

ECHOES



The
Escambia
County
Historical
Society,
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1971

The Newsletter for Nov./Dec. 2020.
There Will Not Be A November Meeting Or Christmas Party for ECHS in 2020.
The Brewton Campus of the Alabama Costal Community College Is Open for the Fall Term. The Museum and Alabama Room Are Still Closed.

News from the Museum and the Alabama Room

Don Sales reports that the Alabama Room is really looking good from the "sprucing up" with new bookcases and continued organization of materials.

There is still no definite date for reopening the Museum and Alabama Room or a date for a ECHS meeting. However, Don invites anyone interested in visiting the Museum to come by and ring the door bell. They will be welcome. He is at the Museum Tuesday—Thursday, 9:00 am-4:30 pm.

Also, remember the museum and Alabama Room are still available to individuals who contact Don for an appointment. Address: P.O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427; Phone: 251-809-1528; E-mail: <escambiacohistoricalsociety@gmail.com>.

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Rural Free Delivery in Fairhope, Alabama at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.

The Doris Rich Collection. The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama.



Methodist Episcopal and Baptist Churches, Calera, Ala.

From the Post Card Collection of Troy University Libraries.



New York City
Conductorettes, 1918

Volume 47 No. 11/12
Nov./Dec. 2020

News and Announcements

Pictures on Loan to the Museum



These two paintings on loan to the McMillan Museum are unique portraits painted on materials composed of horse hair.

The portraits of a Sea Captain, smoking his pipe, and his wife, holding a candle, have been loaned to the Museum by John Clary of Brewton. They will be on display in the ECHS meeting room in the Museum.

Mr. Clary is interested in locating a third painting in this series, a painting of the captain's ship. He would appreciate any information about this painting.



This Week in Alabama History, November 15 - November 21

The Week's Feature Event



The State Capitol Building. The Building Was Commissioned in 1827 & Completed in 1829.

November 20, 1826 Tuscaloosa Becomes State Capital

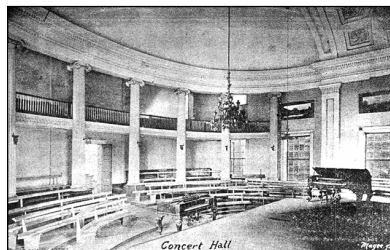
Alabama's legislature convenes in the new capital at Tuscaloosa for the first time. The capital had been moved there from Cahaba, the

state's first so-called "permanent capital." In 1846 the legislature voted to change the capital again, this time moving it to Montgomery.

From the article "The Tuscaloosa State Capitol Building": After the state capital was moved from Tuscaloosa, the capitol building was granted to the young University of Alabama. Seldom used by the university, the property was leased to the Baptist Convention of Alabama for the next century.

In the new building, the Baptist Convention established the Alabama Central Female College, and built a four-story tall dormitory on the same land.

The Representatives Hall was repurposed as a concert hall. The structure was used by the Alabama Central Female College until it was burned down on August 22, 1923, speculated to be caused by faulty electrical wiring (<https://alarchitecture.ua.edu/the-Tuscaloosa-state-capitol-building/>).



Room Used by the House of Representatives when the state capital was located in Tuscaloosa. At the time of the photo, it was the concert hall for the Alabama Central Female College.



The ruins of the capitol building are preserved in Capitol Park in Tuscaloosa.

(Continued on page 3)

Tuscaloosa as Alabama Capital in Context: The Five Alabama State Capitals

(Continued from page 2)



**St. Stephens,
Washington County.**

St. Stephens Territorial Capital 1817-1819

St. Stephens was designated the temporary seat of government by the act of congress which created the Alabama Territory. Two sessions of the Territorial

Legislature met here. The legislature met in the Douglas Hotel, the site of which is currently being excavated by the University of Alabama archaeology department.

The now-abandoned settlement of St. Stephens sat atop a limestone bluff overlooking the Tombigbee River. Today, the site of the town is referred to as Old St. Stephens and is a historical park and archeological site.



**An artist's rendering of
the first Alabama state
capitol building, Cahaba.**

Cahaba, Dallas County, 1820-1826. Designated as the First "Permanent" Capital of the State

The Territorial Legislature had chosen Cahaba,

after much lobbying by political factions, as the site for the first capital of the state. The second session of the legislature met there in 1820.

Cahaba also was designated as the temporary seat of government in the Constitution, which expressly gave the 1825-26 legislature the power to decide upon a permanent site. That session of the General Assembly took the opportunity to select Tuscaloosa for the new capital, deserting the oft-flooded and unhealthy Cahaba site.



**A line drawing of
Constitution Hall, where
delegates met and signed
the first state constitution.
A replica of this
building now stands on
the same spot in
Alabama Constitution
Hall Historic Park and
Museum in Huntsville.**

Huntsville 1819-1820 Site of the Constitutional Convention and the First Session of the State General Assembly

The decision to hold the state constitutional convention in Huntsville was based on a compromise between north and south Alabama residents.

The new permanent state capital of the time would be

Cahaba, a town located in central Alabama. However, the convention would be held in Huntsville because north Alabama with a higher population density than the rest of the state had the political power to influence the location of the convention.



**Early sketch of the
Tuscaloosa Capitol
Building. The dome was
elevated in such a way as to
be seen from across the
Black Warrior River,
which was a source of great
traffic to the area.**

Tuscaloosa 1826-1846

From "The Tuscaloosa State Capitol Building": Tuscaloosa was a thriving community located on the shoals of the Black Warrior River and had been a strong candidate for the capital site when Cahaba had been chosen for the honor in 1819.

Serving as the home for the government beginning in 1826, however, it was increasingly inconvenient as a seat of government for the rapidly growing state. Alabama's population gains concentrated in the state's more eastern counties as Indian lands there opened to white settlement, prompting a clamor for a more centrally located capital.

(Continued on page 4)

Tuscaloosa as Alabama Capital in Context: The Five Alabama State Capitals *(Continued)*

Continued from page 4)



**The Current State Capitol
in Montgomery**

Montgomery, 1846 to the Present

*From the
Alabama
Department of
Archives and
History, this
background on
the capitol*

building:

Andrew Dexter, one of the founders of the town, had held on to a prime piece of property in long anticipation of the capital's eventual move to Montgomery. Dubbed "Goat Hill" for its use as pasturage, the site retained that affectionate appellation despite attempts to dignify the spot with names like "Lafayette Hill" (after the 1825 visit of the Marquis de Lafayette) and "Capitol Hill" (after the 1847 construction of the Capitol).

In selecting Montgomery, the legislature expressly provided that the state should be put to no expense in securing lands or in erecting a capitol building. Thus, the citizens of the town immediately organized to secure the "Goat Hill" site and begin erecting a building. Bonds for \$75,000 were issued by the municipality which were taken up by local real estate dealers and investors.

The Greek Revival plan of the new capitol was drawn

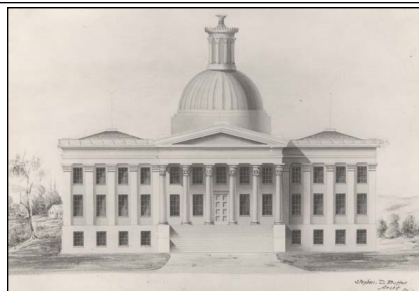
up by Stephen D. Button; the contractors were Bird F. Robinson and R. N. R. Bardwell. The completed building was presented to the state on December 6, 1847, at the beginning of the legislature's first-ever biennial session.

On December 14, 1849, near the beginning of the General Assembly's second session in Montgomery, the Capitol was destroyed by fire. Moving to temporary quarters to continue deliberations, the legislature in February of 1850 appropriated \$60,000 with which the central section of the present building was erected upon the foundations of the burned original. A new architect, Barachias Holt, designed the new structure.

During the 1870-72 period several improvements were made to increase the convenience and appearance of the Capitol's lower floor, but no increase in its capacity was made from its re-erection in 1851 until 1885. In February of the latter year, the legislature appropriated \$25,000 for a "needed enlargement," which became an east wing.

Another \$150,000 was appropriated in 1903 to purchase the privately owned property making up the south end of the capitol square, where a south wing was erected in 1905-06. A north wing followed in 1911 when an additional \$100,000 came from the legislature. An addition to the east wing was completed in 1992 as part of a major restoration and refurbishing project for the entire structure (<https://archives.alabama.gov/capital/capitals.html>).

(Continued on page 5)



**Above, The first Montgomery
Capitol Building which was
destroyed by fire in 1849.
To the Right, the inauguration
of Jefferson Davis as President
of the Confederate States of
America at Montgomery,
Alabama, February 18, 1861.**



**The Capitol Building in 1906.
Note the original steps leading
up to the portico and the iron
fence.**

Text and Pictures from [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama_State_Capitol)

This Week in Alabama History, November 15 - November 21

Other Notable Events for the Week

(Continued from page 4)



November 16, 1873 Birth of W. C. Handy

W. C. Handy is born in Florence, Alabama. Handy brought the sounds of African-American blues to mainstream culture when he composed a song in 1909 that became known as "The Memphis Blues." Handy, known as "Father of the Blues," had a long career that yielded many other blues hits, such as "Beale Street Blues" and "St. Louis Blues." Handy died in 1958.

November 16, 1875 Alabama's Constitution of 1875 is Ratified

The "Bourbon" Democrats, having claimed to "redeem" the Alabama people from the Reconstruction rule of carpetbaggers and scalawags, wrote a new constitution to replace the one of 1868. It was a conservative document that gave the Democrats, and especially Black Belt planters, a firm grip on their recently reacquired control of state government.

From the *Encyclopedia of Alabama*:

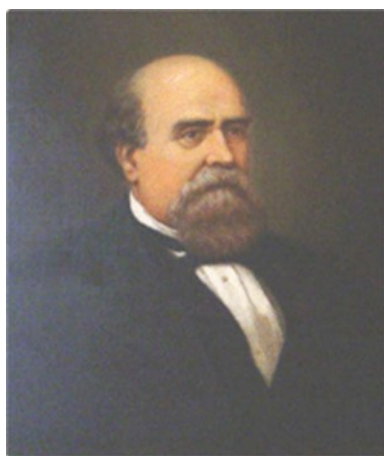
The term Bourbon was used nationally to describe conservative Democrats active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Alabama and the South. In Alabama, it has also been used to describe those who wanted to end Reconstruction and restore as much of the pre-Civil War order that was practical given the defeat of the Confederacy and the abolition of slavery.



Delegates to the Alabama constitutional convention of 1875 on the front steps of the Capitol in Montgomery.

This Week in Alabama History November 22 - November 28

Featured Event of the Week



George Smith Houston

November 24, 1874 George Smith Houston is Inaugurated Governor

George Smith Houston, a Democrat, is inaugurated governor, signaling the end of Reconstruction in Alabama. In addition to defeating the incumbent Republican governor, Democrats won control of the state legislature, leading them

to claim "redemption" for Alabamians from the rule of "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags." It would be more than 100 years before another Republican would be elected governor of Alabama.

Other Notable Events



Kathryn Thornton

November 22, 1989 Kathryn Thornton Becomes the First Woman to fly on a Military Space Mission

Kathryn Thornton, a native of Montgomery and graduate of Auburn University, becomes the first woman to fly on a military space mission on the space shuttle Discovery. Thornton became the second woman to walk in space

in 1992. Dr. Thornton retired from NASA in 1996 to join the faculty of the University of Virginia.

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This Week in Alabama History November 22 - November 28

Other Notable Events for the Week

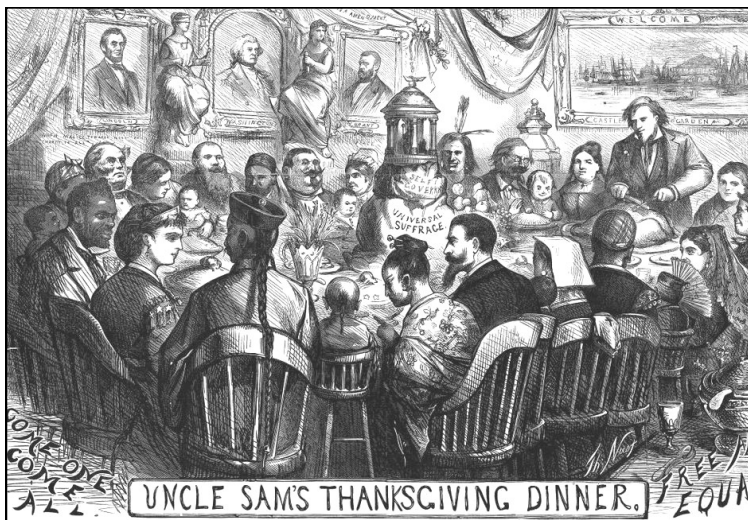
(Continued from page 5)

November 24, 1869 Alabama Ratifies the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S.

Constitution

By joint resolution of the legislature, Alabama ratifies the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The amendment guaranteed the right to vote to blacks, including former slaves.

The Fifteenth Amendment is considered one of the Reconstruction Amendments which includes the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. These three amendments were adopted between 1865 and 1870, the five years immediately following the Civil War.

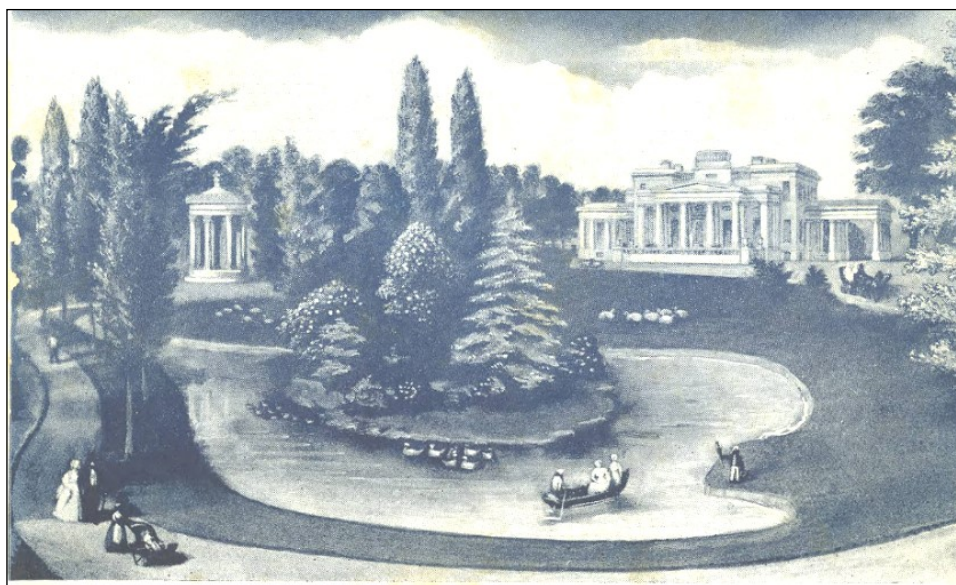


A 1869 Thomas Nast cartoon supporting the Fifteenth Amendment. In the cartoon, Americans of different ancestries and ethnic backgrounds sit together at a dinner table to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal as equal members of the American citizenry, while Uncle Sam carves a turkey.

The Thirteenth Amendment (proposed in 1864 and ratified in 1865) abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, except for those duly convicted of a crime.

The Fourteenth Amendment (proposed in 1866 and ratified in 1868) addresses citizenship rights and equal protection of the laws for all persons.

The Fifteenth Amendment (proposed in 1869 and ratified in 1870) prohibits discrimination in voting rights of male citizens on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."



**Old Gaineswood as it looked in 1860,
Demopolis, Alabama
From the postcard collection of Troy University Libraries**

The ECHS *Journal* Section

“It Came Like A Cyclone”: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Alabama By James L. Baggett

*This article is from
Alabama Heritage, published
on October 7, 2018.*

Edna Boon remembered her mother filling jars with soup. When the Spanish Influenza struck their rural community in Houston County, Alabama, in 1918. Boone's family was spared the illness but not the suffering. The area had only one doctor and one pharmacist, and neither could keep up with the overwhelming number of patients. Some whole families contracted the disease, leaving no one in the home to nurse the sick. So healthy neighbors, like Boone's parents, cared for those who could not care for themselves.

Edna and her neighbors lived in an isolated part of Alabama, but their experience was repeated around the world. The first recorded case of Spanish Influenza came not in Spain (for a time newspaper reports created the false impression that the disease originated in Spain) but at Camp Funston military base in Kansas, where American troops were training to join the Great War in Europe.

On March 4, 1918, a cook reported to the infirmary in the morning and by midday more than one hundred men were ill. In the coming weeks, camp doctors converted an airplane hangar to an infirmary to accommodate all the sick men. At military training centers, men from throughout the United States, some already sick when they arrived, were brought in by train and housed together by the thousands.

The flu was transmitted when infected people sneezed or coughed and ex-

**From the *Dothan Eagle*:
Alabama's first officially reported
cases of Spanish influenza developed
in Madison and Conecuh counties.
Dr. J.W. Haygood, health officer of
Conecuh County, reported six cases
had developed out in the rural section
of that county. The cases were all in
one family and were suspected to have
been contracted from the father who
was recently in Pensacola,
Florida** (<https://dothaneagle.com/news/local/>).



**Men Reading on the front porch of
the hospital barracks at Camp
Sheridan, Montgomery, 1918.**
(Alabama Department of
Archives and History).



**Nurse
Florence G. Birch
at Camp Sheridan,
Montgomery, 1918.**
([https://www.al.com/
news/2020/04/survivors-of-
1918-flu-pandemic-said-heed-
warnings.html](https://www.al.com/news/2020/04/survivors-of-1918-flu-pandemic-said-heed-warnings.html))

pelled mucus into the air or onto another person. The disease spread fastest among people in the close quarters like military barracks, ships, train cars, theaters, and houses. The disease followed the railroad lines and shipping lanes.

By April 1918, the flu had spread throughout the American Midwest; it then traveled with American Soldiers to port cities along the East Coast, onto ships carrying troops to Europe, and then to France. A person could be symptom-free but contagious for as long as twenty-four hours, so many infected people were allowed onto ships. The ships became floating infirmaries as they crossed the Atlantic and then off-loaded the disease at ports where they docked.

In the filthy and confining trenches on the European battlefields, the disease spread quickly and affected troops on both sides of the conflict. By May the disease had spread into the civilian populations of France Spain, Italy, and Great Britain, then to Germany and Russia. That same month the first cases were reported in North Africa and before the month ended, the disease reached India, China, and Japan. It reached Australia in July. This influenza was not an epidemic, an outbreak confined to a single country or region. It was a pandemic; it respected no national boundaries and spread throughout the world.

The first wave of the disease was not the deadliest. Even though the illness

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“It Came Like A Cyclone”: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Alabama By James L. Baggett

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spread fast, it was more a bother than a killer. Behaving like a cruel trickster, the flu seemed to have run its course.

But in August the disease returned, coming again by ship to ports in France, Sierra Leone, and Boston. In September the disease returned to New York and within two months had spread throughout the United States, across Mexico, and into South America. The flu returned to Europe, then reached the southern tip of Africa.

The second wave was deadly and random, decimating some communities while sparing others. The seemingly most vulnerable people, children and the elderly often survived, while the seemingly most robust, young adults, disproportionately died. The disease was terrifying in part because it seemed to make no sense.

Flu cases were reported in Alabama in the spring and summer of 1918, but the outbreak was not severe enough to alarm health officials or the public. Then in September as State Health Officer Samuel W. Welch later reported, the disease “came like a cyclone and swept over the State like a prairie fire.” The flu “made its appearance simultaneously in Madison and Colbert counties in the North,” Welch wrote, “and in Mobile, Baldwin,



Bellamy Planning Co., aka Acme Lumber, in Florence "ran three full shifts a day to build enough coffins for the countless numbers of deceased workers since the lumberyard was located across the river from the camps of the workers building Wilson Dam . . . The majority of the deceased were immigrant Cuban workers buried in common graves, and most had no known immediate relatives or survivors."
(Auburn University Libraries)

***From the Dothan Eagle:*
Alabama's first officially reported cases of Spanish influenza developed in Madison and Conecuh counties. Dr. J.W. Haygood, health officer of Conecuh County, reported six cases have developed out in the rural section of that county. The cases were all in one family and are suspected to have been contracted from the father who was recently in Pensacola.**
(<https://dothaneagle.com/news/local/>).

Escambia and Covington counties in the South.” Again following people as they traveled, the disease reached every county in Alabama by December.

Like people around the world, Alabamians born in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries knew disease and death. But this influenza was an especially horrifying illness, both for those who contracted it and for those who watched their neighbors and loved ones suffer from it. It could start like any flu with a sore throat, fever, fatigue, body aches and head-

ache and most people who contracted it recovered in about a week. But in the most severe cases, the disease moved quickly and sometimes within hours patients developed difficulty breathing. These patients coughed violently, ran high fevers, and became delirious.

One survivor described losing all sense of time. Two reddish brown spots would appear just above the sick per-

son's cheekbones, and their entire face flushed a deep red. Doctors tried to describe the progression of the redness hoping to discover a metric to track the disease's progress and predict a patient's prognosis. Through observation the doctors learned that if the red turned to blue it meant the patient's lungs were too

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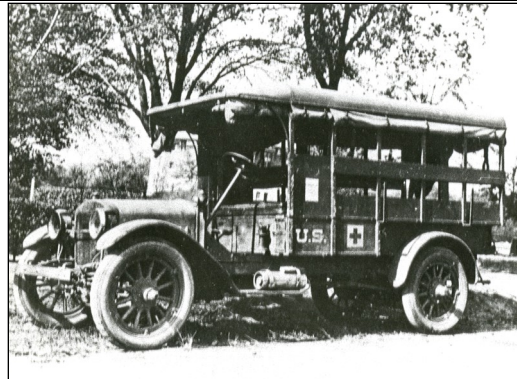
congested to transfer oxygen to the blood, and the patient was likely doomed. The blue sometimes turned black and crept up the victim's extremities starting with the person's fingernails, hands and feet before turning their legs, arms and body black. “As long as you were conscious” a journalist Laura Spinney wrote, “you watched death enter at your fingertips and fill you up.” Many died not of the flu but of pneumonia which followed the flu and infected people's already weakened lungs. Death came by drowning as victims' lungs filled with their own blood.

In the early stages of the pandemic in Alabama, some government officials and physicians downplayed the threat in part to avoid panic. On October 4, 1918, the Alabama State Board of Health reported sixty-seven influenza cases in the state but insisted the “situation by no means has reached the proportions of an epidemic.” On the same day, the Birmingham News, quoting the city's health inspector Dr. J. D. Dowling ran the headline “No Spanish Influenza Here; ‘Cooties’ Attack School Kids.”

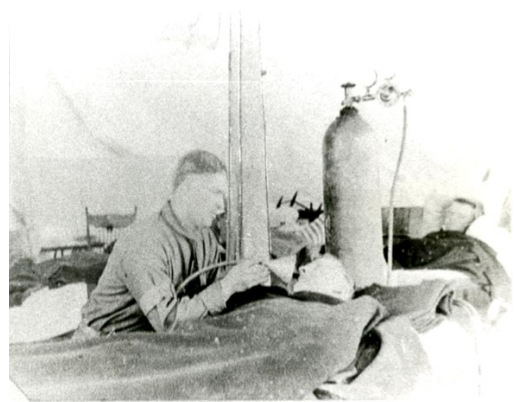
Dowling insisted that no “extraordinary disease of any kind has been reported” beyond the normal flu cases he would expect to see. Dowling then warned that children starting a new school year were at risk from lice or “cooties,” but Dowling's assurances were over-



Influenza tents in Auburn University, 1918, Fall. Near Smith Hall.



Nurses on Red Cross truck, Auburn University, 1918



**Patient Receiving Oxygen, Hospital Tent, Auburn University, 1918.
*The Three Photographs on this Page
Courtesy of Auburn
University Libraries Special
Collections and Archives***

taken by events.

Two days later the first flu deaths were reported in Birmingham, and one day after that, the Birmingham Board of Education closed the city's schools. On October 7, Alabama Gov. Charles Henderson issued a proclamation calling on “all county and municipal authorities” to ban public gatherings and close “schools churches, theatres picture shows, and other places of amusement” as long as “the. disease exists in their respective communities.” On the same day, the Alabama State Fair opened in Birmingham and 35, 000 people visited the fairgrounds that first day. The fair was an ideal environment for the spread of the disease, and on October 8, the Birmingham City Commission closed the fair, churches, and theaters.

The city commission in Montgomery followed the same protocol while also closing fraternal lodges, pool rooms and “soft drink parlors,” and it cancelled the upcoming performance of the Ringling Brothers Circus. The circus cancelled the final two weeks of its season and returned to winter quarters. In Mobile the city commission closed public businesses and “earnestly recommended” that churches close voluntarily. Mobile's closing order came more than a week after Birmingham's and Montgomery's. Mobile was hit hard by the pandemic and the Mobile Register criticized the mayor and city medical officer for not acting

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sooner. Local governments also closed public facilities in Selma, Ozark, Roanoke, and Demopolis. At Clanton in Chilton County, all stores and barbershops were closed and signs were posted on the roads leading into the town that read “Danger, Influenza in Clanton. Stay Out.”

Alabama’s clergy supported the closing of churches. Birmingham’s Protestant Pastor’s Union issued a resolution “pledging our whole hearted cooperation in the effort to stay the epidemic of Spanish Influenza.” But the pastors also reminded church members to “keep up their regular contributions by sending same to your church treasurer.” All Roman Catholic churches were closed in the Birmingham area and Fr. James Coyle of St. Paul’s Catholic Church urged Catholics to say mass in their homes. The Episcopal Dioceses of Alabama closed all parishes in the state and Bishop Charles Beckwith held service in his home.

On October 13, the Birmingham News gave over two pages of its Sunday edition to print sermons from local clergy for the city’s “first ‘churchless’ Sunday.” Church-related meetings and conferences were cancelled or postponed around the state, including the annual convention of the Baptist Women’s Missionary Union, the meeting of the Eufaula Baptist Association, the meeting of the Blount County Baptist Association and the African Methodist Episcopal



Policemen in Seattle, wearing masks made by the Red Cross, during the Influenza Epidemic, December 1918.

(https://www.al.com/living/2018/01/how_the_1918_spanish_flu_pande.html).



The 39th Regiment of the U.S. Army marches through the Streets of Seattle wearing masks. The Soldiers were on their way to France.

(<https://www.al.com/news/2020/04/survivors-of-1918-flu-pandemic-said-heed-warnings.html>)

Conference that was to be held in Camden.

In addition to church closings, fear of the flu caused the cancellation or postponement of large and small events around the state. Like Montgomery, Selma officials canceled the circus. Most county fairs were canceled as was the annual Demopolis street fair. The Dothan fair was also called off along with the “big Shriners meeting” scheduled for the city. The meeting of the Democratic Executive Committee was postponed as was the Alabama Extension Service’s

“a calf club boys” contest, a gathering for boys being trained in animal husbandry.

Alabama Polytechnic Institute (later renamed Auburn University) postponed its football game against a team from Wright’s Field Air Base in Montgomery, and in Mobile a statewide reunion of Confederate veterans was put off until the spring. The Alabama Supreme Court

postponed an impeachment hearing for the sheriff of Chambers County, who was accused of “willful neglect” because “several prisoners” had escaped from his jail. In Birmingham

festivities planned for the opening of the Booker T. Washington Branch Library were cancelled. Because of the pandemic, Alabama’s first public library for African Americans opened with no fanfare.

Four Days after declaring that Alabama’s influenza had not reached the stage of an epidemic, the State

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Board of Health reported that the disease was in “practically every County of the State” and the flu was “fast spreading so as to assume an epidemic form.” And like the tornadoes Alabamians knew well the disease continued to jump about decimating some places while barely touching others. By October 8, two cases were reported in all of Crenshaw County and four in Shelby County. But in the small St. Claire town of Pell City two hundred people were ill with the flu.

While the flu attacked without regard to race or class, African Americans and poor whites living in unsanitary conditions in city slums or mill villages were at serious risk. The more densely populated a place the greater the risk of infection. Physicians in Demopolis reported that the “disease seems to have been more fatal among the Negroes than the whites.” Twenty-five people in Demopolis’ black community had died. Infections were high among Mobile’s black community, and outbreaks were reported in the coal mining villages around Birmingham and “in the village of the Selma Manufacturing Company.” Also in Selma, twenty-six of the twenty-seven African American prisoners in the city jail contracted influenza. The sheriff could think of no way to isolate the sick prisoners from the well ones.

There were not enough hospital beds to accommodate all the sick people. In Montgomery the city worked with the United States Public Health Service to quickly set up an Emergency Hospital that could house five hundred patients. Located “on the Upper Wetumpka Road” the hospital also helped isolate infected people from the general population. The Montgomery Elks Lodge offered its clubhouse to the city as a second emergency hospital. In Birmingham

Edna Boone Register of Madrid, Ala., who was 100 at the time of her interview in 2007, said getting the flu at the time was a deadly prospect and the only people who could help were neighbors. “If you loaded a sick person whom you could no longer help and put them in a wagon and took them to Dothan to a hospital, chances are that patient would be dead when you got there ... If it wasn’t, there’d be no room [in the hospital],” she said. “People were buried in the clothes they died in and wrapped in sheets.”

<https://www.al.com/news/2020/04/survivors-of-1918-flu-pandemic-said-heed-warnings.html>

officials converted the Central High School for whites and the Industrial High School for blacks into emergency hospitals and in Mobile the Red Cross opened an emergency hospital with 150 beds.

Just as there were not enough hospital beds, there also were too few doctor or nurses, and the pandemic killed without distinction. By October 1918, Huntsville had recorded thirty deaths, which included three Madison County doctors. The State Board of Health dispatched

five volunteer doctors to the area, and the Red Cross sent ten nurses. By October 14, every “prescription clerk” in Huntsville was sick with the flu. A retired pharmacist from Birmingham volunteered to go to Huntsville. It was too much work for one man, but he would have to do. The Red Cross had no one left to send.

Physicians had no cure for the flu. They could treat a patient’s symptoms and hopefully improve the chances of recovery but that was all. The best way to survive the pandemic was to avoid getting sick, so people looked to both science and folk wisdom for ways to protect themselves. Like people in many parts of the world citizens of Birmingham wrapped gauze around their mouths and noses when going out or nursing a sick relative and this could help prevent infection. In Montgomery, drug stores distributed masks free of charge. Doctors also recommended that people gargle and spray their nostrils with “antiseptic solutions” Folk remedies like wearing asafetida rags (a pungent herbal concoction) around the neck, inhaling tobacco smoke, eating raw onions or drinking whiskey mixed with lemon or ginger did nothing to prevent infection but may have given people some sense of comfort. At least they were doing something.

And then there were the theories about what caused

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The ECHS *Journal* Section

“It Came Like A Cyclone”: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Alabama By James L. Baggett

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the epidemic in the first place. A woman from Shelby County suspected that the high number of infections among troops at the Camp Sheridan military base outside Montgomery was the work of saboteurs. There were “traitors here

to kill as many men as they are killing over there” she warned Birmingham’s Dr. Dowling. And she suspected those traitors were spiking bottles of whiskey with the influenza virus and then giving the tainted hooch to the troops. “Look into it,” she advised the doctor.

The editors of the Birmingham News also called for an investigation, not of bad whiskey but of the wild-flower named goldenrod. Widely known “to be poisonous to the throat and bronchial tubes,” the editors wrote it “might be interesting to investigate during this surge of influenza, how many of the victims have come in close contact with goldenrod.”

In addition to watching family members and neighbors suffer and die from influenza, Alabama residents dealt with the fear and uncertainty of having loved ones become ill far away. From the small DeKalb County town of Mentone, Alice Nail followed the progress of her son’s illness through letters from her daughter-in-law. The son Perkins, was living in Memphis with his wife Ruth, and contracted influenza in early October. After weeks at home in bed, he was still ill, and on October 28, Ruth reported that Perkins had developed pneumonia, a boil on his back that had to be lanced and an ear infection that had to be drained

On some nights, Ruth wrote he “moaned, & groaned & slept with his eyes half open until I thought daylight would never come.” Often Perkins slept no more than an hour, so neither did Ruth. It was a miserable time for the sick husband and his worried, exhausted wife. Because fluid collected around Perkin’s right lung, his

**From a Kelly Kazak article:
In some states, according to an article at [Stanford.edu](https://www.stanford.edu), people had to abide by strict ordinances meant to stop the spread of the disease.**

“Those who were lucky enough to avoid infection had to deal with the public health ordinances to restrain the spread of the disease. The public health departments distributed gauze masks to be worn in public. Stores could not hold sales, funerals were limited to 15 minutes. Some towns required a signed certificate to enter and railroads would not accept passengers without them. Those who ignored the flu ordinances had to pay steep fines enforced by extra officers. Bodies piled up as the massive deaths of the epidemic ensued”(<https://www.al.com/news/2020/04/survivors-of-1918-flu-pandemic-said-heed-warnings.html>).

doctor recommended inserting a tube to let it drain. The doctor told Ruth “he would come early Sunday and bring a long needle with which to probe his side,” probably inserting the needle “two or three times before he located the fluid.” As happened with

patients, Perkins improved remarkably overnight and the gruesome procedure was unnecessary. By November 1, Perkins was well enough to eat the turnips and apples his mother had sent.

Families of men serving in the military also closely followed the outbreaks of flu in camps around the country and across the battlefields of Europe. The news was frequently heartbreaking. During one week in October, the town of Roanoke of Randolph County buried two local soldiers who had died of influenza, one at a camp in Georgia and the other at a camp in Pennsylvania. Birmingham buried a local soldier who died at Camp Sevier in South Carolina. Montgomery buried a twenty-three-year-old soldier who had died at Camp Zachary Taylor in Kentucky. Less than three weeks after being drafted, Lowndesboro native James Howard died at Camp Pike in Arkansas. Also in October, Leon McGavock, an Alabama soldier serving with a machine gun battalion in France, survived days of combat but contracted influenza and died in a field hospital. His mother did not receive final confirmation of his death until four months later.

Camp Sheridan military base, outside Montgomery, experienced rates of infection similar to bases around the county. Among the 33,000 troops and personnel at the camp, more than 3000 became ill. Twenty-one men died in a single day, and like the young men from Alabama dying at bases in other states, these men died far from home. They came from New York, Colorado,

(Continued on page 13)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

“It Came Like A Cyclone”: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Alabama **By James L. Baggett**

(Continued from page 12)

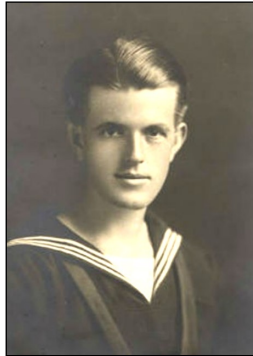
Ohio, Wisconsin and nine other states.

At its mid-October peak in Alabama, the influenza pandemic was sickening hundreds of people per day. On October 15, Florence, Sheffield and Tusculumbia reported that twenty percent of the population was ill. On October 17, Montgomery reported five hundred new cases. By early November, the number of cases had declined significantly but smaller outbreaks continued into 1919.

The public schools avoided large outbreaks of the flu by closing until the worst of the pandemic passed. Colleges and universities, to different degrees, remained open. At the University of Alabama one hundred cases were reported on October 11. The school did not close down but two fraternity houses were converted to infirmaries. At least one student died. At Birmingham Southern the campus was quarantined.

In addition to causing deaths and a significant amount of human misery, the pandemic negatively impacted Alabama's economy. In October more than half the men working in Mobile's shipyards were out sick. The disease spread through the coal mining camps of the Birmingham District and, in a time when coal was needed for the war, left whole mining crews out for days. And in towns and cities throughout the state the owners and employees of theaters, barber-shops, pool halls, cafes and soda fountains, and other businesses that served the public did no business during the days or weeks of closures. Many business owners initially supported the closings but by late October and early November, they became impatient to return to work. Cities and counties began lifting their closure orders and bans on public gatherings. Schools reopened.

On December 9, 1918, US Surgeon General Rupert Blue announced, “The country need not fear that the influenza epidemic will return. It has come and gone



**Photo of Abner
Rush Morrow of
Eutaw, Alabama: One
of dozens found in
the Alabama
Department of Ar-
chives and History
digital collections
who died in the
flu epidemic.
Morrow served in
the U.S. Naval Re-
serve Force and died
of flu on September
23, 1918, at the naval
hospital in
Chelsea, Mass.
Text and Photo from
(https://www.al.com/living/2018/01/how_the_1918_spanish_flu_pande.html).**

for good.” That would not prove to be true but the worst of the pandemic had passed in the country and in Alabama. No one knows exactly how many people died of the disease. The Alabama State Board of Health reported 145,821 cases of influenza in 1918 with 5,446 deaths. There were an additional 5,882 pneumonia deaths.

In the United States, at least 675,000 people died, though many states did not keep reliable statistics. The total was likely higher. Around the world the deaths totaled between 50 and 60 million. The estimates range widely because for many of the hardest hit areas – Asia, Africa, and South America – there are no statistics. The disease may have jumped from wild birds to humans and it is still unclear exactly where it originated or when but it was the deadliest pandemic in human history, and the disease killed more people than both world wars combined.

Alabamians did not forget the great influenza pandemic. It was terrifying and people shared the awful experience across lines of race and class. Ameta Harrison the African American daughter of a Clarke County farm family was eleven years old when the disease struck. Six decades later she told an interviewer from the Alabama Historical Commission, “It killed so many people.” Bertha

Moore Merrill, a white former debutante, was twenty-four when the pandemic struck her hometown of Eufaula. “We had so many deaths here,” she told a different AHC interviewer. “We lost so many.” Alabamians remembered the sickness. They remembered the ways that families and communities pulled together. They remembered being afraid of losing so many of those they loved and cherished, but mostly they remembered all those who died (https://issuu.com/Alabamaheritage/docs/ah130_baggett_1918-influenza).

ECHOES
THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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