

# ECHOES



The  
Escambia  
County  
Historical  
Society,  
Founded  
1971

**The February Meeting**  
**Tuesday, February 26, 2019**  
**McMillan Museum**  
**Coastal Alabama Community College**  
**Brewton Campus**  
**3:00 p. m.**



**Dr.  
Adkisson**

## **The Program:**

### **A Presentation by Dr. Jimmy Adkisson on The Downing/Shofner Institute**

Our speaker, Dr. Jimmy W. Adkisson, DO, is a well-known physician, family practice specialist in Brewton. He has had over forty years of diverse experience in the medical field.

His first career was as a pharmacist. A Brewton native, he completed his primary and secondary education in county schools. He then attended Samford University School of Pharmacy. After graduation, he returned to Brewton to work as a pharmacist eventually becoming the owner of two drugstores.

However, Jimmy wanted to become a doctor so he returned to school, and graduated from the University Of Health Science College Of Osteopathic Medicine in Kansas City. Upon graduation, he returned to Brewton where he established a large practice as a family physician.

Recently, Dr. Adkisson became part of the Alabama Medical Education Consortium (AMEC), a program in which medical students come to rural Alabama

*(Continued on page 2)*

## **Table of Contents**

<b>The Downing/Shofner Institute Historic Marker</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A History of Downing Shofner Institute</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ECHS Places Marker at Boykin</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Snapshots of the ECHS January 2019 Meeting</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Reverend J . M. Shofner</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Robert Elijah (Ellsha) Downing</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Downing Industrial School News</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Story of the Downing/Shofner Industrial School by J. M. Shofner</b>	<b>11</b>

## **The March Meeting** **Tuesday, March 26, 2019**

**Guest speaker Mike Brock will give a program on David (Davey) Crockett. The legendary frontiersman and congressman enlisted as a volunteer in the Indian wars from 1813 to 1815 and saw action in Alabama and Florida**

**Mike grew up in Century; Don Sales recalls that he and Mike played football together. Now retired, Mike was a teacher and coach in Jay.**

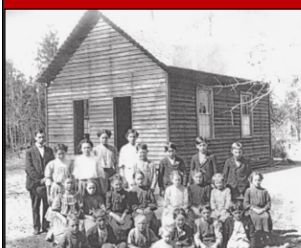
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**School Building**  
**Barnett Crossroads**

**Volume 46 No. 2**

**Feb. 2019**

## The Program

(Continued from page 1)

counties for clinical training. The overall goal of the program is to recruit and increase the number of physicians practicing in rural areas.

Always interested in local history, Dr. Adkisson has been very supportive of ECHS and the McMillan Museum. His large collection of pharmaceutical equipment is on display in the McMillan Museum.

However, the subject of his program for today is not medicine but a school, the Downing/Shofner Industrial Institute, founded by J. M. Shofner, minister and teacher who wanted to provide education for the disadvantaged. The school is also named for Elisha Downing who was the chief benefactor, credited with contributing both money and business expertise.

## The Downing/Shofner Institute Marker



### Text of the Marker for the Downing Shofner School

**East Brewton, 1906-1943**  
**Dr. J. M. Shofner (1863-1926) founder, dedicated his life to-"Give boys and girls a chance."**

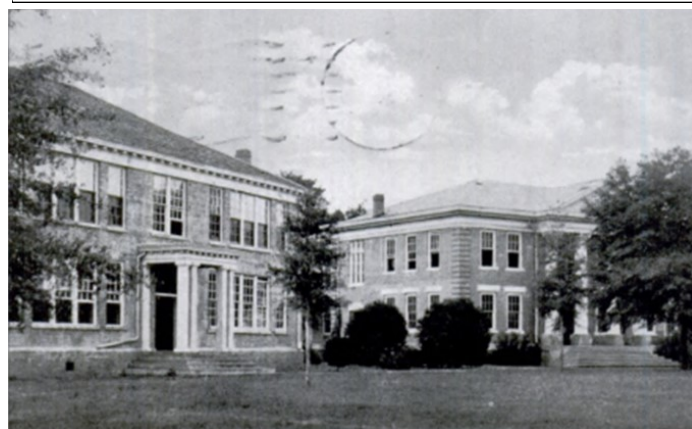
**Dr. Elisha Downing-Humanitarian**  
**First building erected named in honor of Mrs. Esther Downing.**  
**Trustees-1906: J. M. Shofner, D. Gillis, J. E. Finley, W. W. Hinote, J. M. Davidson, J. F. Jones, James K. Kyser.**

**The Downing/Shofner Institute used to stand on the hill where the East Brewton Baptist Church is now located.**



**Laying the Corner Stone for the Pauline Taylor Hall Building at the Institute.**  
**The school has been known by many names, including the Downing Industrial School for Girls. It was an instant success and continued operations from 1904 to 1943.**

***Photo and text from the book***  
***Escambia County by Tom McMillan.***



**The photo shows Wiggins Hall on the left and Taylor Hall, on the right. Taylor Hall was added to the campus for extra classroom space. It was one of the last of the buildings to be torn down. In its last days, it served as a temporary home for the East Brewton Baptist Church while the members were building a new church.**

***Text and Photo from the book*** **Brewton and East Brewton** ***by Lydia Grimes.***

## A History of the Downing/Shofner Institute

The following article first appeared in ECHOES for May, 2005.

The Downing-Shofner Institute was established to provide college preparatory as well as vocational training to under-privileged girls in Escambia County and the surrounding area. The school was the idea of J. M. Shofner, a Methodist minister. Elisha Downing, a local lumberman who contributed both his money and his business knowledge to helping Mr. Shofner joined him.

Beginning in 1904 these two men began to collect donations for the school. Eventually they were able to purchase eighty acres of land in East Brewton. The land holdings for the school, which included the site of the present-day East Brewton Baptist Church and the remains of Fort Crawford, would eventually increase to two hundred acres.

In 1905 the farm land that was part of the purchase was put into production and produced enough income that in the fall several girls were enrolled as students in the East Brewton Academy and the Brewton Collegiate Institute, two schools in the area. Since there were no dorms, the girls boarded in private homes for five dollars a month. On August 8, 1906, The Downing Educational Society was incorporated. It operated a girl's industrial school, a truck farm, a dairy farm, and a dairy, as well as a dressmaker and millinery business.

The first dormitory was completed in 1906, and the

school officially opened on September 24, 1906. One source says the school then had a period of "phenomenal growth," which included the construction of classroom buildings as well as more dormitories, the establishment of a trust fund, and an increase in both students and teachers every year for the next six years).

An article in the Alabama Historical Quarterly for 1949 noted that the school did eventually admit young men as well as young women. This article described the school as one which could be favorably compared with the Brewton school system: "Young Ladies and now even young gentlemen who stroll through its dirt trammelled grounds are as well accredited as those who matriculate in the town system." Also, this source noted that the school offered a full-time summer term and charged reasonable rates because the school received income from truck farming.

The school remained an independent corporation until December 1912 when the Methodist Conference became trustees of the institution.

In 1924, after Shofner, the first president, resigned, the name was changed from "Downing Industrial School" to "The Downing-Shofner Industrial Institute." The school continued to operate until 1943.

*Sources for this article include an article on Brewton from the Alabama Historical Quarterly, 1949 and the History of Escambia County, Alabama by Annie C. Waters.*



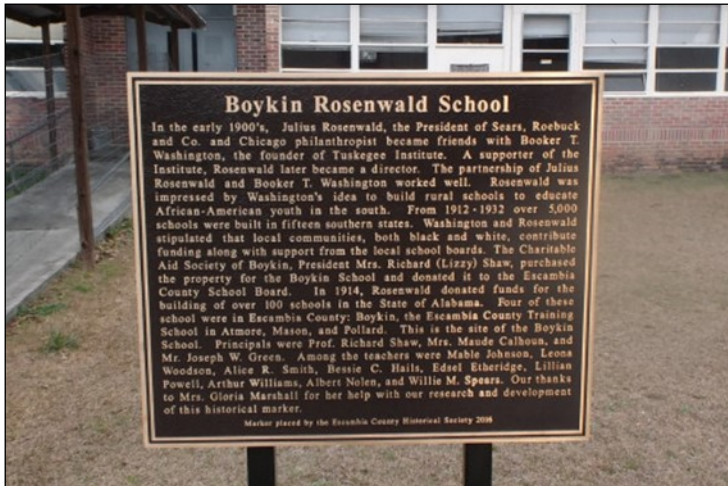
**String band at Downing Industrial School for Girls ca. 1910**



**Esther Home  
First Dormitory at Institute**



## ECHS Places Marker at Site of Boykin Rosenwald School



### Text of the Historical Marker

In the early 1900's, Julius Rosenwald, the President of Sears, Roebuck and Co. and Chicago philanthropist, became friends with Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute. A supporter of the Institute, Rosenwald later became a director. The partnership of Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington worked well. Rosenwald was impressed by Washington's idea to build rural schools to educate African-American youth in the south. From 1912-1932 over 5,000 schools were built in fifteen southern states. Washington and Rosenwald stipulated that local communities, both black and white, contribute funding along with support from the local school boards. The Charitable Aid Society of Boykin, President Mrs. Richard (Lizzy) Shaw, purchased the property for the Boykin School and donated it to the Escambia County School Board. In 1914, Rosenwald donated funds for the building of over 100 schools in the state of Alabama. Four of these schools were in Escambia County: Boykin, the Escambia County Training School in Atmore, Mason, and Pollard. This is the site of the Boykin School. Principals were Prof. Richard Shaw, Mrs. Maude Calhoun, and Mr. Joseph W. Green. Among the teachers were Mable Johnson, Leona Woodson, Alice R. Smith, Bessie C. Hails, Edsel Etheridge, Lillian Powell, Arthur Williams, Albert Nolen, and Willie M. Spears. Our thanks to Mrs. Gloria Marshall for her help with our research and development of this historical marker.

Marker Placed by the Escambia County Historical Society 2016



**Picture of School at Boykin abandoned in 1959-1960. .  
Could Be Original Rosenwald School Building for Boykin.  
Replaced by Brick Building Shown Below**



**Pictures of the Historic Marker and the Brick School Building, as well as the text of the Marker by Darryl Searcy.**

**Photos and text now on ECHS web page.**



## **Snapshots of ECHS January 2019 Meeting**



**Barbara Page, back to camera, visiting with Douglas Finlay**



**Left to right, Douglas Finlay and Jo and Robin Brewton, visiting with Carolyn Geck.**



**Tom McMillan and our guest speaker Victor Campbell**



**Above, John Angel, seated, working to adjust the computer for the program. Shown with Victor Campbell and Barbara Page.**



**At left, Don Sales consulting with John Angel about the computer. Victor Campbell and Barbara Page Are visiting in the background.**



## Snapshots of ECHS January 2019 Meeting (Continued)



**Don Sales is standing and looking over the room. Barbara McCoy is visiting with Ranella Merritt. Stephen Salter is seated in the second row,**



**Our Speaker, Victor Campbell, is shown while presenting his program on Cool Hill Cemetery**



**Enjoying refreshments after the meeting, are, at the table front to back, Carol Jokela, Robin and Jo Brewton. Al Jokela and Carolyn Geck are standing, waiting their turn.**

**Pictured at the right, Don Sales, standing, John Angel and Ranella Merritt.**



**Carolyn Geck, Seated, and Mike Edwards.**





## **Snapshots of ECHS January 2019 Meeting (Continued)**



**A picture of delicious items on the refreshment table**



**Stephen Salter**



**Barbara McCoy and Robin Brewton**



**Back row, Carolyn Geck and Carol and Al Jokela.  
Front Row, Barbara Page and Jacque Stone**



**John Angel, waving,  
and Tom McMillan**



## Snapshots of ECHS January 2019 Meeting (Continued)



**Before the Meeting, at the left, back to camera, Mike Edwards visits with Carolyn Geck, Seated, back to camera, Sally Finlay talks with Judy Purnell. John Angel is at the computer, consulting with Victor Campbell. At the right, Don Sales and Ranella Merritt.**



**Shown visiting before the meeting, in the back, standing, are Charlie Ware, John Angel, and Tom McMillan. In the back, seated, are, Douglas Finlay, Jo and Robin Brewton, and Carolyn Geck. In the Foreground, second row, are Carol and Al Jokela, with Barbara Page and Jacque Stone, front row.**



# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Reverend J. M. Shofner

*This biographical material on Rev. Shofner is taken from an article by Lydia Grimes, "Shofner Founded Girls' School," which appeared in the Brewton Standard on Feb. 25, 2004.*

J. M. Shofner was born in Rehoboth, Ala. June 3, 1868 to Martin Shofner and Willie Jane Glover. He had one brother, William Albert, and two sisters, Annie Jane and Ella Kate. His mother died when he was only five years old and the family moved to Georgiana. His father was a mechanic and a good one, according to his son, but times were hard on the family. Even though Shofner entered school at age seven, he was soon pulled out to help out on the farm.

The family moved from Georgiana to Pineville and then to the country about 20 miles north of Evergreen. It was at this location that he grew into young manhood. At the age of 17, he was 'converted to a religious life' and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church South. At the age of 18, he went out on his own and bought a farm, but soon felt called to preach. He wanted to attend school and borrowed the money to do so.

"Early one morning about the first of November, I left home with all my clothes packed in a little pillow case and walked to Greenville, a distance of 35 miles. Here I purchased a little trunk, packed my clothes in it, threw it on my shoulder, walked up the railroad to Fort Deposit, and entered school."

This was the beginning of a long association with

education. Although there were many times that he had to borrow and put himself in debt, he continued to get his schooling and in 1887, he applied for admission to the Alabama Conference and was appointed. He started his first preaching circuit as he had his schooling - he walked - Evergreen and then down to Castleberry. His territory covered four churches in Alabama and six in Florida.

In 1888, he was married to Eliza Jane Mixon of Commerce and after three years, he was transferred to several places, and it was while he was in Tallassee that he conceived the idea of a school. He saw the need for education for both boys and girls, but girls he saw as being the most disadvantaged. He believed that if a girl was educated, she would later see that her own children were also educated.

Thus came into being his idea of a school for girls of limited means. His idea was to have a school where the girls were educated, but also where they worked to defray the expense of their education. He even thought of the idea of a truck farm, a dairy and a cannery which would supply the school with the necessary food items.

In 1904 he was transferred to Brewton and put his ideas into practice. Donations came in and the site of Old Fort Crawford was bought, but it was 1906 before the school was organized and incorporated with the name of the Downing Educational Society.



**J. M. Shofner**

**He was the driving force behind the building and operation of the Downing Shofner Institute. He actually ran the school for a number of years.**

**He and his family lived in the only building left of the school on Shofner Street in East Brewton. Text from- Brewton and East Brewton by Lydia Grimes, online at <https://books.google.com>.**

# The ECHS *journal* Section

## Robert Elijah (Elisha) Downing

In her article "Forgotten Trails: Downing Family History Reveals Scottish Ancestry," Lydia Grimes traces the ancestry of Robert Elijah (Elisha) Downing back to ancestors who had probably come to North Carolina in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and then later migrated into southwest Alabama and northwest Florida.

The article establishes that as a young man, he was a farmer who worked with and for lumbermen. His work with lumbermen would eventually lead to his ownership of the Cedar Creek Mill which would eventually become the T. R. Miller Mill.

Elisha joined the Confederate army soon after the Civil War began, serving to the end of the war.

Returning to the area, he again worked in the lumber business. He established the Cedar Creek Mill in 1872 and incorporated it thirteen years later in 1885. The mill was located about 18 miles east of Brewton where a settler named Mendenhall had dammed the creek and ran a grist mill and a sawmill. In 1899 Downing sold the mill to William Wiley, Thomas R. Miller and Francis C. Brent. In 1913, this mill became the current T.R. Miller Mill Company."

In his Obituary which appeared in the Brewton Standard for Oct. 10, 1918, Mr. Downing is referred to as a consistent member of the Methodist Church, principal promoter of the Downing Industrial School, and a man who was public spirited to an unusual-degree.



**Elisha Downing Jr., shown with his wife, Lenna, and daughter Dorothy, was the cofounder of the Downing/Shofner Institute in East Brewton in 1904. He was a successful lumberman and banker.**

*The photo and text are from Escambia County by Tom McMillan, online at <https://books.google.com>.*

## Downing Industrial School News From "Gossip by Our Correspondents That May or May Not Interest You"

By Bernice Robinson, the Brewton Standard, March 6, 1913

The Pupils of Miss McCluskey's room are taking special interest in the study of geography since they have their new globe.

Rev. J. M. Shofner has spent several days this week visiting the small towns in the southern part of the state in the interest of the school.

We are indebted to Mrs. J. H. Graylee for another expression of good will to the school-this time by a collection of scrubs and bulbs for our flower garden.

Last Tuesday evening the teachers in their reading club began the study of the second book of Milton's *Paradise Lost* feeling that sufficient mental energy had been expended on the first book.



# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Story Of The Downing Industrial School by Reverend J.M. Shofner Brewton, Alabama 1919

*The following article is taken from the blog, Alabama Pioneers, by Donna Causey at <https://www.alabamapioneers.com/school-downing-for-women/>.*

**“One man’s passion for a school, revealed in this personal account from 1919, changed hundred’s of lives if not thousands.”**

**Donna Causey**

### Introduction

While pastor of the church in Tallassee, in an effort to help the girls who had no opportunity, I taught a night school, and the earnest seekers after knowledge were so delighted that soon the room was crowded and there was no chance to meet the growing demands. I have often been to the homes of such girls as could not read to teach them the Sunday school lesson so that they would not be embarrassed in their class Sunday morning.

### A Need for a School for Girls of Limited Means

As I was nearing my fourth year in this room in this town, my desire grew for a school with industrial features, by which girls of limited means could make their expenses, or part of them, by work. In the discussion at the beginning, the ideas and purposes which I set forth met with considerable favor.

Miss Mary Lou Martin (Librarian of the public library in East Tallassee) was one of the first with whom I talked over a school crudely outlined thus:

To have a home governed by a competent matron in which all the girls should have an equal share in the duties pertaining to the kitchen, dining room, housekeeping, etc., in this way defraying part of their expenses, and receiving good training—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

In the meantime a truck farm, a dairy and a cannery were to be operated, from which the home would be supplied with the necessities and even luxuries of life.

### Some Day It Will Be

I wanted Miss Martin’s opinion, for I knew her to be a woman reserved and modest, when giving expressions to thought, of deep piety, decided convictions, correct judgment, and strong in faith. After listening patiently to me elaborate my ideas, she modestly but firmly said “That ought to be, and some day it will be.”

Little did we dream at that time that the school would someday become a reality and within twelve years reach its present proportions, and that she would be one of the most potent influences in guiding the young life and shaping the destiny of the hundreds of girls who should crowd the halls.

### It Is Noble, but You Cannot Do It

When I laid the matter before my presiding elder he said, “It is a noble thought in you, but you can not do it.” He also said, “I believe in higher education.” I answered, “I also believe in higher education, but how can you get the higher if you have not the lower?” But this remark on his part caused me to drop the matter for a time.

At the ensuing session of the conference I was sent to Brewton, and after a short time the old desires were rekindled and continued with me until I reached a clear conviction that I ought to do the work. Then I began publishing in the papers my plans and purposes, which brought about various comments and criticisms.

### He Did Not Think the Plan Feasible

Dr. J.M. Mason was my presiding elder at this time, and while he did not oppose me, he did not think the plan was feasible. Neither did most of the brethren. There were some, however, who sincerely believed that the plan well executed would result in good. Among this number were Bishops Wilson, Duncan, Morrison, Key, Granberry, who wrote me unqualified endorsements and encouraged me greatly in the work. I appreciate these endorse-

*(Continued on page 12)*

# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Story Of The Downing Industrial School by Reverend J.M. Shofner Brewton, Alabama 1919

*(Continued from page 11)*

ments from our good bishops, for there are those among us, even among the preachers, who have come from the low walks of life, who have been promoted to higher stations, yet who seem to overlook some of the most worthy, as well as the most needy objects of educational work.

### **First Gift Was Made for School**

It was in May, 1904, my first year in Brewton, that the first gift was made by Miss Martha Vincent, of Rehoboth. The next donation came from Miss Grace Dodge, of New York. Soon other amounts followed and by fall we purchased the site of Old Fort Crawford, one mile east of Brewton.

### **I Began with No Organization**

At this stage there were so few who endorsed the plan that rather than be delayed and possibly defeated in the work, I began with no organization. This may have not been wise, but I get so impatient with some people's discussing, debating, resolving, dictating, but never doing anything. So I began all alone and it is perfectly wonderful how the people contributed to this cause when I only was responsible.

Because of many difficulties, the work progressed slow but surely, and it was July 2, 1906, before we organized and incorporated in the name of the Downing Educational Society, but the institution was called the Downing Industrial School, in honor of Mr. E. (Elisha) Downing, who has been quite liberal in building churches and school houses and assisting many in their education.

### **Honored with Confidence and Sympathy**

To offset this, however, I was honored with confidence and expressions of sympathy, and many contributed largely out of sympathy for the work rather than confidence in its ultimate success. So after hard efforts, painful delays, and deep heart yearnings, we erected in 1906 our first building, the Esther Home. This was named in honor of Mrs. Esther

Downing, whose contribution of \$1,000 made this building possible.

On the 24th of September we opened the doors and nine girls matriculated. Mrs. Fannie Cobb was our first matron and the teachers were Misses Mary Lisle, Annie Dowman and Mamie Johnson, who boarded at the dormitory and taught our girls in the East Brewton High School.

### **To Leave My School Was the Greatest Trial I Experienced**

I was closing my third year as pastor of the Brewton church, and I wished very much to return the fourth year and get the school on a more solid basis, but at the ensuing conference held at Eufaula I was sent to Enterprise by Bishop W.W. Duncan. While this was decidedly the best appointment I had ever received, to leave my school was the greatest trial I had experienced.

Some of the brethren wanted my appointment changed after conference so that I might be permitted to remain at Brewton, but I could not agree to this. Believing that every man should be loyal to the cause which he espouses, I went to Enterprise, though with a broken heart. The unbounded hospitality of the people and the unceasing manifestations of their appreciation of me were enough to estrange a man ordinarily from former ties, but I was distressed for the little school I had left at Brewton, which was my incarnate life.

There was a wonderful Providence in all this and I submitted to the leading of the Hand which I could not see. I was determined to wait patiently for the unfolding of his purpose by crystallizing a faith that could not die.

### **Faith Was Materialized**

This faith was materialized when Mrs. Martha Sawyer Gielow, of Greensborro, invited me to come and see her and directed to the school \$5,000.00 which had been contributed to the Southern Industrial Education Association, Washington City. This with

*(Continued on page 13)*



# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Story Of The Downing Industrial School by Reverend J.M. Shofner Brewton, Alabama 1919

*(Continued from page 12)*

about \$2,500.00 which the people of Brewton promised seemed to be a further indication of God's approval of the work.

During the year at Enterprise, the school was still in progress and the matron and teachers held things together so beautifully that it seemed almost useless for me to return. But at the next conference, though there was opposition, I was sent back to Brewton and the good bishop and cabinet were very kind when they agreed for me to carry on the school in connection with my pastoral work.

### **Erected Pauline Taylor Hall**

In 1908 we erected the Pauline Taylor Hall, our administration building, which is a memorial for Miss Pauline Taylor, sister of Miss Cornelis Aiken Taylor, who gave the \$5,000.00.

The next year I was taken out of regular pastorate and appointed to the school. This was by my own consent, yet it worked a hardship on me, for in moving to the school we were forced to live a camp life for awhile. Later on we built a home for the president.

During the next four years there were continual improvements, such as enlarging the buildings, installing water and lights, and erecting a handsome brick building of thirty-two rooms. This last was named in honor of Mrs. Martha Sawyer Gielow, who had shown her friendship many times in a substantial way.

### **Laboring under a Huge Debt**

Again in 1909 when I was laboring under the weight of a \$5,000.00 debt and expenses much in excess of the income, after much anxious worry and perplexity, there came to us \$10,000.00 from the bequest of Mr. C. L. Wiggins.

In 1915 we were called upon to pass through the most severe financial crisis of all. Contributions had ceased to come and a final closing out of business seemed positively inevitable. Again, there came to us

a bequest of \$13,919.29 from Miss Cornelia Aiken Taylor, of New York.

At the launching of the enterprise my great desire was that the church would take up the work, and I made repeated efforts to this end. I first asked the good women of the church of Brewton to take it up and make it a local institution. I then tried to get the Woman's Home Mission Society of the Alabama Conference, then the Woman's General Board through Miss Belle Bennett to adopt it.

After this, the matter was considered by the Pensacola District Conference of the M.E. (Methodist Episcopal) Church, South, but all with one consent positively refused to take it up or have anything to do with it.

So, after our organization July 2, 1905, we were an independent school until December, 1912, when it was tendered to, and accepted by, the Alabama Conference of the M. E. Church, South. The words used in tendering it were, "Take this child of tender years and nourish it."

### **Some Objections to the School**

There were some objections to the school's being tendered by the Alabama Conference, but while many other denominations had contributed liberally, there had not been any promise that it should not become a church enterprise. It was not a denominational feature for me, however, when I insisted on its belonging to the church, but I wanted it distinctively Christian. I have never liked the idea of the independent, self-governing, irresponsible man or organization.

I felt that to insure its permanency one of three things was necessary: that the State should own it; that the church should own it; or that it must be adequately endowed. Of the three I thought the church should be back of the institution, giving it Christian influence, power, and perpetuity. However, there is no sectarian spirit whatever in the school, as each pupil is not only allowed the freedom of her faith, but encouraged to be loyal to her profession.

Now, from the time of the opening of the school,

*(Continued on page 14)*

# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Story Of The Downing Industrial School by Reverend J.M. Shofner Brewton, Alabama 1919

*(Continued from page 13)*

1906, to December, 1912, this school was a child without a home, whether of legitimate origin is for men to decide; but it was homeless, hungry, and begging for someone to whom to look and feel a father's and mother's sympathy and care, a place to which to go and feel at home until December, 1912, when the Alabama Conference accepted it. Now, unlike every other institution of the church, it has not yet any definite way of support. Yet it has lived and progressed to the astonishment of a great many of its friends.

### **Spared No Pains Soliciting Help**

I have spared neither pains nor time in soliciting help for my school. While gathering help from the poor, I have sought in every imaginable way donations from the rich. If I could hear of any person from whom a possible contribution could be secured, I would write that person and get others to write, and this I did repeatedly.

In all of these efforts I am sure I have been guilty of doing some foolish things; for in my own State I have gone day and night, suffering all kinds of privations, hunting down generous persons, and have often returned to my home sick with disappointment, as well as worn out in the chase.

In the North I have tried from every standpoint to get in touch with the philanthropists, but could scarcely ever get nearer than the third or fourth secretary, who would explain that the system could allow the entertainment of no new plan for placing money.

The school has grown in nine years from our first dormitory with nine girls, a matron, three teachers and a plant worth \$5,000.00 to three dormitories, an administration building, president's home, two farm houses, and an enrollment of 173 pupils, a faculty of fourteen and a plant valued at about \$60,000.00.

### **One Girl Expressed Her Gratitude**

Permit me here to tell you of one girl who is worth every effort of heart, mind and body that has ever

been spent in this institution even if she had been the only one who has ever been helped. She came to us in the summer of 1910 and made the very best use of her time through every session until her graduation. When I had secured a scholarship for her, her widowed mother, by hard effort, economy and self-denial, made enough to pay for her books, clothes, etc.

Because of her wonderful resources and peculiar adaptability, I immediately employed her as one of our teachers when she finished school here. During the next vacation she wrote me and I give a quotation from her letter: "No one can ever know how much I appreciate your help to me. I thank God daily for such a man as you are, for I feel that to you is due the praise for my success. Be assured that I shall do my best in the work I am to do for you."

This young lady is still teaching for us and carrying into effect all she promised and all we expected. She has incarnated the fundamental principles upon which our school is established, and she will immortalize the purpose of the institution from which she was graduated and which she serves with sincere devotion. This young lady, having come from an obscure part of our home mission field, has become a splendid leader among the workers of missionary endeavor, and her services are coming more and more into demand.

### **Our Triplets Were Bright and Energetic**

Again, among the many of whom we are justly proud are the three little girls commonly known as "Our Triplets." When quite young they were bereft of both father and mother and were placed in our school. Since then they have been supported by one man whose liberality has continued to this good hour. They are bright, energetic, and happy.

As I know the tender care and protection they enjoy, I am sure if disembodied spirits are permitted to look with interest on the things of earth, their mother must look down with pleasure at the training and care they receive.

I have been many nights tossing from pillow to post

*(Continued on page 15)*



# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Story Of The Downing Industrial School by Reverend J.M. Shofner Brewton, Alabama 1919

*(Continued from page 14)*

trying to rest when the sweet angel of sleep had ceased to caress me into slumber. I have lived many a day when there was no sunshine in my soul, gone many a path where no flower bloomed, passed through many experiences with never a song to chase away the gloom.

There have been times when my nerves seemed so many batteries charged with electricity beyond their capacity and each seemed a pathway for every lightning flash of thought, and the storms have grown terrible at times. Once when "La Grippe" had such a hold on me, my very constitution seemed to be undermined, so much so I strongly contemplated giving up the work entirely.

### **Sometimes I Rejoice, Sometimes I Weep**

My experience has been a very varied one. Wild anxiety, like the internal fires of a volcano, swept me into cavernous altitudes, so that at times there were deep depressions of mind, and my nervous tension would distress me like a nightmare. At other times the vision would be all glorious and optimism has made every one a philanthropist.

Sometimes rejoicing, sometimes weeping; now with a towering faith and again doubting; sometimes succeeding and then failing; sometime encouraged and at others ready to give up; sometimes victorious, at others miserably defeated. Sometimes great gifts would come at an unlooked for time, and then for long, weary seasons nobody would give. Often, oh! so often, I have said, "What shall I do next?" "Say 'amen' and sit down" is what the word says, but it does not suit in this case.

Facing the time when He should tread the wine press alone, yea, when the shadows of the cross were over Him, Jesus said to the disciples, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

At a most fearful crisis David said: "I looked on my

right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto Thee, O Lord, I said 'Thou art my refuge.'"

Every one has his Gethsemane, and while there may be sympathy, there is the cup for each to drink, the fearful loneliness, the battle fierce, peculiar to the individual, and it is his, and no one else can know. Each should know the joy of "The Lord is my refuge," as truly as did the Psalmist.

### **I Am Responsible for It All**

So this school experience has been mine. With all deference due my faithful friends, and they have been many, I am responsible for it all. If it ever grows to great proportions I may have honor more than I am in anywise worthy of. If it goes down in failure I shall bear all the blame. I am responsible for its growth, for every building, all furniture and equipment. The trustees have been exceedingly liberal to grant nearly everything I have asked, vote for any building, change, campaign to raise funds or salaries, with the understanding that the whole thing rested with me.

Twice I was forced to ask for a raise of salary and it was granted—provided I could get it. The salary of all teachers was always granted—provided I could get it for them. Nobody was responsible for anything except myself. Oh, so many times I have felt that I could carry my burden no longer. Surely His grace has been magnifies in my behalf. Truly faith is the victory that overcometh—faith strong in the sunlight, but stronger in the dark. Oh! the longing of a human heart must be immortal. Why should a soul crave with such unyielding tenacity? Clouds of doubt, mountains of difficulty rise up.

### **Slow Progress**

There is such slow progress compared with the burning desire, and freezing indifference to my strongest appeals, and long delay of what sleepless nights when billows of anxiety sweep their merciless waves over me. Why did I not give up?

*(Continued on page 16)*

# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Story Of The Downing Industrial School by Reverend J.M. Shofner Brewton, Alabama 1919

*(Continued from page 15)*

Sometimes tortured nerves and fevered brain mixed with disappointment and disgust would cause me to long for Elijah's angel to refresh me under my juniper tree. But when I was borne in thought to some secluded spot and could hear the wail of so many neglected ones, my strength took on its youthful vigor and I was ready to walk out again into the open field and defy all obstacles in the name of Elijah's God.

I have found great comfort among friends whose faith has never wavered whose confidence in the plan has been unshaken, and whose encouragement has been words fitly spoken and as refreshing as the morning dew. My painstaking, unselfish, and hard-working teachers have stood by me in the severest crises, and have been an exceedingly great comfort to me. Another source of comfort has been the many songs I have loved, among which are the following: "Lead Kindly Light," "Abide With Me," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me," "Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me," "I Shall See the King Some Day; I Shall See Him Face to Face."

### **Work Still in Infancy**

While there is much more to be done, the work really is still in its infancy; the horizon is brightening to a golden dawn.

Often the door has seemed closed to me and when I have called for help there has been no adequate response, and I have said: "Does no one care?" Yes, the Judge of all earth will do right and His promises never fail my plea. Overshadowed with the almighty and undergirded (sic) with His everlasting arms, upon Him I rest my hope.

I shall go forth in His strength and, like Samson, I shall break the fetters and walk out into the open daylight of liberty and into the fullness of life, all remain with hope. For the light shineth in a dark place and soon it will be the dawning, and then the bright morning star. Oh! that my friends would this day help me to make it high noon in the calendar of my life work by giving the help I need.

### **Tenth Year Approached**

The tenth year of the school's life is fast coming to a close and it is beautiful to see the harmony of teachers and pupils in connection with the system which makes every pupil do her part with such accuracy. Rising at 6 in the morning, one section of girls cooks the breakfast, another milks the cows, and another attends to the poultry while others are arranging their rooms for the day. At 7 they march to breakfast, after which another section washes the dishes.

Now, the work is so scheduled and the various departments so arranged that the library, music, business, sewing, cooking, housekeeping, dairy and poultry work are all carried on in such a way that one does not conflict with the other.

In the meantime games of tennis, basket ball, croquet, etc., are very much enjoyed. By vote of the girls a "hand-out" lunch is served at noon. Dinner comes at 5, study hall at 6:30, and retiring at 9:30. The same system is observed on Sunday as well for we have Sunday school at 9 in the morning, church service at 11, dinner at 1:00, quiet hour at 2:30, Y.W.C.A. at 6:00.

Such system, such influence and power find wonderful expression in the lives of the young women who stay long enough to catch the spirit and appreciate its value.

### **Great Needs**

At this stage we are confronted with some great needs, on account of which the work will be greatly retarded if we do not receive help from some source. We are in great need of two buildings for industrial purposes, infirmary department and Y.W.C.A. services. Our greatest need at present is an adequate endowment. But I realize that I will be forced to give up the work before all my ideals are attained, and that soon another must take my place.

End



# The ECHS *journal* Section

## The Story Of The Downing Industrial School by Reverend J.M. Shofner Brewton, Alabama 1919



The Two Pictures Show Students on the Campus of the Downing School. The picture below illustrates that the school eventually included boys as well as girls.



### YOUR OPPORTUNITY

If you would immortalize yourself, here is your opportunity. You can provide money to help build, equip and maintain these two schools, which were established for those who without outside help must grow up in ignorance. We give a cordial invitation to our friends in the North and elsewhere to visit us at Brewton. We will entertain you free of charge. O, Friends, will you not hear and heed this Macedonian cry? For further information, address

(Rev.) J. M. SHOFNER, President

DOWNING INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

BREWTON, ALABAMA

The Image of Pauline Taylor Hall and the plea for funds called "Your Opportunity" are part of an Advertisement in the Northwestern Christian Advocate, Vol. 70 .

The request for funds also included a plea for funds for an Alabama Vocational School for Boys.

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

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	Regular	Mailed
Headstones and Heritage	\$20.00	\$25.00
Escambia Historical Society Cookbook	\$10.00	\$15.00
Wildflowers of The Conecuh/Escambia River Basin CD	\$10.00	\$15.00
History of Brewton and E. Brewton (sc)	\$35.00	\$40.00
Flomaton Centennial Scrapbook	\$30.00	\$25.00
Addendum to Headstones and Heritage	\$20.00	\$25.00
Headstones & Addendum Together	\$40.00	\$50.00

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**Dues are to be paid at the beginning of the year**

**Many members give a membership as a gift!**

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*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 [escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com](mailto:escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com) or call 251-809-1528.*

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