

ECHOES

The Newsletter of the Escambia County
Historical Society

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Editor, Ranelia Holley

Inspired *Southern* Style

Historic Brewton Mansion named
among Top Alabama Garden Settings



THE MARCH MEETING

– The Program for the March Meeting (3:00 p.m., on Tuesday, March 23, 2004), will be a tour of Down South, the historic, 1911 home and its four acres of beautiful gardens. The photo is from the cover of the magazine, also entitled Down South, which

features the story of the restoration of the house. Both the home and gardens of Down South, formerly known as the Gordon home, have been beautifully restored by Beverly Howell Clifton and Jim Clifton. For a "sneak peek" at the house and gardens, you may take a virtual internet tour at the website <www.downsouthinc.com>.

After a tour of the home and gardens, society members will have a meeting in the garden. Refreshments will be courtesy of our hosts, Beverly and Jim Clifton. Our thanks to Immediate Past President, Darryl Searcy, for scheduling this visit last year so that we can tour this year at a time of optimum beauty for the gardens. Members may meet at Down South, located at 1701 Sowell Road at the intersection with

Gordon Lane or they may meet at the JDCC Museum parking lot at 2:30 p.m. to caravan or carpool.

This year, 2004, has been designated "**The Year of the Garden**" in Alabama. The **gardens** at Down South have recently been listed in one of Alabama's tourism brochures as one of **the** gardens to tour and visit in the state of Alabama. For background on other gardens in Alabama, be sure and watch, "**Garden Variety: Alabama**", a PBS Television special on Alabama Public Television on **Monday March 15, 2004 at 7 p.m.** This special is a stunning visual exploration of six of Alabama's botanical gardens.

KATHRYN TUCKER WINDHAM TO VISIT BREWTON

The author of **13 Alabama Ghosts and Jeffrey** and **Alabama: One Big Front Porch**, among other books will be in town at the Brewton Public Library on **Saturday, March 20, at 2:00 p.m.** **Alabama: One Big Front Porch** has tales of Alabama including the Pollard/cat story about **Brewton**. She also has an autobiography, **Twice Blessed**. She is a wonderful storyteller and has done storytelling segments on National Public Radio.

A 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

D.W. McMillan Memorial Hospital is having a 50th Anniversary Celebration on **Sunday, March 14, 2004 from 2-4 p.m.** Program at 2 p.m. in the Education Center. Tours of the hospital to follow.

THE APRIL MEETING.

For the **April 27th meeting**, Society members have been invited to **Pollard, Alabama to tour the Victorian house rennovated by Sally Finlay**. Sally will also speak about the history of Pollard with our group. For more details, see the April newsletter.

F I S H P O N D

By: Darryl N. Searcy

Alligators remain as the only guardians of a logging town.

Fishpond, Alabama! Never head of it? Where have you been all these years? It sounds like the perfect place to be on a lazy summer day -- cane pole in hand and a can of wigglers nearby, and maybe a box of crickets just in case a big one gets finicky.

It seems that once upon a time, an **old logging town was built around a fishing hole** and from all appearances it was a thriving little community. Today, the road that snakes up to the town's namesake leads to a stagnant pool said to be inhabited by more alligators than bass or bream. All the good fishing is on Hodges and Smith creeks.

The **site of Fishpond** is about **one mile or so past the pavement of Escambia's Route 69 in the northeast corner of the county**. No one lives there any more, except maybe a few gators in the swampy-looking pond waters. Admittedly, there isn't even much of a pond after the timber companies have cut, replanted, and cut again.

There are actually **two Fishponds -- Old Fishpond and New Fishpond**. The "New" is located a little further south on **County Rd. 22**. All of this started out as a logging camp for the **old Cedar Creek Mill Company**. Cedar Creek became **the present T. R. Miller Mill Company** and that Brewton-based business is still the apparent landlord of Fishpond.

There are a few **scattered remnants** left behind, a brick here and a few fallen **remains of what must have been the company commissary**, or **perhaps a school or a home**. It was said that a school and homes once stood there -- in fact, **a brick yard operated there** as well. The brick yard was operated by the logging company and it apparently provided bricks to be used in the construction of other buildings. Bits and pieces are still strewn around although you'll have to climb a fence to see it, and you might have to do a little kicking of dirt piles to find them.

A little research will tell you that the **town definitely thrived in the early 1900s with an unofficial population count that included some 30 families**. Some white families lived there but most residents were black, employed by the Miller Company in its woodlands operation.

An old black fellow who lives nearby said that a **logging canal**, known as **Hart Blow ditch**, was extended almost to Brewton “prior to 1900.” A **train track** was built from Fishpond to Brewton shortly after 1900 and steam locomotives were then used to pull the logs to the mill. Questions asked at the Brewton offices of the T. R. Miller Company could not verify much information, but could say that if logging was done it was very likely that a rail track was laid to the site.

As the woods operations developed, the **company created such work camps where whole families lived and labored just as they might have within the city**. This **particular site was about 17 miles from Brewton**. It was a holding site for logs brought into the locale for sizing. Such **mill ponds were sometimes several acres in extent**, and were located next to one of a company’s operating sawmills. Logs were dumped for storage when first brought to the site.

A **log pond** had several advantages over ground storage. First, it was easy to handle logs floating in a pond. One or two men could select the logs needed by the mill for a particular cut and maneuver them to the mill entrance. A second advantage was that the wood fibers were softened and attack by insects was prevented. The **principal reason that ponds are no longer used for storage is that logs cut from second growth forests will not float**.

The Fishpond was **not just a camp**. It had **stores and convenience businesses**, making this a sort of “town within a town” for company employees. When **timber close to the Old Fishpond was exhausted, a new camp site was developed and named - appropriately - New Fishpond**. In each case, there would have been approximately **60 men and women** living and working within the environs of the sites.

It would seem that all the residents of Fishpond were there specifically to work for the operation, and it was the repair base for the train. Fishpond was definitely a company owned town, including housing, and the **folks there either worked for the logging operation, with a train crew, or at the turpentine camp**.

There was an amusing story that drifted into one conversation. It was said that **Mr. Thomas Miller gave picnics and cane-juice drinking parties for the workers**, and often attended the parties himself because **he loved to**

hear the Negroes sing spiritual songs. Some parties lasted until after midnight, and as one man observed, “They would push the old cane mill and hum songs. ‘My Lordy, what a day!’”

Evidently most of the **operation had shut down by the mid-1940s** and the crews were moved closer to New Fishpond or to Brewton. A lady who lives in Damascus says she remembers the turpentine still business, “with barrels of turpentine being shipped out of the town regularly. There were logging trains running from Fishpond,” she recalled, remembering also that the big train yard had a fence around it. “It seems to me,” she mused, “that the town had a brick yard and a commissary, but no church.” “The people had to attend church in Damascus,” she said.

Ironic, perhaps, but apropos is the fact that the **only recent activity in Old Fishpond has been that of a timber crew cutting hardwoods** from the forests. Although Fishpond was born as a logging camp, many years later it is once again yielding its harvest of trees.



The Fish Pond Commissary circa 1928. The men standing on the front are Will Koon, Eubie Kirkland, and John Ramsey.

<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 _____

First	Middle	Last
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Address _____

Street	City	State	Zip
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Phone _____

Email _____
