

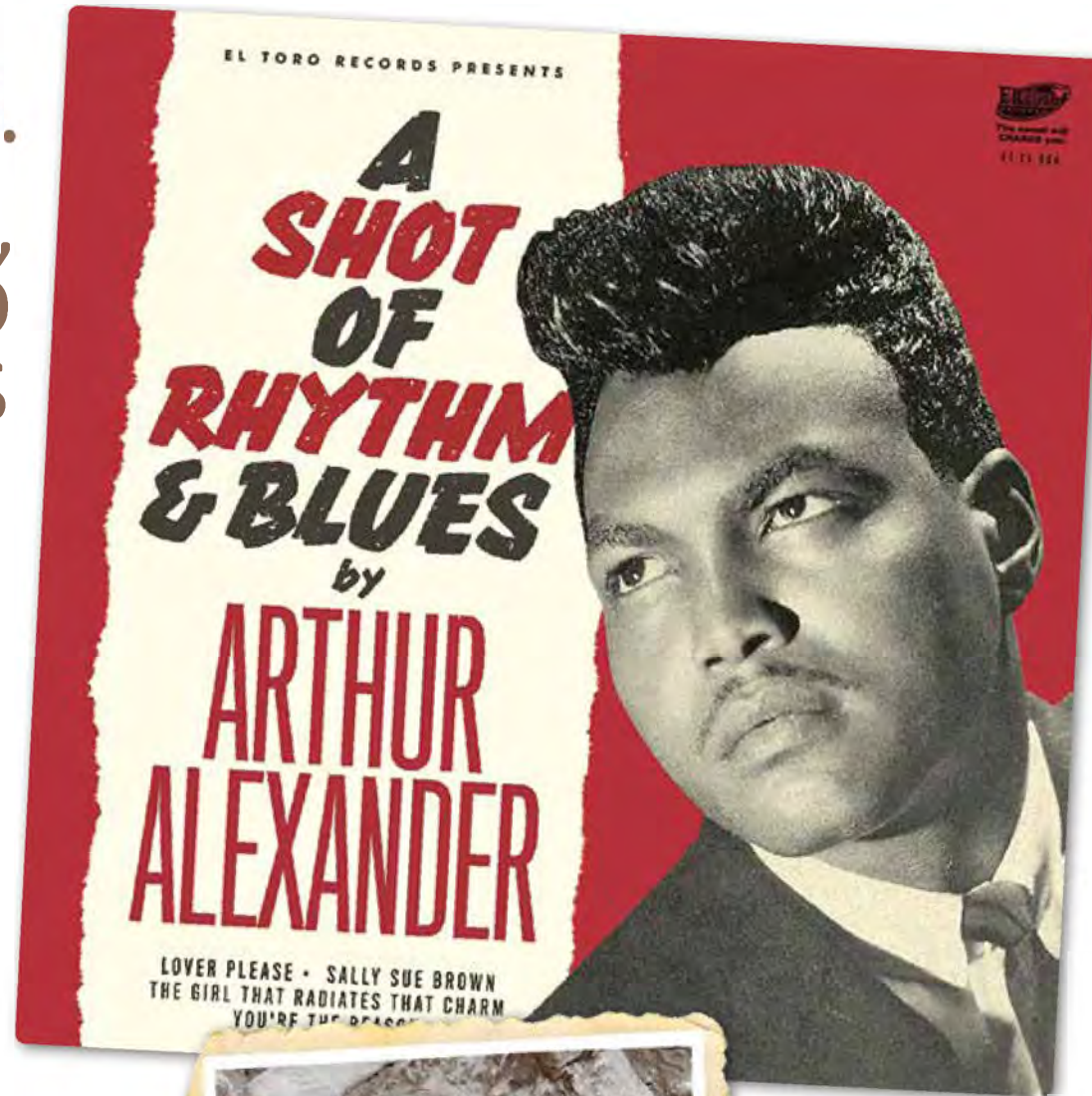
3. THEMES, PEOPLE, AND EVENTS

Arthur Alexander (1940-1993)

Arthur "June" Alexander grew up in a predominately white neighborhood in East Florence in Lauderdale County. His father, Arthur Alexander, Sr. worked on Wilson Dam in the 1920s before marrying Alexander's mother, Fannie Scott Springer Alexander. After his mother's death in 1943, Alexander's father moved him and his sister across the river to Sheffield. The family then lived in the African American neighborhood of Baptist Bottom while his father worked for Reynolds Metal.

Alexander attended Sterling High School until grade nine. Afterwards, in his late teens, he picked cotton and then worked as a bellhop at the Sheffield Hotel. Meanwhile, Alexander had been writing and recording with Tom Stafford at SPAR Studio in Florence. In 1959, the two produced "Sally Sue Brown." But it was in 1962, at the age of 22, that Alexander helped to ignite the popularity of the "Muscle Shoals Sound," when he recorded "You Better Move On" at FAME Studios. This song would later be covered by the Rolling Stones, initiating a lasting relationship between the African American music of the Shoals and the British Invasion music that became popular in the 1960s.

Arthur Alexander continued to create music through the 1970s but retired from the business for a decade or so. He and many of his former associates experienced a revival of popularity in the early 1990s. However, Alexander suffered a heart attack in 1993 and did not get a chance to fully enjoy the



resurgence. He is buried in the Florence Cemetery in Lauderdale County. Alexander is remembered not only for his musical talent but also for the strides his music made in helping to integrate the South and better race relations.

(Left) The Cover for a Release on Vinyl of Arthur Alexander's "A Shot of Rhythm & Blues" (ElToroRecords.com) **(Bottom Left)** Photograph of Alexander in the 1970s (Encyclopedia of Alabama via Alabama Music Hall of Fame, Photograph by Dick Cooper)



The Cobb Family

In early January of 2013, local historian, Butch Walker interviewed Huston Cobb, Jr. about his family's history. Much of the family's story is complicated and hard to come by through publicly available records – validating the value of oral history. Huston Cobb, Jr. was born in 1925 to Huston Cobb, Sr. (1902-1985) and Nazareth Carter Cobb (1902-1962). Huston Cobb, Sr. was born, lived, and passed away within the vicinity of the community of Bethel. The Cobb family lived most of the time near present-day Cobb Drive south of 2nd Street.

Before Huston, Jr. was born, the Cobbs lived and farmed on Hog Island. Hog Island was never much of an island. It was bordered by the Tennessee River on the north side and Town Creek flowed on the south side. When Wilson Dam was completed the land was inundated under a few feet of water. According to Huston, Jr., many African American families lived and farmed there. They all had to move sometime after 1923. The Cobbs moved about a mile south of Bethel.



(Above) The Cobb Family – Nazareth Carter Cobb, Houston Cobb, Sr., and Salley Cobb Griffin – in Front of the 1929 Chevrolet (Ricky Butch Walker's Blog, Via Mr. Huston Cobb, Jr.)

Huston Cobb, Sr. was born to Mack Griffin (died 1923) and Mattie Eggleston Cobb. Mr. Griffin and Ms. Cobb were not married; neither were Ms. Cobb's parents, Shirley Eggleston and Callie Cobb. Therefore, oral history straight from the family is the best way to understand the relationships and contributions of the Cobbs. Callie Cobb was the daughter of a man named Archie Cobb. According to the 1870 census, the family lived in the area known as South Florence near Sheffield. Archie Cobb was 57 years old in 1870, indicating he was most likely born a slave in 1817. Mack Griffin was the son of Mary Griffin from the Moulton, Lawrence County area. They were most likely descendants of the slaves of the G. W. Griffin plantation located in Lawrence County. When Mack Griffin passed away, he left 21 acres of his 42 acres of land to Huston Cobb, Sr.

This land helped the Cobb family to be as useful and influential in the community as they were. The Cobbs were members of the Bethel Colbert Baptist Church. The children most likely attended Bethel School because the family is said to have housed the teachers of the school in their home. Most of the teachers of color working at rural African American schoolhouses were from Sheffield and Tuscumbia – a fact corroborated by the census records. Teachers would board with the Cobb family during the week and return home on the weekends.