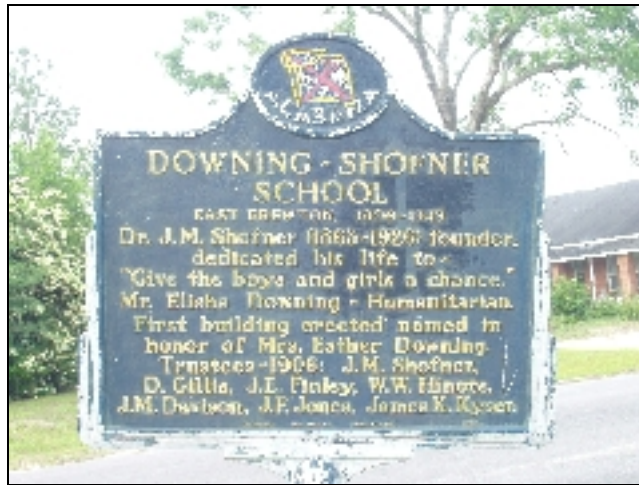


ECHOES

The Newsletter of the Escambia County
Historical Society
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Editor, Ranelia Holley



**Fig. 1. Historic Marker showing location of the Downing-Shofner School. The Marker is in the Parking Lot of the First Baptist Church for East Brewton located on Shofner Street.
Photo Courtesy of Paul Merritt.**

The May Meeting: April 24, 2005 at 3:00 p. m. in the Thomas E. McMillan Museum on the Jefferson Davis Community College Campus.

The Program - Willeen Elliott, former president of the Escambia County Historical Society, will present the ECHS program on May 24th. Willeen will discuss a book by Dr. J. M. Shofner entitled The Story of the Downing Industrial School. The book is similar to an autobiography about Dr. Shofner. Willeen will add other interesting stories about the school and Dr. Shofner. Willeen attended the first grade that was taught by Mrs. John David Finlay Sr. at the Pauline Taylor Hall on the Downing campus.

LOOKING AHEAD TO FUTURE ECHS PROGRAMS

June 28 – “Show and Tell” with Member Participation.

July 26 – Robert Thrower from the Poarch Band of Creek Indians will talk about the southeastern Indian culture.

August 23 – A Look Back at the Early Days of JDCC, which will be celebrating its 40th anniversary.

A New Member for ECHS: Welcome to New Member Evelyn Franklin

Work Day in the Alabama Room – Six volunteers participated in the first training session, May 11, for sorting and filing materials for the Alabama Room. Ann Biggs-Williams and Carol Madden report the first session was a big success. Thanks to all who participated and to Ann and Carol for planning and leading the training session.

Fort Crawford: Tom McMillan has sent us notice of success in funding a project to research the location of Fort Crawford. According to Tom, the Alabama Historical Commission is expected to grant the City of East Brewton \$15,000 for this research project. Local sources will match that with \$15,000. Work will begin this summer with Mac Brooms of Troy State University supervising the work for the research phase which will take place over the next 18 months.

THE REVEREND J. M. SHOFNER AND THE DOWNING SHOFNER INSTITUTE

This biographical material on Rev. Shofner is taken from an article by Lydia Grimes, "Shofner Founded Girls' School," which appeared in The Brewton Standard on Feb. 25, 2004.

"J. M. Shofner was born in Rehoboth, Ala. June 3, 1868 to Martin Shofner and Willie Jane Glover. He had one brother, William Albert, and two sisters, Annie Jane and Ella Kate. His mother died when he was only five years old and the family moved to Georgiana. His father was a mechanic and a good one, according to his son, but times were hard on the family. Even though Shofner entered school at age seven, he was soon pulled out to help out on the farm.

"The family moved from Georgiana to Pineville and then to the country about 20 miles north of Evergreen. It was at this location that he grew into young manhood. At the age of 17, he was 'converted to a religious life' and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church South. At the age of 18, he went out on his own and bought a farm, but soon

felt called to preach. He wanted to attend school and borrowed the money to do so.

“Early one morning about the first of November, I left home with all my clothes packed in a little pillow case and walked to Greenville, a distance of 35 miles. Here I purchased a little trunk, packed my clothes in it, threw it on my shoulder, walked up the railroad to Fort Deposit, and entered school.”

“This was the beginning of a long association with education. Although there were many times that he had to borrow and put himself in debt, he continued to get his schooling and in 1887, he applied for admission to the Alabama Conference and was appointed. He started his first preaching circuit as he had his schooling – he walked - Evergreen and then down to Castleberry. His territory covered four churches in Alabama and six in Florida.

“In 1888, he was married to Eliza Jane Mixon of Commerce and after three years, he was transferred to several places, and it was while he was in Tallasee that he conceived the idea of a school. He saw the need for education for both boys and girls, bur girls he saw as being the most disadvantaged. He believed that if a girl was educated, she would later see that her own children were also educated.

“Thus came into being his idea of a school for girls of limited means. His idea was to have a school where the girls were educated, but also where they worked to defray the expense of their education. He even thought of the idea of a truck farm, a dairy and a cannery which would supply the school with the necessary food items.

“In 1904 he was transferred to Brewton and put his ideas into practice. Donations came in and the site of Old Fort Crawford was bought, but it was 1906 before the school was organized and incorporated with the name of the Downing Educational Society.”

The Downing-Shofner Institute

The following article on the Downing-Shofner School first appeared in the book, The Heritage of Escambia County, Alabama.

The Downing-Shofner Institute was established to provide college preparatory as well as vocational training to under-privileged girls in

Escambia County and the surrounding area. The school was the idea of J. M. Shofner, a Methodist minister. Elisha Downing, a local lumberman who contributed both his money and his business knowledge to helping Mr. Shofner, joined him.

Beginning in 1904 these two men began to collect donations for the school. Eventually they were able to purchase eighty acres of land in East Brewton. The land holdings for the school, which included the site of the present-day East Brewton Baptist Church and the remains of Fort Morgan, would eventually increase to two hundred acres (History of Escambia County, Alabama).

In 1905 the farm land that was part of the purchase was put into production and produced enough income that in the fall several girls were enrolled as students in the East Brewton Academy and the Brewton Collegiate Institute, two schools in the area. Since there were no dorms, the girls boarded in private homes for five dollars a month. On August 8, 1906, The Downing Educational Society was incorporated. It operated a girl's industrial school, a truck farm, a dairy farm, and a dairy, as well as a dressmaker and millinery business (History of Escambia County, Alabama).

The first dormitory was completed in 1906, and the school officially opened on September 24, 1906. One source says the school then had a period of "phenomenal growth," which included the construction of classroom buildings as well as more dormitories, the establishment of a trust fund, and an increase in both students and teachers every year for the next six years (History of Escambia County, Alabama).

An article in the Alabama Historical Quarterly for 1949 noted that the school did eventually admit young men as well as young women. This article described the school as one which could be favorably compared with the Brewton school system: "Young Ladies and now even young gentlemen who stroll through its dirt trammelled grounds are as well accredited as those who matriculate in the town system." Also, this source noted that the school offered a full-time summer term and charged reasonable rates because the school received income from truck farming.

The school remained an independent corporation until December 1912 when the Methodist Conference became trustees of the institution. In 1924, after Shofner, the first president, resigned, the name was changed from "Downing Industrial School" to "The

Downing-Shofner Industrial Institute." The school continued to operate until 1943.

Article Submitted by Ranella Holley; Sources: [Article on Brewton]. Alabama Historical Quarterly, 1949; Waters, Annie C. History of Escambia County, Alabama. Huntsville: Strode, 1983.

A NOTE FROM THE PAST

One Balloon Lands at Brewton; Other Lost at Sea: On the evening of the 22nd of March, 1921, the US Navy launched two free balloons from NAS Pensacola for a night training flight. One of the balloons put in safely at Brewton, Alabama early the next morning. The only communication from the other balloon was a note brought to NAS Pensacola by carrier pigeon the next morning saying the balloon was drifting out to sea. Wreckage of the lost balloon was found two weeks later in the Gulf, 50 miles south of Panama City. The crewmen were never found.

- ② This historical note is supplied by Paul Merritt. Source: Flying Machines Over Pensacola: An Early Aviation History 1909 – 1929 by Commander Leo F. Murphy, U. S. Navy. Gulf Breeze, FL: Pensacola Bay Flying Machines, 2003.

A FAMILY HISTORY

This family history from a society member is a response to our request for those who have family stories to send them to us. Please consider sending us your story. The information will be interesting reading and valuable genealogy for our readers.

Miss Susan

Historical Society Member Blakely Barton has sent us the story of his great grandmother, Susannah Jackson Taylor (known as Miss Susan), and her descendants.

Blakely's parents were Dorothy Hill-Barton and Edd Laffon Barton. Blakely notes that his father worked with the late Jack Hines from 1946 until Edd's death on February 13, 1988. Blakely comments that his dad and Jack Hines were known as best friends.

To trace the genealogy of Blakely's family, through his mother, we start with his mother's, Dorothy G. Hill-Barton's parents, Bufus Hill and Elsie Alford Hill. Elsie Alford Hill, Blakely's grandmother, was the child of Susannah Jackson Taylor-Alford, Blakely's great

grandmother, and Simon Alford. Susannah's parents were Andrew and Elsie Jackson, Blakely's great, great grandmother.

This story of Blakely's family really begins with his great, great grandmother, Elsie Jackson, later Elsie Jackson Taylor, who came to the United States from Kingstown, Jamaica, when she was eleven years old. According to Blakely's mother, Dorothy, Ms. Elsie, spoke very little English when she arrived. She learned English from the family she lived with and worked for as a wet nurse. This family first settled in New York and then moved to Tuskegee, Alabama. Elsie came with them to Alabama.

Elsie eventually married a man named Andrew Jackson, and her daughter, Susannah Jackson, Miss Susan, was born at Gen Creek on March 15, 1875. When her husband left the area, Ms. Elsie and her daughter, Susannah, moved to the Boykin community where Elsie met and married a Mr. James Taylor. Elsie was now Elsie Jackson Taylor and Susannah took the name of her mother's second husband, becoming Susannah Jackson Taylor.

Elsie and Mr. Taylor moved to Brewton. They had two sons: Samuel Jackson Taylor and Wyatt Taylor. Wyatt moved to the North as a young man and never came back to the area. Sam worked with many of the logging camps around the Brewton area. He was known by many as Uncle Sam. A photo of him is found in the book, Bicentennial of Brewton (1976), where he is shown as the camp's cook.

Susannah Jackson Taylor, Elsie's daughter and Blakely's great grandmother (Miss Susan), married Simon Alford in Pollard at the beginning of 1900. They became parents to four children: (1) Lottie; (2) James Taylor; (3) Maggie; and (4) Elsie, who was born November 7, 1910 in Brewton and would become Blakely's grandmother.

Susannah, now Susannah Jackson Taylor-Alford, soon became known as Miss Susan around the Brewton area. She worked for many of the well known families in Brewton. When her husband (Simon Alford) left, she supported her children by taking in sewing and ironing. She later married Mr. Richard Williams and they became parents to six more children: (1) Rosie Lee; (2) James Ervin; (3) Lizzie Mary (Mamie); (4) Dulley Mae; (5) Leila Alafare (Alice); and (6) Spurl Lewis.

Susannah's daughter by her first marriage, Elsie Alford, married Bufus Hill and had a daughter, Dorothy G. Hill, born on March 17, 1926 in Brewton, Blakely's mother. About two years after Dorothy

was born, Elsie, left the area to find better employment. She settled in the Seattle Washington area and began working for a family (DeBeers) as a live-in housekeeper and nanny.

Blakely relates that because his grandmother, Elsie, lived so far away, Seattle, his earliest recollection of her is when she made a visit to Alabama in 1959 when Miss Susan, Elsie's mother and Blakely's great grandmother passed away. Blakely was just over a year old on this occasion of his great grandmother's death and his grandmother's visit to Brewton.

Elsie, the grandmother's, most recent visit before 1959 had been in 1948 when Blakely's second oldest sister died and his second oldest brother was three days old. He also remembers another visit in 1979 when she stayed for three months. He also has memories of pictures of her and of phone conversations with her. Blakely's grandmother, has one surviving child, Rebecca. Dorothy Hill Barton, Blakely's mother and Elsie's only child by her first marriage, passed away on July 17, 2003, but twenty years after the birth of Dorothy, Elsie married again and had another daughter, Rebecca, who now lives in Seattle.

Although all of Miss Susan's children are dead and there are only five grandchildren left, there are many of Susannah Jackson Taylor's great grandchildren left, of which Blakely is one.

Exhibits for the Museum for June

We have this information from Carol Madden: The Museum will present two touring exhibits from The Alabama Humanities Foundation. Recognizing military history in June (D-Day and Flag Day), the Gallery Room will house:

- ② **Trying Times: Alabama Photographs 1917-1945 Exhibition** - The exhibit has this introduction: "Alabama citizens endured particular trials from 1917 to 1945, including the great depression, two world wars, and the collapse of Alabama's agricultural system. The photos displayed in this exhibition reveal how Alabamians coped with an era of "trying times."
- ② **Images of Our Times: Alabama Photographs Since 1945 Exhibition**- The following is the introduction to the exhibit: "Since the end of World War II, the promise of prosperity that was so powerful in 1945 has eluded many of Alabama's citizens. Photos

record this recent history, and this exhibit displays some of the best. The collection includes photos of Alabama's recreation, education, farming and heavy industry, as well as the Civil Rights era and the decline and rebirth of several of the state's cities.”

<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: \$15.00. 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 _____
