

ECHOES



The
Escambia
County
Historical
Society,
Founded
1971

The January Meeting
Tuesday, January 28, 2020
McMillan Museum
Coastal Alabama Community College
Brewton Campus
3:00 p. m.



Tom McGehee

Boehm Porcelain.

The Program: Tim McGehee, the Museum Director for Bellingrath Gardens and Home, will present a program on the Bellingrath Gardens as well as the subject of Steamboats on the Alabama River.

From the "Staff Biographies of Bellingrath Gardens" at
<<https://bellingrath.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/BGH-Information-2019-Staff-bios.pdf>>

Tom McGehee has served as the Museum Director for Bellingrath Gardens and Home since January 1994. In that capacity, he oversees the 15-room Bellingrath Home and its collection of decorative arts and antiques as well as its archives. He also maintains the Delchamps Collection of

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Note:

The Program for the January Meeting will include a vote on Officers for the Society.

The February Meeting
Tuesday, February 25, 2020
McMillan Museum, 3:00 pm
Program: Guest Speaker Earline Crews will present a program on her book, Life with Top Down Country Living.



A Boehm Porcelain at Bellingrath Gallery

Volume 47 No 1
January 2020

Walter and Bessie Mae Bellingrath pose on the grounds of their gardens in Theodore, Mobile County, Ala. ca. 1938, four years after they opened the grounds to the public.



The Program

(Continued from page 1)

From the staff biographies of Bellingrath Gardens <<https://bellingrath.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/BGH-Information-2019-Staff-bios.pdf>>:

McGehee currently serves as president of the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery and is a member of the boards of the Friends of the Alabama Governor's Mansion, the Rotary Club of Mobile and the Friends of the History Museum of Mobile. In 2012, he was named Rotarian of the Year. He has served for 21 years as chairman of the Tree Commission for the City of Mobile and recently ended his third term as secretary of the Victorian Society in America headquartered in Philadelphia. He is a longtime member of Government Street Presbyterian Church, where he recently completed a term as Clerk of Session.

In 1996, the City of Mobile's Historic Development Commission awarded him the Elizabeth Gould Award for his research into architect George B. Rogers as well as Mobile's lost architectural heritage. He is a 1997 graduate of the Newport (RI) Summer School conducted by the Victorian Society, a 1999 graduate of the Winter Institute of Decorative Arts held at Winterthur, a 2000 graduate of the



Tom McGehee celebrated his 25th anniversary as Museum Home Director on January 3, 2019.

Cooper-Hewitt's French Decorative Arts Studies in Paris, a 2001 graduate of the London Summer School conducted by the Victorian Society, and a 2008 graduate of the Attingham Trust Summer School held in the United Kingdom, as well as the first Attingham Trust Study of the London Town House, held in 2010.

Since 1997, McGehee has been a regular lecturer for the Alabama Roads Scholar program (formerly Elder Hostel) hosted by the University of South Alabama, and has conducted walking tours of Mobile's historic districts and Magnolia Cemetery.

His "Ask McGehee" column has appeared monthly in Mobile Bay Magazine for more than a decade and it has regularly won the annual Readers' Choice Award. He also serves as editor for the Magnolia Messenger, the newsletter for the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery, which is published three times a year.

McGehee is a native of Bronxville, N.Y., and a graduate of the Bronxville School and the University of Georgia, where he earned a BA in journalism with minors in business and history. He is married to the former Lucile Rutherford Smith of Monroeville. His daughter, Megan, currently lives in Manhattan, where she works for a private financial group.

The Bellingrath Museum Home



The following is taken from the article "Bellingrath Gardens and Home}" at <<https://bellingrath.org/gardens-home/museum-home/>>.

Until 1934, Walter and Bessie Bellingrath had been residents of Mobile where they maintained a beautiful home and garden at 60 South Ann Street. When they decided to have their weekend property open year-

round to guests, the Bellingraths realized that it would require a great deal of supervision. The couple decided to establish residency at their now famous Gardens, which were beginning to receive national recognition.

The 15-room, 10,500 square-foot Home was built in 1935 and was designed by the prominent Mobile

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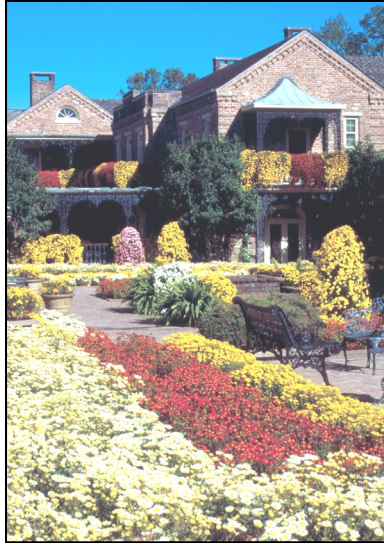
The Bellingrath Museum Home

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architect, George B. Rogers.

The exterior features handmade brick salvaged in Mobile from the 1852 birthplace of Alva Smith Vanderbilt Belmont, who was a notable American socialite and major figure in the women's suffrage movement. Ironwork was obtained from the recently demolished Southern Hotel, also in Mobile. The result was dubbed "English Renaissance" by Rogers.

Flagstone terraces, a slate roof and figural copper downspouts join with a central courtyard, balconies and covered galleries to give the Home a Gulf Coast flair. The architect wanted the visitor to think of the house as a home, not a mansion, and it is situated to give the impression of a much more modest residence. He also wanted the Home to



Bellingrath Home

reflect the architectural heritage of the region.

The Home was the most modern of its kind in 1935, but Alabama Power had not brought electricity to this remote area of Mobile County. The Bellingraths therefore depended on a large Delco generator for electricity until 1940.

The Bellingrath Home appears as it did in the Bellingraths' era and is open for tours. All of the Bellingraths' original furnishings are on display to guests. Guests can enjoy seeing the "ultra modern" bathrooms of 1935, and the kitchen with its original appliances — German silver countertops and sinks

— as well as the Butler's Pantry overflowing with Mrs. Bellingrath's collection of silver, crystal and china.

The Delchamps Gallery of Boehm Porcelain

The following is taken from the article "Bellingrath Gardens and Home" at <<https://bellingrath.org/gardens-home/museum-home/>>.

The Bellingrath Home was adjoined by a guest house with a six-car garage beneath. Completed in 1939, it was built to accommodate the growing number of house guests invited to the Gardens by Walter and Bessie Bellingrath. A small chapel was included in its design, as well.

In 1967, the open garages were enclosed to become the Delchamps Gallery of Boehm Porcelain and a visitors lounge. This fine American porcelain



Entrance to the Boehm Porcelain Collection at Bellingrath Gardens.

collection was a gift to the Bellingrath-Morse Foundation by Oliver and Alfred Delchamps and their sister, Annie Delchamps Moore, who were long associated with the Bellingrath family. Their donation of rare and early porcelain sculptures by Edward Marshall Boehm has become the largest display of its kind in the United States.

Edward Boehm started his porcelain artistry in

1949 after a career as a farm manager and veterinarian's assistant. His deep love and understanding of animals of all kinds was translated into priceless porcelain sculptures featuring incredible

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The Delchamps Gallery of Boehm Porcelain

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detail and color.

In less than a decade, the Eisenhower administration had taken note of his unique American artwork and began a longstanding tradition of sending pieces of Boehm porcelain as official gifts to overseas dignitaries. Within a short time his work was being admired from Peking to Buckingham Palace.

During his lifetime, Boehm was honored by commissions from five American Presidents and his works were given to Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI. A duplicate of the crucifix given to the Vatican in 1959 is on display within the Delchamps collection.



Sculptures from the Boehm Collection at Bellingrath Gardens.

Bellingrath is fortunate to house a collection which covers such a broad range of natural and beautiful subjects. Boehm's birds amidst the branches of realistic flowers are a fitting compliment to the Gardens which surround them. As an art form, this collection represents the first successful American hard-paste porcelain.



**State gifts to China
Mute Swans presented by Richard Nixon in 1972.**

News and Announcements



Dennis Fuqua

Dennis Fuqua to be the New Campus Director for Coastal Alabama Community College's Brewton Campus.

A native of East Brewton, Fuqua is a graduate of W.S. Neal High School. He attended Jefferson Davis Community College for one year before transferring to Auburn University where he received his bachelor's degree in agriculture business and economics in 2000.

He worked for Southern Growers, which is an ornamental and tree nursery in Wetumpka, for one year.

Fuqua went back to Auburn and received his master's degree in agriculture science education.

He taught Ag Science at the Beulah Academy of Science (a middle school located in Pensacola, Fla.), for two years before coming to Flomaton High School in 2004 to teach agriculture science.

Fuqua has been an employee of the Escambia County School System for 16 years. He became principal at ECHS in January, 2013, and will be one week shy of seven years at the school when he steps down from his present position.

Digitizing Newspapers

Tom McMillan reports that the society's copies of early newspapers have been digitized and this collection is now being indexed.

The Curtis Finlay Foundation has contributed funds for this project along with contributions by Tom McMillan.

Decorations from the ECHS Christmas Party for 2019

Thanks to Darryl Searcy, Robert Smiley, Jan Wilson and Susan Crawford for the beautiful decorations.



Gallery of Significant People from Escambia County



**Wayne Stacey
(1943-2019)**

**Atmore
(Military Leader-State
American Legion Com-
mander)**

Clifford Wayne Stacey was born in Atmore, Alabama on March 6, 1943. He grew up in Atmore and was a 1961 graduate of Escambia County High School where he was a class leader and star athlete. He received a BA degree from Auburn in 1965 and, at the same time, was commissioned a second lieutenant in the army through the army ROTC program. Stacey later earned an MBA degree and graduated from the Army Command and General Staff College.

Stacey began his military career serving in Southeast Asia where he was twice awarded the Bronze Star for bravery. During his 25-year career he held many positions of responsibility including being a battalion commander, deputy brigade commander, and numerous staff positions at corps, army, and joint command levels. In addition, he was a leadership instructor at several army schools. His other decorations include 4 awards of the Meritorious Service Medal, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal.

After retiring from the army, Stacey served as Director of Human Resources for the Georgia World Congress Center Authority (Convention Center, Georgia Dome, and Centennial Olympic Park) from 1992 through 2004.

Stacey has served his fellow veterans tirelessly through his dedicated service in the American Legion. He has served as commander of Gulf Shores Post 44, Baldwin County District Commander, Alabama Department Membership Commission Chairman, and 2014-2015 State of Alabama American Legion Commander. In addition, he has served on many national and state level committees.

Stacey's wife Donna, who is also a retired army officer, has also served as State Commander and the couple was jointly presented the National Commander's Medallion for their service and for their diligent efforts to assist veterans.

Wayne and Donna Stacey have become well known in the veteran community throughout the state for the numerous battles they have fought for veteran's rights and benefits. They have not only helped institute policy and legislation providing for veteran's assistance but work individually with any veteran in the state who may need assistance.

Wayne Stacy passed away in October of 2019.

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Gallery of Significant People from Escambia County

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**SSgt. Esther McGowin
Blake
(1897-1979)**

**Brewton
(First Woman in the
United States Air Force)**

“We consider her the first lady of the Air Force,” said Air Force historian William Chivette. “She raised her right hand to enlist in the Air Force on the first minute of the first hour of the first day, July 8, 1948, that women could join the United States Air Force.” The Air Force had been created nine months before on September 17, 1947.

Born on July 7, 1897, near Brewton, Alabama, Blake was serving as a civilian employee of the Army Air Forces Miami Air Depot when World War II began. Recently widowed, she had two sons who joined the Army Air Corps as pilots, and in 1944, both were reported shot down and missing in action.

In March 1944, at the age of 47, Blake enlisted in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) and served in the Aleutian Islands and the Yukon Territory. She stated that she wanted to do anything she could to hasten the end of the war, even if it was only by one minute. When the war ended, both of her sons returned safely. After the war, Blake was assigned to Ft. McPherson, Georgia.

The Air Force became a separate military service on September 17, 1947 and on June 12, 1948, President Truman signed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act. The Air Force announced that as of July 8, 1948, women would be granted equal status.

Since both her sons had served in the Air Corps, Blake wanted to honor their service by enlisting in the newly formed Air Force. She transferred from the Army to the Air Force and planned to be sworn in at one minute after midnight on July 8, 1948, thus becoming the first woman member of the new Air Force.

Blake remained on active duty with the Air Force until 1954, when she separated because of a disability and went to work as an administrator for the Veterans Administration Regional Headquarters in Montgomery.

**This series of biographies
created by Charlie Ware for
ECHS is part of ECHS’s
commemoration of
Alabama’s bicentennial.
(To be continued)**

The ECHS *journal* Section

The Freedom of Growing Older

By Darryl N. (Dobbs) Searcy

As kids we can't wait to grow up. We look forward to the day we can drive and live by our own rules. There seems to be nothing we want more in the world than to be a little older, aside from candy that is. Adults on the other hand like to look back on life and reminisce about "the good old days" back when they were young, fun, and had a full head of hair. But why is it that for half of our lives we just want to be older and when we finally get there all we want is to be able to turn back the clock? The sad truth is we aren't built like Benjamin Button, and we don't live in Never Land, so getting older is going to happen and there's nothing we can do about it.

As we grow older we gain knowledge and experience, and we lose that childish sense of wonder, curiosity and excitement. But why do we need to "grow up" to grow up? I recall a young author and blogger, who frequently keynoted at some of the world's most influential conferences, actually gave a speech teaching adults to think more like kids. "In order to make anything a reality, you have to dream about it first." In the programs the blogger often went on to explain how children don't let the real world's limitations limit their ideas. When a child thinks up something wild, they run with it. While adults realize the impossibility of their plan and give up, children don't let things like logic or the laws of gravity stop their dreaming, and neither should adults.

Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief, all will go through the aging process. However, how well each endures that process depends on the individual. After my recent visit with an older brother who lives in assisted living at the C.C. Young complex in Dallas, Texas, I realized that growing old was a frame of mind, and all I needed do was to break that mind-fix and enjoy the freedom of being where I am. During the visit with my brother, we conversed with a number of "residents," who all were alert and oriented and very aware of their own aging process, but enjoyed the freedom of being among their kind. We conversed about the spirit of Christmas, but never about the process of aging and the factors that appear to account for a longer life, what aches and pains are keeping one from being happy.

There was talk about adjusting to aging as well as the positives of growing old. So, while driving the long distance back to my home in Alabama, I realized that we all age at different rates and aging is a highly individual process that affects people in unpredictable ways. It is inevitable that we all will get there, and how we accept being where we are is a frame that has to be adjusted to fit our day - "Carpe diem." In short, you shouldn't wait for tomorrow to do something, but do it today. You never know what will happen tomorrow or the day after; you never know when it's too late.

As the traffic zipped past me, I suddenly felt a freedom to which I had not been accustomed for a long, long time; the freedom of controlling my day; the freedom of setting my own pace, the freedom of driving according to speed limits, or driving less, choosing how I would keep my lane and let those who were rushing to destinations, known or unknown, go as fast or as slow as they wished, so long as they did it in a lane other than mine. I realized that this attitude is very different than that of the elderly I speak with during my daily routines. Several times in the past it came to mind that I am no longer contributing to society, but instead I am approaching a time when I might well be a burden to someone and to society.

Unlike the elderly confined to some facilities who feel the need to fill time by playing bingo or another activity, there is a significant difference from what they were to what they are now. "Break away," I say, "and make the life you want." Break the sociological principle that aging is socially constructed.

Early on in the drive I realized that nothing in the nature of aging summons forth any particular set of attitudes. Rather, attitudes toward the aged are rooted in society and therefore differ from one social group to another. We all adjust to things differently, particularly aging. The activity theory assumes that the more activities elderly people engage in, the more they find life satisfying. I found this to be true in that I could enjoy the drive, or I could endure and suffer the miles and miles of white lines to the extent of total misery.

I noticed a lot of different activities were available to the residents at the assisted living place and many of the residents seemed to adopt the attitude that the

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The ECHS *journal* Section

The Freedom of Growing Older

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more time they spend in activities or strolling the gardens the more energetic and younger they felt. It was all the healthiest of attitude that served them well.

While on this highway I knew that I had to adjust or the 600 mile drive would be more punishment than enjoyment. It became my motto then and there that I would adjust my mind-set and enjoy the freedom of growing older and to remain independent. Why not enjoy the freedom of growing older? At one moment I recalled a song by Jimmy Buffet, "I'm growing older but not up. My metabolic rate is pleasantly stuck. Let those winds of time blow over my head, I'd rather die while I'm livin' than live while I'm dead."

Who among us remembers: "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" A reflection on beauty, aging and looking like Grandma."

A few days ago while standing in front of the mirror and wondering what I'll look like in 10 more years, I thought of that rhyme. At age 20, did I ever imagine what I would look like at 84? Old, wrinkled, both of them, in different ways, but definitely old. Would I look the same as I did in my 20s, or would I be bent

with bad back, or bald, or gray? Would my mind be fresh and keen, or would senior moments overtake me? All of the above, no doubt about it! Yet, did I ever imagine that while confined by age, was my mind free to enjoy the advances of aging? This I pondered as I steered my ancient Ford vehicle toward our final destination. The answer was that I had allowed myself to be confined, so today would be a defining moment for me and I would open up to the freedom I longed to know.

It did, and I did. Thank you Jimmy Buffet for reminding me that freedom was there; all I needed do was adopt the attitude that I would not be guided by the person and vehicle that sped beyond - I had a lane and he had a lane, let him do with his space as he wished and I would keep a smile as I absorbed the beauty around me in the slow lane. In doing so, I am reminded that everyone has a feeling, a story, a history, a legacy that is waiting to be told.

Maybe I should stop now and enjoy that delicious apple my sister gifted me before I left Alabama.

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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
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Many members give a membership as a gift!

**Business members get a large scale
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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 or call 251-809-1528.

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