



The  
Escambia  
County  
Historical  
Society,  
Founded  
1971

**The January Meeting**  
**Tuesday, January 22, 2019**  
**McMillan Museum**  
**Coastal Alabama Community College**  
**Brewton Campus**  
**3:00 p. m.**



**Victor Campbell**

**The Program:**  
**The History of Coon Hill Cemetery**  
**A Presentation by Victor Campbell**

*This introduction is from Mr. Campbell's book Junction County Road 197, published in 1992.*

Victor Campbell is a native of the Florida panhandle with roots in Santa Rosa County's Village of Chumuckla. He attended rural Chumuckla schools and completed his AS degree from Pensacola Junior College and his BS degree from the University of West Florida in Marine Biology.

He served as a junior Naval officer aboard the frigate O'Callahan in the final days of the Vietnam War. He completed his Master's Degree from the University of Florida in

*(Continued on page 2)*

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**Correction for date and time given for  
January meeting in the December 2018  
newsletter.**

**The January Meeting is on Tuesday, January  
22, not Jan. 19 and the time for the meeting is  
3:00, not 2:00 p.m.**

**The February Meeting**  
**Tuesday, February 26, 2019**  
**McMillan Museum**  
**3:00 p. m.**

**The Speaker will be Dr. Jimmy Adkisson**  
**His Subject will be "Old Brewton."**

**Remember, There is a  
Change in Dues**

**Beginning in January 2019,  
Dues are**

**Single: \$50.00**  
**Family: \$70.00 (same  
address)**  
**Lifetime: \$500.00 (per  
person)**  
**Business: \$100.00**



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**Volume 46 No. 1**

**Jan. 2019**

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## The Program

*(Continued from page 1)*

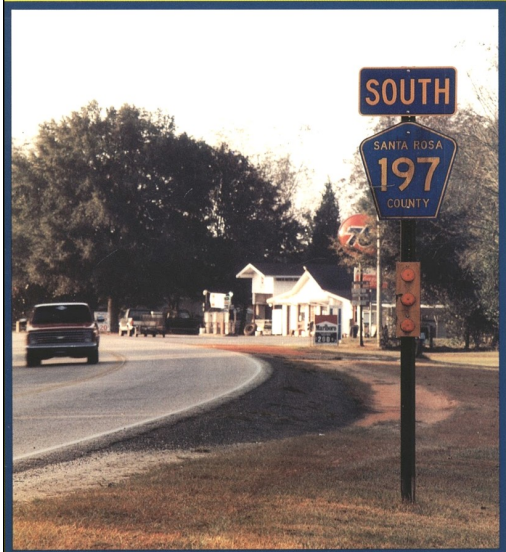
Agricultural Economics which led to a career in agribusiness.

He and wife Karen have been married forty-seven years and have one son. He lived in Sparta, New

Jersey when he authored his first book Junction County Road 197, a Mild Adventure for the Armchair Ruralist. His parents Myrtle and J. Lee Campbell lived in Chumuckla where Vic grew up, among many relatives and friends. The book is full of humor mixed with local area history.

### Junction County Road 197

Mild Adventure for the Armchair Ruralist



**Victor Campbell writes about the Cover photo for his book, shown above, and the portrait of himself, shown to the right:**

**“Thanks also to Tom Carter for the cover photo and my portrait. My sense of style was greatly enhanced by my Aunt Frances, who loaned me Uncle Duke's wool shirt for the photograph that Tom took of me. About the cover photo: Carnley's Store at Chumuckla Crossroads, Autumn 1991, is owned by Andy and Leigh Ann Carnley. The truck is a 1987 Chevrolet Silverado with a stock 350 V-8 engine. It is owned and piloted by "Rusty" Pierce (Bull's Woodshop in Jay). It is for sale. “**



**Showing a strong sense of humor about himself, Victor Campbell places this quote under his picture on the back cover of his book:**

**“Victor is lazy, working only hard enough to get by or earn certain privileges. As a result he is wasting wonderful God-given talent” June 6, 1960 Alfred T. Williams, 5th grade teacher, Chumuckla School, Santa Rosa County.”**



**Vic Campbell, left, discusses local history with Stephen Jernigan as they visit old Jernigan graves in Milton on Friday, November 4, 2016. The Jernigan's were among the early settlers in the area now known as Milton/Santa Rosa County. .**

**Photo and text from <<https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/milton/2016/11/06/jernigan-cemetery/93244164/>>.**

# The Coon Hill Massacre

**By Victor Campbell, from Junction County Road 197:**

Yes, I was present at "The Coon Hill Massacre of 1965." It was very nearly an awful sight. It almost made the papers. And if it had actually occurred the way it appeared during moments of terrified imagination that Halloween night, it would have been headline material for sure.

If I hadn't invited Junior Wade, the whole thing would probably have blown over in a minute. Junior was onto the operation from the start. As soon as he crawled in the back of the pickup truck, I began to explain the mystery of Offal Skidmore, the disgraced brain surgeon turned hermit and mass murderer, who hid out in the swamps around Coon Hill.

The others were falling for the story. Earl Cox paid special attention to the saga. The pupils of his eyes grew larger and larger as my brother, Jim, repeated the part where Offal forced his victims to scrub behind their ears before he "opened their minds," so to speak.

When we stopped to pick up Ezel Lowery, Junior slipped out of the truck for a minute. He talked Ezel into loaning him an eight-inch "Bowie knife" and then hid the knife in his left sock, under his pants leg. He strapped it to his leg with a strip of rubber from an old bicycle inner tube.

Unknown to our passengers, but known to us, a fright crew had already been posted at the cemetery. Our scare squad included Carl Griffin, John Kimbrough, Ronnie Cotton, Benny Enfinger, and Jimmy Saulz. They were stationed in strategic locations throughout the graveyard.

Darkness coated the scene when we arrived with our quarry. As we walked about the cemetery, skirting the tombstones, the chilled air wrapped its tendrils around our very souls. We had just finished wondering aloud about the whereabouts of poor old hermit Offal, when John Kimbrough jumped up with a flashlight shining under his chin and yelled "You gonna die."

He began to come for Earl, and Earl started to back off. Junior was concerned, but kept his mind clear with the thought of the knife on his leg. Then Benny Enfinger appeared from behind a tombstone and let out a hysterical laugh that left a reverberating echo in the swamps around us.

As John and Benny came for the group, Carl Griffin joined in. Earl knew it was a hoax at that point, because he recognized Carl's voice. Only, it was then

that a shadowy figure emerged from another corner of the graveyard, descended on Carl, flashed a long blade in the moonlight, and appeared—from the angle of view—to impale Carl on the gleaming shaft. Earl logically figured this was not a part of the game. After all, who would be out to scare the scarERS.

All the scarEES had been in the truck with us. Earl assumed he had just seen his friend Carl die. Within milliseconds, he was over the cemetery wall and deep in the swamp, taking his chances with snakes and panthers. He figured Offal Skidmore was now among us, performing his butchery.

Junior had his knife out when Ronnie Cotton jumped from the shadows. When Ronnie said "Boo," Junior said, "Be still and shuddup or I'm a gonna cut off parts of your body." Ronnie swallowed hard and said, "Just jokin', Junior."

Junior and Ronnie made a quick pact to make Ronnie appear dead from the big knife. Then Junior held up the knife, with ketchup all over his hands and all over Ronnie and said, "I killed him."

Nobody expected one of the scarEES to have a knife. When the "chief scarERS," John and Carl and Jimmie (Offal) Saulz, saw the "dead" Ronnie, they lost their composure and began to beg Junior not to kill anybody else. Junior ran around loose in the graveyard for some time, yelling, "Come near me and I'll kill you." He was quite convincing, and Ronnie wasn't moving. Ezel was beginning to feel sorry he had loaned the knife to Junior.

The end came when Ronnie realized he was lying in a bed of black ants. The ants tired rather hurriedly of the ketchup and began feasting on Ronnie's adolescent skin. The more Ronnie yelled, the deeper Earl pushed into the swamp. After the revived Ronnie settled down again, Junior gave up the chase. Then, we all began to look for Earl. Midnight came and went before we could convince him to leave the swamp.

We were never again able to duplicate the thrill of "The Massacre at Coon Hill." Earl never really forgave us for our invasion of his innocent imagination. I can understand why. And, I can understand why Junior is a successful insurance salesman

(<http://www.riendsofpacelibrary.org/History/Vic%20Campbell/Campbell%2010-17.html>).



## Coon Hill Cemetery

*From the Jay, Florida Historical Society, this article by Anne Williamson was originally published in the Tri City Ledger*

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

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

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

The community, which lies on the edge of the Escambia River on what is now Santa Rosa County, was connected to the Escambia County side of the river by ferry and by an old wooden bridge. Both the bridge and the ferry have long been gone.

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

In the 1800s and into the early 1900's, Coon Hill was a small logging community. Timber Explorer E.F. Skinner operated in the area from 1874 to 1908. The town had a post office, hotel, church and many homes. One resident, Edward Campbell, was born in Scotland in 1757. He originally settled in Marion County, South Carolina. Following the death of his wife, Mary McClellan, he moved to Escambia County, Fla., which was ruled by Spain. Edward



**Statue and Grave at Coon Hill Cemetery**

Campbell was one of the petitioners who in 1821 appealed to Congress to settle land claims.

Most of the people who lived in the area are also buried there. Although the deed is 20 acres, only 1 or 2 acres is fenced in by a concrete wall.

Most graves at Coon Hill Cemetery range from 1836 to the early 1900s. Only a few people have been buried in the cemetery since the 1960s.

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

War.

Another resident of Coon Hill and one-time postmaster was William Larkin Williams, the man for whom Williams' Station (now Atmore) was named. The oldest grave in the cemetery is that of his first wife, Margaret McMillan Williams, who died March 19, 1836. His second wife, Mary McMillan Williams (sister to his first wife - both daughters of Duncan McMillan and Mary 'Polly' Wilkinson McMillan) are also buried at Coon Hill, plus many of Williams' children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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

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

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

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Coon Hill Cemetery

(Continued from page 4)

Richmond Terrell McDavid and Sarah McCaskill, lived in Coon Hill and are buried there.

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

Descendants from these early pioneers still live and prosper in the south Alabama, northwest Florida area. Some of the surnames of those descendants include: Miller, Lambert, Crumbley, Slade, Severson, Brooks,

McCaskill, Harrison, McDavid, McArthur, Stanton, Davis, Holland, McMillan, McDaniel, Byrne, Savell, Reynolds, Wilkins, Penton, Griffin, Magaha, Jenkins, Smiley, Wilkinson, McKinnon, Campbell, Ezell, Hart, Mims, Diamond, Middleton, Johnson, Mayo, Pearson, Pyburn, Enfinger, Rutherford, Lee, Jernigan, Howell, Salter, Cartwright, and Grimes.

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

*The following are excerpts from two articles about the Celebration of the Cemetery's Restoration held in 2008.*

*First from "Coon Hill Cemetery Celebration of the Historic Site Restoration, October 28, 2008" by Alvin H. Enfinger of the Coon Hill Burial Association Trustees*

We have had three major desecrations over the last 12 years that were devastating. About 150 headstones and slabs have been badly broken.

The big unbreakable ones have been pushed over, sometimes breaking the slab as they fell. The landmark statue of Mary, the Mother of Jesus was broken beyond repair and has been replaced. We also have installed three wrought iron gates in the concrete wall openings with the name "COON HILL" above the entrance gate. About 100 headstones and slabs and 73 new markers have been replaced or repaired. We are proud of this historic cemetery and sometime in the future there may be a need to open a new section for burials.



**Main Entrance to the Cemetery**

*In "Coon Hill Cemetery Restoration Celebrated," ECHS member Sherry Johnston, wrote:*

October 28, 2007, in the Historic Coon Hill Cemetery, folks gathered round the tombstones for an Open House/Fish Fry Dinner to celebrate the completion of the Coon Hill Cemetery Restoration.

The cemetery had suffered several hits of vandalism over the past few years, and the

cemetery committee had undertaken a vast effort to restore the cemetery, preserving it for the future generations of descendants of these early settlers.

Hundreds of cars led into the cemetery with shuttle service provided to bring folks to the gate, where they stood in line for delicious catfish and mullet and all the trimmings (ECHOES, Nov./Dec. Issue, 200).

### Coon Hill Community and Cemetery Connected to Alabama Counties

*In her article on the "Celebration of the Restoration of the Cemetery," Sherry wrote:*

**"Chumuckla, Coon Hill, Florida Town and Pace—what do these communities in NW Florida have to do with Conecuh County? Many of our settlers from Conecuh, Covington, Escambia and Monroe Counties left either before the WBTS (War Between the States) or immediately afterward to settle near the springs in Santa Rosa County."**

## News and Announcements

### **Food for Thought Programs for 2019 at the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH)**

The Alabama Department of Archives and History has announced the 2019 schedule for its popular Alabama history lunchtime lecture series, "Food for Thought." Lectures are held on the third Thursday of every month at 12:00 pm in the ADAH's Joseph M. Farley Alabama Power Auditorium.

The public is invited to bring a brown bag lunch. Complimentary beverages are provided. Admission is always free.

January 17

The Speaker - Tina Naremore Jones  
The Topic - Folklorist Ruby Pickens Tartt:  
Composing a New Score

February 21

Speaker - Peggy Allen Towns  
Topic - Scottsboro Unmasked: Decatur's Story

March 21

Speaker - Ben Severance  
Topic - Voting on the War: The 1863  
Alabama Election

April 18

Speaker - Andrew Huebner  
Topic - Love and Death in the Great War

May 16

Speaker - Elizabeth Findlay Shores  
Topic - Finding Family History: The Secrets in an  
Antique Coverlet

June 20

Speaker - Brian Odom  
Topic - Alabama and the Moon Landing

July 18

Speaker - Jason Wilson  
Topic - A History of Craft Brewing in Alabama

August 15

Speaker - Frye Gaillard  
Topic - A Hard Rain: America in the 1960s

September 19

Speaker - William Nichols  
Topic - Go and Be Reconciled: Alabama Methodists  
Confront Racial Injustice, 1954 - 1974

October 17

Speaker - Alex Colvin  
Topic - Old Traditions in a New State: Creek Families  
in Alabama

November 21

Speaker - Harriet Seacat  
Topic - Surges in the Bayou: Exploring Forces of  
Change in Bayou La Batre

December 19

Speaker - Thomas Kaufmann  
Topic - Historic Tower Clocks and Bells of Alabama

### **More on the Speaker and Topic for January**

*From the ADAH press  
release for the January 17  
presentation:*



**Ruby Pickens  
Tartt**

Livingston native Ruby Pickens Tartt (1880-1974) was an internationally-known folklorist and writer. During a life that spanned nearly a century, Tartt was one of the foremost chroniclers of folklore, folk music, and slave narratives in rural Alabama. In 1936, she was appointed

chair of the local Federal Writers' Project in Sumter County, through which she collected the life stories and folk tales of former slaves and gained a deep interest in preserving southern black culture. In this presentation, historian Dr. Tina Naremore Jones will examine Tartt's remarkable life and the valuable insight her work provides into the history of Alabama's rural communities.

Dr. Jones is the executive director of the Division of Economic Development and Outreach and professor of English at the University of West Alabama. She earned both her B.A. and M.A.T.

*(Continued on page 7)*



## News and Announcements

(Continued from page 6)

degrees in English from Livingston University (now the University of West Alabama) and a Ph.D. in American Literature from the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Jones is co-editor of the anthology Belles' Letters: Contemporary Stories of Alabama Women, one of four editors for Tartts: Incisive Fiction from Emerging Writers, and a contributing writer to the anthology, Alabama Women: Their Lives and Times (2017). Jones has served on numerous boards and committees including the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation, the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area, the Sumter County Fine Arts Council, the Alabama Folklife Association, and Black Belt Treasures.

\*\*\*\*\*



**The Shorter Mansion**

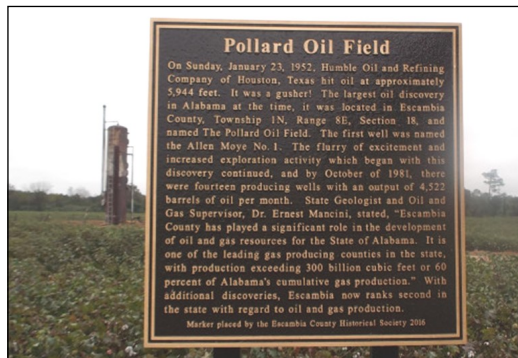
Eufaula hosts Alabama's oldest tour of homes and has more than 700 structures listed on the National Register. Each spring, the city of Eufaula opens its doors to share this historical wealth. Visitors can take guided tours of homes and sites and also enjoy an art show, concerts, a wax museum and much more.

More information at <<https://www.eufaulapilgrimage.com>>.

**54th  
Annual  
Eufaula  
Pilgrimage  
April 5 -7,  
2019**

## ECHS Historical Markers: Recent Additions

### Pollard Oil Field



#### ***The text on the Marker:***

**On Sunday, January 23, 1952, Humble Oil and Refining Company of Houston, Texas hit oil at approximately 5,944 feet. It was a gusher! The largest oil discovery in Alabama at the time, it was located in Escambia County, Township 1N, Range 8E, Section 18, and named the Pollard Oil Field. The first well was named the Allen Moye No. 1. The flurry of excitement and increased exploration activity which began with the discovery continued, and by October of 1981, there were fourteen producing wells with an output of 4,522 barrels of oil per month. State Geologist and Oil and Gas Supervisor, Dr. Ernest Mancini, stated, "Escambia County has played a significant role in the development of oil and gas resources for the State of Alabama. It is one of the leading gas producing counties in the state, with production exceeding 300 billion cubic feet or 60 percent of Alabama's cumulative gas production." With additional discoveries, Escambia now ranks second in the state with regard to oil and gas production.**

(Continued on page 8)

## ECHS Historical Markers: Recent Additions

(Continued from page 7)

### Pollard Station



#### The Text on the Marker:

**William Henry Chase, a Massachusetts born captain in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers came to Pensacola, Florida in 1826 to supervise the construction of the network of harbor fortifications for the defense of the newly authorized Navy Yard. His interest in establishing a railroad to provide a more dependable source of transportation from the South to Northern textile mills began as early as the 1830's with the 1834 charter of the Florida, Alabama, and Georgia Railroad. Mobile, protective of shipping interest at the Mobile Harbor and fearing competition from Pensacola, blocked efforts to grant permission for a Montgomery to Mobile line. Alabama cotton planters strongly supported a railroad, because rivers frequently ran low during shipping season and a more dependable mode of transportation was needed. The two railroads formed were the Alabama and Florida in Florida and the Alabama and Florida in Alabama with Chase as President of the first and Charles T. Pollard as President of the second. The Pensacola Gazette, April 12, 1856 edition, tells how "surveyors mapped the road from its bay front wharf and depot site on Tarragona Street northwest along the Escambia River forty-five miles to join Alabama rails being laid from Montgomery to Pollard Station just north of the state boundary." Planned and laid out by the Alabama lines, President Charles T. Pollard, and his chief civil engineer, Samuel G. Jones, the town was named for Pollard and lay 114 miles south of Montgomery. It was a key link in the connection to Pensacola and would become a Confederate line of defense, with the establishment in 1861 of Camp Pollard (Tattnall). Author Samuel Clements, better known as Mark Twain, was once stranded here when a wreck on the rails ahead prevented his going on to New York. It was hot and there were probably mosquitoes causing the elderly Clements to declare, "I'd rather die in vain than live in Pollard!" Years later a native son of Pollard visited Twain's boyhood hometown of Hannibal, Missouri, and repaid the "compliment" in kind. Longtime Mayor Curtis Finlay loved to tell visitors, "to us the air is fresher, the water tastes purer, the grass grows greener and the birds sing sweeter in Pollard, Alabama than any place else on earth." The first telegraph operator for Pollard Station was C. H. "Charlie" Edwards.**

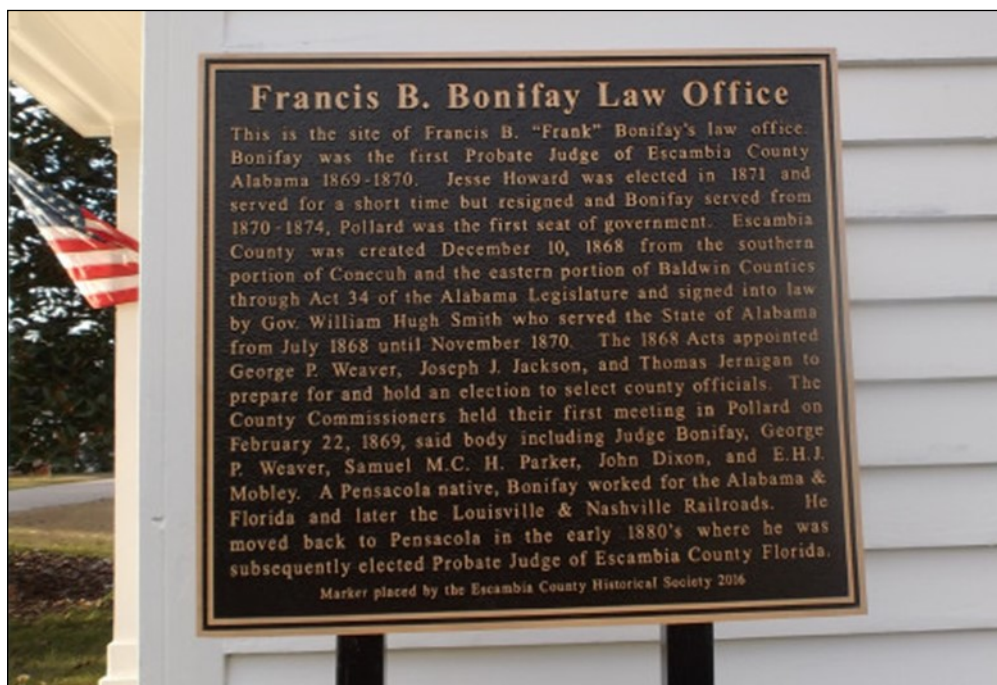
(Continued on page 9)



## ECHS Historical Markers: Recent Additions

(Continued from page 8)

### Francis B. Bonifay Law Office



#### The Text on the Marker:

**This is the site of Francis B. "Frank" Bonifay's law office. Bonifay was the first Probate Judge of Escambia County Alabama 1869 - 1870. Jesse Howard was elected in 1871 and served for a short time but resigned and Bonifay served from 1870 - 1874. Pollard was the first seat of government. Escambia County was created December 10, 1868 from the southern portion of Conecuh and the eastern portion of Baldwin Counties through Act 34 of the Alabama Legislature and signed into law by Gov. William Hugh Smith who served the State of Alabama from July 1868 until November 1870. The 1868 Acts appointed George P. Weaver, Joseph J. Jackson, and Thomas Jernigan to prepare for and hold an election to select county officials. The County Commissioners held their first meeting in Pollard on February 22, 1869, said body including Judge Bonifay, George P. Weaver, Samuel M.C. H. Parker, John Dixon, and E. H. J. Mobley. A Pensacola native, Bonifay worked for the Alabama & Florida and later the Louisville & Nashville Railroads. He moved back to Pensacola in the early 1880's where he was subsequently elected Probate Judge of Escambia County, Florida.**

(Continued on page 10)

## Snapshots of the ECHS 2018 Christmas Party



**Left to right, guest speaker Father Madden of St. Maurice Church, John Angel, Society Treasurer, Shannon Jones, Publicity Chairman, and Darryl Searcy, Director of the Christmas Party.**



**At the table in the background, Barbara Commander visiting with Darryl Searcy. At the table in the foreground, left to right, Debbie Thomas, Carolyn Geck, and Ranella Merritt.**



## Snapshots of the ECHS 2018 Christmas Party (Continued)



**Barbara Commander and  
Darryl Searcy**



**Left to Right, Dawn Merritt and Jacque  
and Charles Stone.**



**Standing in the foreground at the left,  
Tom McMillan. Standing at the right, Don Sales.**



# The ECHS *journal* Section

## Escambia County's First Airport

**By Charles (Charlie) Ware**

There are still a few of us around who can remember when, before the construction of the present Atmore Municipal Airport, Bachelor Field in Canoe was the nearest airport to Atmore. But long before Bachelor Field, in fact almost 90 years ago, Atmore had a federally recognized and maintained airport.

In the late 1920's passenger travel by air was in it's infancy but the potential for passenger service had been realized and more and more airline companies were being formed. At that time there was very little government oversight of aviation. Airplanes were unreliable, there was virtually no weather information available, there was no radio communication, and there were very few airports. When flying between cities, pilots had no place to land in the event things went wrong, which they often did.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) which was the forerunner of today's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in 1928, directed that an airway system be established which designated approved routes which airlines would fly between cities. The airways were like highways in the sky and were given number designators just like the highway system. A similar system is still in use today. The CAA set requirements for the airways which included a number of safety features on the ground. Among these were roof markers (signs painted on the roof of large buildings), flashing beacons for night navigation, and weather reporting (often a farmer with a telephone). Another requirement was that an airport be built at least every 50 miles along the route. These airports which were built between major cities were designated as "intermediate airports."

Atmore was selected as the location of an intermediate airport since it was along the Atlanta-New Orleans airway and was about 50 miles from the airport at Mobile. In 1931 construction was begun at a 100 acre site which was located on what is now Ewing Road, about two miles west of Jack Springs Road and about three miles northwest of Atmore. The airport was officially designated as Atmore Airport (CAA-16) but became known as the Hampton D. Ewing Airport. It consisted of four grass runways (even in major cities, most runways were grass at that time) the longest of which was 3,200 ft. The airport had a sys-

tem of lights so that the field could be outlined at night, a powerful spotlight, wind socks, a supply of fuel, an airway marker beacon mounted on a 50 ft. tower, and an electric generator. There were caretakers who were responsible for maintaining the airport and for providing emergency assistance to airplanes.

Though the intermediate airports were primarily built as emergency airports for airlines, they were available for public use. Many were used for regular air mail service. Flying instruction became available at the Atmore airport in 1934 and airmail service was begun on May 12, 1936. The air mail service was discontinued after about one year due to a lack of demand.

There are no records available of how many airplanes used the Atmore (CAA-16) airport but there are some records of airplane accidents during that period. Accidents were not uncommon then and could amount to something as simple as an airplane running off the runway and into a ditch. The number of accidents occurring at an airport may be used to some extent as a measure of how heavily it was used. I have found records of three airplane accidents that occurred at the airport prior to the start of World War II, so there was apparently some activity there during that time.

From the start of World War II through May of 1943 there are records of nine accidents at Atmore (CAA-16). All but one of these accidents involved Army Air Force AT-6 or BT-13 trainer airplanes, indicating that the airport was probably being heavily used as a training site for flights out of Maxwell and Gunter Fields in Montgomery..

May 21, 1942 was an especially tragic day for aviation in the Atmore area. On that date, thirty-four BT-13 airplanes flown by student pilots (most were from the United Kingdom), took off from Gunter Field in Montgomery for a night cross-country training flight. Most of the pilots were not yet trained to fly on instruments in bad weather. In the vicinity of Atmore, the pilots encountered a large area of thunderstorms with rain and low clouds. Many became disoriented and were scrambling for a place to land. Seven planes, while attempting to find the Atmore airport, crashed nearby and the pilots were killed. Two other pilots parachuted to safety near the airport.

*(Continued on page 13)*

# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Escambia County's First Airport

*(Continued from page 12)*

Two other planes crashed while attempting to land at Evergreen but these pilots survived. Only one pilot managed to land at Atmore. The other pilots were able to eventually find airports and land, one as far away as Dothan. Only five pilots made it back to Gunter that night.

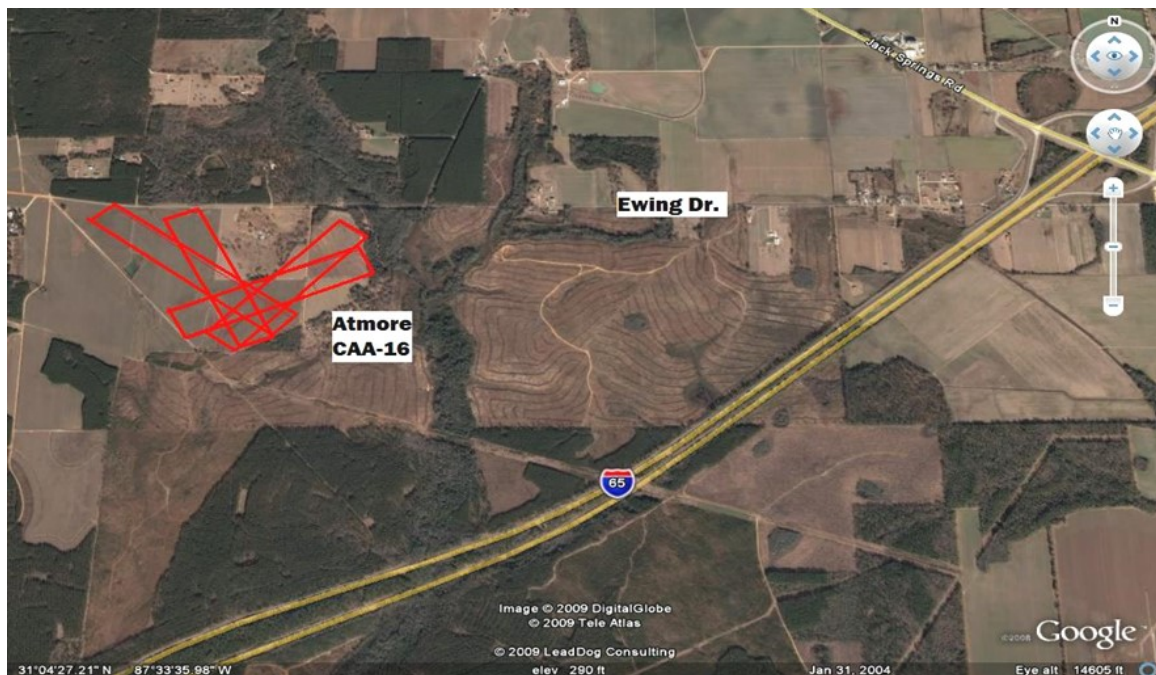
In 1943, the airport was designated as an out-lying field (OLF) for the Navy and became the site for intensive Navy aviator training for students out of Pensacola and Whiting Field. An OLF was a field where pilots flew to do takeoff and landing practice. It would be manned by a small detachment of Navy personnel which included tower controllers, mechanics, and fire fighters. An OLF was also where most student aviators would accomplish their first solo flight so it is very possible that many future aviators made their first solo flight out of OLF Atmore. There were twelve recorded accidents during the years that the airport was used by the Navy, so it appears that OLF Atmore was a pretty busy place.

In 1946 the Navy dropped Atmore as an OLF and

the airport reverted back to CAA use. By 1950, because of improvements in airplane reliability and advances in communication and navigation capabilities, the CAA decided to start phasing out the maintenance of the intermediate airports. In early 1951, Atmore (CAA-16) was abandoned, although the airway beacon light remained in use for several more years. The property once again became farm-land and is still used that way today.

As a pilot, I often look back at the progress that has been made in aviation over the years. As an example, in the early days pilots navigated by reading their maps and flying low enough to be able to pick out landmarks along the route. At night they were aided by airway beacon lights that were spaced 15 to 20 miles apart. Each beacon flashed a Morse code identifier that was unique to that location so that pilots would know which one they were seeing. For daytime navigation there were roof markers. These were signs painted on the roof of large buildings, usually a barn or warehouse, which identified the community where it was located. The sign also had an arrow

*(Continued on page 14)*



**Atmore (CAA-16) location and approximate runway alignment.**

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## Escambia County's First Airport

*(Continued from page 13)*

pointing to the nearest airport and a number indicating the distance to the airport. At one time there were over 13,000 of these roof markers throughout the United States. Some are still in existence. I can remember when there was one on a big barn located near the State Farm. Back then pilots literally flew from town to town by reading rooftops.

Today, modern jets fly six to eight miles above the ground and use GPS computers for navigation. These GPS units use satellite signals to determine

position and are accurate to within a few feet. They depict the airplane's position on a moving map and contain data bases which have maps, terrain information, and all aviation data for the entire world. Even most light airplanes, including tiny home-builts, now use GPS for navigation.

There has been much progress in aviation in the past ninety years and I would like to think that Atmore's first airport may have played a little part in that progress.



**Vultee BT-13 of the type that were flown at the Atmore Airport. The pilots that flew the Vultee called it the Vultee Vibrator because it shook.**



**Navy SNJ training plane landing at the Atmore airport in 1945.**

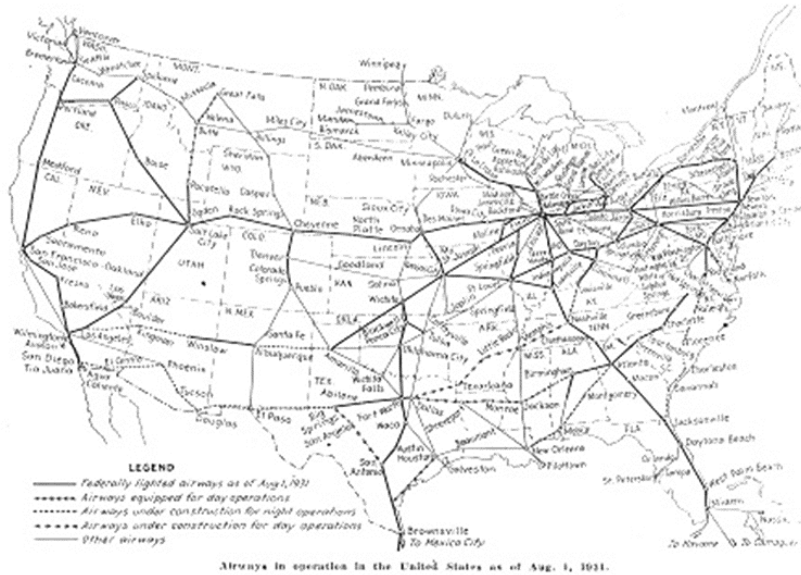
**Roof Marker, from the 1930's, on an old store that still exists at McClellan. (About twenty miles southeast of Brewton)**





# The ECHS *Journal* Section

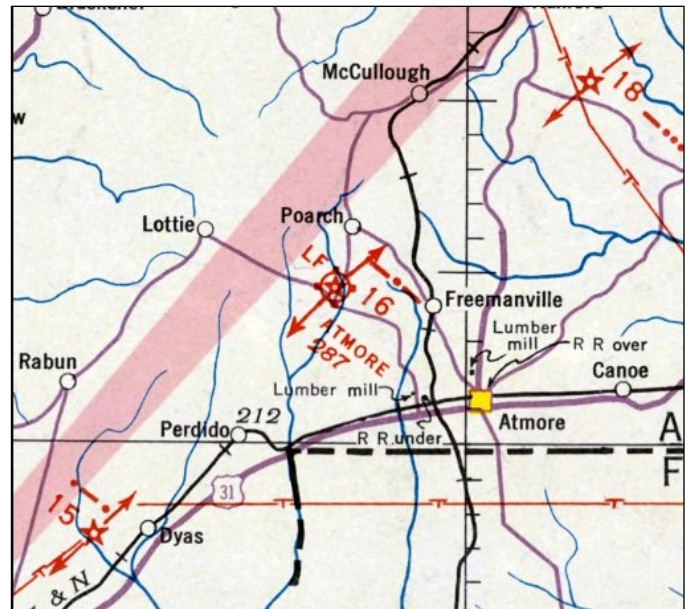
## Escambia County's First Airport



1931 Airway Map of the United States



The caretaker's shack at the Atmore Airport. The NO-A on the roof indicates this is part of the New Orleans-Atlanta airway system. The EL290 on the side means the field elevation is 290 feet



A map showing the location of the old air-field. Note I-65 did not exist when this map was drawn.

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

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