

ECHOES

Tuesday, February 27 Second Meeting for 2007

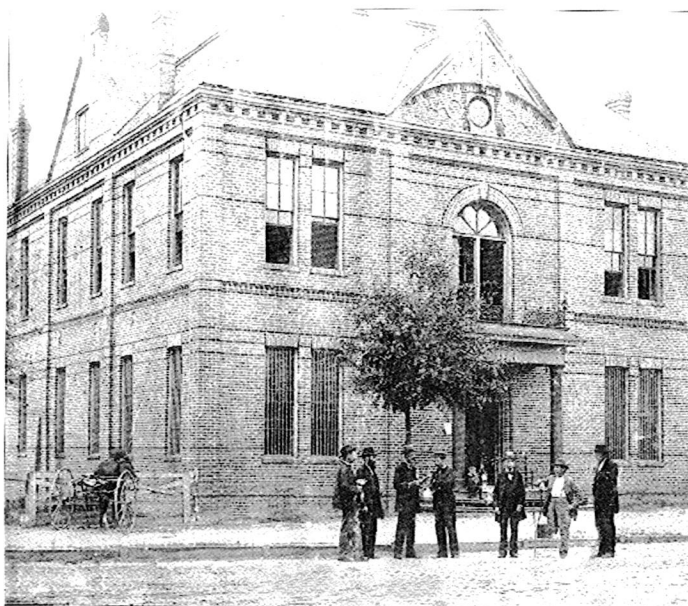
The February Program

The February meeting will be in the Thomas E. McMillan Museum on the Jefferson Davis College Campus at 3:15 p. m. on Tuesday, February 27.

The program will be on the History of the Leigh Place, presented by Tom McMillan.

The Speaker: Tom McMillan

Tom, a graduate of the University of Alabama, is a businessman who has spent most of his career in oil and gas exploration. A husband, father and grandfather, he is interested in local history and works to help preserve that local history.



Brewton's first courthouse which was built between 1883 and 1885. Pictured left to right are Millard F. Brooks, circuit clerk; Edward S. McMillan, sheriff; Alex Johnson, tax collector; T. M Stevens, county attorney; Norville R. Leigh, judge of probate; James Hodges, tax assessor; James Herrington, treasurer. The child on the courthouse steps is Ed Leigh McMillan.

The Leigh Place as it stands today was remodeled in 1969 by Thomas E. McMillan and is now being used as an office building.

Tom McMillan has invited the society to enjoy refreshments in the Leigh Place after the conclusion of the program in the museum.

Hostesses for this meeting will be Jacqueline Stone and Ann Biggs-Williams.



Leigh Place

Volume 34, Number 2

February 2007

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Membership Dues

Annual membership fees are due in January—when you write the check for your own membership, why not make a gift for a loved one of a year's membership—only \$15.00.

A form is printed on the last page of this newsletter—just fill out, clip and mail.

Minutes of the January Meeting

President Ann Biggs-Williams opened the meeting and welcomed guests **Byares Swift, Drunetta Hammack, Mildred Hall, and Sarah Hall**, members of the Atmore Historical Society

Visitors from the Alger Sullivan Historical Society included **Jerry Fisher and Don Sales**.

The society was also glad to have **David Stokes**, chairman of the Escambia County Commissioners, as a guest.

New members welcomed to ECHS were **Barbara Dixon and Kay Wilson**. **Don Smith** was acknowledged as a lifetime member.

Peggy Bracken was recognized for her work in organizing the Society's Christmas Party/Meeting at the Luttrell House, now the Brackin Home.

Correspondence read included a message from **Christie Watford-Shannon** who commented that she found the society's website while surfing the net and is "glad to see that there is some representation on the web from ESC County."

Jerry Simmons displayed the **Sanborn Maps of Brewton**, which have been donated to the Museum and the Alabama Room by **Tom McMillan**. These maps, which cover the years 1893-1930, were used to rate buildings for setting insurance costs.

The society **approved a motion** to provide Jerry with \$100 to make **copies of the maps to display** in the meeting rooms of the Museum. Jerry will select photographs of Brewton to display with the maps.

A new pamphlet about ECHS, prepared by Jerry, has been printed, cost taken care of by private donations.

Members approved a **motion to donate \$100** to the **Coon Hill Cemetery** which has received extensive damage through vandalism.

The society **will consider raising the cost of lifetime membership** to \$150 at a future meeting.

Member **Don Sales** was presented with a certificate for finding the second-oldest marked grave in Escambia County.

Jerry Simmons introduced **John Jackson**, archivist for Baldwin County, who gave a program on the exciting things he is working to develop in Baldwin County. These include the development of a 400 acre park with a village representing life in 19th century Alabama, a Native-American town, a museum, nature trail, and many other features to attract visitors to the area as well as preserve the cultural history.

Paul and Ranella Merritt provided refreshments for members and guests after the meeting.



L & N Railroad Station at Range Alabama., ca 1920. The legend on the picture is Deer Range, Ala., now shortened to Range.

Picture courtesy of Joe Ross.

Bits and Pieces

Membership News

Clair Sanborn has renewed both her membership for 2007, as well as a gift renewal for her Mother, **Patricia Cooper**, that Clair provides for her Mom each year.

Also, **Congratulations to Clair on her retirement**, January 31st, 2007, from Jefferson Davis Community College.

Elsie Langford of Lawrenceville, Ga. (who grew up in the Paul Community over the line in Conecuh County, but moved to Georgia in 1951), renewed her ECHS membership and gave a gift to **Jo Ann Cole** of Mobile, Al.

Elsie is interested in the **Robinson genealogy** from the Brooklyn, Al. area and **has been an ECHS member since the Society began. She still has a copy of every newsletter and journal of ECHS.**

The Society welcomed new member **Barbara Dixon** to the January meetings. Barbara is researching **Dixon, Mayo, and Lynn families.**

Bonnie Jean Fuller of Melbourne, Florida is also a new member.

ECHS member **Vonceil J. Greene** of Nashville gave a gift membership to her sister, **Betty Jean Jordan Goleman** of Houston.

Vonceil and Betty Jean join siblings **Clifton Jordan** and **Cleo Ansley** mentioned in the January Newsletter among the Society's out-of-town members.

The Jordan children's father, **Ollie Jordan** was a world War II Veteran. All the Jordan kids attended T. R. Miller High School.

Mike Williams and **Ann Biggs-Williams** gave a gift membership to **Mary Williams.**

ECHS member **Edwina C. Mullins** of Mobile renewed her membership as she does each year and gave a gift subscription to her sister, **Mrs. Johnnie Stutts** of Meridian, MS, as she does each year.

New life members in ECHS for 2007 Include: **Sally Finlay, Tom McMillan, Alan Robinson, Annie Smith, Don Smith, and June Seravezza**

New Books

There are two new books in the Alabama Room, courtesy of ECHS **Vice-President, Darryl Searcy:**

One is Gregory A. Waselkov's **A Conquering Spirit: Ft. Mims and the Redstick War of 1813--1814.**

The Other is **Alabama in the Twentieth Century** by Wayne Flynt. Thanks Darryl!

Another new title of interest is **The Heritage of Lee County, Alabama**, the last book published in The Heritage of Alabama Series.

David Bice and his wife Alice of Clanton, Al, began a project in 1997 to develop and publish grassroots family history books for every county in Alabama.

According to **Ed Seward**, who brought the Lee County history to The Alabama Room, this is the last of the set and thus the Society now has the complete series.

Ed Seward, a past president of the Escambia County Historical Soci-

(Continued on page 4)



The Center New Grove School (at left) was located between Brewton and Castleberry along U.S. 31.

Built around 1918, the building also served as a meeting place for members of the Center New Grove Church. A church building was constructed about 1940.

Help Needed for Indexing Back Issues of the ECCHS Newsletter and Journal

Volunteers are needed for **data entry** for the project initiated by Museum Coordinator, Jerry Simmons, to **index back issues of the ECCHS Newsletters and Journals as well as clippings of articles from newspapers.**

Donations to Coon Hill Cemetery

Anyone desiring to make a **donation** to the **Coon Hill Cemetery** should make the check payable to Coon Hill Cemetery and mail it to **Al Enfinger, 9487 Chumuckla Springs Road, Jay, Florida 32565.**

If you would like to talk to Mr. Enfinger directly, please **call him at 1-850-994-7033.**

Bits and Pieces Continued

ety, served as Chair of the Heritage Book Committee.

Sissy Dukes Horton and **Marty Dukes** served as editors.

ECCHS Publicity Chair **Lydia Hughes Grimes** served as the Family Coordinator and other ECCHS members who were Heritage Book Committee members were: **Ranella Merritt, Paul Merritt,** and **Ann Biggs-Williams.**

Genealogy Workshop

Three ECCHS members attended the annual genealogy workshop in Montroeville on Feb. 3. They were **Annie Smith, Kathryn Wilkinson,** and **Ann Biggs-Williams.**

Visitor to Society Website

The **ECCHS website** at **<www.escohis.org>** had a visitor sign in the online guest book from **England!** Be sure and visit the society website regularly as the photos change.

Change of Address for Alabama Genealogy Website

Sometime during the month of February, the **Alabama Genealogy Website** formerly hosed on the Alabama Department of Archives and History web sever will move to a new URL. The new address is **<http://AlGenSoc.org>.**

Poarch Indians Commercial

Escambia County's Poarch Band of

Creek Indians began a **statewide media campaign** on January 15 with TV commercials being broadcast in Huntsville, Birmingham, Mobile and Montgomery.

Tribal Chairman **Buford L. Rolin** said, "For years, our tribe has been relatively unknown to many Alabama residents. We played a very important role in settling the state and we would like for more people to know about us and what we try to do as citizens and neighbors.

"This is an **awareness campaign.** We feel the tribe is one of the best kept secrets in Alabama. We believe we are good neighbors and our tribal community wants the people in Alabama to know who we are and what we do and to appreciate us as a resource."

The idea of the statewide media campaign has been in the planning stages for several years. Former Tribal Chairman **Fred L. McGhee** had a vision of telling the tribe's story statewide and initiated the project development.

His successor, current chairman **Buford L. Rolin** shared this vision and made it a top priority. The Poarch Tribal Council unanimously approved support for the project in late 2006.

No actors or television professionals were used in the spots. Instead, **tribal members and community leaders** are the spokespeople. The tribe did

hire a professional production company in the northeast to do the filming.

The **commercials** are scheduled to run **through mid March 2007.**

Places In Peril

Are there **places in peril in Escambia County, Al** that you would like to nominate for this designation? If there is an **irreplaceable historic building or site in our area** that is highly threatened by demolition or neglect, this is the opportunity to help save it!

Places in Peril, a joint program of the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation, recognizes Alabama's most endangered historic resources. Each submission is to be evaluated for it

Send a clear photograph of site to: Melanie Betz, Alabama Historical Commission, P.O. Box 300900, Montgomery, Al 36130-0900. Provide your name, address, phone, and E-mail.

On a separate page, briefly **answer the following questions:** Why is the site significant? Is it architecturally significant? Historically significant? Does it contribute to a district? What makes it unique or different? What is the history of the site?

Provide a brief one to three line **historical summary.** Why is the site significant and threatened? How imminent is the threat? Who are the prop-

Bits and Pieces Continued

erty owners and what is their attitude toward the property. Provide their contact information. How well known is the site? Is it private or open to the public?

Fort Mims Restoration Project

General memberships are available for the Fort Mims Restoration Association. Volunteers are also needed to work on Saturdays.

Membership dues are \$15 per person or \$25 per couple. Dues are now being ac-

cepted for 2007.

Please mail checks to Fort Mims Restoration Association, c/o Edith S. McGuire, 13425 McGire Road, Stockton, AL 36579.

Two hundred poles have been purchased and four hundred made ready for setting in a trench that has been dug at Ft. Mims. When these poles are set, there will be a wall to the east gate.

Volunteers will be welcomed to

assist in this historic work which usually takes place on Saturdays.

For more info, you can call Davis Smith at 251-937-4254 or Martin McGuire at 251-937-5896

Popeye and the Coosa



By Ranella Merritt

Alabama can claim a connection to the comic-strip character Popeye through the writer Tom Sims, who grew up in Ohatchee, Alabama.

When a lock and dam was built on the Coosa in 1913, raising the water level of the river by 10 feet and making navigation over the Horseleg Shoals possible, the Corps of Engineers had the responsibility of keeping the channel clear.

To help with the task, the

corps purchased a steam boat, Annie M, and renamed it Leota. Tom Sims' father would become captain of the Leota ("Coosa River has Claims to the World's Most Famous Sailor Popeye 'The Sailor Man,'" <http://romegeorgia.com/dnordmen/popeye.htm>).

Writer and illustrator E. C. Segar, creator of Popeye, had introduced the character into the comic strip Thimble Theater in 1929.

Segar had already created the Oyl family that owns a shipping company. There is a daughter, Olive Oyl, a son, Castor Oyl, and a "wisecracking, spinach eating, chap," Popeye.

When Segar died, Tom Sims replaced him as writer for the comic strip for a period of time.

Sims was particularly interested

in the Popeye the Sailorman characters.

He says that he based all of his stories about the characters on his experiences of growing up on the Coosa River,

"Fantastic as Popeye is, the whole story is based on facts. As a boy I was raised on the Coosa River. When I began writing the script for Popeye, I put my characters back on the old Leota that I knew as a boy, transformed it into a ship and made the Coosa River a salty sea" (Dennis Nordeman, "Popeye," <http://members.tripod.com/~Write4801/areas/coosa-1.html>).

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Coon Hill Cemetery

The following article is re-printed by permission of the Tri-City Ledger and the author.

Coon Hill Cemetery

By ANNE WILLIAMSON

Ledger Lifestyle Editor

In the year 2007, about the only thing Coon Hill is known for is an almost abandoned cemetery in the middle of nowhere - a cemetery where teenagers pull pranks on other teens, where paranormal investigators run experiments, and all too often, where vandals destroy the remaining headstones of some of the pioneers to the Northwest Florida and Southwest Alabama area.

Nearly 200 years ago, as the United States was in its infancy, people began to slowly migrate to this region. The towns of Century and Flomaton did not become bustling communities until the beginning of the 1900's. But, according to the book *Santa Rosa Cemeteries*, it is believed that people buried at Coon Hill "represent the original founders of this area, mostly of Scottish descent."

The original Coon Hill area, though now located in a desolate area in the middle of timberland and hunting clubs, was a real community, with real people, who came to this unsettled area to make a home. The community, which lies on the edge of the Escambia River on what

is now Santa Rosa County, was connected to the Escambia County side of the river by ferry and by an old wooden bridge. Both the bridge and the ferry have long been gone.

Some family members eventually moved to the Escambia side, while



others stayed in Santa Rosa County. The cemetery at Ray's Chapel Baptist Church in Bogia, on the Escambia County side of the river, is home to many of the brothers and sisters to those settlers buried at Coon Hill.

In the 1800s and early 1900s Coon Hill was a small logging community, even before Florida became a state. Timber Explorer E.F. Skinner operated in the area from 1874 to 1908. The town had a post office, hotel, church and many homes.

One resident, Edward Campbell, was born in Scotland in 1757. He originally settled in Marion County, South Carolina. Following the death of his wife, Mary McClellan, he moved to Escambia County, Fla., which was ruled by Spain. Edward Campbell was one of the petitioners who in 1821 appealed to Congress to settle land claims.

Most of the people who lived in the area are also buried there. Although the deed is 20 acres, only 1 or 2 acres is fenced in by a concrete wall. Most graves at Coon Hill Cemetery range from 1836 to the early 1900s. Only a few people have been buried in the cemetery since the 1960s.

The list of names of those people there reads like a Who's Who in area history. The cemetery has two senators, E.V. McCaskill and Neill McMillan; a circuit rider Methodist minister, Sharrod Lewis Hart; a tax assessor and tax collector, Charles Edward Campbell, who also served in the Florida Militia during the Civil War.

Another resident of Coon Hill and one-time postmaster was William Larkin Williams, the man for whom Williams' Station (now Atmore) was named. The oldest grave in the cemetery is that of his first wife, Margaret McMillan Williams, who died March 19, 1836. His second wife,

Mary McMillan Williams (sister to his first wife - both daughters of Duncan McMillan and Mary 'Polly' Wilkinson McMillan) are also buried at Coon Hill, plus many of Williams' children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Florida became a state in 1845. Margaret McMillan Williams' grave and the town are dated prior to Florida's statehood during the time of Spanish rule. In fact, her grave is recorded as having the oldest headstone in Santa Rosa County.

One of those children was Wiley Q. Williams, who was appointed second postmaster in 1854. After this the post office was moved to Chumuckla Springs where water supposedly flowed from the legendary Fountain of Youth sought by the Spanish Conquistador, Ponce de Leon.

Miss Mary E. Williams, daughter of

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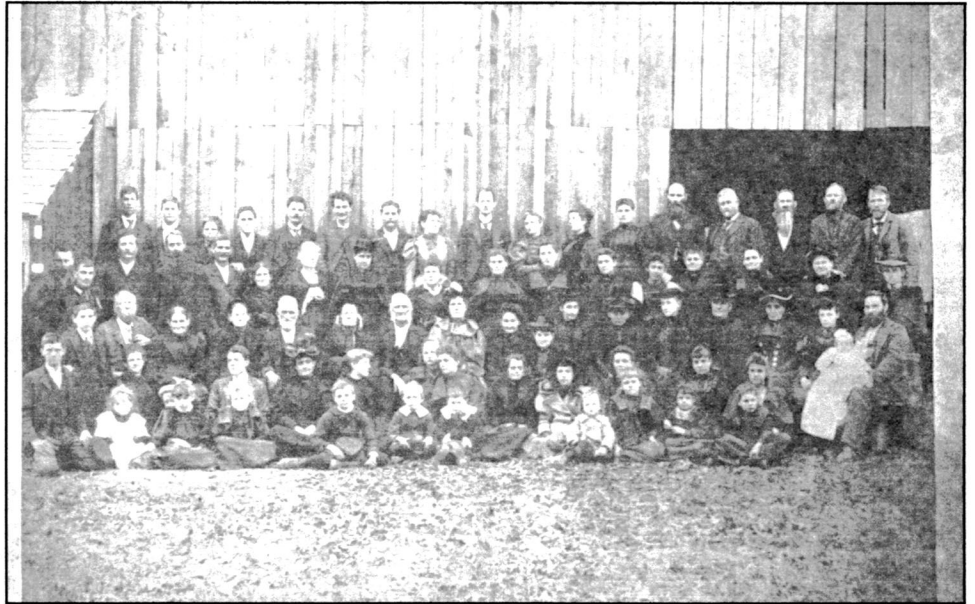
Wiley J. and Margaret McDavid Williams who died Sept. 27, 1877, of typhoid fever, when she was only 17 years old, is buried at Coon Hill. Sabra Williams (daughter of William Larkin Williams and Margaret McMillan) along with her husband Joel Alexander McDavid, are buried in Coon Hill. Joel's parents, Richmond Terrell McDavid and Sarah

McCaskill, lived in Coon Hill and are buried there.

Sabra and Joel and their children, Margaret, Clementine, Albert, Beauregard, David, Mamie, Ida, Fannie, Wiley, Allie and Walter, all lived in Coon Hill. Many of their descendants still live in the Jay and Century areas.

Descendants from these early pioneers still live and prosper in the south Alabama, northwest Florida area. Some of the surnames of those descendants include: Miller, Lambert, Crumbley, Slade, Severson, Brooks, McCaskill, Harrison, McDavid, McArthur, Stanton, Davis, Holland, McMillan, McDaniel, Byrne, Savell, Reynolds, Wilkins, Penton, Griffin, Magaha, Jenkins, Smiley, Wilkinson, McKinnon, Campbell, Ezell, Hart, Mims, Diamond, Middleton, Johnson, Mayo, Pearson, Pyburn, Enfinger, Rutherford, Lee, Jernigan, Howell, Salter, Cartwright, Grimes.

Even though the Coon Hill area is no more than an echo from the past, it is one of the roots to the area's foundation. It is where our ancestors carved out a place to work and to live, to make a home and build a new state.



The photo above was taken at the 88th birthday party and family reunion of William Larkin "Uncle Bud" Williams, on Feb. 18, 1895

Many of those in the photograph lived in the Coon Hill area and are buried in the cemetery there. These residents now have descendants living not only in this region but across the country.

This list gives the following identification.

Top row: Willie Bond, Roy Diamond, Harry McDavid, Wiley J. McDavid, Dade McDavid, Angus McMillan, Beauford McDavid, Laura McDavid, Terrill Williams, [name marked through], Mollie Laskey, Ida McDavid, McDaniel, Marian McMillan, John McDavid, Joe Reynolds, Jim Diamond, Dave McDavid.

Second row: Will Williams, Wiley Williams Jr., Albert McDavid, Rab Williams, Taylor Williams, Malvina Golay Caro, Sabra Collins, Molly Williams, Mary Lovelace, Fannie McDavid Harrison, Dell Williams McLeod, Lilly Diamond (Penton), Maggie Williams, Anna McDavid, Maggie McDavid Diamond, Mrs. Leiza Williams, Rebecca Hobby.

Third row: Walter McDavid, Howard McDavid, Joel A. McDavid, Sabra Williams McDavid, Margaret Williams, Wiley Williams Sr., Rebecca Golay, Wm. L. (Uncle Bud) Williams, Mrs. Fannie Williams, Mrs. Catherine McMillan, Sallie Williams, Annie McMillan, Mrs. Taylor

Williams, Willie May Pou Williams, Fannie Reynolds, Lizzie McMillan, Ida Jones, Cuyler McMillan, Gladys McMillan (Gunn).

Bottom row: Mamie Stewart, Dodie Nicholson Stewart, Earl Williams, Lena Williams (Edwards), Philip Golay Caro, Becky Diamond, Cella Reynolds Gardner, Anna Runyan Barnes, Albert McDavid Jr., Cleve Lidell, Allie McDavid Caro, Chipley Diamond, Edward McDaniel, Mamie McDavid, May Swaine (Reira), Cuyler McMillan, Mollie Diamond (Cleghorn), Dell Diamond (Campbell), Lucille McDavid (Mizell), Daisy McDavid, Annie McDaniel (Stewart), Fannie Diamond (Brewton).

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Vandalism at Coon Hill Cemetery



The Beautiful Monument Depicted Earlier in the Journal as It Appears after the Vandalism Damage to the Cemetery in late 2006.

By DONALD WRIGHT

Ledger Staff Writer

The following article recounts the damage done to the historic Coon Hill Cemetery. Anyone interested in contributing to the restoration of the cemetery can find information in both this article and the bits and pieces section of this newsletter.

Nearly 60 gravesites were damaged and more than \$50,000 worth of damage was done at the historic Coon Hill Cemetery near Jay on Dec. 29 as vandals snuck into the cemetery and broke and overturned many of the tombstones and grave markers.

According to Al Enfinger, the chairman of the board of trustees and caretaker, many of the gravesites were damaged by vandals in 2001. He said the cemetery committee had only recently completed

doing those repairs.

"We had major damage from vandals in 2001 and it has taken us a long time to get those repairs done," stated Enfinger. "It has not been too long since we finished those repairs."

"Since I'm the caretaker of the cemetery, when I first arrived and saw the scope of the damage, I felt like crying," he continued. "I was just devastated."

According to Enfinger, the Campbell and McMillan families settled the area back in 1819. He said the Coon Hill area used to be a thriving community.

"The area had a post office and was a stop for the pony express," stated Enfinger. "They had a church, a hardware store and a saloon."

"Being located along the banks of the

river (the Escambia River) was important back in those days," he continued. "There was just a lot going on back then."

Enfinger said the Santa Rosa Crime Stoppers is offering a \$1,000 reward for the arrest and conviction of the suspects. He said the cemetery is taking donations to try to offer an additional \$5,000 reward.

"I just don't understand why people would do something like this," Enfinger said. "It just goes beyond my understanding."

"We want to try to raise the funds to offer a reward for the capture and conviction of those responsible," he added.

Anyone wanting to make a donation to the cemetery can call Enfinger at (850) 994-7033 to get the address. He said peo-

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ple should make checks payable to the Coon Hill Cemetery Trust Fund.

According to Enfinger, The cemetery committee has tried to take steps in the past to keep vandals off the property.

"They previously wanted to move the gate into the cemetery back to the main road about two miles away," stated Enfinger. "I was against the idea, but now I think it will be the only way to keep the vandals away."

"Hopefully they will think two miles is too far for them to walk and they will think twice about coming in here," he added.

"Anyone who has a legitimate reason for visiting the cemetery, like relatives or ancestors, will still be able to get in," he said. "The cemetery committee will have a key to the gate and members of the hunting club will also have keys. (Enfinger said a hunting club shares the

same access road with the cemetery.)

There are some who have keys and I know who they are. Anyone else can just call me and I will make sure they get in."

According to a report from the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office, deputies responded to the cemetery, which is located off Mineral Springs Road, at 11:38 p.m. on Dec. 29 in reference to a criminal mischief complaint. A person visiting the cemetery noticed that many of the monuments in the cemetery had been vandalized and then contacted the Sheriff's Office.

When deputies arrived, they noticed that about 50 to 60 tombstones and grave markers had been broken, overturned, or damaged. They also observed broken remnants of flower urns and gravestones scattered all around. The damage was extensive throughout the entire graveyard.

Some of the gravestones were simply knocked over, some were pulled out of

the ground, and some were broken in two. Many gravestones were completely shattered.

The reports said the person who was visiting the cemetery noticed two vehicles leaving when he arrived. They were described as being a late model Ford Pickup truck and a smaller passenger car.

Coon Hill Cemetery is one of Florida's oldest and most historic cemeteries. Some of Florida's original state senators are buried there among many war heroes, some dating back to the civil war. Coon Hill is also notorious for its alleged hauntings and supernatural occurrences.

No suspects are known at this time. The Sheriff's Office is asking for the public's help in identifying the suspects responsible for the damage.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office at (850) 983-1190 or Santa Rosa County Crime Stoppers at (850) 437-STOP.

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The U. S. Snagboat Montgomery: One of Alabama's National Historic Landmarks

By Ranella Merritt



The Montgomery Working on the Apalachicola

The U. S. Snagboat Montgomery is one of only two remaining steam-powered, stern-wheel snagboats. The Montgomery has been restored and made available as a museum at the Tom Bevel Lock and Dam and Visitor

Center in Pickensville, Alabama.

Built by the Corps of Engineers in 1926, the boat is a 178 foot long, three-decker that was designed to house and feed a crew of 12-14 around the clock (US Army Corps of Engineers website <http://tenntom.sam.usace.army.mil/snagboat.html>).

In her career as one of the Army Corps of Engineers' hardest working boats, the Montgomery worked seven of the rivers in the southeast.

First based in Montgomery, she cleared snags from the Coosa and the Alabama from 1926 until 1933. She was then transferred to Tuscaloosa to continue to work the Coosa River system as well as the Black Warrior and Tombigbee Rivers (US Snagboat Montgomery web site, <http://tenntom.sam.usace.army.mil/snagboat.html>). In 1959, she was transferred to Panama City and worked

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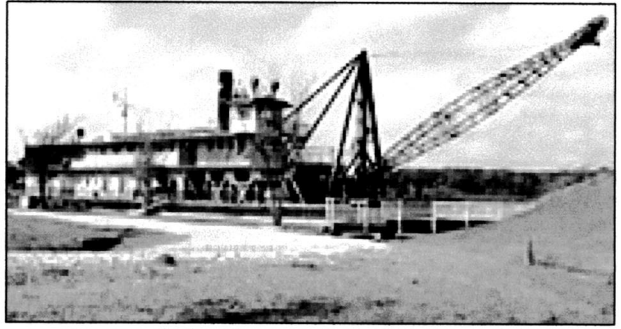
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the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, and Flint Rivers. She was retired in 1982 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1989 by the Department of the Interior.

The website [U. S. Snagboat Montgomery](#) notes that the [Montgomery](#) has two other claims to fame regarding her working career. In 1964, she helped in raising the remaining sections of the confederate Gunboat [Chattahoochee](#) from the Chattahoochee River.

In 1984, she was repainted and modified to look like an ante-bellum, stern-wheeler steamboat in the TV movie [Louisiana](#). It is appropriate that the [Montgomery](#) was part of the movie about the era of the steamboat since she has been called “one of the last remaining vestiges of the



steam powered riverboat era” ([US Corps of Engineers website](#)).

The Development of Snagboats

By Ranella Merritt

Although steamboats were an essential part of the economic growth and settlement in the southeast in the nineteenth century, they were particularly vulnerable to damage caused by snags (submerged trees, stumps, or other wreckage in the rivers).

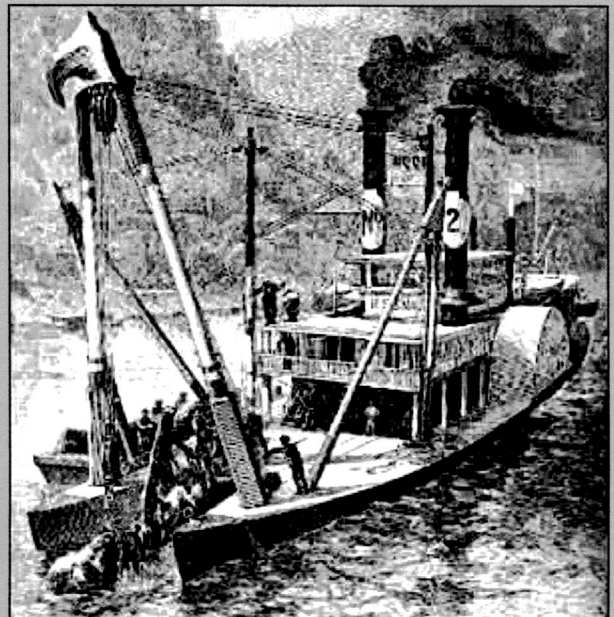
Most states made attempts to keep the rivers free of the hazards which damaged or sank the boats, but there was no successful widespread means of doing so until the U S Army Corps of Engineers were given the responsibility around 1900. The Corps developed a large fleet of ships to help keep the rivers open but the snagboats were the principle method used.

The first steam-powered snagboat was designed by Henry Shreve in 1829. The [Heliopolis](#) had two side by side hulls which held a derrick that lifted snags from the river. A single, steel- hull design replaced the double hull design in the early twentieth century.

The snagboats operated each year in a cycle with their work beginning in May and continuing through the end of the year. Barges and tugboats would operate with the snag boats.

The snagboat would drop the debris it had raised with its grapple hook (also called a clamshell) from the river onto a barge tied to it, and when the barge was full, the tug boat would take the barge away and leave an empty one. Snagboats would remove 120-170 snags a day.

Snagboats also worked on the construction and repair of the locks and dams on the rivers and did dredging work. At the end of the year, they were put into dry dock for repairs.



The Heliopolis