



No. 267

May 2015



# Old Huntsville

HISTORY AND STORIES OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

## THE BOOTLEG WAR

AND THE PROUD LAWMEN WHO RISKED THEIR LIVES



It was around 6:20 a.m. on Wednesday, June 12, 1929 when Hugh Craft left his home on Hobbs Island Road about a mile and a half from Owens Crossroads to drive to Gurley to pick up Deputy Sheriff G.T. Lilly. They were to travel to Huntsville as witnesses in another case.

Craft never made it to Gurley. Around 6:45 a.m. shots were heard on a lonely dirt road over Esslinger Mountain.

*Also in this issue:* **The Wilderness Church**

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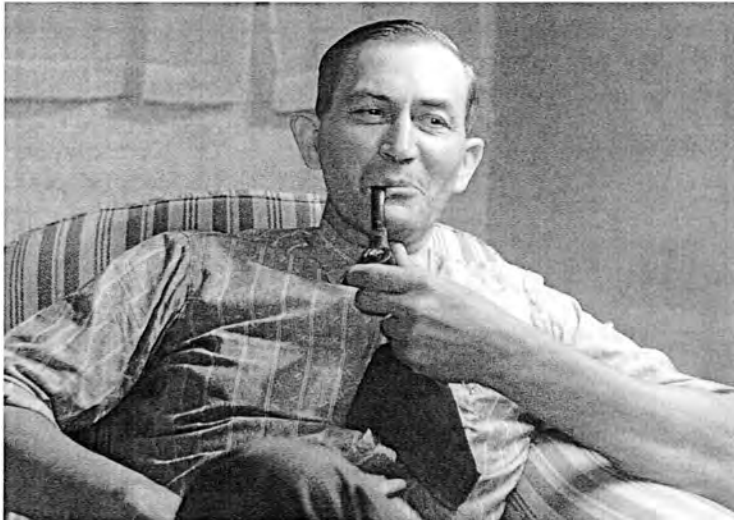
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*Mac Lewter*



# The Bootleg War

by Steve Gierhart



**Former Sheriff Frank Riddick 1940s**

*"Old Huntsville Lawman Hugh Craft Cut Down in Conspiracy Worthy of Scene from Tombstone"*

A man's life can read like the details of an encyclopedia or it can be read in the subtleties below the veneer of facts. The facts written about the 1929 assassination of Robert Hugh Craft (1875-1929), former Deputy Sheriff and Chief of Gurley Police, (along with those surrounding the activi-

ties of his boss, Sheriff Frank Riddick), appear as large as Buford Pusser or the Earp Brothers, men who fought the good fight, even as they died or survived attempts on their lives in the process. We have a thrilling narrative of Craft and Riddick's pre-assassination battles to squash the bootleg industry of Madison County and the known facts of the killing and the publicity afterwards. But what is craved more than the visceral images and the morbid curiosity, like a fine wine lost to history, are the men behind the facts.

Why did the big deputy and his boss, Sheriff Frank Riddick, pursue the bootleggers with so much vigor? Certainly,

**A balanced diet is a cupcake in each hand.**

**Louise Avery,  
Huntsville**



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Gen. Manager - Ron Eyestone  
Copy Boy - Tom Carney (in memory)

"Old Huntsville" magazine is a monthly publication. Annual subscriptions are \$25 per year.

For subscription change of address, mail new information to the above address.

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they knew of the criminal ties to the local constabulary, even in the sheriff's own staff. Were they like the Earp Brothers, men who worked with a heavy hand because the men they fought knew nothing else? Or were they made from the same cut of cloth as Elliott Ness or the many movie lawmen who seemed driven simply by a battle of good over evil - a rarity in an ever more complex world of gray? After all, even today readers are rarely unsympathetic to the poor mountain folk who operate an illegal still and the even poorer men who run the whiskey for them.

It's the graft takers and the mob bosses behind the poor criminals who incur our outrage. As much as we yearn for simplicity, in reality criminals and lawmen have never been that. In reality they are strange bedfellows on the outside. On the inside, however, both can exploit our view of human darkness, desires and power.

This story is superbly appealing for North Alabama and not only for the sensational aspects of an ambush and murder

of a lawman. Its backdrop also includes a probable conspiracy of criminals with the Prohibition Era looming large. But the engine of our interest is driven by primary players who are as fascinating as the canvas upon which they are painted. Robert Hugh Craft is a direct descendent of one of Huntsville's founders, Ezekiel Craft, the city's first Justice of the Peace in 1805. Ezekiel also knew and worked closely with John Hunt for whom the city is named.

Though Hugh Craft's son and daughter left the city long ago for California, the many other branches of the family still live in the city. The Riddick name also overlooks vast tracts of city history though from more recent times. The sheriff bore a son who became a popular probate judge for North Alabama, the Honorable Frank Riddick Jr. And the judge bore a current member of the Madison County Commission, District 5's Phil Riddick. The story could not receive more of a Huntsville blue blood brush of color.

Many articles about Craft,

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including an excellent May 2005 article in Old Huntsville by Tom Carney "Drawing Straws for Murder", outline the facts that Riddick in his election of 1927 swore to break the backs of the liquor rings.

The article also included substantial background information about the events leading to the murder. Riddick's assertions proved not only difficult but frustrating due to the 100 year family ties between

to a pine tree just off the road around 7:00 a.m. by Harris (or also referred to as Marion) Beason, an employee of the Esslingers for whom the mountain was named.

Authorities were called to the scene, including Sheriff Riddick. Riddick was outraged that he was duped into staying in town to meet a fictitious witness who promised information on the whiskey rings. Before the phone call, Riddick had

planned on being with Craft on the morning of the ambush. Craft was found slumped over the steering wheel of his Chevrolet touring car, his 45 pistol laying on the floorboard, seemingly drawn for use or thrown from the passenger seat after impacting the tree.

Skid marks and tracks revealed the car had traveled around 50 yards (conflicting reports have it anywhere from 30 feet to 60 yards) before hitting the tree. An autopsy revealed that buck shot (or squirrel shot; both were reported) had struck Craft behind the right ear, implying someone lay in wait on his right side as he slowly passed on his way to Gurley. The shotgun blast caused the car to careen into the tree.

However, the killing shot was more likely the bullet from a pistol or rifle that passed through the front windshield as the unconscious lawman lay



the three families controlling the business and the embedded payoffs between the criminals and law enforcement.

Below is the chronology of events as they unfolded in the Huntsville Daily Times.

**Wednesday, June 12, 1929**  
 Around 6:20 a.m. on Wednesday, June 12, 1929 Craft left his home on Hobbs Island Road about a mile and a half from Owens Crossroads to drive to Gurley to pick up Deputy Sheriff G.T. Lilly. They were to travel to Huntsville as witnesses in another case.

Craft never made it to Gurley. Around 6:45 a.m. shots were heard on a lonely dirt road over Esslinger Mountain (see map of crime scene, p. 12). The car was discovered pinned

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**NO ARREST YET IN CRAFT MURDER**

<p><b>LEGIONNAIRES AGAIN INVADE HUNTSVILLE</b>                  More Than 150 Visitors From Gadsden Here  <b>PREPARATIONS FOR HUGE CROWD MADE</b>                  Local Men Are Paying Membership Contingents</p>	<p><b>'Miss United States' FRENCH PLANE GETS AWAY ON OCEAN FLIGHT</b>                  Yellow plane with French crew off for Paris  <b>GREEN FLASH MODELS COVER ON TAKE-OFF</b>                  Plane Equipped With Radio And Will Try To Keep In Touch All Way</p>	<p><b>Green Flash Suffers Mishap</b>                    Plane, which crashed in field near Gadsden, Ala., after taking off from Huntsville, Ala., on Tuesday.</p>	<p><b>DRUGGISTS RETURNING HOME TODAY</b>                  James Thomas Re-elected President Of Ass'n.  <b>HUMPHREYS AGAIN IS CHAIRMAN OF LOCAL</b>                  Body Adjourns Following Election And Selection Of Officers Today</p>	<p><b>WORLD'S CHAMPION BEAUTY</b>                    Reported Here That Several Were In Pool  <b>REVIEW OF TRAGEDY SHOWS CAREFUL PLOT</b>                  Funeral Services Held At Criss Roads Home Today</p>
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dazed or dying. At short range the bullet struck Craft's forehead, if not already dead, killing him instantly.

Riddick and investigators interviewed a few residents at the scene. Field hands reported an unknown vehicle leaving the area at the time of the shot. Bloodhounds were brought to the scene. The immediate assertion is that the killers had to be from the whiskey rings that Riddick and Craft were seeking to stop from the moment Riddick gained office.

**Thursday, June 13, 1929**  
 Officers said they would in-

vestigate a report that a black farmhand saw the incident and could identify the killers. It was also reported that bootleggers drew straws to decide who would take out Craft. According to The Huntsville Daily Times, "Other stories that are being heard are declared to be equally improbable, but in the search for the guilty men, every story that springs up is being traced to its source." The State Attorney General, C.C. McCall, sends his best men to assist the investigation. Funeral services for Craft were held at 10:30 at his home in Owens Crossroads.

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# The Huntsville Daily Times

Published Daily, except on Sundays and Public Holidays.  
 Vol. 26, No. 72.

Huntsville, Alabama, Friday, June 14, 1929.

Twelve Pages Today

15 Cents Per Week

## ONE ARREST TODAY IN CRAFT CASE

### YELLOW BIRD IS ON HER WAY OVER OCEAN

French Plane Bearing Across To Le Bourget Field SOUTHERN COURSE IS BEING TAKEN

### Aviator's Bride



As aviator's bride, she is expected to be seen at the airport when the plane returns.

### MERIDIAN PIKE WORK DUE FOR COMPLETION

Expected That Last Gravel Will Be Placed Today THROUGH ROAD NOW TO TENNESSEE

### BULLETINS

At 10:30 a. m. the following bulletins were received from the Alabama State Police:

### BARBECUE FOR LEGIONNAIRES GREAT EVENT

More Than Two Thousand Are Entertained Here COM HERZBERG AN HONOR GUEST

### HER NAME LINKED WITH WALES



### STATE TAKES HAND IN CRAFT INVESTIGATION

McAdory And Men Are Aiding Sheriff Riddick C. C. McCall Also Scene Of Murder

**Friday, June 14, 1929**  
 Ebb Renfroe of Gurley is arrested by Sheriff Riddick at his home in Gurley and booked for murder. The department says another man is under suspicion and is expected to be arrested. Department also noted that details from the tracks and bloodhound investigation reveal a car was parked about 200 yards from the scene. This had to be the getaway vehicle.

Another location further up from the scene was discovered which implies a second man or group of men were waiting in case of the failure of the first. All details point to a conspiracy to murder Craft. Though so far no one interviewed has said they actually saw the event, several witnesses reported hearing the shots and seeing a suspicious car with three men in it at the time of the killing.

Governor David Bibb Graves offered \$300 in reward money for information responsible for the arrest of the assassins.

### Sunday, June 16, 1929 (No Saturday Paper)

The Times reported that a special grand jury will be convened to investigate the case and issue indictments. Ebb Renfroe is transferred to the Jefferson County Jail in Birmingham to await trial. Department reported a massive interrogation of residents by several agents near the scene in hopes of discovering new evidence. Otherwise, old information is said in different ways.

### Monday, June 17, 1929

The Klan inserts itself into the discussion, offering a \$700 to \$1000 reward on top of the \$300 reward offered by the state. Otherwise, things begin to stale as police assertions of

an imminent breakthrough remain unfulfilled. No new developments arise, even as Renfroe remains jailed. Despite rumors that Renfroe and other suspects were seen near the scene on the morning of the as-

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**MORE ARRESTS IN CRAFT CASE IMPEND**

**OCEAN FLIERS SAFE IN PARIS SEEKING REST**

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**WIFE'S SON OF OWEN YOUNG IN CLEVELAND**



**CITY WINS IN FIRST BATTLE TO GET LOT**

Judge Speaks Overrule Deputies Today DEFENDANTS HAVE 20 DAYS TO ANSWER

**ONE OF LAST SURVIVORS MEXICAN WAR IS DEAD**

**AIR LINER WAS FORCED DOWN**

One Passenger Was Drowned, Four Injured, Five Severely Injured

**HUNTSVILLE IN HANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

Justice Managed Affairs Today For An Hour LEARNED MUCH IN A VERY SHORT TIME

**HER LONELY VIGIL REWARDED**



**REWARD FOR MURDERER TO BE RAISED**

Wife Plans To Secure Additional Funds LOOKING FOR HIGHER UP IN THE CASE

sassination, including rumors they mingled with the crowd at the investigation scene, no one is willing to testify to such. On the other hand, the Craft family continued to have hard times as they are told Hugh Craft's life insurance policy does not cover death as a result of police work.


**Thursday, June 27, 1929**

Just prior to the trial the Times reported up to eight indictments could be handed down for the Craft murder. The special grand jury convened on June 18. Though up to 50 wit-

nesses testified, including Sheriff Riddick and other members of the state's investigating team, on September 27 indicted only Ebb Renfroe.

Interestingly, Roily Ashburn, a member of the grand jury, was one of the men who posted bond for Ebb Renfroe soon thereafter. Renfroe is released to his family and well-wishers (and yes, quite a few were on hand at the courthouse).

As the sensational drifts to the practical, it appeared the state's case had run out of



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**SPECIAL GRAND JURY MAKES REPORT**

**OFFICERS FOR ANOTHER YEAR SAME AS LAST**

Charley W. Conner, Mayor, has announced that the city officers for the coming year will be the same as last year.

**HEAVY RAINS IN ALABAMA IN THE LAST WEEK**

The weather in Alabama during the last week has been very rainy, with heavy showers.

**DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE IS PROSPECT**

The prospect of a disarmament conference is being discussed by the United States and other nations.

**OCEAN HOLDS SECRET OF SPANIARDS' FATE**

The fate of the Spanish fleet is believed to be hidden in the Atlantic Ocean, according to naval experts.

**RENFROE HELD FOR MURDER IN CRAFT KILLING**

Special Grand Jury makes its final report on the case of Renfro, who is held for the murder of a man in a craft.

**BUT ONE BILL IN CRAFT INQUIRY**

Secretary of the Navy has announced that only one bill will be introduced in the inquiry into the craft.

**POLICE ARE SEEKING TWO**

The police department is seeking two men who are believed to be involved in a recent crime.



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steam. Weeks go by without any further developments. Both the state and the defense have numerous witnesses preparing for the upcoming criminal trial. However, none of the witnesses for the state have any direct knowledge of the event or its background, at least nothing they are willing to report before a judge and jury.

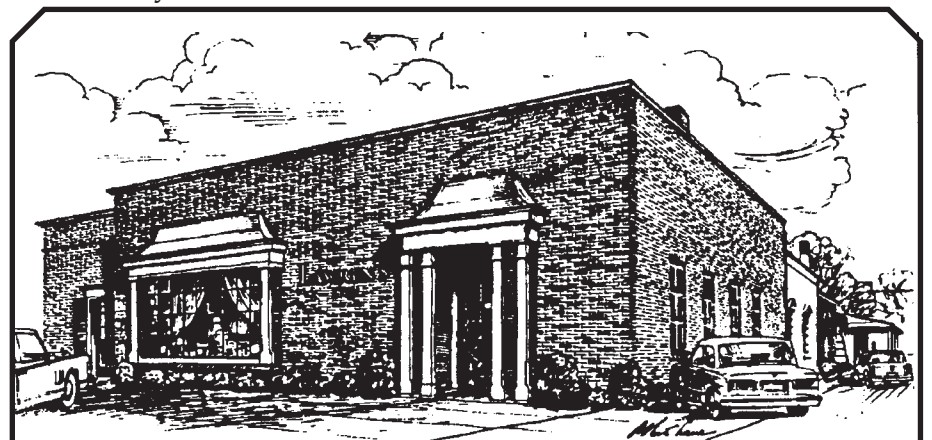
The body of the black farmhand, who reportedly saw the killing from afar and could identify the men who did it, is found in a neighboring county. Below the line of reported confidence of the prosecution is a clear concern that a cloak of silence has enveloped all who could help the state's case. How else could the state have such a weakened case when the rumors report a conspiracy of drawing straws for murder? Names were out in the open for the taking, but no one would testify.

Wednesday, December 4, 1929

After June 27, the case does not make headlines until December 4, but that news is over-

come by the expected. Without any legitimate evidence, the state chooses to 'nol-pros' and the case against Renfro is dropped in one short day. Renfro is released and goes home a free man with his wife and children.

For 85 years the cloak of si-



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Bill Kruse, Huntsville



lence has remained over this sensational murder and trial. Bootlegging continued in Madison County and continued with the same players as well, at least until Riddick leveraged the outrage into some real gains against the outlaws. Peculiarly, as Tom Carney reported in May 2005, "...the strangest fact about this case was that the conspirators talked about it so openly. Every minute detail of the plot became public gossip. Even today, many of their descendents take a morbid pride in telling the story of their fathers' involvement in the whiskey ring and the assassination...."

A decade after Tom's article, that has not changed.


All of this - the fact the men knew when and where to hide in wait, the fact they took out the only real witness to the crime, and finally, the cloak of silence - imply one certainty. Some lawman, or more than one, was tunneling information to the crime syndicate that assassinated Robert Hugh Craft. So the cloak of silence was not only among the conspirators and the people they scared into submission but potentially lay among the few lawmen who worked both sides of the law.

Many pursued activities outside the law in those dark Prohibition days, as well as through the darker days of the impending Depression (Black Tuesday, or the fall of Wall Street, would occur in October of 1929). Times were hard. Prohibition should never have occurred. It was never enforceable.

And for ages past and for ages in the future, men have taken and will take widespread action to avoid paying the tax to which their governments are due. But rarely did a person living during Prohibition, or in the darker days of the Depression thereafter, murder the men sworn to uphold the law.

Robert Hugh Craft should

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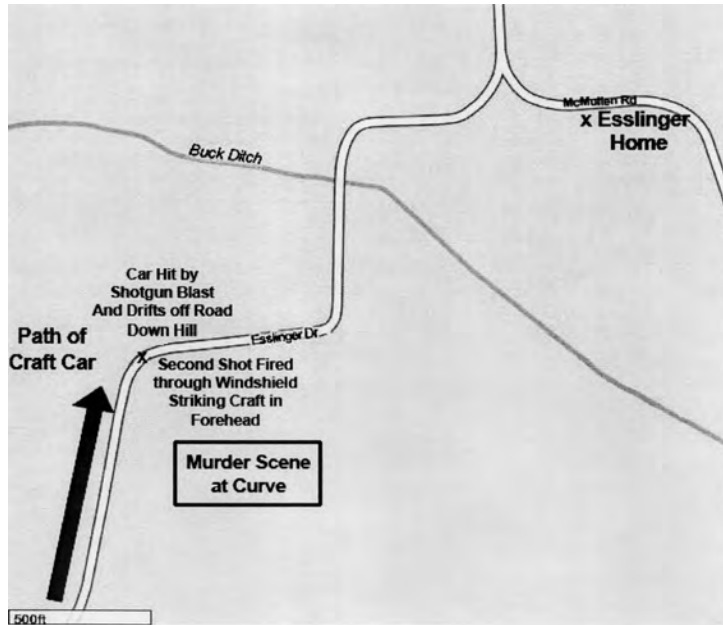
be remembered for his sacrifice. Sheriff Frank Riddick should be remembered for doing what he said he would do. I only wish that the trail to the direct line of descendents of Craft had not dried up so we could feature a photo of the interesting and obviously remarkable lawman.

And today? Well, nowadays the lawman's focus has simply moved from alcohol to meth or some other drug. And the bootlegger's image from illegal alcohol to illegal marijuana, both growin' and distribution. The crime bosses are still rich, even if they do not indulge.

And things remain the same. Tom Carney's message about our morbid attraction with crime's two sides of the coin will also remain.

We are, after all, still addicted to the temptations of and fascination with desire, darkness and power.

For information relating to the buildup to the ambush, read Tom Carney's article from May 2005, "Drawing Straws for Murder," to be reprinted in an upcoming issue of Old Huntsville Magazine.



“You know you've gotten old when they've discontinued your blood type.”  
 Phyllis Diller

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- Chili Dogs
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- Whole Chicken
- Pies
- Banana Pudding - *Made Fresh Daily*
- French Fries
- Potato Salad
- Baked Beans
- Green Beans
- Homemade Hushpuppies
- Slaw - *Mayonnaise Or Vinegar*
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**1 lb. Special - \$15<sup>50</sup>**  
 1 lb. of Pork or Whole Chicken,  
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 2 lbs. of Pork, 3 pint sides, 16 buns, sauce

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 3 lbs. of Pork, 2 quart sides, 24 buns, sauce

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## Happy Mother's Day

To all the Beautiful  
 Mom's out there.  
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# Daring News in 1923



## Found Baby on Front Porch

Attracted by the crying of a baby, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Baldwin, living on Randolph Street, investigated and found a 2 day old baby boy wrapped in a quilt lying on their front porch. The finders notified Dr. G. A. Cryer of the presence of the baby at their home and the official turned the infant over to Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Davison, who had expressed a desire to adopt it.

## Claims he was Married While Hypnotized

Wm. Dobbins of this city, dragged into the court today on a charge of bigamy, declared his second wife hypnotized him and forced him to marry her against his will.

"I don't know how it happened," he claimed. "All of a sudden I was in the church, saw many people, stood before the altar and was required to kneel. A priest stood before us. I was very much wrought up. Beside me stood my bride, who at every opportunity looked piercingly into my eyes so that I saw glittering before me all the colors of the rainbow. And so I was married a second time. As if in a semi-slumber, I left the church."

The court, however, sentenced him to 2 months in jail and a \$20 fine.

## A Mother's Message to Bootleggers - 1923

"The wretched bootlegger who sold the whisky which my boy drank ought to be found and punished. My boy was drunk, all right. He had drunk enough to apparently kill him but he didn't rob anybody."

The mother was Mrs. Florence Pack of Holmes Street, speaking about her son of fifteen, Walter Pack, who appeared in court Monday on a charge of highway robbery and drunkenness.

"They should have gotten the 14 year old boy from Athens who bought the whisky and made my boy drunk and then claimed he was held up and robbed. He is the one who bought the whisky. I don't know how much of it Walter drank, but it was a great deal. He was terribly sick and like to have died."

"He's in jail now waiting for them to carry him away to Nashville to the reform school. I'm willing to let him go through it pretty hard, it will take worry off me and he's content to go. I've tried as hard as anyone to teach

my boy right, but of course he gets into bad company and gets into trouble."

"If the officers could only find out who the bootlegger is who would sell small boys like that whisky. That is the thing which needs to be done."

## Daring Yeggmen are Planning to Hold up the Mill Payroll

A sensational rumor was current on the streets of Huntsville that a number of professional yeggmen were in the city and that they were plotting extensive operations here.

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Bankers and mill men were questioned by the paper, but none permitted their names to be used in connection with the rumor. It was learned, however, that precautions were being taken to make any effort of the yeggmen to pull off anything here and that they would meet a very crushing reception if anything of the kind were attempted.

One report had it that a mill man had been warned of the appearance of the yeggmen and that he had, in turn, warned other mill workers that he had learned that an attempt would be made to hold up at least one of the mill pay rolls.

It was also said that local banks were taking precautions and that extra guards might be employed for any possible emergency. It was stated that in at least one of the local banks every employee was armed for the yeggmen should they appear and that they knew how to shoot if pressed to do so.

The sheriff's office was aware of the rumor and Sheriff Lane will be fully prepared to meet the situation if it arises. It was stated in one quarter that the yeggmen said to be in Huntsville were supposed

to be the same who have been robbing stores, staging hold-ups and creating terror in several parts of the Tennessee Valley.

**Two Accidents in our City**

Out on the Meridian Pike last night, around 9 o'clock, a man driving a Buick Four, operating as a taxi, ran into a Ford car with a man and his family occupying the car and driving in the direction of New Market. Two wheels of the Ford were knocked off and one of the ladies was thrown to the ground, suffering several cuts about the face.

The man was later arrested and placed in jail. The names of the parties could not be learned.

**Accident on East Holmes**

While Mrs. Walter Beirne was driving along East Holmes street late Saturday afternoon her car ran into a baby carriage containing a little one, but the child was unharmed. Mrs. Beirne was so shocked that she is said to have fainted on the scene, but was soon revived. She offered every assistance to the child hit by her car before proceeding on her way.

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# THE COFFIN TABLE

by Judy C. Smith



After Melinda, Lauren and Nicole left the beach house, M.D. and I headed out to do some real shopping at the Waterfront Rescue Mission. I have finally taught him how to shop, or should I say he's taught me how to shop. We are looking for a coffee table for Warren's new apartment at Birmingham Southern.

I find more treasures there; books are fifty cents each, mugs are twenty-five cents with a Christmas scene on it and other things. They are a little bit pricey, but I'll go the extra expense for a Danielle Steel book, "The Crossing." I love all of her books, especially "Echoes." I felt like I was in Poland and Switzerland with her.

Martha Pullen says I can find more buys than anyone else she knows and that I can make a chicken last three meals to feed the family. "Chicken dinner, then chicken stew, and then chicken soup," Martha would say.

I bought a Christmas glass mug. One can't shop too

far ahead since it was fifty cents. Looking up, I spotted a wicker bassinet all covered in white eyelet. It has a mattress pad, a sheet, the works even including a pink bow on top. Having lost one baby in the family exactly one year ago, the Lord works in mysterious ways sending us another baby to be born on Martin's birthday, March the 30th. I can't wait. Luckily, I make a practice of saving everything.

We moved into a smaller house, and then added on, so we have more square feet than we had before. Oh well, the closets got cleaned out. Now we own Smith Store It, where M.D. is so kind to give me TWO storage buildings for my treasures.

Baseball is 90% mental and the other half is physical."

Yogi Berra

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"The only time you have too much fuel is when you're on fire."

Seen in Flight Handbook



I found a beautiful English carriage the other day owned by a grandmother whose grandchildren didn't come to visit, so I bought it. It's a Mercedes of all carriages. I was going to have to get a rent-a-kid, since I had no little one to ride in it, but guess what? Allison knowing this came to my rescue. I am getting ready for the big day. I don't guess I'll be lucky enough to have two named after me, however, Allison is real smart.

As I was about to leave the store, I made one quick trip to the other side just to make sure that I hadn't missed anything. There they were. Two beautiful carved natural oak coffins. What a deal. Two matching ones. How often would I ever come across two that matched again at a thrift store at a special price. How lucky could I be that they were only \$500 each.

I am standing in front of the coffins when M.D. walks up and wants to know, "What have you found?" I tell him that I am contemplating how to get these two coffins home in our two cars, when M.D. reminds me that in May, I donated my body to the Meherry Medical School in Nashville and that I would not be in need of either of them.

But I say, "It's such a bargain. Two for \$500 each and surely someone in our family will need one sooner or later and it's better to be prepared." He agreed since they are beautifully carved. He's into woodworking and likes the detailed workmanship of the heavy oak and the carvings. Then he says, "Judy, read the small print, NO BOT-TOMS."

I was then trying to decide just what I might be able to use one of them for, and I thought about Warren needing a coffee

table. Here was a beautiful oak carved masterpiece that could easily serve as a "coffin table" with storage underneath, even though it was a tad long for his apartment. M.D. actually paused for a moment contemplating how that might work and look, and said he didn't really think Warren would like the idea of it in his student apartment, even if it would fit.

Mission accomplished, I head for the check-out and leave the coffins behind. Oh well, no coffin table for Warren.

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**Rodney Dangerfield**

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# Heard On the Street

by **Cathey Carney**

A reader has a question - does anyone remember the name of the motel and club that was located on the land where the north Kmart was built? Let us know and we'll let everyone else know!

Our Photo of the Month winner for last month was none other than **Tom Blakemore** of Brownsboro, AL. The photo was that of a very young **Tallulah Bankhead** who was born in Huntsville on East Side Square. Tom and **Ranee Pruitt**, who worked in the Archives Department of the Huntsville Public Library for so many years, were best of friends. Tom now works in construction handling rebar, drainage pipes, etc. Congratulations to you Tom!

**Mabry Miller** was a name that thousands in Huntsville knew. She passed away at the end of March but during her lifetime she was the role model for volunteerism. She loved teaching and community service, and loved her church, the First United Methodist Church of Huntsville. In addition to all of her contributions she was a talented musician who played piano for many clubs, organizations and her church. Mabry leaves her son, **H. E. Miller, Jr.**; daughter **Mabry** who is married to **James H. O'Donnell III**; as well as grandchildren and great grandchildren who will always remember Mabry's gentleness and kind heart.

So many people are walking around **Big Spring Park** now with the beautiful weather. Please be careful with the ducks and geese and birds there - this is egg-laying time and kids who don't know better are running after the ducks and scaring them. We would all appreciate it if you could leave the eggs where they are and just be kind to the critters out there.

Tom Miller remembers how it was living on Meridian Street close to downtown, and is looking ev-



erywhere for pictures of Meridian back in the 40s thru 70s if anyone has any. Contact me at 534-0502 and I'll put you in touch with him.

Happy Anniversary to those lovebirds **Lisa and Wayne Gregg** who live in Old Town and just celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary on Apr. 29th!

Alabama folks who love history will be very interested in a Facebook site maintained by **Tyler Mount** of Scottsboro. He just loves the history of our state and has so many interesting pictures and facts dealing with Alabama history over the years. He also has 10,000 followers so he's doing something right! You can find him if you do a search on Google for "Historic Alabama Online."

When the AMF Bowling Lanes burned to the ground on South Parkway between Governors Drive and Bob Wallace Avenue, it was a shock to many who belong to bowling teams here in Huntsville. In addition, with the closure of the Playmor Lanes across the street it would have left only one place where teams could compete. **Jerry Damson Honda** owns the area where Playmor is located and needed the space for expansion. However when they heard about the loss of AMF, the owners and managers of Jerry Damson decided to postpone their expansion plans and leave the Playmor there to be used until a new AMF can be built. Many appreciate this move to postpone the closing, proving that Jerry Damson Honda is thinking more about the community than their gain. Love it.

Happy Birthday to my friend **Linda Goldman** - I swear she never ages and I know her sweet hubby Darryl is going to make

sure she has a great day.

Can you imagine living to be 109? **Angelica Wilhelm** is a delightful lady who lives at Redstone Village retirement community and in May will celebrate her 109th birthday. Her Mom always taught her to be productive and stay busy and Angelica did that - and still walks daily around Redstone. Happy Birthday to a beautiful lady!!

This is to see who actually reads all my column. Somewhere hidden in the pages of this May issue is a **picture of a tiny rose**, to commemorate Mother's Day. I'll begin accepting calls in mid-May to allow our out-of-town subscribers to try it as well!

**Tom Huskey** is so impressed with his sweet wife and wants everyone to know it. Here's what he says: "I'll probably get in trouble on this one, but **Kim Huskey**, my beautiful and loving wife of 20+ years was voted Environmental Educator of the Year by her peers at EEAA (Environmental Education Associated of Alabama). If you are friends with her give her an Atta Girl!" I want to add, knowing how much Kim has done on behalf of homeless animals over the years, that I love what

## Photo of The Month

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

Call (256) 534-0502

Hint: This little girl is part of a team with a color.





she does for those little critters who can't help themselves without aid from people like Kim and **Nina Beal** of the Ark and many others in Huntsville who help our abandoned pets.

**Ron Eyestone** of Madison has a May birthday as well, and will celebrate with wife **Barb**. Let us know where the Big Party will be!

Many at this time of year suffer from Athletes Foot and try to find natural remedies. Thanks to our friend **Lisa Gregg**, who knows alot about essential oils, for this info. "The oil of the Australian tea tree is a potent antiseptic. For a soothing, healing treatment, mix tea-tree oil with the same amount of olive oil and rub the combination into the toes 2 times a day. The olive oil helps to tenderize skin toughened by athletes foot so the tea-tree oil is better absorbed." Lisa can be contacted at [greggmw@bellsouth.net](mailto:greggmw@bellsouth.net).

Happy Birthday to **Bill Leatherwood** from his loving wife **Rosemary of Ole Dad's BBQ** - he has a May 2 birthday.

**Esther Wills Owen** was the beloved wife of **Dr. Alfred Owen**, and they moved to Huntsville in 1955 to begin his Ob/Gyn practice. She raised 4 children with Dr. Owen and as a nurse, helped him in his practice for many years. She, like her husband, was a gentle caring person and their patients and friends love them to this day. Esther passed away at the age of 89 and is survived by her son, **Brian Owen** and wife **Renee**; daughters **Karen Schmitt** and husband **Warren**; **Anita Hausheer** and husband

**Jim**; grandchildren **William Healy** and wife **Sarah**; **Jeremiah Healy** and wife-to-be **Alaina Hamaker**; **Leighton Healy** and wife, **Bella**; and **Martelia Healy**; and great grandchild **Joseph Healy**.

I got a great tip from the lady who cuts & colors my hair, **Annette Joplin** of Salon 528. She said when you want to add extra volume to hair (especially short) when you have it pretty much how you want it, don't spray hairspray from the top, but from the bottom. In other words, spray up into the hair rather than down onto it. I tried it and it really works!

Got a note from writer **Gene Simonson** who months ago wrote about the building of the Guntersville Dam:

"You recently asked about the spelling of the dairy in Huntsville called "Monte Say-Mo". My mother's explanation to me when I was 12 or 13 was:

"The dairy wanted a name that would appeal to the local population. At the same time, it wanted the name to have a positive spin - "Mo" for more, rather than "No" for none." Thanks to Gene for taking the time to let us know about this!

We are SO happy there's no more ice in Huntsville! Warm weather feels wonderful and all the blooming trees and flowers - it's like we're in heaven except for those who have **bad allergies**. Even my cats don't go outside without major sneezing fits. You can

bring pollen in to your home from the outside so what I do is just get a good air purifier unit and filter. It'll get better - just hang in there!

Mother's Day is coming up on May 10 - Happy Mother's Day to all the beautiful Mom's out there.

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## Mom's Day Favorites

### Olive Cheese Balls

1-1/4 c. plain flour  
 8 oz. Cheddar cheese, shredded  
 1 stick butter, melted  
 1 4-oz. jar stuffed green olives, drained

Combine flour and cheese in bowl; mix until crumbly. Add butter; mix well. Chill for 1 hour. Shape mixture into small balls, punching a hole into each ball. Insert an olive into hole in each ball.

Wrap dough around olive to enclose completely. Chill for 1 hour or longer.

When ready to bake, place olive balls 2 inches apart on an greased baking sheet. Bake at 325 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until brown. Serve warm. May freeze before baking.

### Lentil Salad

1-1/2 c. lentils, sorted, rinsed  
 1/2 t. salt  
 1/2 c. fresh cilantro, chopped  
 6 green onions, chopped  
 1/2 c. olive oil  
 Juice of 1 lemon  
 3 cloves garlic, minced  
 1/4 t. coriander  
 1/2 t. ground cumin  
 Pepper to taste

Soak lentils in water to cover in saucepan for 2-3 hours. Bring to a boil and simmer until tender, then drain.

Combine lentils, salt, cilantro and green onions in bowl; mix well. Pour mixture of remaining ingredients over lentils; toss to coat. Serve chilled.

This salad is even better the next day when all the spices combine!

### Pineapple Muffins

2 c. plain flour  
 1/2 c. sugar  
 1 t. salt  
 1 t. baking powder  
 1 c. raisins  
 1 egg, beaten  
 1 t. vanilla extract  
 2 T. canola oil  
 1 t. baking soda  
 1 16-oz can crushed pineapple with juice

Sift flour, sugar, salt and baking powder into a bowl. Stir in raisins. Add egg, vanilla and oil; mix well. Dissolve baking soda in crushed pineapple in bowl. Add pineapple mixture to flour mixture, stir just until moistened. Fill paper-lined muffin cups 2/3 full. Bake at 325 for 20-25 minutes and toothpick comes out clean.

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### Pancake and Waffle Syrup

- 1 c. sugar
- 1 c. packed brown sugar
- 1 c. water
- 1 t. vanilla extract

Combine the sugar, brown sugar, water and vanilla in saucepan; mix well. Bring to a boil over high heat. Remove from heat, stir to make sure all is blended. Serve immediately.

### Southern Mac and Cheese

- 2 c. elbow macaroni
- 2 c. shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
- 1/4 c. butter
- 1 t. salt
- 3/4 c. milk
- 2 eggs, beaten
- Paprika & pepper to taste

Cook macaroni and drain. Combine it with cheese, butter and salt in bowl, mix well. Spoon into greased 8" square baking dish. Combine milk and eggs and pour over macaroni mixture. Sprinkle with pepper and paprika. Bake at 350 for 20 minutes and set.

### Melting Moment Cookies

- 1 c. butter, softened
- 1/3 c. powdered sugar
- 3/4 c. cornstarch
- 1 c. plain flour

### Frosting

- 2 T. melted butter
- 1 c. powdered sugar
- 1 t. vanilla extract
- 1 t. almond extract
- Milk

Cream 1 cup butter and 1/3 cup powdered sugar with mixer until light and fluffy. Add cornstarch and flour; mix well. Chill dough slightly. Shape into small balls. Flatten with thumb. Place on greased cookie sheets. Bake for 15 minutes at 325. Cool on wire racks.

Combine 2 tablespoons melted butter, 1 cup powdered sugar, vanilla and almond flavorings in bowl. Stir in enough milk to make of spreading consistency. Spoon frosting into indented area of cooled cookies.

### Just Strawberries

- 12 oz. whipped cream
- 1 21-oz. can strawberry pie filling
- 1 14-oz can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 c. chopped pecans
- Fresh strawberries

Combine the whipped cream, strawberry pie filling and condensed milk in a bowl. Mix well. Add the pecans and mix. Spoon into serving dishes and top with fresh strawberries to serve.



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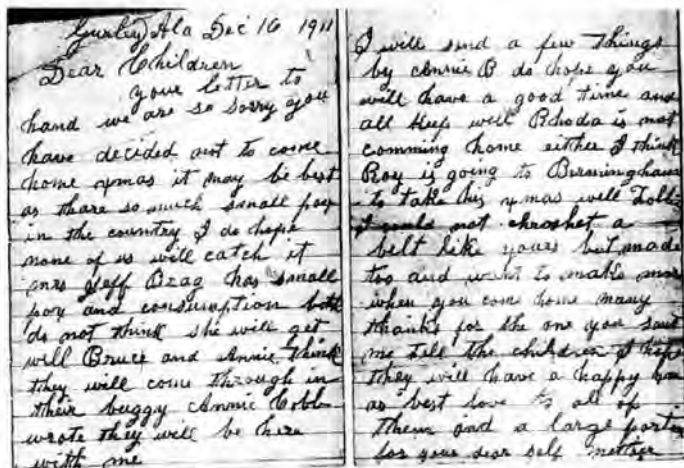
# The Wilderness Church

by Bob Overall

The first two Baptist churches in Alabama were organized and constituted in 1808 and 1809 when Madison County was just emerging from the wilderness. Home seekers came west in ox carts, wagons, horseback, or down rivers in flat boats. Following Indian trails driving their cattle, sheep and hogs along with them. Cutting the trails wider as they came, creating dirt roads. The first road improvements consisted of removing trees and large stones from the trail. Travel was by horseback or buggy. Stagecoaches were in use by 1820 and were replaced by cars between 1890 and 1915. Henry Ford produced his first car, the Model A, in 1903. The Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 was passed to assist in road improvements, but the United States entered World War I before the program could get off the ground.

The Old Stone Bridge over Elk River in Fayetteville, TN was built in 1861. It was unique, because there was only one other stone bridge like it in the United States. The county awarded the \$30,000 contract for this bridge in 1858 to two local bridge men, Patrick Flannery and John Markum. They received another \$10,000 for the approaches to the bridge. The road was improved and the steel truss bridge was built to replace it in 1928.

This letter was written by Winnie Stone





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Lawler, in Gurley AL to her daughter Laura Francis Lawler Mason (my grandmother) known as Lollie, who lived in Fayetteville, TN. Lollie gave up Christmas with her mother in 1911 because her buggy would have to take the muddy road over that Stone Bridge to reach her mother's home over 30 miles away, in Gurley, AL.

Government mail service required a 2,812 mile mail run to be completed in less than 25



Thomas Jefferson Lawler - 3335 Winchester Rd.,  
New Market, AL

days to qualify for a \$600,000 government grant. The average speed of a stagecoach was about 8 miles per hour on good roads.

The Locust Grove Inn, built about 1810, was a stage coach way station where horses could be exchanged and riders provided bed and breakfast. It was bought by Thomas Hunt Bayless (1826 -1900) and converted into a residence, which later burned. His daughter, Betty Bayless and her husband, James Jefferson Lawler built another house on the site of the Inn and lived there until they died. They are shown standing in front of their house.

The Locust Grove Baptist Church was formed on May 25, 1867 by 24 members of the New Market Baptist Church. Thomas Hunt Bayless, one of the founders, deeded land for their first building March 1, 1873. The Bayless and Lawler families have been leaders in the Locust Grove Church for decades. ("Lawler Family at Locust Grove, A Story of Remarkable Constancy" - By Joseph M. Jones)

*Benjamin Lawler (1796 - 1863) married to Rhoda Paseur*

*James Henry Lawler (1829 -1914) married to Winnie Maria Stone*

*Benjamin Beaugard Lawler (1864 -1948)*

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married to Lida Meade White

Laura Frances Lawler (Miss Lollie) (1870 -1948) married to Robert Lee Mason

Jehu Lawler (1824 -1893) married to Mary Hewlett

John B. Lawler (1827 -1907) married to Selina W. Stone

James Jefferson Lawler (1861 -1951) married to Betty Bayless d/o Thomas Hunt Bayless

The Flint River Baptist Church was organized and constituted in the home of Brother James Deaton in Killingsworth Cove on October 2, 1808 - making it the first Baptist Church in the state of Alabama. Miss Lollie's mother, Winnie, and her father James Henry Lawler also lived in Killingsworth. Her family was very active in this church.

Eldership had come from Elder John Nicholson from the Boiling Fork Baptist Church of Christ in Franklin County, TN. Elder John Nicholson met with about 12 believers in the home of Brother James Deaton, in Killingsworth Cove, in October of 1808, for the purpose of constituting a Baptist Church in which to worship their Savior. Elder John Nicholson served as their Pastor until about 1830.



Old Stone Bridge

"A History of the Flint River Baptist Church" by Elder Benjamin C. Winslett states that the church met in the homes of her members until the spring of 1809 when they constructed a church building, on a 3 acre lot, by the Flint River. In 1838 they voted to withdraw from all missionary principles and adopted the name Flint River Primitive Baptist Church. When the Memphis & Charleston Railway was completed, about 1856, precut lumber

and bricks became available and the frame building was replaced with a brick building known as the "Red Brick



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New Bridge over the Elk River

James Henry Lawler married Winnie Maria Stone (1835-1913) April 20, 1853 in her parents' home (Jesse & Winnie Jordan Stone) in Gurley, AL by David Jacks, MG.

Laura Francis Lawler (Miss Lollie) was married to Robert Lee Mason on November 25, 1890, by Rev. C.T. Johnson in Gurley.

One acre of land, on Gurley Pike, was purchased from D.M. Jones September 28, 1884. A new building was constructed and the church met at this second location until 1937.

In 1937, Flint River Church relocated one last time to her current home, located on Moontown Road, adjacent to Central School. The land was deeded to the church by Miss Lollie's brother, Benjamin Beaugard Lawler, who also donated 5 acres for the establishment of Central School in 1917.

Baptist Church" which was constructed on the East Bank of the Flint River near the community of Maysville, Alabama.

The "Red Brick Church" property was sold to the African Methodist Episcopal Church on March 1, 1890 by James Henry Lawler, Jehu Lawler and Elijah B. St Clair, Trustees of Flint Baptist Church. James and Jehu Lawler are brothers and Miss Lollie is the daughter of James Henry Lawler.



**The Wilderness Church 1809-1861**

Spain ceded Mississippi to the United States in 1796 and the Spaniards left. After they left the Baptists multiplied rapidly. By 1800 four Baptist churches operated in Mississippi. In 1807 they formed the Mississippi Baptist Association and went ahead with the work of spreading their faith. Wherever half a dozen or more Baptist families came together to worship, another



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congregation formed ("A Way Through The Wilderness", by William C. Davis).

Chickasaws, Choctaws, Cherokees and Creek Indians, at the turn of the nineteenth century, claimed present-day northern Alabama as hunting grounds until the Indian War of 1808 -1812. By 1809, a total of 2,223 white inhabitants and 322 slaves resided on the frontier known as Madison County, Mississippi Territory.

The Flint River Baptist Church had been organized in 1808, with the help of Elder John Nicholson. Another group of Baptists, separated by 10 miles and tributaries of the Flint River, met to organize another Baptist church northeast of the village of Meridianville .

They called Brethren John Nicholson, John McCutchen and John Canterbury as a presbytery, June 3, 1809, in order to constitute a Church of Christ under the name of the West Fork of Flint River. Several weeks later the name was changed to Enon Baptist and in 1895 to First Baptist Church.

It is believed that John Canterbury was born between 1776 and 1780 and died in November 1833. His first wife was probably Lydia Lindsey, born about 1779. At the time of their marriage he was Chief Justice of Old Catawba

County. On July 5, 1811 he was empowered by the Orphans Court of Madison County to "Solemnize the Rights of Matrimony."

John Ames McCutchen (1735 - 1835) was born in the 96th District Pendleton South Carolina. He served in the Revolutionary War (1776 -1783) and

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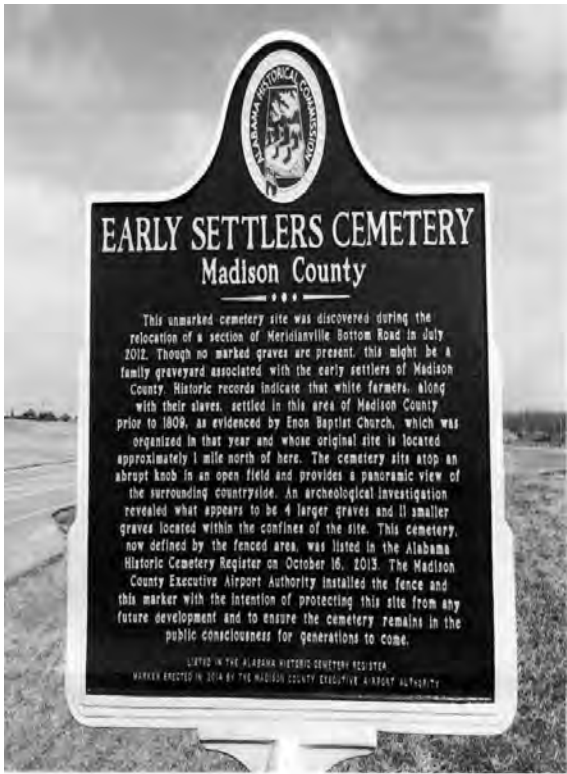
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married Sarah Ann Walker in 1780 (Research by Emily Burwell).

(Nehemiah 8:2 - 17) Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" The Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

In June 1811 the church appointed a committee to find a location for a "meeting house" to be constructed from logs. In 1814 they received title to the property. In 1814 Enon Baptist was listed under the name of W.F.N.Cr. (West Fork of North Creek) as the first church in the Flint River Baptist Association.

In 1815 the second meeting of the association was convened in the log meeting house of Enon Baptist Church.

In March 1825 Enon Church voted to move to "the new brick meeting house" on the West Fork of North Creek.

Because many of their members had moved to Huntsville and overflowing of the West Fork of North Creek had cancelled meetings, Enon voted to move to the corner of Gallatin and Clinton Streets in 1861.

Landlocked at this site, Dr. Alvin Hopson led First Baptist to move to its present location on Governors Drive and preached its first sermon on January 6, 1963.

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# Though I Walk Through the Valley

by Glenn Grady

The simple five-room, one-story farmhouse appeared much the same as the elderly woman rocking on its low covered front porch. Both had long endured the ravaging effects of life and time. They were faded and careworn, yet both showed a constitution of being made of materials consisting of raw strength. Although time would eventually overcome, both still had many years of remaining determination. The woman had known her grandson would visit today. She had no telephone. No word had been sent. She knew he would visit today. Country people seem to know these things.

It was the fall of the year. The season was changing. Some leaves had fallen and many more would soon do so. The weather, while not cold, was brisk with a stern promise of that which would soon arrive. The old woman had just stood and moved the old rocker to a place fully in the warm rays of the sun. She then sat and began rhythmically rocking to and fro and seemed to be concentrating on the work in her hands.

Her hands were constantly busy. One did not possess the luxury to sit idly. Idle hands are the devil's tools. There always was work to be done. That was the one thing he would have always remembered about the old woman if he would have been able to see her wrapped in her burying clothes lying in her simple pine coffin. She would have looked much the same except that her hands were still.

She had seen him from far off. She appeared not to notice as he approached, but as he stepped from the leaf-strewn yard onto the porch she stood and embraced him warmly, then sat and

commenced with her work. The young man pulled a straight-backed wicker bottomed chair nearby and sat beside her. For a while nothing was said. Both knew the future course of events: she would work, he would talk, she would answer, when it was time supper was ready on the stove. The only other sound would be the rocking chair and her fingers busily working.

After a few minutes she stopped and set her work carefully to the side. She shifted her frail thin body slightly and looked the young man full in the face. The look from her eyes, eyes that had repeatedly seen life, joy, suffering and death, was crystal clear. Her gaze was uncom-

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**"The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch and do nothing."**

**Albert Einstein**



plicated and intense, yet full of compassion and understanding. "What's the matter son? You know you can talk to me." The young man trusted the woman. "It's the war." He slowly and carefully replied "I'm afraid I won't do right."

Today was his last day of leave. Tomorrow he would take a bus and then fly on a jet plane to a strange far away place called Vietnam. The time of year was late October 1967. He was nineteen, slender, wiry, and had been raised on a nearby farm. He was no stranger to hard work, but he was a stranger to war. Having received his draft notice two weeks after graduating from the county high school, he had duly reported, passed the physical, attended basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, infantry training at Fort Polk, Louisiana and was granted seven days leave before being shipped overseas. In the beginning he didn't know what to do, now at the end he realized all he had not.

The woman gazed with her old eyes, eyes that had seen so much, into the clear young eyes across from her. She again stopped her work; stood, placed it into the seat of the rocker, and stiffly standing fully took the young man's hand in hers as if he were still a small child and without saying a word she led him from the porch into the house. She led him through the sitting room into the back bedroom. He had entered this room maybe twice in his life. Its scent was of the woman.

She released his hand, turned, opened the chiffarobe door, reached up to its top shelf, and removed a very worn and faded cigar box. She set it on the chiffarobe counter, opened it, carefully shifted a few of its contents, and removed a bundle of letters. The wooden framed mirror and the walls of the small room reflected her image like a portrait from an old world master. The young man's image was reflected standing behind her.

Although not touching, they appeared as one. The letters were bound by a wide faded blue ribbon. She turned and presented them to the young man. "Here son, take these to a quiet place and read them. I think you'll find the answers here. Family has been before."

The young man thought her comment unusual but

said nothing. Often she had referred to things he had not understood. The woman returned through the front room. He heard the screen door shut and the scraping of the rocker as she shifted it slightly again into the sun. The next sounds were the rhythmic rocking and the sounds of her hands doing work.

He exited through the kitch-

**"Last month I joined a support group for procrastinators. We haven't met yet."**

**Mike Self**

en (dinner was on the stove) to the back porch, down the steps and across the yard into the pasture. The gate was broken and hung crookedly on its hinges. Following a weed grown yet still defined field path he seemed to be searching for something that he would only know what it was when he found it. He suddenly stopped upon realizing he was walking to the family cemetery. Having unconsciously made the decision he now strode purposely down the field path and entered the cedar copse that provided the boundary for the cemetery. A marching cadence automatically entered his mind. He quickly shut it off.

The tombstones were as he remembered. Interesting, he thought, how tombstones never seem to change. He sat on a worn wooden bench that faced the grave markers, realized he had the bundle of letters in his hand, untied the faded blue ribbon, and examined the envelopes. There were four. The first was a blue gray colored envelope with red markings. The left top corner was marked War Department of the Army and Navy with a red V and Victory Mail. The postmark was Dec. 10th 1944. He opened the envelope carefully, removed, and unfolded the letter. It read:

“Dear Mother,


Thank you for the package. The wool socks are wonderful, especially with the cold weather here. Its’ just plain freezing every day. I’m in a small town somewhere in Belgium. The houses are all destroyed and we are living in cellars. Christmas is only a few days off but you could never tell it here. I don’t know how these people survive. War is terrible but at least it is here instead of at home. I guess it’s worth what we have to do to keep it that way. This is my third year away from home, I wonder sometimes if it is still there. I’m doing well otherwise. Give Christmas greetings to all. I’ll be home soon as they let me. I hope next Christmas to be there. It has always been my favorite holiday.

Love, John


Attached to the letter with a paperclip was a War Department telegram notification that John had died of wounds received in Bastogne, Belgium on 25 December 1944. The young man raised

his head to view the tombstone of Corporal John Henderson, United States Army, Jan 16th 1922 - Dec 25th 1944. He had died on Christmas Day.

He placed the letters on the bench, stood, took the few steps to the tombstone, knelt and traced the name and dates with his finger. He understood his uncle, this man he had never met nor would



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ever meet except through the letter. He returned to the bench, sat down and removed the next letter. He was surprised to see it was from his father. He knew his father had been a Marine in the war but very little had ever been said about it. The letter was in another V mail envelope. He removed it carefully, unfolded the blue gray flimsy single sheet, and began to read. It was dated 18 February 1945.

Dear Mother;

This will be short. We are taking another island tomorrow. The dinner meal was steak and eggs. That always means we are going in. I couldn't eat. I know the name of the island but it really doesn't matter. This will be my fourth one. I guess we are ready - the replacements have no clue of what they are in for. I envy their innocence. I'm not afraid. God will determine who makes it or not. The replacements are looking at me like I have some special knowledge or skill for them to learn. God forgive me but I don't. Got to go now. Love to all. Will write again soon as I can.

Herbert.

Attached to the letter were three War Department Telegrams. The first was dated 17 June 1944, notifying family of wounds received on Saipan, the next dated 20 February 1945 of wounds received on Iwo Jima, the last notification dated 4 June 1945 of wounds received on Okinawa. He had never known his father had been wounded. He carefully replaced the letter and telegrams in the envelope.

The next letter was different from the first two. The envelope was an off white color, the postmark was a simple roll mark without a date and there was a three cent stamp attached. In the upper left hand corner was a red triangle and the letters YMCA. There was also an American Expeditionary Force stamp. The postmark was June 25th 1918. He removed the letter. It was from his Grandfather written to his Grandmother. It read:

Dearest Mae,

I'm in the hospital. Tried as hard as I could but the influenza has taken over. I can't ever recall being so sick. The hospital is filled with wounded from the battle

that has been going on for days. The poor men suffer so. Some scream and cry; others pass quietly. The smell is horrible. It is hot and the flies are everywhere. Just imagine being in an outhouse. I miss you and the children. Just knowing you and my two boys will be there for me when I get home means everything. I'll be home soon as I can.

Love James

The young man looked at his grandfather's tombstone. He had died sixteen years earlier. He could barely remember the funeral. Next to his grave were the small tombstones of Jacob and Henry, his two small sons. They had died of the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919. The old woman never spoke of the two boys she had lost. Other children had followed. "The past is over," she always said. "Remember, but don't obsess."

The last letter was the oldest. It was a simple white envelope. The writing was printed in pencil in an almost child-like hand yet clearly with a direct intent. The letter was from his great grandfather to his great



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grandmother. The postmark was July 1863. He opened it slowly and unfolded the single page with great care. The date was July 7th, 1863. The writing was plain simple print. It read:

Dere Mavis  
I am well. We fit a big batle last wek. I think we one but ifn we didn I doan ever wante lose. Somwher in Penselvanier called gattesburg. Never seed the likes of hit. Plese tel Henry thet Josh was kilt. I seed hit. Was fast. Wether is hot. Wadder hard to fin. Didn now war was thisaway. To meny god men getten kilt. We foutem hard. Stud ourn grund and foughthem all dae. Shur hop we one. Be hom sun as I kan.

Henry

The young man stood and stepped to the tombstone of his great grandfather. As he did with his uncle's tombstone, he traced the man's name with his finger. He then knew what his grandmother had meant. This would be his first experience with war, but others in his family had been there before. There would be nothing he could experience that would come close to the battles fought by his ancestors. They were in the ground, long dead, yet by reading their letters he knew their blood was in his veins. He would also be a soldier. He was no longer afraid. He carefully wrapped the letters with the blue ribbon and departed the cemetery.

The old woman was still on the porch. The sun was setting fast. She had moved to the edge of the porch. The young man stepped up and moved his chair next to hers. He sat and said nothing. She gazed into the horizon as if dreaming about events long ago. She stopped her work and again looked the young man full in the face. "Did you find the answer?" she asked? "Yes ma'am. I did." "I thought so." "I guess I'd better go." "You take care, son. Write when you can."

The young man embraced the old woman and strode across the yard. He left the letters in the chair. The light was fading. The marching cadence again entered his head. He let it stay this time.

The house was torn down soon after the old woman died. She passed on a cold afternoon while sitting in her rocker.

I still visit the cemetery occasionally. There is another tombstone there now. It belongs to a then twenty-one year old who once stood here reading the letters. He died on February fourth 1968 in a stinking rice paddy on a hot afternoon.

They told me I had Type A blood, but it was a typo.

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Halfway between Charleston and Kansas on Illinois Route 16 at the turn off to County Road 124, a small black dog of questionable parentage took up residence one warm day in the summer of 1966.

It was not uncommon for owners of unwanted pets to let their animals loose on the less traveled county roads, but only the cruelest person would put an animal out on a busy highway.

There was something about the little black dog that indicated he had been cared for and loved by someone at one time. He wore a collar which bore no name or any identifiable marks. Neighbors believed he had jumped out of a car window, perhaps to chase a rabbit, and his family must have driven on without taking note of the incident.

Illinoisans in this area are hard-working, no-nonsense, realistic people. Yet they adopted Blackie. He was not a friendly animal and never seemed to really appreciate the food that kindhearted neighbors brought over to him.

He was an animal obsessed, and it was almost as if he were chained to that corner where he spent the rest of his life. He just sat and waited patiently for his master to return.

Newspapers from nearby cities printed his picture and urged his master to come forth. Reports from as far away as Chicago carried Blackie's story. A group of Chicago firemen donated money to buy the dog a beautiful 3-room doghouse which was placed in a field 10 yards from the highway. Still, no one came.

The weeks rolled into months. Then, one day in early February, Blackie lay dead on

the corner where he had patiently waited for so long.

The Associated Press carried the obituary of Blackie. People from many distant cities sent money for Blackie's burial. A retired Army Captain donated a tombstone and an unidentified man gave money to mark the spot with a small statue of the dog. Donations totalling over \$5,000 were placed in a special fund to be used by the Kansas Animal Shelter.

Blackie is a part of the rich heritage of the Illinois prairie because one summer day he was involved in a seemingly insignificant incident. Perhaps his master never knew of Blackie's vigil. But hundreds of lives have been touched by Blackie's love, dedication and faith.

On his tombstone, these words are inscribed:

"Blackie Feb 6, 1966 Know ye Now True Loyalty and Love"

My father told me this story and showed me the grave site in 1967. I visited the grave again recently and it is still well-kept with bouquets of plastic flowers.

*(Editor's Note: In early 1995, Charles Kurault told Blackie's story. The story caused many more people to make the trek to Illinois to see the grave. Thanks to Shirley Mohler of Huntsville, Alabama for submitting this story.)*

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# OLD PENCE

by Malcolm W. Miller

His name was Pennsylvania Jones, however everyone that knew him referred to him as "Old Pence." He was a very old black man. How old was he? I doubt if he really knew himself; but suffice it to say, he was very very old.

Old Pence just seemed to kind of drift in and start living with an old black lady who lived just down the road a piece from us. Her preacher husband had just passed away about the time World War II started and no doubt she needed help around the house carrying in wood and doing chores.

Since Old Pence did not have a radio and did not get the paper he would stop me as I passed by the little two-room shack where he was staying. As I recall he would always ask, "Well, son, how is the war?" I would always stop and chat with him awhile. We would talk about everything, the war, the weather, the crops, friends, etc. I would always leave Old Pence and walk on down the dirt road feeling better than I did before I had talked to him. I felt better about people, the War, and life in general.

My family was poor as were many others during these times but this old gentleman really had nothing. His shoes had long since fallen apart and were tied to his feet with wire and twine. His baggy clothes had been patched so many times that they looked like a quilt. During this time there were no Government welfare checks for the poor and other people looked after the poor as best they could. I know from talking to him that there were times when he was hungry, however he seemed to always look on the bright side.

Almost every day when the weather permitted you would see Old Pence going down the lane past our house headed for the river, loaded down with fishing poles, a burlap bag to put his catch in, and a home made chicken wire dip net. If he saw me outside he would always say in his very optimistic way, "I am really going to catch a bunch today." It didn't seem as though he caught any big fish, but whatever he caught he took to his home and it was cooked for dinner, whether it was a carp or a turtle. He was always happy regardless of the catch of the day or anything else that was going on.

Many times, even today, when I really get depressed and life seems to be really bad for me, I think of Old Pence and remember our conversations and it makes me realize that I have much to be thankful for.

Thanks to an old black man who lived many years ago I learned to look on the brighter side when things are rough. It is amazing to me the people who are the ones that make excellent long lasting impressions on the young.



I got a job at a bakery because I kneaded dough.

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# EFFECTIVE TREATMENT FOR VARICOSE VEINS

Varicose veins are a very common problem, affecting an estimated 40% of women and 25% of men. New minimally invasive techniques in vein management, along with insurance companies recognizing the need for treatment of varicose veins and their complications, allow patients who have not previously considered treatment a simple and relatively pain-free option.

Abnormal veins can appear as a bulging rope-like cord on the legs. Other symptoms of varicose veins include pain, aching, heaviness or tiredness, a burning or tingling sensation, swelling, pressure or throbbing, and spider veins. If you experience these symptoms and don't seek treatment varicose veins could lead to more serious complications, including phlebitis, blood clots, skin ulcers and bleeding.

Varicose veins occur when the valves in superficial leg veins malfunction. The superficial veins have one-way valves which allow the venous blood in the legs to return to the heart. When these valves become dysfunctional, typically caused by trauma, increasing age, pregnancy, and a family history of venous dysfunction, the valves may be unable to properly close. This allows blood that should be moving towards the heart to

flow backwards. This is called venous reflux and it allows the blood to collect in your lower veins causing them to enlarge and put the venous system under high pressure. Once a vein develops venous insufficiency it will always be abnormal and will only lead to the development of more abnormal veins and worsen.

In the past, venous insufficiency was typically treated with surgery using a procedure called vein stripping. This involved either multiple small incisions or a large incision leaving scars. Stripping can involve general anesthesia, treatment in a hospital, and multiple weeks of recovery. We now have minimally invasive treatments that are proven to be 98% effective in treating varicose veins.

## ***Do I have Varicose Veins?***

### **Do I have any of these symptoms?**

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Heaviness, Bulging Veins,  
Pressure, Burning, Tingling,  
Restless Legs

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A new procedure called EVLT (Endo-venous Laser Treatment) is now available and covered by most insurance companies. EVLT is a non-surgical, more effective treatment for varicose veins. The treatment is performed in the doctor's office under local anesthesia. The doctor uses ultrasound to map out the vein. He then applies a local anesthetic; patients feel very little pain. After administering anesthesia, a thin laser fiber is inserted through a tiny entry point, usually near the knee. The laser is activated as the vein is destroyed. The body will absorb the vein over the next 3 to 6 months.

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# ALLEN LYNN'S GARAGE

by Jerry Keel

I grew up on Beirne Avenue near the Goldsmith-Schiffman field. That place was loaded with characters - people who were always just one step or behind everyone else. At the time they seemed perfectly normal to me but now looking back I can see they were a little different. Like each one marched to his own drummer.

One such person was Mr. Allen Lynn, who was referred to as Uncle Zip. Where that name came from I do not know. He ran a garage behind his house where he did all kinds of auto repairs. I can still see him in his blue coveralls with grease on his hands from working on the various cars and trucks which were always crowded around the garage.

Some of the minor repairs he did outside while the more complicated repairs were done inside the huge building. There was a large Warm Morning heater that was used to heat the building in the winter months. The area around the heater was always the most popular place in the cold weather.

There was no air conditioning of any kind then. During the summer two huge fans were

run to keep the air moving so it wouldn't be unbearably hot. The fans didn't help much but they were better than nothing at all.

This was back in the days before the electronic ignition systems and all the fancy gadgets that modern automobiles have. Everything then was done by the mechanics who used their eyes and ears to tune an engine. No diagnostic machines were available.

Mr. Lynn had one mechanic who worked for him - Mr. Otey Esslinger. He was just the opposite of Mr. Lynn. Mr. Otey was very quiet and studious in his approach to everything, whether it be working on a car or discussing the various subjects that inevitably came up when a group of men were gathered around waiting for

their cars to be repaired. Sometimes the men would get carried away and use some strong language. Always one of the other men would caution them about their language since there was a nosy little kid in the crowd.

As I said, he was very outgoing, always talking loud and laughing about everything. He was something else. Always happy, always laughing and joking. He could get serious when a car had a problem he couldn't figure out. But as soon as he whipped the problem he

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was back to his old self again.

Many times when he was doing a tune-up on an engine he would raise the hood and sit on the fender with his feet down in the engine compartment as Mr. Otey would drive down the street with his head out the window so he could see while Allen made adjustments to the carburetor and the points of the ignition system. When he was satisfied that the engine was running at its optimum level he would tell Mr. Otey that he was satisfied and they would return to the garage.

One time when I was about 16 years old I had an old car that had a burnt valve, a common problem of some of the older cars. He told me to take the heads off the engine and then bring them across the street to him so he could grind and polish the valves and restore the engine to its proper running condition.

Well, I was young and didn't know all that much about cars so I had a lot of questions for him to answer. I finally got the carburetor off so the heads could be removed.

He laughed his usual boisterous laugh and told the men around that it took him longer to answer all my questions than it would have taken him to do the whole job himself. But he graciously said the only way I could learn about what to do was to ask questions.

The days of the neighborhood garage have gone like so many of the other fun things of the past. Cars are now so complicated it takes a well educated, factory-trained person to work on them.

The shade-tree mechanics like Mr. Lynn are just more victims of progress. I'm not knocking progress though. Things were simpler then but so many steps have been taken to improve our quality of life. The thing I miss the most about those days is the easy pace of

life. We don't have time to just stop and talk. Everyone now is in such a hurry to get things done. We don't have time to just be neighbors like the people back then. Everybody was a true neighbor - always willing and even anxious to help each other.

Even though those days were peaceful and wonderful I don't think many people today would like to go back to that lifestyle. I don't honestly think I would like to myself. We all have become spoiled to all the modern conveniences we have at our disposal today.

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# SHORT & SWEET

MEMORIES FROM OUR READERS

*From David Williams  
Owens Cross Roads, AL*

Recently while working on a story about farming in Madison County, I placed a call to Wilson Mann III (3rd generation farmer in Madison Co.) who is a kidney transplant recipient like myself. I left a message on his machine for him to call me. Unable to reach me by phone he drove to my house thinking something was wrong.

Having only spoken to Mr. Mann maybe a half dozen times in nearly two decades, I wish to say thank you, I wish everyone had neighbors like that in their community.

*From Gerri DeSanctis  
Huntsville, AL*

When our boys were young

my husband was in a pet shop in New York. The shop had a baby Pug for sale, and the manager told him that a Pug would be a great pet for our sons. My husband bought him that day, brought him home and we called him "Puggy."

Anytime we would travel with the children and come home, Puggy would put on such a show by running around in circles as the children laughed hysterically. Puggy was just so happy to see us again and this was his way of telling us "Welcome Home!"

A pet is a great way to introduce children to a love that they will remember the rest of their lives!

*From Ms. Donna Piraino  
Prospect, TN*

I had read your story years ago about Clarence Powers, a black man who was the horse and buggy mailman. I was one

of those children who ran out to see him daily. I lived on Lee Drive off West Holmes Street or Athens Highway, as it was known back then. I lived with my Aunt and Grandmother. My Aunt owned a two-story brick home at the end of the street before they built homes past hers. My friend and I would run out to see Clarence turn his buggy around because we lived at the very end of the road.

I was very young but can easily remember him. I was eight years old when he retired and I have talked about him all my life.

Just thought you would like to know some of us who are still around to remember Mr. Powers. He was one of a kind.

My Aunt later tore the brick house down and built a smaller one. The bricks from her house were used to brick the house next door to hers. All buildings are still standing.



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**\*For pictures, listings, details, and directions, log onto [www.auctionzip.com](http://www.auctionzip.com) ~ Auctioneer I.D. #5484. Call us for questions, inquiries, and seating at 256-837-1559!!**

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# Tweetie's Pet Trivia

## Create a Hummingbird Garden



Hummingbird gardens are very easy to create if you follow a few simple guidelines. Plus, they are fun, beautiful and can be a low maintenance gardening solution if you set it up that way. Here is how to do it.

When creating a hummingbird garden, you want to think about creating a whole hummingbird habitat. Let's look at the components of a successful hummingbird garden so that you can have the happiest hummingbirds in your neighborhood.

### Location:

The hummingbird garden needs to be positioned where you can see it; otherwise, what is the fun of attracting the hummingbirds in the first place. Also, how much room you have is a consideration. It can be as small as a window box or as large as several acres.

You will need both sun and shade. The hummingbirds love the sun but will make their nest in the shade.

### Flowers:

Hummingbirds love the color red (and other colors) and have terrific sight. They also like tubular or trumpet flowers like those on the Trumpet Vine. Since hummingbirds are natural pollinators as they travel from flower to flower, the flowers will love being a part of your garden.

When planning your hummingbird garden, be careful of hybrid flowers as they can produce less nectar than their wild cousins. This doesn't mean that they should not be used, just don't be surprised if your hummingbirds prefer a wild cousin over the hybrid variety. Also, try to select flowers that bloom at different times of the year so that there will always be flowers around for the hummingbirds.

Use a variety of flowers and flower colors. You don't like to eat the same thing every day and neither do the hummingbirds.

A good place to look for flowers that are native to your area is a local garden shop like Bennetts' and Earth Touch. When planting your garden, remember that it is good to give some spacing between each plant. This will give the hummingbirds space for their wings to hum.

### Trees:

Bottlebrush and Willow trees are great for a hummingbird garden because they grow nice soft nesting material for the hummingbirds to use in a hummingbird nest. These plants also have wonderful branches with many places for a Momma hummingbird to build her nest.

### Water:

Water is very important to a hummingbird garden. Hummingbirds need water to drink and to bathe. A small birdbath like the ones at Alabama Bird Supply works very well. Make sure you change out the water every other day or so to prevent mosquitoes from breeding. Also, try putting in a water mister. The hummingbirds really like taking a shower in a mister and can be quite entertaining.

### Feeders:

Even though you have all these beautiful hummingbird flowers and vines and trees, you still need to keep hummingbird feeders in your garden. Flowers will tend to go in and out of bloom and aggressive hummingbirds will declare a flower theirs. Having an extra feeder or two is just a good insurance policy for that nectar meal a hummingbird needs to eat about every 15-20 minutes. It is really also the best way to get a good look at them.

### Bugs:

A great thing about a hummingbird garden is the minimal maintenance. They love to eat small bugs like gnats, aphids and spiders. They will even eat all of the bugs out of the spider web, eat the spider and then steal the web to help build a nest. Pesticides are not needed in a hummingbird garden. The little birds themselves are great exterminators and truly earn their keep.

### Moss:

Hummingbirds will use moss and lichens to help make a nest because the material is nice and soft for their babies.

By utilizing these guidelines, you can create a hummingbird garden of your dreams just about anywhere.

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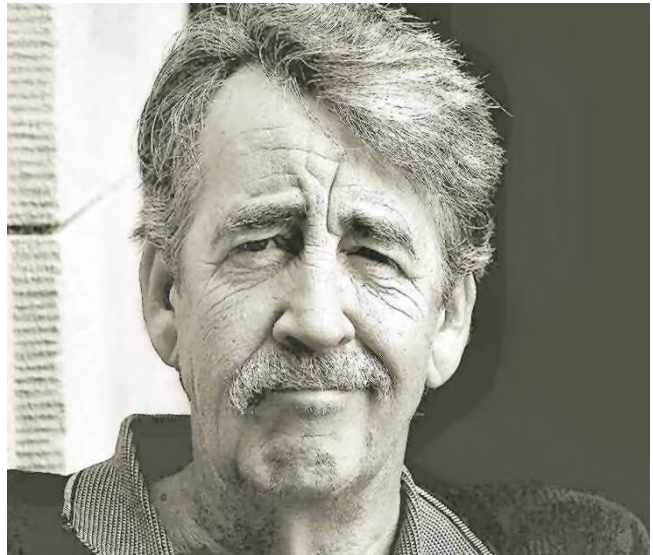
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# From the Desk of Tom Carney

## A GOOD LIFE

by Tom Carney



Mrs. Ruth Jenkins was 98 years old when we recorded her memories. She had lived in Huntsville most of her life and had no desire to be anywhere else. This is her story:

"When Mama and Daddy moved to town (1902) I never had any idea there were so many houses and people. We lived in this little three room house. Mostly what I remember about it is the mud. Whenever it rained the road in front of the house would be so muddy the buggies would get stuck. My brother and I were playing in the road one day right after it rained and my feet got stuck in the mud. That mud just sucked my shoes right off my feet. Mama really got mad at me because that was the only pair of shoes I had."

"When they declared war back in 1917 or 18, I was working at the telephone office. Mr. Hughes, my manager, would listen on the phone for a minute and then rush outside to tell the crowds what was happening. That night we stayed open all night and there was a crowd

in front of the office the whole time, waiting for news."

"Cecil was courting me at the time and he couldn't hardly wait to enlist. He was young and wanted adventure and wanted to defend his country. The day that him and all of his friends signed up, they were so happy. They were scared the War would be over before they got a chance to do any fighting."

"I remember Uncle Cabe sitting on the front porch of the house that afternoon watching the young men and looking real sad. Uncle Cabe had fought in the Civil War and had lost one of his legs

in a brutal attack."

"When Cecil came back from France we got married. He had gotten gassed during the war and had a lot of trouble breathing for the rest of his life. He never talked about the war or the fighting to anyone as far as I know."

**"I carry a gun because I'm too young to die and too old to take an ass whoopin'!"**

**A Grandpa in Arab, AL**

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"He got a job in a garage and I kept working until I had our little girl Martha. We had a good life together. We bought a house and Cecil spent all of his spare time fixing it up. During the summer we had a large garden plot behind the house that Cecil had plowed up for me. I grew all kinds of vegetables and we had several apple trees. I made yellow curtains for the kitchen. I still have them somewhere. We gave \$700 for that house."

"When the banks crashed Cecil lost his job. He wasn't by himself, cause most of the people we knew were unemployed. He got a part-time job cleaning a bar after it closed at night and sometimes he could pick up a little day job."

"We kept using that plot of ground in the back of the house and that summer I planted it all in green beans. We had stewed green beans, green bean casserole and every other kind I could think of. We just about lived off those beans. I can't hardly eat green beans today without thinking of Cecil. He hated them awful, but he acted like he liked them. In those days our gardens kept us alive."

"When Roosevelt got elected, times got a little better. Cecil got this job working in a CCC camp and he was able to send home a little money. He was a foreman

or something, teaching other people how to work on cars."

"The very last thing I expected to hear was when I got a visit from the preacher at our church. He brought word of Cecil being killed. It was an accident that nobody could help. He died instantly and wasn't in pain. He was a good man and a good husband. I still miss him so bad sometimes. I wonder how things could have been different if we had grown old together."

"When the Second War started, Martha and I got a job in a defense plant helping pack ammunition. We were making good money, but there wasn't anything to spend it on. Just about everything was rationed. Martha met a young man and got married about then. He was a pretty boy, didn't want to get his hands dirty but loved to paint. He was shipped out right after they got married and was killed on some island in the Pacific."

"It looked like things were changing so fast after the War was over. Everybody had money and jobs. I think that the '50s were the best time to be alive. Everybody was happy."

"Martha bought a television about that time. It was one of those real big box things and

it had a little bitty picture screen on it. We didn't have an antennae so we took some clothes wire and ran it to a tree in the back yard. For the sake of me, I never could figure out how they could send those pictures through the air."

"Back when I was a little girl, riding in a horse and buggy, if someone had told me that I would see men walk on the moon, why I would have said they were crazy."

"When Martha got married again it was about the happiest day of my life. John's a good man and has taken good care of her."

"Do I have any regrets? No ... I've had a good life. A lot of things could have been different, but the Good Lord has blessed me."

"I hope my grandchildren can have as good a life as I have had."

**A small town is a place where everyone knows whose credit is good, and whose spouse isn't.**

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# THE WEST HUNTSVILLE WITCH HOUSE

by Jerry Wilbanks

Was she really a witch? Most everyone in my immediate family would have said yes. She was strange, old and frightening, especially to me and my sisters, all of us under the age of ten. For a year back in the early fifties, she was our neighbor in a duplex that my Father had rented in West Huntsville on Sixth Street. In the southern vernacular, we lived in adjoining rooms; or as my Mother would have put it, "joining rooms." It was the only time before the age of fourteen that I lived anywhere besides Huntsville Park. This period occupies a dark fearful part of my childhood memory, a strange interlude steeped in superstition and dread.


There was a fireplace inside and a well outside. The driveway and most of the lot was dirt. A few drooping trees and scrub bushes completed the landscaping. A dilapidated picket fence wrapped the whole property in a scene of ruin and disrepair. We could walk a couple of blocks to a general store, a couple of blocks to a drugstore and the Center Theater, and a block or so more to

the YMCA. That was just about the extent of our movement around the West Huntsville neighborhood.

The scary old woman, Miz McAbee as we called her, always presented the appearance of a witch or wild woman. She had long, ratty dark hair, piercing black eyes and always wore an oversized robe or gown that made her look like a Halloween witch. There was a door between our two apartments that was always kept locked, from her side. At any time of the day or evening, she would silently open it and stand framed in the doorway to the great fear and apprehension of us kids. How long she might have been standing there, no one could say! She would address my Mother and the two would talk briefly. My Mom was always greatly relieved when the old lady faded back into her half of the house and locked the

door securely.

Needless to say, we all had nightmares about the old woman creeping into our rooms late at night and getting up to who knew what kind of dark, secret, witchy activities! We all felt like we'd had a curse put on us and we were bravely waiting for the terrifying outcome; would it be snakes, spiders, accidents, or visitation by other-worldly beings? Perhaps disease and long weeks of suffering and then horrible, agonizing death! Our imaginations covered all the bases. We tried to prepare ourselves for any curse, hex,



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*Jimmy Davis, Athens*



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plague or otherwise unchristian and un-American eventuality.

These few things we knew for sure:

(ONE) The old lady's black cat Rufus was pulled drowned from the well in a bucket on Monday morning. Miz McAbee seemed unconcerned. By the following morning, Rufus, or his exact double, was to be seen strutting around the property, big as life and twice as ugly. His "drowning" had not slowed him down in any way that we could determine.

(TWO) Items seemed to travel in our half of the house. Things that disappeared from the kitchen would turn up in the bedrooms, in the bathroom, and vice versa. Some things would mysteriously appear in the fireplace, burned almost beyond recognition. Nothing seemed to stay put for long.

(THREE) There were sounds at night. Creepy, moaning, clumping sounds; crying, groaning, altogether disconcerting sounds. Sounds that could never be tracked down or fully understood. Sometimes it was mumbling voices and low grieving, for all the world like a funeral or wake; sometimes sharp cries and pleading intonations. Getting a full night's sleep became more and more difficult.

(FOUR) There were the mysterious appearances and disappearances of old Granny McAbee herself. As already described, she would material-

ize at the doorway between our apartments, no one having seen or heard her arrival. The old woman's lips were always moving: reciting the Lord's Prayer backward, we guessed, or calling down curses on our innocent heads.

(FIVE) And then there was the Big John and Sparky episode. Big John and Sparky was a radio show which aired on Saturday morning and I never missed it. Big John was an adult

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*(Warning label on a Batman costume)*

and Sparky was his kid sidekick. It was regular children's programming with jokes and stories and special features. One part of the show that I was especially fascinated with was the "magic spyglass." Big John claimed that he could look through this glass and actually SEE the listeners. He would supposedly inspect the kids in his listening audience for clean faces and fingernails, combed hair and brushed teeth.

Occasionally he would say something like, "Well, Tony (or Mary), it looks like you didn't comb your hair this morning!" I always felt supremely confident, because I was always prepared for the closest inspection. Imagine my surprise and consternation one Saturday morning when Big John peered into his magic spyglass and said, "Well, it looks like Butch didn't wash behind his ears this morning!" Why would he lie like that? And how did he find out my family nickname? I was devastated and never listened to the program again. It was the worst humiliation I had ever suffered up to that point in my five year old life!

However, the spookiest aspect of this whole affair was yet to come. That afternoon while I was sitting out on the old wooden porch alone, the old woman came out of her front door. She stooped and leaned close to my ear. "Well, Butchie," she crowed softly "I guess you'll keep your ears clean from now on!" I was

petrified with fear, unable to move or speak. This is what convinced me that the cackling old hag was truly a witch. She might well have picked up my nickname innocently enough, but there is no way she could have known about Big John and his magic glass. The old crone didn't even own a radio!

(SIX) As hard as this may be to believe, there were rumors on good authority that she threw live ammunition into her fireplace in a kind of twisted game of Russian Roulette. We sometimes heard cracks and pops like rifle shots and obscene cackling and chortling coming from the old lady's side of the house. When this would hap-

pen late in the evening, we threw ourselves to the floor in our bedrooms until all the rounds had cooked off. We could only guess at when the game might be over.

One more incident occurred while we lived in that witch house which has haunted my memory for fifty years. My Mother's good friend lived a few blocks away. She was not really related to our family but everyone called her Aunt Lydia, in the Southern tradition. She was old and in poor health. When she became so ill that the doctors gave her no chance to live, friends and family began "sitting up" with her through the night. This death watch

**"It's easy to get everything you want, provided you first learn to do without the things you cannot get."**

**Elbert Hubbard**

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had gone on for the better part of a week when my Mother's turn came to sit by Aunt Lydia through the night. She brought me along and I was instructed to keep very still and quiet. Around ten or eleven P.M., when it became apparent that my Mom's presence would be required through the night, she decided to take me home and return alone.

It was a cloudy and moonless evening, altogether dark and foreboding. It was late winter and a cold wind cut through our thin coats as we turned the corner and started up the walkway toward the witch house. A large bush stood at the corner of the lot and as we walked past it a shimmering, filmy sheet of some transparent substance began to rise up from behind it. My Mom and I were both

stunned into immobility as the gauzy thing spread out in front of us. In a moment it was blown away by the wind.

"It's a sign!" my Mom whispered, "It's a sign that Aunt Lydia is gone!"

She grabbed me up in her arms and ran back to Aunt Lydia's house. Sure enough, the saintly old woman had expired in the few minutes that we had been gone. Later that night when we were back in our house, the old witch next door could be heard chuckling and chattering to herself.

Shortly after this incident, our family moved back into the Merrimack Mill Village and tried to put all the creepiness behind us. We heard that within a month of our moving out, the Sixth Street duplex caught fire in the night and burned to the

ground. They say that rocks fell from the sky on that unhappy house, that wild dogs circled the property, that smoke and fog erupted from the well, and dust devils kicked up clouds of dirt which made visibility almost impossible. The neighbors and firemen were helpless to attempt any kind of rescue. There were shrieks and screams coming from the house and the old witch was presumed dead. However, not one trace of remains was ever recovered from the scene.

I felt that a place of evil had been purged and that it was fortunate for my family that we had gotten out of there when we did. Was she really a witch? I'll let the readers decide that for themselves. As for my family, we just don't talk about it that much anymore.

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# Remembering Days Gone By

Marvin O. Webb  
Tampa, FL



The March 2015 issue of Old Huntsville had two articles which really caught my eye and triggered some nostalgia.

The opening article: "Medicine and Life in the Old Days" by Jerry Keel spoke of Dr. O. J. Brooks. I was born on Stevens Avenue in Dallas Village on July 3, 1926 and Dr. Brooks signed my birth certificate.

A few years later when I was old enough to remember, Dr. Brooks visited my Grandparents Almon Lee and Nancy Caldonia Burkett on Halsey Av-

enue at least one time and I can recall the three of them sitting in those old straight back chairs talking and laughing.

Many years later after I had served in the Navy during WW II and returned home, I had need for my birth certificate so I asked Mother if she had it. She said she did and got it for me. I started reading it for the first time and began to laugh. Mother wanted to know what was so funny. I started showing her the errors on the certificate. Her name was Martha but it was spelled "Mattie," my dad's name was Elgie Marvin but was spelled "Marion," my name was supposed to be Marvin Oliver and it was spelled "Marion Oliver."

There were others but these are enough. Mother and I both came to the conclusion that Dr. Brooks did not fill out this form and all he did was to sign it. So Mother had to fill out a sworn statement correcting these errors which she did. I have to say that Jerry wrote a very interesting article.

The next article began on Page 30 and was entitled "The

Gentry Brothers" by Austin Miller. What really sparked my attention in this article was the reference to Jim Tom Gentry and the Dallas Mill baseball team. As a young boy, I listened to anything which was said about the team - primarily because my dad, Elgie Webb, played on the team with Jim Tom. Jim Tom played second base and my dad played third base.

I was told a few years later by some older folks that dad was a good third baseman. I happened to have a picture of the Dallas Mill 1930 team of which I am enclosing a copy. (Old Huntsville note - we will run this picture in the June issue along with some Mill Stories.)

You will note the reference to the 1931 team which played the St. Louis Cardinals and which my memory says they beat the Cardinals. As to whether Jim Tom and/or my dad played in that game I do not know.

I have cousins still living in Huntsville and two of them are ex-Judge Danny Banks and Buddy Burkett. Just wanted to let you that I enjoy every issue but this one was special.

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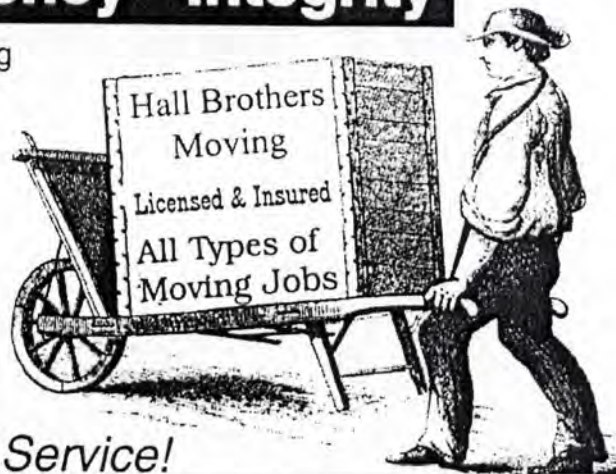
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# Swings and Such

by Cynthia C. Brown



The mere sight of a front porch swing evokes a reverent nod in passing and strums the “aaaww” chord in many hearts. You'll rarely meet a soul who doesn't smile at the thought of one. They're places where thoughts were shaped, memories were sifted, songs were sung, tales were spun, hands were held, kisses were stolen and promises were given. The hearthstone of the front porch, swings were hung along the same beam as the Golden Rule and have been a source of sheer enjoyment, evoking a treasure of carefully threaded, fond memories woven into our past.

Grandmothers on both sides had one on their front porch. Each Granny lived in the old section of town, a few blocks off the Square - one on Broad Street, the other on Scott. Both streets paralleled each other, feeding cars directly into town. Righteously, each swing flanked these two main streets, with seats equivalent to season tickets on the 50 yard line. From either side, we both passed and kept time from the swing.

Neighbors walked the sidewalks to town on a regular basis in the early 50s. People visited each other, checking on one another and their families regular-

ly. I'm not sure it would have been quite the same without the front porch and the swing. The porch was an open invitation. The rhythmic back and forth creak of the swing would lend cadence to conversation and likewise to our lives. Slow but steady, a generation determined to keep on keeping on.

Porch swings common to this time period weren't ornamental, not decorative, not the least bit fancy. They were practical and sturdy, built to withstand and support generations of laughter and problems, restlessness and idleness. They were a welcome extension of good natured souls who graced the home, and as much a part of their greeting to the outside world as their comforting and embracing hello.

The memories that strike some of the sweetest chords in my soul began at Granny's, on Mama's side. For three solid seasons each year, her porch was the epicenter of all things fun. She lived in a post-war bungalow styled home with one of those roomy front porches common to the era. Light blue-gray porch boards matched the ceiling, a color believed to ward away any bad spirits if a person believed in such. I think she did.

**“I went to a bookstore and asked the owner, ‘Where’s the self-help books?’ She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.”**

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Old fashioned flowers in an assortment of containers lined one side of the steps leading the way to a wavy glass-paned front door. Marigolds kept flies at bay, and their bright golden hues strikingly contrasted with red geraniums. Rainbow colored nasturtiums had a fragrance all their own. Four-o'clocks came up as volunteers in early summer from seed pods the previous year, offering an interesting, nostalgic outline. Long fronds of lacy, Boston ferns lent an ethereal texture midways up the steps. They thrived opposite each other just under the overhang, far enough from the edge to escape the blazing southern sun. Each spring she brought out a round shaped hanging basket of rosette shaped sedum that had been wintered over in her root cellar.

Off to the side, commanding its own space, a white wooden swing was suspended by heavy chain. Invitingly, it awaited any family member or non-member, with or without a purpose, to pause and re-connect to the tune of life. It was the perfect place to read, mend, work on homework, or simply sit; half mesmerized in weightless motion.

It was everyone's favorite place to cool off in the absence of air conditioning. It was Granny's choice seat for taking her big round dishpan full of freshly picked green beans. She was picky about stringing them but sometimes allowed the children to help her break a first crop. I could have watched her shell beans or peas forever. She

never got in a hurry, and she never ran late. I have an indelible mental image of her sitting happily behind a veil of sugar maples, talking and laughing with her neighbors. She was part of a generation who took

only what was needed and gave back more than what was taken. Granny squeezed nickels into dimes and used her imagination in between.

For countless hours, we played "Cars" from her front

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**"Sometimes I panic and think, 'There's a crazy person in this house.' Then I realize it's just me."**

**Jenny Adams, Scottsboro**



porch swing. I'd pick a color, then she'd pick a color, then sometimes we'd change our minds before we started because that was important strategy. It was a game that almost any number could play. Whoever saw or counted the most cars of their color in a given time, say til Granddaddy got back from plowing the garden, was the winner. Granddaddy plowed behind a gray mule, when the mule took the notion to plow. He mowed with a reel mower. They had one car, and like some others, rarely used it, except on Sundays.

As for the cars, not every family had one and I don't remember a single family who owned more than one. Playing Cars was a relaxing game that probably taught patience, although there was some caveat to the game that could sway a score pretty fast. Say, if a white car came along, we both had to start over.

Cows was some variation of the game Cars. You played Cows on long road trips in a similar nature where one person counted cows on one side and vice versa on the other. If a cemetery was sited on your side by your opponent, you lost your count and had to start over from scratch. Rules have a tendency to fade with time. We'd slowly swing and count cars with eyes fixed to the street, half-hypnotized, half-squinting, fully determined to win the game, waiting for our chosen color to pass. As you swang with someone, etiquette called for one person to be in the lead, the same as you would follow a dance partner. It was a second nature skill, learned in a matter of seconds.

As time passed, backyard swingsets became popular. They were triangular shaped and made of steel. Mine had two adjustable swings, a slide, and a glider for two. You could pretend you were a trapeze artist hanging by your elbows, or completely upside down from bent knees.

Swingsets had to be tightened frequently, especially with a neighborhood full of children making regular use of them. You began to feel the looseness as you swang just as high as possible without allowing the

chain to slack and jerk you back down to reality. If there were such a thing as a recommended weight limit, we tripled it most days. With the boys perched on top, the girls took turns swinging, sliding on a sheet of wax paper, or somersaulting on the side reinforcements. We would run for dear life when it gave way and toppled over.

And who can forget the swings on the school playground? Our playground fell quite close to paradise. Tall oaks provided an umbrella of shade. Cedars peppered the ground offering light fragrance to an ever present and refreshing, gentle breeze. It was the type place that beck-

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*Old  
Town*

oned you to stay awhile, to let go of every thought, care and consequence and just play. For years to follow, it was a favorite place to take my children on weekends.

The swings were the absolute best. None were taller, smoother, nor more relaxing. You waited in line for your turn to swing. Starting was an important part - if you could get someone to push you off, that was great. Otherwise, you walked your swing back as far as possible, gave one determined jump, back and up, then hung on and sailed forward, climbing up, stretching your feet high to the heavens before the next descent - this time in reverse.

Nothing compared to the whoosh of wind, the utter freedom of flying up and down thru the cool air, gliding to and fro, near weightlessness.

The baby boomer generation grew up on porch swings, swing sets and slides, monkey bars and see-saws, and merry-go-rounds, large and small. We were young and carefree, with healthy joints, strong backs and legs. It didn't matter if we were a little lanky or pudgy, uncoordinated or not. If we fell, we brushed off, got a drink from the cool water fountain and lined back up for another turn. Our only pains were growing pains.

Swing sets evolved into grand, wooden structures. Being on the pricey side, we never managed one of those. True to life, other doors opened. My parents built a home in the early 70s. By most standards, it was fairly modern and uninteresting, with one exception. When they leveled the lot for the foundation, the excavating crew left an embankment at the rear of the home. The bank angled up at least 10-12 feet. An old pecan tree rose from the top

of the bank with one arm outstretched, begging for a swing. With a little rope, an old tire, a few knots, and two shakes of a lamb's tail the swing was up and ready. The grown-ups had to test it first, for safety.

Testing took awhile. This was the swing of swings. You started out on top of the bank and once you swang out, you were suddenly 25 feet off the ground and climbing due to the drop-off. It took an adult's breath away. The kids loved it. Everybody loved it. It became a favorite backdrop for family pictures. It was a happy place to gather. After Daddy passed away, I noticed the rotten rope and missing tire, and thought how lonesome it looked and felt up there.

Just the other day I was visiting my son who's been working on the home place. We watched the squirrels play, admired the garden and he pointed out a nest of baby birds just under the eave. I looked up, and there it was, the reconstructed swing, fashioned this time with a wide wooden seat. As soon as I spotted it, I hobbled around to the side yard, a shortcut, while holding onto him and him to me.

Once there, I turned to him, "Push me," I pleaded. My grown son bit the side of his lower lip and blinked with concern.

"I'll be OK," I promised, half begging. Once in, he gave me a good strong push and off I went, as light and free as a bird in the wind, up and out and back again, slowing turning in mid-air, flying high, then back down, with not a care in my being. One slip and I'd have been a paraplegic for life. Never

mind that. It was just a turn or two - a wonderful few moments that I wouldn't exchange for the world.

Would I recommend this? I would. Find the closest one you can. Close your eyes, relax, and swing like you did as a child. If you can't manage it yourself, by all means, ask for help. I came home with a smile on my face, tears on my cheeks and a lightness in my spirit - identical to the 50 year old memories that still rest in my heart.

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In order to prevent any dishonest person from stealing the treasure, the money was stowed away in an old satchel under the counter, thrown purposely in "a careless manner to look altogether innocent of having anything of value in it."

A few weeks later, as the day for final payment approached, one of the ladies went to get the satchel and remove its contents. To her absolute astonishment the satchel was empty. What had become of the greenbacks was a mystery for some time.

At length a tiny hole was discovered gnawed through a corner of the satchel, and then the ladies remembered having lately seen a little mouse running about the shop in the vicinity of the satchel. Putting these circumstances together, a clue was obtained as to the identify of the thief.

The next step was to verify suspicion that the mouse was indeed the thief. By carefully scrutinizing the floor, the ladies tracked the course of the diminu-

tive burglar by means of bits of greenbacks to a hole in the wall, behind which was a soft nest made of the missing \$200. But the bills and scrip had been torn to fragments, so not a cent could be saved. To make matters worse, in the nest lay the mouse, dead. He had probably been poisoned by the arsenic contained in the green coloring of the money.

*From 1871 newspaper*



*Happy Mother's Day to all the Beautiful Mom's out there! Maria and I want to send our love and best wishes to the folks who live in Huntsville, AL and especially the Huntsville High Class of 1966!*

**Oscar and Maria Llerena**

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