



The  
Escambia  
County  
Historical  
Society,  
Founded  
1971

## The Christmas Party Tuesday, December 5, 2017 McMillan Museum Coastal Alabama Community College Brewton Campus 2:00-4:00 p. m



**Date: Tuesday  
December 5, 2017**



**Time:  
2:00-4:00 p. m.**



**Place:  
McMillan Museum**

Bring your favorite Christmas dish and join the party which promises good food and good fellowship. Skip lunch and plan to enjoy an array of dishes including gumbo, side dishes and desserts.

The Society will furnish drinks.

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**Don't Forget to Bring  
Your Favorite Holiday  
Dishes to the Christmas  
Party**



Christmas Parade 2008

Lydia Grimes, Darryl  
Searcy, and Pat  
McArthur

Volume 44 No. 11-12

Nov. & Dec. 2017

**January Meeting  
Tuesday, January 23, 2018  
3:00 p.m.**

**McMillan Museum  
Program: "Show and Tell"**  
Plan on bringing an item that has  
meaning for you or your family and  
sharing the story about it.

ECHS has been given a gift of a year's  
subscription to Ancestry Worldwide with  
access beginning on January 2, 2018.

**A Correction:  
This  
photograph  
attributed to  
Mark Stacey in  
ECHOES,  
October 2017,  
is actually by  
Glenn Wills**



**Old Memphis &  
Charleston Freight Depot**

## Alabama 200, Bicentennial News and Announcements



### State Bicentennial Committee Awards First Grants to Communities for Bicentennial Events

On November 13, 2017, the Alabama Bicentennial Commission awarded its first three community and county grants to the local bicentennial committees in Mooresville, Athens, and Limestone County. The grants, \$2500 each to the communities and \$5000 for the county, will support bicentennial related activities and projects developed by local committees.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **“ALABAMA 200: I’m Coming Home,” Birmingham’s Kickoff for the Bicentennial Celebrations, Held at the Alabama and Lyric Theatres November 27, 2017**



The event opened in front of the Alabama Theatre with band performances and speakers. The ceremony continued at the nearby Lyric Theatre with musical presentations by the Temptations Review and other guest performers.



### **Bicentennial Marquee at the Lyric Fine Arts Theatre in Downtown Birmingham.**

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Two of Alabama’s Oldest and Most Significant Historic Landmarks, Celebrated Momentous Anniversaries.**



**Ms. Mamie Lee  
Johnson, Veteran  
Reenactor at the  
St. Stephens  
Historical Park.**



**Band Reenactors  
Play Bagpipes at  
Fort Toulouse-Fort  
Jackson Frontier  
Days.**

### **St. Stephens**

St. Stephens served as Alabama’s territorial capital from 1817 to 1819. St. Stephens was the eastern most city of the Mississippi Territory and a very important site during the settlement of the southwestern frontier.

During a brief three decades beginning in the 1790’s, St. Stephens became a Spanish Fort, an American trading post, and Mississippi territorial capital as settlers streamed down the Federal Road from the Carolinas and Georgia. At its height, c. 1820, the town boasted between two and three thousand residents and 450 substantial buildings.

Upon Mississippi gaining statehood in 1817, Alabama became its own territory and St. Stephens its capital. Alabama’s first Governor, William Wyatt Bibb, presided over the first meeting of the Territorial Legislature at the Douglass Hotel on St. Stephens’ High Street. From here was the beginning of Alabama. St. Stephens declined rapidly to a ghost town after the capital was moved away in 1819.

To commemorate its bicentennial, the site held an official ceremony on October 7, 2017, at the St. Stephens Historical Park in Washington County. Festivities included living history vignettes performed by local school children, historical reenactments, and demonstrations of traditional arts and skills.

*(Continued on page 3)*



## Alabama 200, Bicentennial News and Announcements

*(Continued from page 2)*

In celebration of St. Stephens, The Museum of Alabama has debuted a new temporary exhibit called St. Stephens and the Alabama Territory. It will be on display in the second-floor lobby of the Alabama Department of Archives and History through May 11, 2018.



**St. Stephens  
Courthouse in  
"New" St.  
Stephens,  
Completed in  
1854.**



**Flag Ceremony at St. Stephen's Day.**

### **Fort Toulouse/Fort Jackson**

Since its founding by French settlers in 1717, Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson has become one of the most important historical and archaeological sites in Alabama. Each year, the Alabama Historical Commission hosts a four-day celebration to honor those who once lived and served at the fort.

From November 1-4, Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson Frontier Days have offered visitors a glimpse of the last 300 years with historical reenactors, authentic Indian hoop dances, cannon demonstrations, delicious frontier-themed food, and an official ceremony to celebrate its tricentennial.

In 1717, Fort Toulouse served as the eastern-most outpost of the French colony of Louisiana. The French intended that the fort secure the friendship of the

populous Creek Confederacy and make French policy known, while keeping the soldiers and interests of the British Empire out of the region.

The Alibamu Indians, who were a part of the Creek confederacy, invited the French to build the fort here. Most Creek villages remained officially neutral so they could bargain with the British and French for better prices in the deerskin trade. British and French rivalries came to a head with the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1754. With the French defeat, the 1763 Treaty of Paris ceded Louisiana to Britain and Spain. French soldiers and their families moved west of the Mississippi river to live among the Spanish at Opelousas, Louisiana.

Between 1717 and 1763, the French built three forts in succession as the relentless Coosa River washed the first two away. As French soldiers brought their families here, they built some of the very first farms in what is now Alabama around Fort Toulouse. The sons of these families grew up to be French soldiers during the 46 years of the fort's existence. Sons and daughters of French soldiers married, creating large extended families within the Fort Toulouse garrison. The largest family was that of the Fontenot's, who raised 12 children at a farmstead next to Fort Toulouse. Many French soldier descendants visit the park today.

The Alibamu Indian village of Pakana was located adjacent to the French fort and community. Bilingual French and Indian children played among the fort ramparts and villages while their parents farmed the adjoining bottomlands around the fort and villages. The Alibamu became close allies and friends with the French, with much of this tribe following the French to Louisiana in 1763.

William Bartram, a well-known botanist, visited the site in 1776 making notes and drawings of the area's plants, animals and native cultures.

With the outbreak of the Creek War phase of the War of 1812, American forces built a fort over the old site of Fort Toulouse. In May of 1814, Andrew Jackson came here to the forks of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers with United States Army regulars and militia units from Georgia, the Carolinas, and Tennessee after the bloody battle of Horseshoe Bend, where the power of the Red Stick faction of the Creeks was broken.

In August, the Treaty of Fort Jackson signed over 15 million acres of Creek lands to the U.S. which soon opened much of Alabama to American settlers.

*(Continued on page 4)*

# Alabama 200, Bicentennial News and Announcements

(Continued from page 3)

Alabama became the 22nd state five years later.

After Fort Jackson was decommissioned in 1817, its brig served as the jail for Montgomery County's first county seat, Fort Jackson Town. By 1819, the county seat moved to Montgomery and Fort Jackson Town quickly fell into disuse. Today the only remnants of the old town are a sparse series of drainage ditches that parallel the orientation of the town.



**At Fort Toulouse, Reenactment of French Marines Meeting the Alabama Indians.**



**As Part of the 300th Anniversary Celebration, There Was an Unveiling of Granite Markers that Designate the Location of Part of the Original 1717 Fort Wall.**

\*\*\*\*\*



**Marshall County "Paint Out" Exhibit a Part of the County's Celebration of the Bicentennial**



**A French Cannon that Traveled Upriver in 1717 Returned to Fort Toulouse for the Celebration, Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History**

The Marshall County Convention and Visitor's Bureau has partnered with the Guntersville Museum to showcase landmarks around Marshall County with help from several local artists. The Marshall County Paint-Out was a weekend event, April 29-30, in which Alabama artists painted selected historic places across Marshall County.

The fifteen original works of art produced from the Paint-Out event are now being displayed as part of an exhibit traveling throughout Marshall County in commemoration of Alabama's bicentennial.

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(Continued on page 5)



## Alabama 200, Bicentennial News and Announcements

(Continued from page 4)

### Alabama Commemorates World War I



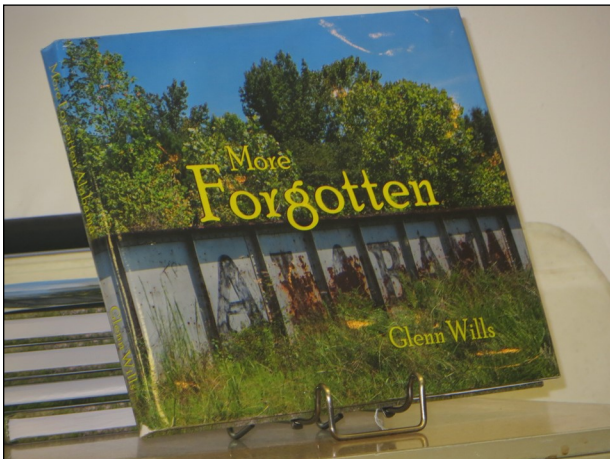
**Rainbow Soldier Statue at Union Station in Montgomery.**

Two monuments dedicated to World War I soldiers from the state were recently installed in Alabama.

On August 28, 2017, exactly one hundred years after the departure of the 167th U.S. Infantry Regiment from Montgomery, a bronze statue depicting the soldiers was unveiled at Montgomery's Union Station. The Rainbow Soldier statue, designed by renowned British sculptor James Butler, was dedicated at a ceremony in downtown Montgomery with distinguished military leaders present, including Consul General of France Louis de Corail.

On November 12, a monument dedicated to honor those civilians who died in the Greater Shoals Area during World War I was installed in Sheffield. The ceremony, held at Oakwood Cemetery, featured a rifle salute by the American Legion Post 31 and a keynote address by former Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb.

## Snapshots from the October 2017 ECHS Meeting



**Top Left, Our Speaker Glenn Wills. Top Right and Bottom, His Two Books of Photographs of Forgotten and Abandoned Places in Alabama**

## Snapshot from the October 2017 ECHS Meeting *(Continued)*



**Speaker Glenn Wills Listening to a Question.**



**Carolyn Geck Enjoying the Program.**



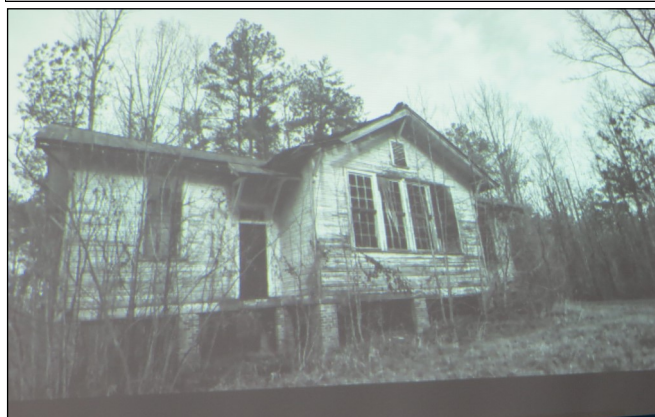
**Ranella Merritt Introducing the Speaker.**



**Florence Rowser and Amanda Bell Enjoying a Laugh.**



**At Left, Photograph of an Abandoned Church with Flower Arrangement in Foreground. Below, Photograph of an Abandoned School.**





## Snapshots from the October 2017 ECHS Meeting *(Continued)*



**Enjoying Refreshments, Left to Right are Barbara Page, Darryl Searcy, Mike Edwards, Don Sales, and Charles Ware.**

## ECHS's First Float in the Christmas Parade

*From ECHOES for December 4, 1978:  
Editor, Carolyn McLendon*

The Christmas Parade this year was one of the finest Brewton has ever had. This was accomplished by the many talented people of this area putting their energies together with their imagination and creating a Fairyland parade through the streets.

This Society entered its first float in this parade, entitled "Christmas as a Legend" with a parlor scene complete with Oriental rug, pump organ, and a Christmas tree decorated with popcorn.

Our Curator Mr. Roger Anderson, who really went over and beyond the call of duty in working on this float, was assisted by Miss Rita Jane Boykin and Miss Lula Pearl Neal, who are both members of this Society. Mr. Earl Evans was recruited by Carolyn McLendon to help in her place.

Mrs. Lillian Watson, Mrs. Pauline Duke and Mrs. Maude Yeldell popped and strung popcorn for the tree until they were fairly exhausted.

Riding on the float in the parade were Mr. and Mrs. Roger Anderson and their two daughters, Mr. Earl Evans, and Mrs. Carolyn McLendon. Mrs. Anderson played the pump organ through the streets filling the air with lovely Christmas hymns.

Although the Society's float won no prize, it was good that we put in an appearance as one of the outstanding organizations supporting this city.

## Our Business Members

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our Business Members**

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# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Christmas Fern - A Fern For The Holidays

**By Darryl N. Searcy**

Taking a page from our local “Wildflowers of Escambia” website, we offer this article that we hope will help to set the stage for a joyful upcoming holiday season and that our spirits will be raised while celebrating the Christian season, as well as the period of Hanukkah when our Jewish friends and neighbors celebrate the Festival of Lights that commemorate the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

Did you know that among all our beautiful forest growth stands a plant that celebrates our Christian holiday? It’s called Christmas Fern. Of course, at the Christmas season we rejoice in the snow and ice of the season, and we gather all the evergreen boughs we can find to brighten our homes to aid in our search for a festive holiday. We gather the Holly, Yaupon, Winterberry, Smilax, Fir, and Cedar to help brighten our most holy of seasons, and we decorate the “halls with holly” to bring inside a season of cheer and the aroma of seasons past. But there is another evergreen out there that is rarely, if ever, mentioned - the lowly Christmas Fern.

It's unclear how the Christmas Fern got its name; some think it's due to the shape of its leaflets, which resemble a stocking or a winter sleigh. It could also be that the Christmas Fern is one of the few woodland plants still green in December, making it ideal for use in holiday decorations. The plant also serves as a welcome splash of color during any winter hike. So, grab your hat and gloves and see if you can spot the Christmas Fern at our local parks, the banks of Murder and Burnt Corn creeks, pine hills or bluffs and at beaver dam preserves.'

Regardless of how it got its name, the Christmas Fern is one of the most common ferns in the eastern United States. It can be found in a wide variety of habitats and locations, particularly on shady hillsides and wooded stream banks. The fern typically grows



**Polystichum Acrostichoides - (Michaux)  
Schott  
Dryopteridaceae Family**

in a fountain-like clump and features leathery, lance-shaped evergreen fronds. Young fiddleheads (or cro-siers) are silvery and scaled, and are found in the spring. Unlike some native ferns whose fiddleheads are edible and quite yummy (like the ostrich or garden fern), Christmas Ferns are best left off the salad plate.

Christmas Fern, being a perennial evergreen native to the eastern North America, enjoys a range that extends from Nova

Scotia west to Minnesota and south to Florida and eastern Texas. It is one of the most common ferns in North America, being found throughout the moist and shady areas in forests, rocky slopes, and stream banks. The common name of the plant is derived from its evergreen fronds which are usually still green through the end of December, and even though the color of green may become brown from frostbite, the frond remains very much alive as it awaits the warm rays of spring sunshine.

Christmas Ferns are great as wreaths and add beautiful greenery to a bare forest landscape, but it can also be a great addition to a backyard garden.

The fern is popular in cultivation because it is easy to grow and can be used in almost any setting or soil. It's an excellent choice for shaded gardens as it happily thrives under trees and rocky areas. Though it prefers partial shade, the Christmas Fern also tolerates direct sun if the soil is kept damp. In the right conditions, it can even survive periods of drought.

Christmas Ferns are quite hardy and require little care. Besides its ability to adapt to most growing conditions, it is also resistant to pests and diseases. Even deer tend to stay away from it when grazing in the woods (or, unfortunately, our backyards). If you're looking for an easy plant that will add some green in your garden over the winter, then the Christmas Fern is definitely a good answer.

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# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Christmas Fern - A Fern For The Holidays

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The Christmas Fern, like the Cinnamon Fern, grows in a circular form with all the leaves arising from a single point on the ground. It usually forms colonies but frequently grows singly or in twos or threes. In the winter the fertile leaves (those bearing spores) will die, but the sterile leaves remain through the winter, though laid down by snow or frost. The frond is supported by a stem, which is typically about 1/4 the length of the total leaf. The stem length is given as a ratio because the leaf size can vary and its more accurate to estimate the length based on each leaf's size. The stem is black to very dark brown at the base and fades to green as it continues toward the tip. It is also covered in coarse light brown to tan scales which are typically quite short, translucent, and grooved on the upward side. As the stem continues toward the tip of the leaf the size and density of the scales decrease. The young fiddleheads (also known as crosiers) are a scaly grey, becoming happy and prominent in early spring.

The fronds grow from 20 to 30 inches long and about 4 to 6 inches broad, divided into 20-35 pairs of leaflets. Each leaflet (pinnae) is typically about one inch long and has a finely serrate or spiny edge and is oblong to being hooked like a sickle in shape. The fine teeth, or spines are on the edge of the leaf point toward the tip of the leaflet. Each pinnae has a triangular lobe at its base which also points toward the tip of the leaf.

This protrusion is approximately 0.19 inch wide and equally as tall and its tip bears a small spine. The lowest two leaflets point downward and are opposite to each other. The leaves are dark green and rather leathery in texture; linear to lance-like. The light brown spores are produced on leaflets that are conspicuously smaller than the leaflets below them, leaflets that are located at the tip of the frond.

Christmas Fern resembles the Pacific Coast Sword Fern, but does not make the huge clumps which that fern forms, and it differs from it and most other ferns in that fertile (spore bearing) leaflets of the Christmas Fern are noticeably smaller than the sterile leaflets. The fertile leaflets are identified as being covered by a brown mass and are located at the tip of the leaf.

The Christmas Fern is known to hybridize with oth-

er ferns if kept in an overlapping range.

Now, if I fail to give a few technical facts about the Christmas Fern, I would be remiss in having failed my scientific duty. Christmas Fern belongs to the group Pteridophyta (plants that do not produce flowers and seed). It originates from North America, where it is widely spread and abundant. Christmas Fern inhabits riverbanks, ravines, woodlands and hillsides. It grows in partial shade, in areas that provide good moisture. Typical forest grazers (such as deer) do not browse Christmas Fern because of its specific chemical composition. As a result, Christmas Fern can easily occupy new areas and prevent growth of other plants. Our northern neighbors cultivate Christmas Fern in their gardens as an ornamental plant and/or use the leaves of this fern as Yule Tide decorations.

If you will, allow me to tell you just a few interesting facts about the Christmas Fern as we rarely consider it as we see the plant as just a fern in the woods without regard to its life habits. It is an evergreen plant that can reach two feet in height. It grows in large colonies or in groups of two to three individual plants.

The stems of Christmas Fern are short, scaly, woody at the base and green on the top. It develops around 20 leaves that are better known as fronds. The leaves are semi-erect before the first frost, which pushes them toward the ground. The leaves are dark green and leathery; each consisting of 20 to 35 pairs of lance-shaped leaflets with pointed tips.

The stems of Christmas Fern are short, scaly, woody at the base and green on the top. It develops around 20 leaves that are better known as fronds. The leaves are semi-erect before the first frost, which pushes them toward the ground. The leaves are dark green and leathery; each consisting of 20 to 35 pairs of lance-shaped leaflets with pointed tips.

Christmas Fern produces fertile (with reproductive structures) or sterile (without reproductive structures) leaves. Sterile leaves are shorter and located on the periphery, around centrally positioned fertile leaves. The upper leaflets on a fertile frond are smaller and they bear sporangia (organs that produce spores).

The life cycle of a Christmas Fern is complicated as it consists of two morphologically different genera-

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## Christmas Fern - A Fern For The Holidays

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tions (sporophyte and gametophyte). The first of these generations produces spores that give rise to the development of miniature reproductive units, as well as to the development of a gametophyte generation. Gametophyte produces male and female reproductive cells (sperms and ova). Fusion of these two types of cells gives rise to the next generation of ferns. It is the Sporophyte generation that we know as Christmas fern. The production of spores lasts from June to October, when temperature and the amount of moisture are optimal.

Christmas fern can also reproduce via root division. Daughter plants are coiled and called fiddleheads, which are seen during the spring. The resulting evergreen leaves can be found all year round, including

the period of Christmas, which fronds are often used in decorative arrangements, especially for the production of Christmas wreaths, hence further suggesting the name - "Christmas Fern".

Christmas Fern is used in some flood zone areas for the sole purpose of erosion control. It grows on the slopes and creates dense pile of decaying leaves that play an important role in stabilization of the soil beneath them.

Stacks of leaves of Christmas Fern are also used as shelter or ideal nesting sites for ground dwelling birds such as wild turkey and quail. In the spring Christmas Fern is an important source of food for the caterpillars of some butterfly species.

## Searching for Bartram's Evening Primrose

By Ann Biggs-Williams

Looking for a pale yellow flower on the roadside in the autumn of the year is probably not on many "bucket lists", but since 2007, it **has** been on **my list**. Attending the Bartram Trail Conference that was held at Five Rivers Delta Resource Center in Spanish Fort, Alabama that year, I learned that William Bartram discovered a beautiful flower a few miles from the Tensaw in 1775.

My purpose for attending the conference was to confirm that William Bartram traveled through my home community of Lottie in Baldwin County in order to include Bartram's trek on a historical marker application for the community. Brad Sanders, who wrote Guide to William Bartram's Travels: Following the Trail of America's First Great Naturalist, confirmed that indeed Bartram did travel through Lottie, Alabama.

(By the way, Bartram traveled the path that ran from Burnt Corn to Ft. Stoddert, and also



**Evening Primrose**

traversed the part of **Escambia** County over which ECHS made a field trip along the Old Federal Road path through present day Huxford, and then north of McCullough through Jack Springs—the oldest settlement in Escambia County-- and then down County Road 47 in Baldwin County on to Ft. Stoddert. There were several branches of the road on that end of the path.)

When France ceded what is now Florida to England following the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War), John Bartram was appointed by King George III to explore the area as the king's official botanist. William Bartram (1739-1823) was the son of John Bartram (1699-1777) who served as America's first great botanist and plant explorer.

Through his Father's contacts in Europe, William did his own exploring and proved to be America's first naturalist and first botanical artist, as well as an artist, writer, and wilderness explorer. William, in

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## Searching for Bartram's Evening Primrose

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his early thirties, followed in the footsteps of his Dad, but the son traveled over 2400 solitary miles through eight southeastern states on his three year trek.

William published in 1791 the book, Travels: Through North and South Carolina, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy and the County of the Choctaws that chronicles his trip and the discovery of flora and fauna -including the discovery of my sought after yellow flower, which he named the **Large-Flowered Evening Primrose** (*Oenothera grandiflora*).

Many consider the book Travels the first great example of American literature and others proclaim it the first classic of environmental literature written and published in the United States. Travels inspired Henry David Thoreau and Charles Darwin. My husband, Mike Williams recently finished reading Travels and found the descriptions of the culture of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Indians very interesting.

Professor Hugo Devries of Amsterdam, noted as the originator of the mutation theory of organic evolution, made a visit to Alabama in 1912 to study the evening primrose in its native habitat. It was chiefly from observation of one of the evening primroses that he deduced his mutation theory.



**Roadside views of Evening Primrose  
Photo taken in Lottie, Alabama**



**Photograph of Evening Primrose Taken  
on Three Mile Road in Escambia County.**

primrose was --in approximately the same area on Rice Landing Road where those on the field trip had found the elusive plant.

Due to recent rains, a 5 to 6 foot stalk was lying on the ground. I took a close-up photo of the plant and confirmed with Darryl Searcy, our ECHS' Botanist-in-Residence Wildflower expert that this plant was indeed the **Evening Primrose**. (You can read Darryl's entry on the primrose at the website, "Wildflowers of the Escambia" at

The primrose wowed many attending the Bartram conference in 2007 as the group that went on a canoe trip found the primrose blooming. I understood from Dr. Kathryn Braund, that the late John Hall, who presented a program to the Escambia County Historical Society (ECHS) as Bartram, back on February 26, 2008, was the first to see the primrose on the roadside as they were driving to a canoe launch on the Tensaw for a conference field trip. Joel Fry, Curator from Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia was able to collect a live specimen.

Although I was unable to go on the conference canoe trip, the late Davida Hastie, of Stockton, Alabama, later told me where this location was and I carried the directions in my billfold for many years. Ten years later, this October 2017 was my year to finally find the primrose in bloom. There the yellow

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## Searching for Bartram's Evening Primrose

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www.wildflowers.jdcc.edu). From the hands on expedition and the close-up photo, it was then easier to spot the light yellow flower on the roadside among the myriad golden yellow flowers of autumn. (If you have visited the Stagecoach Restaurant in Stockton, Alabama, there is a photo of Bartram's Evening Primrose on the wall.)

I was even more excited to find the primrose blooming on County Road 47 in my home community of Lottie not far from my family home! The plant is easily overlooked and I suspect has fallen victim to the spraying by utility companies and the mowing of roadsides by county transportation departments.

Steve and Karen Caldwell of Lottie have been scouting the community for me and are finding the primrose in numerous places, particularly along routes of the older roads where the roadsides are not mowed.

I am happy to report as I write this article in mid-November, the primrose continues to bloom in Baldwin, Conecuh, and Escambia counties, so keep a lookout—and consider saving some seeds to plant. Let's keep this beautiful historic plant alive. Darryl Searcy said he found the plant growing on Old Highway 31 near Pollard. This November, I have observed the Evening Primrose blooming on several roads in Escambia County around the old settlement of Jack Springs, specifically on Rube Steadham Road, Taylor Circle, Old Stage Road and on the Three Mile Road in Escambia County near the Baldwin County line.

There is currently a documentary for television in the works about William Bartram, entitled "**Cultivating the Wild.**" Bartram fans everywhere are very excited over this production. In contacting Dorinda G. Dallmeyer from the University of Georgia, who is one of the producers, I learned the film is currently in the editing phase.

The film is a story of Bartram's life and work and the "modern day Bartrams" who are at work 220 years after Travels was written. (See **cultivat-**



**Evening Primrose**

**ingthewild.com website or Facebook.)** They met their Kickstarter goal with 148 backers who pledged 31,539 but I think they are expanding that and I am sure they would still appreciate donations at this time. I plan to encourage Alabama Public Television to show this documentary. Dorinda mentioned that it is hoped one day to have a Bartram Trail, on the order of the Lewis and

Clark Trail.

The Bartram Trail Conference was established in 1976 as part of America's Bicentennial observance with the purpose to locate and mark the route of William Bartram in the eight southern states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. For more information on the Bartram Trail Conference, check out the website at [www.bartramtrail.org](http://www.bartramtrail.org).

If you would like to search for this historic primrose yourself, I learned from Karen and Steve Caldwell in Lottie that there is an app called **iNaturalist** that enables you to take a photo of a plant or animal and submit it for confirmation. Go to **iNaturalist.org** to learn more about this online community aimed at citizen scientists. Interested in reading Travels? Our own botanist, Darryl Searcy donated a copy to the Alabama Room in 2008 following the ECHS Bartram program by the late John Hall.

I would encourage ECHS members to search for the primrose plant and collect seeds to plant and share. Let's keep the **Large-Flowered Evening Primrose** thriving in Escambia and our neighboring counties. As far as the completed bucket list item, maybe I will replace that entry with the wish to visit Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia, which is the oldest surviving botanic garden in North America.. For Christmas this year, I am definitely asking Santa for a copy of Dorinda Dallmeyer's book, Bartram's Living Legacy: the Travel and the Nature of the South.

# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Antebellum Christmas Traditions: Blowing Up Anvils Was Family Fun in Early Alabama

*The following article by David White is from the Birmingham News for December 24, 2009 <[http://blog.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2009/12/post\\_61.html](http://blog.al.com/birmingham-news-stories/2009/12/post_61.html)>.*

Some Tennessee militia members who marched into what is now Alabama in 1813 celebrated Christmas by firing their weapons and playing town ball, a game similar to baseball, one soldier wrote in his diary.

Other soldiers simply wrote, "It's Christmas," with no further comment, said Jim Parker, director of the Fort Toulouse national historic park near Wetumpka.

Some Christmas celebrations from the early to mid-1800s in Alabama aren't followed much anymore, such as playing town ball, while other traditions still are practiced, such as filling stockings, enjoying food and drink and giving gifts, though gifts may not have been as plentiful and often were homemade.

Kittie Watson was about 13 when she wrote an essay on Christmas at a girls' academy in Cahaba in 1864, recalling how before the Civil War she would peep into her stocking first thing in the morning, to see what toys and candy Santa Claus had brought. She also wrote of drinking eggnog at breakfast and eating roast turkey at dinner, and how some people had Christmas trees alight with candles and loaded with toys hanging from branches.

Christmas decorations in antebellum Alabama were likely more subdued than in some homes



**The dining room at the Arlington antebellum home in Birmingham, Ala., Sat., Dec. 5, 2009 is decorated for Christmas as Alabamians would have done in the 1800's. (The Birmingham News/Bernard Troncale)**

today, with families using greenery from outside their homes to make up the displays, as was done at Arlington Historic House and Gardens in Birmingham.

Unlike today, many Christmas trees of the time were short and stood atop tables, with fruit as well as toys sometimes dangling from branches.

Antebellum Christmas cele-

brations were sometimes loud. Settlers in frontier Alabama often would kill a pig or cow, barbecue it and invite people over to celebrate Christmas, said Craig Sheldon, an anthropologist at Auburn University at Montgomery. Many people in early, rural Alabama probably celebrated Christmas as they did the Fourth of July, Sheldon said, shooting firearms instead of fireworks and sometimes shooting anvils.

### Don't try it at home

That involved tipping over an anvil, filling its hollow bottom with gunpowder, flipping it upright, lighting a fuse and running for cover. The explosion rocketed the anvil up in the air and produced a huge boom, Sheldon said.

Small farmers in the 1800s on Christmas Eve or Christmas night sometimes practiced "fireballing," said Van Smith, a volunteer guide and lecturer at Fendall Hall, a mansion in Eufaula built in 1860 and now run as a museum by the Alabama

*(Continued on page 15)*



# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Antebellum Christmas Traditions: Blowing Up Anvils Was Family Fun in Early Alabama

(Continued from page 14)

Historical Commission.

Men would wrap rags into a ball, maybe bigger than a softball, soak them in coal oil or pine resin, light them and throw them to each other.

"The flight through the air would make the flames roar, and the idea was to catch the doggone thing and get rid of it before it burned you," Smith said. "As strange as that sounds, they thought that was a real fine pastime."

For others, Christmas was a more formal affair.

The editor of the Dallas Gazette in Cahaba, then the county seat of Dallas County, wrote in 1858 that the "crowning glory of our Christmas festivity" was a nighttime parade brightened by bonfires and torches and featuring a brass band from Mobile. Members of the "G.G.H." social society and guests then attended a ball in Saltmarsh Hall, where "the ladies gave the room the appearance of an immense flower bed." Supper served at midnight featured "boiled and baked hams, oysters, salads, cakes, jellies, fruits, champagne, etc.," the editor wrote.

For slaves of the area, some were given days off work and money to shop in town, according to a newspaper article from 1857 cited by Linda Derry, director of the state's Old Cahawba historic park -- the spelling of the town's name changed over the decades. But money gifts for slaves may have been uncommon. Slaves often were given Christmas day off work, in part to celebrate the end of the harvest, said University of Michigan historian J. Mills Thornton III. But he said gifts for slaves, if there were any, likely would be an extra ration of corn meal or a bit more cured pork.

Montgomery historian Mary Ann Neeley said some former slaves, in accounts written in the 1930s, recalled that an owner would kill a hog and give them pieces of pork, or that an owner would give men a nip of whiskey or some tobacco. Neeley said female slaves sometimes would get shawls or scarves.

Many Alabama families would have had Christmas celebrations that were quiet and close to home.

Many people in Montgomery in the 1840s and 1850s observed Christmas as more of a religious and family time that featured eating more than gift-giving, with baked goods that used sugar, which was expensive, served as special treats, said Carole King, curator at Old Alabama Town in Montgomery.

Thornton, who wrote a book about Alabama politics of 1800-60, said that for many Alabamians then, Christmas "was a quiet, religious holiday in which people might, but wouldn't necessarily, take off from work."

### Legislative workday

He said gifts often were given children but maybe not adults. "You'd expect parents to give gifts to their children, if they're young," he said. "You wouldn't expect a husband to give a gift to a wife, or vice versa."

Thornton said Christmas "was not a particularly important holiday" in antebellum Alabama, and that the Legislature often met on Christmas, though he said lots of members would get drunk that day "and all sorts of high jinks would go on."

The Legislature didn't make Christmas a state holiday until 1883, though for decades many books and articles have wrongly said Alabama in 1836 became the first state to recognize Christmas as a state holiday, said Rickie Brunner, a reference archivist at the state Department of Archives and History.

But an editorial writer for The Daily Advertiser in Montgomery wrote on Christmas 1868 that Christmas had long been regarded "as a time blended both of prayer and festival," when family members "are accustomed to gather around the same table and fireside" to exchange sentiments, talk of the past and "renew the old affections."

**ECHOES**  
THE NEWSLETTER FOR  
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 276  
Brewton, AL 36427  
Phone: 251-809-1528  
E-mail: [escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com](mailto:escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com)

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