

ECHOES



Exhibit in Wentworth Museum

Volume 36, No. 8

August, 2009

The August Meeting Tuesday, August 25, 2009 3:00 p. m. Thomas E. McMillan Museum

The Program

Dot Diamond of the Jay Historical Society is the guest speaker for the August program. Dot will assume the role of a pioneer woman of the 1880's to describe living in northwest Florida in that era.

Dot was born in Pensacola but has lived in Jay for fifty years. She is married and has four children and eight grandchildren.

She is President of the Jay Historical Society and works in other church and community organizations as well. Her interests include history and education.

Dot has a Doctorate degree from FSU in Educational Administration. She is retired from the University of West Florida's Department of Education.



Farmland Near Jay.

Although the occupation of the first settlers of the area was "lumbering," these early settlers soon learned that Jay had some of the richest farmland in Santa Rosa County.

Today, Jay is a farming community with its agricultural activity based on cotton and peanuts, with cattle as the main livestock farming.

Why Jay and Not Pine Level?

From the article, "Reflections and a Salute to a Town Called Jay" (The Heritage of Santa Rosa County, Florida, p. 12.), we learn that in the 1800's, Jay was known as Pine Level and was often called The Cobb Old Field.

The town received its name in 1902.

The first name submitted for approval by the U. S. Postmaster was the name used early on for the town, Pine Level.

James Thomas Nowling, who owned the only store in the community, sent the name to the Postmaster General.

Pine Level, however, was rejected because Florida already had a post office with that name.

Another name was submitted and this one
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The September Meeting TBA

Dues

Your membership dues for 2010 will be due very soon. Have you paid your 2009 dues yet?

Just Briefly

Wow - we had no takers on the list of possible and necessary jobs to do that was in the newsletter last month. Either nobody read the newsletter or no one is interested in helping out.

I have to say that we do have at least one member, Byron Findley, who has gone above and beyond the call of duty. Byron spent the last few months, a few hours at a time, making copies in response to a query. It was to search the *Brewton Standard* newspapers from about the 1960s through the 1980s for a column written by Dr. Ernest Rosemore.

Do the math: at 52 weeks a year and nearly 30 years (let's see now, 52 times 30... carry the one...) - well over 1500 pages! And that's not counting the last several years when the *Standard* was published twice a week!

Byron deserves a special thank you from all of us for representing the Society in performing this tedious task. So when you see Byron next, be sure to express your gratitude and admiration for

pitching in.

The early August field trip to Repton was, in my opinion, an overwhelming success. Not only was the tour of the hospital eye-opening and enjoyable, but the hospitality shown by our gracious hosts, Repton Mayor Terri Carter, her husband William, his father William, and his aunt was exceptional. The day was much more than any of us expected. Thanks, Mayor Carter, and please express our thanks for us to all who served us and had the job of cleaning up after us.

It's a day like that that encourages us all to keep on going, even when the going gets a little hard.

See ya at the meeting.



Program (Continued)

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was rejected as being too long. Before the committee could submit a third name, the Postal Department named the town "Jay" from the first initial of James T. Nowling's name.

Thus the town acquired its name and Mr. Nowling was the first post master.

Black Gold

Oil production became a part of the economy of

Jay in the 1970's. The article "Jay, Florida's Black Gold" ([The Heritage of Santa Rosa County, Florida](#)) summarizes that the effect of the discovery of oil was to make only a few people millionaires.

The fact that huge tracts of land in the area are owned by paper companies and some residents sold out cheap to speculators, diminished the number of people directly benefiting from the discovery of oil.

A Correction

This correction for an article on the Creek Indian War in the June newsletter.

. In the newsletter, in the sentence concerning Andrew Jackson's plans for the future of the Indians, the reference was made to the Creek Indians rather than the correct reference which is to the Southern Tribes. The corrected version should be:

"In the 1830s after he had become president, Jackson required all five Southern tribes to move to Oklahoma. The Indian nations that had helped Jackson fight the Red Sticks could not understand his decision. A Cherokee who had saved Jackson's life at Horseshoe Bend said that if he had known what Jackson had in store for the Southern tribes he would have killed Jackson himself."

Mondays at the Museum this Month is Friday, August 28



**T. T. Wentworth , Jr. ,
Florida State Museum**

The Escambia County Historical Society continues its field trips to area museums. Another tour is planned for Friday, August 28, 2009. This tour will include the T.T. Wentworth Museum, Old Christ Church, and the Museum of Commerce.

The T. T. Wentworth Museum, the State Museum of Florida is a self-guided tour.

Mr. Jim McMillen, Educational School Tours & Living History Coordinator of the West Florida Historic Preservation, Inc., will lead tours of the Old Christ Church and the Museum of Commerce.

The complete experience should last approximately two hours.

Additional details of the August 28 field trip will be discussed at the August 25th meeting.

Those going on the field trip will meet at ECHS member Susan Crawford's home at 8:30 a.m., on Friday, August 28th planning to be at the T. T. Wentworth Museum at 10 a.m.

The T. T. Wentworth Museum is free to the public. However, admission to Pensacola Village, which is normally \$6.00 will be available for \$5.00 --if ECHS has a group of at least ten.

For lunch, one of our ECHS members has invited us to lunch at her home on the bayou, about 15 minutes from downtown Pensacola. There is also the option of eating at area restaurants.

These options will be discussed at the regular August 25th ECHS meeting.



Old Christ Church



**A. M Avery Hardware Store Exhibit
from the Museum
of Commerce**

Houses in Historic Pensacola Village Open for Tours



**1805 Charles Lavelle House,
A French Creole Style Cottage**



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The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Turpentine Industry

Terms and Method

To understand the industry, one must first understand certain terms used in the industry language, how and why it evolved to be known as “naval stores,” or better still as “gum naval stores.”

Naval stores refers to the process of extracting pine rosin from the trees (the raw gum), and the method of collecting the gum from the trees.

The process resembles that used on a rubber plantation or to harvest maple sap for its sugar. Instead of preparing the tree to receive a pipe or tap, the tree bark was gashed open with a curved blade, called a “hack,” to remove all of the bark down through the cambium layer. An angled piece of galvanized tin was then placed below the gash (known as “the streak”) to direct the oozing sap into a cup fixed to the tree, or a box set into a deep cut made at the tree base.

Each new “streak” was put onto the tree above the preceding one, and gradually a series of diagonal streaks measuring some three to four feet in height was formed. This pattern of cuts was called a “cat face,” as the pattern vaguely resembled a cat’s whiskers.

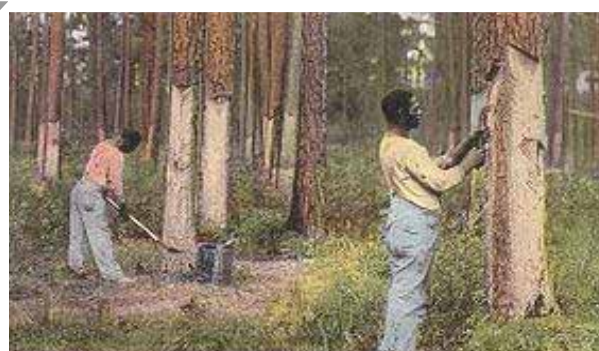
Through the mid-twentieth century a “puller” (a type of hack that had a long or short handle) was used to extend the streak up the tree to a height of more than nine feet.

Factors

Once, large operators, known as “factors,” controlled vast tracts of forests, some in the hundreds of thousands of acres, which they leased to “operators.” The factor often advanced capital to the operator in the form of equipment and goods with which to get started or to continue an operation. The operators satisfied their debt to the factors by bringing in barrels of gum, the product.

The name “Factors Walk” on the riverfront in Savannah, Georgia, commemorates an area on the Savannah River harbor where thousands of barrels of product were collected for shipment around the world.

Between 1880 and 1920, Savannah was the largest



Workers Cutting Catfaces

port for naval stores products and continued to set the world price of naval stores until 1950.

Development of Naval Stores in the 18th & 19th Centuries

Naval stores were, of course, the materials extracted from pine trees to be used in the construction and repair of sailing vessels. Typical naval stores might in-

clude lumber, railroad ties, rosin, and turpentine.

The naval stores industry in North America originated in the mid-18th century in North Carolina. Before 1800, the major products of the trade were raw gum, pitch, and tar. After the American Revolution, processes were developed for distilling spirits of turpentine from gum. By 1850, the bulk of U.S. naval stores came from North Carolina.

In the early 1870s the producers in North Carolina and Virginia began migrating to southeast Georgia and the sandy coastal plain to take advantage of the untapped virgin pine forests in the Deep South region.

Long before the Carolinas were opened to settlement naval stores were being used, an activity that could be said to foreshadow the industry that would be developed.

It seems that in 1734 a young Englishman traveling with a party from Georgetown saw barrels of pitch on the banks of the Waccamaw River. These men were exploring the area to find likely places to file for land warrants as soon as the government permitted the land to be recorded. They used the barrels of pitch for their campfires.

They brought their equipment and laborers and established residential communities on large turpentine farms. By the mid-1880s about seven in ten turpentine workers had been born in North Carolina.

The dominance of North Carolina earned it the title of “Tar Heel State,” for the tar that accumulated on the

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The Turpentine Industry (Continued)

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feet of field workers. It was the highly resinous wood (often called tar wood or lightwood) of the pine tree that made it so desirable, thus sparking the naval stores industry throughout much of the south.

The term was generally used to describe the pitch and tar needed for caulking a ship's planks and waterproofing canvas sails of the seagoing vessels, dating to the Royal British Navy in the 17th century. As the industry evolved, the distillation of fatwood gum from a tree of the same name, shifted to the processing of pine gum taken from the living pine tree.

One method of extracting pitch involved old fallen trees that had a high concentration of gum. This wood was called "lightered" (lightwood). The logs were cut up and piled in a shallow pit and covered with earth. A slow burning fire lighted in the top of the pile caused the gum to liquefy and the tar to run down into catch basins outside the mound. These tar kilns were a common sight in most settlements.

Around the mid-1800s, the production of gum turpentine peaked in the eastern states and began to spread southward through the longleaf pine belt as the north and eastern forests were exhausted. In fact, the movement of many families in the South can be traced to the naval stores industry.

The industry grew so rapidly that by 1890 Georgia found itself being the nation's leader in naval stores production, a ranking that lasted until 1905. Florida was the leader from 1905 to 1923, after which Georgia regained its predominance and maintained it until the 1960s.

Extracting and Distilling the Turpentine

Reliable labor was important to any successful naval stores operation. At the top of the turpentine farm hierarchy were a superintendent and a woods rider, who coordinated the work of the laborers that boxed the pine trees and chipped and dipped the pine gum.

Other workers operated the turpentine distilleries, while coopers made the barrels used to transport the product, and teamsters transported the product to market. The superintendent and woods rider were usually white men, while the majority of the laborers were

African American.

The work was compartmentalized into a series of seasonal tasks. In the winter, pine trees were "boxed" (a triangular notch cut into the trunk). A typical farm was divided into sections called "crops," each of which contained about 10,000 mature trees. With the arrival of warm weather, chippers cut the bark above each box to allow the gum to flow into the cavity.

In the spring and summer, dippers removed the rosin, also known as "dip," from the box with a trowel-shaped spade. A scrape might also be used to remove the hardened gum that had accumulated in the chip above the box.

Crude turpentine was distilled throughout the eight-month dipping season. A crop might produce as much as 80,000 pounds of crude turpentine during the first two years of harvesting. Longleaf yellow and slash pine produced the highest grade of turpentine.

The distillation process began with log fires heating the turpentine still, while the stiller and his crew charged a copper kettle with several barrels of gum. Each barrel of crude dip normally produced six or seven gallons of spirits of turpentine. The remaining rosin, which formed a hot residue at the bottom of the kettle, drained through a mesh into a vat where the liquid was skimmed of trash and then poured into barrels.

The peak of distilling occurred in the summer, when the flow of gum was greatest. Accidental fires at the stills were frequent and often seriously injured the workers.

After two or three years, naval stores crews dismantled their stills, commissaries, and other facilities and moved their laborers and equipment to another area where virgin dip was more plentiful. The growth of the industry attracted increasing numbers of migrants to the pine barrens of the Deep South.

Cutover pinelands were available for purchase or lease to new settlers, particularly African Americans, who farmed the land as tenants or owners. Much of the acreage that had been tapped for turpentine was subsequently cut for timber and then turned over for a third commercial use, agriculture.

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The Turpentine Industry (Continued)

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The Herty Cup and Gutter System

By 1900 the turpentine industry began to decline as the primitive harvesting methods continued to damage and destroy the pine forests. It was a University of Georgia chemist, Charles Herty, who revolutionized turpentine production by designing a clay pot known as the "Herty cup."

The cup was suspended from a nail driven into the tree. This allowed shallower tree cuts to be made above the cup. Gum dripped into metal gutters tacked to the tree, and then flowed into the cup.

The Herty cup-and-gutter system was patented in 1902 and quickly replaced the more primitive box method of rosin collection. The turpentine industry saw renewed productivity, which aided Georgia in regaining its leading position in the world naval stores market in 1923.

From the 1890s through World War II, Savannah and Brunswick were the world's leading ports for the shipment of naval stores.

Small-scale production of naval stores declined after 1940 due to rising competition from large chemical companies and the lack of innovation by small producers. New methods introduced in the 1930s modernized turpentine production, primarily through large-scale steam distillation and the vapor-condensation process, which produced sulfate turpentine.

By the 1960s, the small-scale production of naval stores was very limited.

Demand for Naval Products

In the early 19th century industrialization was accelerating in the United States. Those who lived and worked among the virgin forests of pine were sitting in the middle of a resource for which there was an enormous demand throughout the outside world. The demand was comparable to that for petroleum today. And like petroleum, it became a universal ingredient in manufacturing.

During this time (19th century), numerous public and government publications listed the use of turpen-



Turpentine Still
Picture Courtesy of Jeff Cannon

tine in hundreds of ways; thinners for paints and varnishes, solvents for waxes in polishes, water-proof cements, cleaners to remove paints and oils from fabrics, disinfectants, liniments, medicated soaps, medicines, ointments, synthetic camphor, celluloid, explosives, synthetic rubber, glazing putty, printing inks, lubricants for grinding and drilling glass, moth repellents,

insecticides, crayons, patent leather, petroleum refinement, textile manufacturing, and ore refinement.

Rosin was used in soaps, sizing for paper products, paint dryers, axle grease, waterproofing, emulsified oils, leather dressings, enamels used in ceramic manufacture, fire kindling, artificial wood, roofing materials, grafting wax used for trees, linoleum, oil cloth, lutes and violin bows, ointments, plasters, veterinary medicines, disinfecting compounds, dry batteries and electrical insulation, setting bristles in hair brushes, insect powders, fly papers, printing inks, cements for glass. The list goes on and on.

The Longleaf Pine and the Turpentine Industry

The longleaf pine was so full of gum that it burst into flame at the touch of a match, especially in its roots and the lower portion of the trunk. That characteristic gave it the local name of "lighter wood," or frequently, "fat lightered."

When the railroads were put through the county, many pioneers sold "lightered" to them, as it was an easy way to start a fire under the wood or coal-fired locomotive boiler.

The southern-most counties of Alabama were a great source of this product after about 1830 and the industry lasted until the early twentieth century. Pine trees in this region had always been tapped for medicinal, caulking, and other purposes, but naval stores was introduced as an industry and the vast pine forests of the coastal plain came into play.

Longleaf pines were destroyed by the technology of the day - scoring trees to cause them to "bleed" even-

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The Turpentine Industry (Continued)

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tually killed them. A heavily tapped forest could be depleted and destroyed in a decade. When that happened the industry was forced to move on to find new forests to exploit.

In the pre-Civil War period great plantations that had more male slaves than they needed for their work sometimes leased these men out for hire to work in the turpentine woods. After the war, slave labor was replaced by wage labor, but the wages were pitifully low.

In Alabama, Georgia, Virginia and North Carolina turpentine “farms” tended to be large and both black and white laborers hired themselves out to the landowners.

There were many small landowners in this region and most of the laborers in the pinewoods were the small farmers and their sons. They produced the turpentine from their own trees and took their product to a nearby distillery.

Larger landowners, like the Huxford operation in Escambia County, Alabama, took their labor from the same pool. Whenever the industry moved to other locations, the workers followed, as they knew no other way to make a living.

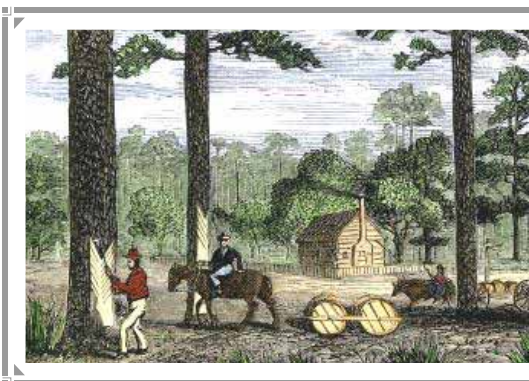
In other places a “crop” of turpentine that could be tended by one man amounted to a set number of mature long-leaf or slash pine trees spread over 50 to 100 acres of land. This was generally not the case in Escambia County, as most of the cropland was owned or leased by the Huxford “factor.”

A few private boxed tree farms did exist, whereby the farmer gathered turpentine from as many of the trees on his land as he was willing to work. The crop farm product was generally sold to local distilleries located throughout the county.

A Personal Account

A. J. Baker, of Bakers Chapel, Georgia described the naval stores industry in Alabama this way:

“I was raised on a farm and had every opportunity to observe just what was going on in and around our small farm. Our place was surrounded by a primeval



Hauling Turpentine

the puller, the dipper, the scraper, the bucket, the scrape box, and the barrel. Some of these implements will seem foreign to many of the people today.

“The predominating forest of trees at that time was the longleaf pine from which the sap was extracted. A notch or box, as it was called, was cut near the ground in the tree, holding about a quart. This was done with a boxing ax. The next tool used was the hack. The hack was used to cut streaks along the trunk to about head high.

“The streaks were cut by the puller, primarily done during the spring and summer. The streaks usually dried out in a few days stopping the flow of sap. Then, of course, a new one must be applied to start the sap flow again. When the notch or box was full of sap it was ready to be dipped, put in barrels, and hauled to market. This was known as dip turpentine.

“During the spring and summer season (or working period), some of the sap would lodge on the face of the boxed tree. The face is where the numerous streaks had been made by the hack or by the puller. Since not all of the sap of the tree would reach the box below, some of it would lodge on the face. Here it would harden and lose much of its liquid appearance, becoming a sort of dry turpentine. During the summer season the accumulation of this turpentine amounted to quite a haul.

“During the fall and winter, the turpentine was scraped from the face of the tree, gathered in suitable boxes, packed in barrels, and made ready for market. This was known as scraped turpentine and it gave the workers something to do during the off-season. The tree face was made ready again for the prime summer season. Often, a new face would be

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The Turpentine Industry (Continued)

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hacked on the opposite side of the tree trunk. All too often this double facing was more than the tree could bear and it died.

“After the turpentine was gathered and placed in barrels, it was hauled to market by mule wagons, as there were no trucks then. If there had been trucks, the roads would have been inadequate for their use. At the market place, the barreled product was weighed and paid for at a certain price per the gage weight that was in force at the time.

“The next step of the gummy product was the distillation. The larger merchants who owned the stills bought up the barreled turpentine. The stills consisted of a large retort (a vessel in which substances are distilled or decomposed) with a capacity of several barrels. The retort was built in a furnace under which a fire produced a slow heat driving the spirits into a condensing or cooling system. The product was then placed in tight non-leaking barrels for shipment to the commission merchants. The residue or rosin was also poured into barrels for shipment.”

To expand on Mr. Baker’s brilliant description, we can add that just as any tenant farming system is operated today, the landowner would often sharecrop his timberland to producers. Thus, the small landowner could be his own producer, while the large landowner might have several tenants and producers. The tenant would be allotted a specified number of boxes (or trees) to be worked as a crop, as any farmer would do.

Distilleries were generally owned by local firms, who

did the initial processing of the sap and then shipped it out as turpentine, spirits of turpentine, or rosin. A processing still was a simple operation. There was a large kettle into which the gum was dumped. The kettle was connected to a coil (called the “worm”) that went through a vat of water.

In the mid-1880s, J. W. Ogilvie of Georgia, expressed his disapproval of this system when he wrote an article that appeared as a reprint in the Horry, North Carolina Herald on 25 November 1909:

“The circulating medium was almost exclusively a piece of round or square cardboard bearing the information that it was good for such and such an amount in trade at so and so, and further that this was not transferable. These bits of cardboard represented the price of labor. They were the shackles that bound the people. The laborer was even denied the privilege of spending the fruits of his labor in a manner and in such a way that to him seemed the best in contributing toward the comfort, happiness and pleasure of him and his family.”

When the kettle was heated, steam and vapor rose from it and went into the worm where it condensed into water and spirits of turpentine. The turpentine was lighter than water, so it rose to the top. The turpentine was drained off into barrels, making it ready for market. The whole process took from three to five hours.

The fire was removed from the kettle and the rosin from the distillation was drawn off and put through a screening process in a large trough, from which it was

dipped and stored in barrels for shipment.

Local newspapers carried the daily market prices, just as we see on the stock market ticker today. On May 10, 1888, virgin turpentine was worth \$3.00 for a 320 lb. barrel, yellow dip and scrape was \$2.25.

The woods workers were the primary producers, but they didn’t make much money. They were paid in tokens issued by a nearby distillery, or in the case of cut timber, the local sawmill. The tokens were exchanged at the commissary store that had been established by

the distiller. There were no “rain checks” or lay-a-way plans” for any goods, and the laborer’s family had to take whatever was in stock.

Those who prospered the most were the owners of the stills and the sawmills that cut the trees for its heartwood lumber. By the beginning of the 20th century, the turpentine woods were essentially depleted and the industry

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Workers in Turpentine Still at Wallace, Alabama

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Turpentine Industry (Continued)

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moved on. Many men, some with their families, moved with it into Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas -- everywhere the longleaf pine grew.

A Personal Account

T. N. Searcy, a retired railroad executive, and author of the historical novel, *Remembered Names - Forgotten Faces*, Xlibra Corp. 1998, was a former student at the Wallace school in Escambia County. He wrote a few sentences that describe his remembrance of the industry in a most tragic and disturbing fashion.

"My family owned a sizeable parcel of land along what is known today as CR-40, or the Wallace Road. The parcel was in Section 20 of Escambia County, near the present-day I-65 at Barnetts Crossroads. The distance between our house and the road was about one-half mile. A small church was at the head of the road that we kids called "Hard Shell Baptist" because we didn't know one denomination from another. I believe the real name is Gravel Hill Primitive Baptist Church, and many of our good neighbors at the time are buried in its cemetery today.

"I was a student at the Wallace school (later named the A. D. Kelly School before it was destroyed by fire in the late 1990s). I remember the teacher taking the class to the turpentine still in Wallace as a field trip.

"I recall the large vat bubbling with hot rosin and a black man skimming off the trash, using a net on the end of a long pole. We were shown some hardened rosin that had been cut into large blocks, awaiting shipment. It was amber in color. I also remember the chipping of trees in front on our house on the land that sat between our property and the church.

"During the depression era in the late 1930s and early '40s, the black men working in the woods would come to our fence and ask mama if she had any cold biscuits left from breakfast. The men were

hungry as they had not eaten a breakfast. She would give them whatever was left over and she also gave each man a jar of fresh water. In those days the

white people observed strict segregation rules, but mama let the men come inside the yard and take a drink of cool water from the well.

"Some times we could hear the workers singing gospel songs in the woods as they worked, going from tree to tree. I remember the cups hanging on the trees, and how the rosin was gathered, put into buckets, and carried to barrels that sat on the



Still at Wallace, Alabama

bed of a skid that was pulled by mules or oxen.

"The still at Wallace might have been owned by the Kellys, as the sheds were built close to the cotton gin, but there was also a still owned and operated by J. Donald and his sons, so I cannot be sure if it was a Kelly or Donald operation.

"Nowadays I think the longleaf pine is practically a memory due to over-harvesting, and the timberlands are filled with loblolly and pond pine species. These varieties are fast-growing, making them more desirable and profitable for the lumber and pulpwood industry.

"In 1945 our father purchased another large parcel of land in the Big Escambia Creek 'bottoms.' The land was previously owned by Mr. A. D. Kelly, and by the time it was sold to our father, the longleaf pine had disappeared, as a result of turpentine and lumber operations. To this day, there remains evidence of two portable sawmills having been set up on the land. At the time of the transfer of deed, the entire acreage had reforested itself with hardwood trees, and about 40 acres had been turned under as farmland.

"It was an interesting time, but I've never thought of the history of the industry. Talking to you folks has brought it all back to me. I want to incorporate some of this material in my next novel. I'm sure the Escambia County Historical Society would have no objections if I reprint my own memories."

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The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Turpentine Industry (Continued)

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Editorial note: "Indeed, Ted, we would not."

The Turpentine Industry Becomes Big Business in Escambia County, Alabama

The turpentine industry evolved in Escambia County through the efforts of the senior Camilla Calvitt Huxford, who promoted and built one of the largest naval stores enterprises known to Alabama and Florida.

The turpentine harvesting business in Escambia County began in the early days when C. C. Huxford, Sr. apparently saw a way that his sizeable tracks of timberland in south Alabama and northern Florida could support a naval stores business, as well as other worthwhile ventures. The business unfolded around the mid-1920s. While the initial enterprise was of exceptional success for a number of years, the availability of reserves to maintain naval stores suffered a slow decline and the naval stores business was discontinued around 1953.

However, at about the same time, a market had developed for the sale of "cat faces" (turpentine trees which had been scraped for turpentine) that now existed on the land. Again, Mr.

Huxford took advantage of an opportunity and in subsequent years the sale of these "cat faces," and other good round trees, became the primary business of his company.

To harvest the product, the thick sticky rosin was drawn off the pine tree, and subsequently used in thousands of non-edible products from waterproofing ships, to medicines, or as paint thinners.

The longleaf pine region of the Deep South was responsible for producing the greater part of the world's supply of naval stores - the collective name



Workers Bleeding the Trees

Notice the "Catface" cuts on the tree in the left foreground.

Picture Courtesy of Long leaf Alliance

for products such as tar, pitch, spirits of turpentine and rosin obtained from the pine tree.

Gum from the pine tree was distilled into rosin and spirits of turpentine in what could be described as an "oversized liquor still." The collection and processing of gum was a year-round job that often required a large work force. Laborers would work their way from tree to tree chipping shallow gutters into the fresh wood of the tree face. This cut face and

metal gutters nailed to the tree would direct the gum down into a box that was notched at the bottom of the tree. However, these boxes were often destructive, as the process was not yet recognized by the industry as being devastating to the trees. While doing good around the world, the harvesting of turpentine was not seen as being detrimental to the forests, and no conservation techniques were known or even considered at the time.

In the early years of the 20th century, technological improvements allowed the gum to be collected in clay or metal cups hung from the tree by a nail. A squad of workers traveled from tree to tree dipping gum from the cups or scraping it from the tree face and dumping it into a barrel.

When a worker finished a tree, he would call out the name he had chosen for himself (called singing out). A tallyman would record the song with a check or dot by the man's name. The number of dots or marks determined a worker's pay. Barrels of gum were then taken to a nearby collection point, and later hauled to the distillery and refined.

In Escambia county, the primary producer was Huxford and the stills were located on what is now highway 41 about equal distance between Wallace and Brewton. The location was known then and today as

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The exploitation of the pine forest of the Deep South was one means by which southerners recouped their capital after the war. Between 1870 to 1950, or approximately two generations, most of the original stands of longleaf pine that covered 130,000,000 acres were consumed.

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the Huxford Quarters. A second major operation was at Local, Alabama on Hwy-21, north of Atmore. All operations of the Huxford business were overseen by mounted "woods riders." Many of the roads over which the rosin was transported to the distillery were not paved, and the primary transport was by horse-drawn wagons.

A single "crop" consisted of 10,000 trees with cups attached. When a turpentine operation spoke of having ten crops under operation, it meant that he had 100,000 pine trees tapped for turpentine. The cups were emptied into barrels by crews of men who traveled the forest continually.

As the barrels were filled they were placed on platforms equipped with skids and pulled by mules to the side of the road for later collection. Other haulers, usually wagons pulled by four-mule teams, gathered the barrels and delivered them to a still, whether to the main still at Huxford Quarters, or a temporary still set up on the crop. The still itself was a crude structure that reeked of the spicy aroma of pine.

The land was dotted with independent "tree farmers" throughout south Alabama and northern Florida. Often the stills were small operations set up inside the forest being worked. The Huxford operation was no exception.

The turpentine products found their chief market among the manufacturers of paint and varnishes. The rosin was used in the manufacture of soaps, paper, and hundreds of commodities of daily use.

So successful and widespread was the Huxford operation in south Alabama that to give away a few thousand worked-over acres didn't mean very much to his business one way or the other. Nevertheless, being a shrewd businessman looking for a way to divest himself of useless land and to help the community as well, he offered 8,000 acres to the Alabama Department of Prisons.

The gift was intended to be converted for agricultural so the prison system could grow vegetables and animals that would, in turn, feed the prisoners. Such an agricultural system would allow the state to

free itself of a tremendous burden if the prisoners were allowed to grow their own food. The land was offered and accepted by the state in 1927.

Mary Lee Conwell reported in the Mobile Press Register on July 13, 1985 that Mr. C. C. Huxford donated the land, where his turpentine still was located. She further elaborated that the prisoners were brought by train to the town of Local, and they walked down hot dusty roads to the state farm. In 1928 the citizens of Local voted to change the name of their town to Huxford, after the man who owned so much of the land that had brought employment to the area.

In about 1929, the Huxford operation began earnestly acquiring all the available land as was possible in Alabama and Florida, which bore trees suitable for the production of turpentine and other naval stores. The naval stores business was brisk and profitable up to the early 1950's.

We know that in about 1933 a Huxford son, known locally as "Skeeter," moved to Brewton to take charge of the Huxford Naval Store Company that he had leased from his father. The senior Huxford apparently continued to take an active part in the overall business. But for the most part, Skeeter ran the enterprise along with other pulpwood, turpentine, and timber-dealership operations.

The senior Huxford died in 1961, at which time the timberland he had accumulated passed to his estate. By this time the naval stores business was in deep decline, and it was time for the Huxford estate to start diversifying, and applying better tree plantation management techniques if the business were to survive.

In order to give their younger trees room to grow, the overseers periodically cleared out dead, worked-over, and inferior trees. Some of these were sold, but they seldom brought in a decent income, as their value as saw lumber was limited and there was no substantial local market for pulpwood until 1950.

Skeeter Huxford was born at Atmore, Alabama on August 10, 1911 and died in Brewton, Alabama on December 3, 1985. Mrs. Huxford, the former Alice Jean Miller, was laid to rest early in life, having

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Skeeter Huxford

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passed on December 1, 1966. The couple rest side-by-side in the Union Cemetery at Brewton.

Editorial note: Skeeter and Alice are survived by four daughters and numerous grandchildren. Two of the daughters continue to reside in Brewton. This community applauds the Huxford heirs, who were quick to ensure that advanced management techniques were put into place to guarantee that they, and their forestry engineers, would remain good stewards of the land.

"Cat Faces" in the Piney Woods

Traditions of Turpentine in South Georgia are an oral history project of the South Georgia Folk-life Project at Valdosta State University. It is developed from the perspective of the field of folklore and focuses on the occupational folk-life of South Georgia turpentine workers. This site contains information gathered from 1998-2004 through background research, photographs, video, and oral interviews. It includes information on work in the woods and life in the turpentine camps as told by those who lived it.

For much of the past century, Georgia was the nation's leading producer of gum naval stores, or the industry of extracting products such as turpentine and rosin from living pine trees. The last bucket of gum for commercial turpentine was dipped in the summer of 2001 in Treutlen County, Georgia.

The end of domestic turpentine in the U.S. inspired the project team to interview former turpen-



Major Phillips dips the last buckets of commercial turpentine in the United States for Soperton (Georgia) Naval Stores, August 9, 2001.

Photo by Bill Godfrey, courtesy of Georgia Forestry Magazine.

tine workers about their lives and traditions. Chiefly, African American men did the work of gathering and processing the raw gum, although countless European-American small gum farmers turpented on their own land or on land leased from others. These workers developed specialized knowledge, terminology, customs, and lore which folklorists call "occupational folk-life."

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