting. Usually they were given immunity for their prior crimes. If a witness ran afoul of the law while they were waiting to testify, the government would often go to great lengths to clear the matter up. The last thing government prosecutors wanted was for their star witness, who was swearing to tell the truth, to be charged with another crime.

Some people, like Peter Abate, knew how to take advantage of this.

Glen Brooks, a Deputy Marshal in Huntsville at the time, was a well known and highly respected lawman. He had earlier

served on the Huntsville police force and had acquired a reputation as a tight-lipped investigator who would never reveal his sources. For people who knew him, his word was his bond, leading many people to say, "If you're a friend of Glen, that's good enough for me."

Ron Eyestone, a longtime friend of Brooks, recalled seeing him downtown one day with a well-dressed stranger. When he stopped to say hello to Brooks the stranger stuck out his hand, introducing himself. "Hi," he said, "My name is Peter Abate and if you are a friend of Glen, then you are a friend of mine."

Eyestone was pleasantly impressed with Abate's outgoing personality, but he noticed that Brooks seemed uncomfortable. After a minute or two Brooks abruptly ended the conversation, mumbling something about being

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late for an appointment before taking Abate by the shoulder and leading him away.

Several weeks later Eyestone received a call from Abate inviting him to a party. At first he was hesitant, he had really planned on staying around the house that weekend, but Abate went on to explain that Brooks was helping throw the party. Finally Eyestone decided, "Why not? After all, Abate was a friend of Brooks."

Eyestone and his wife Barb arrived at the home, a spacious well-kept house in Southeast Huntsville. They were met at the door by an enthusiastic Abate who immediately placed a cold glass of beer in Ron's hand and invited them to join the party taking place out back at the swimming pool. Sounding somewhat apologetic, Abate explained that Brooks was called out of town on business, but the party was still on.

Eyestone recognized several people he knew as well as a surprising number of people who were good friends of Brooks. Included in the mixture was a number of people who were well connected in Huntsville's business community.

Abate was the perfect host as he went from couple to couple making small talk. Although no one there knew anything about Abate they were taken by his charm and courteous manner. At first he appeared reluctant to talk about himself, he said he didn't want to brag, but several of the more winsome lasses finally managed to get him to open up.

He was from Boston, he said, and had recently retired as an FBI

agent where he had worked undercover for years infiltrating organized crime. When his wealthy step father died the previous year, leaving him fourteen million dol-

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lars, he decided to retire, pick a place on the map and start a new life. Now, he said, he was waiting for the will to be settled and exploring different business ventures to invest in. He vaguely alluded to the fact that the Mafia had placed a contract on him, which was one reason he was keeping a low profile.

Barb Eyestone remembered Abate as "not really all that goodlooking. He was short and stocky with non-descript brown hair, but he had the best personality that made everyone want to be around him. I believed everything he said."

All in all, it was a pleasant party and everyone left impressed with the gracious host. The following week, Eyestone ran across Brooks and thanked him for the invitation, mentioning it was a shame that he had to miss his own party.

"What party?" asked Brooks with a puzzled look on his face. After Eyestone explained, Brooks began to ask questions about "his party." He was particularly interested in who had attended, why the people thought he had anything to do with the party and how and when they were invited.

It was obvious Brooks was concerned. After pumping Eyestone for all the information he could, Brooks left with the curious warning that "Abate wasn't really a friend of his, and that his friends shouldn't have anything to do with Abate."

Eyestone was left standing on the corner wondering "what the hell was going on, but I knew Brooks well enough not to ask questions."

It later became apparent that Abate had compiled a list of Brooks' friends by asking around town. He had correctly assumed that as a "friend" of a U.S. Deputy Marshal his story would be accepted by Huntsville's social elite, as well as the business community.

Brooks was caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. He was not about to confirm Abate's claims nor was he in a position to give out any information. Almost anything he said about Abate would have led to more questions, something the Marshal's service highly discouraged.

All Brooks could say was "I really don't know him that well" or "he's not what you would call a friend of mine."

In the next several months Abate became the toast of Huntsville as people began vying for his friendship and his supposed riches. Every banker in town had visions of placing his fourteen million dollars in their bank. He knew that in a small town like Huntsville you only had to tell a few people and they would spread the story.

Abate appeared to be everything he claimed. He entertained at the Fogcutter so often people thought he had a reserved table there constantly. He often showed up at parties, unannounced and uninvited, but no one cared. Everyone had heard about Peter Abate. He was seen having breakfast with the Mayor,

A tobacco chewer on Sand Mountain has agreed that if smokers won't blow smoke in his face, he won't spit at them.

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Joe Davis, and was on a first name basis with the chief of police. Adding to his charm were the elegant ladies who always seemed to be around him.

No one knew exactly what he did for a living although visitors to his home told of him receiving envelopes in the mail stuffed with money.

As Abate's social life grew, so did his opportunity for more investments. After learning that a couple in Decatur were interested in going into the motel business, Abate talked them into giving him ten thousand dollars. Abate was supposed to research the market and help them secure a small business loan. They never saw the money again.

One person approached Abate with the idea of borrowing money for a nightclub. The person ended up giving Abate twenty thousand dollars to "explore the idea." The money disappeared. Before long, literally dozens of people had put money into different ventures with him. Amazingly, Abate was able to placate everyone who had questions about their "investments," and in some cases actually talk them out of more money.

While Abate was cutting an ever-widening swath through Huntsville's social circles, he had his eyes on bigger game. He had gotten to be friendly with many of the bankers in town and most were familiar with his "story." He explained to the bankers that he had discovered several investment opportunities and needed a small loan to tide him over until his stepfather's estate was settled. When the bankers asked to see a copy of the will, Abate readily agreed, promising to drop it by the bank in the next couple of days.

While producing a bogus will might be difficult for many people, for Abate it was easy. He simply went to a prominent local attorney and after introducing himself as



Angelo Blassi, said he wanted to draw up a will and leave the bulk of his money to Peter Abate, his beloved stepson. The attorney took the information supplied, drew up the will and never thought anything about it.

Several days later Abate returned to the bank with the will. As an added inducement, he gave the name of a bank in Boston as

a reference.

The bankers were delirious with joy. They could already smell Abate's supposed fortune sitting in their vault. After checking the will to be sure it "appeared" authentic, the banker called the bank in Boston who verified that "yes, a man by the name of Angelo Blassi was once a customer but he had recently

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died." They were sorry but they could not supply any information about the account because it was tied up in probate. Off the record, they furnished information that Blassi's bank records showed huge sums of money being transferred in and out of his accounts on a regular basis before he died.

There was a bit of truth to Abate's story. His stepfather had died, but left no will, which was why it was taking so long to probate his estate. There had been a lot of money in his account but it was assumed to be Mafia money and had been withdrawn within hours of Blassi's death.

Next, the bankers called Glen Brooks, who they thought was a friend of Abate's. Brooks, regardless of his personal feelings, was forced to answer with the only statement he was allowed to give, "I can neither confirm it nor deny it."

Within weeks of creating the will Abate had borrowed almost five hundred thousand dollars from local banks. Another forty

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five thousand came from local finance companies and unknown thousands from private investors.

There was no doubt that Abate knew his days in Huntsville were numbered. Already he was making noises to the Marshal's Service about wanting to be relocated and given another name.

One banker who was not impressed with Abate's story was determined to find out more. He was possibly influenced by the fact that his ex-fiance was now seeing Abate.

After making the standard phone calls, and getting the same answers, he asked the Boston banker about Blassi's stepson, Peter Abate. The banker thought for a moment and said, "Oh, you must mean Peter Aver. That's the only stepson he had."

A few more phone calls brought out the fact that Aver/ Abate was in the witness protection program at an "undisclosed location."

Strangely, when the banker tried to tell people it was dismissed with, "That was probably when he was working undercover."

At the same time the Mafia, anxious to keep Abate from testifying, was hot on his trail. Several sources claimed that Abate had been in contact with mem-

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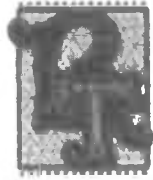


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bers of Boston's organized crime, possibly trying to collect money owed from old business deals, which could explain the envelopes stuffed with money that he received in the mail.

While the mafia had reportedly traced Abate to North Alabama, they still did not know his exact location. Their problem seemed to be solved however when a New England vending machine company filed a lawsuit in Federal court. The suit alleged that the company's rights had been violated because Abate had fled owing them five thousand dollars and the government was refusing to divulge his whereabouts. They asked the court to order the U.S. Marshal's Service to reveal where Abate was so they could collect the money.

Many people wondered at the time why a small company would go to such great lengths to collect such a small amount.

With so many people beginning to raise questions, Abate decided it was time to leave, but even then, his stories would prove controversial. He told several people who had invested large sums of money with him that he was going to Atlanta for a few days to help his mother move. The story he told two young ladies who worked for local attorneys was much different. He said he was moving to Atlanta to take advantage of several business opportunities and offered them great paying jobs if they would relocate with him.

"When we got to the Atlanta airport," they later explained, "one minute he was there and the next moment he was gone. Just like that. We never saw him again."

Many people believe the government helped Abate flee Huntsville rather than see their star witness tarnished by law-

suits and criminal charges.

After Abate moved to Atlanta, the Witness Protection Program created a new identity for him, this time using the alias "Peter Abbott." He apparently appeared in Boston at several trials for Mafia figures before again disappear-

ing. Repeated requests for information about him were ignored by the government.

The following summer he was briefly arrested in Jacksonville, Florida, still using the name

Abbott, where he had applied

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for a restaurant license. During a routine fingerprint check it was discovered he was a fugitive from justice with two warrants outstanding for his arrest. When Huntsville authorities were notified, it was decided the warrants were not sufficient for extradition. He was released after spending only a few hours in jail.

Several sources say he next moved to the Miami area, this time using the name "Abbitt," where he stayed for several years before relocating to Seattle, Washington. He has not been heard from since. The Marshall's Service claims he is no longer under their control.

Eventually most of the law suits and "problems" he left behind in Huntsville were solved. Many people, some of Huntsville's most respected businessmen, simply wrote the debts off to a bad experience. An out of town attorney, who many people assumed was representing the

government, settled some of the other cases by paying the claimants a percentage of their losses. Some of the banks, when warned of possible adverse publicity, decided to forget the whole matter.

Glen Brooks resigned from the United States Marshal's Service shortly afterwards and has since refused to talk about his dealings with the Witness Protection Program.

Many of his friends say he quit in disgust because of the way the government regulations had protected Peter Abate.



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The Gurley Jail

by Margaret S. Connally

Early in the 1900s, Gurley had a jail. It was a little one-room affair located by the rail road tracks. It was used mainly to lock up young men who celebrated too much on weekends.

One young man, Allen Sanford, tired of spending so many Saturday nights there, decided to do something about it. He went to the local saw mill and got a long log chain. That night when the train stopped in Gurley for water Allen hooked one end of the chain to the jail and the other end to the train.

I am told that a Gurley resident used the remains from the

jail in a barn he was building, but Gurley hasn't had a jail since.

Allen served in the Rainbow Division during World War One. While he did have a drinking problem he had a big heart, es-

pecially when it concerned children. I am told that once during the war he won a large sum of money in a poker game, and had it all changed into small coins to throw to the French children begging in the streets.

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News From the Year 1916

News From Huntsville and Around The World

United States Invaded by Mexican Pancho Villa

Columbus, N.M. - A Mexican revolutionary army, led by Pancho Villa, has crossed the border at Columbus, New Mexico.

Rampant looting and outright banditry preceded the army of almost 600 men as they swarmed across the Rio Grande. At least 12 ranches have been robbed and their buildings put to the torch.

Though preliminary reports are sketchy at this time it appears the operation was carefully planned. Small groups of 15-20 men snuck across the border first, cutting telegraph wires and sealing off the roads leading into and out of Columbus. As the main army approached Columbus it became evident that resistance was futile against the heavily armed band of marauders.

There is no report on the numbers of lives lost, though it has been confirmed that the two

banks in Columbus, along with all the other businesses, were looted of their cash and weapons.

First reaction from Washington was one of shock with a promise of swift retaliation.

Polio Discovered in Maysville

Dr. L. W. Howard has confirmed that a new and dreadful disease has been identified in Maysville.

Nettie Preston, the two year old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Will Preston, was diagnosed yesterday as having polio.

Though two other cases have been reported in other parts of the state, this is the first confirmed case in North Alabama.

Wilson Urges World Peace


Washington - President Wilson called tonight for creation of a league of nations to keep peace in the world once the war in Europe has ended. The president's proposal was made in a speech to the League to Enforce Peace.

Saying that rule by force should end, President Wilson maintained that the United States would be willing to join in an organization that would protect all small countries from aggression and stop wars begun in violation of treaties. The world, Wilson said, has a right to live in peace.


Although such an organization has often been discussed it is unsure if any government would seriously consider joining.

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Tragic Fire Ravages Ringling Brothers Circus - Horses Killed

Huntsville - What started as a day of merriment for people attending the Ringling Brothers Circus here quickly turned into tragedy as flames swept the compound.

Over 600 people were on the circus grounds when a fire, apparently caused by a carelessly discarded cigarette, and fueled by high winds, swept through the grounds.

The main damage was concentrated near the stock pens where immense quantities of fodder had been stowed for the livestock.

The stock handlers, who had been prepared for such an emergency, immediately began blindfolding the horses and leading them to safety.

Though there is no report of human casualties, 37 horses burned to death in the conflagration. Scores more were severely injured.

Several of Huntsville's doctors were pressed into service in an attempt to save the injured animals but in many cases it was too late. Shots rang out through the day as more of the animals were put out of their misery.

A spokesman from Ringling

Brothers Circus stated the show will continue its run here in Huntsville with no interruption of scheduled shows. Agents for the circus are already in negotiations with local livestock dealers to replace the horses.

The fiery blaze, and the smoke, was seen all across the county.

Citizens in New Hope, upon seeing the smoke, immediately raised a contingent of volunteers and dispatched them to Huntsville.

Ford To Unveil \$250 Auto

Detroit - The horse and buggy days may be ending for many people when the new \$250 touring automobiles roll off the Ford Motor Co.'s assembly lines.

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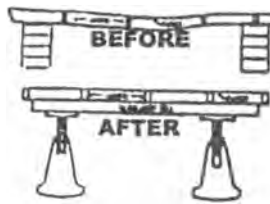
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I Remember

by Cecil Ashburn

I'm a Huntsville resident and not that old but I remember things that younger folks can hardly believe nowadays.

Everyone had their chores - men had theirs and women had theirs and they didn't mix, unless it was out in the cotton field.

Annie Gray's husband had about a hundred acres of cotton. When the cotton was picked and ready to be processed he would take it to the gin to get the seeds out.

But Annie liked to pick her own pure white cotton out of the bolls (hull, very sharp) and get the seeds out by hand. Then she'd take a wad of cotton and 2 paddles they called "Cards", kind of like 2 hairbrushes. These cards were about 3" by 12" and they had little combs on them, so that when you pulled the cotton wad through the cards what you got was coarse, irregular strands of cotton. Then

she'd take the strands and put them on the spinning wheel that twisted the strands into thread.

Women would have quilting bees. They all saved pieces of material and clothing and cut them into patterns like stars or squares - then sew the squares into quilts. There would be a large rack hanging from the ceiling that could be pulled down when they were working, then pushed up to get it out of the way.

One cold day I was visiting my grandparents, I think I was 7 or 8 at the time. Back then everyone had open fireplaces. My grandpa asked me if I wanted a boiled egg - he was boiling them over the fire. I had a piece of country ham with it - uncooked but cured in a smokehouse. Tasted really good I remember. I remember he always had a bottle of wildcat whiskey to go with it. I think I took a little sip from time to time. He taught me

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how to suck eggs too - when you put a hole in the pointed end of a raw egg and sucked the whole thing out.

Killing hogs was the highlight of the year. Farmers kept "Fattening Hogs", they would force feed them all year with corn and grain until the hogs were so big they could hardly walk. A lot of them got to at least 500 pounds. My job was to kill the hog every year - the value of the hog was not so much in the pork or the rind but in the lard - that's all that was used for cooking in those days. There was no Crisco back in those days.

Some of you may remember the Southern Cottonseed Oil Company that was located near Wheeler and Church Street. You would smell it before you saw the plant - if you remember that popcorn smell as you drove near it you know what I am talking about. The plant was quite large but was torn down when the road for 1565 was developed. The O'Shaughnessy brothers owned it. One of the brothers built the Kildare Mansion that is located off

Oakwood Ave. and the other lived on Monte Sano. In fact it was these brothers who built the Monte Sano Hotel.

Mules Stolen in New Hope

from 1901 newspaper

John W. Buford, a planter from the New Hope neighborhood, reported to the police late yesterday afternoon that two of his tenants, Jackson Jones and Henry Brooks, stole from his place two fine mules and when last heard of were coming in the direction of the city. When last seen they were both under the influence of whiskey.

Police are under the impression they have skipped to some other state with the animals.

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The Cross on the Mountain

by Jon Jackson

For anyone who grew up in Huntsville, the huge concrete cross on the side of Monte Sano was a landmark. While the cross is highly visible to almost all of Huntsville, its history is virtually unknown to most. Sitting on the Burritt Museum nature trail, the cross has, since it's erection in 1963, attracted a lot of attention. No one is sure how many of Burritt's 100,000 plus annual visitors go to the foot of the cross but officials believe that many of them do. Although called the Monte Sano Cross, it actually sits on Roundtop Mountain, one of a series of mountains that runs through Huntsville.

The current cross is the third to sit on the mountain. The first was erected in the early 1900's. No one really knows a lot about it. The Monte Sano Civic Association erected the second in 1956 during the Easter season. The 30-foot wooden

cross sat on a bluff overlooking Huntsville.

When Sam Thompson sold the property to John and Robert Moorman in the late 1950's, the cross had to be moved. The Burritt board minutes from May 2, 1960 state that a request had been made to move the cross to the Burritt Museum property. On May 27 the minutes state that, "Mrs. Moorman has been notified [that] the cross could be placed on Burritt property." That is when

the Ministers Association stepped in and the third cross project began and on December 5, 1960 the Burritt board approved the site for the new cross.

Soon the Ministers Association began collecting funds for the erection of the cross. Estimates of the amount raised vary from \$3,500 to \$15,000, but no one is really sure just how much was raised. The Southern Cast Stone Company took the job of fabricating the cross when no one



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in Huntsville wanted the job. The cross is hollow, composed of steel reinforced concrete cast in sections and brought in three sections by truck to Huntsville when completed. At 70 feet tall and 31 feet wide, the cross dominates the mountain side and is the most visible structure there.

When it arrived the only vehicles that could erect it on the site belonged to the U.S. Army, which refused to become involved in the matter because of its religious nature. But, as the Reverend Edward "Ted" Gartrell said in a 1990 interview with the Huntsville Times, one of his members soon came to the rescue. "Milton Cummings," said Gartrell, "was the President of Brown Engineering at the time, and he somehow contracted out with Redstone Arsenal to use their vehicles. The army wouldn't touch it but Milton somehow found a way around it."

A road was then cleared by the Madison County Commission to the site for the trucks and a crane to erect the cross. James Record, chairman of the Madison County Commission at the time and a member of the Burrirt board, volunteered the county to clean out the area, which says cost about \$5,000. Record was later quoted as saying, "I think it was well worth the money because the cross is one of the best things to ever happen to Huntsville and Madison County. It's a landmark I am very proud of." With everything in place, the erection of the structure began and H. A. Godsey, a member at Faith Chapel, operated the crane. One of the workers had to be lowered down into the first section to weld it to the base but after that construction proceeded quickly.

Next came the issue of lighting. The Ministers Association wanted to string white light bulbs around the cross but the Burrirt Board of Directors quickly voted that down. Dr. Frances Roberts, a member of the board later said, "I don't remember a great deal about the cross when it was erected, but I do remember the Ministers Association wanting to put white bulbs around it. We were totally opposed to that, but we did agree to let them put a foot light at the base." The lighting committee of the Ministers Association, chaired by the Reverend Edsel Keith, moved quickly to put up the 12 floodlights. The Association then asked the Burrirt Museum to pay for the electricity to light the cross. The museum declined since it was having trouble just paying its own bills. Instead, a separate meter

was placed on the property for the cross lights and until 1975 the city of Huntsville paid the bill. In '75 the city elected to stop paying for the lights because the upkeep was becoming prohibitive. The bulbs themselves cost around \$1,000 and many had been either broken by vandals or burned out from con-

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tinuous use.

Since then the bill has been paid by anonymous donors and Huntsville Utilities will not release the names. But according to Gartrell, "I wouldn't be surprised if it had been Milton [Cummings] because he was very interested in the project."

While the cross was not erected under controversy, it has seen some in the ensuing years. The biggest one came in the 1970's when Huntsville decided to adopt a flag. The one selected had a boll weevil, a rocket, and the cross. When some people in the community objected to the religious symbol the idea was quickly dropped.

Today the Burritt Museum keeps the bushes around the base trimmed, but very little else can be done because of the city's slope ordinance prohibiting clear cutting on the mountain side. Around the base today one will find thorns and wild roses, which help to protect the cross from vandals.

"You have only the rights you are willing to fight for."

Jimmy Smithson, Athens

Whipped and Brideless

From 1890 newspaper

They don't permit a drunken man to marry in Huntsville. On the contrary they whip him and give his bride to another. An illustration of this occurred, when a couple appeared in church and requested the priest to marry them.

The priest, detecting an unsteady gait in the bridegroom, refused and called the young man a "boozing swine". Indignant at the untimely inebriate, the father of the drunkard seized

him by the collar, dragged him out and belabored him with a stout cudgel, in the hope of making him sober enough to marry.

The bride's father, however, took a more practical view of the situation, and, declaring the engagement off, said that any eligible candidate for his daughter's hand might wed her on the spot without incurring any expense.

Two aspirants came forward, and after inspection by the bride, and interrogation as to their worldly condition, one was politely dismissed, and the other took the "Boozing swine's" place, and was made a happy husband.




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News from Gurley in 1891

- Our little city is quiet as usual, moving on "in the even tenor of its way."

- Last week the weather was extremely warm, but it has suddenly changed and forced us to put on our overcoats and kindled the fire to keep us warm.

- Gurley is still enlarging her borders. The new bucket factory of Vorenburg & Bros. is about completed. The workmen are putting up the machinery, and expect to commence the manufacture of Cedar Buckets in a very short time.

- It would seem to an ordinary thinker that there is great room in the country for cedar bucket factories, there are only

about 4 in the United States.

- Mr. Vorenburg is in Boston now in the interest of his business.

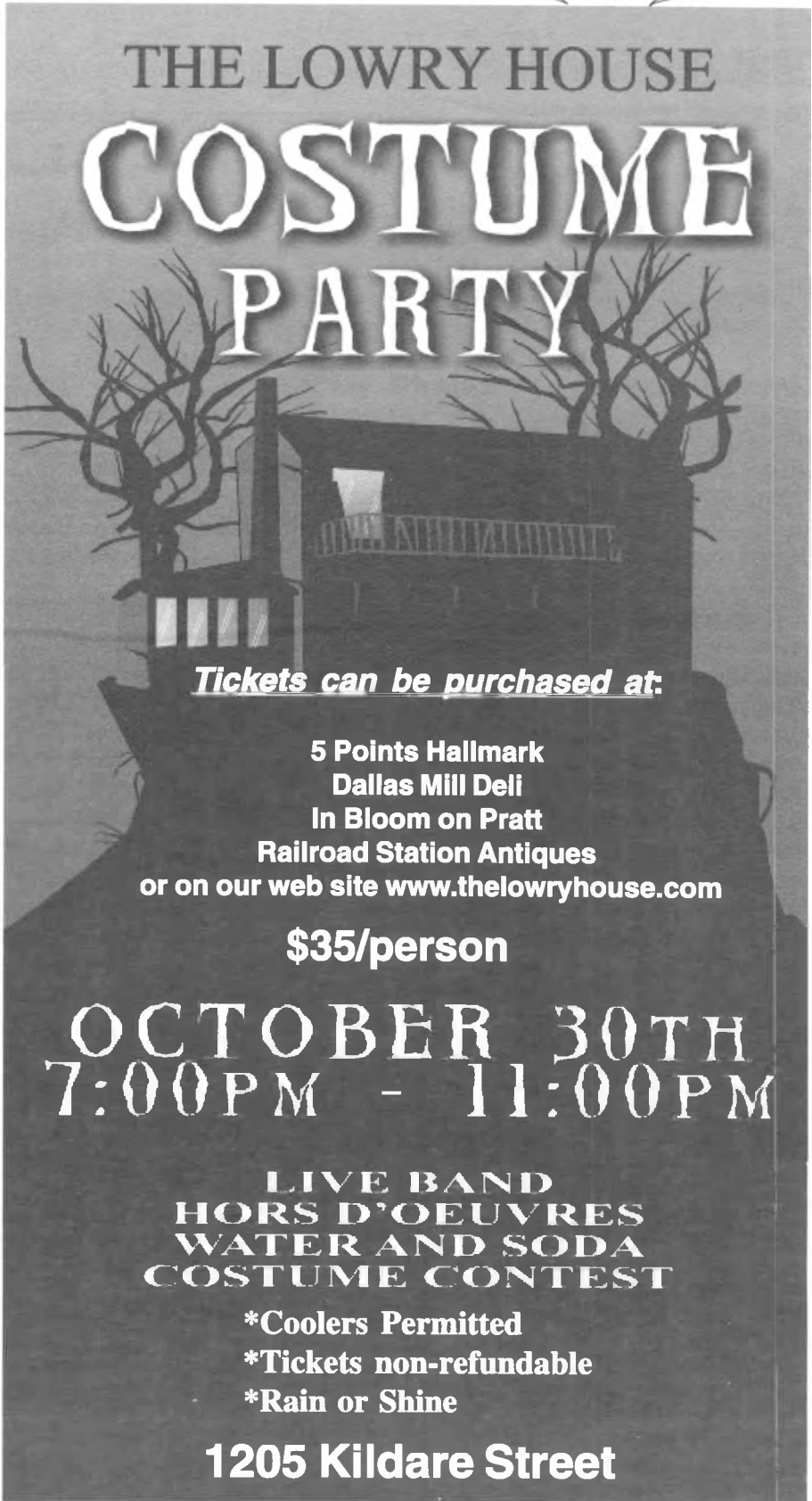
- The new Baptist church

will soon be completed, which will be quite an addition to our town. The work of the new building seems to be first class.



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Influenza Paralyzes Huntsville

from 1918 newspaper

A particularly virulent form of influenza, commonly known as the Spanish Flu, has paralyzed Huntsville. More than four hundred people have already died and thousands more are seriously ill.

The mayor has ordered all places of business, with the exception of drug stores, be closed between 5 P.M. and 9 A.M. and all sporting events, theaters and similar gatherings be canceled until further notice. All city and county schools will also remain closed.

Citizens are warned against entering any premises displaying the quarantine notice. All deaths are to be reported to the authorities as soon as possible and the clothes, bedding and personal effects of the victims are to be left where they are until such time as the authorities can burn them. Failure to do so can result in a fine and imprisonment.

City leaders are considering

a proposal to post guards at the city limits in an effort to stop any more sickness being brought from other communities.

In a related incident, there was a shooting on Monte Sano when a family, fleeing the illness

in the city, tried to set up a campsite on private property. Scores of families are reported to be camping on the mountain in the belief that it is a healthier site. Some of the property owners, armed with guns, are said to be patrolling their property.

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Baking Tips

- * To make cakes and pancakes moist, add a teaspoon or two of honey to the batter.
- * To keep waxed paper down on the counter when rolling dough, try wetting the counter first.
- * The best way to cushion cookies for mailing is with popcorn.
- * When baking any pie with a graham cracker crust, dip the pan in warm water for ten seconds and it will be easy to remove.
- * Angel food cake should be cooled by turning the pan upside down over a tray of ice cubes.
- * Icing will stay where you put it, if you first sprinkle the cake with powdered sugar.

Civil War Shell Causes Excitement in New Hope

From 1891 newspaper

From a very reliable source, a Mercury reporter was informed that on last Saturday at a point in the vicinity of New Hope, but on the Marshall County side of the river, an explosion occurred that has recalled the war and nearly scared the life out of an honest old darkey.

It seems that the old man was burning logs for the purpose of clearing up, and he had set fire to a heap which ignited a large dead tree. Suddenly a most terrific explosion occurred, one that was heard for miles, and the old tree was slivered and scattered to the winds. The old darkey who was a hundred yards distant took his departure without troubling himself, with an investigation.

A party who finally visited the spot where the tree once stood and made an investigation, found from the surroundings every evidence that the explosion was that of a bombshell that had been imbedded in the tree during the war.

It is known that there was a good deal of firing from cannon loaded with shell at this point during the war, a point that commanded the river.

The circumstances can admit of two theories, one that the shell became imbedded in the tree by being fired from a cannon and failed to explode.

The other that it had been left in the hollow, if there was any in the tree, as a sort of keepsake, hoping at some future day

that it would get in its work. The first theory, however, is the most probable. The report was heard far into Madison County and occasioned considerable wonder. It is said the old negro will burn no more brush in that neighborhood.

"If they really wanted to honor the soldiers, they would let them sit in the stands and have the people march by."

Jay Spalding, U. S. Army, Ret.



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Bear Mauls Dog in Sharp's Cove

from 1909 newspaper

Campers in Sharp's Cove got a surprise when a black bear wandered near their campsite last week. Seven different people saw the bear which was described as being of a good size.

A terrier, belonging to A.J. Fortner, was seriously mauled when it tried to confront the bear. It is not certain if the dog will even live through the week.

There had been earlier reports of bear signs and tracks in the vicinity but were mostly dismissed as products of an active imagination.

The last confirmed sighting of a bear in Madison County occurred shortly before the Civil War.

Whiskey Still Burns House

from 1919 newspaper

A fire destroyed the home of James Sutler on Madison Street last night when a whiskey still exploded. Sutler was firing the still with wood when mash clogged the drip pipe and the built up pressure caused it to explode, sending burning sticks of wood throughout the house. By the time help arrived the house was almost totally burned. Sutler escaped with burned hair and a severe scalding on the upper parts of his body.

"Never underestimate the power of stupid people in large groups."

George Carlin

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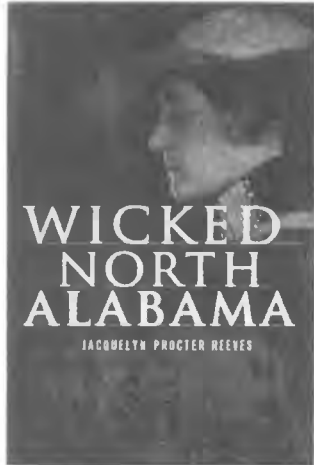
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Shaver's

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2. *Historic Photos of University of Alabama Football*: by Joseph "Woody" Woodruff \$35.00
3. *Historic Photos of Huntsville* by Jacque Gray Reeves \$39.95
4. *True Tales of Old Madison County* by Virgil (Pat) Jones \$7.95
5. *When Spirits Walk: Madison County Ghost Stories* \$16.95
6. *Lessons from the Skillet (Lick Skillet, Alabama)* Revised edition by Harold Fanning \$13.95
7. *Treasured Alabama Recipes* by Kathryn Tucker Windham (signed) \$14.95
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