

ECHOES

The Newsletter of the Escambia County
Historical Society
June 2005 - Vol. 32, No. 6
Editor, Ranelia Holley

The June Meeting: Tuesday, June 28, 2005 at 3:00 p. m.
in the Thomas E. McMillan Museum on the Jefferson
Davis Community College Campus.
The Program – Show and Tell.

The July Program –

There is a change in the July 26 ECHS program. Robert Thrower with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, originally scheduled for July has been rescheduled for October 25th. Instead, the Society is indeed fortunate that Nevin Heller, owner of The Flomaton Antique Auction in Flomaton, Alabama will speak to us about the history of the auction, the historic location of the auction house, and a bit on the history of Flomaton.

The Flomaton Antique Auction is known regionally and nationally. People come in from the Carolinas to Texas and from Kentucky to the Southeast. For more information on The Flomaton Antique Auction, check out there website at www.FlomatonAntiqueAuction.com
The next scheduled auctions are August 5th and September 3rd.

Genographic Project - Ann Biggs-Williams sent us this item of interest from the May issue of National Geographic:

"Trace your own genetic journey back to the dawn of humanity. National Geographic and IBM are embarking on a groundbreaking research project, along with field research support provided by the Waitt Family Foundation that will help us "map" the history of human migration from its earliest origins to the places we live today. And you can be part of it. Ultimately, the findings will enhance our understanding of humanity; who we are, where we came from, and how our individual genetic families relate to the rest of the human race. As a participant in the Genographic Project, you'll even be able to trace the journey of your ancestors over the past 50,000 years. To find out more or to order your own Genographic Participation Kit, visit www.nationalgeographic.com/genographic. National geographic's net proceeds support vital exploration, conservation, research, and educational programs."

The Two Way Trip

The following story depicts the difficulty of travel in the early years of the automobile: muddy roads, cars that were hard to start, and few people who knew how to drive well.



Fig. 1. Picture of a Model T.

The author and first person narrator of “The Two Way Trip” is Herman Merritt, a relative of Escambia County Historical Society member Paul Merritt. Oran and Kate Merritt are Paul Merritt’s great grand-parents. The story is reprinted by permission of the author. He wrote the following introduction:

My dad wrote this story about 1988. He was raised in Muscogee. The grandpa and grandma in the story are Oran and Kate Merritt. The trip is from Muscogee to Atmore – a distance of about 34 miles. Shortly after this trip to see her daughter, Minnie Bowman, Kate died. I suspect she knew her time was short before the trip began since she was under a doctor’s care for many months before her death on 21 Sep 1922. Here’s a picture of Kate and Oran in their younger days in the yard of their home in Muscogee.



Fig. 2. Picture of Kate and Oran Merritt.

THE TWO WAY TRIP
By
Herman Arthur Merritt

It was just before my twelfth birthday and right after Grandpa bought his squeaky, new 1922 Ford flivver that he and Grandma decided that he had learned to drive well enough for them to make the trip to visit Aunt Minnie.

Now Aunt Minnie lived just over the Alabama-Florida line, about sixty miles as the crow flies from Muscogee, Florida, but by the roads we had to travel, no telling how far. But, since it had been quite a while since Grandma and Grandpa had visited their oldest daughter and her family, they were willing to risk an automobile trip.

It was the middle of December and the weather was freezing. Grandma got out the old buffalo lap robe and some bricks to be heated and wrapped in blankets for foot warmers. And Grandpa got out the rain curtains for the flivver and found one of the isinglass windows was cracked out so he had to patch it with a piece of wool horse blanket. That shut out some of the light inside the flivver but was better than a hole to let the cold wind blow in.

As he snapped the last curtain in place, Grandpa remembered that we had better fill the gasoline tank so he closed the radiator drain cock, which I had opened the night before to drain the radiator so it wouldn't freeze and burst, and filled the radiator with hot water that Grandma had heated. Then he poured the rest on the engine manifold to warm it up for a quicker start.

Grandpa let me drive him down to the company store and while he went in to see about getting some gasoline I crawled under the engine and checked the oil cocks then took the front seat out to get to the gasoline tank. Mr. Sharp, the store manager, came out with a big funnel covered with chamois skin. He said that was to strain out any water that might be in the gasoline and it was a good thing, too, because when the tank got full there was about a cup full of water pooled up on the chamois cover. It took four gallons to fill the tank. Grandpa gave Mr. Sharp a silver dollar and got fifty-two cents change. He handed me the pennies for four jaw breakers.

Meanwhile, Grandma had baked a big fruit cake and some potato pies that she put in a big basket. When we got back home, she was frying a chicken to take along to eat on the way. She had already made arrangements with Mr. Ledbetter across the lane to feed the chickens and the pig. She said that the cat could catch a rabbit or two to keep her going.

It had been decided at the last minute that I could go along, for school would be out the next week for the Christmas holidays and I would only miss two days. And also Grandma was afraid that Grandpa might need some help with the driving because he still talked to the flivver like he did to his old buggy horse, Dexter, especially when he wanted to stop. And also because he still insisted on straightening out all the deep, crooked ruts in the sand beds in the roads. That had caused him to knock down some small pine trees and a few fence posts and had created the need for lots of shoveling to get unstuck. He always carried a well worn short handled shovel for that purpose.

We were up at four o'clock Wednesday morning. Grandma fixed ham and eggs, grits, hot biscuits with cane syrup, and her fresh homemade butter. The cold wind snapped at my pants leg as I stepped off the front porch. A blanket of white frost covered

the ground. Grandpa refilled the radiator with hot water and poured the extra over the engine manifold. While the engine warmed up, we loaded everything and climbed in.

It was daylight now and we headed off down the lane crunching frost under our tires as we went. By the time we got to the hard road we were going so fast I thought sure we would turn over when Grandpa made the curve. Grandma shouted, "Oran, don't go so fast," but he paid no attention and pulled the spark and gas levers down about half open. He could see through the top half of the wind shield but frost covered up the bottom part so I couldn't see the road. I glanced out the curtain window. Goats and chickens slipped and slid and squawked across the ice in the ditch on the edge of the road trying to get out of Grandpa's way. Even before we got to the sand bed on the other side of the rail road tracks, I could see the deep ruts. And by the time we hit the bottom of the hill I knew we were going too fast but I didn't dare to say anything. I looked at Grandpa. His jaw was set as he clinched the steering wheel. When the front wheels hit the deep rut he couldn't hold it straight. The wheels jumped out of the ruts and sank into the loose sand stopping us so suddenly Grandma flew over the seatback and hung head down between Grandpa and me. She yelled, "Oran, be careful." The sudden stop killed the engine.

After quieting Grandma down, Grandpa got out and tried to crank the engine but he had pulled the choke wire out and the engine flooded it was so hot. Grandpa was also getting hot now and he tossed his felt hat up on the hood and pulled his Sunday coat off and threw it in the front seat. He sniffed real hard and a drop of sweat dripped off the end of his nose as he muttered something that made grandma say, "Oran," so I got out and he climbed in while I scrambled around front to crank the engine. It had cooled off some now and started with the first crank. Before I could get in he had pulled the gasoline and spark levers all the way down. Wide open now, the engine roared like the buzz saw down at the mill. His hat vibrated across the hood and fell in the sand. Grandpa pushed the low gear pedal down hard and the flivver jumped and bucked up and down several times and choked out again with a sharp cough.

Grandpa's face glowed red now as he climbed back out, sweat running down his forehead. He loosened his tie and unbuttoned his collar. I said, "Grandpa, let me try it now." He picked up his hat and glared at the flivver for a second before he nodded, "All right."

I grabbed the shovel and dug out the loose sand behind the wheels, cranked it up, pushed the reverse pedal and backed it right out. This made Grandpa madder but Grandma talked him into letting me drive for a while until he cooled off. By following the ruts we went right on through the sand bed without any trouble.

The road was bumpy and full of holes and poor Grandpa was having it pretty rough. But shortly we hit the state road which was much better traveling and Grandpa was soon snoozing and snoring softly. Things went along pretty good until we got to Cow Devil Hill. Grandpa woke up just as we reached it and decided he wanted to drive again.

Now Cow Devil Hill is the longest and steepest hill in this part of the country - over two miles from the top to the bottom and up the other side and if it rains much it washes lots of holes in the road and sometimes if the creek is flooded the water is over the bridge. And the road is so crooked you can't see the bridge until you get right to it. I pulled up the high gear lever to neutral and braked to a stop leaving the engine running

which Grandpa has never learned to do and crawled over him as he slid under the steering wheel and down the hill we went.

Sure enough the rains had washed holes and gullies in the road but Grandpa paid no attention to them. Once in a while he would say, "Whoa," and pull back on the steering wheel but kept going. As we got farther down, though, the holes got bigger and when we hit a real bad one it threw Grandma clear over the seatback again. She was holding on to the seatback with one hand and the roof support ribs with the other. Half standing up, I had caught her just before her head bumped the windshield. Her hat covered her face so she couldn't see and she was yelling in a muffled voice, "Slow down. Slow down." But Grandpa paid no attention to her. I struggled with her hat and finally got her back in her seat. She was holding her hat on and crying when we sailed out of the last curve at the bottom of the hill and she screamed all the way across the bridge as we careened from rail to rail so Grandpa pulled off the road onto a grass plot and killed the engine.

We finally got Grandma upright and out of the back seat. She was still fussing about some of the flowers on her hat being broken up, when Grandpa said to me, "Come on. Let's go over there behind those bushes and bleed our lizards."

There was a big oak tree behind the bushes with acorns scattered all over the ground and just before I could get my pants unbuttoned a covey of quails flew up and scared me so bad I wet my pants a little bit but I didn't say anything about it.

Grandpa pulled out his watch and said, "We're about half way there and it's almost twelve o'clock." While Grandma was getting lunch ready, I crawled down under the flivver and checked the oil cocks again and Grandpa found a tin can and topped off the radiator with creek water. Then he kicked the tires all around to see if they were still hard. We ate our lunch on the creek bank. After the fourth piece of chicken I began to look for the potato pie but Grandma made me eat the neck before I could have a piece. When I tossed the neck bone into the creek, a big bass struck it just as it hit the water, making such a splash that it got Grandma wet. She screamed like it hurt her.

The trip up the hill went a little better. After charging it in high gear and almost choking the engine down, Grandpa had to use the low gear pedal all the way to the top. By the time we reached the top, the radiator was spewing white clouds of steam into the cold air so we pulled off the road again to let it cool.

Grandma climbed out to pick some dried wild flowers on the side of the road and had not gone far when she let out a scream. I ran to see what was wrong with her. She had thrown her flowers over her head and was pointing to the ground. A little spreading adder not over a foot long had come out of his hole in the ground to sun himself. I assured her that it would not hurt her and picked up her flowers and handed them to her, but she decided that she did not want them now.

The engine had cooled down when we got back so I cranked it up and we took off. We were in hilly country now. Every time we rolled over one crest another one was waiting right behind it. Buzzards circled over the valleys and droves of robins and black birds drifted across the sun like dark clouds in an otherwise cloudless sky. Then we turned off the state road to a real good county road, hard and smooth, but very narrow. Two automobiles would have had a hard time passing. Great stands of virgin long leaf pine trees flanked us throwing the road into almost complete shade. Squirrels raced up and down the trunks and leaped from limb to limb.

Grandpa was enjoying driving. Then the road got real crooked with lots of sharp curves. As we rounded an especially sharp bend, we ran right into the middle of a flock of wild turkeys feeding on pine mass. They scattered in all directions. That set me to watching the road for anything that moved when ahead I saw a bunch of buzzards feeding on the carcass of a deer. I told Grandpa about them so he slowed down a little and blew the horn. They hopped around in all directions and some of them flew off and one flew into the windshield right in front of me. Feathers went everywhere. I looked back at Grandma. She had both arms over her face and her head down. Grandpa looked like he had not even seen it. My side of the windshield was a mess but we kept going.

Soon the road ran along between two fences. We finally passed a few farm houses and barns and Grandpa said, "Farming country." In a little while we saw a man plowing a field, the first person we had seen all day. Grandpa stuck his arm out from under the curtain to wave at him and almost ran into the fence. Grandma said, "Oran, pay attention to the driving and quit trying to wave at people." Then we passed a field of cotton stubbles with a big pond in it. Tall weeds about waist high covered the road, all except for three ruts made by one horse wagons. Grandpa had the throttles about half open when we hit something that almost turned us over. He lost control and ran into the fence and knocked down some posts before he could stop.

We looked back and saw a big black hog that must have weighed at least two hundred and fifty pounds turning around and around and squealing in surprise. A bloody spot on his neck shined in the sun. He must have been down in a mud hole right in the middle of the road and raised up just in time for our back axle to hit him. It skinned him up pretty bad. By the time Grandpa got the bumper and front fender untangled from the fence and went back to look at the hog, it had wallowed back down in the mud again and didn't look so bad but Grandpa insisted on finding out who the hog belonged to so he could pay him for damages to the fence and the hog.

We continued on down the road passing several ponds close to the road and then we came to a big pond that extended out into the road. It looked pretty bad to me but Grandpa didn't even slow down. Red mud splashed up ten feet in the air and splattered all over the fence posts. We hit some rough spots but Grandpa dropped her into low gear and kept going. It got deeper and bumpier then the back wheels began to slip making it harder to steer. The back end kept sliding from one side to the other. We were almost through when the back wheels dropped into a deep hole and began to spin. Grandpa gave it more throttle but we were up to the running boards stuck hard and fast.

I jumped out and landed in a hole over knee deep and splattered my Sunday clothes in mud. Grandma started to crying when Grandpa stepped out, slipped, and landed in a sitting position with mud up to his elbows. The expression on his face was something fierce as he staggered upright scooping the mud out of his coat pockets. Just then a two-horse team came around a bend in the road with a man walking behind them.

They came right up to the edge of the pond and stopped. The man yelled, "Pull you out for two dollars." Grandpa was so exasperated he just glared at him but Grandma stuck her head out from the curtains and said, "All right. Come on."

He had rubber boots on so he waded right in, hooked his team to the front end of the flivver, and pulled us right out. Grandpa still had not said a word. He reached in his pocket and pulled out two muddy one dollar bills and handed them to the man. We got handfuls of grass and straw and cleaned up as best we could. The flivver was a mess.

The road was mostly red clay now as we started out again, and when we rounded the bend the horse team had come around, there was a farm house and a fork in the road. Grandpa was not sure which fork to take. Grandma said, "Let's ask at the farm house." but he said, "No. We'll take the one to the right."

Well we went down that one for quite a way before Grandpa decided it was the wrong way so we stopped and were turning around when one of the back wheels slipped over into the ditch. The flivver was leaning over so far towards the ditch that Grandma had to hold on to the other side but Grandpa was not concerned. Even though the ditch was full of holes and bumps, he opened the throttle all the way and pushed the low gear pedal and tried to steer back into the road. The flivver spun dirt and whined and bucked as it skittered along, half on the road and half in the ditch. Grandma was holding on the best she could. Finally we hit a big bump and the rear wheel jumped back up on the road and she yelled, "Stop. Stop."

Grandpa was getting pretty nervous now so he stopped and grandma talked him into letting me drive for a while. When we got back to the farm house, there, tied to the fence, was the team that had pulled us out of the bog. They still had muddy feet and legs. Grandpa looked them over for a second then sloshed along the fence to the gate and rapped on it with a stick. A mean looking dog scrambled out from under the house barking and looking every which way for trouble. It finally spotted Grandpa and the stick and backed up several steps and barked some more. Then a lady with a big brown bonnet and an apron on came out to the gate. After she told him that he had taken the wrong road, he asked to see her husband, but she said he was taking a nap and she was not to wake him unless she heard an automobile stuck in the pond.

It was getting late afternoon now. The trees cast long shadows down the road as we bounced and squeaked along about half throttle. I saw way up ahead a horse and wagon coming towards us. The horse was prancing around and side stepping, and as I watched, it bucked once and tried to turn around in the middle of the road. A boy about my age was trying hard to keep him going straight. Then he started rearing up on his hind legs. Grandpa told me to pull over to the side of the road and turn the engine off. "That horse is afraid of the flivver."

He eased out and edged slowly up to the horse talking real soft to it as he went. Then he took hold of the bridle and pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket and gently tied it over the horse's eyes and guided him past the flivver and took the handkerchief off. The boy did not say a word all this time, but when Grandpa let go of the bridle, the horse went calmly on down the road.

Grandpa cranked the engine and climbed back in saying, "I hope this has taught you a lesson you can use all your life. Whenever you meet a horse on a narrow road like that, you have got to get out and help him by. Horses won't ever get used to automobiles. There just aren't enough of them around."

When we came to another farm house down the road, he had me to stop and let him drive. The sun was beginning to sink into the western horizon. Overhead, great flocks of migratory birds all streamed southward. It was a pretty sight. Grandpa said, "There's the state line. It won't be long now."

I looked and looked but all I ever saw was a rabbit run across the road. I thought he was pulling my leg because I did not think there were any lions in this part of the country, but when I looked at him, he looked serious, so I didn't say anything.

The sun had just dropped out of sight and the sky was red and purple, and the air was getting colder when we pulled up in front of Aunt Minnie's house. I jumped out and ran up on the front porch. Grandpa was helping Grandma get the things out of the flivver. I had my hand on the front door knob when a little girl came out of the house next door and stood spraddle-legged, picking her nose and looking at me.

"They ain't home," she said. "They all left early this morning on the train going to see their Grandma and Grandpa down in Muscogee."

<u>Books for Sale</u>	Mailed	Regular Price
<u>A History of Escambia County</u>	\$55.00	\$50.00
<u>Headstones and Heritage</u>	\$40.00	\$35.00
<u>Escambia Historical Society Cookbook</u>	\$10.00	\$ 5.00

Get in Touch with Us

Address: Escambia County Historical Society, P. O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427;

Phone: 251-809-1612; **Email:** Ranny1@earthlink.net

Membership: \$15.00. **Clip the following form and send to Treasurer: Peggy Bracken, 602 Edgewood Drive, Brewton, AL 36426.**

Membership Renewal/Application Form

Name _____

First	Middle	Last
--------------	---------------	-------------

Address _____

Street	City	State	Zip
---------------	-------------	--------------	------------

Phone _____

Email _____
