

THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 276
Brewton, Alabama 36426

December 6, 1973

Newsletter

Carolyn Pugh McLendon, Editor

NOTICE OF MEETING - In place of our December meeting an OLD FASHIONED CHRISTMAS PARTY has been planned and will take place on Tuesday night, December 18, 1973, at 7:00 p.m. (our regular meeting night) and will be in the new auditorium on the campus of the Jefferson Davis Junior College. Bring as many guests as you like. Delightful yesteryear refreshments are being prepared under the leadership of Mrs. Bert Campbell, Jr., who, with her committee, will act as hostesses in serving the "old fashioned" refreshments. If you've never heard of syllabub, you better come to find out about it. The 1971-1973 out-going officers will form a receiving line at each of the entrances to the lobbies. Dr. E.D. Rosemore will appoint a Master of Ceremonies and judges (not necessarily qualified) for the "yesteryear costume contest" on stage in the auditorium at 8:00 p.m. Entertainment, as in times of long ago, will be a short period of story-telling and singing--audience participation fully expected for both stories and songs. A few people will be appointed to tell funny stories of "things past" and riddles of long ago. The success of this part of the entertainment will depend upon you. After the contest and "entertainment" we will revisit the refreshment tables. We hope to have 200-250 in attendance. I urge as many of you as can to dress to enter the costume contest.

STILL MORE MEMBERS, total 220 now: Mrs. Estelle J. Smith, Evergreen, Rhoderick M. Williams, Warrington, Fla., Joseph A. Jackson, Signal Mountain, Tennessee.

GOT THE CHRISTMAS SHOPPING BLUES? - The answer to your problems is a gift membership to the Escambia County Historical Society. You may enter the subscription for the 1973 publications or for 1974, or, for an extra special gift, both 1973 and 1974. Just send the check for \$5.00 in with mailing instructions, and our secretary, Miss Helen Robertson, will do the rest.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO MEMBERS - The January meeting will be our annual meeting and new officers will be elected for a two-year term. Harry Weaver has been named Chairman of the Nominating Committee. From January through March we will be having the annual membership drive and will mail out invitations to interested persons. If you know of persons who would like to receive an invitation and application form please give us their names and addresses. Your dues should be paid before March 15th or you will not receive the March quarterly. An index to the four 1973 Quarterlies is being prepared and will be mailed in January. If you are interested in having the 1973 Quarterlies and index bound you may contact Miss Janel Redditt at the college library, as she is going to have a cost estimate made. IT HAS BEEN A VERY GOOD YEAR, AND WE HOPE THAT 1974 WILL BE EQUALLY SUCCESSFUL FOR THE SOCIETY.

THE ALABAMA GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, INC. is now accepting members for 1974, dues \$6.50 should be mailed to Miss Alice M. Lee, Treasurer, Route 1, Box 408, Fort Deposit, Ala. 36032.

A NEW HISTORY OF PIKE COUNTY, entitled "One Hundred Fifty Years In Pike County, Alabama, 1821-1971," by Margaret Pace Farmer, more than 500 pages, hardbound cover, is available for \$10.00 from Pike Pioneer Museum, Troy, Alabama 36081.

WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE from M. Brooks Hayes, Blountstown, Florida, an original copy of the GEORGE GRANBERRY MUSIC CLUB YEAR BOOK, 1931-1932; and from Bryant C. Smith, Jr., of Burbank, California original program of September 30, 1945, Services of Installation of Rev. James Herbert Gailey, Jr., Th.D. as Pastor of The First Presbyterian Church, Brewton, Alabama and The Presbyterian Church, Evergreen, Alabama.

ESCAMBIA'S GOPHER FARM

Compiled by
Mrs. Annie Crook Waters

In the January 7, 1909 Pine Belt News there appears an article on a very unique farm. It was operated by Robert Emmons who was nearing his eightieth birthday and was located three miles northwest of Flomaton, Alabama. Mr. Emmons relates his story:

"When I first moved here, fifty-nine years ago, I found seven gopher eggs. They all hatched and every one lived. This year one of them ran away. That leaves me with only six of the originals. My largest gopher got caught in a steel trap not many days ago. I think he was fully seventy years old. Kilby Wiggins gave him to me something like five or ten years before the Civil War and the animal was five or ten years old when he brought him in.

"My oldest gophers are older than all my children except two and I have 80 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren, and the gophers are not grown. I have heard that they live 150 years, but my opinion is they live longer than that. It takes any animal about one-third of its natural life to get fully grown and matured. Now, if the gopher requires eighty years to get grown, in my judgment he will live at least 200 years or more.

"He comes just as near eating anything as any animal you ever heard of. Grass of any kind, cotton, watermelons, peaches, plums, potatoes, corn, and all garden vegetables. He has a peculiar fondness for the Indian potato. He thrives better on pursley than anything else. He might take a chew of tobacco if you passed it around.

"I draw water and pour it in a hole like a hog wallow and they come and drink like horses or any other stock. Gophers have some funny ways. When you see one throwing dirt out of his cave you may know that it will rain in twenty-four hours. I have never seen it fail in 50 years. In my judgment he piles the dirt at the mouth of the cave as a dam to keep the water out. When it thunders he is sure to go to the bottom of his cave and when he comes out again you may rest assured that the weather is settled.

"He goes to sleep in winter like the snake and the frog and never makes his appearance in spring until all cold weather is past. I have never seen any frost after the appearance of my gophers.

"All the mother does for the young gopher is to lay the egg at the mouth of the cave about six inches deep in the sand. When they hatch they go to the bottom of the cave and from that time on shift for themselves. All young gophers have a soft place in the middle of

the breast like the baby's head. You can hold a one year old gopher between you and the sun and easily see his internal organs at work.

"I have about 300 gophers, and have eaten about 50 this year. That is what I raise them for. I don't use him as an ornament. He is a failure in that line. They have paths like hogs to the well and all around the place. I can go to any den and call the inmates out like so many pigs." He demonstrated to the writer by going to the mouth of the den, patting on the ground and calling to them. They knew his voice and came out, but will run from strangers.

"When I am gone I want my posterity to take these original gophers and keep them as long as they live. I want them to fully determine the actual life of the animal."

I wonder if any of Mr. Emmons' descendants can fill us in on the outcome of the original gophers. An editor of a north Alabama paper who read the article in the Pine Belt News wrote the editor and asked, "As a native of north Alabama I have never seen or heard of a gopher; what kind of an animal is he? Does he have a skin or scales?" Editor Sowell answered his query explaining that he was a burrowing land tortoise (*gopherus polyphemus*) with a hard shell, and invited the northern editor down to enjoy some gopher gumbo. For sometime thereafter there was a running joke between the two editors.

---Contributed by Mrs. Annie C. Waters

STARS FELL ON ALABAMA - The coming of the Kohoutek Comet, proclaimed to be the comet of the century, brings to mind the night of November 12-13, 1833, an event that has become a landmark in state history. According to Lucille Griffith's HISTORY OF ALABAMA, "Huntsville was the scene of great commotion, particularly among the blacks who were praying and shouting, thinking the day of judgment had come. There was temporarily a great revival among the Christians of whatever color who interpreted the falling stars as signs of approaching doom. At Fayette Court House a group of carousing young men took alarm and went rushing to the house of the Methodist preacher and roused him up and had him offer prayer, but next day each was joking about how bad the others had been scared."

According to The Florence Gazette, November 16, 1833, "Thousands of luminous meteors were shooting across the firmament in every direction; their course was from the center of the concave toward the horizon, and then they seemed to burst as if by explosion. The scene was as magnificent as it was wonderful. To the eye it appeared to be in reality a "falling" of the stars..."

Comets have not always been eagerly awaited. For centuries people thought of them as harbingers of disaster. Jewish chronicles tell of a great flaming sword that appeared over Jerusalem in 69 A.D. just before the city fell to the Romans, others supposedly forecast earthquakes, floods, the Black Death, and in 1456, Pope Calixtus added this prayer to the litany: "Lord save us from the devil, the Turk, and the Comet." Halley's Comet which last appeared in 1910, will make another appearance in 1986.

--The Editor