

ESCAMBIA ECHOES

September 14, 1976

1776 - 1976



BELLEVILLE BAPTIST CHURCH  
Belleville, Ala.

Published by:  
The Escambia County  
Historical Society  
P.O. Box 276  
Brewton, Alabama 36426

Carolyn Pugh McLendon,  
Editor

Annual Membership Dues  
\$6.00

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*FALL PILGRIMAGE\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

The Pilgrimage will take the place of the September meeting.

PILGRIMAGE TO BELLEVILLE, CONECUH COUNTY, ALABAMA - Saturday.

September 25th, 1976, by motorcade, leaving from the courthouse parking lot at Brewton at 1:00 p.m. Bring a sack lunch or picnic basket (whichever you prefer). We will go first to the Hampden Ridge Methodist Church, then to the Belleville Methodist Church and Cemetery which has several burials from the old Sardis Methodist Cemetery, then to "The Country Place," a home built in 1830 to which we have been given a warm welcome by Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Williamson, and to the Belleville Baptist Church which has a slave gallery, and its adjoining cemetery. MRS. MARGARET GASTON is our Tour Chairman for this Pilgrimage and has done an excellent job in making the arrangements. We will have our picnic supper at the Belleville Baptist Church where the ladies of the church have graciously offered to furnish cokes and coffee to go with our sack lunches. A brief history of Hampden Ridge is contained in this newsletter. You may also refer to the April, 1975 newsletter for another Hampden Ridge history written by Miss Elizabeth Riley. A history of "The Country Place" appeared in our September, 1975 newsletter, also written by Miss Riley. As "hand-out" material on the pilgrimage a History of the Belleville Baptist Church by Mrs. Margaret Gaston and lists of the burials in the Baptist Cemetery and Methodist Cemetery, also compiled by Mrs. Gaston, as well as a copy of the Act of Alabama creating the Belleville Male and Female Academy in 1854, will be given to those participating in the Pilgrimage. We extend a welcome to anyone wishing to join the group for the tour. The conduct of The Escambia County Historical Society and its guests on its events has always been exemplary and we count on anyone who attends to conduct themselves accordingly. IN CASE OF RAIN THE TOUR WILL BE HELD THE FOLLOWING SATURDAY, ALSO BEGINNING AT 1:00 P.M.

\*\*\*\*\*

Alabama Historical Association Pilgrimage to Fort Payne, Alabama, October 30. Any of our members wishing to go to Fort Payne with me, please call Carolyn McLendon, 867-4881 or 867-2382. I will be representing your society on the Morning Program.

MORE GIFTS from our benefactor, Duncan Merriwether of Chester Springs, Fa.: "BENEATH SOUTHERN SOD" containing mesne burials over the southern parts of Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, published 1964; "Pike County, Alabama Abstract of Wills, Will Book A, 1830-1862" compiled in 1963; and "Henry County, Alabama Genealogical Records" published in 1963.

QUERY: Information wanted re: Irvin Wilson born around 1834 in Red Level. He was living with his family in Escambia County in 1880. Martha Cooper Pugh born in Escambia County around 1840; and Gordeny Smith Downing also born in Escambia County around the 1840's. If you have information regarding these persons contact Sandra Wilcox Ray, 102 Bonnie Brae, Denton, Texas 76201.

---

#### HAMPDEN RIDGE

Copied from booklet "People and Places of Conecuh County, Alabama, 1816 to 1860" published by the Conecuh County Historical Society, Robert H. Jones, Jr., Evergreen, Alabama, President. The booklet may be purchased with accompanying map from Mr. Jones for \$5.00.

The first permanent settlement within the present boundaries of what is now Conecuh County was made in 1816 by Alexander Autrey and his wife, Parthenia Bulloch Irvin, on a high range of hills west of Murder Creek. Fort Autrey was established here from which early settlers moved further into the eastern and southern sections of the county. Later Fort Autrey became Hampden and finally Hampden Ridge.

The origin of the name Hampden is clarified by an entry made in the diary of Edwin Robinson, founder of Brooklyn on Sepulga River in the southeastern end of the county. He writes: "Houghton and myself bought a few goods and established ourselves at Murder Creek at a place which we afterwards named Hampden where Major Thomas now lives. This place was then the seat of government for Conecuh County. I arrived at this place December 26, 1818." From the reading of the diary, it would seem that Alexander Autrey, Mabry Thomas, Edwin Robinson and Dr. Houghton had all agreed that this would be a fitting name for the site. Alexander Autrey built his house in front of the fort, and the house of Major Mabry Thomas was close by. An interesting sidelight about the old fort is that tradition states that the first white child born in Conecuh County was born here. His name was Richard Baggett.

One of the first public roads in the county ran through Hampden from Belleville to Sparta linking these two centers of settlement and trade with the county seat. The Territorial Legislature required that courts may, "for the time being, be holden at the house of Mabry Thomas." A one room log house with clay floor was built for this purpose, and it withstood the elements until it was burned by a woods fire in the 1920's. The little community did not enjoy the distinction for long for Sparta was chosen by popular vote as the new seat of government in 1820, and it was to remain so for the next 46 years.

Of these four earliest settlers at Fort Autrey and their influence, much could be written. After serving as physician and faithful friend, Dr. Houghton died early in 1821. Edwin Robinson moved southeast and founded Brooklyn and vast plantations in the Sepulga River Basin. Major Mabry Thomas continued to live at Hampden Ridge and served his county in many capacities with great distinction. Alexander Autrey, according to the census reports of the period had accumulated considerable wealth before he died in 1857. He had given each of his surviving children large plantations in nearby parts of the county or had made

property settlements if they wished to migrate to other parts of the South. As a result, at the time of his death, his administrator sold his home plantation of 2600 acres at Hampden Ridge to Hon. William Adam Ashley, a son-in-law of Major Mabry Thomas, for \$11,926.49 in gold, a staggering sum at that period. This is recorded in the Conecuh County Courthouse in Deed Book "V", page 131.

With the arrival of the Ashley Family, Hampden Ridge enjoyed new life, for Hon. William Adam Ashley was a Senator in the Alabama Legislature. Later, he served with distinction in the Secession Convention which carried Alabama into the Confederate States of America.

After 1865, the plantations declined, but for the convenience of the families living there, a post office was established with J.P. Anderson as postmaster.

Little remains at Hampden Ridge today to mark the site of Conecuh County's first permanent settlement. There are the ruins of chimneys at the Autrey-Ashley House and at the Thomas-Suddith House, the depressions where old cellars have partially filled and the mute testimony of the Thomas-Ashley-Anderson Cemetery lovingly cared for by descendants who remember.

#### SOME EARLY LAND OWNERS OF HAMPDEN RIDGE AND VICINITY:

Alexander Autrey, John S. Autrey, William S. Autrey, Abram Baggett, John Bell, Benjamin Blow, William Bonnell, Blanton Box, Eli Bradley, Samuel Bradley, Fielding Bradford, John Bradford, Samuel Brantley, Zachariah Brown, Samuel Burnett, James A. Cary, George W. Clover, William Coleman, John H. Cowsant, Chesley Crosby, John Crosby, Sarah Crosby, William Crosby, Carey Curry, William Curry, Alexander Donald, Hezekiah Donald, Joel Duke, John Farnell, John Farnham, John H. Franham, Alexander Fuguson, Daniel F. Fuguson, John Fuguson, Cyrus Gill, John Gillies, Samuel Greenlee, William H. Hamilton, John Hawkins, Wiley Hawkins, Charles D. Hunter, Starke Hunter, James Ingraham, David Johnson, Catherine King, William King, John C. Lassiter, John McIntyre, Samuel W. Oliver, Whiting W. Oliver, James Ormank, Robert Pendleton, Andrew Pickens, John G. Porter, Stephen C. Richardson, Layayette Robertson, John Sampey, Robert Savage, Thomas Simpson, Thomas W. Simpson, William Simpson, John G. Smith, Elizabeth Taylor, Jordan Taylor, William Taylor, John A. Thomas, Mabry Thomas, Thomas Watts, Willie Williams.

---

#### BELLVILLE SCHOOL GIRLS

By: E.J. Hardy, a teacher in the Bellville Academy

Sweet little Kittie, the smallest of all,  
Comes tripping along with feet so small.  
Next comes the Maggies, number one and two.  
And pretty little Florence, I'll not forget you.  
Next is Ophelia, walking down the lane,  
Then we have another bright, smiling little Jane.  
And Sidney Mae glides swiftly by--the fairest of the fair,  
With books and bonnet in her hand, with light, plaited hair;  
And Kate comes next in her playful way with heart light and free.  
If any girl should get hurt, she is sorry as can be.  
Then we have Belle with laughing eyes, in the crowd is seen,  
Laughing, playing, skipping about in the hall and on the green.  
Next is Annie, Oh! beautiful girl,  
Comes in with blushing face and hair matted with curls.  
Otie is next, who is quite a lady, you see, in position,  
But Bettie, the largest of all these is best in disposition.  
Now these are all, both great and small  
That go to school in Bellville Hall.