

ECHOES

The Newsletter of the Escambia County Historical Society

February 2004 - Vol. 31, No. 2

Editor, Ranella Holley

THE NEXT MEETING

Date: February 24, 2004; **Time:** 3:00 p. m.; **Place:** The Thomas E. McMillan Museum on the JDCC Campus; **Program:** The speaker for the Feb. 24th ECHS meeting will be **Tim Currie**, Manager of Frank Currie Gin Company, a division of Alabama Farmers Coop. The gin is located in McCullough, Alabama. Mr. Currie will speak on the history of cotton ginning in Escambia County, Alabama: **Refreshments:** Pat McArthur and Darryl Searcy.

THE JANUARY MEETING

Society members were pleased with the plans Dr. Susan McBride (JDCC President) presented for moving the materials and equipment in the Alabama Room into the Museum. She stressed the valuable partnership she sees between the College and the Historical Society to work together to preserve the history of the area as well as make available to the public historical materials for research. She also spoke of the College's plans to make greater use of the Museum by developing programs to bring in area school children and making the Museum accessible on such occasions as the Blueberry Festival.

Paul Merritt, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, presented a slate of officers to lead the society for 2004-2005, which, with no additional nominations from the floor, members voted to accept.

ECHS Officers for 2004-2005

President: Lynn Wixon.

Vice-President: Ann Biggs-Williams

Secretary: Jacque Stone

Treasurer: Peggy Bracken

Curator/Historian: Darryl Searcy

Librarian: Brooke Walker

Editor Newsletter/Journal: Ranella Holley

Publicity Director: Lydia Grimes.

Lynn Wixon presented Darryl with a beautiful plaque for his outstanding service as president, while guests and members gave Darryl a standing ovation.

Darryl distributed a review of the accomplishments of the Society during his two years as President. There are extra copies available for anyone who would like a copy.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT

"I would like to thank the Escambia County Historical Society membership for allowing me to be your President for years 2004-2005. I know that we have many actions that will be required of us during this time and I am sure that your slate of officers will represent you well. We look forward to seeing you at our meetings. Lynn Wixon"

A REMINDER

Please check your records to see if you have paid your dues. The dues should be paid by the first of January each year.

ELI WHITNEY AND THE COTTON GIN



Since the history of cotton ginning in Escambia County is the subject of our program, a brief history lesson on Eli and his invention. The material and illustration are taken from the Web Site, Teaching with Documents, a part of the Digital Classroom of the National Archives and Records Administration <www.archives.gov>.

In 1792, Whitney, a graduate of Yale, came to work and live on a plantation in Georgia as a private tutor. He found that the cotton planters needed a machine that would make growing cotton profitable. The problem for the planters was that the long staple cotton, which was grown along the coast, could easily be separated from its seeds, but the variety that grew inland had sticky green seeds that were difficult to extract from the cotton boll.

The South needed to have a profitable crop to replace tobacco, which was declining in profits because of over-supply and soil exhaustion. Within seven months of coming to Georgia, he had invented a machine that could extract the seeds. He obtained a patent which granted him exclusive rights to the machine for fourteen years. He thought he could use the machine to make his fortune. After being granted his patent, he and a business partner made as many gins as possible, installing them all through the south.

Whitney and his partner charged two-fifths of the profit, paid in cotton, for any planter who wished to use his machine. The planters refused to pay the cost, stating the fee was too large. Planters began making their own versions of the machine and applying for patents for their “new invention.” Whitney’s partner, Pheneas Miller, sued the owners of the pirated versions of the gin, but because of a loophole in the law, the partners were not able to win any suits. They finally decided to license the machines at a reasonable cost. Eventually the partners arranged to sell the patent rights to South Carolina (for \$50,000), to Tennessee, and to North Carolina. Whitney never made the great profits on his machine that he had hoped for.

Whitney’s invention fueled not only the increase in the production of cotton (the yield of raw cotton doubled every year after 1800) but created a demand for other inventions of the Industrial Revolution – machines to spin and weave it and steamboats to transport it. By mid-century, the south was providing three quarters of the world’s supply of cotton.

Other effects of his invention on southern culture include the growth of slavery and the lack of development of cities and industries. Cotton growing was so profitable that it created a demand for more slaves and more land. The gin reduced the need for workers to remove the seeds but did not reduce the number of people necessary to grow and pick the cotton. In 1790 there were six slave states but in 1860 there were fifteen. From 1790 to 1808 Southerners imported 80,000 slaves. In 1860, approximately one in three southerners was a slave. Large plantations spread into the southwest and the price of slaves and land encouraged the growth of large plantations but not the growth of cities and industries. In the 1850’s, seven-eighths of the immigrants settled in the North where there was 72% of the nation’s manufacturing capacity.

Whitney not only invented the cotton gin, he also invented the mass production method inventing a way for mass producing muskets. Mass production demanded that the production of interchangeable parts. He was successful in creating machines to make the parts and was able to manufacture muskets by machine. It is his invention of the mass production method and the production of musket which enabled him to become rich, not the invention of the cotton gin. The article from the Digital Classroom ends with this summary of the impact of Whitney’s two big inventions on American history, “If his genius led King Cotton to triumph in the South, it also created the technology with which the North won the civil War.”

THOMAS HILL WATTS 1863-1865



Thanks to Darryl Searcy, we have this material on Alabama's governor at the beginning of the Civil War. The Picture, courtesy of the Web Site of the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH)
<<http://archives.state.al.us>>

Thomas Hill Watts was born in the Alabama Territory (near present day Greenville, Butler County) on January 3, 1819, the oldest of twelve children born to John Hughes Watts and Prudence Hill who had moved from Georgia to find the better lands of the frontier. Prepared for college at the Airy Mount Academy in Dallas County, Watts graduated with honors from the University of Virginia in 1840. He passed the bar examination the next year, and began practicing law in Greenville. In 1848 he moved his lucrative law practice to Montgomery. He also became a successful planter, owning of Representatives and served from 1842 to 1845. He then served in the Alabama Senate and served from 1847-1853. He was a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1855 but lost.

Politically, Watts adopted a pro-Union stance during the 1850s, but subsequent developments made the depth of his beliefs questionable, for on the eve of the Civil War he played an important role in the secession of Alabama, and was one of the signers of the secession ordinance. Defeated by John Gill Shorter in an 1861 bid for governor, Watts organized the Seventeenth Alabama Regiment, but resigned later to become attorney general in President Jefferson Davis' cabinet. (While serving as Colonel of the Seventeenth Alabama Regiment, he was stationed in Pensacola, Florida, and Corinth, Mississippi before resigning to become Attorney General on March 18, 1862.)

He is referred to as the most prolific of the attorney generals, writing over 100 opinions on the interpretation of Confederate law. He upheld the Conscription Act and also actively, but unsuccessfully, fought to establish a Confederate Supreme Court.

In 1863 Watts was elected governor of Alabama. Assuming office on December 1, he began an eighteen-month governorship at a time when impressments, the tax-in-kind, and other severe wartime economic measures had become most odious. Worthless Confederate money, lack of credit possibilities, irregular supplies of goods, impressments efforts that often amounted to pillage and plunder, and harsh (and unevenly applied) taxes-in-

kind levied on agriculture convinced many people that they preferred the "Old Union" to the "new despotism."

The need to raise troops for the defense of the state became more urgent. Appeals to the male population to form volunteer companies and appeals to the state legislature to reorganize the state's awkward two-class militia were met with insurmountable resistance. Some critics of Watts thought he should concentrate on forcing deserters back into military service. The legislature's failure to act meant that the state, and the Confederacy, would not have an effective militia in the final critical months of the war. Furthermore, the Confederate Conscription Act of February 17, 1864, inaugurated a policy of conscription that inevitably led to conflict between the state and the Confederacy.

By September 1864 another turbulent issue confronted Governor Watts: the opening of negotiations for peace. A faction in the Alabama House of Representatives introduced resolutions in favor of the negotiations. Governor Watts was also faced with rising desertion rates, states' rights issues including the controversy over the conscription of the cadets at the University of Alabama, the issue of which state civil officials were exempt from conscription, the defense of Mobile, blockade-running, and cotton trading with Europe.

During the winter of 1864-65, Governor Watts had to deal with the increasing number of sacrifices demanded of his state, the breakdown of authority, the drain on war power, and an evaporating hope of victory, all of which contributed to the state's war weariness. Governor Watts was well aware of his ineffectiveness and unpopularity by this time and made no effort toward reelection, although he continued to talk optimistically about the military situation. Arrested in Union Springs on May 1, 1865, Governor Watts was released a few weeks later and returned to Montgomery. He died twenty-seven years later on September 16, 1892.

<u>Books for Sale</u>	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

Address: Escambia County Historical Society, P. O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427; **Phone:** 251-809-1612; **Email:** Ranny1@earthlink.net

Membership: \$10.00. Clip the following form and send to Treasurer: Peggy Bracken, 602 Edgewood Drive, Brewton, AL 36426.

Membership Renewal/Application Form

Name	<hr/>			
	First	Middle	Last	
Address	<hr/>			
	Street	City	State	Zip
Phone	<hr/>			
Email	<hr/>			
