

*Two Dollars*



*Summer*

1988

THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE  
QUARTERLY

of Local Architecture and Preservation



# THE HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE QUARTERLY

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**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The road across Blevins Gap (the dip slightly right of center) was for many years the only direct route from Huntsville to points to the southeast. Monte Sano is at far left; Huntsville Mountain and Green Mountain stretch from the edge of Monte Sano southward to the Tennessee River.



**COVER:**

Guests of Monte Sano Hotel taking their ease at Alum Spring on Monte Sano in the late 1800's when the hotel was at its height of popularity as a healthful mountain resort.

**PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS:**

Nancy Rohr: pp. 3-6.

Courtesy of Ruby Webster Champion: p. 12.

Micky Maroney: pp. 13, 16.

Courtesy of Huntsville Public Library: Cover; pp. 8-9, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26.



# BLEVINS GAP:

## A Road Less Traveled

by Nancy Rohr

Long before there was a state of Alabama or even a town of Huntsville, Indians and animals had carved out a road for themselves over the Green Mountain Range which lies to the south and east of this valley near Huntsville. If early risers in the southernmost part of town look up toward Green Mountain when the first ray of sunlight appears, they can see the exact location of the old road. The sun will be shining on them through the rim of a pass, while the rest of the valley remains dark behind higher elevations. This is Blevins Gap. It was the logical place for a road because it is only 1200 feet high while the elevations on each side measure 1400 feet or more. Today there is little to show for the site. It is a forgotten part of the past.

When settlers and traders began to come into the valley from the east, they followed this old road perforce, because it was the only road. It became the connecting link with the Owens Cross Roads, Big Cove, New Hope, and Guntersville areas and on toward Atlanta.

It wound down the mountain to a point just east of the present Grissom High School, then turned slightly north to connect with the Four Mile Post Road, which was another very old thoroughfare. (Bailey Cove Road was originally part of Four Mile Post Road.)

Early in the nineteenth century, the Blevins brothers, John and William, and their father Dillon, came to the Madison County area looking for good farmland and

pleasant homesites, as all typical settlers did. It is interesting to note that their forebears had been with Daniel Boone on the Wilderness Trail.<sup>1</sup>

Judge Thomas Jones Taylor recalls in his **A History of Madison County** that John and William bought land as early as 1809. The land office records indicate that their land was along what is now Whitesburg Drive and Four Mile Post Road in Huntsville. John also purchased property in Little Cove in 1809, 1810, and 1811. The family bought the gap itself, not for farmland - it was too rocky - but to insure easy passage over the mountain. Records show that John bought more land in 1833, 1835, and 1838, and that William Blevins owned a house in town on Clinton Avenue. However, Alabama deed books show, too, that by 1819 the family had begun to look elsewhere for even more land, and at least part of them had moved on to Shelby County, Alabama.<sup>2</sup>

There are numerous references to Blevins Gap Road in books and in records, even

up to the present. One of the most intriguing was an account written by Lucius Bierce, uncle of the writer Ambrose Bierce. Lucius, after graduating from Ohio University in 1822, traveled extensively on foot and on horseback through the southeastern United States.

Bierce chose to "ramble" into the interior of the young nation, and his travels took him through what is now West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, the northern part of Georgia, and into the newly formed state of Alabama.

On April 5, 1823 he climbed Sand Mountain, stopping for the night at Brown's Tavern. The next day he passed by Gunter's Landing, the Big Honey Comb Spring, and the Paint Rock River. After walking 29 miles that day, he spent the night by the Flint River, sleeping in the rain.

On April 7, 1823 he wrote in his logbook:

leaving Flint, which is the boundary between



Blevins Gap from the Big Cove area east of Green Mountain.



The old Blevins Gap road today seems hardly more than a wide footpath; however, in years past, the road was used by wagons and buggies, as well as by pedestrians. At one time, a stage-coach regularly traveled the road.

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Decatur [a county from 1821-1825 in the area between the Flint and Tennessee Rivers]<sup>3</sup> I went five miles when I came to Blevins gap, an opening in an otherwise impassable mountain, and after wading through creeks and mud holes, eight miles farther I came to Huntsville, the county seat of Madison County, being the first village I have seen for two hundred and eight miles and containing the first brick dwelling house I have seen since leaving Virginia.

The day he arrived in Huntsville there had been a jail break and no one would

take him in for the night. He had to walk on to Mooresville for a bed.<sup>4</sup>

Early local records refer many times to the road through the gap. At a meeting of the Orphan's Court between 1810 and 1817, the minutes stated: "...David Cobb and James Neeley be appointed overseers over a road leading from John Bunches and by Armistand Bealers, by Dillon Blevins and crossing the mountain at his gapp [sic] and on the Stick Sholes [sic] of the Flint River."<sup>5</sup>

In his account, Judge Taylor related that "Below Huntsville a road has been opened through Blevin's Gap," apparantly in the 1820's.<sup>6</sup>



This rock retaining wall on the east side of the old Blevins Gap Road has been in place since before 1875, the year Madison County stopped maintaining the portion of the road which crossed the mountain gap.

It was the old English county system to require every able-bodied male from the age of eighteen to work ten days each year on the county roads in their own neighborhoods. According to this arrangement, an apportioner was appointed in each precinct. He saw to it that the appointed overseer for each section of county road did his job accordingly. From the Madison County Commissioners' Minutes, it is known that in 1831 Noah E. ? was appointed overseer of "the road from the foot of the mountain at the North and South line of Blevins Gap to ? S. Teagues."<sup>7</sup> So the responsibility for maintaining the road is made clear as established by law. The road

is shown clearly on the Madison County Map for 1850.

In 1857 the Blevins Gap road was described in the Minutes as starting from "Whitesburg near Cooper's place to within 200 yards of the top of the mountain to the cave road."<sup>8</sup> Later, in July of 1857, S. J. Esslinger was "appointed to oversee Blevins Gap Road from the Pike at Gafree's old place to within 200 yards of the top of the cave road."<sup>9</sup>

At the fall term in 1859, Andrew Esslinger was appointed overseer of the road from the Turnpike to the top of the mountain, and John Hale was appointed overseer for the second half to Vienna (New Hope).<sup>10</sup>

During the War between the States, Madison County suffered in many ways. The entries in the Commissioners' Minutes were clearly written for 1861, as they had been previously. Each section of each road was listed in the volume, mile for mile. However, there was a blank space for the name of each overseer! No one had the time or inclination to work on the road systems!

There were at least two Civil War incidents reported in the Official Records regarding activity through or near Blevins Gap. In 1864 Captain Robert S. Richart of the 12th Indiana Cavalry reported a skirmish in the Big Cove area to his commanding officer. On June 30 the guerrillas were driven into confusion. The Southerners fled "...into the hills near Blevingston [sic] Gap, a distance of two miles from the scene of the fight."<sup>11</sup>

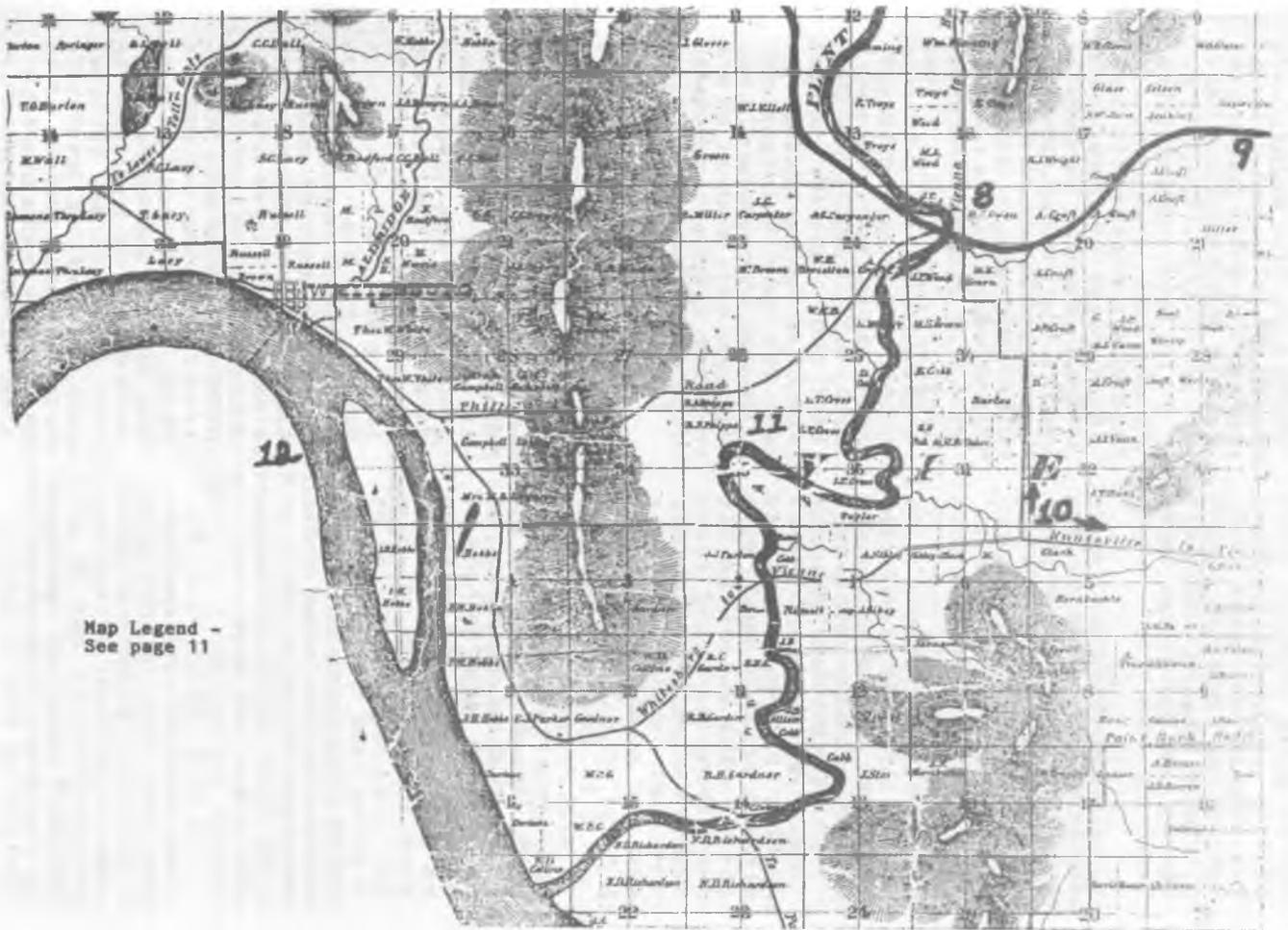
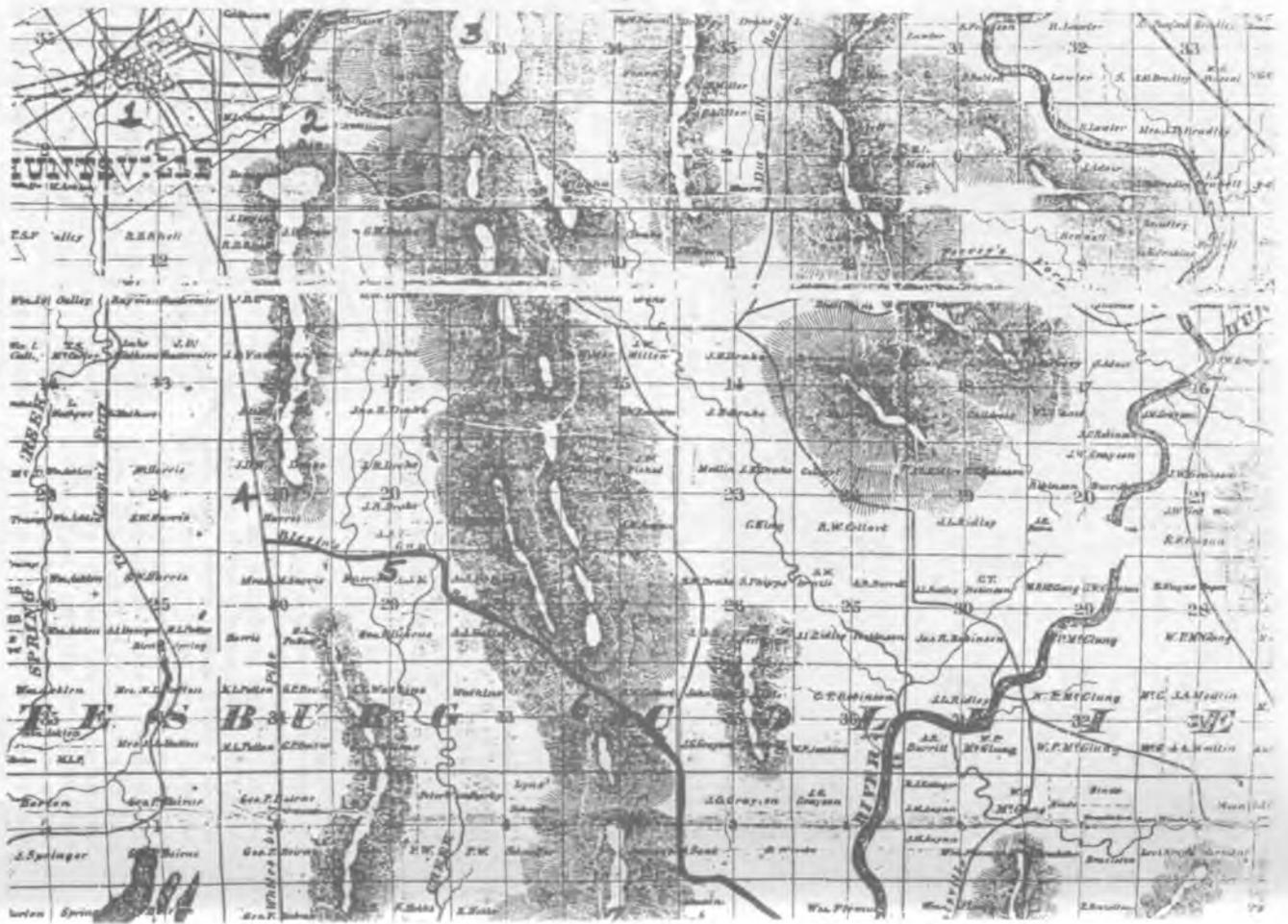
Again, from the Official Records, on April 5, 1865 Lt. Col. John W. Horner wrote to his commanding officer: "I have the honor to report that on the evening of the 3rd instant I started with a force of 65 men from the Eighteenth Michigan Volunteers Infantry on a scout in the direction of Vienna (New Hope). Starting at 6 p. m. on that day we moved out on the Whitesburg road four miles, where we filed to the left and crossed the Huntsville Mountains into what is known as Big Cove."<sup>12</sup> The sight and sounds of 65 fully attired mounted military men must have caused quite a clatter and stir on the quiet road in the woods.

There was a local story, told by more than one person of the Big Cove area, that two luckless Northern soldiers, or deserters, caught stealing horses, were killed and their bodies hidden in limestone sinkholes by a young Southern boy. The location of these sinkholes was supposedly near the road. No bodies have ever been found to verify the story, but that does not mean people are not still looking for them.

The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War shows clearly three different maps of the Madison County area with Blevins Gap Road drawn in as the only way out of Huntsville to the southeast and over the mountain.

Madison County, to its credit, was one of the first Alabama counties to pay off its indebtedness after the Civil War. The Commissioners' records take up again with an entry that Levi Esslinger was appointed overseer for the work on the west side of Blevins Gap Road, and James Grayson was in charge of the eastern section in 1868.<sup>13</sup>

The duties of the overseer must have sometimes been more demanding than anticipated. In February 1870 William Nichols was appointed overseer of the Whitesburg side of the road.<sup>14</sup> However, in August 1871 it was "ordered by the Court that the Resignation of Wm. Nichols overseer of the Blevins Gap Road from the Turnpike near Coopers old stand via Esslingers to the top of the mountain at Blevins Gap be relieved by this Court for



Map Legend -  
See page 11

the following reasons. First that he is inefficient and unworthy for the trust im\_? (impovered ?) in him as an overseer of the roads."15 County road work was taken seriously even then.

In the 1873 records for September, overseers for the road through the Gap and over the mountain were Robert Miller and W. Esslinger.<sup>16</sup>

At that time, however, the transportation needs of the area were changing. The people living farther to the northeast of Huntsville and on top of Monte Sano were becoming more numerous and vocal. So the county road builders made plans to build a road that would serve more needs. The resulting Big Cove Turnpike would reach both those on the mountaintop and those in the Big Cove area and beyond.

Alas for this history; it must be reported that in the minutes of November 6, 1875, it was "ordered by the Court that by agreement of all parties concerned now in open court that the Petition to discontinue the public Road known as the 'Blevins Gap' road be discontinued as a public road from this date" across the mountain. Nevertheless, on both sides of the mountain, the roads would be open from their sources to the foot of the mountain.<sup>17</sup>

Later overseers for these sections were appointed and road expenditures were itemized. Names included James Esslinger, Peter Fyne, Henry Peevey, and W. C. Bailey.<sup>18</sup> The last reference in the county "Road Book" to Blevins Gap Road is June 9,

1900, when Mack Webster was appointed to oversee the road "from the toll gate on the Pike to Websters."<sup>19</sup>

In 1893 county minutes became more organized with the use of precinct maps showing and naming roads. Although the road through the Gap is not shown, the 1893 map does show an intersection with Whitesburg Pike and Blevins Gap Road where Four Mile Post Road currently begins. So, certainly, it was still in use as a reference point. There are different existing maps printed in 1870, 1878, 1888, 1889, 1890, 1892, and 1893 with the road indicated, going through the Gap and over the mountain. Although the county did not maintain this section of the road, it appears to have been in common usage.

By 1921 the notation of the Blevins Gap Road had disappeared from the map prepared by G. W. Jones and Sons. The Commissioners' Minutes showed a change in their "Road Book" system, and there is no mention of the road again until the 1960's. A portion of the old road did remain, however, as a street leading east off the present Bailey Cove Road, which was then a part of Four Mile Post Road. That part of the old Blevins Gap Road dead-ends at a creek at the foot of the mountain. In the 1960's the city, apparently in an attempt to tidy up street names, was planning to change the Blevins Gap street name to the name of a resident in that neighborhood. At that time, Blevins Gap Road would have been lost forever if it had not been for one determined citizen. Ruby Webster

Champion, a lifelong resident of the area, petitioned the city to keep the original name because of its historical significance. And the city complied.

There are no further written records about the history of Blevins Gap Road. However, there are several people in the community who recall stories or events from their own experiences or family history.

One local character, Wash Anyon, an alleged bootlegger, often came to Huntsville from the Big Cove area during the years of Prohibition. He was known to travel by way of Blevins Gap Road and was always welcome on this side of the mountain because he never traveled without his brown jug of moonshine in hand.

Mr. L. M. Taylor used the roadway as a young man in the 1920's to hunt squirrel and possum. Many other local hunters certainly must have traveled the road without being aware of it.

For many years in the 1920's, John Hays' grandfather drove his cattle from fields in the Big Cove area through the gap to pasture near Huntsville for the winter.

Mrs. Winston Bailey recalls that her mother-in-law told her that her first visit to Huntsville as a new bride was in a horse and buggy driven over the road through the gap.

Ruby Webster Champion, who was instrumental in keeping the Blevins Gap street name, was born in the family home at the foot of the mountain. Among her many interesting stories is one that her mother told her about the stagecoach that used the old road. The driver would always unhitch his team of horses and water them at Webster's Spring after the trip over the mountain, and again on the way back.

As a young man, Mr. R. T. Lyle was a member of the Big Cove baseball team. The team had to go wherever the

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**See Map, pp. 8-9:** 1875 Map of a portion of southeast Madison County, showing the old Blevins Gap Road (heavy black line) running east from Whitesburg Pike, crossing Green Mountain at Blevins Gap, and continuing southwardly to the Owens Cross Roads area and on toward Vienna (New Hope). For easier comparison to modern landmarks, familiar locations are numbered on the map as follows:

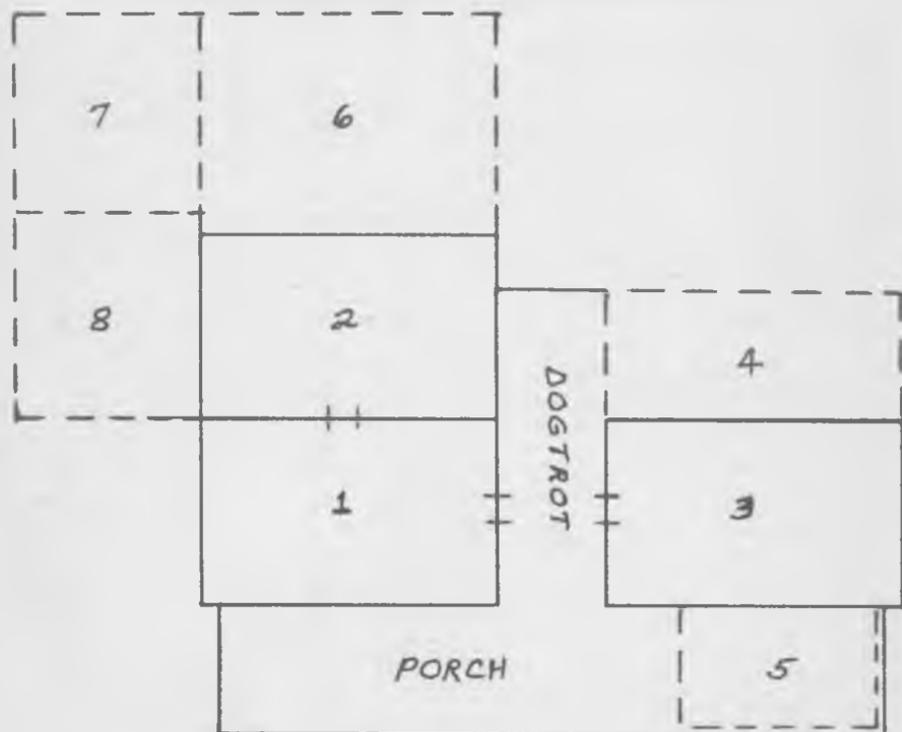
(1) Huntsville; (2) the later Big Cove Road, now U. S. Highway 431 South; (3) Monte Sano; (4) Whitesburg Pike, now U. S. Highway 231 South; (5) old Blevins Gap Road; (6) Blevins Gap; (7) Green Mountain; (8) Owens Cross Roads; (9) old Blevins Gap Road continues eastwardly to the present Old Gurley Pike; (10) old Vienna (New Hope) to Huntsville road; (11) Flint River; (12) Tennessee River.



A painting of the childhood home of Ruby Webster Champion. The Webster home, now demolished, was located at the foot of the gap on the Huntsville side of Blevins Gap Road. The painting depicts the home after several additions were made. The porch posts were the original posts made of cedar logs.



An earlier view of the home, which was built in 1900, shows the original board and batten oak siding and rock chimney. Mrs. Champion's uncle, Harve Bailey, is standing at the corner of the house.



Rough sketch of the floorplan of the Webster house is taken from an outline drawn by Mrs. Champion. The original three rooms were (1) the front room, (2) kitchen, and (3) side room, with an open dogtrot connecting the two sides of the house. The two new side rooms (4 & 5) and a new kitchen (6) were added first; then in 1942, the two bedrooms on the left (7 & 8) were built.

[ED. NOTE]: The dogtrot type of house was built in Alabama from about 1800 until well into the twentieth century. Several are still standing in Madison County, the earlier ones being constructed of logs. The dogtrot was the ultimate in natural air conditioning, sometimes causing a draft (weather conditions permitting) similar to a chimney draft and producing a cooling breeze, even on a hot, still day. The enclosed center hall type of houseplan is based on the same principal. The Webster house is typical of many of the homes built by pioneers and by later immigrants to Madison County.

competition was offering a game and a challenge. He clearly recalls using Blevins Gap Road once around 1914 to come to Huntsville to play baseball. He and the other members of the team walked over the mountain. He says the Big Cove team soundly defeated Huntsville, and there are not a lot of people around to dispute his word. Mr. Lyle is a young 92 years old.

The foregoing information is all that is currently

available about Blevins Gap and the road across the mountain, which were such important parts of the growth of Huntsville. How much more unknown history about the area there is, we can only guess. Pioneers may not be using the road now, but the gap is still there. Look up, and admire its low, inviting way across the mountain. Although today it is a road less traveled, for a period of time, history did pass that way.



#### FOOTNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Kincaid, **The Wilderness Road** (New York: The Bobbs Merrill Co., 1947), p. 678.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Cowart, **Madison County Land Records** (Huntsville, Ala.: privately published, 1979), pp. 121, 174, 177.

Dorothy Scott Johnson, **Madison County Alabama Deed Book** (Huntsville, Ala.: Johnson Historical Publications, 1976), pp. 2, 3, 37, 60, 66, 68, 71, 84.

<sup>3</sup> John Robert Kennemer, **History of Jackson County** (Winchester, Tenn.: Southern Printing & Publishing Co., 1935), pp. 20-22.

<sup>4</sup> Lucius V. Bierce, **Travels in the Southland, 1822-1823** (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1966), pp. 92-96.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Scott Johnson, **Madison County Orphans' Court Minutes, 1810-1817** (Huntsville, Ala.: privately published, 1972), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Judge Thomas Jones Taylor, **A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama** (University, Ala.: Confederate Publishing Co., 1976) p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> **Madison County Commissioners' Court Minutes**, Vol. 7827, p. 29, unpublished, Elbert Parsons Law Library, Huntsville, Ala.

8 Ibid., 7829, p. 82.

9 Ibid., p. 88.

10 Ibid., p. 179.

11 **War of Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies**, Series I, Vol. 39, Part 1 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), p. 241.

12 Ibid., 49, p. 510.

13 **Madison County Commissioners' Court Minutes**, 7830, p. 205.

14 Ibid., p. 427.

15 Ibid., 7831, p. 165.

16 Ibid., p. 440.

17 Ibid., 7832, p. 78.

18 Ibid., pp. 78, 305; and 7833, pp. 17, 550.

19 Ibid., 7835, p. 133.



# GREENLAWN UPDATE:



## Changes Under Way At The Old Plantation

by Micky Maroney

Ravaged by time and the elements, rooted to the spot where it was built one hundred thirty-eight years ago, Green Lawn stands forlornly, patiently awaiting its fate.

Vacant for over twenty years, but, until recently, still harboring many Otey family antiques, the house and remaining acreage are no longer owned by descendants of the builder. With development plans in the offing, the antiques were sold not long ago at an auction on the premises.

Green Lawn, built in 1850 by Madison Otey for his bride, Octavia Wyche, had remained in the family for generations. [See *Historic Huntsville Quarterly*, Fall/Winter 1985-86, p. 16, "The Oteys and Green Lawn."] The last descendant to live there

was Mrs. Leslie Cummins (Imogen). However, for the last twenty years she had been living in Tennessee with her daughter, Mrs. David Browder (Leslie).

When Mrs. Browder died suddenly in 1987, Mrs. Cummins, now in her 90's, went to California to live with her son John. Whatever their reasons, the Cummins decided to sell Green Lawn and the several hundred acres surrounding it.

It was sold last year to a local man who had plans to develop the property into commercial lots and housing subdivisions. Although not planning to restore Green Lawn himself, he wanted to keep the antique furniture with the house and was willing to sell the house and contents to someone inter-

ested in its restoration. Nevertheless, he recently sold the entire property to Huntsville contractor Jerry Atnip of Atnip Design and Supply Center, Inc.

Consequently, changes are occurring at the old plantation. It is located about a mile south of Meridianville, on the east side of U. S. Highway 231-431 North at Cummins Lane, slightly north of the now-closed Edwards Furniture store.

The Atnip's immediate thought upon acquiring the property was to demolish the house and proceed with development. However, the previous owner had given them a copy of the **Quarterly** relating Green Lawn's history, and they began to have second thoughts about the old house. Perhaps it could be used somehow in conjunction with their planned housing development.

After conferring with an out-of-town consultant, they were convinced that the house would make an elegant and historic centerpiece for the subdivision they intend to build nearby.

The Atnip company's plans are for the subdivision to be located to the rear of the Otey house, with the street entrance to be placed on the south side of the house where the old driveway entered the property. The company intends to construct fine homes in a subdivision which will include tennis courts on the site where the Cummins family once had their own tennis courts. In the area of the Cummins' former private golf

course, a community swimming pool will be built.

Plans for the near future call for the house to be made weather-tight, exterior repairs made, and gleaming white paint applied. The unattractive 1930's lean-to addition at the rear of the house will be removed. In its place, eventually, a screened and/or glassed-in porch area will be added. Interior repairs and redecorating will come at a later date, after which the company hopes to use the house for offices.

The underbrush surrounding the house has already been cleared away and the yard will soon be rehabilitated. The remaining old trees, large bushes, ancient flowers, and newly-sprouted green grass should produce a befitting landscape. Refurbished, too, will be the nearby graveyard where Madison and Octavia Otey and other family members are buried.

"Green Lawn," of course, was the first choice of names for the Atnip's residential development. But since there is another subdivision named "Green Lawn" nearby, the Atnips have chosen the name "Cummins Place."

So, the historic old house has been given a reprieve from demolition. In the foreseeable future, neither neglect nor deliberate human destruction will claim the once beautiful home. Perhaps in a short while, Octavia's house will be standing proudly once more, with hope for the future.

# First Bathtub Said To Be A Monte Sano Product

REPRINTED FROM THE HUNTSVILLE TIMES -  
HUNTSVILLE'S SESQUICENTENNIAL - SEPTEMBER 11-17, 1955.

Huntsville is credited with many "firsts" for the State of Alabama, and by some, with at least one national "first" - the public waterworks system. But there is another alleged first, of which few people know.

A home on Monte Sano reportedly contained the first bathtub in America.

This was the residence of one Thomas Martin, who moved here from Fairfax, Va. in 1808 and completed a home for his bride on the north-west side of Monte Sano, just a few hundred feet from the Cold Spring. Construction was started in 1815 and completed in 1816.

The Cold Spring, later to become one of the attractions of the area when the Hotel Monte Sano was in its prime as a summer resort, furnished water for the house through a system of hollowed red cedar logs.

Piped some 500 feet, the water went into a milkhouse, and into a bathtub which had been dug out of limestone rock from the mountainside.

This tub, 5 feet long, 19 1/2 inches wide, and 12 inches deep, was in 1934, and perhaps still is, considered to be the nation's first bathtub.

According to the October 1934 issue of Valve World, a trade magazine published by the Crane Co. of Chicago, the tub was used in the Martin home on Monte Sano for nearly half a century.

It was moved, sometime before the Civil War, to a home Martin had built at the corner of Jefferson and Holmes streets, approximately where the Post Office is now located. The tub was uncovered during excavations in 1934 for the Post Office, and for a while was in the possession of John C. Stanard, a



"MARTIN HOME ON MONTE SANO, 1815 - The picture above is a reproduction of a noted 1820 painting by Henry Strode, called 'The Martin Home,' which was built by Thomas Martin near Cold Spring on the northwest side of Monte Sano in 1815-16. It was in this home that the first bathtub in America was used, cut from limestone by Martin... (Reproduction courtesy Thos. W. Martin)." [Photograph and caption were in *The Huntsville Times* Sesquicentennial Issue, September 11-17, 1955.]

resident of Huntsville now deceased. Whether it still exists could not be determined.

Valve World pointed out the discovery of the old tub brought to light "the hoax perpetrated upon the public by H. L. Mencken in December of 1917, when in an article in the *New York Evening Mail*, he alleged the bathtub was unknown in the world until the '40s of the last century, and that it was invented in Cincinnati by Adam Thompson.

"Seven years later in the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Mr. Mencken admitted that his former article was 'a piece

of spoofing to relieve the strain of war days."

"Apparently," the article continued, "there is no evidence of an earlier tub in this country, so that the old Martin tub may be accepted as 'the first bathtub in America.'"

The early Martin home itself was well known to residents of the city before time consumed its timbers, originally cut from trees nearby.

It was home for Martin, a son, Thomas Fuller Martin, and three daughters, Sallie, Bettie, and Hassie, the three



Water from Cold Spring was once piped via hollowed cedar logs to the old Martin Home on Monte Sano. Later, the spring, as pictured above, was one of the attractions at Monte Sano Hotel.

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girls being born in the home, according to notes made by John C. Stanard.

Bettie and Hassie Martin were married to two Erwin brothers, Josephus and John; Sallie was married to the Rev. Eugene Strode, the first Baptist minister to come to Huntsville.

Sallie Martin Strode was the grandmother of Eugene Hudson Strode, now one of Alabama's best known writers and a professor at the University of Alabama.

The painting of the Martin home on Monte Sano was done in 1820 by Henry Strode, a brother of the Rev. Eugene Strode.

Henry Strode is reported to have become a well known landscape artist after leaving Huntsville, and many of his paintings hang on walls throughout the South. In addition to his landscape paintings, he did many religious sketches in the churches of America before dying at Madison, Ala.



# Monte Sano

## Mountain Had Early

### Health Settlement

REPRINTED FROM THE HUNTSVILLE TIMES -  
HUNTSVILLE'S SESQUICENTENNIAL - SEPTEMBER 11-17, 1955

By Pat Jones

"Moses, fetch a log or two more heah!"

George Fearn's command appeared for a moment to have gone unheard, and he straightened his slumped shoulders as if to call again. When, from the rear of the row of tiny log cabins at his back, came a muffled voice, slow and wheezed.

"Yassuh, Marse George, I's a-comin' soon's I gets mah shoes on."

"Listen at that rascal - asleep again."

With the remark, the master tossed into the smoldering fire before him a small twig he had been rolling between his fingers.

"That's the mountain air, George," John Martin joined in. "You can't blame [Moses] for that. Why, man,

I can do more sleeping and eating up here than anywhere else in the world."

His remark drew the approval of several others of the group gathered around those burning logs that summer night in 1827.

The season was near the middle of August, but a chilly breeze, sweeping the ridge of Monte Sano after nightfall, had made them realize their small fire was not an unpleasant addition.

As Moses, a short darky with a touch of gray above his ears, came into the circle with more fuel, the reflection was cast upon a scene once so typical of Monte Sano, a scene somewhat primitive in its beginning, but which showed an early forethought on the part of its creators, a never-outgrown step in the general fight for health.

A few feet from the fire stood a T-shaped building, solidly constructed and several times larger than the one or two-room shanties nearby. Its neatness and the freshness of the chinks between its logs indicated that it had not been there long. Attached to the ends of each of the three ells to the house were broad, squatty chimneys of limestone rock, affording patrons the utmost in open-fire comfort.

Windows were no more than holes in the walls, covered with heavy slabs formed by spiking together logs cut away to form the aperture.

This larger structure, known as the Inn, was the headquarters for the little health colony, planned not long after settlers first came from Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia and the Carolinas to till the fertile soil in this section. At its board, nourishing meals were served thrice daily to visitors up from the surrounding territory. Many persons were from Huntsville, the little town gathered down in the valley to the west, not quite four miles away.

The cabins on each side of the inn were no more than sleeping quarters, principally for the women, for when visitors on the mountain were numerous, men curled up in blankets beside open fires, and slept with little thought of wild animals which constantly, after dark, stalked the odor of food to within a few feet of the circle of light. These smaller structures had been built over a decade or more of years, new

foundations appearing as additional families found the health-giving qualities of the spot.

Trees stood in massive growth on all sides forming so thick a forest that the narrowest of footpaths were of necessity meandering studies. Oak, hickory, chestnut, redbud, sweet gum, walnut, prickly ash, cedar, even the rare shittim-wood all were to be found within a short radius of each other.

Down the northern slope of the mountain, only a few feet below the spot on which the circle of men surrounded the fire, was a dell literally covered with flowers, the plants growing amid random rocks, surrounding a tiny chalybeate spring. This source of water, giving forth so cool a supply that the spot had been named "Cold Spring," was the actual explanation for the presence of the houses above. Not a cabin was without its wooden pail of the sparkling fluid, the mineral qualities of which were so revivifying. Babes in arms drank it freely, for doctors had advised mothers of its great aid in teething.

A number of men prominent in county history, who had taken an active part in the development of Monte Sano, were gathered on the mountain that August evening of 1827.

Several had driven up from Huntsville during the day to remain over the weekend; others had been residents there since early in the summer.



Old view of Coe's Roost at Sadler Spring on Monte Sano.

Among them, in addition to George Fearn and John Martin, were General Bartley M. Lowe, "Merchant Prince" of Huntsville, later to become first president of the local Branch Bank of Alabama, and brigadier-general of militia; Levin Wilson Shepherd, early contractor; Samuel Chapman, later circuit judge for a number of years; John Brahan, one of the organizers of the Huntsville Episcopal Church; Dr. Alexander Erskine, Dr. Samuel Breck, John M. Fackler, Preston Yeatman, William Patton.

Others included Dr. Thomas Fearn, active in the early development of the county, and credited with having given Monte Sano its name. Dr. David Moore, member of many sessions of the Legislature and speaker of the House in 1840; Arthur F.

Hopkins, member of the state constitutional convention in 1819, legislator and supreme court judge; Hunter Peal, early county surveyor, who laid the first water main in Huntsville; George P. Beirne, Robert Fearn, Thomas G. Percy, Charles Cabaniss, Martin Miller, kinsman of John Martin, and the Rev. James Rowe, pastor of the First Methodist Church in Huntsville.

These men sat on logs drawn up in a huge circle. Some were engaged in private conversations; others listened to the general talk around the fire, their attention first on one group, then on another.

The minister gazed abstractedly at the coals. His mind was hundreds of miles away, upon his sweetheart attending school in Ohio.



Old log house on Panorama Drive, Monte Sano, 1970 view.

Quite a few of the men puffed slowly at long pipes, filled with tobacco furnished from his plantation by Charles Cabaniss, owner of the first cotton mill in Alabama, whose father had been that extensive Virginia planter who had placed upon the market the famous Cavendish brand of the leaf.

Seated at the end of a hickory log, his back resting against a small tree, Shepherd, the contractor, held a golden-haired girl, scarcely past her third birthday. She lay in the hollow of her father's arm, her long curls trailing from beneath her left shoulder to emblazon in lovely disorder his rough doublet. At the slightest noise above the ordinary, she opened her sleepy blue eyes, stared silently around the

circle, then nodded off again.

Little did those visitors of 1827 see of the future that awaited the mountain. They knew that it was a healthy location for both children and adults, that only a short stay there brought a remarkable change in both appetite and general feeling, and based on this certainty, they already had made plans for greater development.

Their ideas had seemed farfetched and utterly ridiculous to the average "hard head" settler who saw only cotton land as soil worth looking at twice, but the bracing effect of the air up on this 2,312-acre plateau, 1,700 feet above sea level, gave them confidence.

Shaped like a large, jagged U, this range, a terminal ridge of the great Cumberland chain, covering an area west of Flint River and running southward toward the Tennessee, possessed many natural phenomena of both beauty and oddness. Topped with sandstone, its soil was gray and porous, and dried rapidly after rainfall. Furthermore, numerous springs of chalybeate, alum, sulphur, magnesia, limestone and free-stone water had been found running from beneath rocky cliffs on its sides.

Cold Spring was the most prized of them all, registering a temperature of 55.4 degrees Fahrenheit, the coldest water in Alabama.

In a year or two, a girl's school was to appear on a point only a few feet from where the fire burned that night. This seminary, a healthy institution conducted by none other than the Rev. James Rowe and his young wife, was to attract pupils from many miles around, and was to afford them all of the classes considered proper for young ladies of that date. Then was to come Viduta, the little town given the Italian name, "view." Laid off on the northern end of the mountain, its streets orderly lined and numbered, this settlement was to be inhabited by many prominent families and to include many substantial homes before the Civil War.

Coal mining was still another topic slated for a chapter in the mountain's history. Started under the initiative of two men, who had noticed that Monte Sano

was the most southern point of the great Tennessee coal fields, this industry grew until it became a fairly lucrative business for those involved. Tunnel openings were made rapidly at certain points along the upper rim on the plateau during the score or more of years the activity lasted.

Finally, as a fitting climax to the century in which its qualities were discovered, Monte Sano was to blossom forth into one of the best-known summer resorts in the South.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars were to be spent in development, bringing to a head the dream of those men who first frequented the mountain. The spot was to become the toast of pleasure seekers, who gathered from all over the United States and from several foreign countries -- millionaires, celebrities, social leaders, prominent business men -- each following the holiday trend of the gay 90's.

Only a part of this could those patrons of 1827 see. They could pray and weekly visualize, but it remained for their hopes to be transplanted into the minds of future generations before there could be realized even a part of what they had planned.

The first piece of Monte Sano land entered, oddly enough, was that of Charles Cabaniss, whose son, Septimus, was to marry Virginia Ann Shepherd. A patent for this 80-acre tract (in the northwest quarter of Section 29, Township 3, Range 1 East)



Soldiers' Guardhouse, Monte Sano, 1888. In order to escape the scourge of yellow fever in 1888, U. S. troops stationed in Florida were sent to the healthful atmosphere atop Monte Sano. Due to the demands of the soldiers for transportation between the mountain and Huntsville, the promoters of the Monte Sano Railway, eyeing the lucrative military trade, hurried to complete their dummy line in 1889.

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was obtained from the government on Sept. 18, 1809.

On this land, which extended over a part of the heavily wooded slope and valley toward Chapman's mountain, Cabaniss built a two-room log cabin as a temporary home for his wife, Lucy Ingram, and four children. Later, he was to remove them to a plantation two and a half miles northeast of Hazel Green, on which he grew tobacco and built the first cotton mill in the state.

The next man to enter a mountain tract was William Patton, who on July 11, 1811,

obtained a patent for 40 acres, covering the later hotel site and a part of the immediate slope toward Huntsville. The third entry was by Judge William Smith, U. S. senator and congressman from South Carolina. He acquired 160 acres even farther west from the top of the plateau than that gotten by Patton.

Then five years before Alabama became a state and the same length of time after Madison County was formed, was recorded the first step toward development on the mountain. On Jan. 3, 1814, John Martin received title to 80 acres (east half of the

southwest quarter of Section 28, in Township 3, Range 1 East), the future location of the town of Viduta.

The register certificate of payment for this land had been obtained from William Sharp, government land agent, by George Fearn, Dr. Alexander Erskine, John Brahan, Bartley M. Lowe and Thomas Fearn, who had planned the health settlement. In order to procure a patent with more convenience, however, they had transferred the certificate to Martin, selected to acquire the grant and to hold it in trust until details were ready to actually begin the town.

For four years after 1814, land on the mountain was taken up rapidly. Then during the next decade, not an acre was entered.

In 1828, however, began a rush for patents which continued through 1835, then dropped off just as had been the case after 1818.

Three tracts of land were entered soon after John Martin procured a patent for the site of Viduta. The next day, Jan. 4, 1814, his kinsman, Martin Miller, acquired the title to a quarter section. So did John Brahan the following August. Three months later, the same number of acres were registered in the name of Hunter Peal.

Although the land was patented at an early date, a number of years were to pass before buildings were erected at any point other than on that particular part of the Viduta site where the group had assembled on that night in 1827.





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