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Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY



The Life and Times of Virginia Clay

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

Of all the people that Virginia met in Washington, it was a young senator from Mississippi who was to have the biggest effect on her life.

His name was Jefferson Davis.

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The Life and Times of Virginia Clay

She captivated the hearts of Huntsville for three-quarters of a century. As a young woman she walked the corridors of power both in Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia. As a middle aged lady she was linked romantically with one of the most revered men in the South and most importantly, in her later years, she knew how to keep her secrets.

Virginia Tunstall, better known as Virginia Clay, was born in Nash County, North Carolina on January 17, 1825. Three years later her mother died and her father moved to Alabama, where Virginia was placed in the care of an aunt.

The aunt assumed the task of raising Virginia to be a proper Southern lady, a task no doubt made harder by the young girl's vivacious and often inquisitive mind. At the tender age of fourteen Virginia was sent to a Nashville female academy to "complete" her education.

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

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

The next few years were probably the happiest the couple spent together. Virginia fit easily into Huntsville's extensive social scene where her youth and vivacity endured her to the patriarchs of the plantation society. Clement's family, too, was won over by the young girl, and she soon found herself helping manage the Clay's vast plantation holdings.

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

Clement Comer Clay, Clement's father, possibly saw some-



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thing in Virginia that was lacking in his son. Within a short while Virginia had become a *trusted confidant* and valued advisor to the senior Clay.

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

During these separations, Clay often expressed fear of losing Virginia. In one of his letters he wrote, "...I fear some fellow will forget you are married and make love to you." One has to wonder if he was more worried about his marriage or his social prestige.

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

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

The Southern culture and graces that had been instilled in Virginia since birth quickly made her one of the most popular hostesses in the nation's capital. President Pierce and his wife became admirers of her as did most of Washington's elite. Her life became a constant string of parties, concerts and teas. Conscious of her role as part of the Southern Aristocracy, she made regular trips to New York where she would shop for the fine clothes

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she thought befitted her position. At one point she "complained" to a friend of having purchased over two hundred pairs of shoes.

Of all the people that Virginia met in Washington, it was a young senator from Mississippi who was to have the biggest effect on her life.

His name was Jefferson Davis.

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

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

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

olved with.

The two couples became good friends. They spent much time together at one another's homes discussing politics and Washington gossip. Though Clay and Davis were both senators and worked together every day, it was Virginia and Davis who developed the closest relationship. When Davis took sick, while his wife was out of town, it was Virginia who spent days at his bedside, wiping his brow and reading him the poetry he so much admired.

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

Virginia must have also been frustrated by her husband who seemed to be preoccupied with his health most of the time. Though still professing his love for her, he was rarely seen at her side. In one of his letters he actually seemed to be encouraging Virginia by writing, "...you have more fun without me."

Jefferson Davis often invited Virginia to accompany him on trips to inspect nearby mili-

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tary installations. One of these trips was to Fort Monroe, an installation just outside Washington that would become very familiar to both of them in the coming years.

If there was to be anything else besides an innocent flirtation, it was soon ended by events culminating in the Civil War. In 1861 both Davis and Clay resigned their Senate seats to return South. A short time after Clay reached Huntsville he was elected as a senator of the newly formed Confederate States of America Congress. Jefferson Davis, rather than remaining at his Mississippi plantation as he wished, was elected President of the Confederate States.

Virginia and Clement traveled to Montgomery to watch the new president be sworn in. Though Davis's schedule was crowded with people wishing to see him, as soon as he saw Virginia he ushered her into his office. He motioned for her to sit next to him, and thus she remained throughout the evening as he continued to receive visitors. Perhaps in such a trying time President Davis found

it comforting to have a dear friend near him.

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

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

Despite the unnerving news coming over the telegraph wires daily, or perhaps because of it, Davis once again began to seek Virginia's company. The relationship caused a whispering campaign that has endured to this day.

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

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ladies openly despised Varina Davis.

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

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

Containing such phrases as, "I long to lay my head on your bosom again as I hold your hand in mind," the letters leave no doubt that Clay had forsaken his marriage vows.

Meanwhile, events in the Confederacy had deteriorated to the point where Virginia Clay was forced to leave Richmond and seek refuge at a friend's home in Georgia.

On April 3, 1865 General Robert E. Lee was forced to retreat, beginning a march that would end at Appomattox, and leaving the way open for the Federal Army to march into Richmond. Hastily, the Confederate government made preparations to evacuate. Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet

fled the already burning city in a railway car with no destination in mind except for "south."

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

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

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they learned of Davis's capture by Federal troops in Georgia.

Again accounts of the actual events vary, with some saying that Clay proposed surrendering himself to the authorities, while another account quotes Virginia as saying, "We must join the President."

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

In Macon, Georgia they were placed aboard a train where they found Davis in a somber mood. Seeing Virginia enter the car, the ex-president immediately rose to embrace her while saying, "This is a sad day, Jinnie."

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

tives.

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

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

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

When Davis and Clay were transferred from the ship to the fort, Varina broke down and began sobbing uncontrollably. Virginia, watching the men

being escorted from the ship, clenched her teeth and proclaimed, "I should die before they should see me shed tears."

Several days later Virginia was released from custody and returned home to Huntsville. The scene she returned to was far different from the Huntsville she had left years earlier. The plantations were almost

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bankrupt and the former slaves had fled, leaving no one to tend the fields. Even the building on the courthouse square, which had brought in a small rent every month, had been confiscated and was being used as an office by the freedman's bureau.

While most of her fellow Southerners had given up all hope, Virginia refused to accept defeat. Immediately she began a letter writing campaign on behalf of her husband and Jefferson Davis. Borrowing money from a local merchant she purchased material for a new dress and made preparations to go to Washington.

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

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

Finally after repeated appeals Virginia was able to get Johnson's word that the prisoners would be released from military custody.

Clement returned to Huntsville as a hero to the throngs who gathered to welcome him home. The exultation over his freedom was short lived however as he and Virginia surveyed the financial wreckage left by the war. The Clays re-



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luctantly realized the life they had once known was gone forever.

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

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

In 1867 Jefferson Davis was released from prison after almost 18 months imprisonment. On Davis's first trip to Alabama, he stopped in Huntsville to visit Virginia. If their friendship in the past had been merely an innocent flirtation, it was soon to take another course. Probably driven by memories of a happier time, Virginia seemed to be irresistibly drawn

to the ex-president. For the next six years, she would be almost a constant companion of Davis.

Virginia began spending much of her time traveling, meeting Davis in Niagara Falls, Memphis, Sewanee and Charleston. Even when they were apart, they carried on a lively correspondence.

After one trip to Huntsville, Davis wrote Virginia, "The hours dragged by wearily after you left me at the station for the contrast with your sweet home was a sweet one. ...Let me hear from you as freely as your convenience will allow. ...Put on the envelope, "Personal."

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

Varina Davis almost certainly knew of the relationship

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between Virginia and her husband. Though she had never been particularly fond of Virginia, she now refused to allow Virginia's name spoken in her presence.

As if following Clement Clay's example, Varina also withdrew into seclusion, spending much of her time in Europe, leaving Davis to live by himself in Memphis. In one nineteen month period they spent a total of sixteen days in one another's company.

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

Possibly the rumors would have died down if it had not been for an unfortunate incident on a Pullman car. Late one evening, after the passengers had retired to their individual sleeping berths, the conductor saw a shadowy form emerge from one berth and enter another. Alarmed, possibly thinking it was a sneak thief, the conductor hurried to investigate.

According to an article on the front page of the Louisville Commercial, July 15, 1871, the conductor discovered the ex-President of the Confederacy

"occupying the berth with the married lady under his chivalrous protection."

When Davis refused to leave the berth, the conductor called his superior who "sternly ordered Davis to take another berth at once." Then, according to the Louisville Commercial, Davis "retired with deep disgust, and elevated his venerable form (in shirt and drawers) to the upper bunk."

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licity, or maybe because of Varina's return from Europe, their relationship seemed to end shortly afterwards. No longer were there enduring letters waiting in the mailbox and Virginia's trips to Memphis stopped altogether.

Virginia remained in Huntsville where in 1882 her husband, Clement, died. She waited five years before remarriage. Her new husband was Judge David Clopton, an old friend and member of the Alabama Supreme Court.

After Clopton died in 1892 Virginia moved to Gurley, to the farm cottage she had once refused to live in.

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

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

Sitting on a sofa, receiving guests, Davis looked up to see Virginia standing in the doorway. In a scene oddly reminiscent of another age, he once again motioned her to take a seat next to him as he con-

tinued to greet well wishers. Those were to be the last moments Jefferson Davis and Virginia Clay ever spent together. Two years later Davis died.

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

In 1904, Virginia published a book of her recollections under the title "A Belle Of The Fifties". She was aided in this endeavor by diaries and scrapbooks she had been collecting for over a half-century.

She made no mention of her alleged romance with Jefferson Davis.

Her diaries and scrapbooks, which found their way into the archives of a prominent university library, provided more puzzles than answers for modern historians. Portions of her penciled-in diary, especially the dates of her trips after the war, had been meticulously erased. The diary for 1871, when the alleged Pullman car incident was supposed to have happened, was missing altogether.

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

The young flirtatious girl who had captivated the hearts of so many, entered history books for the last time, as the Grande dame of the Lost Cause.



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Memories of a Day of Golf

By Gene Primm

The day of golf with J.D. Primm, his son Gene, younger son Glenn and family friend, L.D. Askew got off to a great start when they teed off on a beautiful morning back in April 1952 at a local golf course in Huntsville. Young son Glenn was along for the ride and to maybe gain some experience for his day in the sun with his dad.

Things were going along fine until the crew arrived on the fifth hole, young Glenn drove the cart into the weather stand and it became stuck in the mud and water. They all had to pull and tug the cart to get it unstuck and pulled it out. Mr. Primm drove the cart to the front of the pond and told son Glenn to drive the cart on around in front and to Mr. Primm's displeasure, he lost that hole.

Glenn got on the cart and didn't change gears and drove the cart to the next hole and wouldn't you know - drove it straight into the very same muddy pond again.

Mr. Primm couldn't believe his eyes, but true as it was, it looked like his golfing day was beginning to go downhill.

It took all four to pull the cart out of the murky pond. Mr. Primm lost that hole and the game. He may have lost the game but the day was a success in that he had a very enjoyable day with his sons and friend.

Old Huntsville Trivia

1808 - First whiskey distillery opens in Huntsville, located next to the Big Spring, and its products are sold by the barrel.

1820 - The first tin can is sold in Huntsville. L.B. Williams reports throngs of people in his store to see the novelty of "Food in a tin can."



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News from 1866

- The value of ice to the city can only be estimated by the disastrous consequences of a deprivation of it for use in sickness or as a luxury. The winter was so mild that not a pound of ice could be gathered here. To meet the wants of the city, Mr. Robert Coltart, having fitted up his Ice Depot, ordered from the North, is now receiving and packing away nearly 500,000 pounds of ice. We have not heard the price per pound but we know that Mr. Coltart will not take advantage of his monopoly to burden the customers with exorbitant prices.

- Taken up running at large in the city of Huntsville, a mule between a mouse and a cream color, about fourteen hands high, with a brown stripe across the shoulders and down the

back, branded I.C. on the left shoulder, and S. on the back. The owner will come forward, prove property, pay charges and take it away. Apply to the City Marshall

- 300 acre plantation near Gurley. Has fresh spring with sweet water. Almost 200 acres worked. House burned. Will dispose of on liberal terms.

- A large lot of fresh country butter just received at 30 cents per pound; also a large lot of fresh eggs at 25 cents per dozen, warranted good and fresh. Cash or trade.

- Nine hogs of a reddish nature. The hogs are the property of J.D. Kendall and were last seen on the streets of Huntsville on the corner of Clinton and Jefferson. The above has already, this year, lost 33 hogs and two milk cows to the infidels of the dark who seem to be continuously preying upon the trusting manners of our townspeople. A liberal reward will be paid.

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Peanuts & Double Cola

by Nolan Myrick

I sure enjoyed reading about Mr. Coot's store. It brought back a lot of memories. When I was 4 or 5 we lived across the road from Lipscombs Store. That's all I ever remember calling it. We lived in 2 rooms in the back of our Texaco service station. I believe Mr. Thrasher in Huntsville owned our station and we leased it from him.

Momma had a lot of relatives who lived in Laceys Spring. Uncle Tommy and Aunt Bertha Dean, Joe Dean, Alec Dean just to name a few. Joe Dean has an auto salvage yard there now. Highway 231 was two-lane back then. My grandparents, Acklin & Annie White, lived on Old Rescue Road up at Morgan City on Brindlee Mountain. The most vivid memory in my mind about Lipscomb Gas was when my mother and I went over there shopping. When she wasn't looking I got a piece of bubble gum and didn't pay for it. I was smart enough to not chew it til I got home. She caught me chewing it and wanted to know exactly where I had gotten it. I told her I stole it from Mr. Lipscomb's store. She whipped me all the way from one end of the road to the other. I had to confess my theft to Mr. Lipscomb, but he told me it was alright and to forget about it. My mother made me give him a penny and tell him I was sorry and I would never do it again. He was a really good man.

Another man I remember was Mr. Ira Arnold who had a Pure Gas station on our side of the road. We had one of those drink boxes with water in it and a circulating pump. I liked Double Cola, Nesbitt Orange and a good chocolate drink that I believe was put out by Nesbitt. I learned how to put my hand around an open Double Cola, making something like a funnel and pouring salty peanuts into the drink. The peanuts would sort of make it foam up at first, then you had to drink a little out of the cola so you could make even more room for more peanuts. There was a real art to this. If you got all the liquid out before you ate all the peanuts, some would stick to the bottom of the bottle and it would be impossible to get them all out.

It's funny what we remember, later on when we get older.

Old Time Justice

The parties who went in search of the horse stolen from Mr. Luke Matthews, a long time and respected resident of Huntsville, succeeded in finding the horse and the four culprits responsible for its removal.

After brief negotiations the horse and the culprits were returned to Huntsville under guard. Mr. Matthews once again has possession of his animal and one of the thieves is now lodged in our jail. The other three are still recovering.

from an 1869 Huntsville newspaper



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Heard On the Street

by *Cathey Carney*

Congratulations to **Jimmy Satterfield** who was the first to correctly call and identify the youngster in last month's Photo. The beautiful little girl was **Margo Gray**, who is an Assignment Reporter for Channel 48, WAFF. She has only been in town for a year but already likes it alot. Jimmy worked as a pump builder for CDS John Blue Company and is our latest winner!

Elizabeth Butler Burks celebrated her 25th wedding anniversary with sweet husband **George** in late November. She said George is the best husband in the world! **Nathan Burks**, their son, celebrated his 29th birthday in early November and she's so proud of him. Elizabeth is an Avon representative and loves it! But the best news of all, on Dec. 9 Elizabeth celebrated 7 years of remission from leukemia.

There are lots of us who are dealing with care giving and elder care issues and there is a great web site out with lots of useful information to check.



www.CaregiversLibrary.org is the site. Best of all, it's free to use. Thanks to **John Richard** of Rise Real Estate for this!

Back around the early 1900s there was a one-room schoolhouse for black children, located downtown Huntsville. A building was built on top of it in later years and when that building was torn down, the little one-room schoolhouse was discovered. There was an old bell - cracked & soldered - that was given to a lady who subsequently donated it to **Alabama A & M University** here. Does anyone remember hearing any stories about a black 1-room school house located downtown? We would love to do a story on this and need more facts.

Ruth Moore of New Mar-

ket is a special friend of **Wilma Renfroe**, and Wilma wants to send out a special hello to her dear friend!

In Star Market recently it was packed with people buying snacks for the Iron Bowl, and I ran into an old friend. **Mark Haymes** used to live in Huntsville, then moved out of state to work, but he's back now. He is currently working for Southland International Trucks. Glad you're back!

We so very sorry to hear of the death of **Archie Murchie**, the man who was the founder of the **Golden K Kiwanis** here in Huntsville. He was 92 years old, and lived a full, wonderful life. His daughters **Liz Zeman** and **Margaret Funderburk** spent nights with him recently, sleeping on the floor just to be near him. He was a funny, feisty and accomplished man. We send our deepest condolences to Liz and Margaret, to the Golden K's and Archie's many friends.

Photo of The Month

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

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Hint: This young boy is now a man about town who helps you plan for the future.



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Happy birthday to **Laquanda Ford**, who's 28 and sweet daughter of **Liz Ford**. Laquanda is mom to son **Tyler**, and is expecting another baby in late August with her husband **Terrance Holmen**.

After seeing the crowds shopping before Christmas, I am convinced that **Huntsville & Madison** alone jump-started the country's economy!

Joe Walker, of Southern Sealing & Striping, gives some of the best hugs you'll ever get. Recently at LeeAnn's on Church Street Joe was there with some friends, and several ladies came by to talk with Joe, he hugged every one of them. One of the ladies was me and Joe definitely knows how to give a great hug!

Vicky Barnes Davis is the sister of **Chris Barnes** and he is very proud of her! She works for the government out of Tuscaloosa and she is married to **Larry Davis**, who is the head coach of the Rowing Team at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. When Vicky lived in Huntsville she was on the rowing team here and that's how she met Larry. We had the opportunity to meet Chris recently and he is just the nicest man. His family moved here in 1965 and his parents, **Kelly and Cathy Barnes**, now live in a pretty house in Madison. Chris remembers eating at the Bon Air restaurant, Aunt Eunice's, etc. & really misses them!

Have you ever noticed that when **pigeons sit on the power lines** around town that they always line up very evenly with one bird space in between each one? They never like to crowd each other. Just like people!

There are SO many pet lovers in the Huntsville area, and alot of new folks to our

area may not know of the **annual Dog Ball** that is put on by the **Greater Huntsville Humane Society**. This year ought to be a hoot because it is titled "**Woofstock**" and will be a night filled with Huntsville's finest "Hippie Hounds." (Get it, Woofstock?)

Anyway all the proceeds from the ball go right back to the Humane Society and in addition to a silent auction, a good dinner and runway presentation of the dogs, there are tons of prizes to be won. I hear that if you go one year, you'll go every year from that time on! It's sold out nearly every year! The lady to call for information & tickets is **Loretta Satterfield**, at (256) 881-8081.

We live in Old Town, and recently we noticed that an older, quite large Maple Tree was dying and had lots of limbs that were in danger of falling. As we have smaller grandkids who visit and often play in the front yard under that tree we were a little concerned. We called the city because the tree sits on city property. Within just a month or so the city trucks showed up and really trimmed back the bad limbs, did a great job. In addition, they cleaned

up all the debris that came from the cutting. I know I say it all the time, but we have some of the **best city workers and contractors** that you can find anywhere and we're so proud of **all our city employees**.

Did you know that in 1940 Gas was selling for 21 cents a gallon and you could buy a bottle of beer for 15 cents?

Have a good January and stay warm!

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Hot & Spicy from Huntsville Hospital

These recipes were taken from the cookbook "Welcome Back" by employees & volunteers at Huntsville Hospital.

Spicy Sausage Dip

- 1 lb. hot sausage
- 1 lb. Velveeta Mexican cheese, cubed
- 1 10-oz. can Rotel (tomatoes & green chilies)

Brown sausage in skillet, stirring til crumbly and drain. Combine the sausage, cheese and Rotel in microwave-safe dish and mix well. Microwave on high til melted, stirring occasionally. Serve with tortilla chips. **Lora Vinyard**

Wassail

- 3 sticks cinnamon
- 6 whole cloves
- 1 whole nutmeg or 1/2 t. ground
- 1 small orange, sliced

- 1 c. rum
- 2 qrts. apple cider
- 1 pint cranberry juice
- 3/4 c. sugar

Combine all in a slow cooker and cook, uncovered, on low for 4-8 hours, stirring frequently. Serve warm. **Diane Ingram**

Rose's Cheese Soup

- 4 medium potatoes, diced
- 2 T. butter
- 1 c. milk
- 1 16-oz. jar Cheez Whiz
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Chopped onion or garlic to taste

- 1 c. hot water

Put your potatoes in a soup pot with enough water to cover them, boil til tender and drain. Combine the butter, milk, Cheez Whiz, and spices in a soup pot. Add 1 cup hot water; mix well. Add potatoes

and simmer for 10 minutes and cheese melts. **Joanne Caudle** (This recipe is her grandmother's recipe, who was 80 in 1995)

Marinated Roast

- 1 thick chuck roast
- Adolph's Meat Tenderizer
- 1 lrg. onion, chopped
- 1 T. sesame seeds
- 2 T. butter
- 1/2 c. strong coffee
- 1/2 c. soy sauce
- 1 T. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 T. vinegar

Sprinkle roast with meat tenderizer in bowl. Brown onion and sesame seeds in butter in skillet. Add coffee, soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce and vinegar; mix well. Pour over roast. Marinate in refrigerator for 12-24 hours. Place roast on gas grill rack, grill over medium hot coals for 10 minutes and turn roast. Grill for 5

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minutes longer for rare or 10 minutes longer for well done. The marinade may be frozen.

Sue Terry

Crispy Cajun Chicken

- 4 skinless chicken breasts
- 1/2 c. mayonnaise
- 1 t. ground cumin
- 1 t. onion powder
- 1/2 t. ground red pepper
- 1/2 t. garlic powder
- 1 1/2 c. crushed sesame crackers

Rinse chicken, pat dry. Combine mayo, cumin, onion powder, red pepper and garlic powder in bowl; mix well. Brush chicken with the mixture. Coat with cracker crumbs. Place in baking pan and bake for 45-50 minutes and chicken is tender.

Doris Williams

Green Chile Rice

- 1 c. chopped onion
- 1/4 c. butter
- 3 c. cooked rice
- 2 c. sour cream
- 1 c. cottage cheese
- 1 bay leaf, crushed
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 3 4-oz. cans green chiles, whole
- 1 c. shredded Cheddar cheese
- Snipped parsley
- Cook onion in butter in

skillet til tender. Combine onion, rice, sour cream, cottage cheese, bay leaf, salt and pepper in large bowl. Cut green chiles lengthwise into quarters, rinse and seed. Chop half the chiles. Stir chopped chiles into rice mixture and spoon into a baking dish. Place quartered chiles diagonally over top. Sprinkle with cheddar cheese. Bake, uncovered, for 30 minutes and sprinkle with parsley.

Renee Fabian

Crazy Pie

- 1 c. sugar
- 1 c. chopped pecans
- 1 c. finely ground butter crackers
- 4 egg whites, stiffly beaten
- 1 c. whipping cream
- 1 t. almond extract
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 2 T. sugar
- 1/2 c. broken pecans

Fold 1 cup sugar, chopped pecans and crackers crumbs into the stiffly beaten egg whites. Pour into a pie plate and bake til light brown. Cool. Beat whipping cream, flavorings and 2 tablespoons sugar in mixer bowl til stiff. Spread over the cooled pie.

Sprinkle broken pecans over the top. Refrigerate til serving time.

Martha Durham



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Leslie St. Clair

by Austin Miller

I met him in the summer of 1960, the year I graduated from High School. We were both working for the county cutting off road right of ways. We cleared alongside roads in Ryland, Brownsboro, Maysville, Cedar Gap and Yankee Town. It took us all summer; we should have done it in three weeks. With the exception of two or three students, this was a crew of poor, uneducated, environmentally and mentally challenged white men who lived way below the poverty level. They were not pillars of the community even by Ryland standards. It was the best job most of them ever had or ever expected to have. Only one of the adults in the crew could read or write; his name was Leslie St. Clair.

I noticed Leslie my first day on the job. He was tall and lanky with light sandy colored hair. He was about 40 and worked harder than most of the others, which was not saying much. Most days he had great difficulty getting by the local bootlegger's house. Some mornings he didn't. His favorite bootlegger was a black man named Cope Haygood who lived just outside of Brownsboro. Cope was one of two notorious black bootleggers in the area. The other was Caleb Daniel who lived at Ryland. On those mornings when his thirst was real powerful, Leslie didn't meet the work truck at the county shed in Maysville. When he didn't, we knew he was setting on Cope's front porch rocking and drinking bootleg whiskey. We always yelled and waved as we passed. I don't think he ever missed that porch on Friday.

His scarecrow appearance, bib overalls and his dilapidated flat bed half-ton Dodge truck on first appearance blended him in with the other men on the crew. I instinctively sensed that Leslie was different and it bothered me that the workers my age treated him in a disrespectful and condescending manner. I was drawn to him out of curiosity and

made it a point to get acquainted. It was not easy; he was clearly a loner who talked only when he had to and then only with the fewest words possible. He kept his own company and had nothing to do with the other workers. I hung close by him and he eventually started talking to me. I found out that he was a graduate of Auburn University and was once the agriculture teacher at New Market High School. In those days, this was the best school teaching job there was because the salaries were supplemented by the government and they made as much money as a high school principal. It was a very important job in farming communities.

I also found out that he had been a Naval officer who served with distinction in the Pacific during World War II. His family owned several hundred acres north of Ryland across Flint River. In the thirties and forties, his family did not allow outsiders on the land. Jody St. Clair, who I believe was Leslie's uncle, patrolled the property armed on horseback. Three or four hundred acres adjoining the river could not be farmed because it was in a flood plain. It was rich untended river bottomland perfect for wildlife. The abundance of game made for good hunting. It was a temptation too strong for Daddy and others to resist; he along with my

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Uncles, Clyde Gossett, Ulan Golden and others often slipped across the river to hunt despite the persistent efforts of Mr. St. Clair. This land always held high intrigue for me. There were several reasons; one was the stories I heard from Daddy and others about various encounters Ryland people had with Jody St. Clair; another was the river created a barrier and divider that made it seem foreign, perhaps most important; it was pristine, it was land that had not been farmed or changed by man. Wildlife was not the only bounty; it also had an abundance of wild plums and blackberries.

One summer when I was little, daddy and Uncle Malcolm were trotline fishing. About sundown, when they finished running and baiting the lines, they paddled quietly to the St. Clair side, tied up to a tree limb and the three of us got out of the boat. We walked about fifty feet to a sea of tall blackberry laden bushes. Both Daddy and Uncle Malcolm had two buckets apiece that they quickly filled to the brim. I remember that they talked in a whisper and insisted that I stand in silence; my job was to listen for any noise that might indicate the approach of Mr. St. Clair, luckily he didn't show up. It was a successful fishing trip, we got gallons of blackberries and when they ran the lines the next morning, they were full of fish.

Finally, I found out why Leslie was working for the county. He had been engaged to marry the love of his life. He said he had never had any interest in any other woman before or since. Just before they were to be married she met another man and broke the engagement. He quit his job as agriculture teacher, started drinking, didn't stop and was cutting bushes to buy whiskey. Before the summer was over, he warmed up to me to the point that he would find me for lunch if for some reason we were not working close to each other at noon. Just before I quit to go to college, he wished me luck and advised me about college and the kind of courses I should take the first year. I felt proud to know him.

One time, while I was in college, I heard that he almost drowned drunk in a shallow ditch in Maysville. After that, I didn't hear anything about him for 37 years. In October 1997,

"Men look at women the same way they look at cars: Everyone looks at Ferraris, but we all buy station wagons."

Tim Allen

when I was home painting the house at Ryland, I was visiting Uncle Gib. He was telling me about this man who wrote the editor of the Huntsville Times at least once a week. It seemed he never gave the politicians and city, state and local government leaders any rest. Some thought he was a genius, others thought he was a kook. In any event, he had a lot to say and people listened. His opinions were topic of discussions in the newspaper and on local television.

As we talked I soon realized that it was the same Leslie St. Clair that I knew in the summer of 1960. He had quit drinking, married, got a good job and became a political activist. The land his family owned was worth a lot in 1960; by 1997 it must have been worth a fortune. Somehow, though, I doubt

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that a fortune meant much to Leslie.

This is a story that will never be complete. I will never know what turned him around; did he do it of his own will, was it caused by a catastrophic event in his life or did he meet a woman that gave him the incentive to change? These are questions I will not be able to answer; Leslie died a couple of years ago, he was in his eighties. All the old timers around Ryland have heard of him but there is nobody to be found that knew him personally; somebody did tell me that he retired from a high level State job.

I was truly glad to learn that he had straightened out his life, somehow I knew in 1960 that he would. I sometimes wonder if he remembered me in the years after we worked together on a job that was the closest thing to a chain gang you could get without being a prisoner. He may not be the most interesting person I ever met but I believe he was the most eccentric. In any event, I am glad that I got to know him even if it was for only a short while.

"A household hint - Stop dusting, and you can use your coffee table as a message board."

Maxine



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The School That Never Was

by Charles Rice

To 19th century North Alabamians, the city of Huntsville was often viewed as an oasis of culture. Unlike many frontier towns which simply grew up more or less by chance, Huntsville was largely planned and settled by wealthy planters from Georgia and Virginia. Thus the city had its culture virtually imposed upon it almost from the beginning.

By the middle of the 19th century, Huntsville was celebrated for its Methodist Female Academy and Presbyterian Female Seminary, while many young men came to receive their education at the nondenominational Green Academy on East Clinton Street.

However, another little known Huntsville educational institute died stillborn as just one more casualty of the War Between the States. This was the North Alabama College, a cherished project of the local Presbyterian Church.

The idea seems to have started in 1852 among the members of Huntsville's First Presbyterian. Many church members desired a Presbyterian men's school to serve as the equivalent of their highly respected Female Seminary.

The project took

some time getting off the ground, however, and it was not until April of 1858 that the North Alabama Presbyterians finally got around to electing a board of trustees to oversee the college.

Appointed as trustees were three prominent Huntsvillians: Dr. Frederick A. Ross, the distinguished minister of First Presbyterian, Dr. Lawrence B. Slieffey, a medical practitioner, and Isaiah Dill, a noted Huntsville attorney. The terms of service for the

men were staggered, with Ross to serve one year, Slieffey two, and Dill three.

On May 14, 1858, the North Alabama College was incorporated under the laws of Alabama. Two months later, the Presbyterian Church negotiated the purchase of 140 acres of land from George Horton for the sum of \$7,000.

The land was on the south side of Governor's Drive a short distance beyond today's Huntsville Hospital East. The present residential area is even now known as College Hill.

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Matthew W. Steele, son of the noted Huntsville architect George Steele, was awarded the contract to construct the impressive edifice. The three-story brick building was to be 125 feet in length and 65 feet in width. It faced northward toward the city of Huntsville.

Work commenced in early 1859 and proceeded steadily. "The North Alabama College is being built upon an eminence one mile from town," said the 1859 City Directory. "It is of the castellated style of architecture. The building is to be three stories high, with two towers. It will contain a lecture room and hall for societies. It is under the direction of the Presbytery of North Alabama, yet in the selection of professors it is allowable to choose them, irrespective of religious creed. It will cost when finished, from thirty to thirty-five thousand dollars."

The spring of 1862 found the North Alabama College almost completed. However, the fledgling school was never to open its doors. On April 11, 1862, a Union Army led by General Ormsby McKnight Mitchel seized Huntsville. Work was immediately halted.

Harper's Weekly, the famous New York illustrated newspaper, carried an engraving of the city one month after its capture. The North Alabama College is clearly visible in the drawing, looking for all purposes virtually ready for occupation. Later testimony revealed that the exterior of the building was, indeed, finished. The tin roof was in place, and the interior was also largely completed. The material required for the final touches was stored within the building. However, that is as far as it ever got.

The Union Army retreated from Huntsville at the end of August 1862, but war time conditions kept the school from opening. In the summer of 1863, the Union Army returned, this time to stay for almost all of the remainder of the war.

Unfortunately for the Presbyterian Church, the winter of 1863-64 was unusually severe in North Alabama. In early 1864, Union General David H. Stanley, who then commanded in Huntsville, decided his men simply had to have bricks to

build chimneys for their makeshift dwellings. He ordered the Union soldiers to take their bricks from the North Alabama College!


By the time the Yankees had finished vandalizing the beautiful building, almost all of Matthew Steele's fine work had been undone. The North Alabama College was left in ruins. It would never be rebuilt.

Impoverished by the war, the First Presbyterian Church was left to foot the bill for their shattered dream. On August 25, 1866, the church was forced to sell the property and all that was left of the college at public auction to pay off the mortgage of \$3,300.

Many years after the war, the church sought to recover the losses from the Federal Government. General Stanley wrote to the church in December, 1891 to confirm that everything happened just as they said.

On September 12, 1893, Joseph Wheeler introduced a bill

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Lauri, age 8



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into Congress to investigate the church's claim against the government. The wheels of government turn slowly, however, and nothing much had been done through December 3, 1901, when Congressman William Richardson re-introduced the bill. This time the matter was sent to the committee on War Claims.

Testimony before Congress confirmed that the money to build the college was raised by contributions of Huntsville citizens, and that the trustees were a nonpartisan group that had nothing to do with wartime politics.

Huntsvillian Augustus Pryor, then 75, testified that he had seen the Union soldiers destroying the college building. Pryor added that after the Union troops left Huntsville, he saw at least a thousand brick chimneys standing at the Union campsite, which was about a quarter of a mile from the school.

On February 25, 1907, the Federal Court of Claims finally decided in favor of the church to the amount of \$7,600. After legal expenses were deducted, the Church received \$5,320.

It had taken 43 years for the Presbyterian Church to receive what it was owed. Unfortunately, Huntsville never did get its hoped-for men's college.

A Freudian slip is when you say one thing but mean your mother.

Grandma's Kitchen Tips

* Mix three pounds of margarine with one pound of butter and see if anyone can tell that you don't have four pounds of butter.

* Add a quarter cup of grape juice to a cup of lemonade for a refreshing drink.

* A teaspoonful of ground mustard dissolved in your dishwasher will take away strong odor of fish and garlic and will remove stains from your hands.

* If you've added too much salt to a stew just throw in a raw Irish potato, it will absorb the excess salt.

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Bottle Collecting in Huntsville

by Dottie Cutts

A bottle collecting hobby swept Huntsville In the mid 1960s and 70s. I was first drawn in through my son Bob.

One day, in the mid 1960s, he and a friend were in the Big Spring Park where the spring was undergoing one of its periodic renovations. He waded in and under a rock found one of Coca Cola's earliest brown Coke bottles. Excited about his find, they stopped at an antique store in 5 Points. I shall always be thankful to that lady who took the time to tell a teenager the history of the bottle.

That started us on our bottle collecting adventure. We haunted flea markets at Scottsboro (First Monday), Tullahoma and Nashville. At first Bob collected any and all old bottles. He soon delved into Huntsville's history and was thrilled with every old medicine, soda, and spirits bottle.

After finding a perfect Blorent Springs cobalt blue bottle, we traveled to Blorent Springs and found the location of the bottling works. The ground was strewn with thousands of pieces of cobalt blue glass. We gathered a box of the pieces and later used them with a quart and pint bottle for a display entitled "The Survivors."

Soon we discovered there were other people in Huntsville who were interested in this hobby. We banded together and founded the Huntsville Bottle Club, Inc. We even had our own bottle shows at the old Sears Mall. Early members were the Speegals, Mrs. Rosborough, the Pfeiffers, Freeman, McLemore's, Hickox, Gordon Esslinger, Betty Root, Charles Bozeman and of course, the Cutts.

A boon to our collecting was the discovery of two early dumps in Huntsville. One was next to the old Naval Reserve Building, just south of the creek. It was to become a parking lot and we had to work fast. At night we would go down, lantern and spade in hand and

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dig for old bottles. It was a buried treasure of old brown Coke bottles which were very much in demand at the time. These we would use for trade or sale at the bottle shows that had sprung up all over the country. Bob would start the digging in my area then I would sit with a trowel in hand and carefully extract the bottles.

It was so exciting to find a previously unknown bottle. It would become more history to delve into.

Then another dump was discovered, perhaps a later date than the Naval Reserve, but still a treasure. It was located just east of Traylor Island behind the Double Cola factory. Bob was not old enough to drive, so I would drive him to the dump, he would start my area, then I could sit and dig to my heart's content.

Oh yes, I was bitten by the bug, too, by now.

This dump was full of Betterton spirits bottles. The saying was "Find A Better Betterton." We did find a beautiful puce colored one, one day, that is still in his collection.

By this time Bob had a paper route and saved his money to buy better bottles. One day he had gone to Scottsboro with a friend to buy a Log Cabin bitters bottle. He purchased the bottle and rushed home excitedly to show it to me. Unfortunately, in his excitement he tripped on the front steps and smashed the bottle. Several months paper route money lay in pieces on the steps. That was the closest I ever saw the teenager come to tears. I suggested we go to the dump and he could work out his frustration. Two nights later we had our club meeting and I told his story.

After the meeting Mrs. Rosborough invited us to stop at her house on Echols Avenue. There in her case was the exact bottle Bob had broken. She reached in her case, brought it out, and gave it to him. What a beautiful thing to do! It is still one of his most cherished bottles.

We soon realized there were higher planes in bottle collecting, and Bob graduated to the historical flasks of the 1800s. I went to the older figural bottles. At the bottle shows we would sell or trade our dump bottles to get one flask. Our knowledge of history expanded with each new flask or figural.

Our interest in antique bottles never disappeared, but kind of slowed down as we aged. However, the other day I had a beautiful small, pontil marked flask given to me by a friend. It woke me up again. The tornado of 1989 destroyed my most prized figural of "Our Lady of Lourdes." I've never seen another one.

Now interest seems to have revived in bottle collecting. I hope the new generation enjoys it as much as we did.

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The Story of John Hunt

John Hunt was born in 1750 in Fincastle County, Virginia to parents of Irish and Dutch descent. His family appears to have been of typical pioneer stock, not owning any large tracts of land and moving every few years to a new territory.

Among the families living in Fincastle County were the Acklins, Holbrooks and the Larkins. Many of these families would later play prominent roles in the early development of Huntsville.

In 1769 John Hunt married the daughter of William Holbrook. The following year the Holbrook family moved to Hawkins County, North Carolina, and John moved with them. Within a few years the

Larkins and Acklin families had joined with them in the new settlement.

After the new settlers had become established in their new home-sites many of the young men took up arms to fight in the Revolutionary War. Many historians would later contend that John Hunt served as a Captain during the war. This mistaken claim would later lead to confusion in trying to establish Hunt's early years. In fact, Hunt's only military service consisted of several months enlistment as a private under Captain Charles Polk of the Company of Light Horses, in Salisbury District, North Carolina. Short service periods of a few months were common in North Carolina as the settlers had crops and Indians to deal with and could not be gone for long periods of time.

At the end of his short military career Hunt returned to his home in Hawkins County.

Young John and his wife probably lost several children at childbirth as it was not until eight years after their marriage that they had their first recorded child.

As the young community grew in size the North Carolina government began to realize the need for some type of civic jurisdiction. John Hunt had established himself as a leader of the community and in 1786 was appointed the first sheriff of Hawkins County. It was required at that time for a sheriff to post a bond as a prerequisite to taking office. The bond, in the amount of "1000 pounds current money" signed by John Hunt and four sureties, can still be seen at the North Carolina

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Archives, located in Raleigh.

This is the only known sample of John Hunt's handwriting.

Four years later when North Carolina ceded the lands west of the Allegheny Mountains, John Hunt was made a Captain of the Militia by William Blount, the newly appointed governor of the territory. The duties of a captain in the militia and a sheriff had many similarities in the sense that they were both charged with keeping the peace, and as Hunt's term of sheriff had just expired he was a logical choice. As he was also the first and only sheriff at the time he was probably the only choice.

Everyone living in the territory had heard stories about the new rich land lying across the Clinch River. This was Indian land and supposedly protected from settlement by the treaties with the federal government. Many families, ignoring the treaties, began to move into the new lands.

John Hunt, along with the Acklins and Larkins, moved across the river in the mid-1790's into an area known as the Powell River Valley. Years later this community would become known as Tazewell, Tennessee, and John Hunt would be recognized as the founder.

Many stories have been written about the romantic fron-

tiersmen who were bitten with wanderlust. Legends have us believe that the early pioneers kept moving to escape the confines of civilization, constantly moving to see what lay over the next mountain range.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, greed was the motivating factor.

In Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and many other states vast areas had been set aside as Indian territories. Though these areas were supposedly protected by federal law, it did not prevent "squatters" from settling. These squatters knew that it would only be a matter of time before the government recognized their rights and then they could gain possession of large tracts by simply paying a registration fee. If they settled on the right land, with a little luck, they could become wealthy.

Basically it was a get rich quick scheme that worked for many people.

The other alternative was to wait until the lands had been "opened" for settlement and bid for them at auction. Few

"If God had not intended for us to drink beer, he wouldn't have given us stomachs."

Billy Bob Johnson, Arab

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pioneers could afford to acquire prime land in this manner.

John Hunt had carved a respectable homestead out of the wilderness when he learned to his dismay, in 1797, that President John Adams had sent 800 federal troops to evict the settlers. In an attempt to stall his eviction, and probably using his title of Captain in the Tennessee State Militia to help his cause, he wrote the newly-elected governor, John Sevier, asking for help.

On the 25th of November, 1797, Governor Sevier wrote Hunt:

"Sir: I am honored with and am sincerely sorry for your embarrassed situation, and would I, to God, I had it in my power to render you relief. You may assure yourself that everything will be done for you that is possible for me, but it is in the president's own power to do whatever he may think best on this very important and alarming occasion. I hope in three or four weeks to hear from Congress and whether or not anything is likely to be done in your favor. In the meantime, I earnestly beg the people, for their own interest, to conduct themselves in a peaceable, orderly and prudent manner."

Shortly afterwards the squatters' claims were recognized.

By 1801 the land John Hunt had settled became part of Claiborne County. When the new community held its first election


David Rodgers was elected sheriff but was unable to post bond so Hunt was elected in his place. There were no facilities for the new government in Tazewell at the time so the first term of court was held in the home of John Hunt. (This log cabin later became the first school in Tazewell.)

The sheriff was not only responsible for keeping the peace but was also responsible for administering justice. A book describing the early days of Tazewell included the following description of the sheriffs

duties:

"A whipping post stood between the jail and courthouse. As near as I remember, it was made similar to two ox yokes, the one below fastened in a frame and turned upside down; the one above to fit down and form two holes large enough to confine the head and neck. Debtors were taken out two at a time and the duty of the sheriff was to whip them until they would promise to go to work and pay their debts."


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John Hunt appears to have been living a fairly contented life. He had recently given land for a church and was a well respected figure in the community. His daughter, Elizabeth had married Samuel Black Acklin, the son of his old friend, Samuel Acklin. The newly married couple made their home with John and the rest of the family. The Acklin family had prospered to the point that when Samuel married Elizabeth, he was the owner of five slaves.

The Hunt family had not prospered though. John Hunt, along with the Larkins and many other families had staked everything on Tazewell's future. The town simply refused to grow. The land was poor for farming and the town itself provided no incentive for commerce. The only thing the town had going for it was its close proximity to the Cumberland Gap, "gateway to the western lands."

By the time Hunt's term of sheriff was up on September 1, 1804 he had already made plans to leave Tazewell. Popular legend tells us that he went south in search of a big spring he had heard stories of. Again, the truth is much simpler. There were already rumors that territory belonging to Indians in what is now North Alabama would be opened for settlement. Anyone already living there would probably be able to exercise their "squatters' rights" by paying a small registration fee. Everyone else would have to purchase their land at a public auction, which by its very nature tended to drive land prices up.

John Hunt was determined to have squatters' rights.

Early in September, 1804, John Hunt and Andrew Bean left their cabin in East Tennessee and struck out into the wilds on foot (not on horseback as many historians have claimed). They traveled in a south-westward direction, guided only by the sun and the stars. Almost a month later they arrived at the stream of water now known as Bean's Creek, at a spot near where Salem, Tennessee, now stands. At that place they struck camp for several days in order to make observations and investigate the surrounding country. According to legend it also became necessary to replenish the larder.

Their unerring rifles soon procured several bear and fat deer, the choice parts of which were jerked and packed for future use.

Traveling further south the explorers came upon the newly completed cabin of Joseph Criner near the Mountain Fork of Flint River. Criner and his brother Isaac were the first white settlers in this area. According to later accounts given by Criner, Hunt and Bean spent the night and inquired about land further south. It was at this time that Hunt first heard of the Big Spring.

The next morning Mrs. Criner made bread for their journey and the men left to seek out the big spring.

John Hunt and Andrew Bean were not the first white persons to reach the spring. Earlier, in 1802,

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John Ditto had built a crude shack there. He only stayed a short while before moving southwards to the Tennessee River where he opened a trading post. When Hunt arrived he found the beginnings of a cabin that Samuel Davis had started. Unfortunately, Davis, in haste to bring back his family, left the cabin unfinished and when he returned found Hunt had completed the cabin and was living in it.

The cabin was a rough one-room affair. People searching for it today will find only a parking lot across from the present day Huntsville Utilities.

The area where John Hunt settled would be beyond comprehension to a resident of Huntsville today. The area above the bluffs, where the

courthouse now stands, though reasonably flat, was a maze of thick vines, and bushes. Below the spring, toward Meadow Gold Dairy, was an endless swamp inhabited by bears, geese and rabbits. Where Huntsville Hospital is now located was a thick hardwood wilderness teeming with deer.

After hastily completing the cabin (frontier law did not recognize a squatter's claims unless a home was built on it) Hunt and Bean turned their sights north. Bean had decided to settle near Salem, Tennessee and Hunt returned to Tazewell for his family.

Returning to the Big Spring with Hunt was his wife and three of his sons, William, George and Samuel.

We know for a fact that

at least one other family, and possibly another, accompanied them on the journey.

It was early summer of 1805 when Hunt returned with his family. He spent most of that

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summer clearing and fencing a small field, which lay in what is now one of the best parts of the city of Huntsville, running from Gates Street as far south as Franklin. The land was exceedingly fertile and produced bountifully in return for little labor. William would recall years later how he had killed a bear between the present location of the First Alabama Bank and the courthouse while clearing the field.

The brave old pioneer, scout and hunter was now happily fixed; his farm gave him employment during the spring and summer. Hunting, fishing, dressing meats and skins and prospecting occupied his time in the fall and winter. Other pioneers were coming in and settling in other parts of the county. Neighbors were few and highly valued in those primitive days. When the proper time arrived in the fall, all the hunters for miles around went out together to lay in their stores of meat for the year. Whenever a settler died, his family continued to share in the proceeds of the hunt; when a division was made, a proportionate share of bear and deer meat was always taken to the families of widows. These rough men knew charity as well as courage. Legend has it that John Hunt was always foremost in providing for the poor and helpless.

One Christopher Black, an Irishman, who assisted Hunt in removing his family from East Tennessee, was famous for delivering game to the fatherless and the widows.

Hunt's Station, as the spring was now called, was fast becoming the center of the community. More and more settlers were pouring into the valley. Much evidence suggests that Hunt, who had already enlarged his cabin, ran a public house at this time. A public house was where a traveler might get a meal or purchase a few basic supplies. This probably explains the persistent rumor today that Hunt operated a shop that sold castor oil.

In 1807 his daughter, Elizabeth, moved to Huntsville from Tazewell along with her children, husband and five slaves. The whole group moved in with Hunt in anticipation of the land sales. Congress had already called for a land sale with squatters being given pre-emptive rights to one section of land each. With the Hunts occupying the best land in the county, it seemed as if their fortunes were made.

Unfortunately, when the sales were held it was discovered that John Hunt had not registered his claims. The wealthy planter LeRoy Pope outbid the other purchasers

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and ended up with legal title to all of John Hunt's dreams. Hunt was forced to move from his beloved Big Spring.

With all the prime land in Huntsville already taken, or being too expensive, Hunt purchased a quarter section of land far outside of town by paying eighty dollars as down payment. This parcel was located at approximately where the old airport on South Parkway is now. His daughter and son-in-law purchased the adjoining land.

The Acklins were doing well it would seem, as they were able to send their son to college, something unheard of for most pioneer families.

Pope had forced the name of Twickenham upon the new community, but many people resented the fact that he had bought Hunt's land.

One of the first actions the new city government took was to change the name to Huntsville, in honor of the sturdy pioneer.

The next few years of Hunt's life is well documented. He joined the Masonic Lodge, served on juries and was appointed coroner. And he also lost the last piece of land he would ever own for failing to make payments.

John Hunt was broke. He was also an old man. As if this was not enough, he also lost the right to vote, serve on juries or hold public office in the very city that he had founded.

According to the law of that period a man could not do any of the above unless he was a landowner.

An old and discouraged man by now, Hunt was forced to move in with his daughter and son-in-law. In 1820 Hunt applied for a Revolutionary War

pension but was turned down because the unit he served with was not considered a part of the Continental Army.

Like old men everywhere, Hunt probably spent his last days recounting tales of when he was young and adventurous, hopefully surrounded by his grandchildren.

In February, 1822, John Hunt died at the age of 72. He was buried in the Acklin graveyard, a short distance from where he spent his final days.

John Hunt left behind the legacy of a great city, but ironically, in a few short years he would become lost in the history of old Huntsville.

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George Wallace and Politics

Excerpted from "Just Get On With It," by Billy Gene King

The Alabama State Capitol is located on a hill east of downtown Montgomery where goats used to graze. The hill is still referred to as "Goat Hill." I wonder if it kept its name because of the goats, or because of the human occupants?

George Corley Wallace was elected Governor of Alabama in the early 1960s on a platform of segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever. He was known as the "Fightin Little Judge" when he first ran, because he was a Circuit Judge from Barbour County and a former Golden Glove boxing champion. He was one of the most powerful Governors in the

history of Alabama.

I was never an ally of George Wallace, even though I served eight years in the Legislature while he was Governor. My Mother, whose maiden name was Wallace, was the Governor's second cousin, which made Wallace and I distant relatives, but that is about as close as we got during my legislative years. I liked him personally, but politically we were enemies.

I had been elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1970, and I didn't know much about State Government, nor the issues. I ran against a system of rules that allowed the

Governor, who was a part of the Executive Branch of Government, to organize and control the House of Representatives, which is a part of the Legislative Branch. I must have hammered that theme thousands of times during the campaign, so often, in fact, that I became identified as a political reformer who would "rock the boat." A theme which apparently gained momentum during the campaign. An "outsider" and a "reformer" combined, turned out to be a successful combination.

Immediately after the primary election, Wallace called our delegation to Montgomery

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to let us know, among other things, who was in charge. Our delegation consisted of six legislators, four in the House, and two in the Senate.

I got lost trying to get to the Capitol for the meeting. So my first encounter with the Governor started on a negative note, because I was the last member of my delegation to arrive and fifteen minutes late at that.

The Governor's Executive Secretary invited us into the Governor's office acknowledging, while looking directly at me, that the "late member" had finally arrived.

Wallace had already been Governor for two terms, and his first wife Lurleen, one term, so by the time I met with him, I knew all about his policies and philosophy. But this was my first personal encounter, and I was intimidated.

He sat in a huge leather chair, that dwarfed him, at the head of a massive mahogany table with eight large chairs, four on each side of the table. He shook hands with each of us, as we lined up at his chair, and invited us to sit down. I found a seat at the end of the table to his left side slumping slightly into it to avoid any attention. I listened for the major part of an hour, while he did the talking, with the support of most of our

delegation.

One of his concerns was a black dentist from Huntsville, who was running against him in the November General Election. He made a point of letting us know, that since we represented that area, that we needed to help him because, as he put it, "Nigra's will vote only for a Nigra, but white folks, especially in a liberal city like

Huntsville, would sometimes vote for a Nigra."

I was offended with his use of the term "Nigra," and when he began talking about how he was going to organize the Legislature, I became annoyed. He said he hadn't made a decision yet, as to whom he wanted to be the Speaker of the House. At that moment, I knew that I had to take issue with him, or

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start my political career as a hypocrite, since the theme of my campaign had focused on the separation of powers doctrine.

I sucked in my breath, and with all the courage I could muster, I raised my hand, and got his attention.

He kept his eye glasses on the table, because he used them to see at distances, and he picked them up and held them to his nose as he cut his eyes to me and said, "What is it." I cleared my throat, feeling the weight of silence in the room and the eyes of all my colleagues glued to me, and said, "Governor, with all due respect to you, I don't think you should be organizing the Legislature. I believe we are a separate branch of government, and in order to maintain that separation of powers, the Legislature should organize itself without any involvement from the Governor's Office."

You could have heard the proverbial "pin drop." He left me hanging there for what seemed to be minutes, then still peering at me through those glasses perched on the end of his nose, he asked me to move up next to him, claiming he could not hear very good. I moved up to the seat to his immediate left. He pulled my chair over against his, as I sat down. He then, still peering through the glasses, said "Now what was it that you said Mr....? I said, "King, Bill King."

"Well Mr. King," he said, "I have a hearing problem, and you were speaking a little low, could you repeat what you said?" I could feel my face flush as I pulled myself together, and repeated it verbatim. Again he studied my face, knowing I was

"I have just as much authority as the Pope. I just don't have as many people who believe it."

George Carlin

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uncomfortable, suddenly he chuckled and said, "You know when I was first elected to the Legislature, I ran as an independent thinker too."

He insisted that I continue to sit there with my chair directly against his for the rest of the meeting.

I was relieved when he moved on to other legislative matters, although he would continue to spar with me by asking my opinion about every issue discussed that day.

He kept a cigar in his mouth the entire meeting, chewing on the end of it. As he accumulated pieces of the cigar in his mouth, he would spit them into a brass cuspidor on the floor which caused him to spit across my knees, since it was located on the opposite side of my chair.

The meeting ended about two hours later, and I was anxious to get out of there. As I started to leave, he caught me by the arm and asked me to stay for a minute.

This time he was warm and pleasant, and said my Mother had written to him and asked him to look after me.

He again reiterated that he was an independent thinker as a freshman legislator, and that he wanted to work with me in the upcoming session.

That was as close as we ever got politically, during my eight years in the House and Senate. I felt insulted by his condescending manner toward me. First, he embarrassed me in the presence of my colleagues. Then, in

their absence, he tried to use my Mother's letter to manipulate me through implied obligation. It was easy to see why he dominated the Alabama political scene for so many decades.

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Cheryl Tribble, Woodstock



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A Call For Volunteers

Written by A. S. Elliot in 1914

John Steele Dickson, citizen, closed his hardware store in Huntsville, and obeying the first call to arms, enlisted as a Lieutenant with the historic Madison Rifles, and under the command of the gallant Captain John G. Coltart. He left Huntsville, and home, bearing the distinction of being among the first troops to leave Madison County for the front.

The enlistment of one year soon expiring, Lieut. Dickson returned to Huntsville with a Captain's commission to raise a company of volunteers to serve three years - or for the duration. This was his second enlistment.

It was the 22nd of March, 1862, and that portion of the Courthouse Square along the sidewalk and fronting Bank Row presented a scene that stirred the hearts of men, women and children gathered from all parts of the county. Varied were the emotions of each one, according to age and temperament at the time.

As a wee small boy the writer of this saw Capt Dickson in plain citizen's dress, with a small walking cane, walking back and forth along the street from the National Bank corner to the old Huntsville Hotel, calling for volunteers.

"Volunteers for the war," he cried. "Volunteers for the War!"

And thus the company was made up, men stepping forward and falling into line, marching behind one another until the company was sworn in.

Among so many we knew

and loved going forth into battle for their beloved State and Southland were Spotswood, Patterson, McDavid, Elliot, Hudson Brown, aid Newman. There may be others yet living who can supply the full muster roll.

On the 5th of April, 1862, this company left Huntsville, and so close were the Federal army of invasion upon the scene that six days afterwards Gen. Mitchel's command occupied Huntsville, and blue coats took the place of the gray in our midst for the next five long months.

I now return to the subject of our communication. The Southern historians have followed the marches, the privations and the battles of the 35th Alabama through the war from Corinth, Vicksburg, Jackson, Champion Hills, Franklin to North Carolina and Joe Johnston's surrender. Let us keep fresh the memory of the gallant and self sacrificing Dickson, that noble martyr to the Southern cause, for as a Major, to which position he

had won his way, he fell while bravely leading his men in the desperate battle of Franklin, Tenn. on Nov. 30, 1864. Like another of Huntsville's noble, the immortal Col. Egbert Jones, he sleeps peacefully with many of his comrades in the beautiful Maple Hill Cemetery.



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News from the Year 1962

News From Huntsville and Around The World

Marilyn Monroe Dead

Marilyn Monroe has been found dead in her Los Angeles home, a vial of sleeping pills beside her. She was only 36. While police hesitate to call it a suicide, her psychoanalyst says she has tried to kill herself twice before, rescued only by placing a call in time. This morning, she was found in bed, her arm limply stretched to a phone beside her.

Marilyn had a phenomenal career as a sex symbol, starring in films such as "The Prince and the Showgirl" and "The Seven Year Itch." She had serious aspirations, studying under Lee Strasberg in New York. The public, who could not see beyond her sex kitten persona, thought her ambitions absurd. They did not know she was a voracious reader, in her way as much an intellectual as her third husband, playwright Arthur Miller.

Marilyn flubbed a line in "Some Like It Hot" a dozen times. The script called on her to knock on a door and say, "It's me, Sugar." Instead she said over and over, "It's Sugar, me." No cast member, no director, no producer, asked her what drug confused her mind so thoroughly or what drove her to take it.

And no one stopped to ask if Sugar's life was truly sweet.

First Man is Killed Climbing the Wall

Peter Fechter, 18 years old, lay in a pool of blood for an hour this afternoon while East German police watched. The youth was attempting to defect over the six-foot-high Berlin Wall when he was machine-gunned in the back. He cried out for help a few times before sinking into silence. His body was finally removed by East Berlin police.

Israel Hangs Eichmann

Inside a fog-enshrouded Israeli prison, a noose was placed around the neck of Adolf Eichmann just before midnight tonight. His last appeal for mercy had been rejected. Eichmann's ankles and knees were tied. He said a few last words and then a black trap door sprang open in the floor. Eichmann, who sent millions of Jews to their deaths in Nazi concentration camps, was dead.

"Long live Germany. Long live Argentina," Eichmann said before he was executed. Argentina was the country where he hid until he was kidnapped by Israeli security agents. "I had to obey the rules of war and my flag. I am ready," were the mass murderer's final words.

In denying Eichmann's appeal for mercy, the Israeli Supreme Court said he had shown no repentance for his crimes, which it said he had committed with "genuine joy and enthusiasm." The justices also called the death sentence "inadequate compared to the millions of deaths in the most diverse ways he inflicted on his victims."

"For three days after death, hair and fingernails continue to grow, but phone calls taper off."

Johnny Carson



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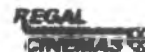
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Court Bans Official Prayers in Schools

Justice Black firmly stated a Supreme Court opinion today: "In this country, it is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite."

With that, the court ruled that a prayer written by the New York Board of Regents and read aloud in public schools violates the "establishment of religion" clause of the First Amendment. The landmark decision will affect an estimated 30 percent of public schools which conduct some form of prayer.

"I will not take part in any sport that includes ambulances waiting for injuries."

Erma Bombeck

Rioting Erupts as Ole Miss Admits Negro

The admission of a Negro student to the University of Mississippi has stirred violent passions of segregationist whites, resulting in riots and pushing Governor Ross Barnett and President John F. Kennedy into confrontation. Despite the controversy, James Meredith has become the first Negro to enroll in the all-white institution.

The university Board of Trustees agreed a week ago to adhere to federal law prohibiting segregation, allowing Meredith to enroll. The decision infuriated Barnett, who vowed to fight the board and the government to sustain school segregation. Kennedy and the governor negotiated on the phone, but Barnett would not budge, saying he was following the law of the state.

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My Father, James Elbert Nunn

by Neva Nunn Drake, written in 1966

Submitted by Neva's daughter, Patsy Giesecke, Alvin, Tx.

My father, James Elbert Nunn, known as "Papa", was married to my mother, Ella Foster, on February 17, 1893. They were both natives of Barren County, Kentucky and moved to Madison County in the fall of 1897. He made the trip to Huntsville with four mules hitched to a low-wheeled log wagon and as was the custom in those days, he rode one of the mules. My mother and brother Benton joined him later by train. I was born in Madison County, AL on the 13th of January, 1898.

He came to Madison County because of the availability of timber and consequently became a logger. The mountains and river bottoms supplied him with an almost unlimited source of good timber of the best grade.

After renting various places in the valley, he bought what was later known as "the home place" and began farming as well as logging. Later he owned a saw mill, cotton gin, and one of the largest general stores in the county. This store continued for many years and was known far and wide as "Nunn's Store".

Later he bought another large farm which was known as "The Mill Place". It was the site of one of the early water-powered corn mills (Robinson's Mill). This farm was very rich in fine timber and he began at once to harvest timber for his saw mill. He used both oxen and mules to clear the timber. I will never forget the names of these mules - Alex, Joe, Belle and Kate. Belle and Kate

**"When I was a kid I had two imaginary friends,
but they would only play with each other."**

Rita Rudner

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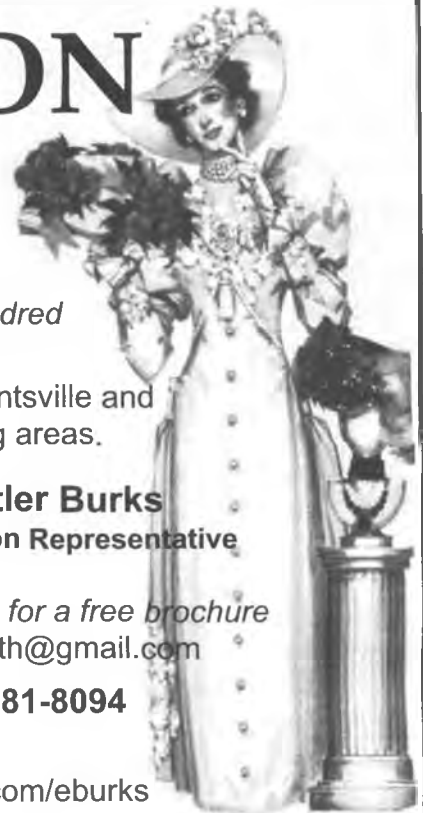
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were also used to pull our "surrey with a fringe on top". This was a very fine farm, as the high red land could be used for planting cotton and the heavier river bottom land for corn and hay.

About this time Papa told me that if I would work in his store for one year, he would buy me a piano. I worked for a year and, true to his word, he bought me the piano which I still have in my home.

Papa owned the second Dodge car in Madison County, the first owned by the dealer for his own use. My father campaigned very hard to have the new road built from Huntsville to the Big Cove Valley. He and the other landowners in the area argued about the route the new road should take. Some wanted it to be located near their farms; however, Papa insisted it be built in the middle of the valley where it would be of benefit and centrally located to the greatest number of residents. My father won the argument and it is now a four lane highway to Nunn's Store**. Papa served one term as County Commissioner and continued to work for better roads in his district.

About 1913 or 1914 the Presbyterian USA Church undertook the building of a new building and he contributed his time and money to this project. He later contributed pews for the new church. I do not know what his total contribution was, but it was considerable.

He was at one time one of the largest landowners in Madison County, owning 2,867 acres. My father was a friend in need to many people and at one time wrote off about \$60,000 for food and clothing furnished to many people during their hours of need.

**Neva Nunn married Peyton A. Drake, also of Big Cove, on January, 11, 1919, They were married until his passing in 1971. She passed in November, 1988 and was survived by five children and their spouses, twelve grandchildren, and fifteen great-grandchildren.*

***Nunn's Store was located near Highway 431 and Sutton Road in Hampton Cove.*

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An Adventure

by Mrs. Lola Haney

Julia Haney, Mrs. Haney's great, great granddaughter, recorded these remembrances in 1995.

I was born in 1898, in a two-room log cabin near Paint Rock. My Daddy grew cotton and tobacco. One of my earliest memories is my Mother carrying me to the fields and placing me on a blanket in the shade of a tree while she helped Daddy in the fields.

By the time I was 6 or 7 years old, I had to help in the fields, too. Daddy made me a cotton picking sack out of old pillow cases and I helped pick cotton. My other job was fetching water for the field hands. My cousin and I were both expected to pick a certain amount of cotton each day. One day, realizing we didn't have enough, we decided to put some heavy rocks in our bags to make them weigh more.

When Daddy got home from the gin he took a belt to both of us. We learned later that the rocks had tore the gin up.

Daddy also raised honey bees. After he robbed the hives every fall he would take the honey to Huntsville where he would trade it with Mr. Harrison (Harrison Brothers Hardware). We also dug ginseng to trade in town.

Going to town was always a big event for us. The night before Daddy would load the wagon with crock jars full of honey packed with straw so they wouldn't break. The next morning we would get up before daylight, and after Daddy had hitched the wagon up, we would start for town. Mother always placed a quilt behind

the wagon seat and I would curl up back there listening to all the honey jars rattle.

About lunch time we would stop at a creek to eat our biscuits Mother had prepared the night before. Sometimes there would be other families stopped there and it was always a good time to visit with them. There was a wooden box nailed to a tree next to the creek where people would leave messages for other people.

Lots of time people would leave a note asking you to pick up something in town. Late in the afternoon we would get to Huntsville Mountain (Chapman Mountain). The road going up the mountain was washed out most of the time and very steep. There was a double-hitch station at the foot of the mountain where people could rent another set of mules to help pull their wagons up the mountain. Our wagon wasn't that heavy and we always made it up with our own mules.

Our first stop in town was at the Big Spring. All the people from out in the county camped out there when they went to town. Daddy had a piece of canvas he would make a tent out of, and that's where we spent the night. It was always great fun with all the campfires and everyone visiting back and forth.

One night it came up a terrible storm and Daddy took me and Mother to the hotel to spend

the night. He had to go back and stay with the wagon to make sure the honey wasn't stolen. Once someone stole a dog from someone camped next to us and there was almost a shooting before it got resolved.

The next morning we would hitch the wagon and take the honey up to Harrison's (Harrison Brothers). Daddy and the man who had the store would always argue and shout for

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what seemed like hours and finally they would make a deal. We got paid in half cash and half trade out.

Next we would look up a man by the name of Foster, who always bought our ginseng. He didn't have a store or an office, but was always hanging around the Courthouse Square. He would look at it real carefully and if he liked it, we would go to another place where they would weigh it. I think we got paid by the ounce and it was always in cash money.

While Daddy got supplies from Mr. Harrison, Mother and I would go shopping at the other stores. I still remember the first store-bought dress I ever had. Before that they were always made from flour sacks.

When we got done we would always meet Daddy in the Courthouse yard. He had already taken the wagon and mules back to the Big Spring and he would always spend the rest of the day talking to the other men who were also waiting for their families to finish shopping.

I never knew for sure but I always

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suspected the men were drinking whiskey.

Someone later told me they had deer in the Courthouse yard back then but I don't remember it. The only thing I remember about any animals there is stepping in mule droppings and Mother washing my shoes under the pump. There were lots of pigeons too. I remember you could throw a piece of bread on the ground and hundreds of pigeons would fight over it.

They hung a man once while we were in town but I don't remember his name. Daddy made me go back to the wagon and stay while they went and watched. There was a preacher holding a revival at the Spring on the same day but more people were interested in the hanging than salvation. The

preacher finally gave up and went to watch the hanging, too.

Once Daddy carried us to a hotel for dinner and we had oysters. Daddy liked them but Mother and I got sick. A large piece of peach cobbler made me feel much better, though. Most times, however, we just ate at the Spring whatever Mother cooked.

The next morning, before the sun came up, we would start for home. On the way we always stopped at the creek again and had crackers and cheese that Mother had purchased in town for lunch. Going to town was fun but after being gone for three days, it was always good to be back home.

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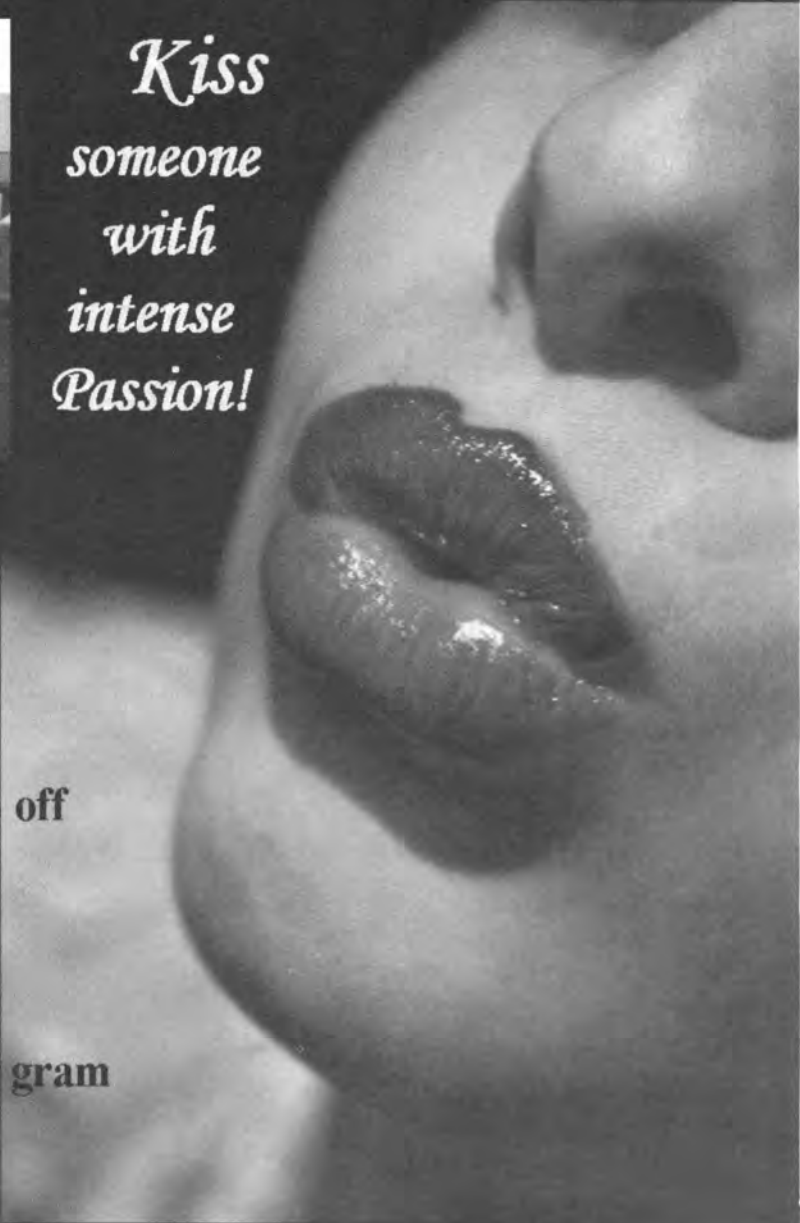
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