

ESCAMBIA ECHOES
The Newsletter of the Escambia County Historical Society
May 2002 - Vol. 29, No. 5
Editor, Ranella Holley

The Next Meeting

Date: Tuesday, May 28, 2002; **Time:** 3:00 p.m.; **Location:** The Thomas E. McMillan Museum on the JDCC Campus; **Program:** Guest Speaker James W. "Bill" Carroll; for more information on Mr. Carroll, look at the end of the Newsletter; **Refreshments:** Louise Stone

The April Meeting

Wes Hardin, who painted the **large mural** in downtown Brewton, was the guest speaker. With the original model for the painting behind him, Mr. Hardin discussed the **steps in the process of producing a wall mural** and the changes and adjustments that were made in the one for Brewton. He is delighted that people have looked at the mural in such detail that they feel free to give him comments and suggestions about it.

In **designing his murals for buildings**, such as the one in Brewton, he pointed out that he takes into consideration the **doors and windows**, designing his painting so that these architectural features will seem to be a part of the painting rather than an obstruction. He tries to never cover up a door or window since this would interfere with the building's function.

He told the group about the model he painted for a mural about **the Battle of Burnt Corn**, for which he did extensive reading and research. However, when he showed his preliminary sketches to some "authorities on the subject of the battle," he was told that he **had it all wrong**. Seemingly this is typical of the life of the artist who recreates historical events.

Mr. Hardin said he was not a great student of history in school but has come to love it and enjoys doing murals about **historical events** more than anything else. He is still working on the mural which will advertise the **Rhett Butler Truck Company** (scenes from Gone with the Wind, of course). He said that designing a painting to cover the truck trailer has been quite a challenge.

According to Hardin, **the mural in Brewton** has been constructed to last for many years. In fact, he said that if the building were demolished, the wall with the painting would probably be one of the last parts to come down. Hopefully the funds will soon be available for Mr. Hardin's **other murals for Brewton**.

And, in case any of you wanted to know, **Wes Hardin** admits to a connection with the infamous gunslinger/outlaw **John Wesley Hardin**, who had a “**Pollard connection.**”

In other business of the meeting, **President Darryl Searcy** presented the **editor of the Newsletter** with a framed card, which is a picture of a beautiful Monet watercolor, and a Certificate of Appreciation from the Society. The beautiful card was sent by a Society member with her dues as a note of appreciation of the Newsletter.

The Society also honored two of its trustees, **Elvira McMillan** and **Doris Bruner**, with birthday cakes and corsages. Doris Bruner was unable to attend the meeting and her cake and corsage were taken to her.

Welcome to New Members

We welcome **Ted Searcy** of **Dallas Texas**, **Nell Pitts** of **Brewton**, and **Ann (Annie) Smith**, formerly a Brewton resident who now lives in Repton, and **Wes Hardin** of **Dothan**.

Ted Searcy is an **older brother** (by six years) of Society President **Darryl Searcy**. **Ted** and his wife **Lois** have lived in Dallas since 1977. They have four sons, all married and away from home.

A **retired vice president for industrial development** with the **Santa Fe Railroad**, he began his career in transportation with the **Waterman Steamship Company**. He then joined the **Southern Pacific Railroad** and served as traveling secretary to a vice president of the company. Eventually Southern Pacific and Santa Fe merged and he moved to Dallas.

A published author, his book, **Remembered Names – Forgotten Faces**, can be found in the Brewton Public Library. He travels extensively throughout Europe and America and is working on a second novel.

Nell Pitts became interested in the Historical Society through her research into her family's history. She has made good use of the materials in the Alabama Room.

Annie Smith, a gifted artist, has promised our President, **Darryl Searcy**, to do a program for us sometime this year on painting.

Wes Hardin, our guest speaker for the April meeting, received a year's membership in appreciation of his presentation.

News About Members

Brooke Walker, **Society Librarian**, plans a trip back home to Maine this spring. She is a true “Maniac” who can't wait to get back to her beautiful home state with lots of natural scenery and few folks.

Annie Smith will be taking a trip to Europe.

We missed **Lynn Wixon, our Vice-President**, at the April meeting, and hope her husband's health continues to improve.

Memorial Day/Decoration Day

Honoring the dead by decorating their graves with garlands of flowers, candles, wreaths, is a custom that was practiced among very ancient civilizations, the Druids, the Greeks, the Romans, the Chinese. **In the United States**, the custom of honoring the dead, specifically veterans of war, began during the **Civil War**. **Women** in many communities in the south began decorating the graves of the dead soldiers with flowers before the war ended. The American Book of Days states that in the north also, there were "spontaneous gestures of remembrance." For instance, **Waterloo, New York** honored the war dead on May 5, 1866 by suspending business so that citizens could participate in the ceremonies at three cemeteries in the area, decorating the graves of the war dead with flowers, and flying flags at half-mast.

In describing the **designation of an official Memorial Day**, one source, (the Book of Days), records that Adjutant General Norton P. Chipman of the grand Army of the Republic, the organization of Union veterans, realized that the nation was eager to honor the war dead and suggested to **General John A. Logan**, head of the G. A. R., that their organization should arrange to decorate the graves of Union soldiers on a uniform date throughout the country. Thus, General Logan issued **General Order No. 11 on May 5, 1868** proclaiming that the thirtieth day of May would be the official day for "strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country" (American Book of Days).

An internet source ("Confederate Memorial Day"), relates that General Logan was so impressed with the way the **south was honoring its dead** that he decided that there must be a day to **honor the Union dead**. Many southern states refused to acknowledge the day, honoring their dead on separate days, **Confederate Memorial Days**, until after World War I, when the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to honoring Americans who died fighting in any war. Now southern states that observe a Confederate Memorial Day also observe the national Memorial Day.

In 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation shifting the dates of several holidays to provide Americans with an increased number of three-day weekends. Memorial day was one of those and is now observed on the last Monday in May. Today, **the meaning of Memorial Day** has expanded, so that many families observe it as a time to honor all of the deceased members of their families, not just veterans.

Some of the notable observances of Memorial Day include (source, an internet page, "Memorial Day History"):

- **At Arlington National Cemetery**, the 1,200 soldiers of the Third U. S. Infantry, on the Thursday before Memorial day, place small American flags at each of the more than 260,000 graves and then patrol 24 hours a day during the weekend to ensure that the flags are still standing.
- **At Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park** in Virginia, girl scouts and boy scouts place a candle at each of the approximately 15,300 graves.

Escambia County's observance of Memorial Day on May 27, 2002 will take place at the Veterans Memorial in front of the Court House, and will include the laying of a wreath, remarks by Retired Colonel J. Fred Mitchell, and the Honor Roll Call.

Our Speaker - James W. "Bill" Carroll

On **September 3, 1944**, Bill Carroll rode his U. S. Army motorcycle into the town square of **Peruwelz, Belgium**, a small city of 10,000 on the French-Belgium border, just as the occupying forces were leaving. Someone took a picture of the **smiling Mr. Carroll**, his Harley-Davidson draped in flowers, surrounded by dozens of young woman and children, and that picture came to symbolize for the citizens of Peruwelz their liberation from German occupation.

For **fifty years** the people of Peruwelz believed that the young man who had represented liberty to them, was dead, killed shortly after he visited their city. However, they continued to honor him, displaying his picture at **City Hall** and in the church where he was remembered each year in a **Mass in his honor**. He became part of the town's **legends about the war**, according to the article, "An American Hero" (Wall Street Journal). His picture was sold in a hat shop on the town square, the story of his ride into town was taught in school, a taxi driver told of handing the young man a flask of cognac, the young women of the time, when they grew up to become mothers, told their children that they had danced with the young soldier, and the young men recounted that they had ridden on his motorcycle.

In 1994, when the town planned to put **flowers on Bill Carroll's grave**, Belgian researchers began to try to locate it. When they could not find the grave, one Belgian professor contacted a military researcher who used the **photographed logo on the front of the motorcycle** to identify an armor unit, the veterans in it, and finally Bill Carroll of Brewton.

Today, Mr. Carroll is still a "household word" in the town of Peruwelz with his picture on placemats, posters, and in news columns. The

parades in his honor, which began in 1995, “encompass several neighboring towns, last all day and include about 125 military vehicles” (source, “Brewton Veteran Heralds Freedom,” Pensacola News Journal). Bill Carroll has made several trips to Belgium to participate in the celebrations, and **citizens from Belgium and neighboring towns** have made two visits to Brewton (in 1996 and 2000) to join Mr. Carroll in touring parts of the U. S.

In 1996, the visitors from Belgium who toured the Gulf Coast with Mr. Carroll, were especially interested in fishing villages with French names. In the most recent visit, July 2000, a group of about forty citizens of Belgium, Holland, France, and Luxembourg came to Brewton bringing with them fifteen vintage, World War II, military vehicles. Calling the visit “**Operation Overlord Returns**,” the contingent had come to the U. S. to celebrate with Mr. Carroll, since his health did not permit him to go to Peruwelz to participate in the festivities there.

Drafted into the army in 1942, Bill Carroll **left the army in 1965** after a twenty-two year career in the military, which included twelve years in post-war Germany and participation in the Korean War. After leaving the army, he worked in the **library at the University of Minnesota** and was **part-time Mayor of Hilltop, Minnesota** from 1974-1978. He retired to Brewton when he was 69.

Books for Sale

	Mailed	Regular Price
<u>A History of Escambia County</u>	\$55.00	\$50.00
<u>Headstones and Heritage</u>	\$40.00	\$35.00
<u>Escambia Historical Society Cookbook</u>	\$10.00	\$ 5.00

Get in Touch with Us

The editor of the Newsletter would like to share information and news about members of the society in the Newsletter each month. Let me hear from you.

Address: Escambia County Historical Society, P. O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427; **Phone:** 251-809-1612;

New Email Address for Editor: Ranny1@earthlink.net

❖ Deadline for Membership Fees.

- **The Society’s policy is that members must pay their membership fees within six months of the due date or be dropped from the membership list.**
- **The deadline for payment is July 1, 2002.**

- ❖ Send the **\$10.00** Membership/Renewal Fee, now due, to the **Treasurer: Peggy Bracken, 602 Edgewood Drive, Brewton, AL 36426.**
- ❖ Please clip the following form and return whether you are mailing Membership fees or not, so that we can verify addresses.

Membership Renewal/Application Form

Name				
	First	Middle	Last	
Address				
	Street	City	State	Zip
Phone				
Email				