

## The Meeting

Tuesday, August 28, 2007

Thomas E. McMillan Museum

3:15 p. m

### The August Program

Dr. Alan Brown, Professor of English from the University of West Alabama, will present a program entitled "Alabama's Most Famous 19th Century Outlaws."

The presentation which will focus on **Railroad Bill, Rube Burrow** and **Steve Renfroe** will include a text panel exhibition.

Each panel will include a photograph of the outlaw.

*This program is presented through the Alabama Humanities Foundation.*



*Dr. Alan Brown*

Dr. Brown, who has published and lectured extensively in the field of American Literature, has, for the past few years, developed his interest in Southern folklore.

This interest resulted in several collections of Southern ghost stories,

including The Face in the Window and Other Alabama Ghostlore (1996), Shadows and Cypress (2000), Haunted Places in the American South (2002), and Stories from the Haunted South (2004).

He has presented a previous program to ECHS on ghosts, appropriately it was the October program and the setting was a local cemetery. Dr. Brown's latest book is Ghost Hunters of the South.

Now, as can be seen by this presentation, Dr. Brown is interested in another part of Southern history, the outlaw.



Steve Renfroe, Outlaw Sheriff

Volume 34, Number 8

August 2007

### Inside this issue:

-Minutes of the June Meeting	2
Where the Heck is Othite	3
New Donations	3
New of Members	4
Other News and Announcements	4
Brown Bowen and Brewton Petition	6
Brown Bowen and Bob Hardy, Desperados	7
The General Pushes On	8
Two Notorious Sons and an Honest Father	7
Escambia County Bad Man	9

### The September Program

**Debbie Russell, Environmental Planning Coordinator with the Conecuh National Forest, will present the September 25th program entitled, "History of the Conecuh National Forest and the Longleaf EcoSystem."**

# Minutes for the July Meeting

**President Ann Biggs-Williams** opened the meeting by welcoming members and guests. She recognized member **Irene Lister** (nee McArthur) from Pensacola and welcomed back members **Pat McArthur**, **Kathryn Wilkinson**, and **Annie Smith**.

Ann recognized and welcomed **Dr. Susan McBride**, president of JDCC, state representative **Alan Baker**, and visitor **Allen Settle**.

The president passed around a photo (which had appeared in the July newsletter), by **Eugene Allen Smith**, showing Dr. Smith's buggy on a trail in woods near Bradley. The photo shows Dr. Smith's son in the Studebaker buggy which was Dr. Smith's vehicle for his geologic surveys of the state.

She noted that there will be updates

from **Frances Robb** (who presented the program in June on Dr. Smith's photographs) concerning her book on photographs and their historic and cultural importance

The president announced that the society is interested in information on **Julie Downing Pope**, a Brewton native who with her husband founded and developed Cypress Gardens.

Also, members of his family are searching for information on the grave of a man named Benson, who was a telegrapher in Pollard during the Civil War.

Finally, Ann is interested in developing an article on **Abbott Downing** from Brewton, an artist who taught art in her home and is remembered as being a great positive influence on those who were in her classes.

Two financial issues which the society will be considering in the future are the possibility of a credit card for the society and increasing the amount for a lifetime membership to be in line with the increase in dues.

**Susan Crawford's** treasurer's report as given at the meeting and the minutes of the June meeting as printed in the July newsletter were approved.

At the **conclusion of business**, **vice-president Darryl Searcy** introduced guest speaker Della Scott Ireton, who presented a program on the Emmanuel Point Shipwreck.

Following the program, guests went outside to the front of the museum and enjoyed ice cream treats from an ice cream truck, courtesy of hostesses **Margaret Collier** and **Evelyn Franklin**.



*Members enjoy ice cream at the July Meeting*

## Where the Heck Is Otehite?

*By Paul Merritt*

If you read through Brewton newspapers from the 1885 to 1900 period, occasionally you will read where Miss So-and-So from Otehite was in Brewton visiting friend or family or doing some shopping.

Otehite, where the heck is that?

Well, it turns out Otehite was five miles south of the Alabama line into Florida and about one mile west of the Black Water River on what is now Kennedy Bridge Road.

This is where the stage coach road crossed the Blackwater, thus the community. My ancestors (maybe they

are?) were Mashburns and moved into this area from Andalusia about 1850.

The town eventually died out when the railroads replaced the wagons and stagecoaches. Per some of my family, there is an Otehite community cemetery somewhere around there. Some say it is about a half mile south of Kennedy Bridge Road, in the woods on the west side of the Blackwater.

Unfortunately, most of the folks who currently live in this area have never heard of Otehite and don't know of the cemetery.

The general area is called Beaver Creek today.



*Society Members at the July Meeting. To the left of the picture is the exhibit of Eugene Allen Smith's photographs taken on his surveys of Alabama as state geologist.*

## New Donations to the Museum and Alabama Room

**ECHS Member Jacob Lowrey** has donated a Christmas booklet to the museum that was used as a promotional by May Candy Company of Brewton at one time. The booklet illustrates Christmas around the world. Jacob's ancestors ran the Burnt Corn Creek Store and traded with May Candy Company in Brewton.

**Judith Jolly of Pensacola** has donated a microfilm copy of "The Minutes of the Florida Baptist Association's Pensacola Bay District from 1887--1959."



*A donation by Robert Winther. This is part of Mr. Winther's father's estate left to Mr. Winther some years ago.*

*It appears to be a pocket ashtray.*

---

## News of Members

---

We welcome as a new member **Robert H. Winther** of Brewton. Mr. Winther has made numerous donations to the museum, including the post-World War I postcards and the shirt with the Robbins and McGowin label, items which were featured in the July newsletter.

**James Follin Smith Jr.** of Montgomery, Alabama has upgraded his ECHS membership to lifetime status.

**Missy Pershina** of Fairhope sent a donation to the Society.

**ECHS member Betty Robinson Hoomes** and husband recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a

reception at the Fellowship Hall of the Brewton Church of Christ.

**Dr. Susan McBride**, President of JDCC, attended the July ECHS program about the shipwreck at Emanuel Point. Dr. McBride and her husband Reid are both scuba divers.

**Kay Ross** continues to recuperate after her wreck and foot surgery. The Society continues to send get well wishes. Kay and husband **Joe Ross** are both ECHS members.



*Jacquie Stone and her granddaughter filing clippings in the Alabama Room.*

*A big thank you to Jacquie who consistently comes in and helps with the cataloguing of material.*

*There is always work to be done in the Alabama room and any and all volunteers to help are always welcome. Jerry Simmons says "please help."*

---

## Other News and Announcements

---

**The Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance** has announced that the Alabama Cemetery Preservation Bill was approved! The legislature passed it and the governor signed the bill on June 14, 2007. It could become law as soon as September 1, 2007.

---

**The ACPA has worked towards this goal since 2003.** Details of this important announcement may be found at <[www.alabama-cemetery-preservation.com](http://www.alabama-cemetery-preservation.com)>.

---

**The biennial meeting of the Bartram Trail Conference** will be held in neighboring Baldwin County on October 26--28 at the new Five Rivers Delta Resource Center located on the causeway, just east of Mobile. The Resource Center serves as the new terminus of the Bartram Canoe Trail.

<[www.bartramcanoetrail.com](http://www.bartramcanoetrail.com)>.

**William Bartram** traveled 2500 miles in seven modern states back in the 1770's. In his journals he wrote about nature and science. His works are a primary sources of history on

the early Creek, Cherokee and Seminole People.

**In his book, William Bartram's Travels**, Brad Sanders writes that Francis Harper believes Bartram and his traveling companions may have traveled down the east side of the Big Escambia Creek and crossed downstream, taking a connecting road on the Mobile Path as shown on David Taitt's map of 1772.

**For more info on the conference**, visit the website

*(Continued on page 5)*



---

## Other News and Announcements *continued*

---

(Continued from page 4)

<[www.bartramcanoetrail.com](http://www.bartramcanoetrail.com)>.

---

**A Reminder - The Memorial Plaque in the Elvira McMillan Parlor** in the Thomas E. McMillan Museum is one way to honor a deceased friend or relative.

**Peggy Bracken is the Memorial Plaque Chair.** Cost of memorials are \$25 and should include full name and birth and death dates of name of person being honored. Mail info and check to ECHS address on Newsletter.

---

**A suggestion for a gift idea:**

**The Society has books for sale**, listed on the last page of the Newsletter. Recently, a copy of Annie Water's History of Escambia County was purchased as a retirement gift for Atmore native The Reverend Albert Kennington who was honored August 12 at Mo-

bile's Trinity Episcopal Church. Reverend Kennington will conduct his last service as Rector of Trinity Church in Mobile on August 26.

**Sherry Johnston of Evergreen** will be teaching a **Genealogy Class at Reid State** in Evergreen this fall. The class has tentatively been set for Tuesday evenings from 6 to 8 p.m. The cost is \$30, which includes handouts, tips, instruction, and great ideas to learn to manage and organize family history. Also there will be tips on research.

**If you are interested in the genealogy class**, please call Sherry at the Evergreen Library at 251-578-2670 or E-mail her at [canebrakesociety@yahoo.com](mailto:canebrakesociety@yahoo.com)

**Also, later this fall, possibly around October/November**, Sherry will be teaching a class about **Scrapbooking Your Heritage Memory Book**. For more information on this class, contact Sherry using the information listed above.

---



*Della Visits with Tom McMillan at the July Meeting*



*Ann gives copy of History of Escambia County to July Speaker*

# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Brown Bowen and the Brewton Petition

By Jerry Simmons

In keeping with our speaker's topic for this month, we're including a couple of items submitted some time ago by member Buddy Mitchell. In browsing through some archives, Buddy ran across a couple of documents regarding the not-so-well known Brown Bowen.

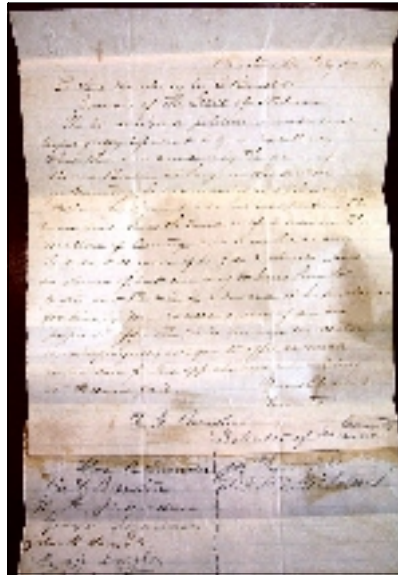
One document gives his description and the other is a petition from some Escambia County citizens pleading with then Alabama governor George S. Houston to issue a warrant for his arrest. Both were signed by Escambia County, Alabama Solicitor E.G. Brewton.

The text of the petition follows:

*Brewton Ala Feby 3rd 1875*

*To His Excellency Geo. S. Houston Governor of the State of Alabama*

*The undersigned petitioners would*



*The Petition*

*most respectfully represent to Your Excellency that there is a murderer by the name of Brown Bowen at large in this section of country. He was arrested and placed in Pollard*

*Jail and made his escape from the said jail. He is the murderer of 3 men in this section of country and 3 in Texas and he will kill more if he gets a chance and we know of but one way to bring him to justice and that is by a reward to be proclaimed for him by Your Excellency and if you see proper to offer the said reward we would most respectfully ask you to offer as much as you can for his apprehension and delivery to Pollard Jail.*

*Yours [sic] Obedient Servants*

*(s) E. G. Brewton*

*Solicitor of Escambia County*

*Thos. B. Snowden, H. Harold, E. F. Brewton, D. N. Nicholson, George Snowden, John M. Arends, S. R. Douglas, L. M. Watson, T. S. Sowell, P. H. Yost, J. Schirot, P. H. M. Tippins, S. B. Evans, M. Gibson, J. E. Deen, Halpay ?, W. L. Potter ?, E. Downing, I. C. Croker ?, B. B. Brewton, W. Crook, W. L. Mudge ?,*

Bowen's description:

*Description*

*Brown Bowen*

*Height about 5 feet 8 inches*

*Age about 32 years*

*Complexion light*

*Black eyes light hair*

*Whereabouts supposed to be lurking around Pollard Escambia County Ala*

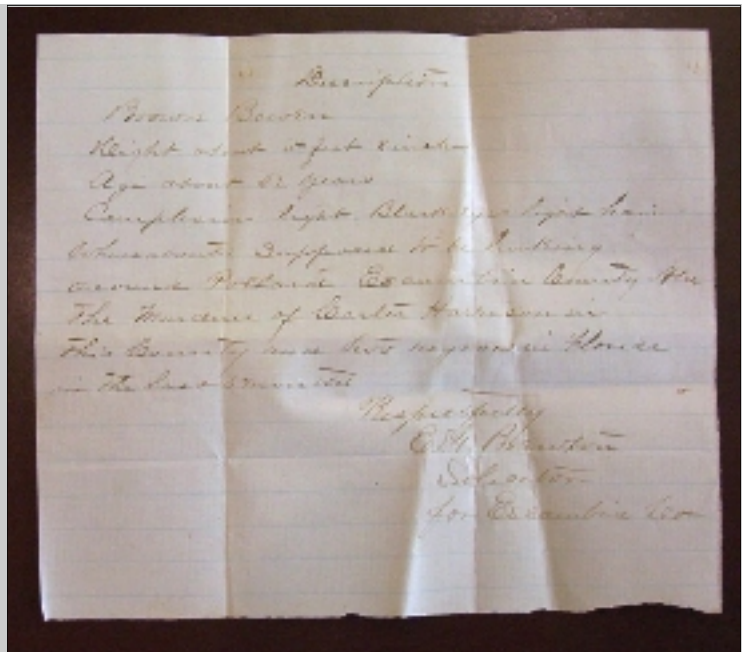
*The Murderer of Carter Harrison in this county and two negroes in the last 6 months*

*Respectfully*

*E.G. Brewton*

*Solicitor*

*for Escambia County Ala*



# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## **BROWN BOWEN,**

### **DESPERADO**

By R. W. Brooks

Contributed by Gertrude J. Stephens

Copied from The Atmore Advance

October 15, 1931

From ECHS Quarterly

Vol 1 No 1 1973

*Old Timer tells of desperado in this section, Brown Bowen, born near Walnut Hill; operated in Texas.*

About the worst desperado that was ever in this section was Brown Bowen. He was born ten miles from Atmore near Walnut Hill and his mother and father were loved and respected by all who came in contact with them. And as far as I know the boy was an exemplary child, but he went off to Texas when the West was in the making and got in with a bad set, as boys will. He learned their ways and got to be an expert with a gun and a crack shot and before he left Texas he had killed several men.

When I first knew him at Bluff Springs, Florida, it was 1874, when he returned from the West and took up his abode in the upper end of Santa Rosa County. just across Escambia County from Bluff Springs, where the town of Jay is now located, which at that time was about as isolated a section as there was in this part of the country. He married an estimable young woman of that county and one son came of that union, who turned out to be a splendid young man. He secured a position on the railroad and got to be a conductor and died in service. Brown gathered around him a class of men like himself, among them Bob Hardy and Shep Hardy and

a lot of others all of whom are now dead.

When I went to Bluff Springs in 1872, there were four saloons in the burg and Brown Bowen and his crowd were constant patrons of them. When sober he was a friendly sort of man but when drinking which was often, he had an ugly temper and was dangerous. He lived over the river where he made his living mostly by hauling logs to Bluff Springs Mill and selling them. The logs he sold mostly

*"When sober he was a friendly sort of man but when drinking which was often, he had an ugly temper and was dangerous."*

were the property of a local mill which was 15 miles further down the river, but a little matter like that never touched his [conscience].

So far as I know he never killed any white man in this section but several [blacks] were killed by him. His undoing came about when he went to Flomaton and tried to kill one of the [blacks] who was in the employ of Col. Chipley, who was superintendent of the railroad. Mr. Chipley saw one of his [workers] coming toward him with a white man after him with a pistol.

Chipley was a large man, the athletic type, and with one movement he jerked the pistol out of the white man's hand and beat him over the head with it. The white man was Brown Bowen and he swore vengeance against Chipley and intended to carry out his threats to kill him at the first opportunity.

Chipley had a detective from Texas where Bowen was wanted, and after a great deal of strategy he was arrested on the west bank of Escambia River, two miles from Flomaton and carried to Texas where he was tried for the murder of Thomas Haldeman and convicted and sentenced to be hung. But the people heard that his friends were going to attempt a rescue, so before the day set for execution he was taken out and hung May 18, 1878 at Curea, Texas where a crowd estimated at 2500 attended. Thus ended the life of one of the worst men ever to afflict this country.

His wife, who remarried, just passed away a few weeks ago. She was a splendid woman, loved and respected by all who knew her. Of his companions, Bob Hardy was hung in Texas. Shep Hardy was killed by a passenger train at Perdido Trestle a few miles South of Atmore.

## **BOB HARDY,**

### **DESPERADO**

By R. W. Brooks

Contributed by Gertrude J. Stephens

Copied from The Atmore Advance,

October 22, 1931

*Bob Hardy was noted desperado of this section. Lets innocent man die for brutal crime which he committed.*

In a former article I mentioned the name of Bob Hardy as being a companion of Brown Bowen. I knew him well. In those days I had the happy faculty of getting along with anybody, and while I did not mix with them much, they were all friends of mine in a way. At least they were always friendly with me.

*(Continued on page 8)*



# The ECHS *Journal* Section

---

## Bowen and Hardy, Local Desperados *(continued)*

---

*(Continued from page 7)*

Bob Hardy was one of the toughest characters I ever knew. He could drink more whiskey and carry it, talk bigger, and swear the loudest, and tell more smutty yarns than any man I ever came in contact with. He was born and reared in Santa Rosa County, Florida and his holding out place was where the beautiful town of Jay is now located. Stealing hogs was most of his business and patronizing saloons kept him busy.

In order that the reader may know the man, I will have to shift the scene to a place near Leaksville in Green County, Miss. A young man, who shall be nameless, went from Mobile to Green County to see his girl on a certain Sunday afternoon.

Sunday morning they started to attend church a few miles away from where the girl lived, and the other young people went on to church, while the young man and his girl were to come later in his buggy. But it seems they had a lover's quarrel and the girl got out of the buggy and refused to go with him and he drove off alone. The people at the church saw him go by on his way to Mobile and later the girl started to church on foot but never arrived there.

Tuesday morning her dead body was found floating in a pond by the road and the authorities sent to Mobile and arrested the young man for the murder. He protested his innocence but was tried and on circumstantial evidence was convicted and

*"Bob Hardy was one of the toughest characters I ever knew. He could drink more whiskey and carry it, talk bigger, and swear the loudest, and tell more smutty yarns than any man I ever came in contact with."*

sentenced to be hung.

The night before the hanging, the sheriff, a kindly man, told the young man he had only eighteen hours to live and said, I want you to tell me if you are guilty or not. The young man raised his hand to heaven and swore he never harmed the girl and, had nothing to do with the murder. On the gallows next day, he asserted that he was being hung for something he did not do, but the law was carried out and an innocent man was rushed to eternity, a victim of circumstantial evidence and the evidence no doubt to the jury seemed conclusive, as he left the house with the girl, went the road to the church by the pond in

which her body was found. He was seen to go by the church without the girl on his way to Mobile and the jury was sure he was the guilty party.

Six months after this man was hung in Leaksville, Miss., Bob Hardy, the subject of this sketch, killed a man in a Texas town, having wandered out to that state and was arrested and tried for his life, was convicted and sentenced to be hung.

The sentence was being carried out when he asked the sheriff to let him confess some of the crimes he had committed and in that confession he said on a certain Sunday morning he was coming through Green County, Miss. and met a young lady alone on a lonely country road. He criminally assaulted her, killed her, and threw her body in a pond beside the road. The date was compared and it was found that the young lady was the same the young man was hung for in that town.

Thus ended the life of a man so far as I know that never followed an honest trail or did a good deed, but on the contrary, like Ishmael, his hand was against every man. Very few, if any, people are now living who know anything about these people I am writing about. These things happened nearly fifty years ago.

---

## The General Pushes on

Hearing the approach of his troops, General Andrew Jackson went up the road to meet them. Coming to a stream, he saw the wagons of several up-country traders stuck in the mud. On the other side of the creek, he saw several men lying on the ground.

Accosting the men who were tugging with the

stuck wheels, Jackson asked: "Why don't you ask those men across the branch to help you?"

"Oh," they said, "they say they are the staff of General Jackson".

Well, he said, "I am General Jackson and by the Eternal I will help you!" He then hastily put a shoulder to the wheels.

*Campbell's Colonial Sketches*



# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Two Notorious Sons and an Honest Father

This article by Jerry Simmons first appeared in the **Tri-City Ledger** for the Alger-Sullivan Historical Society in September 2006.

Many folks have heard of Rube Burrows – although more than one source claims it should be spelled "Burrow." But I'd say there are those who hadn't heard of the infamous train robber and killer at all before today.

Santa Rosa County, Florida has a partial claim on another legendary outlaw, John Wesley Hardin, but Burrow beat a lawman in a bet with sharp shooting in Milton about the time Hardin had made his reputation.

Vernon, Alabama, county seat of Lamar County, was the place of his birth, not ten miles as the crow flies, from the Mississippi state line. He was the oldest of four siblings raised by Allen and Emily Burrow. He and his brother, Jim, or "Buck," wearied of the life of poverty and made their way to Texas. There they bought a small farm which eventually served as a refuge for the criminal life ahead of them.

Rube and Buck were in the process of robbing a stagecoach when Rube noticed one of the passengers coughing in a fit of consumption. The man had only five silver dollars to his name and in a surprising show of compassion Burrow allowed the sick man to keep his money.

Two other men joined the brothers in their schemes and they soon raised the stakes from stagecoaches to trains. When holding up a train that had stopped for water, Burrow once more showed a softer side when he gave back a ruby ring to a small boy who said it was a gift from his dead mother.

With a penchant for anger at the slightest provocation, Rube was oddly not afraid to show a tender side of his nature. Most people around Lamar County were not fearful of the brothers when they came back home. Actually, they admired the Burrow Brothers. They were seen as "Robin Hoods," robbing from the rich and giving to the



poor. In fact, Rube bought new clothes for his relatives and lent them money when they needed it. He never robbed a poor man.

Although folks weren't afraid of Rube, they still didn't want to be robbed by him. A good bit of money was kept up at the Courthouse, and officials tried to figure out a safe place to keep it. Banks weren't secure and neither was the courthouse. They finally found the answer. They took the money from the Courthouse and carried it to Rube's father, Allen, who was known in the area as an honest man, despite the fact that two of his sons were notorious robbers. They figured that of all the places to keep the money safe, this was it because Rube would never rob from his own

father.

Later, Rube and Jim decided that being back in Lamar County was too dangerous, so they packed their belongings and went their separate ways; Rube headed for Birmingham, and Jim went to Montgomery. Shortly, Rube went back to Texas, and went on a spree of train robberies.

By this time, his description was sent out to railroads everywhere and a small army of railroad and Pinkerton detectives set out to capture him. He was trailed to Santa Rosa County, Florida, where rumor had it that he was in Milton on Christmas Day, 1889.

It was also a day for an annual shooting contest for a hundred-dollar prize, and a large crowd began milling around where the shooting was taking place. One of the detectives pursuing Rube, T.V. Jackson, impulsively decided to be a contestant.

At a hundred paces, the half-dollar-sized bull's eye must have been just a dot to the participants. The bull's eye hadn't been touched until Jackson placed three shots around its edge, close enough to win.

*(continued on page 8)*

# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Two Notorious Sons and an Honest Father *continued*

(Continued from page 9)

Then a man stepped forward to shoot against Jackson. His shots not only pierced the center of the target, but the last two shots went in the same hole as the first! The man took the hundred dollar prize and walked off.

Jackson was humiliated when he later found out the man was Rube Burrow himself! He dashed about trying to find him, to no avail. Burrow was lost in the crowd.

Three weeks later, Burrow was seen near Castleberry, Alabama, and the detectives tracked him to the Alabama River. The posse crossed the river near Demopolis and planned to catch him as he traveled north toward Vernon.

T.V. Jackson and John Mc Duffie, a landowner in that section of Alabama, came across two men working in a cotton field. McDuffie called out to them and asked if they'd seen a strange man with a rifle pass by recently.

They said they had – that a man came along about dark the night before and spent the night in an empty cabin about two hundred yards across the field from where they now stood.

Jackson offered the men, Hildreth and Marshall, a hundred dollars each to help capture Burrow. Jackson said, "That man, since he knows you two from yesterday, will let you come into the cabin. You'll have to have some excuse, like seeing if he wants some water." Jackson continued, "When you get in there, grab his gun, or he'll kill you both."

The two did as they were instructed. Hildreth was a huge man and wrestled Burrows to the floor when Marshall jerked the gun from his hands. The group, Jackson, McDuffie, Burrow, and a man named Carter rode the seven miles into Linden, Alabama, to place Burrow behind bars. Marshall and Hildreth walked behind; they wanted to be sure they got their money.

Before good daylight the next morning, Burrow tricked Hildreth and Marshall into handing him his bag, where he had previously stashed a .38 Smith and Wesson revolver. It was a gun Burrow had taken from an express messenger during a train robbery at Flomaton. Rube went next door where Carter was sleeping, to get his rifle back. When Carter came to the door carrying a lantern, he surprised Burrow by throwing it at him, and then he grabbed a gun

just inside the door.

Carter's first shot hit Burrow in the stomach and as he staggered and fell, he fired his pistol at Carter who narrowly avoided being fatally hit. Burrow died almost immediately.

Rube Burrow's body was shipped by train back to Lamar County. It was reported that on a stop in Birmingham thousands viewed the corpse and people snatched buttons from his coat, cut hair from his head and even his boots were carried away by people.

When Rube's father Allen met the train, the story goes that the train attendants threw the coffin at his feet. "He was a prized catch and they hauled him through town on the back of a wagon," said one observer. "He was photographed in his casket with his guns by his side."

Allen Burrow carried his son's body back to his home community near Vernon. One can only imagine the sadness that filled the old man's heart, knowing his son was reviled so.



*Burrow, pictured above, is noted for one of the South's most brazen train robberies which took place near Flomaton (less than half a mile from the train depot), Sept. 2, 1890. Burrow forced the engineer to stop the train on the trestle across Big Escambia Creek and escaped into the swamp afterward.*

# The ECHS *Journal* Section

## Escambia County Badman Leaves Legacy of Fact and Fiction

*The website Alabama Artsnotes that the author of this article, Burgin Mathews, interned with the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture during the summer of 1999. Railroad Bill was the subject of Mr. Mathews senior thesis at Vassar College.*

“In October of 1892, deputy sheriff Alan Brewton of Bluff Springs, Florida fired a shot at a turpentine camp worker who refused to register his rifle in accordance with the state’s license laws. The worker returned the shot, wounding one of Brewton’s men and fleeing into the swamps for escape.

“This man’s name was Morris Slater, but he was soon known across northern Florida and southern Alabama as Railroad Bill, gaining status as a hero of African-American folklore. Bill was famous for jumping freight trains and stealing goods, throwing cans of food out of boxcars and returning by foot to collect the loot. Then he’d sell the provisions cheaply, or, according to the popular story, simply give them to the poor.

“As the stories and ballads detailing his exploits grew, Railroad Bill’s life became surrounded by legend, so that the facts and the tales remain blurred today. Because of his ability to elude the law, he was believed by many to possess supernatural powers. Many believed he was a conjurer, trained in the powers of hoodoo, and that he could change himself into an animal, a trick he, reportedly, used to escape. Once Bill supposedly joined the sheriff’s pack of hounds in the shape of a dog and “chased himself” all the way to his girl friend’s house, where he remained as the posse and dogs continued their search.

“Legends arose that Bill could be killed only by a silver bullet, and that he could painlessly catch bullets in his hands. He was said to be so skilled with a gun that he could shoot a hole through a dime, and, according to one ballad’s verse, he sportingly “shot all the buttons off the brakeman’s coat.” Some people believed that simply touching him would bring luck.

“To others who tangled with Bill, however, his touch brought death, and he gained the reputation as a murderer as his career continued to unfold. Brewton sheriff Ed

McMillan took on the case of capturing Bill, and on July 3 of 1895 he found and cornered the outlaw, only to be shot and killed.

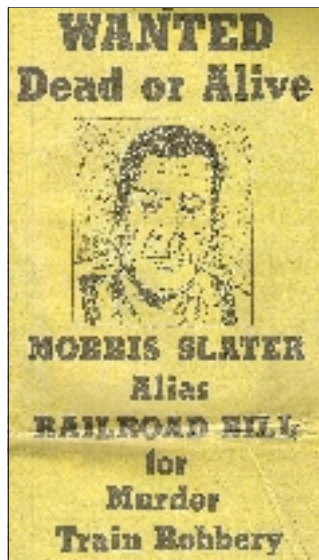
“Rewards were offered for Bill’s body, dead or alive, and the hunt escalated. Candidates for public office throughout south Alabama promised, in their speeches, to catch the villain. Several black detectives were hired to gain Bill’s confidence and capture him, but all failed. One detective by the name of Mark Stinson traveled with Bill for months without ever catching the outlaw with his

guard down, until finally his reports to the local officials stopped coming. Stinson was never seen nor heard from again.

”Railroad Bill’s career ended at last in Tidmore and Ward’s general store in Atmore. On March 7, 1896, he walked into the store to buy some food and was shot by Sheriff Leonard McGowan. McGowan’s bullet sent the outlaw to the floor, where the body was riddled by further shots to ensure that Bill was dead.

“But Railroad Bill’s story continued, even in death. His body was put on display in Montgomery, Brewton, and Pensacola, where visitors could pay 25 cents for a look. Souvenir hunters bought pictures of McGowan posed with the famous corpse, and even stripped the body itself of buttons, scraps of clothing, and bullet cartridges. And still the legends continued.

“The son of Sheriff McMillan, one popular story claimed, placed bitterweed in the dead man’s mouth as a symbol of his hatred and revenge. Another story explained how one of the men who tended the outlaw’s body was scratched and died of blood poisoning. Still others insisted that Railroad Bill did not die at all, but that he still roamed the piney woods and swamps, as a fox or an eagle or a hound, always laughing at the white society which believed him dead. As late as the Depression, stories circulated that the food some families received from federal relief was actually from Railroad Bill. Even today, Railroad Bill’s name looms large in the memory of Escambia County, an often-recalled symbol of the local history and lore.”



# FIRST CLASS MAIL DATED MATERIAL

THE NEWSLETTER FOR  
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Escambia County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 276  
Brewton, AL 36427  
Phone: 251-867-7332

E-mail: [escohis@escohis.org](mailto:escohis@escohis.org)

We're on the web!

[www.escohis.org](http://www.escohis.org)

<u>Books for Sale</u> Price	Mailed	Regular
<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
<u>Wildflowers of The Escambia CD</u>	\$17.50	\$15.00
<u>A Picture Story of Century DVD</u>	\$17.50	\$15.00
<u>Old 100 in Indiana DVD</u>	\$17.50	\$15.00
<u>Pictorial History of Brewton</u>	\$40.00	\$35.00

Notice that some pages are "Journal" pages. On these pages are longer and often more in-depth stories of interest usually found in the Society's *Journal*. You may expect at least 2 journal pages in each newsletter.

Due to rising costs and to keep membership rates the same, the membership voted to include journal-type pages in the newsletter instead of making a separate publication. We hope you enjoy this new format.

If you have a suggestion for a topic, or will help in research, please let us know!

Clip the following form and send to ECHS  
Treasurer, P.O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427.

## Membership Renewal/Application Form

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

First Middle Last

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Street/P.O. Box City State Zip

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Dues (\$15.00/person) \_\_\_\_\_ (or \$100.00/person Lifetime)

Donation \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Your interests \_\_\_\_\_

You will help with \_\_\_\_\_

❖ Dues are to be paid at the beginning of the year. Give a membership as a gift!

*ECHOES, The newsletter for the Escambia County Historical Society is published monthly except November. Editor, Ranella Merritt; Assistant, Jerry Simmons*

*Comments are welcome. You may email the Society at [escohis@escohis.org](mailto:escohis@escohis.org) or call 251-867-7332, or 251-809-1528.*

Mailing address:

**ECHOES**

Escambia County Historical Society  
PO Box 276  
Brewton, AL 36427.