

ESCAMBIA ECHOES

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-MAY 1981-

SOCIETY GET TOGETHER

There will be no May meeting of the Escambia County Historical Society. Instead, on Tuesday, June 2 at 7:00 PM, there will be a societal party in honor of Jefferson Davis's birthday at Mrs. Thomas E. (Elvira) McMillan's home at 105 McLellan in Brewton. Meat and rolls will be furnished, but members attending are requested to bring such dishes as casseroles, salads, desserts, or relishes. Members are invited to bring guests. Please let us know that you are going to be able to attend by calling 867-3093, 867-4444, or 867-4626. Please do come for an enjoyable and friendly evening get together.

QUARTERLY RETRACTION

The articles, "Grandfathers" and "Grandmothers", which appeared in the March Historical Society Quarterly, were written by Mrs. J. Greeley (Essie Stallworth) McGowin. Mrs. Annie C. Waters' name appeared as the author of these articles due to an inadvertent copy typist's error. Mrs. McGowin was writing about her grandmother, Ophelia Crosby Stallworth, and her grandfather, Mr. Joseph Jackson Stallworth in these pieces.

The editorial staff apologizes for this oversight, hoping that it caused no difficulties or confusion on the parts of readers.

MUSEUM NEWS

As the college's Spring academic quarter draws to a close, the museum is looking forward to a summer of exhibit improvements and additions. The archaeological materials recovered from Forts Montgomery and Crawford and Cantonment Montpelier--dating from the period of 1814-1821--are now in the process of being preserved and sorted for final placement in exhibits and study collections.

Dr. Ronald Peters, D.D.S., of Brewton has donated a turn-of-the-century medical-dental cabinet with an assortment of dental instruments and accessories which will form the mainstay of an early dentistry exhibit. We are searching for a pedal-powered dental drill unit to fill out the display.

M. Kieth Allen of Milton, Florida has donated a collection of antique tools to be used in the blacksmithing display. He and Mr. Hank Locklin of McLellan, Florida have also donated materials to be used in a planned showing of nineteenth century cotton production in South Alabama.

Mrs. C.E. Garrett of Brewton has donated a blue wool, red striped swimsuit and a brass-handled formal parasol, both used in 1900, for inclusion in the museum's costume and dress collection. Both items are in an outstanding state of preservation, and they will be exhibited as soon as exhibit facilities are prepared for that purpose.

MEMORIALS

Due to its length, the following memorial biography will constitute the remainder of this newsletter. Members and readers are reminded that we are seeking biographical articles such as this for the sake of the preservation of our area's heritage and for ultimate preparation of a memorial book.

THOMAS E. MCMILLAN

Thomas Edward McMillan was born July 10, 1912 in his parents' home on Belleville Avenue in Brewton, Alabama. The son of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Leigh McMillan, Thomas was named for his maternal and paternal grandfathers; his maternal and paternal grandmothers lived next door to each other across the street from his home of birth, which was built by Uriah Blackshere and in which Thomas and his parents lived until 1929. At that time, the old homoplace, one of the earliest in Brewton, was torn down and salvaged to be used in the Georgian Colonial home that replaced it on the same spot.

Thomas was christened into the Universalist Church of Brewton when he was about six months old. He later attended Brewton Grammar School and participated in all of the school's activities. He became interested in music, taking piano lessons under Mrs. Hardy, who lived next door. Later, he played the saxophone with a band that was organized. He tired of his music and stopped playing when he reached high school age. His most intimate childhood playmates were Claud and Charlie Sawyer, George Yancey Shackelford, Sam Foshee, and Flournoy Lovelace.

When he was about eight years of age Thomas fell from the arched trellis under which his parents had been married and broke both arms. At the time, the boy told John David Finlay, "I couldn't be in a worse fix!" Finlay replied, "Oh, yes, you could; you could have the itch!"

He went to the Brewton High School named for his maternal grandfather, T.R. Miller. There, he participated in the Tutwiler Society, Glee Club, Football, Who's Who, Hardy Literary Society, Dramatic Club, Annual Staff, and Baseball. His high school friends included Oscar Gordon, Flournoy Lovelace, Sam Foshee, Daisy Miller Boyd, Marjorie Miller, Willa Gene Strain, Bernard C. Cooper. He graduated in 1929.

During the summers from 1926 to 1929, Thomas went to Culver Military Academy in Indiana, where he participated in Naval training and sports. When he was home, he spent much time at the family's summer home at Camp Palms, Florida, about ten miles from Port St. Joe and eighteen miles from Appalachicola. At this home, which was built in 1910, Thomas played, relaxed, and, later, entertained high school, college, and business friends.

From 1930 to 1931 McMillan attended Culver Military Academy full time. In addition to his studies and military training, he participated in varsity football, shellcrew, and boxing. He was selected to represent the Culver Y.M.C.A. at the Southern Students Conference. In the summer of 1930, he solicited students for the school all over Alabama; in the summer of 1931, he was made regimental Adjutant of the Corps of Cadets. Additionally, he won the gold medal for overall athletic accomplishments and he won the heavyweight boxing championship.

In the fall of 1931, McMillan transferred to the University of Alabama. Again, he participated fully in extracurricular activities, including: DKE fraternity; President, Freshman Class; President, Junior Class; member, Rho Alpha Tau fraternity; Football, '31, '32, and '33; Delegate to the

Constitutional Convention; and member of the "A" club. When McMillan was initiated into the Delta Kappa Epsilon ("Doke") fraternity, a special ceremony was held in which his father, Ed Leigh McMillan--himself a loyal D.K.E. member who had used his fraternity pin on Thomas' first diaper--presented the pin to his son.

Thomas started studying law during his final year in the university's A.B. school. As a result, he saved a year's time in law school.

While at the University of Alabama McMillan met Elvira Minge Cochrane of Tuscaloosa. A romance developed; when doctors decided it best for him to spend a year in the West, he and Elvira decided to marry before he had to go. They were married on August 11, 1935 in Montgomery, Alabama. After a hastily prepared but memorably happy ceremony, Thomas and Elvira went to South Florida and Cuba for their honeymoon. When they returned to Brewton, a 210-guest reception was held for them by his mother.

The couple went to Tucson, Arizona in the fall of 1935. There, he continued his study of Law at the University of Arizona. They returned to Brewton in the summer of 1936 and went to the University of Alabama the following fall, where Thomas received his Law degree in July, 1937.

While at the University the couple had their first child, Iva Leigh, on May 7, 1937. The child was born prematurely, however, and died four days after birth.

Upon graduating, McMillan came back to Brewton to enter his father's law firm, McMillan and Caffey, as a partner. He and his wife lived with his parents until their own home was built, a house that was given to them by his parents. The site chosen for the home was on the corner of Evergreen and McLellan streets, where once had stood the home of Jephtha Blacksher, a pioneer resident of Brewton.

On July 12, 1940, Ed Leigh McMillan II was born to the couple; the child was named for his grandfather. Like his father, Ed Leigh was christened in the Universalist Church at a tender age (February 16, 1941). Two more sons--Thomas E., Jr. and Robert C.--and a daughter, Katie, were born to Thomas and Elvira.

Dr. D. W. McMillan, Thomas' father's first cousin, left a large estate for charity in Escambia County, Alabama. Thomas's father was placed in charge of this estate, and Thomas inherited D. W.'s family paintings and a fine gun collection. These materials are still in the family, as is a fine library of rare books, many of which relate directly to the history of this region. Thomas E. was, like his father, intensely interested in the history of South Alabama and, in particular, the area of and near Brewton.

Thomas had always had an interest in cattle in addition to his commitment to his legal profession. His cattle activities were centered in and near Brewton and Brooklyn, and he also owned range lands in Conecuh County. As he built, bred, and developed his herd, Thomas's stock became some of the finest in the Deep South.

Thomas's primary interest and investment was law. Influential, energetic, and imaginative by nature, Thomas put his training to work in a myriad of areas, including land management and oil exploration. He was always successful in his endeavors, and he was extremely active almost constantly. With his offices at The Leigh Place (completed 1969), he operated with the community for its betterment and growth. He was closely associated with T.R. Miller Mill Company until his death, and he also owned McMillan Mill Company (Brewton) and was a partner in Ala-Flora Forest Products. The attorney for Southern Pine Electric Cooperative, he was also on the Board of Directors of T.R. Miller Mill Company, First National Bank, Cotton State Life Insurance Company (Tuscaloosa), Southland

National Life Insurance Co. (Tuscaloosa), Neal Lumber and Manufacturing Co., (Blountstown, Florida), and Neal Store Company, also in Blountstown.

Remaining active in the cattle business, he acquired Jay Villa Plantation, near Evergreen, Conecuh County, Alabama, to expand his cattle interests. He was also Vice President and Director for the Alabama Polled Herford Association, Director of the Southeastern Polled Herford Association, member of the Escambia County Cattlemen's Association, Member of the Alabama Cattlemen's Association, and Member of the National Cattlemen's association.

His civic interests and dedication were equally broad and involving. McMillan served as Vice President for the Gulf Coast Council, Boy Scouts of America and was presented the Silver Beaver award in 1970; he was presented the Dean's Award from the University of Alabama in 1973; member of the Official Board of the Brewton Universalist Church; received the distinguished service award from the Escambia County Historical Society in 1974; presented with the Alabama Historical Commission's Award of Merit for preserving and restoring Alabama's heritage, 1974; and, posthumously, he was awarded Brewton's Man of the Year in 1978.

Thomas E. McMillan died quite suddenly on June 27, 1977; he is buried in Union Cemetery, Brewton, Alabama.

In honor of his outstanding achievements in the fields of historic preservation and heritage conservation, the official museum of Escambia County, located on the campus of Jefferson Davis State Junior College in Brewton, which serves an area of 2,500 square miles, is named after him; this facility, the Thomas E. McMillan Museum, was dedicated in his memory on May 6, 1979.

Don't forget! There will be NO May meeting; we'll see you all at Elvira McMillan's home on Tuesday, June 2, at 7:00 PM!