



Model of Farm

By Stephen Ethridge Beck

Volume 38, Number 6
June 2011

The June Meeting

Tuesday, June 28, 2011

3:00—5:00 p. m.

The Thomas E. McMillan Museum

The Program: Recording Cemeteries

For

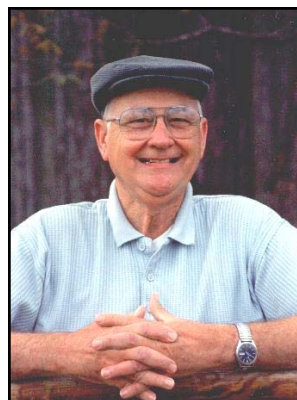
Find-a-Grave

Speaker: Darryl Searcy

“My interest in cemeteries is primarily geared to historical recording rather than expert photographic efforts. There are many cemeteries that have gone unrecorded and considering today's rush toward industrial expansion, it is essential that a record be made and kept for the benefit of future generations.” Darryl

Darryl Searcy: Find-a-Grave Contributor

In the summer of 2010, when Darryl was working on the article for the Second St. Saloam Church and its 100th anniversary (see August 2010 issue of ECHOES), Reverend Blue, ECHS member and pastor of the church, pointed out to him that there were no



listings for Afro-American Cemeteries in Headstones and Heritages.

Darryl promised Reverend Blue that he would do something about listing the cemetery markers at Baptist Hill Cemetery, the cemetery associated with Second St. Salome.

(Continued on page 2)

Contents

Summary of Minutes of the May 24, 2011 Meeting	3
Gail Thrower	3
Stephen Beck's Model of His Childhood Farm Home	4
Snapshots	5
Our Business Members	6
The Wakulla County Volcano	7
Picture of City Park in Brewton	10
Tobacco in Brewton	11
The Tobacco Industry in Escambia County	15

The July Meeting

July 26, 2011

Guest Speaker:

Brian Rucker

The Program:

“Unauthorized Raids in 1814 by American Forces into Spanish Florida ”

Brian Rucker gave the tour of the Acadia Mills in Milton for ECHS in in June of 2010.

Darryl Searcy: Find a Grave Contributor *(continued)*

(Continued from page 1)

Upon further research, Darryl found that there were no references to any Afro-American cemeteries in Escambia County in Headstones and Heritage. He also found that many cemetery listings had not been updated since 1998. In an email, Darryl commented, "I felt like something needed to be done, and we (ECHS) were the right people to do it."

Since that beginning, not only has he photographed the Baptist Hill site (now online at Find-A-Grave with all 790 grave markers photographed and a memorial prepared for each), as of June 2011, he has taken over 10,000 photographs and created and managed, with the help of Martha Williams of Pensacola, over 5,000 memorials.

Martha is his online partner for his Find-a-Grave contributions. He photographs the headstone and down sizes it and sends it to her to build the memorial.

Darryl says of his coworker, "When I start a new project, I always ask Martha if she will join me to get it done the right way. She has always been most obliging and works long hours at her computer to get the job finished on time. I would truly be lost without her."

He reports that as of June 2011, the cemeteries that have been completed, large and small, in Escambia County are: Baptist Hill (17 - 802), Bergen, Pine Grove, Oak Grove, Catawba (248 - 684), Weavers,

A Thank You from California

Shortly after posting the listings for Baptist Hill Cemetery, Darryl received this email from Karla McLemore of Richmond California:

Hello Mr. Searcy,

I was strolling through the online Baptist Hill Cemetery in Brewton, on Find-A-Grave. I wanted to thank you for creating most of the memorials.

You posted a memorial for my great-grandmother, Lucy Charlie. She was the mother of Albert McNeal, who was my mom's father. I never had the pleasure of meeting Lucy, as she passed two months before my mom's thirteenth birthday. I never knew anything else about her, so I was really happy to see your handiwork. My mom was also thrilled. We live in California, and haven't visited Alabama in decades. It's nice to know that we can "visit" Lucy, and our other kin buried there, as they are added on.

Baptist Hill wasn't included on the Find-a-Grave cemetery search list, until I decided to create a memorial for my grand-parents (Albert, mentioned above, and his wife Rosa) back in 12/08. You can imagine how happy I am to see that the Baptist Hill memorials have grown from zero, to 371 to date and counting.

Still, Fannie, Hollywood, Little Escambia, Magnolia, Canaan, Freewill, Bowman, Spear, Travis, Dixie, Mason, McGowin, Wallace, Pleasant Hill, Beulah, Pineview, Douglas Chapel, Rock, Traveler's Rest, Hall, Little Rock, Hoomesville, Little Brooklyn, Miller, Hanberry, Odom, Beasley, Union, Fuqua-Haveard, Weaver Family, Boutwell-Lambeth, May Creek, McCurdy, New Bethlehem, Springhill, Hammac, Emmons, Serenity Gardens, Cooper, Green Acres (203 - 966), and Fort Crawford (490 - 1,696).

The cemeteries that have been photographed but not completed and posted are:

Elim, Oak Hill, McCullough, Lucy Hill, Stall-

worth, Fairview, Robinsonville, Pollard (black and white sections), Flomaton Memorial, Dixonville, and numerous small family plots.

He says he still has some 5,000 photographs to be edited, transcribed, and posted. "Martha and I have worked on numerous out-of-county cemeteries that are located in Conecuh and Monroe. These were done at the request of individuals who invited us to take a look and see what we could do."

By recording and posting on line these cemetery records, Darryl and Martha are helping ECHS to perform one of its most important functions—to collect historic and genealogical data and afford the public access to those records. €

Summary of Minutes of the Meeting, May 24, 2011

Old Business:

- ♦ Jacque Stone reported that the Scholarship Committee has chosen Jessica Madden Sutton to be the recipient of a \$500 scholarship from the Escambia County Historical Society.
- ♦ Kathryn Wilkinson had asked for information where a Mr. Gilbert was buried, President Tom McMillan reported he could only find out that the grave site could possibly be at Choctaw Bluff.
- ♦ President McMillan also reported he is still considering the microfilm located in the courthouse and what may be done to improve the organization of the material.
- ♦ Also, the president reported that the Ft. Crawford historical marker will be repaired, the spelling of Finlay corrected, and a new post installed.

New Business:

- ♦ Secretary Jo Brewton read a note from Margaret Gaston (tour guide for the visit), expressing appreciation for the ECHS fieldtrip to the Hank Williams, Sr. Boyhood Home and Museum in Georgiana, Alabama.
- ♦ Jacque Stone reminded members that volunteer workdays are to be each Thursday in June, starting at 10:00 a. m. in the Alabama Room.

The Program:

- ♦ Reverend Alan Gantzhorn of Molina, Fla. presented a program on "The British in Pensacola." He discussed the five phases of the siege of Pensacola with emphasis on the British period from 1763-1781.

Minutes recorded by Secretary Jo Brewton

Gail Thrower

Gail Thrower, a former President of ECHS, passed away this June. She was unable to complete her term as President because of the illness of her father, but she presented several programs to ECHS sharing her knowledge of Native American culture.

Also, her son, Robert, the Poarch Indian Tribe's Historic Preservation Officer/Cultural Director, has given programs for ECHS and also guided the recent ECHS tour to Poarch.

Sherry Digmon, senior staff writer for the Atmore News commented in her tribute to Gail, "A wealth of Poarch Creek Indian history died with the death of Gail Thrower, Saturday, June 4. Thrower made it her life's work to preserve the heritage and culture of her people" (Gail Thrower Passes Away," Atmore News, Wednesday, June 11, 2011).

Gail Thrower was also instrumental in the Tribe's gaining federal recognition. Gay Drew, Manage-



ment Consultant, Native American Affairs writes:

"The Poarch Band of Creek Indians....Aye, Gail was a key player in the federal recognition process. With the zeal of a soldier, she took on the formidable task of documenting the existence of the tribe in the area from the time of the removal.

"Gail worked diligently with the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Branch of Acknowledgement and Research and Dr. Tony Paredes to satisfy the criteria for federal recognition. . . .

"There was one decade in the early 1900s that we needed more documentation. One day, Gail came bouncing into the Tribal Center with a newspaper article she'd found in the Escambia County archives [Material from the Alabama Room]. The specifics escape me, but suffice it to say that it documented a Saturday night frolic wherein her great-grandfather was involved...establishing existence of her people.

(Continued on page 4)

Gail Thrower *(continued)*

(Continued from page 3)

“She served as the tribal historian for the tribe and as an advisor in Indian country on the process of genea-

logical research”

In 1992, Gail was presented with the Folk Heritage Award by the Alabama State Council on the Arts (“Gail Thrower Passes Away,” Atmore News).

Stephen Beck’s Model of the Farm Which Was His Childhood Home

**Stephen Ethridge
Beck**

6/8/1930 – 5/18/ 2007

Stephen was born in Enon, Florida, a small farming community approximately five miles south of Walnut Hill in north-central Escambia County, Florida.

He graduated from Ernest Ward School in 1948 and immediately went to work for St. Regis Paper Company in Cantonment, Florida. He retired after forty-four years from that same paper mill.

Shortly after going to work at St. Regis, he was drafted into the U.S. Army, where he spent two years as a heavy artillery operator in the security forces guarding the Inner German Border between East and West Germany. The disciplines he learned while in the Army became an embedded part of his personality that he was very proud of and would pass on to his children.

In 1953, he married Frances Paul and started a family. They conceived two children, Kay and Stephen, and were very happily married until his passing. He was an avid outdoorsman, enjoying freshwater fishing, hunting and camping as well as gardening with his wife and any project he could do with his children.



The model of the Mr. Beck’s childhood home is a marvel of woodcraft. Plan to view and admire it as it is now on display in the McMillan Museum.

Thanks to Jerry Simmons for the photograph and the enhancing of the color of the model for better viewing on the page.

Upon his retirement from St. Regis/Champion, he spent many hours on woodworking projects, such as doll cradles, rocking chairs, bird cages and just about anything else that he could think of.

However, he seemed driven to create a precise model of his childhood home. He spent several months designing and building it, sometimes working day and night as if

he had a deadline to meet.

The entire model was made from materials similar to those used in the original house – cypress, juniper, cedar and pine. All of the parts were fashioned by him on standard cabinet shop equipment, not model making tools. Each and every piece, including the shingles, were cut from large boards on saws 10” in diameter and larger.

The model became a defining point for him, and family and friends would visit just to see the model and reminisce about the time they lived in the house.€

Snapshots of the May 2011 Meeting



Our Business Members

Please patronize our business members. Be sure to tell them you appreciate their support of the Escambia County Historical Society!

DIXON'S NURSERY
Nursery—Landscaping—Irrigation
323 Dixon Nursery Road
Brewton, Alabama 36426
Phone (251) 867-5847

Herrington's
The FLORIST, Inc.
"Where Flowers Are Special"
719 Douglas Ave.
Brewton, AL 36426
(251) 867-7085
(800) 235-0824
RONNY HERRINGTON

the L house
Printing & Frames
Custom Event Stationery
Business Documents • Custom Framing
131 Saint Joseph Avenue
Brewton, Alabama
251-867-9962
Lhouseprinting@gmail.com

CHARLIE GERMAN
OWNER
Woodlands
LAWN CARE
RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL
400 Stallworth Street
Brewton, AL 36426
Home 867-7919 Cell 363-2274

Place your future in our hands...



"The Bank To Believe In"

A Locally Owned Community Bank
Striving to Meet Your Financial Needs

Personal Loans

- Rates based on length of time and type of collateral

Real Estate Loans

- Fixed rates up to 15 years
- Adjustable rates up to 30 years
- Home Equity Loans
- Construction Loans

Local Decisions

- Fast approvals
- Local closings
- Minimum fees on all loans



ESCAMBIA
COUNTY BANK

P.O. Box 601 • Flomaton, Alabama 36441
Telephone (251) 296-5356

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Wakulla County Volcano

By Jerry Simmons

The following article first appeared as an Alger Sullivan Historical Society Tri-City Ledger column for 09 2010.

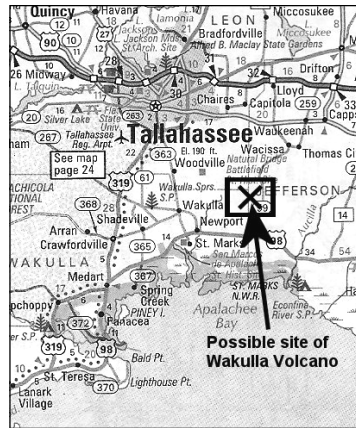
In the school year of 1957-1958, some classes at Century High School were interrupted by loud booms coming from the swamp northeast of Century. Legend had it there was a treasure hidden in a mysterious hill out there called "Rocky Mountain." Rising from the forest floor about sixty or more feet and maybe a half mile in circumference at the base, a mound of huge rocks and sand supposedly held a golden chain running through it. Connected to the chain were untold riches of pirate loot or an ancient Indian cache of gold and silver.

The mound is gone now, almost leveled by oil exploration crews who put a road right through the middle of it. What we thought were prospectors using dynamite searching for the legendary gold and silver were actually seismic engineers probing for signs of black gold: oil.

In the 1940s, revenuers used to fly Piper Cubs over the Escambia River swamp between Century and Pensacola, and watch for the many very small columns of smoke. These columns of smoke came from the charcoal fires under the whiskey stills hidden in the swamp. They generally flew over the swamp early in the morning, when the smoke was most visible, and would try to guide the revenuers on foot and in boats to the stills so they could destroy them.

It seemed to be an endless game of cat and mouse. Then along came the drug business and the moonshiners switched to that much more profitable business. Thus the poor folks who lived along the river and made a living tending the fires under the stills had to go on welfare.

Strange goings on in those times for a sparsely populated region of Northwest Florida, you have to admit. Back in the 19th century, sparsely-populated



Wakulla County, Florida had some strange goings-on, too. It had its very own volcano. Yes, you read that right: "volcano!"

During the 1800s, sea captains off the northwestern coast of Florida navigated their vessels toward the entrance to the St. Marks River using a dark column of smoke as a bearing. The Seminole Indians first reported the smoke, and by 1830 the phenomenon was also being reported by white settlers. Many explained the smoke as the campfires of local Indian settlements, smugglers, or pirates—and some said it was a volcano.

Wakulla County was created in 1843. It may (although this is disputed) be named for the Timucuan Indian word for "spring of water" or "mysterious water." This article is a reference to the county's greatest natural attraction, Wakulla Springs, one of the world's largest freshwater springs, both in terms of depth and water flow. In 1974, the water flow was measured at 1.23 billion gallons per day—the greatest recorded flow ever for a single spring.

Another possible origin for the name Wakulla, not as widely accepted, is that it means "mist" or "misting," perhaps in reference to the Wakulla Volcano. This is an attempt, not to solve the mystery, but to present the account, in as much detail and through as many voices as possible, of a puzzling phenomenon and local tradition, one made all the more enduring by its very improbability, gleaned and copied from multiple Internet sources. And if telling this story and gathering this history together should lead to a definitive answer? Well, that would be a great day for knowledge, but a sad day for imagination, this in a world where we so often have more than enough answers, amidst an ongoing shortage of wonder.

Although the smoke was never positively identified,

(Continued on page 8)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Wakulla County Volcano *(Continued)*

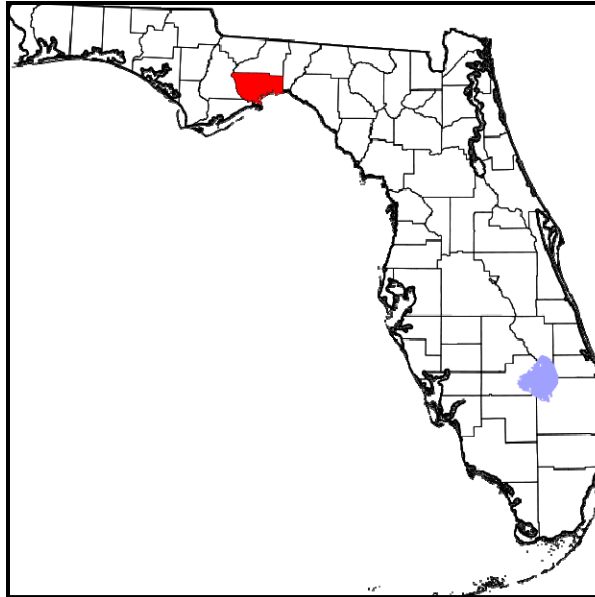
(Continued from page 7)

it was clearly visible from the hills of Tallahassee, some 25 miles to the north, the St. Marks Lighthouse, and taller buildings in Wakulla County. At night the area that produced the smoke was lit by an eerie luminescence.

Eventually dubbed the "Wakulla Volcano" by area residents, a legend grew that it was Florida's volcano. While many tried to reach the source of the smoky plume, all attempts failed, like finding the end of a rainbow. A treacherous swamp filled with bogs, quicksand, alligators, poisonous snakes and other manner of deathtraps surrounded the location. Although several adventurers made determined attempts to reach the source, all admitted they never got any closer than a few miles.

The phenomenon continued to mystify the locals, and the sea captains still accurately navigated by the smoke. More accurately, the "volcano" area is likely over the county line and in reality in Jefferson County, FL. Old accounts from the years of the War Between the States through the late 1880's consistently put it "south - southeast from the capitol building" (which sits just in front [east] of today's very tall "new" capitol building).

From that vantage point, a line south-southeast would be roughly in the area where Jefferson County borders Wakulla County. During the early 1990's one could eat lunch at the observation deck of the new capitol building and see a column of smoke in that exact direction - but when people made inquiries about existing forest fires, they were told there were no forest fires at that time, which



In this Picture of Florida, Wakulla County is Highlighted in Red

was confusing. On clear days or nights, one might hear "thunder" from that region, which the TV news weatherman explained as "temperature inversion." Another line of sight was from the St. Marks lighthouse, but that direction is not given.

Using old contemporary descriptions from the FSU library, computerized maps, and overlays, some were able to locate what appears to be the location of a missing encampment of Spanish explorers (de Soto or Vaca?) near an In-

dian village of the 1500's just a few miles north of this location. Travel to the spot in the present day yielded an area of many arrow heads, stone implements, and five large stones in the shape of a star, about the size of a de Soto style military encampment of its day.

Old timers in the area, including a man whose direct ancestors had received the land in a grant from Spain before the U.S. owned Florida, confirmed ancient stories of the Spanish coming through that area, and their trading and conflicts with Indians, etc. That was a few miles north. But folks haven't seen the reported Wakulla volcano or the purported burnt rocks and ground fissures. At least one party reported a clear hot springs in the general vicinity, but no one seems to know where that is either.

Many assume there are no earth crust faults in the region because there has been no evidence of such in the last hundred years. That's what they thought in Missouri in the early 1800s until they had huge quakes (much bigger than the San Francisco quake)

(Continued on page 9)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Wakulla County Volcano *(Continued)*

(Continued from page 8)

and since 2008 residents there are warned that the New Madrid fault is due another very big one at any time - geologically speaking, of course.

Interestingly, there was an earthquake in Quincy, FL, in 1952 which is northwest of Tallahassee by about 22 miles. Then in 2006 there were two earthquakes in the Gulf of Mexico, some 260 miles southwest of Tampa, off the coast of Naples. Those earthquakes were 7 months apart, and 5.2 and 6.0 magnitude respectively. If you draw a line (not that faults are straight lines) on a map from Quincy to the spot southwest of Tampa where the 2006 quakes hit, it crosses not far from the region of the fabled Wakulla Volcano.

If you draw a line from Quincy to the hot springs area of Venice, FL (south of Tampa), it too passes not far from St. Marks and the reported hot spring (if it exists) near the so-called Wakulla volcano. Each of the recent earthquakes were in areas that "are unusual" for earthquake activity. Perhaps there is a thinning of the earth's crust along that line that allows for present day hot springs and/or the occasional open fissure.

Just before the advent of the 20th Century, on August 31, 1886, the dark plume suddenly disappeared. The time of the disappearance coincided with an earthquake that rocked the region with such force that church bells rang in Tallahassee. Suddenly, on that day in 1886, the day the great Charleston, South Carolina, earthquake rang the church bells of St. Augustine, drained Lake Jackson, and shook the ground in Tallahassee, the mysterious column of smoke vanished, apparently never to be seen again.

However, during the early 1900s people would come forward from time to time claiming they had located the famous "lost volcano." They testified that they had seen boulders and charred rocks strewn about a blackened crater on a hill with a gaping chasm splitting open the earth. There was a report

from the general area of a site of burned and blackened rocks and a small hole or vent that is of unknown depth. Large cracks or fissures are also numerous.

The place is very difficult to locate as the terrain is swampy and heavily forested. When pressed, however, none were able to provide anything but a general location. Since that time, no one is able to tell the tale can credibly claim to have found the source of the smoke.

Those who made the claim never went back, and were uncertain they could find it again if they did. Over time, the timbering industry has plowed and planted. Swamps have been drained. Roads have been built. What was once too remote and hostile to survive is now just a day out hiking or hunting. A sulphur smell permeates the area and vegetation is sparse in an area approximately 30 feet in diameter around a vent.

The twenty-foot alligators and cotton-mouths are (mostly) gone and anyone can embark in search of their favorite adventure - perhaps only to walk right past it. "Difficult" becomes "impossible" and "unfound" becomes "unfindable." But the legend never dies.

The Wakulla Volcano was never found. Later in the 20th Century, though, an area was found that matched the early explorers' descriptions. It is adjacent to the Aucilla Sinks region where the Aucilla River rises and falls. The lower part of the river disappears underground and reappears several times, and is known as the "Aucilla River Sinks." The River is a rich source of late Pleistocene and early Holocene animal bones and human artifacts.

Large limestone boulders clutter the area. Black lichen grows on many of the boulders creating the illusion they are charred. Researchers decided that the smoke seen by so many during the latter half of the 1800s was nothing more mysterious than a smoldering peat bog. The theory seems plausible until the

(Continued on page 10)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Wakulla County Volcano *(Continued)*

(Continued from page 9)

surrounding terrain is taken into account: a wet, marshy swamp.

How could something burn for decades in the midst of so much water? In October 1997, three researchers braved the swamp seeking the elusive volcano. They found some large rocks and smaller ones that were burned—but not from any volcanic heat. Try as they might they couldn't find evidence of any fissure, but it might not have been the correct area. No one really knows for sure.

Then there's this: some who claim to have found the remnants of the volcano have returned with molten rock. And just after World War II, an oil com-

pany that had set up drilling operations near the area where some said the volcano was located hit volcanic rock with their drill bits.

For now, we can just remember that for many years, perhaps even since prehistory, a column of smoke rose from the massive swamps which lie just inland from the top of the arch of Florida's Big Bend. Some say a den of pirates, others still say fire from the earth, but no human ever saw the smoke up close and lived - or chose - to tell the public.

The preceding was compiled and copied from research and reports from various Internet sites, including Wikipedia. For more information, Google "Wakulla County, Florida Volcano." €

This Postcard Picture of Brewton's City Park Courtesy of Buddy Mitchell



The ECHS *Journal* Section

Tobacco in Brewton: Hope-Suspense-Disappointment

The following article was published by columnist Lydia Grimes under the title "Brewton Tobacco Tale Retold" (the Brewton Standard, October 11, 2006). Lydia found the article had been originally published in the Standard in 1956. It is reprinted with permission.

Initial Enthusiasm

By W. Emmett Brooks

Enthusiasm over making Brewton a tobacco-growing center was first generated in 1908. In that year, J. W. Terry had occasion to investigate the raising of tobacco in the Quincy, Fla. Section and was sold on the possibilities of growing the crop here. Mr. Terry was a highly respected and prosperous farmer who owned the property on which one of his grandsons, John Douglas, now resides.

Before inspecting the project as a community enterprise, Mr. Terry gave tobacco growing a trial on his own. He planted a few acres under shade, built the required drying barns, harvested a fine crop, and made a great profit.

The variety planted was Sumatra Wrapper, which, as the name indicates produced a fine-textured leaf used as a wrapper in the making of cigars. At the time of Mr. Terry's venture, the wrapper was selling on the market at \$3.00 a pound, which gave the grower a profit of around \$1.00 a pound. With a minimum expected yield of 2,000 pounds to the acre, the money should roll in. In fact, there had been nothing quite so promising since gold was discovered in California. Thus the stage was set for what proved to be one of the most interesting, if at same time unsuccessful, civic adventures ever undertaken in this community. Everybody saw visions of getting rich



Certificate of the Escambia Tobacco Company

Thanks to Tom McMillan for bringing this copy of the certificates. This one is made out to N. R. Leigh, Sr., for one share of the capital stock of the Escambia Tobacco Company, cost ten dollars.

from tobacco and the selling job that was done on this project was terrific.

The Escambia Tobacco Company Formed

Promotion (and promotion is used here in no way in a disrespectful sense) led to the organization of the Escambia Tobacco Company, which was incorporated on May 15, 1909. The enthusiasm with which the stock was purchased is indicated by the fact that the records show that there were 94 subscribers on the original list and

they ranged from leading businessmen to kids on the street (of which the writer was one). The original charter of the corporation reads like a city directory and space will not permit a listing of the stockholders here.

Additional proof of the interest of our citizens in this enterprise is found in the total amount of stock subscribed; 1567 shares were sold at \$10.00 each, giving the corporation a paid in capital of \$15,670. When the population of Brewton in 1909 was less than 1500, and comparing dollar values now and then, the amount invested would perhaps be equivalent to raising at least \$100,000 at this time. And all of this was done locally. There were no high-pressure outside organizers of stock salesmen. With one exception, every stockholder was a resident of

(Continued on page 12)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Tobacco in Brewton: Hope-Suspense-Disappointment *(Continued)*

(Continued from page 11)

Brewton. The exception was, by the way, Daniel H. Pratt, wealthy cotton gin manufacturer of Prattville, who sought the privilege of investing \$1,000.00 in the undertaking.

The Board of Directors

(Editor's note: In this section Mr. Books gives brief biographies about the men on the board. Remember that this article was originally published in 1956 and references to people and places do not refer to the present day.)

With the stock sold and the company ready for business, the following board of directors was named: E M. Lovelace, president; H. H. Foshee, first vice-president; O. M. Gordon first vice-president ; Dr. J. T. Boyd, secretary; M. F Brooks, treasurer; J. W. Adkisson; J. E Finlay, O. F. Luttrell and A. C. Smith. Only one of that board now survives – J. W. Adkisson, who is as he was then, president of Luttrell Hardware Company

To further identify the others for the benefit of the younger generation, E M. Lovelace was president of Lovelace Lumber Company and father of Ed Mac and Flournoy Lovelace of this city. S. S. Foshee was a wealthy lumber operator and landowner who built the home at the corner of Belleville Avenue and McLelland Street which is now occupied by Seaman Hudson and his family.

Mr. Gordon was of the naval stores business, coming here from South Carolina, and later became president of the Bank of Brewton. His son, Oscar, now lives in the home on Sowell Road which was erected by his father.



Cigar Rack and Press

This cigar rack and press, now on display in the McMillan Museum, has been given to the Museum collection by ECHS member David Allen.

Racks such as this would have been used by the Escambia County Tobacco Company to dry the cigars after they were formed.

Dr. J. T. Boyd was for many years a beloved dentist in Brewton, as his father before him. He and Mrs. Boyd lived on Greenville Avenue in what is now the Baptist Church Annex. After the death of S. S. Foshee, they purchased the home where they resided for the remainder of their lives. They had two daughters, Mrs. Peter Hamilton of Montgomery and Mrs. Albert Bell of Lake Charles, La.

M. F. Brooks was Judge of Probate of this county and had previously served as Circuit Clerk, and died in office after having served for more than 30 years in the courthouse.

He was the father of the writer, my brother, Leon, and sister, Mrs. D. B. Hayes of Blountstown, Fla.

J. E. Finlay was a prominent merchant of Brewton for 50 years. For many years, and until his death, he was president of Robbins and McGowin Company and connected with other local businesses. His two sons, John David and Bob are now operating the company. Bob (whose correct name is Norville Leigh Finlay) and his family now live in his father's home, which was originally built by S. J. Foshee who was the father of S. S Foshee.

O. F. Luttrell was vice-president and cashier of the Bank of Brewton almost from the beginning of that institution. He left here for a few years to engage in business in Sylacauga, but returned to resume his connection with the bank, which he continued until his death. His first home (since remodeled) is now occupied by Mrs. J. A. Hainje, which his later one is used as a church by the Latter Day Saints. One of his three sons, Frank Alex, still lives here, while the other surviving son, J. Oden, resides in Montgomery.

(Continued on page 13)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Tobacco in Brewton: Hope-Suspense-Disappointment *(Continued)*

(Continued from page 12)

Albert C. Smith, the ninth member of the board, was another Brewton merchant for many years. He was one of the owners of the Brewton Bargain House, which was quartered in the building now occupied by Everage's. Like most businesses of that day, it was general merchandise establishment where you could purchase anything from a paper of pins to a carload of fertilizer. Later he was one of the owners of a men's furnishing store. Smith Colley Mercantile Company, and shortly before his death served a few years as postmaster of Brewton. His only son, Albert J., was president of a bank in Monroeville.

Company Will Not be Controlled by Big Business Interests

The organizers and developers of the local organization were rugged individuals. Many of them had made fortunes in various lines and they had not done it by being pushed around. Never before had their businesses been run by someone in a Manhattan skyscraper and they didn't intend to be ground under the heel of the tobacco trust.

They said, in effect, "They can't do that to us. We have some of the finest wrappers in the country. We don't intend to sell them at a loss. We'll just manufacture our own cigars and not only make a profit on the raw material but on the finished product as well."

The Cigar Business – The Factory and Workers

And so, Escambia Tobacco Company went into the cigar business. Of course, it was necessary to steam-cure the leaves but a solution to that problem was quickly found by E. M. Lovelace, the company president. He owned the old courthouse and it was found that with a little insulating here and there the rooms



Cigar Rack and Press

Here the rack has been opened and shelves removed.

could be adapted to curing the tobacco. Getting steam was no problem either, since Mr. Lovelace and his brother, Yancey, also owned Lovelace Lumber Company just a short distance away on Mill Street (now St. Nicolas Avenue). It was comparatively easy to run steam line from the lumber company's boilers into the building.

Next to consider was the matter of a factory in which to make the cigars. With their

usual resourcefulness, officers of the company erected a frame building on what is now known as "Hotel Alley," just back of where the fair Store is located. It was not an expensive structure, but it served the purpose and was equipped with bins worktables and other necessities.

The question of labor was no deterrent either. The company simply imported from Tampa eight or ten of the best cigar makers obtainable and put them to work. Be it said to the company's credit and that of the quality of the local tobacco, it produced some of the finest cigars that ever went into a box.

The Product – Fine Cigars

They were not the stogies or cheroots of the three for five cents variety, so popular in that day, but a product for, shall we say, the carriage trade that sold for ten fifteen, and even twenty-five cents each. They bore fancy labels and were packaged in attractive boxes. Nothing was overlooked that would create a demand for Brewton cigars from smokers all the way from the banks of Burnt Corn Creek to the lobby of the Waldorf Astoria.

Things were again looking up for the stockholders. That bunch of cut-throats on Wall Street weren't going to lick them, after all. Where they had counted

(Continued on page 14)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Tobacco in Brewton: Hope-Suspense-Disappointment (Continued)

(Continued from page 13)

definitely on indoor plumbing and had hopes for electric wiring in their homes, they now were quite certain that all of them could also own one of those new-fangled horseless carriages that were being made in Detroit by a man named Ford.

The Big Manufacturers in the Tobacco Industry Take Action

But once again the directors of the company had failed to learn the facts of life. It had not occurred to them that the same trust that controlled the price of tobacco also had a few things to say about the sale of cigars. It didn't push down the price, for its own interests would suffer. Such a procedure wasn't at all necessary. It was much simpler than that to attain the desired results.

The big manufacturers of cigars, cigarettes, smoking and chewing tobacco merely passed the word to wholesalers and distributors that handling of the Brewton-made smokes would not be at all pleasing to them and might mean that their supplies of the standard items would be seriously curtailed, if not entirely cut off. Quite naturally, the dealers were not interested in handling something that would put them out of business and the local cigars were dropped from their stocks.

With sales restricted to Brewton outlets, the fate of the local company was sealed. It would have taken every man, woman and child in town smoking 24 hours a day to consume even a portion of the output. The factory was closed down and the cigar makers wended their way back to the clime from which they came. The building stood unoccupied for several years and was finally torn down and replaced by a dwelling.



Cigar Press

In spite of their dogged determination, those who had launched the venture under such promising circumstances were forced to admit they were licked by an enemy they never saw. It was a bitter blow and one such as many of them experienced for the first time. Never before had they been faced with a situation in business where they were trying to fight a foe on his terms and on a battleground a

thousand miles away.

The End Comes

The assets of the company—such as they were—were disposed of to apply on its debts. The acreage on which the bountiful crop had been grown went back into private ownership as a producer of cotton and corn.

Thus terminated another enterprise on which, like many others before and since, the people of the community had pinned their hopes for a bigger and better Brewton. Although nearly 50 years have passed and this city has enjoyed a prosperous growth, tobacco has played no part in it. So far as is known, nobody in this vicinity has attempted to grow a stalk of it since the Escambia Tobacco Company came to such a sudden, unexpected and disastrous end.

Perhaps the reader is wondering by now why this writer has such a vivid and detailed recollection of the first and only tobacco venture in Brewton. That question is readily answered. In the first place he has been blessed with a fairly retentive memory. Next, as an investor in the enterprise, he lost the first 20 dollars he ever made. And, finally, he was among those who had looked forward with great pleasure to the day when they would no longer have to expose a portion of their anatomy to the chilling blasts of winter while perusing the pages of last year's Sears-Roebuck Catalog.€

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Tobacco in Brewton: Hope-Suspense-Disappointment *(Continued)*

The Tobacco Industry in Escambia County

By Annie Waters

Mrs. Waters' account of this industry is a good companion to the previous article, adding details and stories not given in the previous article by Mr. Brooks. As with the article by Mr. Brooks, some of the most interesting information is about the people and places in Brewton rather than just the story of the tobacco industry.

Mrs. Waters would have been writing this material in the 1970's or 1980's as she published her book on the history of Escambia County in 1983.

In 1906, a Mr. Johns who lived east of Brewton decided to grow a small patch of tobacco for his own use. He was so successful and the leaves of his plants were so large that he displayed a sample at the newspaper office in Brewton. This led to considerable interest in the possibility that the soil and climate of this area was suitable to the growth of tobacco.

The neighboring state of Florida was having success in tobacco production, and in 1907, Charles

Sowell, Jr., and his brother, Preston R., invested in the tobacco business in Quincy, Florida. In June of that Year W. G. Martin and H. C. Rankin in company of P. B. Sowell toured the tobacco farms of Gadsden County, Florida, and returned with visions of thriving farms in Escambia County.

A group of Brewton business men met on October 17, 1907 and formed The Tobacco Growers Association. Tobacco production was the talk of the town, and newspapers extolled its economic possibilities. Residents were asked to do their part in making the dream a reality. Leaders of the association, James Sowell, W. Y. Lovelace, S. S. Foshee, M. Lindsey, and J. W. Terry, solicited subscriptions to a \$10,000 fund for tobacco cultivation and succeeded in raising \$16,000.

The venture began with a two acre experiment of Sumatra wrapper tobacco being planted by the Terry Tobacco Company on land which today is part of the Lynnbrook Subdivision to the city of Brewton. Considerable risk was involved and much

(Continued on page 16)

**Tobacco farming
in Northwest
Florida circa
1896**

Bliss' Quarterly



The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Tobacco Industry in Escambia County *(Continued)*

(Continued from page 15)

labor was expended at a cost of \$500 for enclosing and shading the area.

Posts were set that extended eight feet above ground to make a network on which slats and cheese cloth were used to create the desired shade. J. W. Y. White, an experienced tobacco grower, was employed to supervise the planting, cultivation gathering, and curing of the tobacco.

All necessary preparations had been completed by the end of March 1908, and early in April, Mr. Terry journeyed to Quincy, Florida, and returned with 6,000 plants and more were to be shipped. Seventy-two tons of fertilizer were used on the two acres. The growth of the plants was phenomenal, and a three days growth measurement showed an increase in height of over one foot, and eventually the stalks protruded through the eight-foot latticework.

By June, the lower leaves were ready for harvesting, and the experimental farm was drawing a large number of curious and interested visitors.

In February of that year J. M. Gonzalez, an expert Cuban Cigar maker, opened up a small cigar factory in one of the store buildings of The Brewton Oil and Manufacturing Co. on St. Joseph Street to be in readiness for the Terry Company harvest. In the meantime, he was turning out high grade Havana cigars from shipped-in tobacco and he invited everyone to come in and watch the interesting process.

J. A. Wilkerson, Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture, and William Hinson of the U. S. Agricultural Department, visited the Terry farm in September, examined the tobacco, tested the soil, and pronounced it ideal. They shipped 35 pounds of Terry tobacco to Washington for thorough inspection. It was said to be equal to Cuban produced tobacco.

At the end of the year, the two-acre experiment tract had yielded 2,500 pounds of Sumatra tobacco, which sold for \$3,750, producing a profit of \$1,800.

The local paper proclaimed: "Tobacco a Huge Success."

Enthusiasm continued to grow, and on November 9, 1908, a second company, the Escambia Tobacco Company, was organized with E. M. Loveless, President; S. S. Foshee, treasurer; and J. W. Adkisson, J. E. Finlay, W. A. Lovett, and A. C. Smith, directors. A part of Section 16, Township 2, Range 10E was purchased by the Company. Part of the land was in cultivation and many more acres were cleared during the winter months. This land was the area of the present Woodmere Subdivision of Brewton.

In the autumn of 1908, Mr. Terry held a mass meeting in Atmore in an attempt to solicit farmers of that area to plant at least 20 acres in tobacco the coming year, but so far as can be determined, only Mr. N. Dohrn experimented with a small acreage, which did well.

The industry prospered in 1909 and around one hundred men, women, boys and girls were busily engaged in gathering the harvest at the two farms. The yield was conservatively estimated at 1,000 pounds per acre of Sumatra wrapper, although some damage had been caused by wind and rain.

The huge barn at the Terry farm and one at the Escambia farm could not contain the yield, so E. M. Lovelace purchased the Old Courthouse (Leigh Place) to be used as a warehouse. According to Mr. Ed Leigh McMillan, the first floor was used for additional space for manufacturing cigars.

The Terry barn stood west of the present home of Mr. and Mrs. John Douglas and north of the now existing ancient oak trees which were planted by Mr. Terry. At that time, the road ran between two rows of large oaks between Sowell Road and present Highway 31, with a large dug well in front of the barn. For many years after tobacco cultivation ceased, the well remained a legendary place for

(Continued on page 17)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The Tobacco Industry in Escambia County *(Continued)*

(Continued from page 16)

country residents going to town on Saturday to stop their wagons in the shade, refresh themselves with a cool drink, and exchange neighborly conversation.

The year 1910 saw the continued prosperity of the tobacco industry with above forty acres of land planted and the creation of a two-story packing house in Brewton, located on Mill Street (St. Nicholas). A group of young ladies known as the “tobacco girls” were kept busy sorting the leaves into “hands.” The leaves were of number one quality, eighteen inches in length and without a flaw.

Mr. Crawford, one of the expert cigar makers, stated that he had never worked a better grade of tobacco. Mr. Terry asked residents to send in a name for cigars, something that would appeal to the smokers and popularize the brand.

In August, Messer’s Terry and White were hosts at an ice cream supper for Frankie Rodgers, Mamie Burnett, Minna and Lillian Morris, Julia Boland, Minnie Crook, Virginia Sowell, Kate and Mamie Johnson, Lida Pittman, Mrs. Key, Sallie and Boulah Hodges, “the tobacco girls.”

Mr. J. E. Blohm, the U. S. tobacco inspector for the State of Alabama, established his headquarters in Brewton and travelled to other areas of the state where tobacco was grown. He praised Brewton produced tobacco very highly.

The industry continued to thrive the following year, and Cigar Factory No, 89, District of Alabama, located on the second floor of the packing house, was doing its part to build a bigger, better Brewton. An additional two-story building was erected adjoining the Factory; the cigar makers were increased from six to twenty, and they produced 3,500 cigars a day.

The following brands were on the market: Terry Smoker, Brewton Enterprise, Brewton Booster, Pauline Perfecto, Dixie Queen, Brewton Triumph,

Col. Travis, all five cents; W. T Lovelace, ten cents; Brewton Superba, fifteen cents; and Lord James, twenty-five cents. They proved to be a distinct success.

Rev. E. A. Smith, popular Presbyterian minister, said he was personally interested in the cigar factory because Mr. Ed Lovelace kept him in cigars made there.

At the 1911 State Fair held in Montgomery, the Terry Tobacco Exhibit won first prize and Escambia grown tobacco triumphed over tobacco grown in other sections of the state.

After this point in time, recorded articles on the tobacco industry began to dwindle. Only one was found for the year 19123. Mr. Terry made a business and pleasure trip of several weeks to Georgia . While there, he attended the reunion of the veterans of “The Lost Cause” at Macon and represented the General Clanton Camp. He received a number of orders for Brewton-made cigars in Georgia cities; the Georgians informed him that they were “good smokes” and considerably better than the average.

The year 1913 marked the beginning of the end for the once prosperous tobacco farms in Escambia County. The area had a late frost, which greatly reduced the number of plants, and in March a flood came, destroying still more of the plants. The growers made no profit for that year.

This was the end of tobacco growing in Escambia County for commercial use, as farmers were not in favor of continuing a commodity that could so easily be destroyed by late spring frost and all too frequent floods.€

** Mrs. Waters adds the note that Mr. Terry, the tobacco grower, was the maternal grandfather of Mr. John and Dr. William Douglas.*

ECHOES
THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 276
 Brewton, AL 36427
 Phone: 251-809-1528

E-mail: escohis@escohis.org

We're on the web!

www.escohis.org

FIRST CLASS MAIL
DATED MATERIAL

**Address correction
 requested**

<u>Books for Sale</u>	<u>Mailed</u>	<u>Regular</u>
<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
<u>Wildflowers of The Escambia CD</u>	\$12.50	\$10.00
<u>History of Brewton and E. Brewton (sc)</u>	\$51.00	\$45.00
<u>History of Brewton and E. Brewton (hc)</u>	\$66.00	\$60.00
<u>Flomaton Centennial Scrapbook</u>	\$46.00	\$40.00

**Clip the following form and send to ECHS
 Treasurer, P.O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427.**

Membership Renewal/Application Form

Date ____/____/____

Names) _____

Mailing Address _____

Do you prefer to get your newsletter by
 U.S. Mail ____ or email? ____

Phone _____

Email _____

Dues _____

(\$25.00/person, \$35.00/two family members - Lifetime,
 \$250.00/person; \$50.00/year business)

Donation _____

(Business members get a business-card sized advertisement in 11 issues of the
 newsletter. Larger sized ads are available)

Amount enclosed _____

Your interests _____

You will help with _____

❖ Dues are to be paid at the beginning of the
 year. Give a membership as a gift!

ECHOES, The newsletter for the Escambia County Historical Society, a 501 (c) (3) corporation, is published monthly except November. Comments are welcome. You may email the Society at escohis@escohis.org or call 251-809-1528.

OFFICERS

President, Tom McMillan
 Vice-President, Robin Brewton
 Secretary, Jo Brewton
 Treasurer, Susan Crawford
 Echoes Editor, Ranella Merritt
 Librarian, Jacque Stone
 Publicity, Lydia Grimes
 Historian/Curator, Barbara Page

TRUSTEES

Wilellen Elliot
 Doris Bruner
 Ranella Merritt
 Tom McMillan
 Ann Biggs-Williams, Alternate