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Editor
Elbert L. Watson

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DR. THOMAS FEARN: PIONEER BUILDER OF HUNTSVILLE

By LYNN MURRAY

In the lusty days at the turn of the century when the Tennessee Valley lay in peaceful tranquility, pioneers came from Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana to settle in the curved and rounded river valley. They were attracted by Hunt's Spring, named after John Hunt an early settler who built the first cabin there in 1805. The abundant supply of fresh clear water and the robust valley air made the location an ideal one for a township. When Madison County was carved out of the Mississippi Territory on December 13, 1808, the town which grew around the spring was chosen as the county seat and named Twickenham. However, the English connotation proved too great for the citizens who had fought in the Revolution and the name was changed to Huntsville.

Huntsville emerged almost overnight as the cultural and commercial center of what later became the new state of Alabama. After some controversy growing out of the Yazoo Fraud of the 1790's, land was auctioned off at a United States Land Sale in 1809. Shortly thereafter the land office for the lower Tennessee Valley was moved to Huntsville. The sales brought increasingly higher prices as wealthy young planters from throughout the South turned their attention to acquiring large land holdings in Madison

County. Among the most brilliant and learned individuals who invested their lives and fortunes in the area was Dr. Thomas Fearn of Danville, Virginia.

There is surprisingly little written about Dr. Fearn or his family despite his significant contributions to the social and economic growth of the Tennessee Valley. A founder of Danville, his father, Thomas Sr., was a member of the Committee of Safety in 1775.¹ There are records of the senior Fearn's two daughters by his second wife, Lucy Coleman Allen. Leannah Fearn married Charles Payne on June 16, 1800.² Widowed by him, she later married Samuel Patton on March 31, 1819.³ Thomas Sr.'s third wife, Mary, daughter of Dr. Robert Burton, gave him three sons: Thomas, Robert Lee, and George. After her husband's death, Mary Burton Fearn remarried and later moved to Huntsville, where she died Mary Dodson, March 2, 1848.⁴

Thomas Fearn was born November 15, 1789, on his father's plantation near Danville in Pittsylvania County, Virginia.⁵ After completing his early schooling in Danville, he attended Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, in 1806, and the Old Medical College at Philadelphia, graduating in 1810. He arrived in Huntsville the same year to practice medicine and found the thriving community in the midst of an economic boom.

Between 1810-1818 Dr. Fearn acquired a large amount of land in Madison County, some of it in the heart of the bustling city. Sometime prior to 1816 he purchased the lot on Franklin Street where he built his beautiful home.⁶ When General Andrew Jackson marched south through Huntsville in 1813 to meet the Creek Indians in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, Dr. Fearn served as the surgeon of a battal-

ion and a regiment of Tennessee and Alabama troupes. In recognition of his professional excellence, Jackson, in 1814, appointed Dr. Fearn "Surgeon's Mate" in charge of Huntsville's military hospital and "All the sick and wounded of the army."⁷

By an act of the Mississippi Territorial Legislature, the first bank of Alabama was incorporated on December 11, 1816. Dr. Fearn was named one of the nine commissioners. Incorporated as "The President, Directors and Company of the Planters' and Merchants Bank, of Huntsville,"⁸ the bank was organized primarily to meet the rising demand for currency during the North Alabama economic boom. Stock was sold the first Monday in February, 1817, and the bank opened its doors for business on October 17, 1817, with a capital of \$49,137.97.⁹

The location of the land sales office in Huntsville was the key to the economic success of the energetic city. With LeRoy Pope as its president, the Planters and Merchants Bank soon procured through his friendship with Secretary of Treasury, William H. Crawford, the right of deposit for the funds received by the land office. This privileged position of the bank; the passage of the Usury Law by the first Alabama Legislature; and LeRoy Pope's appointment as Pension Agent for Alabama enabled the bank to engage in highly profitable speculation. But the bank's money-grabbing activities eventually proved its undoing, when William B. Long, the crusading editor of the Huntsville Democrat, launched a vigorous attack through his columns.¹⁰

Dr. Fearn, however, had given up his directorship in 1818 to continue his medical studies in Europe at the Royal College of Surgeons in London and St. Thomas' in Paris. There he earned a reputation of excellence in his profession that followed him back

to Huntsville. One writer said of him:

Among the physicians and surgeons of the time, Dr. Thomas Fearn was by far the most celebrated--holding a high rank among the scientists of the South... On his return (from Europe) he took a high position among the physicians and surgeons of the day and was a valuable contributor to many of our medical journals.¹¹

Dr. Fearn attained a high professional reputation among his colleagues for his research on the use of quinine, which he made from the bark of trees to treat typhoid fever. His findings were published in a medical journal and attracted the attention of prominent medical men, and marked the beginning of a revolution in the treatment of that dread disease.¹² He was also a member of the Board of State Medical Examiners from 1823 to 1829. During his years of practice, he was offered the chair of surgery at Transylvania University, Center College of Kentucky, Louisville School of Medicine, and the Cincinnati University. Honorary degrees were conferred on him from Rutgers College in April, 1827, and Transylvania in March, 1827.¹³

Dr. Fearn's medical reputation is further enhanced by the story that was passed down by his children about the naming of Monte Sano. According to their account, he had been treating a child for a disease similar to colitis for some time with no visible improvement, so he built a cabin on the mountain and moved the child there. When the child recovered a few weeks later, Dr. Fearn christened the place Monte Sano, which means mountain of health. One writer has stated:

This is possibly true for Dr. Fearn was a physician who did not adhere to the beaten path of his prede-



HOME OF DR. THOMAS FEARN

cessors in this profession. When he failed to find a successful cure, he invented one of his own, just as in the case of his discovery of the nature of quinine. He was well educated, and he likely enough thought of the combination of words by which the mountain has been known for more than a century. ¹⁴

Dr. Fearn and his brother George were among the early developers of Viduta, a village on Monte Sano which was incorporated in 1833. It was their intention to develop the mountain into a health resort. Although the dream was not realized in their life times, many of Huntsville's wealthier citizens built summer residences upon the mountain.

With his beautiful Franklin Street home completed, Dr. Fearn began to court Sallie Bledsoe Shelby, the tenth child of David and Sarah Bledsoe of Sumner County, Tennessee. They were married on February 26, 1822 and had seven daughters. Mrs. Fearn was a prominent member of the First Presbyterian Church, and her daughters sang in the choir.

Business enterprises with cotton proved successful ventures for Dr. Fearn. By 1820, he and his brother, Robert Lee had established themselves as successful cotton merchants in the Tennessee Valley. Cotton in those days was marketed by shipping the bales in flatboats over Muscle Shoals down to New Orleans when the Tennessee River was at high water. Ten miles south of Huntsville at Ditto's Landing, or Whitesburg as it came to be called, the cotton was loaded onto wagons and left there to await the next shipment. This strategic location caused Dr. Fearn and several other prominent Huntsvillians to envision building their own city on the river and connecting it with Huntsville by means of a canal. The idea was to deepen the waters of Big Spring Creek and run the canal into Price's Fork of Indian Creek, meeting the

Tennessee River at the bluff city of Triana.¹⁵

On March 11, 1820, the following notice was published in a local paper:

Notice is hereby given that the erection and completion of a two story frame building, thirty-two feet by twenty or of a building or buildings equivalent in value thereto, by the 1st of January 1821, upon any lot in the town of Triana, will entitle the proprietor of said lot to an indulgence of two years from said time upon the original cost of the lot upon which said building shall be erected.¹⁶

The notice precipitated a rush for prime locations on the newly laid city streets. On December 21, 1820, the Indian Creek Navigation Company was formally chartered by the Alabama Legislature, with LeRoy Pope, Thomas Fearn, Stephen S. Ewing, Henry Cook, and Samuel Hazard as commissioners. Stock was advertised for sale on March 30, 1821, at fifty dollars per share to establish a capital of \$2000. The directors were elected on April 16, 1821, with Dr. Fearn being selected as president of the group.

The flurry of excitement surrounding the construction of the canal became somewhat muted a year later when Dr. Fearn, as president, advertised for bids on the unfinished half.¹⁷ The construction of the canal had turned out to be much more complicated and expensive than anticipated, and most of the Indian Creek Navigation Company's early promoters gradually withdrew their support. It was only through the preserverance of Dr. Fearn, who may have spent about \$10,000 of his own money, and his brother, George, that the canal was ever completed.

On January 26, 1827, the Southern Advocate advertised that though the canal was not completed the Indian Creek Navigation Company was prepared

to ship cotton to the Tennessee River.¹⁸ Four years later the canal was finally completed. It was the first canal to be built in Alabama, and on Tuesday, April 5, 1831, Huntsville staged a celebration in its honor. The canal, known by this time as "Fearn's Canal," could accomodate boats loaded with eighty to 100 bales of cotton and fifty passengers.¹⁹

Before the opening celebration, however, a new scheme was already being hatched in the eager minds of the canal's promoters to do something to make the Tennessee River itself more navigable. Plans were well under way by 1826 when the state legislature enacted a bill to appoint a canal commission to improve the navigation of the Tennessee River. The commissioners elected by the legislature were Clement C. Clay, Thomas Fearn, Nicholas Davis, and James Jackson of Alabama. Benjamin Reynolds and William Moore represented Tennessee.

The six commissioners ran an article in the January 5, 1827, issue of the Southern Advocate discussing the merits of building a canal system into the Tennessee River, comparing the proposed system with the Middlesex (Boston), Erie, and Union (Pennsylvania) canals. They estimated that the "whole cost of improving the Tennessee River for small steamboats of four inch draught to Knoxville" would be about \$487,760. Arguing that the "savings in the ascending freight alone would be five hundred and ten thousand dollars annually," the commissioners asked for public and governmental support of its proposals.²⁰

Unfortunately, improvements in the Tennessee River were not destined to be made for another 100 years, and then, interestingly enough, not by the state but the federal government. Nevertheless, the Indian Creek Navigation Company by 1835 had made

tentative plans to enlarge Fearn's canal to make the stream navigable for large boats at a cost of \$150,000.

One year earlier, however, the completion of the Decatur-Tuscumbia Railroad sounded the whistle that marked the end of America's canal era in the lower Tennessee Valley. The Indian Creek Canal had fared rather well, clearing \$4,675.08 on toll alone between January 16, 1832 and February 25, 1835. The canal continued to operate for about ten more years, but by the time the first railroad was built in Madison County in 1851 it was gone and the dream city of Triana lay desolate on the bluff.

Dr. Fearn was not only the builder of Alabama's first, and the nation's second city water works. The land near Big Spring was purchased at the 1809 land sales by LeRoy Pope for ten dollars an acre, John Hunt having lost title to the land. Hunter Peel, a skilled engineer who had emigrated to Huntsville from England, acquired rights to the property in 1823 and undertook to supply the town with water from the large spring by hydraulic machinery near the present First National Bank.

A number of damaging fires in 1829 triggered a public controversy over the apparent mismanagement of the water works. Peel and Thomas Barclay designed and installed a new system with an engine house, water turbine, pump, and dam. The Southern Advocate urged the town to build a water reservoir to complete the system; shortly thereafter one was duly constructed on Pope's Hill.

George and Thomas Fearn purchased the water works on June 15, 1835, for \$2,530.30.²¹ On December 3, 1836, they made an agreement with the city of Huntsville to construct pumps to lead to the courthouse to extinguish fires. Completion was to be

within five years. To do this, the brothers erected a large cistern in the rear of the Huntsville Branch of the State Bank of Alabama, which was under construction on the cliff overlooking the spring. In 1841, Dr. Fearn, having become the sole owner of the water works, became involved in a controversy with the bank about his right to build the cistern. Fortunately, the bank's \$10,000 suit for damages was thrown out by the chancery court on December 13, 1841, and the Fearn's contract with the city was honored.

Fearn's water works, thereafter smoothly and efficiently run, were a source of pride to the city as evidenced by the following glowing description:

The water works of Huntsville have ever been a marked feature. Water is forced up an elevation of ninety-six feet into a reservoir (sic) on a hill in the edge of the city, whence it is distributed over town through the principal streets in five inch cast pipes. The power used at the spring is a turbine wheel and a nine inch pump. The water facilities of the city give to every family the opportunity of running a waterpipe into their yard, thus giving an inexhaustible supply of pure and fresh water at all times. There are water plugs established at convenient distances all over the city, used in case of fire.²²

The rates of water rents, as recorded in Dr. Fearn's 1834-7 account book, were not exorbitant, but enough to make his investment of over \$4,000 worthwhile. Families of five persons and under were charged fifteen dollars per annum; families of six, sixteen dollars per annum; families of seven, seventeen dollars per annum, etc. The local tavern was assessed forty dollars plus three percent of rent or annual value. A confectionary where liquor was sold paid twenty dollars, but only fifteen dollars was

assessed against a confectionary where no liquor was sold.²³

Dr. Fearn's third important business enterprise (he had by 1837 given up the regular practice of medicine) was the Fearn, Donegan and Company. They advertised themselves as a general commission, receiving and forwarding merchants with offices on 17 Caronadet Street in New Orleans, and between Whitesburg Pike and Franklin Street in Huntsville.²⁴ Other important positions of community trust which he held included that of director of the Northern Bank of Alabama, Huntsville Hotel Company, and Madison Turnpike Company; and president of the Board of Trustees of Huntsville Female Seminary and the North Alabama College for men.

Even though he was involved in many commercial aspects of Huntsville's early growth, Dr. Fearn still found time to devote to public service. He was a Madison County representative to the state legislature; trustee of the University of Alabama; presidential elector; and member of various state and national commissions, including the October 23, 1849, convention, representing fifteen states which met in Memphis to promote a railroad to the Pacific. At this convention, through the efforts of Clement C. Clay and Fearn, a number of the representatives of the southern states voted to meet in Huntsville the following November 26, to promote a railroad which would connect Memphis, Tusculumbia, and Huntsville with Rome, Georgia.²⁵

Locally, Dr. Fearn was one of the early supporters of the First Presbyterian Church which was established on October 13, 1822. A leader in Huntsville's brief abolitionist movement, he served as one of the vice presidents of the Huntsville Auxiliary of the American Colonization Society that met at the

Presbyterian Church in 1832. Dr. Fearn was also a member of the committee to draw up rules for the Committee of Vigilance in Madison County.

Perhaps it was because of his feelings about slavery that Dr. Fearn did not favor secession in 1861. However, when the Alabama's Secession Convention elected nine deputies to the proposed convention of seceding states to be held in Montgomery on February 4, Dr. Fearn was one of those named.²⁶ The esteem in which he was held by his constituents was further indicated by his election to the First Confederate Congress. He held this position for about a month, resigning on March 15, probably because of ill health.

There is little else known of Dr. Fearn's activities during the Civil War period, though it was reported that he was among those who refused to sign Federal General Ormsby Mitchel's allegiance document during the first occupation of Huntsville in May, 1862.²⁷

On January 19, 1863, Miss Sarah Lowe noted in her diary that Dr. Fearn had died in his home on January 16. "I was very distressed to learn of the death of Dr. Fearn," she wrote, "but he has suffered so much that I believe that his death is for the best. With the afflicted family I sympathise greatly."²⁸

The petition to probate Dr. Fearn's will was made on January 17 and was filed one month later on February 17. Interestingly, his obituary did not appear in the Democrat until the April 2, 1863 issue. Dr. Fearn was laid quietly to rest in Maple Hill Cemetery beside his wife, who had died twenty-one years before him on May 2, 1842. He left his children, the beautiful brick home, deeds to property scattered all over Madison County, and the memory

of a cultured and brilliant father whose dreams for Huntsville stretched beyond every new horizon.

¹Frederick A. Virkus, editor, The Abridged Compendium of American Genealogy (Chicago, 1925), 548. Thomas Fearn, Sr., lived from 1745 to 1805.

²Catherine L. Knorr, Marriage Bonds and Minister's Returns of Pittsylvania County (Pine Bluff, Arkansas 1956), 64.

³Kathleen B. Williams, Marriages of Pittsylvania County, 1806-1830 (1965), 120.

⁴Kathleen Paul Jones and Pauline Jones Gandrud compilers, Alabama Records, Madison County, Vol. CXXXIV (June, 1952), 49. Mrs. Dodson was buried in Maple Hill Cemetery.

⁵Thomas McAdory Owen, History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography, Vol. III (Chicago, 1921), 567. Dr. Fearn was the great-great-grandson of Richard Lee, the emigrant of Westmoreland County, Virginia, Secretary of the Colony of Virginia, first attorney general of Virginia, and the ancestor of Henry Lee, Lighthouse Harry Lee, and of Robert E. Lee.

⁶Victor B. Haagen, The Pictorial History of Huntsville (Meriden, Connecticut, 1963), 113. The house was not completed until the 1820's.

⁷Owen, op. cit., III, 567.

⁸E. M. Betts, Early History of Huntsville, Alabama (Montgomery, 1916), 32. The other commissioners were LeRoy Pope, John P. Hickman, David Moore, Benjamin Cox, John M. Taylor, Jesse Search, Clement C. Clay, and John W. Walker.

⁹William H. Brantley, Banking in Alabama, 1816-1860, Vol. I (Birmingham, 1961), 7.

¹⁰Ruth K. Nuermberger, "The Royal Party in Early Alabama Politics," Alabama Review Vol. VI (April, 1953), 91. Long came to Huntsville in 1822 to practice law.

¹¹Thomas Jones Taylor, "Early History of Madison County," Alabama Historical Quarterly, Vol. II (Spring, 1940), 89.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Owen, op. cit. III, 567.

¹⁴Birdie Campbell, "A History of Monte Sano," 3. Typed Mss. in the Huntsville Public Library.

¹⁵Betts, op. cit., 66. Triana was incorporated on November 13, 1819.

¹⁶Alabama Republican, March 11, 1830, 1.

¹⁷Alabama Republican, April 26, 1822, 3.

¹⁸Page 4.

¹⁹Betts, op. cit., 68.

²⁰Southern Advocate, January 5, 1827, 2.

²¹"Thomas Fearn Water Works Account Book." Mss. in Huntsville Public Library.

²²Williams' Huntsville Directory, City Guide and Business Mirror (Huntsville, 1859), 18.

²³"Thomas Fearn Water Works Account Book." Other assessments included the following: private bath house, \$2.50; each horse or cow, \$1.00; lawyer's office or doctor's shop, \$5.00; blacksmith's shop, \$10.00; apothecary's shop, \$20.00; and printing office, \$20.00.

²⁴Huntsville Democrat, October 22, 1842.

²⁵Ruth K. Nuermberger, The Clays of Alabama (Lexington, 1958), 106.

²⁶David L. Darden, "The Alabama Secession Convention," Alabama Historical Quarterly, Vol. III (Fall and Winter, 1941), 327. David P. Lewis of Lawrence County and Richard W. Walker of Lauderdale County were the other North Alabamians included in the group. Both were anti-secessionists.

²⁷Haagen, op. cit., 113.

²⁸Sarah Lowe's Diary. Typed Mss. in Huntsville Public Library.

THE WILLIAMS STREET AREA IN THE EARLY 1800'S

By SARAH FISK

Huntsville's historic Williams Street, originally the town's southeastern boundary, lies in the area where more than 150 years ago early settlers found a magnificent grove of tall oak and stately poplar trees.

Home sites on the rolling acres that stretch from Williams toward the foothills of Monte Sano were early recognized as choice residential spots. Many of the people who built their town houses and mansions there were leaders, not only in the development of Huntsville, but of the state and nation as well. Many of the homes erected in this lovely setting remain today, and are cherished by the present generation as they were cherished by past generations.

Williams Street was named for Robert Williams, governor of the Mississippi Territory when Madison County was established on December 13, 1808. On the original town plat, the street was only four blocks long, and only a scant half-block has been added since to connect with Adams and McClung Streets on their opening around 1825.

Williams Street and the area bordering it lie within the southwestern and southeastern quarters of Section 36, Township 3 South, Range 1, west of the basis meridian. These two quarter sections were among those purchased by LeRoy Pope on August 25,

1809, at the Nashville sale of Federal Lands in Madison County. Pope, noting the exceptional beauty and possibilities of the location above the spring, became the highest bidder for the southwest quarter of this section at a price of twenty-three dollars per acre.

When the town site was selected along the bluff and laid out in 1810 under the name of Twickenham, Pope agreed to sell thirty-eight lots in the southeastern half of the town area to the city commissioners. The profit made on the transaction was used to erect public buildings.² This sale included all the lots on the north side of Williams, except numbers 71 and 72. Lot No. 72, which is the last of the numbered city lots in the original plat, lies opposite the Masonic Temple. No. 71 joins 72 on the west. All of the town lots, as originally laid out, were 150 feet square and contained one-half acre. The land east and south of Williams Street outside of the original town limits remained in Pope's possession until he sold it to various individuals. For his own home, he selected a choice spot on the bluff east of Lincoln Street. There he began the erection of his mansion before 1815, facing it toward the town.³

In examining the early history of the area adjoining Williams Street, it will be practical to proceed lot by lot, beginning with No. 71, on the corner of Williams and Greene Streets. This lot was apparently purchased from Pope by Simeon Jennings sometime before 1815, though a deed does not appear to have been recorded. On July 6, 1815, Jennings sold this lot and another one to Neal B. Rose, who held it for three years, selling during the boom times of 1819 at twice what he had paid for it.⁴

The lot where the Howard Weeden home stands is No. 63, to the northwest of No. 71. It was first sold in 1816 by the city commissioners to Alexander

Wasson for fifty dollars. Two years later John Jones purchased it for \$350. On May 15, 1819, Henry Bradford purchased it for \$700. This price increase from fifty dollars to \$700 for a vacant lot within a space of three years is a good example of soaring land values during Huntsville's first land boom in 1818 and 1819. Sometime in 1819 or 1820, Bradford erected the brick house which stands there today. On Lot 71, which he also purchased, he built a frame stable. However, he mortgaged and lost both of these lots early in 1821.

The next owner was John Read, a city commissioner and the registrar for the sale of public lands when the Federal Land Office was opened in Huntsville in 1811. Read made this house his residence until he sold it in 1824 to John McKinley for \$6,000. McKinley, one of numerous distinguished public men who owned property in this area in the early days, was a lawyer and United States Senator. From 1827 to his death in 1852 he served as associate justice of the United States Supreme Court. Other owners of both of these lots were Bartley M. Lowe and Mrs. Martha Betts, who sold the property in 1845 to William Weeden, father of Howard Weeden. The Weeden family owned it for over 100 years.

Lot No. 72, across Lincoln Street from the Masonic Temple, was sold on February 13, 1816, by LeRoy Pope to Alexander Wasson for sixty dollars, the deed stating that Wasson lived on the lot. On January 29, 1818, Wasson was still living on the lot when he sold it to Jesse Searcy for \$700. Wasson had moved by August of that year, however, when Searcy sold to John I. Winston, receiving almost twice what he had paid for the property only eight months before.

In 1825, Catherine G. Brown acquired this lot for

\$1,650. But two years later a levy was placed on it to cover her debts, and Sheriff John P. Neal sold the property to Henry Cook, the highest bidder, for only \$525. The "For Sale" ad in The Southern Advocate of March 2, 1827, described the property as "one house and lot known as the place where Robert Orrell, Jr., formerly lived and fronting the Masonic Hall."⁵

After the sheriff's sale of Lot 72, it changed hands several times in a short period, the price continuing to decrease. In 1830 Bartley M. Lowe acquired it for \$400. Apparently there was no house, or a small one, on the lot at this time.

Lot 64, the fourth lot in this block, was sold by the city commissioners on August 16, 1817, to John K. Kyle for \$400. On January 12, 1826, Edward G. Kyle and his partner, Nathaniel Herbert, sold to Harry Innis Thornton for \$4,000.⁶ This 1826 deed is particularly interesting for it describes Lot 64 as "being the same whereon William F. Moore now resides and opposite the Presbyterian Church."

Facing Lot 64 across Lincoln Street, on a lot which originally extended to the boundary of the Masonic Lodge's property, there stands today what appears to be one of the very earliest of Huntsville's homes. On December 2, 1819, LeRoy Pope sold this lot to Arthur F. Hopkins, a resident of Lawrence County, prominent lawyer, and member of the convention which framed the State Constitution. His deed to this property describes the lot as containing half an acre and including the brick house and other buildings erected by Colonel Peter Perkins. Information given in deeds to the adjoining property, indicates that John J. Winston lived on this lot on February 22, 1819, and that Richard Pryor was in occupancy before that and as far back as August 16, 1816.

Whether Colonel Perkins built the house before 1816 and occupied it himself has not been determined. It is, however, entirely possible that he did. He was living in Huntsville very early, having been appointed by the Territorial Legislature as a member of the committee to select the seat of justice for Madison County in 1809. Also, he served as the first clerk of the Superior Court, when it was established in 1810.

Arthur Hopkins held this lot almost ten years after he bought it, selling on September 12, 1827, to George W. Harris for \$2,000. Harris mortgaged it almost immediately, the mortgage stating that the property had recently been occupied by George Fearn. On November 14, 1831, Harris sold to Richard Lee Fearn for only \$1,250, considerably less than the amount he paid for it.

Richard Lee Fearn's wife was Mary Jane Walker, daughter of Senator John Williams Walker and his wife, Matilda Pope, daughter of LeRoy Pope. On January 27, 1834, Mrs. Walker became the owner of this house and lot, paying \$3,360, a price which indicates that her daughter and son-in-law had made improvements to the property during their ownership. At the time Matilda Walker came into possession, she had been a widow for more than ten years. Whether she resided in the house or to whom she sold it is not known.

The original lot owned by the Masonic Lodge in Alabama, was purchased from LeRoy Pope in 1823 for one dollar. This lot was only fifty by sixty-six feet and did not extend to the corner of Williams Street. The first lodge hall was erected there in 1820 before the actual transfer of the property from Pope. In 1850, when the present lodge hall was built, the Masonic bodies purchased the corner section of the

lot from the estate of William Patton.

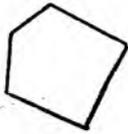
Turning to the south side of Williams Street, one of the first pieces of property sold in this area by Pope was at the southeastern corner of the junction of Williams with Franklin. On March 21, 1816, David Munroe paid Pope \$150 for two acres there, Pope agreeing in the deed to extend Franklin Street southeastward from its junction with Williams and to keep it open as far as the sectional line.

Munroe held this property for three years selling on March 22, 1819, to John Read, who, according to the deed, was already residing on the property. The \$3,000 that Read paid indicates the presence of a substantial house. It is believed that this was the house, or at least the main part of it, which is presently known as the Erskine-Dilworth house.

At the time that Read lived on this corner lot, he acquired all the land on the east side of Franklin down to the Samuel Hazard property, which is now known as the Rhett-Pipes home just north of Dry Branch Creek. On August 9, 1819, Read sold all of this land to Robert Fearn for \$9,000, and the deed stated that Fearn resided on the property. All indications are that he lived in the house on the corner lot, Read having vacated it on April 14, 1819, when he bought the second lot to the east.

On June 2, 1820, Fearn sold this corner lot to Alexander Erskine for \$6,232, which indicates the presence of a fine house.⁷ Fifty-nine years later, Susan C. Erskine, widow of Alexander Erskine, sold to Kate Erskine her interest in this property, stating that it had been her residence for more than fifty years. These transfers seem to indicate that the Erskine-Dilworth house, or at least part of it, was erected before June 2, 1820.

On April 2, 1817, Pope sold two large adjoining



Pope's home on the bluff.

LANDS OF LEROY POPE

Property of:
 Arthur F. Hopkins, 1819
 George W. Harris, 1827
 Richard Lee Fearn 1831
 Matilda Pope Walker, 1834

First Masonic Lodge
 in Alabama
 Chartered Aug. 29, 1811
 Original Lot 50' x 66'
 Purchased corner portion
 of lot 1850 when new hall
 erected.

House built by Col. Peter
 Perkins before 1816

original hall

House built about 1824 by Dr.
 Dabney M. Wharton; later
 owned and occupied by:
 George P. Bierne, 1831-1844
 John Patton, 1844-1855
 Leroy Pope Walker, 1855-1862
 House burned March 8, 1862.

LINCOLN STREET

House occupied by
 William F. Moore, 1826;
 owned and occupied by
 Harry I. Thornton, 1836.

House occupied by
 Alexander Wasson
 before 1816.

House built about 1824 by
 Capt. Francis T. Mastin

Birthplace and home of Howard
 Weeden, 1845-1905.

House built by Henry C. Bradford
 1819 or 1820. Owned and occupied
 by John Read 1821-1824;
 by Justice John McKinley
 1824-1829

House built by John M. Taylor 1817 or 1818.
 Owned and occupied by:
 John Read, June 28, 1819;
 Thomas Bibb, April 30, 1821;
 James Bradley, Sept. 9, 1836;
 George P. Breen, Aug. 6, 1844.

House was reportedly rebuilt or remodeled
 during Governor Bibb's ownership.

STREET

GREENE STREET

House built before 1825;
 owned and occupied by:
 Phillip A. Foote, before 1825;
 John Brahan, 1825-1833;
 Edmund Irby, 1833.

House built by Henry Minor, 1817 or 1818.
 Later owned and occupied by:
 George H. Malone, 1824;
 Emile Devendel, 1826;
 Robert Fearn, 1834.

WILLIAMS

House built before 1823 by
 Rebecca Ballard; bought by
 Thomas Bibb, 1823;
 James Bradley, 1830

Clement Comer Clay
 owned and probably occupied
 1816-1819.

House probably built by David Munroe,
 between 1816-1819. Later owned and
 occupied by: John Read, March 22, 1819;
 Robert Fearn, Aug. 9, 1819;
 Alexander Erskine, June, 1820;
 occupied by Erskine family for many years.

FRANKLIN STREET

Drawn by Sarah Huff Fisk, June, 1965.

lots on the south side of Williams. The purchaser of the most westerly of the two lots was Henry Minor, another public man who resided in this area. Minor served Madison County in the Constitutional Convention in 1819 and the same year was chosen reporter of the State Supreme Court. In 1823 he was elected to the bench and two years later became clerk of the Supreme Court, a position in which he distinguished himself until his death in 1838.

Minor built a large house on this lot and resided there until his public responsibilities necessitated his moving nearer to the state capital in Tuscaloosa.⁸ Minor's house was said to be similar to the Bibb mansion on the adjoining lot to the east. It stood very near the line of the Bibb lot and almost directly in front of the Greene Street intersection. One long extension, possibly a kitchen or servants wing, extended behind the house. Though the main structure was replaced more than fifty years ago by the present house, there still stands near the northeastern property line an old building which very likely may be the original wing of Minor's house. Minor sold this property to George W. Malone in 1824. The deed stated that the house and lot were then occupied by James W. McClung, for whom McClung Street was later named.⁹

In 1826 this property went to Josephine DeVendel and her husband Emile DeVendel, who conducted one of the first schools in Huntsville. In 1834 Robert Fearn acquired the property and occupied it for a number of years. All of these transfers from Minor down to Fearn, were for almost exactly the same amount of money, about \$4,150.

The lot to the northeast of Minor was purchased by John M. Taylor. The deed, which was dated April 2, 1817, carried a consideration of \$445.50. Taylor,

a lawyer, had apparently only recently come to Huntsville to open a merchantile business with Phillip A. Foote, his wife's brother. It appears that this business soon ran into difficulties and Taylor resumed his legal practice. Chosen to represent the county at the Constitutional Convention in 1819, he served on the sub-committee which drafted the State Constitution. He was subsequently the law partner of Henry Minor and succeeded him on the Supreme Court bench in 1825.

After Taylor acquired the lot adjoining Minor on the northeast, he built a large house and resided there. On April 14, 1819, he sold this property to John Read for \$16,000. This sum, by far the largest in this area, indicated either the presence of a mansion on this lot, or some arrangement for an exchange of properties, which is not apparent from the records.

Read occupied this property, after selling his corner lot to Robert Fearn, and remained in occupancy until he purchased the Weeden house and moved there in 1821, thus making it three lots that Read owned and occupied in this neighborhood within a period of three years.

On April 30, 1821, Read sold the property which had cost him \$16,000 to Thomas Bibb for \$8,000. Perhaps this great difference in his purchase and selling price was due to the cotton market crash in late 1819, or to some other property transaction. Nevertheless, the deed is most interesting, for it not only states that John Read had lately resided on the lot but that it was then in the occupancy of Thomas Bibb.¹⁰

What happened to the original large house built by John M. Taylor on the Williams Street lot is a matter of interesting conjecture. Did Bibb tear it down after

paying \$8,000 for it? Or did it burn? One writer says that Bibb built the present house on the lot for his daughter, Mrs. James Bradley, in 1837 at a cost of \$32,000 and nine years of labor. The house is said to have been patterned after Bibb's home at Belle Mina in Limestone County.

On September 9, 1836, Bibb deeded the Williams Street property to his son-in-law, James Bradley, for \$5,000. The deed describes the property as "a certain lot of ground and tenements formerly occupied by Thomas Bibb fronting on Williams Street, containing 2-80/100 acres."

After Bibb's death, his heirs sold the property on August 6, 1844, to George T. Beirne, who was already in occupancy at this time, for the sum of \$7,500. No transfers indicate the presence of a \$32,000 house; however, Governor Bibb must have been able to build one had he wished, for he was very wealthy. His estate included numerous plantations in Mississippi as well as Alabama.

The lot northeast of Bibb was sold by Pope to Clement C. Clay on January 15, 1819, for \$1,465. This is about a thousand dollars more than the two lots to the west had sold for two years earlier. The increase was probably due to the land boom, for when Clay disposed of this lot on October 1, 1823, after the market crash he received only \$800. The purchaser, Captain Francis T. Mastin, is said to have built, soon after he acquired the property in 1823, the beautiful home which stands on the lot today. Captain Mastin's wife was Ann Elizabeth Caroline LeVert, daughter of Claudius LeVert, who had come to America from Lyons, France, during the Revolutionary War to assist the colonists in their struggle for freedom. This property remained in the Mastin family for a number of years.

The lot on the south side of Williams across from the Masonic Hall was not sold by Pope until January 27, 1824.¹¹ The purchaser of this corner lot was Dr. Dabney M. Wharton, who paid \$515 for the two acres. Dr. Wharton, one of Huntsville's earliest physicians, erected a large house on the lot and made it his residence until he sold it in 1831 to George P. Beirne for \$4,500. Beirne lived there until he moved into the Bibb house in 1844. John Patton became the new owner of the corner lot and resided there until he sold it on September 18, 1855, to LeRoy Pope Walker.¹²

At the time Walker, a prominent attorney, purchased this lot, he was returning to Huntsville after making his residence in Lawrence and Lauderdale counties and other localities where he had distinguished himself in various positions of honor in Alabama. During the time he occupied the large brick house on this corner lot, he also served as a delegate to the historic Democratic Convention in Charleston of 1860 where irate Southern delegates withdrew when the Convention deadlocked over the Party's stand on slavery. Chosen as the first Secretary of War of the Confederate States, he gave the order to fire on Fort Sumter.

While Walker owned this property, the home and all its contents were destroyed by fire, on March 8, 1862, shortly before Federal troops occupied Huntsville. There still remains on this lot, behind the present house, two small brick buildings which appear to be some of the original buildings which were not destroyed.

On the northwest side of Williams, Lot 69 was sold by the city commissioners to Rebecca Ballard on August 28, 1820, for \$212. Apparently, the purchaser built a large house on this lot for when she sold it on April 1, 1823, to Thomas Bibb, the deed

mentions a transfer of houses, buildings, and appurtenances, the consideration being \$2,000. It is very likely that Governor Bibb bought this house for his eldest daughter Adeline, who had married Major James Bradley in 1821. He deeded the property to James Bradley on March 15, 1830 for \$2.00 and the deed stated, "whereon the said James Bradley now resides."

After James Bradley and his wife Adeline moved into the Bibb mansion on the south side of Williams years later, this lot and the adjoining No. 61 were occupied by Joseph C. Bradley, a brother of James. In 1861 there were two houses on Lot 69 and Joseph Bradley appears to have occupied the one on the northwest. It is possible that the houses there today may include some part of these original structures.

Lot 61 was sold by the commissioners on October 3, 1816, to Clement Clay for \$500.¹³ On December 22, 1819, Clay, in turn, sold to Clayton Talbot, local inn-keeper, for \$3,500. Though the deed does not state, there surely must have been buildings on the lot. Whether these buildings were occupied by Clay and his wife, Susanna Claiborn Withers, who were married in 1815, is undetermined. They did not purchase their home on the present site of the West Clinton Grammer School until 1823.

The two remaining lots in this block, Nos. 62 and 70, are unique in at least two respects. They seem to have always been owned together by the same person, and no record indicates that a residence has ever stood on Lot 70. The main portion of the present house on Lot 62 is believed to have been built before 1825 by one of the lot's first owners, Phillip A. Foote, brother-in-law and mercantile partner of John M. Taylor.

On March 31, 1825, the settlement of a circuit

court suit against Foote by complainants John Brahan and William Atwood brought about the public sale of Lots 62 and 70. A Philadelphia firm purchased for the high bid of \$3,000. The deed of transfer stated that the house and lots being sold had formerly been owned and occupied by Foote and were then occupied by Brahan.

On February 27, 1827, Brahan purchased the property from James T. Mather, representative of a Philadelphia firm, for \$4,000. This deed also stated that Brahan resided on the lots.¹⁴ Brahan was still in occupancy of these two lots when he sold the property on August 2, 1833, to Edmund Irby, whose family held it for many years.

There is much room for further historical search concerning the Williams Street area in its early days. In this beautiful natural setting where the pioneers found tall oaks and stately poplar trees, men who were leaders in the founding and progress of our city and state, chose to build their homes and live their lives. As research goes on and additional facts are unearthed, papers and stories concerning them and their families and this historic street will continue to be written and told.

¹This paper by Mrs. Fisk was prepared jointly with Mrs. Wayne Smith of the Huntsville Public Library. It was read to a meeting of the Huntsville Historical Society by Dr. W. M. McKissack, June 20, 1965.

²The sale was not made final until September 1, 1815.

³Pope also operated a cotton gin, which stood at the far southeast end of Williams Street. The gin was there as early as 1820, and probably very much earlier. His other acreage in the present McClung and Adams Street areas was used as pasture land or cultivated until around 1824.

⁴For more than 100 years, Lot 71 held only a stable and a garden that became rather famous in the late 1800's. Here "Uncle Champ," with his hoe, reigned supreme, immortalized in the verses of Howard Weeden, Huntsville's artist-poet.

⁵Page 3. If newspapers spelled names incorrectly in those days, this was probably intended for Robert Norrell, Jr., a Huntsville innkeeper in the early days.

⁶Thornton held this property for ten years and resided in the Weeden house. The acquisition of Lot 64 made him owner of the entire block.

⁷Fearn did not dispose of his other property along the east side of Franklin at this time.

⁸Philip M. Mason, "Henry Minor, 1783-1838," Alabama Review. XII, 121-2 (April, 1959).

⁹McClung was a lawyer who served Madison County in the state legislature at various times, being speaker of three different sessions.

¹⁰At that time, Bibb was serving as Alabama's second governor, filling the unexpired term of his brother, William Wyatt Bibb, who had died while in office. After coming to Madison County in 1811, Bibb had lived on his large plantation at Meridianville until he sold it in 1818 upon the purchase of extensive lands in Limestone County. The mansion that he built on his plantation in that county at Belle Mina still stands today.

¹¹In that year neither McClung nor Adams yet existed as streets, all of this area still being part of Pope's pasture and farmland.

¹²LeRoy Pope Walker's father was Senator John Williams Walker, who in 1819 had presided over the Convention that framed the State Constitution. His mother was Matilda Pope, who was mentioned earlier in this paper as once owning the house on the lot that originally joined the Masonic Hall lot.

¹³Clay served as chairman of the committee which reported the original draft of Alabama's State Constitution. His illustrious public career included the offices of chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court; speaker, 1828; member of Congress, 1829; governor of Alabama, 1836; and United States senator, 1837.

¹⁴General John Brahan, for whom Brahan Spring is named, was an extensive local landholder and city commissioner. When the Federal Land Office was opened in 1811 he served as receiver of Public Monies.

MADISON COUNTY MISSISSIPPI TERRITORIAL PERIOD, 1804-1817

By KATHLEEN PAUL JONES

My interest is in tracing families, but to do that one must read all sorts of records to formulate impressions of the conditions under which they lived.¹

About 1805 Thomas Freeman and Pharoah Roach began to survey the land now included in Madison County. But earlier than that East Tennesseans had heard of this rich, new country through John Hunt who had come here game-hunting. Judge Thomas Jones Taylor tells of a personal interview he had with Isaac Criner who came with his uncle, Joseph Criner, and another kinsman, Stephen McBroom, apparently early in 1804.² Criner said that in the fall of that year Hunt and David Bean spent the night with them. The next morning, his uncle's wife baked bread for them, and they went on to Huntsville's Big Spring, built a cabin and then returned to Tennessee.

Earlier in the year Samuel Davis and several of his sons arrived at the Big Spring, cut some poles, then went back to Tennessee for their families. A great grandson of Hunt wrote that when Hunt built his cabin, he found a pole lean-to which, he thought, Ditto had abandoned. But almost surely the lean-to was made of the Davis logs. When the Davises got back and discovered that a cabin had been built of their poles, they were furious. Samuel Davis said angrily he would



The Big Spring as it probably looked in the ante bellum period.

never be a neighbor to a man who would use another person's logs, so he settled near Plevna.

The family tradition of the Criners indicates that they went first to the Big Spring, did not like the water, and settled on Mountain Fork. Many years ago an old riverman recalled that, as a boy, he frequented Cooper's Tavern in Huntsville, where the "first comers" were often discussed. It was generally agreed that Criner, Ditto and Hunt all came about the same time, but that Hunt was a hunter, Ditto an Indian trader and riverman, and the Criners the first to clear and till land.

The first comers picked out a likely spot, built cabins and prepared to farm--these were called their "improvements." Sadly enough, when the land was put up for sale in August, 1809,³ many were unable to make the required payments and bid high enough, so they lost both the land and their labor. Much of the land was bought by wealthy speculators, as is generally the case. The minimum bid allowed was two dollars an acre, plus three dollars down for each quarter section, or five dollars for a section to pay for the surveying. One fourth of the price had to be paid in forty days, with the balance in one, two, and three years with interest. Cash was a very scarce article in those days. Barter and promissory notes were usual. Most of the early lawsuits were efforts to collect past due notes, which had passed through several hands, much like endorsing a check today.

Madison County of that day, though not a residence area for Indian tribes, was claimed by both Cherokees and Chickasaws as a hunting ground. Old maps clearly show the Indian boundry lines and deeds mention them. Huntsville architect G. W. Jones told that one man once refused to give the surveyors a drink of water, so they told him they would run the line around

him and leave him on Indian land - and they did.

In an effort to prevent squatting on Indian land, soldiers were stationed here to remove those who did. But many settlers like the Criners went right back. These settlers maintained two cabins to move back and forth from Madison County proper to east of the line. Apparently no effort was made to burn them out, although some old stories indicate that this was often done by the soldiers.

The Indians here were not hostile, but they did pick up things which were left lying around. The Criner women had their loom in a shed, as there was no room for it in the cabin. Each night they had to cut out what cloth had been woven that day. Now and then a settler reported a horse or two missing; but if he found his property and could prove that it was his, the Chief always made the thief return it. One time the Criners tracked some of their horses to what is now Gunter-ville and got them back with no difficulty.

Because of the proximity of the Natchez Trace west of Huntsville, and accessibility of Muscle Shoals as the head of navigation on the Tennessee River, there were many white people in the Shoals and on the Trace long before a white man ever settled here. But they came rapidly once the lands were opened for settlement. In January, 1809, a census listed 2,223 whites and 322 slaves. All these had come into rich and fertile virgin land, with towering forests so shading the ground there was no undergrowth. One could see a deer running for a quarter of a mile and drive a wagon anywhere under the trees.

Those trees would be priceless now, but the only thought then was to get them out of the way. Even many years later, they were still plentiful, so that it was easy to get planks wide enough to make a coffin with no joints except at the corners. The houses built

in the 1820's and even later, usually had panelling around the lower parts of the best rooms, the centers being of eighteen inch wide plank, and often matching window sills.

It seems that those who came first were preponderantly from John Hunt's area in the East Tennessee counties of Knox, Grainger, Hawkins, Anderson, Washington, and others near them. Many, however were natives of Virginia or the Carolinas, which a little later, along with Georgia, supplied most immigrants. These earliest settlers were true pioneers with but very few slaves. They did most of their work with their own hands and very inadequate tools. Cabins were necessarily small, so that one wonders how such large families were raised in them. At least, the children had plenty of room for an outdoor playground.

Coming by foot, horseback, and in ox carts, the settlers brought only the barest necessities with them. Slips of the creeping myrtle, which blankets so many old graveyards today, were brought by the women who knew there would be fresh graves to cover. There were doctors among the newcomers, as old bills against estates show, but their skills and drugs were quite limited. They had emetics, purges, blisters, morphine, and little else. The sick and injured suffered; many died from diseases that are now practically wiped out. Death from childbearing was great and second and third wives common. A lack of knowledge about sanitation was a factor which, coupled with poor refrigeration, made many infant and children's graves, even without the recurrent epidemics of diphtheria and scarlet fever.

By 1807 a few whites, without hindrance from the Indians, had squatted near the spring, among them Stephen Neal, later the first sheriff; Hunt's son-in-law, Samuel Acklen; and the Morgans, who were later

merchants. By 1809 there was a settlement of several hundred inhabitants within reach of the spring. There were no buildings on what is now the downtown square, a rough, rocky, knoll, sloping on every side with a large pond at the northeast corner.

Judge William E. Skeggs of Decatur, a great-grandson of John Hunt, wrote that Hunt kept a public house, and having many mouths to feed at the land sale, entrusted his money to LeRoy Pope to buy the quarter on which the spring is situated for him. Pope bid up to ten dollars an acre which was far beyond Hunt's ability to pay. As the story goes, Hunt was so incensed that he would have killed Pope had not his friends protected him. Later, however, Pope reimbursed Hunt and the matter was settled.

On January 1, 1818, Anne Royall gave a lucid description of the bustling community:

"The land around Huntsville...is rich and beautiful as you can imagine, and the appearance of wealth would baffle belief. The town stands on elevated ground, and enjoys a beautiful prospect. It contains 260 houses, principally built of brick; has a bank, a courthouse and market house. There is a large square in the center of the town...and facing this are the stores, twelve in number. These buildings form a solid wall, though divided into apartments. The workmanship is the best that I have seen in all the states; and several of the houses are three stories high and very large. There is no church. The people assemble in the Court House to worship."⁴

There are no records before 1809. Judge Taylor's daughter once told me that couples who wished to marry, used the Quaker (and frontier) method of declaring before witnesses that they considered themselves to be man and wife. After Madison County was established an Act was passed (presumably by Mississippi

authorities) legalizing all such unions. One of our earliest records is of a marriage on August 28, 1809, between a couple, whose descendant said they lived near Elk River, and rode horseback all day to get here to be certified by the proper authorities.

Even in 1810 there was only one grist mill in the county. For many this meant an all day's journey to have their corn ground. But soon mills sprang up along all the good watercourses. The first settlers, after gathering their cotton, sat near the fire at nights and handpicked the lint from the seed, so that it might be spun. By January, 1814, there were eighteen cotton gins in the county. There was one, long abandoned, at my grandmother's which I dimly remember. It ran by mule power. The little ginheads were about the size of one of today's small pianos, and ginning must have been a slow process indeed. Naturally, stills came in with the pioneers, and are mentioned in many estates. One man willed "my still and tubs" to his wife.

How little these people brought is shown in the inventories of old estates. What was done about property of those who died before courts were set up remains a mystery. Perhaps the heirs settled the matter among themselves. One of these was Spencer Rice who died in 1808. His widow went back to North Carolina, taking her two youngest sons with her. Soon she died, however, and the unhappy boys, about ten and twelve years old, joined a caravan of neighbors moving to Madison County, and returned to their brother's homes near New Market, making the trip in less than two weeks.

When local laws were established, after the executor or administrator was named, men were appointed to appraise the personal property of the decedent, down to the last pot, pan, or other small article. Then a

sale was held, and what the family wished to keep, they had to bid on. Later a "year's provision" was allowed to be set aside for the widow and minor children. One of these listed a tablespoon of pepper.

From the start, Alabama's laws were in some degree concerned about women; at least no man could sell his homestead without her, "without fear, constraint or threat" signing the deed, or later signing a relinquishment of her dower right. In a few cases a suit was brought and her right established. But the poor married woman could not hold title to property herself; whatever she had before, or inherited after marriage, was immediately vested in her husband and subject to seizure for his debts. So the careful father often left his daughter's heritage in the hands of a trustee, for her benefit, and after her death to go to the heirs of her body.

Of course, schools were few. While many newcomers were well educated, there are many more legal papers signed with a mark than with the maker's signature. Where there were enough children, often someone, usually a preacher, set up a small private school, but for children of the very early years getting an education was a struggle.

To clear the great forests, the pioneers first girdled the trees and then let them die. A little corn could be raised between them but not much. After a time the branches rotted and fell and had to be piled. When the trunks were felled, the huge logs, some so large a man could not see over them, were notched at about ten foot intervals. A fire was built and a dead branch laid across it; and as that branch burned out, another replaced it until the fire had burned all the way through. As soon as enough "cuts" had been made, the landowner sent out a call for a log rolling, and all of the able bodied men were expected to come and

help. Often there were as many as forty or fifty men present.

In order to stack the logs, the first cut above the one at the roots was turned at right angles. Then several others were rolled alongside it for the base of the heap. Long dogwood spikes were inserted under the remaining cut logs, and all together the men raised the log and walked with it to the log heap and slid it into place. There was quite an art in getting the handsticks placed so that the load was distributed fairly. This originated the phrase "to tote fair," and also probably the story about getting the short end of the stick. If the men at each end of the stick were both strong, the stick was placed evenly. But if one were less strong, the more able man was given the shorter end, and thus, the heavier part of the load.

After all the logs were piled they were set afire and illuminated the night. Log rollings were indeed hard work with not even a rope and pulley to help the men who worked from early morning till sundown. The host always furnished supper, passed the jug, and frequently had a dance or "frolic."

Skilled axmen that they were, the men cut the trees for their buildings, rived the boards to roof them, and adzed the half logs for the puncheon floors. Roof boards were held down by weight poles, nails being too few and precious for such. Instead pegs were used in construction. Later the local blacksmiths made the square-ended handwrought nails in old fences and buildings.

The early settler usually arrived with dogs and a gun, an ax or two, some iron wedges, and a cross cut saw, which he sometimes had to borrow. If he had only his wife for help, he had to use poles which he could handle himself; if there were friends to aid, then larger logs could be cut, notched, and put in place.

Chimneys were made of stick and clay, window shutters of boards, and hinges of wood.

These hardy people travelled long distances over new roads, through untraversed forests, and across unbridged streams, often waiting for flooded ones to subside. Water came from a well which the pioneer dug, or more likely a spring some distance away. Isaac Criner's spring was at the foot of a steep bluff. Until old age blinded him, he washed his face in it every morning often returning to the house with icicles in his beard when the weather was exceedingly cold.

Washing was probably done as it was in my mother's childhood in the after-war years with battling sticks and soft soap. The clothes were soaked, soaped, and laid on a table or rock, and beaten with sticks resembling long, slender paddles, the blades about an arm's length and some three inches wide. There were no washboards in those days. This battling resulted in many broken buttons, because of the vigorous threshing given the clothing. When I was small, I can recall seeing the old paddles still around the old home.

To obtain the main necessities of bread and salt, the earliest settlers often had to go from fifty to a hundred miles, and at times do without. After corn was raised each family had hominy. A mortar was made by burning a bowl shaped hollow in the end of a block of wood, and with that they used a large wooden pestle, usually run by a sweep. The lye for making the hominy came from leaching wood ashes. Ash hoppers were V shaped troughs of boards with a vessel underneath. The ashes were placed in the hopper and water poured on them; as it seeped through and fell into the vessel, it leached out the lye. This was also used in making soft soap from waste grease, a slimy, loathesome, ill smelling stuff. Salt first brought in from Nashville,

was later obtained more easily from the Whitesburg trading post where shipments were received from East Tennessee. Iron and other necessities were also obtained at the trading post.

Flintlock rifles were popular for hunting. A supply of lead was usually hard to obtain. Powder was scarce and dear, but the dirt in caves was worked for the saltpetre.⁵ Sulphur was bought, charcoal burned, and gunpowder manufactured. When cattle became plentiful, tallow candles were dipped. Judge Taylor tells of taking a wick, twenty or thirty feet long, dipping it into pine resin and beeswax, and wrapping it around a cob with the end pulled up; after lighting, it gave light for a good while.

Life despite its hardships, had its pleasures. Horse racing was a favorite sport; Andrew Jackson raced his thoroughbreds at the tracks at Buckhorn, Green Bottom Inn, and other spots, and it is said, fought his cocks as well. Quite a bit of card playing seems to have gone on, and some of the very first citizens were arrested for gaming. Apparently "dancing frolics" were often held at private homes.

People then were much as people are now. Some were honest; others definitely were not. Some were peaceful; some preferred strife. Some were good husbands and wives; some were not. Some seem to have enjoyed litigation; others preferred to settle matters their own way. These people had fought figuratively and literally to stay alive and were ready to do so again. The county was very well represented with soldiers at Emuckfau, Horseshoe Bend and New Orleans. Many of the early arrivals had fought in the American Revolution.

An old Court Minute Book of 1811 reveals that most cases were for assault or riot. An amusing legal phrase concerns value: "Did stab him the said Samuel

with a large knife of the value of one dollar, in and just above the second rib on the left side." The testimony in this case might have been interesting, as the jury found the defendant guilty but fined him only twenty-five cents. One wonders what the value of the weapon had to do with the case.

The pioneers who settled Madison County worked hard, lived hard, played hard. They wore no man's collar.

¹This paper was read to a meeting of the Huntsville Historical Society on January 17, 1965.

²Thomas Jones Taylor, "The History of Madison County, Alabama", 7. Typed copy in Huntsville Public Library of Mss. written from 1880-86.

³It had taken that long because the rattlesnakes were so numerous that surveying could only be done in certain months.

⁴Anne Newport Royall, Letters from Alabama, 1817-1822 (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1969), 119.

⁵Records show that Sauty Cave in Jackson County as early as 1812 was used to make saltpetre.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

By ELBERT L. WATSON

In his book Prefaces to History, the distinguished Civil War historian Bruce Catton tells of a historian who advised his students to study their history so diligently that they could hear the people of the period talk. Those of us who are local history buffs find this thought particularly noteworthy as we begin publication of the Huntsville Historical Review. Though we will aim for factual, well-researched material for the Review, we will not insist on having authoritative articles which fall within the special province of the academically trained historian. Our pitch primarily is to give the local historian the opportunity to publish some of his material which does not reach the standards required by a more scholarly journal. Indeed, it seems to me sometimes that local historians have a special calling in life. Where the professional historian is concerned with the sweeping social, political, and economic events of past ages, the local historian is given the unique opportunity to become personally acquainted with individuals who were involved in these great forces. The historical period, thus, often takes on a larger dimension for the researcher.

Some years ago I became intensely absorbed in some research on the life of David William Baine, Through my delving, I discovered a person who is

practically lost to history, despite the fact that he exercised a significant influence on the events leading up to Alabama's departure from the Union in 1861. Baine, I found, was a political protégé of the ardent secessionist, William Lowndes Yancey. With Yancey, he stalked out of the Democratic National Convention which convened in Baltimore in 1860, thus helping split the National Party and assure the election of Abraham Lincoln as president. Later, with secession a fact, Baine was a member of the delegation which welcomed Confederate President Jefferson Davis to Montgomery for the inaugural ceremonies. He enlisted in the Confederate Army and quickly rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel of the 14th Alabama Regiment. He died on June 30, 1862, while leading a charge into a withering Federal fire at the Battle of Frazier's Farm during the Seven Day's Battles around Richmond. After the war, young Baine was briefly remembered when the Alabama Legislature established Baine County in 1866. But because this name was distasteful to the Reconstruction government which was imposed on the state in 1867, the county in 1868 was renamed "Etowah," the name which it proudly bears today.

My point is this: as David William Baine emerged from the shadows of history through my research, I found more there than mere fragments of his life. A panorama of historical events in which I had little more than a passing interest up until then began to unfold before me. As time has gone on there have been many other stimulating experiences equally as profitable to me as this one.

The Review will enable many of us to share our information about the past with each other. As Madison County Commission Chairman James Record sometimes states: "We learn to go forward by studying backwards." In this great Tennessee Valley we

are fortunate to reside in a place impregnated with a grand historical record which stretches back to the earliest settlement of Alabama. We can all profit by having a better knowledge of those who have gone before us as we write our own historical record today.

So the Huntsville Historical Review takes its first peep of modern Madison County. May it live a long life and may its influence be far-reaching.

