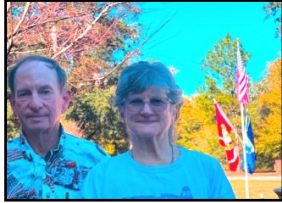




## The January Newsletter

The Meeting will be  
**Tuesday, January 28, 2024, 3:00 pm**  
**in the Meeting Room of the McMillan Museum**  
**on the Brewton College Campus.**



### The Program: ECHS Member Dick James and His Sister, Diann VanGrowski, Will Present a Program on Two of their Distinguished Ancestors: W. S. Neal & Eugene "Red" Neal James.

Their great, great grandfather, William Schaffner Neal, as the Superintendent of Education for Escambia County, Alabama, was an influential educator who lead the effort to have the first public funded high school in Alabama, Escambia County High School in Atmore. The second distinguished ancestor is their Father, Eugene "Red" Neal James, a much decorated Marine pilot in World War II and the Korean War, as well as a community leader in Milton, Florida where he settled after leaving the service.

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#### Refreshments

Plan on again bringing your favorite finger foods for the January Meeting. The Society will provide drinks.



**Weighing and Sampling Cotton, Lee Street, Montgomery.**



**Three Young Girls on a Front Porch in Montevallo, AL, 1890's.**

**Volume 52**  
**No. 1**  
**January 2025**

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**Business Members**

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## The Program—Superintendent of Education W. S. Neal and the Establishment of the First Public High School in Alabama.

### W. S. Neal

William Schaffner Neal was the Superintendent of Education in Escambia County Alabama who championed the creation of state-supported secondary schools. He was instrumental in passing a bill through the Alabama legislature that allocated money for these schools. Neal believed that public schools were necessary to educate the general public.

The first state and county supported secondary school in Alabama opened in Atmore in 1909. W.S. Neal had suggested the idea circa 1896. He later lost a subsequent election for his post, with the high school proposal being a campaign issue. William Carney funded the high school despite Neal's election loss.



**The 1926 high school building now. The building was Escambia County High School from 1926 until 1960 when the new high school opened on South Presley Street. Two different buildings sat on this site with one being destroyed in a fire in 1923 and the other holding classes from 1924 until the move to the new site.**

That 1909 building later burned. The current 1926 building was acquired by the Atmore Lions Club in 1989 and later dedicated as the Atmore Lions Community Center in 1991. In 2004, the building was donated to the Atmore Area YMCA.

Although the County High School in Atmore is not named after W. S. Neal, the Escambia County Board of Education named the high school in East Brewton, previously known simply as the East Brewton School, W. S. Neal in recognition of his

contributions to the schools in Escambia County.

At this time there is also a W. S. Neal Elementary School, a W. S. Neal Middle School and a W. S. Neal High School in East Brewton.



**In the Atmore Advance article for Dec. 13, 2011, “History in the Making,” Chandler Myers wrote, “When county schools Superintendent W.S. Neal proposed building Escambia County’s High School more than a century ago, the idea cost him his job. But decades later, the county’s Historical Society have recognized how forward-thinking Neal’s idea was. Alabama’s oldest county high school received some long-awaited recognition Tuesday morning as the Escambia County Historical Society dedicated a historical marker at the site of the original Escambia County High School.”**

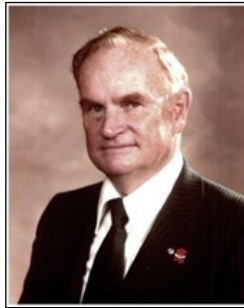
## The Program-Eugene “Red” Neal James. Decorated Marine Pilot and Respected Civic Leader in Milton, Fla. and Santa Rosa County

### Eugene N. “Red” James

Eugene N. “Red” James, born in Brewton, AL, was the oldest son of a 3rd generation Methodist minister and was raised in numerous small towns as he and his family moved around West Virginia.

He left college and enlisted in the Aviation Cadet program of the U.S. Navy in September 1942, graduated in the first aviator class at Whiting Field, was designated a Naval Aviator at NAS Pensacola, and commissioned a 2nd Lt. in the U.S. Marine Corps in October 1943.

James deployed to Hawaii in April 1945 joining VMF-311 “Hell’s Belles” flying 36 combat missions in F4U-1 Corsairs from Okinawa from June to August 1945, followed by occupation



Eugene James



F4U-1 Corsair

duty in Japan from September 1945 until the fall of 1946.

Capt. James loved flying Corsairs and joined VMA-312 “Checkerboards” in Korea flying 101 combat missions from the aircraft carriers USS Badoeng Strait and USS Bataan in F4U-4 Corsairs.

For his service, his awards include 7 Air Medals, 2 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and a Purple Heart.

After the war he settled in Milton and started a successful construction company. For his work on many civic organizations in Milton, he was twice named Santa Rosa County’s Man of the Year. He was known for his generosity including donations of land and

other support to his church, the Chamber of Commerce, and numerous other causes.

## The Society Is Planning the Purchase of a Digitizing Machine

The Society is at this time raising money to buy a digitizing machine. It is a way of saving documents, many of which have become brittle with age making them useless for research. We have a large collection of local newspapers which are in such a frail state. This is just one of our collections which can be preserved for the future by digitizing.

### Key Benefits of Using a Digitizing Machine

**Preservation:** By creating digital copies, the original documents can be stored safely in controlled environments, reducing wear and tear from frequent handling.

**Accessibility and enhanced research capabilities:** Digitized collections can be accessed remotely by researchers, students, and the general public through

online databases, expanding the reach of historical information.

**Outreach and education:** Digital collections can be used to create online exhibits, educational materials, and interactive experiences to engage a wider audience.

**Disaster preparedness:** Digital backups provide a safety net in case of physical damage to the original collection due to fire, flood, or other disasters.

### Donations

Please consider donating to the fund for a digitizing machine. Simply send a donation to the Society using the same method as you would for paying dues. Or, for those who prefer electronic payments, our PayPal address is:

[escambiacohistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:escambiacohistoricalsociety@gmail.com)

All donations are tax deductible.



## Coastal Alabama Historical Society Plans Living History Day

**Feb 6th, 2025,  
9:00 AM - 3:00  
PM**

The Coastal Alabama Historical Society Presents the First Coastal Alabama Living History Day February 6, 2025

9:00 a.m.-3:00 p. m.


The Coastal Alabama Living History Day is a free event and will be held in and around the Brewton gymnasium from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. — all are welcome to come.

It is a Free Event  
Open to the Public

**Purpose:** To promote a greater awareness and appreciation for local, state, regional, and national history on campus through interactive activities, discussions, events, and partnerships with like-minded community groups.

### Events Planned:

- Local historical societies, parks, museums, educational institutions, and other organizations have been invited to set up booths containing information about local history, artifacts, photographs, and other relevant historical items.
- A video of local historians explaining our rich history will be displayed for viewers to watch.
- Volunteers from Coastal Alabama Historical Society (CAHS) will dress in historical costume to assist in registration, welcome volunteers and guests, and provide tours through the history fair.




THE COASTAL ALABAMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS

# COASTAL ALABAMA LIVING HISTORY DAY

**FEBRUARY 6, 2025 | 9 AM - 3 PM**  
**BREWTON CAMPUS**

Discover our history at the Coastal Alabama History Fair! Explore booths with artifacts, photos, and historic displays from organizations all across our region and beyond! Talk with historical reenactors from pioneers to WWII soldiers. From a live Raku pottery firing, a community car show, and musical performances by the Coastal Sound, this Living History Day promises to be a fun-filled event for all ages!

**FREE EVENT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!**



**HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**  
*Student Organization*

Local schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) will be invited to tour the history fair.

- Coastal Sound (jazz band and vocalists) will perform a patriotic concert.
- A live Raku pottery firing will be held for visitors to learn more about the process.
- The Blueberry Trail Maids will be greeting visitors with a smile and available to assist as needed.
- The event is being organized by the Coastal Alabama Historical Society, a student organization who partners with the Escambia County Historical Society to promote learning in new and expansive ways

### History Reveals Humanity.

“Attendees of the Brewton event will be treated to a variety of educational experiences, including a raku pottery firing, historic woodworking and much more.

“Don't be surprised if you see a soldier from the War of 1812 or World War II walking around, or a pioneer woman doing laundry. One of the arguments I continually make in my history classes is that while things like technology change, the one thing that doesn't change is human nature,” said Brett Chancery, history instructor and organizer of the event.

# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## A Brief History of Escambia County, Alabama

*The following is a continuation of "A Brief History of Escambia County, Alabama," by Henderson A. Potter who identifies himself as "a Colored Man of Brewton, Alabama."*

Sheriff Railey succeeded the McMillans in office and it was in the early part of his term when a man came from Covington County and committed a crime. This man visited Escambia frequently but was always fortunate in eluding the sheriff. For this reason, he deputized Mr. Tom Fuqua to arrest the fugitive when he caught him in the limits of Escambia County. Deputy Fuqua lost no time in getting his man.

He took his prisoner home with him to sleep for the night, as it was too late in the afternoon to take chances at a possible escape while proceeding to the sheriff after dark. The deputy secured a room in his home for the prisoner and demanded his clothes when he undressed for bed, thus preventing an escape during the night (or so he thought). Despite all security measures employed, the deputy made the mistake of placing the prisoner's clothes in the room with the deputy and his wife, unguarded as they slept. In the dead of night the prisoner crept into the room, donned his clothing and escaped into the woods and was not seen in the county again.

Alf Bill stood six feet three inches high and weighed 200 pounds; he bet Kit Smith \$2.00 he could eat two dozen raw eggs, shell and all. So Kit took the bet and they went over to McCall's store and bought the eggs and he ate the two dozen eggs, shell and all. The funny part of this story is that some of the eggs were rotten, but he ate them without knowing it, and then went to Fulton's Bar and drank a pint of whiskey at the bar for winning the bet, but a little later on the whiskey and the eggs got together and he had to let them all come up right there in the middle of Fulton's bar room.

Mr. David Blair and an alligator had a tussle on Big Juniper's Creek. He was on a log crossing the creek; he was on one side and the alligator on the other. Blair was trying to catch the alligator, so he ran home and got his gun, but when he got back the alligator was gone.

Mr. Green was sheriff after Mr. McMillan and also at one time Mr. John Helton was sheriff. Mr. Owens was sheriff for a short while, but resigned on account of not being able to make a living.

The first man to be hanged in this county was a colored man, for killing the section boss on the M&M Railroad in the year 1874 at Pollard, Ala. His name was Ed Turner.

Mr. G. K. Fountain, Sheriff of Escambia County, was a good sheriff and believed in the right things.

In 1777 Jesse and Frank James came to my father's home and ate dinner; they paid for this meal before leaving. These two men were brothers and outlaws. After they ate their dinner they got my brother Clem Potter and myself to take them to Burnt Corn Creek where they each took a bath but one would sit on the bank and watch while the other bathed. We furnished them with towels and soap and they gave us 50 cents a piece for this service.

Escambia County was founded, or formed, in 1868. Mr. G. C. Harold built the first brick store in Brewton, a two-story building on the corner of Mildred Street, fronting the old depot lot; this was 1884, and this building is now owned by Robbins & McGowin Company.

Mr. Mark Colley and Mr. Ben Jernigan were in the general mercantile business in 1883 and did a large business. They were also in the timber business. They both died with yellow fever.

Lawyer James M. Davison was the first man to install telephones in Brewton. He was a practicing attorney here for a number of years.

Mr. L. L. Thompson is Mayor of East Brewton and has been for past 16 years. He is also Deputy Sheriff of this county.

Two of the older physicians of Brewton, who are still practicing, are Dr. P. H. M. Tippin, who has been practicing medicine for the past 55 years, and is still active. Dr. F. H. Mason has also been practicing here for a number of years, and has a large office practice as well as making many home calls.

There are three banks in Brewton and all are in a prosperous financial condition.

The Bank of Brewton was organized in 1889 and has enjoyed steady progress throughout this long period.

The Citizens Bank was organized in 1891 and has shown a marked success throughout the years.

The Farmers and Merchants Bank was organized some years later, and, like the other two banks, has been most prosperous.

*(Continued on page 6)*



# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## A Brief History of Escambia County, Alabama

*(Continued from page 5)*

A few of the practicing attorneys are:

Mr. G. W. I. Smith, who graduated from law school in Washington D. C. in 1893 and who came to Brewton some 45 years ago. For a time he was partners with Mr. J. M. Davison, under the name of Davison & Smith. They dissolved the partnership and since that time he has been a most successful attorney, practicing in many courts.

Mr. Ed Leigh McMillan was born September 26, 1888. He began the practice of law in 1910. Was married to Miss Iva Lee Miller in 1911. Mr. McMillan is an outstanding attorney and enjoys the esteem and confidence of the people.

Mr. Herbert Franklin is also one of the older practicing attorneys in Brewton, has a large practice and is a diligent worker

Wish to mention just a few of the prosperous merchants who have made marked success in their given lines,.

Mr. W. Y. Jernigan, Jr. went in the beef market business after his father resigned. Now he has one of the most ideal markets in the city.

Mr. M. J. Bracken has been in the grocery and market business for the past five years. His business has increased wonderfully and he has a nice place of business.

Mr. Bennie Stokes also conducts a nice market and grocery store, has a large patronage and is doing a profitable business.

Mr. Bracken and Mr. Stokes were formerly employed by Mr. W.Y. Jernigan before entering business in their own names.

Mr. Barney Thompson commenced his transfer business in 1920 and has made a great success, having commenced on a very small scale. By prompt attention and courteous treatment to all his patrons he has made much progress.

Mr. Leavy, who came here from the north and conducts the Bonita Ribbon Mills, also has diverse kinds of industries which have aided the growing population of Brewton in a very material way and the employees receive good compensation for their work and thus are a contented group.

The present Probate Judge of this County is the Honorable Thomas A. Peavy who is a very capable judge and who is serving his second term in office.

Miss Pearle Keeble has been in this office for the past sixteen years, and several other clerks are busily keeping the records in order.

The citizens of Brewton will have to give T. R. Miller Company credit for the thousands of people they have given work. One white man said if that mill would stop for six months that Brewton would look like a famine. No one should ever say anything against that company.

Honorable G. W. I. Smith, lawyer of Brewton, was graduated at the University of Alabama in 1891, was graduated from the Georgetown University Law School in Washington, D. C., 1893 and came to Brewton in 1895 or 1896. He served as a member of the legislature from this county in 1898 and 1899.

He married Miss Jessie Lockhart about the year 1900. He has one daughter, Mrs. Malcolm McMillan, and one granddaughter. All of them live in Brewton.

Mr. Smith has been diligent in his profession and has used much of his life in securing the establishment of State and County Highways. For some time he has been the loyal advisor and attorney for our county. He is a member of the Methodist Church, a 32 degree Mason and a member of the Brewton Rotary Club.

Mr. Theodore Franklin May, President of the May Candy & Grocery Company, was born at Victoria, Coffee County, Ala., May 14, 1875. He is the son of Thomas Locke May who was born in Devonshire England, 1836 and came to the United States at the age of 21.

Mr. T. F. May spent most of his youth on a farm, attended rural schools in Escambia County and at the early age of 14 became self sustaining. Mister May has been in various lines of business and has been most successful in his ventures. In 1914 the May Candy and Grocery Company was incorporated.

In addition to his business ventures, Mr. May has always taken an active part in local civic affairs. He is a member of the local Methodist Church. On August 8, 1900 at Morrison in Baldwin County, Alabama, he married Miss Maggie E. Bell. Mr. and Mrs. Bell are the parents of eight children.

The J. M. Chevrolet Company commenced business in May 1927. Mr. R. K. McMillan and Mr. R. M. Jernigan being the owners. These gentlemen have built up a large business and have been most success-

*(Continued on page 7)*

# **The ECHS *Journal* Section**

## **A Brief History of Escambia County, Alabama**

*(Continued from page 6)*

ful in all their undertakings. They have a number of employees in their service and their business is still increasing in a most satisfactory manner.

Mr. J. B. Roby is our efficient sheriff and has been in office for some time. His term of office expires in January, 1948. Mr. Roby has attended to the affairs of his office in a manner pleasing to the citizens of the county. He is alert in apprehending the law-breakers at all times.

Mr. C. S. Johns is the Tax Assessor of this county and has been since April 1, 1919. He is what may well be termed a "permanent" Assessor and is well liked by the people of the County which is self-evident inasmuch as he has held office for twenty-seven years. He and his office force are always ready and willing to be of any assistance they can to the many persons who have business in the office.

Mr. Ben S. McMillan came to Brewton from Monroe County in 1897 and kept books for Mr. J. M. Padgett for about one year. He then went to Morriston and worked for Mr. W. T. Neal who had a planning mill at that place and he stayed with Mr. Neal for about a year. Went back to Monroeville and later went to Atmore and clerked in the store of J. M. Padgett.

Came back to Brewton in 1900 and was employed by Robbins and McGowin Company. Later commenced working in the Cedar Creek Store company. In 1905 he was made manager of Cedar Creek Store Company in which position he remained for 41 years. On December 1, 1946 he was retired from duty as Manager of Cedar Creek Store Company at the age of 75 years.

Mr. McMillan is a stockholder and director of both the May Candy and Grocery Company and the Farmers and Merchants Bank.

In 1881, Van Jernigan, Jr., went with Dave Nicholson and Tom Snowden to New York to purchase "Green Goods" (counterfeit money). Upon arrival in New York, two men met them at the station and took them upstairs to a dark room in a nearby building to make the transaction. Mr. Jernigan and his part-

ners purchased \$5,000.00 worth of the counterfeit money for \$500.00 in good ole U. S. currency. They carried the package to the express office and shipped it to Brewton and to their dismay they found nothing but one brick in it after receiving and opening it.

In President Cleveland's administration times were so hard that it was almost impossible to get work. Mr. T. R. Miller was operating his new saw mill but there was no demand for timber or lumber and he had to close his mill down.

In 1896 during President Cleveland's administration, there was a preacher by the name of George Kays, who preached at the Baptist Church which was located between the two Escambia Creeks in Pollard. At that time the times were hard indeed, and the people could hardly get enough to eat.

They were planning a big meeting and the members of his church told him they didn't know how they were going to feed a large crowd on that Sunday because food was so scarce, and he told them God would provide for them to have something to eat for all those people.

On Friday before the Sunday, they were expecting the large crowd at church, the train killed a big steer within 200 yards of that church. The Section Boss gave the ox to those church workers and they had plenty to eat that Sunday. I was there and saw the baskets brought in and they had plenty of beef, bread, etc.

*To be continued.*

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

251-809-1528 or  
escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com

**We're on the web!**  
**www.escohis.org**

The Museum is on Facebook at  
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**Books Available by Contribution**

	Regular	Mailed
History of Escambia County, Alabama	\$90.00	\$96.00
Headstones and Heritage	\$20.00	\$26.00
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)	\$40.00	\$46.00
Flomaton Centennial Scrapbook	\$30.00	\$36.00
Addendum to Headstones and Heritage	\$20.00	\$26.00
Headstones & Addendum Together	\$40.00	\$52.00

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

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