

ECHOES



The
Escambia
County
Historical
Society,
Founded
1971

The July Meeting
Tuesday, July, 23, 2019
McMillan Museum
Coastal Alabama Community College
Brewton Campus
3:00 p. m.



Judge Jordan

The Program:
David Jordan, Circuit Judge of
Escambia County, will present a program on his
role as Circuit Judge.

A graduate of the University of Alabama Law School in 1984, Judge Jordan was admitted to the Alabama Bar in 1985. He practiced law from 1985 to 1989 in Mobile and then moved to Brewton. From 1989 to 2003, he was a partner in the Law Firm of Otts, Moore, Jordan and Coale in Brewton.

He was the District Judge for Escambia County from January 2003 until June 31, 2014. He has been the Circuit Judge for the Twenty-First Judicial Circuit Court of Alabama, serving Escambia County, from July 1, 2014 to the present.

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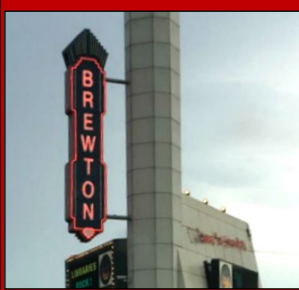
131 Saint Joseph Avenue
Brewton, Alabama

251-867-9962
Lhouseprinting@gmail

The August Meeting
Tuesday, August 27, 2019
Coletta Bailey of the Baldwin County
Heritage Museum will present the
program.



Courthouse in Brewton, AL, Escambia
County, undated. Erik Overbey
Collection, The Doy Leale McCall Rare
Book and Manuscript Library, University
of South Alabama.



Marquee, Ritz Theatre,
Now Message Center
Brewton, AL

Volume 46 No. 7

July 2019

The Program

(Continued from page 1)

He was appointed to the circuit court by Gov. Robert Bentley (R) on July 2, 2014, to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Bradley E. Byrne. Judge Jordan won election to a full six-year term in the general election on November 8, 2016.

In an article in the Brewton Standard, Judge Jordan commented on his reason for applying for the position of Circuit Judge, "I decided to submit my name because I thought I could serve the people of Escambia County more," he said. "I feel I have a broad knowledge of all aspects of the law, and I have served my country in Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. This is my opportunity to serve this country that I love" (<https://www.brewtonstandard.com/2014/07/02/governor-appoints-new-judges/>).



Circuit Judge Bradley Byrne, swears in newly-appointed district judge Dave Jordan. Judge Jordan's wife Becky is holding the Bible for the swearing-in.

[com/2014/07/02/governor-appoints-new-judges/](https://www.brewtonstandard.com/2014/07/02/governor-appoints-new-judges/).

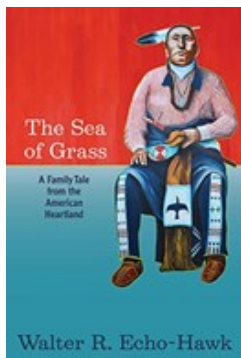
Judge Jordan has received several awards for his service as Circuit Judge, including Judge of the Year for the Alabama Forest Owners' Association in 2010. His accomplishments include creating programs that benefit children/youth/families.

He is a member of the First Baptist Church of Brewton and several community organizations including the Brewton Kiwanis Club and Atmore Lions Club.

His wife Becky and he have two sons Matthew and Coale, and a daughter, Jillian.

News and Announcements

An Evening with the Elders Event
Tue. July 30, 2019
6:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Wind Creek Ballroom



The announcement of the event reads: Join us to hear Indian Country activist Dr. Walter Echo-Hawk speak about storytelling, the subject of his new book, The Sea of Grass (cover at the left). You are invited to bring stories of your own family to share with everyone.

From the Amazon website:

The Sea of Grass: A Family Tale from the American Heartland is inspired by real people and events that were shaped by the land, animals, and plants of the Central Plains and by the long sweep of Indigenous history in the grasslands. Major events are presented from a Pawnee perspective to capture the outlook of the Echo-Hawk ancestors. The oral tradition from ten generations of Echo-Hawk's family tell the stories of the spiritual side of Native life, and give voice to the rich culture and cosmology of the Pawnee Nation.

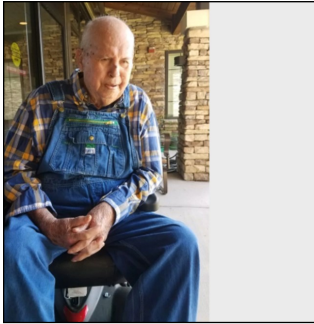


Dr. Walter Echo-Hawk, author of The Sea of Grass

(Continued on page 3)

News and Announcements

(Continued from page 2)



Carl 'Buster' McGhee, shown at the left, the oldest living Poarch Creek Indian, passed away in July at the age of 102.

The following is a statement by the Poarch Creek Indians:

At his death Mr. McGhee was the oldest living Tribal Member of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. He was born on February 9, 1917, and passed away July 2, 2019. He was 102 years old at the time of his death. According to his family he was also the oldest living WWII veteran in the state of Alabama.

Escambia County, Alabama, Historical Society, Places Historical Marker at Catawba Springs Baptist Church



The marker states:

The Catawba Springs Baptist Church

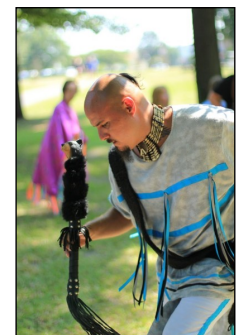
On October 7, 2018 the Catawba Springs Baptist Church celebrated its 200th anniversary. Pastor Jeff Edwards welcomed several hundred guests and members to commemorate this historic milestone. A representative from the Alabama

Baptist Historic Association recognized the Church with a framed certificate. Escambia County Historical Society President, Sally Finlay, spoke on the historical contributions of the pioneer families who helped found this Church and the significant role these Christian families played in the founding and success of our County. State Representative Alan Baker presented a proclamation from Gov. Kay Ivey. The Escambia County Historical Society presents this historic marker, during the Alabama State Bi-Centennial Celebration, with sincere appreciation to Catawba Springs Baptist Church for over two hundred years of service to this area.

Marker placed by the Escambia County Historical Society 2019



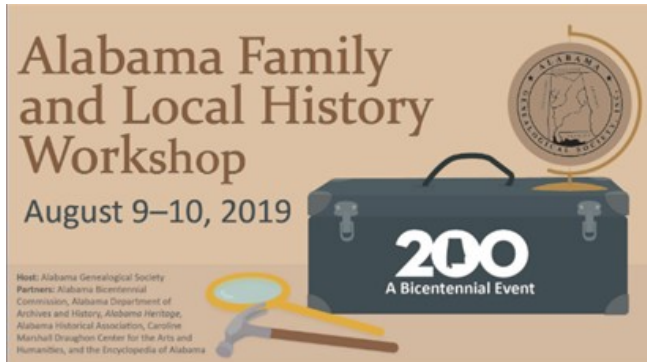
Battle of Burnt Corn Creek Reenactment: Saturday, July 27, 2019 at 12:00, Jennings Park, Brewton, Alabama



(Continued on page 4)

News and Announcements

(Continued from page 3)



This unique workshop is designed to strengthen skills in family and local history research and to bolster the organizations who support this research. Come to one day or both, depending on your interests to learn from the 20 speakers and panelists that have been lined up.

- Alabama Department of Archives and History
624 Washington Ave, Montgomery, AL 36104
- Coffee and registration at 8:00 a.m.
- Seminars held from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- *Optional reception and Museum of Alabama tours held evening of August 9.*
- **Cost:** \$30.00 for each day.
- **Day One:** For leaders or potential leaders of genealogical and historical societies. Two tracks will cover topics for strengthening societies for the 21st century.
- **Day Two:** For anyone who wants to do history—family and/or local. Two tracks that discuss the skills of doing history well and getting that history to the public.
- For details and to register go to
<<https://www.alabamaheritage.com/>>



**Food For Thought
August 15, 2019
Alabama Department
of Archives and History
12:00**

Author Frye Gaillard will present a program on his autobiographical book, *A Hard Rain: America in the 1960s.*



Frye Gaillard

Frye Gaillard, writer in residence at the University of South Alabama, has written extensively on southern race relations, politics and culture. He is former Southern Editor at The Charlotte Observer,

where he covered Charlotte's landmark school desegregation controversy, the ill-fated ministry of televangelist Jim Baker, the funeral of Elvis Presley, and the presidency of Jimmy Carter.

Admission to Food for Thought presentations is always FREE. The public is invited to bring a brown bag lunch. Complimentary beverages will be provided. For additional information call (334) 353-468.



Joe Weaver, former Dean of Students at Jefferson Davis Community College, now Coastal Alabama College, Passed Away this Month

Although not a member of ECHS, Joe Weaver and Jan Redditt presented a program For ECHSS on the early days at JDCC.

Also, one of Mr. Weaver's former students, Ed Williams, who is a longtime ECHS member and was a student at JDCC sent us a moving tribute to him:

"A good and godly man who touched a lot of lives. Mine was one. He steered me toward journalism when I was 18 years old.

"Mr. Weaver showed me how to use a twin lens reflex camera when he was dean of students and I was an impressionable freshman at Jefferson Davis Junior College in Brewton in 1971. It was a skill that I passed on to my photo journalism students at Auburn University years later.

"He was adviser to the JDJC newspaper and yearbook where I worked. The darkroom skills that this fine man revealed to me are obsolete now, but they were essential in my newspaper career and in my early teaching days."

Remembering Wilellen Elliott, Former ECHS President and Trustee Who Passed Away This Month



Wilellen was a major contributor to the society through her leadership as President in 2000-2001 and as a trustee. She and her husband Dave made generous donations of monetary gifts as well as documents, books, and pictures to the society and its Alabama Room.

She shared her knowledge of Brewton history by

giving help for research to members, providing articles for ECHOES and in giving programs at ECHS meetings. She was especially noted for her knowledge of the Downing/Shofner School.

After retiring and returning to Brewton, Wilellen and Dave embarked on the task of restoring her childhood home. ECHS members have enjoyed both a meeting in the restored Weaver home as well as one in the beautiful new home which Wilellen and Dave built near the Weaver home.



ECHS President Tom McMillan Presenting Wilellen with a Certificate of Appreciation from ECHS upon her retirement as Trustee in 2012. Tom and Wilellen are shown in the restored Weaver home, Wilellen's childhood home. They are standing in front of a wall of family pictures and mementos



ECHS Christmas Party 2004 at the Elliot's in East Brewton. Wilellen is shown in front with society members in the background



The Presenters for Show and Tell in 2010

Left to right on the back row are Alan Robinson Sammy McGlotheran, Charles Booher, Tom McMillan, Robin Brewton, and Ann Biggs-Williams and Golson Harrison. In the middle row are Beverly Stark, Barbara Page, Kathryn Wilkerson and Wilellen Elliott. In front is Bucky McCoy.

Wilellen showed a picture of the Pauline Taylor Hall at the Downing Industrial School for Girls.

A Gallery of Significant People from Escambia County



**Louis Malone
Finlay, Sr.
Pollard
1891-1963)
(Businessman)**

Born and educated in Pollard until age 16, further education at Southern University in Greensboro, Ala. and the University of Alabama. He returned to Pollard at father's death to run the family business, the Finlay Mercantile Company.

Joined the army in 1917, was a 2nd Lieutenant in the 10th Field artillery, and was involved in several major battles in France. At war's end had duties at the Versailles Peace Conference, and was military attaché to the court of Queen Marie of Romania until 1920. Then furthered his education at the Sorbonne.

Returned home and became associated with the Armour Fertilizer Company. Later moved to Mobile, very successful with the Virginia-Carolina Chemical Co. and remained with that company until he retired.



**Lt. Fred H.
Jones
Flomaton
(Died in 1975)
(World War II
Bomber Pilot-
POW)**

Participated in Operation Tidal Wave, the famous B-24 raids on the German held oil refineries in Ploesti, Romania. Jones, commander of an aircraft (he had named it "Available Jones"), was able to drop his bombs on the refineries but on the return trip his plane was severely damaged.

Forced to ditch in the Ionian Sea off the coast of Greece, he and surviving crew members were picked up and taken to a POW camp.

Jones was transferred to the infamous Stalag Luft 3 in Poland for the duration of the war, the German POW camp that housed captured airmen, remembered for two famous prisoner escapes that took place there by tunneling. One of the escapes was featured in the movie, The Great Escape.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery in his actions over Ploesti. He returned to Flomaton after the war and later became vice-president of the Escambia County Bank there.

This is part of the series of biographies created by Charlie Ware for ECHS as part of the commemoration of Alabama's bicentennial.

**Lt. James E.
McCurdy
Flomaton
(World War I
Aviator)**



*(No Picture
available)*

Grew up in Flomaton, during the early 20th century. When the U. S. entered WWI, he joined the army, trained as an aviation observer. Commissioned a second lieutenant, he went to France to serve as an observer with the 50th Aero Squadron. He was to serve as observer and gunner in a DH-4 biplane, flying missions to regulate artillery fire, locate enemy positions, support friendly troops, and protect other aircraft. On three occasions, his aircraft was shot down.

At the beginning of Oct. 1918, units of the 308th Infantry Regiment were cut off, surrounded by German forces. Communication was by carrier pigeon and the information sent about their location was inaccurate. The 308th became known as the "Lost Battalion." The 50th Aero Squad was given the task of locating and supplying this battalion.

In a plane flown by another pilot, McCurdy pinpointed the location of the battalion and in an attempt to drop supplies was seriously wounded. Back at the base, he refused to be treated until he had given details so others could locate and resupply the battalion.

The resupply has been called the first combat airlift in history. He received the Purple Heart and Silver Star. He returned home and lived out the rest of his life in Flomaton.

The ECHS *journal* Section

Brewton's Historic Theater Marquee



Above, The Ritz Theater Marquee Today

(Courtesy Jimmy Emmons via The Encyclopedia of Alabama)

Top, Right, The Ritz Theater In 1958

(Courtesy of Tom McMillan)

Bottom, Right, Marquee of the Historic Ritz Theater

(Courtesy of Tom McMillan)

All of these photos are in the Kelly Kazek Article



The following article by Kelly Kazek was posted online, June 10, 2019 at <<https://www.al.com/life/2019/07/how-the-town-of-brewton-preserved-its-historic-theater-marquee.html>>.

How an Alabama Town Preserved Its Historic Theater Marquee

Even without a reminder, many residents of Brewton, Ala., would remember the Ritz Theatre, a downtown hub of activity for 51 years. After the theater closed in 1987 and fell into disrepair, many residents wanted to save the historic building. City officials, however, declared there wasn't enough money to restore it so one local man had an idea

that would preserve it as an important part of the community.

In the mid-1990s, Bob McMillan suggested at least saving the façade and marquee of the Ritz, which featured a vintage tower topped by an eye-catching neon sphere, his brother Tom McMillan says. Bob died last year.

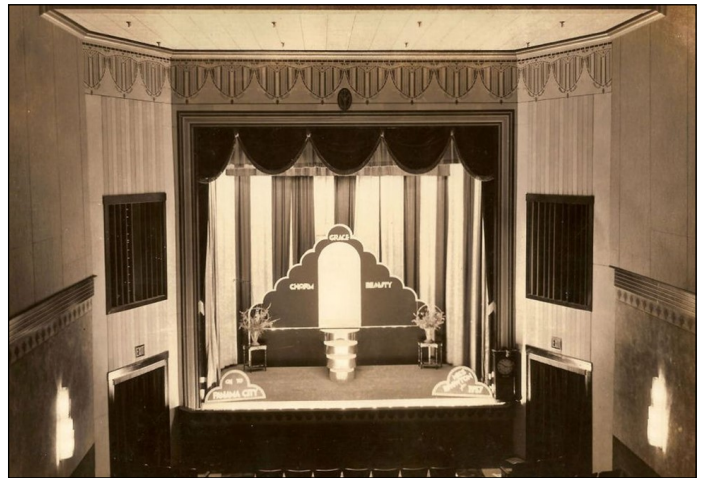
According to CinemaTreasures.com, the Ritz served as a source of news for residents during World War II and, in subsequent years, was used to host numerous community events.

The plan to save the marquee was approved and, in 1996, the building was demolished. Materials

(Continued on page 8)

The ECHS *journal* Section

Brewton's Historic Theater Marquee



Upper Left, Back of Message Center/Ritz Marquee

Upper Right, The stage of The Historic Ritz Theater (Courtesy of Tom McMillan)

Left, The Historic Marker for the Ritz Theater



(Continued from page 7)

from the marquee and tower were saved and reconstructed on the original site. The unusual piece of architectural history operates as a community information kiosk, where announcements or tidbits of local history are displayed. As an added bonus, it created a fun roadside attraction, where visitors stop for photo opps.

"It's a message center," Tom McMillan says. "You have to pass by it if you come to downtown Brewton." It is located near the intersection of U.S. Highway 31 and Alabama Highways 29/41.

A historical marker at the site says:

"The Ritz Theatre opened its doors on this site September 14, 1936 and for more than fifty (50) years prided itself as the 'Hub of the Brewton Community.' Between its first feature, 'Yours for the Asking' and its last 'Crocodile Dundee,' shown Jan-

uary 22, 1987, the Ritz served as stage for fashion shows, beauty pageants, dances and various other community events. Stars of the 'Grand Ole Opry' and 'Hollywood' made live appearances at the Ritz. The Ritz was the community's prime source for reliable news from the battle front during World War II. With a seating capacity for 761, the Ritz was the place to be on Saturday afternoon for generations of children. This legacy of the Ritz Theatre has been perpetuated with the construction of this community message center in March 1996."

Comments

Annie Middleton Robinson

"Reminders of an era that went away. There was at one time in many cities, small and large, that had a movie theater. You could take your sweetheart to a

(Continued on page 9)

The ECHS *journal* Section

Brewton's Historic Theater Marquee



Historical Society Members at Message Center 2003
(Photo Courtesy of Ann Biggs-Williams)

(Continued from page 8)

movie and go out to eat afterwards for as little as \$7.00. In some towns and between towns there was the drive in theater. In Birmingham there were multiple theaters and drive in theaters.”

MT 1716

“Loved this place. Thanks to those who preserved its memory. Saw 101 Dalmatians here and Swiss Family Robinson along with dozens of other movies.”

Elcid

“Loved the old theaters.
Mainly because they were air conditioned.”



A carriage decorated with flowers for the 4th of July parade in Huntsville, July 4, 1899.

From Department of Archives and History Facebook

ECHOES
THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Books Available by Contribution

	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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Treasurer, P.O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427**

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Dues are to be paid at the beginning of the year

Many members give a membership as a gift!

**Business members get a large scale
advertisement 11 months of the year.**

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 or call 251-809-1528.

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