
- ESCAMBIA ECHOES -

Published by
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 276
Brewton, Alabama 36426

June 9,
1975

Mrs. Carolyn Pugh McLendon, Editor

Annual dues - \$6.00

NOTICE OF MEETING : Date: Tuesday, June 17
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: Jefferson Davis Junior College Student
Center
Speaker: WOODFIN P. PATTERSON, President of
Jefferson Davis Junior College

We have asked Mr. Patterson to bring us up to date on plans for a museum on the college campus and whatever other subject he might like to present to our group. We all share with Mr. Patterson the desire for having a museum here. Since the organization of our group we have experienced no low attendance during the summer months--let's keep our society alive with enthusiasm this summer as well.

Did you miss the May Newsletter and 1974 Index? Several have called to our attention the fact that they did not receive their May newsletter which was mailed out in an envelope with the 1974 Index. If you didn't receive yours call me at 867-4881 or Helen Hildreth at 867-7904 and we will get these in the mail to you. If we have much of this we will have to go back to mailing "first class" again.

Alabama Historical Association Pilgrimage to Brewton - At the May meeting the Escambia County Historical Society voted to welcome the proposed October pilgrimage to Brewton of the Alabama Historical Association of Birmingham to see the "Anti-Bellum Style Homes of this Generation." The Alabama Historical Association was formed in 1947 and has held pilgrimages for 18 years. It is 1550 members strong from all over the state, and publishes "The Alabama Review" with Dr. Malcolm C. McMillan of Auburn as Editor. It is reported that their usual attendance for pilgrimages is 200 and that all 18 pilgrimages have had sunny skies. Their President is James R. Record of Huntsville, Vice President, Dr. Robert R. Rea of Auburn University; Secretary, James P. Sulzby, Jr. of Birmingham; and Treasurer, Milo B. Howard, Jr. of the State Department of Archives and History of Montgomery. Their day of activities for the pilgrimages begins with a program at 10:30 in an auditorium, picnic lunch at 12:30 which each individual brings, tour of homes from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. when they disband, Appreciation is expressed to the following persons who have graciously agreed to open their homes for the tour:

Mrs. John R. Miller, Sr.
Mrs. Adrian P. Downing
Mr. Ed Leigh McMillan
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. McMillan and
The Leigh Place
Mr. and Mrs. John David Finlay.

We still have to make contacts for two other homes for the group to tour. It is an honor for Brewton to have been chosen for this pilgrimage, and especially since this is the first time they have ever toured at homes that were not built "before the war." The pilgrimage will take place in October.

U. S. MAIL IN ALABAMA 1815 - 1820

By: Mrs. Annie Waters
January, 1975

Communication has always been necessary to man's progress and well-being and the post rider in America's history was a brave and daring man, facing hostile Indians, flooded streams, boggy marshes, snakes and wild animals, unmarked trails, storms, a horse gone lame, cold and heat, robbers and many other hardships. Many are the tales and legends told and written about this hardy breed of pioneers.

In 1815, Alabama, then a part of the Mississippi Territory, had a goodly number of forts occupied by military men and squatters' homes were scattered over the territory making it necessary for the U. S. government to finance a postal system.

At this time letters were folded and sealed with sealing wax; there were no envelopes and no postage stamps. The words "paid" or "collect" would be written on the corner of the letter. The amount of postage was charged by weight, just as it is today, but the distance they were sent was taken into consideration which made postage very high, a letter frequently costing twenty-five cents. Postage stamps did not come into use until 1847.

On April 21, 1815, the Postmaster General ordered deerskin bags dressed in oil and linen bags dressed in oil be tried out to determine which best preserved the mail to suffer the least friction from the movement of the horse. The deerskin bags proved most successful and these were called "portmanteaus." Documents, such as records of government officials and land surveyors' plats and field books were wrapped in paper, then put in a cover of leather or skin with the fur outside before being placed in the mail bag. This was a precaution against dampness when the rider would be forced to swim his horse across a swollen stream. Several months later the Postmaster General ordered the bags painted red to distinguish them from the portmanteaus that were being used for luggage.

The post rider purchased the speediest horses available and blew a trumpet on his approach and arrival at his stopping points. His schedule did not allow him to tarry and there were many complaints by the settlers that they did not have enough time to get their letters to the stopping point after they heard the trumpet.

In 1817, Israel Pickens, register of the land office at St. Stephens wrote to Postmaster General, Josiah Meigs, Jr. saying,

"Indeed the irregularity in our receipts of newspapers prevents all opportunity of intelligence (on important happenings) in any connected manner. Letters are generally preserved and brought at some time but when the mails become cumbrous newspapers are thrown out or left as lumber at different places on the way." The mail deliveries in south Alabama in this year, failed several times in succession because of renewed depredations by the Creeks who were in sympathy with the first Seminole War being waged at that time. The Georgia mail route crossed the state from Ft. Mitchell to St. Stevens and a second route called the "Tennessee Mail" traversed the state, north to south from Huntsville to St. Stephens and on to Baton Rouge; it ran but once each month, arrived at night and left early the next morning. At this time the area was the Alabama Territory. The pay for the Georgia mail route was increased from \$12 per mile to \$16 because of the bad conditions existing in 1817.

The Postmaster General, in 1818, appointed one town in each of the 21 counties to have a post office. In January of this year the post route from Claiborne to Blakeley began, however the act establishing this route was not passed by Congress until April 20th.

The Postal Department on June 20, 1818 advertised for riders for nine routes in the Alabama Territory, contracts to begin on January 1, 1819 for a term of four years unless terminated by the head of the department. If the time prescribed was not reached the contractor lost one dollar, if he missed the connecting mail he lost double the amount allowed for one trip (unavoidable actions accepted).

The Georgia mail to St. Stephens arrived twice a week in 1819. This route is believed to have been from Ft. Mitchell by Ft. Bainbridge, Ft. Jackson, Burnt Corn Springs, Ft. Claiborne and the town of Jackson to St. Stephens. This route was approved by an act of Congress on April 20, 1818.

The 1819 post route advertisements contained No. 60--From Burnt Corn to Blakeley, one round trip every two weeks, No. 61--Burnt Corn to Conecuh Courthouse (Sparta) once a week, a distance of twelve miles, one round trip on Wednesday. This route also connected Sparta with Ft. Crawford. The contracts were to begin January 1, 1820 and end December 31, 1822.

Before postal service was inaugurated by the Federal government in this area the mail was transported at very irregular intervals by special messengers employed by a government official or post commander, and civilian letters were included in the deliveries; however these were few in the early days of settlement.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL (Prediction in 1917):

"Coal and oil are strictly limited in quantity. We can take the coal out of a mine but we can never put it back. We can draw oil from subterranean reservoirs, but we can never refill them again....Alcohol makes a beautiful, clean, and efficient fuel and can be manufactured very cheaply."