

THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O.Box 276  
Brewton, Alabama 36426

OCTOBER 4, 1973 NEWSLETTER

Mrs. Carolyn P. McLendon, Editor

FORT MIMS TRIP - "A Journey Into History"

The trip to Fort Mims will take the place of our October meeting. Our approximate time schedule for the trip on Sunday afternoon, October 14, is as follows:

- 1:00 p.m. Motorcade to leave from the courthouse parking lot in Brewton, escorted by Escambia County Sheriff's Department. Be on time.
- 1:20 p.m. Stop at Flomaton High School for residents of the Flomaton area to join the motorcade.
- 1:40 p.m. Stop at Atmore City Hall for residents of the Atmore area to join the motorcade.
- 2:30 p.m. Arrive Fort Mims where Dr. N. R. Stowe, Archaeologist of University of South Alabama will be our tour guide, explaining the various sites and excavations.
- 4:00 p.m. Arrive Montgomery Hill Church for brief conducted tour.
- 5:00 p.m. Arrive Live Oak Landing for picnic with Mr. and Mrs. John M. Hastie as hosts.
- 6:00 p.m. Return trip.

We encourage each of you to come, bring a friend, neighbor or student. A special invitation is extended to the public to join us for this excursion. This should be a most enjoyable and historically interesting afternoon. We are especially appreciative of the fact that Dr. N. R. Stowe, archaeologist in charge of the Fort Mims excavation, is to be our guide at the Fort Mims site. Some of the members of the Baldwin County Historical Society will join us. We hope that many parents in this area will take advantage of this opportunity to give their children some insight into the history of our area.

We are asking that you notify Mr. or Mrs. Buddy Mitchell that you will attend by calling them at 867-7684, advising them if you need transportation, or if you are taking your car how many will be with you and whether or not you can take an extra passenger. Please call no later than 3:00 p.m. on October 13th so that we will know how many to prepare for.

Bring with you your own sack or basket supper for the picnic at Live Oak Landing (we will not spread the lunches), folding chairs, and put whatever posters on your car as you see fit. Soft drinks will be furnished for the picnic by Mr. and Mrs. Hastie.

In case of rain this excursion will be postponed to October 28th with the same time schedule and events.

Attached to this newsletter is "A History of Fort Mims and North Baldwin County" prepared by Miss Bernice McMillan, Vice President of the Baldwin County Historical Society. Copies of Miss McMillan's history and a "History of the Battle of Burnt Corn" which took place on what is now Escambia County, Alabama soil (then Baldwin County) and which lead up to the Fort Mims Massacre will be handed out to all persons on the pilgrimage as a gift of your Society.

Four New Members This Month, Total 211: Mrs. Ethel M. Bethea, East Brewton; Mrs. Clifford Eddins, Bay Minette; J. F. Elliott, Montgomery; Mrs. Leslie Snider, Brewton.

Area students are beginning to use our quarterly publications for their school work. There were several requests this week for "Indian stories" which the September quarterly has supplied. It is a joy to be able to fulfil this need.

We acknowledge with thanks this month:

The assistance of Mr. Dan S. Robertson, age 90, in helping to stuff envelopes for mailing of the quarterlies-

Roger McDowell, C.P.A., for preparation and filing without charge to the Society, application to become a non-profit educational organization. We are now waiting for IRS approval.-

Pinebelt Cablevision for sending a photographer to our September meeting.

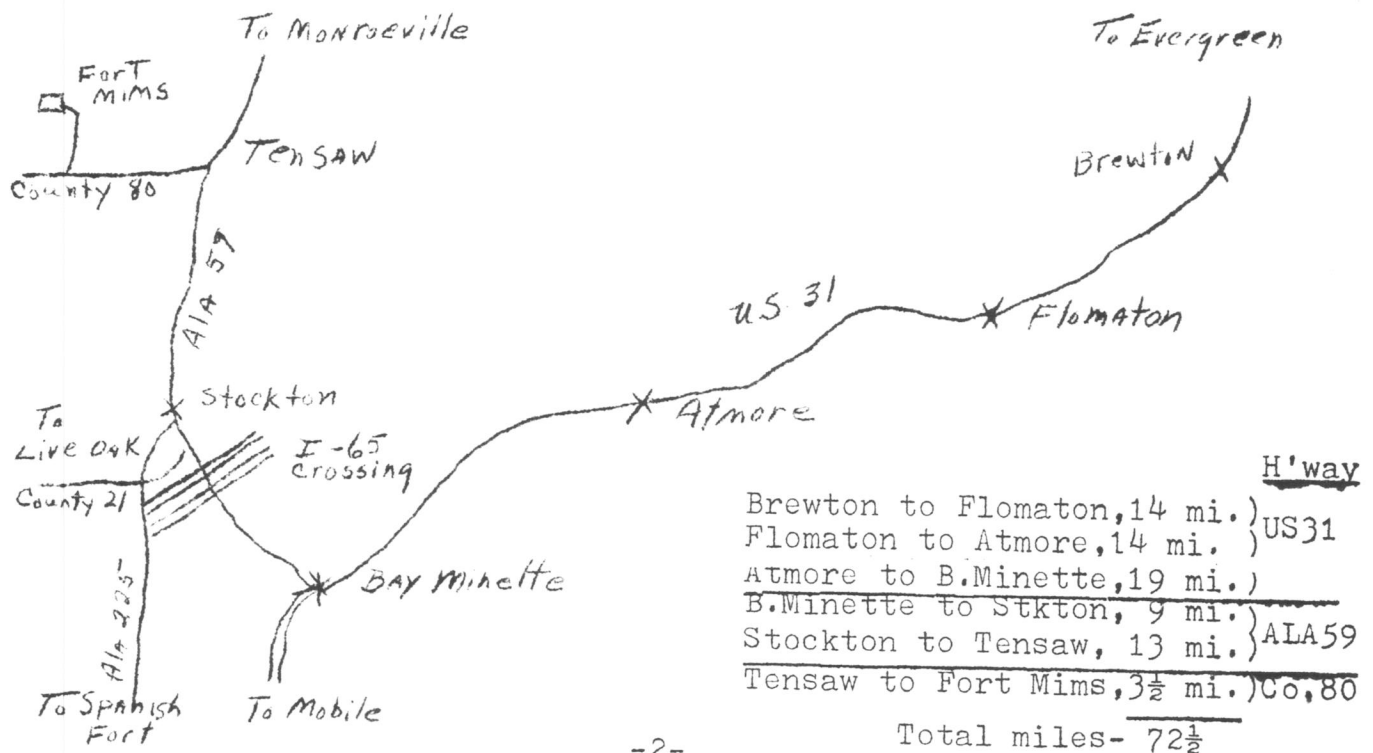
Reginald McFarland for Ehlert/Elliott family history and 1809 Petition by Inhabitants of Washington County, Mississippi Territory (of which this county was a part at that time).

Mrs. Lennis Shelton for Blackwater Cemetery, Bradley community, 1861-1972.

Mrs. Agnes Watson for information on the Foshee family.

---

The map below is for the use of persons not joining the motorcade to Fort Mims or who would like to go at another time. From Atmore the motorcade will go out the Jack Springs Road and by way of Blackshear in order to miss the traffic of the main highways.



A HISTORY OF NORTH BALDWIN COUNTY, FORT MIMS,  
AND MONTGOMERY HILL CHURCH

By Miss Bernice McMillan

North Baldwin County has several historical places that many of its citizens would like to see restored just as a historical place and not as a money making attraction. It seems to me that these places which were of so much importance to the development of our county should stand on their own merits. Foremost among these places is Fort Mims.

To understand the viewpoint of each side I would like to give you a few facts leading up to the massacre. Mr. Frank Earle wrote a small pamphlet on the "Story of Fort Mims." Much of the following will be from his story and Pickett's history.

During the American Revolution and for two decades following there was a movement of many settlers into South Alabama from Georgia and the Carolinas. Many left their homes for political reasons and some because they were not satisfied with the conditions where they lived.

In the beginning there was only an Indian trail which led thru Georgia into Alabama and into Baldwin County by what is now Tensaw, and crossed Boat Yard Lake by Mim's Ferry which was established in 1797, across the Alabama River, Nannahubba Island, and on to Fort Stoddard.

This trail was later known as the Federal Road, and most of the people who came to Baldwin County came by this route. Since water was the best means of transportation they settled on or near the river bank from Montpieller, now Blacksher, to Stockton. All of this settlement was known as Tensaw.

Even though the colonists had defeated England, she didn't give up trying to keep a foothold in the new land. England with the secret aid of Spain began operations on the Gulf of Mexico to harrass the white citizens. They did all they could to stir up the Indians against the settlers. It began to work, for the Indians went on the warpath and murdered people in outlying places. This naturally frightened the people, and after the Battle of Burnt Corn the people began to leave their homes and seek protection of the forts. It isn't known if any part of Fort Mims was built at an earlier date but just before the Battle of Burnt Corn the people united in constructing a fort around the home of Samuel Mims.

Mims was a wealthy Indian countryman who had once been a pack-horseman for George Golphin. Mims house was 400 yards east of the Boat Yard and one mile east of the Alabama River. The house was a large one-story frame building with spacious shed rooms. Around it pickets were driven, between which fence rails were placed. Five hundred port holes were made  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet above the ground. The stockading enclosed an acre of ground, in a square form, and was entered by a gate on the east and one on the west. Within the enclosure, beside the main building were various out houses, together with cabins and board shelters, which had been erected by the people who moved into the fort, wherever a vacant spot appeared. At the southwest corner a blockhouse was started but never finished. There was a large potato field on the south, woods were between the fort and the lake (this would be to the west), to the north were cane swamps and on the east were flat lands covered with cane brakes at intervals with some large ravines. It was altogether a most ill chosen place for a fort, as was ultimately proven.

General Claiborne placed Major Daniel Beasley in command of the Fort, and told him to strengthen the picketing, build two more block houses, respect the enemy and send out scouts frequently. Major Beasley did extend the picketing on the east side for sixty feet and formed a separate part for the officers. He weakened his command by sending small detachments to Fort Madison, Easley, Pierce, and to Joshua Kennedy's saw mill where some citizens had gathered. The mill would have been about 20 to 25 miles to the south on Rains Creek.

Pickett says that the population of Fort Mims now was 553 souls. Being crowded together like this in an Alabama swamp, in the month of August, you can see that there had to be much sickness.

Beasley and Claiborne kept up a correspondence. Beasley told him of many false alarms about Indian attacks. But, on August 30, 1813, they had relaxed their vigilance, dinner was about to be served, the soldiers were lying around on the ground, the young people were dancing, the children were running from tent to tent, while one thousand warriors in war paint lay in a ravine four hundred yards from the east gate thirsting for American blood. The east gate was open and recent rains had washed sand against it. When the awful moment came that these warriors rose and rushed the fort, Beasley tried to close the gate, but to no avail.

The weak, wounded and feeble were pressed to death and trodden under foot. There was one immense mass of human beings herded together too close to defend themselves.

This terrible battle lasted from about twelve o'clock until five. About five o'clock the Indians began to scalp all the victims, since the British Agent at Pensacola had offered \$5.00 for each scalp.

Only about fifteen persons were able to escape. Among these were Dr. Thomas G. Holmes who made his home in Tensaw and is buried on the site of his home place. Edward Steadham lived in this vicinity and is buried in the cemetery at Montgomery Hill Church.

After several days General Claiborne sent Major Joseph P. Kennedy with a detachment of men to bury the dead. When they arrived they found bodies scattered everywhere. They dug two pits and buried everyone in these common graves. The main buildings in the fort were burned to ashes, which was filled with bones.

After the destruction of Fort Mims, Fort Montgomery was built in 1814 to accommodate the troops of Andrew Jackson who came to the rescue of the people in this area.

We can hardly think of Fort Mims without thinking of William Weatherford or Red Eagle. Major J. D. Driesback of North Baldwin County presented a paper on Red Eagle to the Alabama Historical Society at Tuscaloosa in January, 1884. He says that Weatherford was an extraordinary man and that no man has been more misrepresented or less understood. To him the stake to be fought for was the land of his childhood, the land where deer roamed and flowers bloomed and where his kindred slept. He considered the white man his foe since he was trying to drive him from his native land. He would have been called a coward had he joined forces with the whites and this he couldn't take. He also felt that maybe he could help the women and children that fell into the hands of his warriors. These reasons were given by him and it is said of him that he never lied. But as in the case of Fort Mims he started the storm but then couldn't control it.

On the night before the attack on Fort Mims they camped about ten miles to the north on David Tait's Plantation. Weatherford made a speech to his warriors and told them they were to fight warriors and not women and children. When he saw what was happening at Fort Mims and realized he had no power to stop it, he rode away back to the plantation where they had camped the night before.

After the war was over Weatherford became a citizen of this part of the county. He owned a fine plantation and a number of slaves. He was highly esteemed and respected for his strict integrity and manly qualities. He died in 1824 and now sleeps by the side of his mother, Sehoy, on the same spot where he camped and made his speech on the night before the attack on Fort Mims.

Religion has always played an important part in the life of the Tensaw community. Tensaw claims the first protestant church in Alabama organized in 1803 by Lorenza Dow. The first services were held under a brush arbor then later in a log school building. The Holly Creek Church building was built by Mr. Davis who was a wealthy settler and a Methodist from South Carolina. He owned a saw mill and gave the lumber for this building. This church served both Methodist and Baptist until the Baptist decided to build a church of their own. This building was used until 1900. It has since been demolished. All that is left on the site is a Baptismal Hole. This can be seen off Highway 59 near Holly Creek.

The deed to the property of the Montgomery Hill Church is dated March 25, 1822. Members of the building committee were Dr. T.W. Belt, Thomas Atkinson, Thomas G. Holmes, and Edward Steadham. The contractor was John Blake. The building was completed in 1854 at a cost of \$1,400. Still in use today the Montgomery Hill Church is much the same as when completed 119 years ago. The pews are the ones that were installed when the church was built. The same old light fixtures were wired and rehund by Pierce Holmes, a former member of this church.

North Baldwin County claims several historic firsts:

1. First American School taught by William Pierce of Massachusetts.
2. First Post Office in Baldwin County 1811.
3. First Missionary, Lorenza Dow, 1803.
4. First Methodist preacher Matthew P. Sturdevant preached at Tensaw in 1808.
5. First appointee from Alabama to United States Military Academy at West Point - David Moniac.
6. First Military hospital in Baldwin County which was at Fort Montgomery in 1814.
7. First distillery in Alabama erected by James McGirth at Tensaw.
8. Second cotton gin in Alabama owned by the Pierce Brothers at Tensaw.

Many distinguished people whose names have appeared on the pages of history books were visitors to this area. Lorenza Dow, Albert Pickett, Sam Dale, Andrew Jackson and his wife, Rachael, William Bartrom, the English naturalist spent some time with Major Robert Farmer in Stockton in 1777, and Aaron Burr who passed thru here on his way to Washington to stand trial.

All that is left of Tensaw today is its history, but so much of our early history lies there that it should be an interesting place to visit.