

ECHOES

**The Newsletter of the Escambia County
Historical Society
August 2004 - Vol. 31, No. 8
Editor, Ranelia Holley**



**Fig. 1. Memorial Plaque for
“Miss Elvira”
Mrs. Thomas E. McMillan.
Photograph Courtesy of Darryl Searcy.**

Historical Society Loses Trustee and Charter Member

Elvira Minge Cochrane (Mrs. Thomas E. McMillan) died this month. She was born in Tuscaloosa, met her husband there, when she was attending the University of Alabama, and moved with him to Brewton in 1938. Active in many groups in the community, she was most supportive of and generous to the Historical Society. The Thomas E. McMillan Museum on the Jefferson Davis Community College Campus, where society meetings are held and where the Alabama Room collection is housed, is named for her husband. The parlor in the museum is named for “Miss Elvira.” Her name has been added to the Memorial Plaques in the Museum. This society and our membership will miss this lady more than words can ever possibly express. “Godspeed Miss Elvira.”

The August Meeting

Tuesday, August 24, 2004 at 3:00 in the Woodfin Patterson Auditorium (lobby) located on the Jefferson Davis Community College Campus.

The program will be “**Show and Tell.**” Note that the society is meeting in the lobby of the Patterson Auditorium rather than in the usual meeting room in the Museum because the meeting room will be used for voting for local elections on that Tuesday.

The September Meeting

The society will return to the Museum for the September 28 meeting at 3:00 p. m. Mr. Eddie Nall, Senior Vice-President of the Bank of Brewton, will discuss the history of the bank, the oldest bank in Alabama offering continuous service.

New Members

Welcome to new members **Susan Crawford of Brewton** and **Odelle Jordan Holley of Raleigh, North Carolina.**

Gift Memberships

Vonceil Jordan Greene, who recently gave her sister, Odelle Jordan Holley, a gift membership to the Historical Society, is one of many who have considered membership a great gift idea. Consider giving memberships to family and friends.

The membership is a great way for those who are not able to attend the society’s meetings to keep in touch as well as receive informative articles on family history and local and state history through the newsletters and journals. Of course, a gift membership to someone who lives in the area gives the recipient the chance to enjoy the fellowship and educational value of the meetings as well as receive the publications.

To give someone a gift membership, you can use the membership form at the end of the newsletter, filling out the form with the name and address of the recipient and adding a note to Peggy explaining that this is a gift or you can simply send a note to Peggy with the request, giving the appropriate information.

Brewton’s Missing Post Office Mural

Earlier this summer, the society had an inquiry from Jimmy Emmons, who is interested in Post Office Murals that were commissioned and painted in various post offices in Alabama cities and towns as a part of the WPA

projects. Mr. Emmons wanted to know if anyone has any information about the mural in the former Brewton Post Office, now the Escambia County Board of Education Offices. He has photographs of all the murals in Alabama except the one in Brewton. The following description of the mural in the Brewton Post Office is taken from “New Deal Art in Alabama Post Offices and Federal Buildings”

www.alabamamoments.state.al.us/sec49det.html.

Brewton: "Logging," John von Wicht, 1939 (missing).

The Brewton mural is the one mural (in Alabama) which today is missing. Originally from Germany, but in 1939 a resident of New York City, von Wicht chose as his theme the early history of the lumber industry in the area around Brewton. When it was installed it was met with many favorable comments by the postmaster and the citizens in Brewton.

Some Brewton citizens remember seeing the mural in the old post office during the 1970's. The best guess is that during renovation it was painted over. Anyone with information about the Mural or knowledge of a photograph can contact the Society at: **Escambia County Historical Society, P. O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427; Phone: 251-809-1612; Email: Ranny1@earthlink.net**

The Post Office Murals in Alabama

According to the previously mentioned site, “New Deal Art in Alabama Post Offices and Federal Buildings,” the basic facts about this project are:

- ② The Section (U.S. Treasury Section of Fine Arts) was one of a number of relief projects undertaken during the Depression that had a direct and lasting impact on Alabama.
- ② Its major goal was work relief for artists but it also had goals relating to the production and placement of quality art in small towns across the United States.

- ② In Alabama they produced twenty-four murals and sculptures for post offices and a courthouse. Twenty-three of these works still exist today.
- ② The major work of the Section lasted from 1934-1942.

In addition to the above summary, the web site “New Deal Art in Alabama Post Offices and Federal Buildings,” www.alabamamoments.state.al.us/sec49det.html contains a detailed background on the New Deal Art Projects and a description of each of the post office murals in Alabama.

Another excellent site is Nancy Lorance’s site, “New Deal Art During the Great Depression,” <http://www.wpamurals.com/index.htm>, which lists current exhibits and posts information about New Deal art in danger of being destroyed.

The Post Office Murals in Atmore, Monroeville, and Bay Minette

Since Brewton has the unfortunate distinction of having the only mural in the state of Alabama that is missing, here are pictures and descriptions of three murals from nearby towns.

Notice that the mural for Bay Minette depicts citizens of Bay Minette stealing county records and documents from the town of Daphne after the county seat was moved from Daphne to Bay Minette and the citizens of Daphne refused to give up the records.

This incident should ring a bell with the citizens of Brewton and Pollard, since citizens from Brewton took the county records from Pollard to make Brewton the county seat. Being a county seat was obviously very important to a town’s survival.

Descriptions of the Murals and the artist are from “New Deal Art in Alabama Post Offices and Federal Buildings” www.alabamamoments.state.al.us/sec49det.html

Pictures of the Murals and credits underneath are from “New Deal Art in Alabama”

<http://www.wpamurals.com/alabama.htm>.



Fig. 2. Atmore, AL Post Office
"The Letter Box"
 by Anne Goldthwaite (1938) - oil on canvas
photograph taken by Bobby Nall.

Atmore: "The Letter Box," * Anne Goldthwaite, 1938.
 Goldthwaite, a Montgomery artist, used the suggested Section theme of postal history for both of her Alabama murals, this one and her panel in Tuskegee. In this panel she shows a group of rural children eagerly gathering to await the daily mail delivery ("New Deal Art in Alabama Post Offices and Federal Buildings").



**Fig. 3. Monroeville, AL Post Office and Agricultural Building
"Harvesting"**

by Arthur Leroy Bairnsfather (1939) - oil on canvas

photo taken by Molton Mayberry, Post Master.

Monroeville: "Harvesting," * Arthur Leroy Bairnsfather, 1939.
A.L. Bairnsfather, of Birmingham, submitted three initial sketches to the Section after his invitation to do the Monroeville mural. The Section chose a harvesting scene even though Bairnsfather suggested to them that there was actually very little grain grown in the area. The mural was installed in January of 1939 and the postmaster and public were so pleased that they requested another panel for the opposite wall of the lobby.



Fig. 4. Bay Minette, AL Post Office
“Removal of the County Seat from Daphne to Bay Minette”
by Hilton Leech (1939) – oil on canvas
photograph taken by Larry Kessler, Post Master.

Bay Minette: "Removal of the County Seat from Daphne to Bay Minette," Hilton Leech, 1939. Leech chose a local scene of history for his panel, the removal of the Baldwin County seat from Daphne to Bay Minette. The event took place on October 1, 1901, when a group of citizens from Bay Minette went to Daphne, by dark of night, and gathered all the records of Baldwin County to take them to Bay Minette. For years before 1901 Daphne had served as the county seat. When the state changed the county seat to Bay Minette the citizens in Daphne refused to give up the records, so they were "stolen." This is one of the murals which have been moved from the original post office to a new location, the new post office. When the painting was moved, it was also cleaned and restored

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

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 _____
