

The September Meeting

Tuesday September 23, 2008, 3:15 p. m.

Thomas E. McMillan Museum

The September Program

“Fiddlers, Banjo Players, and Strawbeaters: Alabama’s First Pop Musicians”

In our program for today, Joyce Cauthen and her husband, Jim, will discuss the early fiddlers of Alabama, the musicians who played with them and the popularity of this music in their communities.

Discussions will also surround the pivotal role played by African-Americans in developing the music at the roots of today’s bluegrass and country music.

This talk will be made especially interesting by the presence of fiddler Jim Cauthen who will demonstrate fiddle tunes that have been specifically mentioned in historical writings,

slave narratives and early newspapers of Alabama.

Joyce Cauthen will demonstrate use of the banjo, “straws” (a technique in which broom straws or knitting needles were beat on the strings as the fiddler played) and guitar in backing up the fiddle.

The audience will hear musical styles and tunes that are seldom heard today and will have the opportunity to ask questions and share their perceptions of the differences in this music and the modern country music that is based upon it.

In this picture of Joyce and Jim Cauthen’s band, the Flying Jenny, Joyce is seated with the guitar and her husband Jim holds the fiddle.

The other band members are Duncan Blair who plays “clawhammer” banjo and Rachel Turner who plays bass.

From the website for the band entitled Flying Jenny: Old-Time String Band, we have this story of the band’s name. which it took from, “. . . a story that two elderly fiddlers from Sand



The Flying Jenny: Old-Time String Band

Mountain told the Cauthens about their first paying job in the late 1920’s. They sat in the center of a mule-powered carnival ride called a Flying Jenny, and played tunes for the riders.

“It was a homemade, portable ride, something like a carousel with benches instead of wooden horses. Each time the ride stopped and folks got off, the owner dropped a nickel in the musicians’ pockets. The Louvin Brothers got their start on this same Flying Jenny.”



Image on Bronze Map of Alabama representing fiddlers tradition.

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The October Program

John Appleyard will present a program on his book, The History of Brewton, which will be out this fall.

ECHS Meetings for 2008

- October 38
- December Christmas Party—TBA
- November: No Meeting

More about Joyce Cauthen

The following text and accompanying photo is provided by the Alabama Humanities Foundation

Joyce is the executive director of the Alabama Folklife Association, a statewide organization that sponsors research, promotion and preservation of Alabama's folk culture.

She is the author of With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow: Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama, published in 1989 by the University of Alabama Press, and has served as the producer of numerous recordings of traditional music of Alabama, including Possum Up a Gum Stump: Home, Commercial, and Field Recordings of Alabama Fiddlers.

She served as editor of Benjamin Lloyd's Hymnbook: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition and produced the ac-



Joyce Cauthen

companying CD. Her last project was a CD and booklet entitled Bullfrog Jumped, which features recordings made across Alabama of children's folksongs and games in 1947.

She is a graduate of Texas Christian University and has a master's degree in English from Purdue University.

Joyce's presentation today is part of the Alabama Humanities Foundation 2007-2008 Road Scholars' speaker program.

The Alabama Humanities Foundation (AHF) is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The AHF brings scholars and the public together to explore human values and meaning through the study of history, literature, religion, philosophy, and other humanities disciplines.

Snapshots from Show and Tell, the August Program



Participants in "Show and Tell" L-R: Jerry Gehman, Jerilyn Curry, Kay Ross, Joe Ross, Darryl Searcy, Barbara Dixon, Ann Biggs-Williams, Pat McArthur, Susan Crawford, Alma Hall, Wilellen Elliot, "Doc" Bradbury



The Bronze Map at the Alabama Department of Archives and History



The Bronze Map on the Lawn of the Alabama Department of Archives and History

Images on the Bronze Map were chosen by ADAH staff from a list of images suggested by Alabamians from across the state. The map was commissioned by an anonymous donor in memory of Isidor Weil. It was dedicated December 14, 2006.



Forest Products

Placed on the map in the Escambia County area, the website comment for this image on the map is,

“Statewide, especially the Piney Woods of south Alabama.

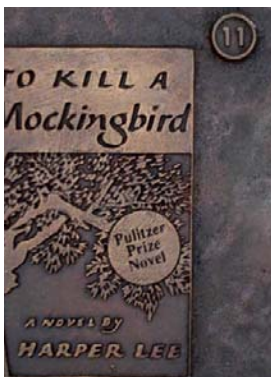
“Alabama has long been a major producer of forest products, from turpentine and logging to the pulp and paper industry.”

Longleaf Pine, Alabama State Tree

Placed on the map in the Conecuh County area, the website comment for this image on the map is

“ Statewide, but mostly south Alabama, Pinus palustris, the Southern Longleaf Pine, is Alabama's official state tree.

“It has the largest pine cone of any pine tree in the eastern United States. It can grow to be 100 feet tall, and its wood is often used for poles or tapped for turpentine and resin.”



To Kill a Mockingbird

Monroeville, Monroe County

The ADAH website comments that *“Monroeville native Harper Lee won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1961 for her world-famous novel To Kill a Mockingbird.”*



Rattlesnake Rodeo

The ADAH website comments

“Opp, Covington County In 1959, the Opp Jaycees organized the first Rattlesnake Rodeo. Held annually every year since 1964, the event attracts thousands to Opp in early April to enjoy musical performances and a karaoke and songwriter's contest, to select beauty pageant winners, to browse arts and crafts, and to visit displays of rattlesnakes.”

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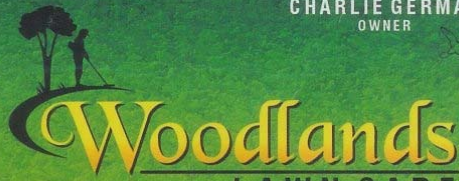


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The ECHS *Journal* Section

Folk Music and Fiddlers

The following material is taken from a web site written by Chris Haigh, who describes himself as a fiddle player, writer and composer (web address <<http://www.fiddlingaround.co.uk/>>. Reprinted with permission.



Chris Haigh

Old Time Fiddle

“For the middle class, urban fiddle player of today (and let’s face it, that’s most of us), with a choice of fiddle style comes a bundle of ideals, values and romantic notions. For Americans, Old Time fiddling represents a nostalgic link with the country’s past, a tradition rooted in the simple, honest, hardworking lives of the first rural farmers.

“British settlers began arriving in the uplands of the southeast in the mid 1700’s, colonizing the Blue Ridge mountain and Southern Appalachian states of Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee. Whilst fiddlers would have existed among all the nation’s settlers, it was in these isolated communities of the southeast that the tradition was best preserved.

“With little help to be expected from outside, self-sufficiency was essential. The big tasks of rural life- barn raising, stone picking, apple peeling and bean stringing and so forth were communal affairs where all the neighbors would help out, the day’s work invariably capped with drinking, dancing and music, for which the local fiddler was essential.

“Early fiddlers could name among their ranks such diverse luminaries as the pioneer Davey Crocket and, surprisingly, the author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was an accomplished player and practiced every day.

“He is said to have been so fond of his fiddle that when he heard that his family home had been destroyed by a fire, he first asked his servant “Are all the books destroyed?” and was told “Yes, massa, dey is, but we saved de fiddle!”

Source, Chris Haigh’s <<http://www.fiddlingaround.co.uk/>>.

He was at the same time greatly prized by the community and condemned by the churchman, who saw only idleness, liquor and licentiousness associated with “The Devil’s Box.”

Fiddle Contests

“Of course, the fiddle was not the only instrument available.

The Jew’s Harp was popular, as were the plucked or hammered dulcimers. With emancipation in the 1860’s African Americans started to move into the Appalachians, bringing with them the banjo and a new style of guitar playing.

“These instruments gradually became incorporated into the string band tradition that we would recognize today. Harmonica, autoharp and mandolin also arrived at the turn of the century, largely via the new mail-order catalogs.

“The fiddle, however, remained pre-eminent, and fiddlers were by now becoming celebrities far beyond their own communities. Fiddle contests, with a history dating back to at least the 1730’s, became hugely popular events, with skilled practitioners stalking the land like gunfighters in search of prize money.

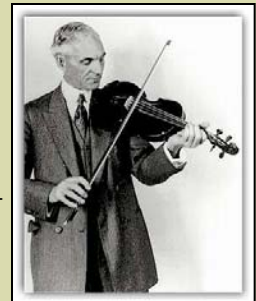
“It was not unknown for such contests to be completely fixed: a traveling show man would arrive, propose a championship, and then watch his apparently unknown associate ride into town and scoop the prize.”

Contest Fiddling

“The earliest recorded American fiddle contest was in 1736, held in Hannover County, Virginia, the prize offered being “a fine Cremona fiddle to be paid for, by any number of country fiddlers” With fiddling being such a valued skill, there would always have been an element of competitiveness between fiddlers, who would be vying for the best jobs and the

“It was not unknown for such contests to be completely fixed: a traveling show man would arrive, propose a championship, and then watch his apparently unknown associate ride into town and scoop the prize.”

“At the other end of the moral spectrum, Henry Ford sponsored a series of contests at his car dealerships in the mid 20’s, which he described as a search for ‘The King of the Fiddlers.’



Henry Ford

“He saw this as a way of promoting old fashioned American values and staving off the twin evils of jazz and communism. So keen was he on fostering the good old days that he built Greenfield Village, an idealized frontier town where he hosted barn dances (shades of Disney’s Frontierland!), and invited (ok, ordered) reluctant executives from his company to attend dance classes.”

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Folk Music and Fiddlers (continued)

(Continued from page 5)

highest fees, and also between the fans, who wanted their local hero to be seen as the best.

“Some of the contests were mobile; a promoter would arrive in a town square and announce the open contest and the cash prize. The local fiddlers would all know one another, but would be wary of a stranger- he might be a travelling “gunslinger” of a fiddler who would win wherever he went, or might even be a “ringer”, in league with the promoter.

“The concept of a “brag fiddler” developed- someone who fancied his own skill and was happy to take on all comers to prove it. In such a competitive atmosphere, showmanship was at a premium. Fiddlers would develop a patter and stage show, and “trick fiddling” started to evolve.

“This involved finding ever more bizarre ways to play the instrument- tossing the fiddle in the air, playing behind the head, one arm

“Alabama fiddler Monkey Brown was one such fiddle wrestler; he got his nickname when it was said of him at a Tuscaloosa fiddle convention ... ‘that boy can do more with a fiddle than a monkey can with goobers!’”

under one leg, fiddle upside down, bow held between the knees and fiddle held with both hands, and so on.

Certain tunes became associated with trick fiddling; using “Pop Goes the Weasel,” a fiddler would play each section of the tune in a different contorted position. Expert trick fiddlers could do all these antics whilst playing accurately and in time.

“Less athletic but equally demanding tricks developed along more conventional lines; the double shuffle or “hokum bowing” is a flashy pattern of triplets carrying across two bars; this was popularized by jazz fiddler Joe Venuti in the late 1920’s, incorporated into ‘The Beaumont Rag’, and reached its apogee in the tune “Orange Blossom Special’ in the 1940’s.

“Fiddle contests (a term more or less synonymous with fiddle conventions) were hugely popular all across the States for over two centuries. Most were small, local affairs in schoolhouses or courthouses, but many were huge, attracting dozens of fiddlers and thousands of eager fans.

“It was possible for a fiddler who was prepared to travel to attend three or four contests a week, earning cash prizes or produce of some kind; these prizes would have been particularly welcome when the conventions reached their peak, which was in the gloomy years of the Great Depression.

“In the early days, flashy tricks were one sure fire way to

walk off with the prize. It was a case of almost anything goes, whether it was trilling like a mockingbird, braying like a mule, hollerin’, jokin’, or dressing as a rooster to play the Chicken Reel.

“Practically the only thing not allowed was a player who had formal training; the old timers saw a big difference between themselves and the purveyors of more highfalutin’ classical music, and wanted to maintain that difference. If a player “trembled his fingers” (i.e. used vibrato), he would be viewed with deep suspicion.

“The contests were always highly entertaining, and the larger ones may have been combined with other attractions such as hog calling, cracker eating, husband calling, buck dancing, lying contests, ugliest fiddler contests and so on.

“More recently, as contests have become more formalized, trick fiddling, cross tuning, hokum bowing and the tunes most associated with them, are explicitly banned in most competitions. Typically a contest will be divided into three age groups, and in each round you will play three tunes; a breakdown, a waltz and a” tune of choice” such as a rag, polka or hornpipe. There’ll be a time limit of around five minutes.

“The judges are normally professional musicians, and they will be looking for clarity, intonation, rhythm and creativity. After a considerable lull in postwar years, fiddle contests have once more become very popular, and hundreds of them attract large audiences across the USA and Canada

The Afro-American Tradition

The Fiddle

On the PBS web site <<http://www.pbs.org>>, the section entitled American Roots Music calls the Fiddle, the oldest and most basic instrument of roots music and further comments:

“ Though often thought of today as primarily a white instrument - and indeed many tunes and styles came over from Ireland and Scotland - there arose in the 19th century a strong fiddle tradition among blacks. Some of it started out as slave fiddling, in which talented slaves were sent to places like New

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Folk Music and Fiddlers (continued)

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Orleans to learn how to fiddle standard dance tunes.

Blues composer W.C Handy remembered his own grandfather in northern Alabama playing fiddle tunes in the late 1800s, and a strong style of blues fiddle developed and persisted well into the 1930s. Native Americans and Mexican Americans also developed important fiddle styles in the Southwest.”

The Guitar

The source for the following material on the guitar, the accordion, and the harmonica is American Roots Music <<http://www.pbs.org>>.

“If the fiddle was the primary contribution to American music from northern Europe, the banjo was the primary contribution from Africa. The banjo has been called ‘the outstanding American contribution to the music of folklore,’ and can be traced back in some form to sub-Saharan cultures of the 13th century.

“It was almost certainly brought to the New World by slaves, and as early as 1781 Thomas Jefferson, writing about slaves on his own plantation, said, ‘the instrument proper to them is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa.’ Many of these early "banjars" were made from gourds and played with a fretless neck.

“We have no idea how these sounded, but surviving illustrations suggest they used heavy strings and probably had a deep, mellow sound. By 1847 we have eyewitness accounts of the fiddle and banjo being played together in the South - the origin of the modern string band or bluegrass band.

“This early black folk tradition eventually transferred the banjo to whites, especially in the Appalachians. Here, musicians made banjo heads out of groundhog skins and adapted their songs to the instrument's harmonics. A parallel tradition began to develop in the 1840's, with the popularity of minstrel shows, in which professional entertainers performed songs and dances derived from what they interpreted to be black culture.

“The banjo became the central instrument of these "plantation melodies" and songs like "Old Dan Tucker" entered the pantheon of vernacular music. “

The Other Instruments of American Root Music

The Accordion

“A cousin to the harmonica (both are classified by musicologists as "free reed" instruments) is the accordion, which exists in roots music in several forms. One of the earliest - one of the

first of any sort - was the octagonal-shaped concertina, with sets of buttons on both sides, perfected around 1844 in England. These small bellows boxes were used by Irish and Irish-Americans as both dance instruments and as accompaniment to singing.

“The larger "piano-key" accordion was developed in Vienna and Paris and gained popularity in America in the early 20th century. Certain folk musicians in the South, especially buskers on street corners and railway stations, used the piano accordion as a substitute for an organ or piano, and often used them to accompany fiddlers.”

“By the time of the Civil War, German settlers had brought the accordion to the Acadian population of southwest Louisiana, and the button accordion soon became an integral part of Cajun music, especially in the hands of masters like Joe Falcon and Nathan Abshire.

“A similar button accordion was introduced to tejano music about the same time, often played in a manner derived from German and other European styles. Polkas, schottisches, and waltzes were especially popular in the early days, but by the dawn of the 20th century, tejano musicians were combining the accordion with the bajo sexto to create a different style and more original repertoire.

“Today the accordion is still a distinctive part of Cajun and norteno music.

The Harmonica

“The harmonica, that most modest of instruments, has ancestors that go back to Asia over a thousand years ago. But the "mouth organ" or "harp" as we know it today dates back only to 19th century Germany.

“In 1822 an inventor and musician from Berlin named Christian Bauschmann made an experimental instrument with fifteen reeds called the aura, designed mainly as a pitch pipe. It attracted the attention of a local clockmaker named Christian Messner.

“Because of an economic depression, the clock business was bad and Messner was looking for other ways to make a living. He started making cheap copies of the aura to peddle at local fairs and carnivals, and soon other German craftsmen were getting into the act.

“Then, in 1857, Matthias Hohner figured out how to mass-produce the little instruments, and soon became the leader in the field. By 1977 he was making over 700,000 harmonicas a year, and over half of them were being exported to America.”

The ECHS *Journal* Section

History of the U.S.S. Escambia (AO-80)

This journal article was researched and written by Darryl Searcy who acknowledges his sources throughout the text.

Overview

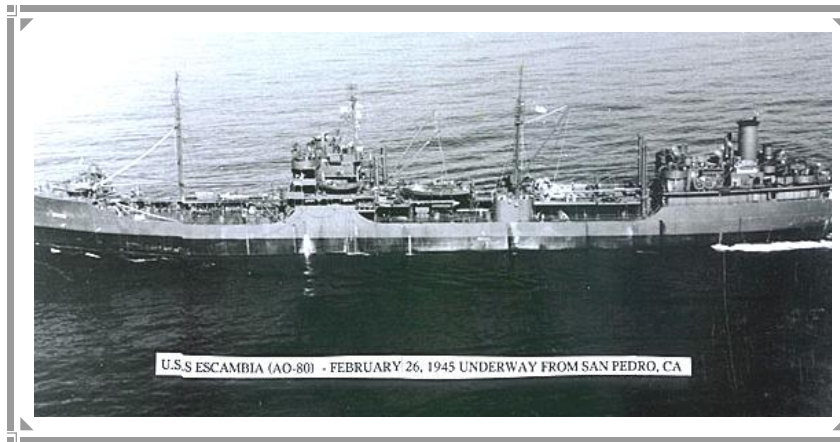
On 1 October 1945, Captain Richard Georgian wrote about the history of a valiant warrior ship that served our

country well as a navy oiler and an Army transport. It was named for the Conecuh/Escambia River. His account was submitted to the Secretary of the Navy's Public Information Section.

The account was accepted and the U.S.S. Escambia was recorded in history books as one of the most prized of all sea-faring ships to do battle in WW-II. After being decommissioned by the Navy, she was attained by the U.S. Army and re-commissioned as a transport. After the ship was commissioned, all Navy oilers and Army transport vessels were said to be and thereafter were called "Escambia Class" ships.

The ship was appropriately named for one of the most important waterways to flow through Alabama and Florida. Today the river is too shallow for boat and barge traffic, but its importance to the history of this region is unsurpassed during a time when industry was beginning to flourish along its banks. Of particular importance were the ferries that crossed it before bridges spanned its width, and the millions of board-foot timber logs that floated on its pristine waters to the sawmills and turpentine stills that dotted the landscape from Andalusia to Pensacola.

There was a time when the Spanish controlled the bay into which it flowed and the Creek Indians used it as a landmark path for carrying war-like goods supplied by the Spanish governor in an effort to discourage pioneer settlements. Military forts were built along its banks to provide safe passage and order for white settlers, while



stage and rail lines were being established to bring humans and provisions to those who saw greater opportunity among the vast pine and hardwood forests.

Today the river is used primarily for recreation and hydroelectric. No efforts have ever been made

to contain its waters south of Andalusia, no levies are built to control flooding, and no waste is disposed therein. Indeed, as a qualified natural resource reminiscent of Robert Redford's film, *A River Runs Through It*, the Conecuh/Escambia river is one of many designated natural resource waterways to be preserved in Alabama. So important is the river to the economy of the combined south Alabama and western Florida peoples that the US Navy saw fit to build a warship and name it in honor of the Escambia.

The keel of the ship was laid in December of 1942 at the yards of Marinship in Sausalito, California. Mrs. Joseph Cooper, wife of a marine ship worker, was the sponsor. The launching took place on 24 April 1943. The vessel was then moved to the San Francisco piers of the Matson Navigation Company for conversion to a Navy fleet oiler. Prior to commissioning, the ship's company was assembled at the Receiving Ship on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, and went through an intensive training program.

A pre-commissioning ball was held on 20 October 1943 for those chosen to be plank owners. On the day after Navy Day, 28 October 1943, the ship was placed in commission by a representative of the Assistant Industrial Manager's Office, San Francisco. The name "Escambia" was taken to commemorate the river that flows through Alabama and Florida. This was the first of a series of eight "Escambia" or "80" class fleet oilers. The shakedown cruise was held in the San Francisco - San

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History of the U.S.S. Escambia (continued)

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Pedro - San Diego area. All equipment was tested and gunnery and fueling-at-sea exercises were conducted. The ship was inspected by Navy representatives of Commander Operational Training Command, Pacific Fleet. Upon conclusion of the training period, 7 December 1943, the U.S.S. Escambia left San Pedro bound for Pearl Harbor. Lieutenant Commander J. M. Paulsson, USNR, in command.

On arrival at Pearl Harbor, another inspection was made to check the material setup of the vessel. The authorities decided to send the ship back to a repair yard in San Francisco to eliminate the final kinks and to ready her for extended operations.

After her cargo was discharged, the return voyage was made and the vessel was docked at United Engineering Company in Alameda, California, where all necessary changes and repairs were accomplished. A cargo of fuel oil, diesel oil and aviation gasoline was loaded aboard and once again Pearl Harbor was the destination.

After a brief stop at Pearl Harbor, the ship was sent to help supply the fleet in the Marshall Islands campaign, arriving at Majuro Atoll on 9 February 1944. From Majuro, a short round trip was made to Roi Island on Kwajalein Atoll. During this time, major fleet units were fueled in the two anchorages.

Early in March, the U.S.S. Escambia was one of several fleet oilers ordered to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. She was one of the many fleet oilers that fueled the task forces assaulting Palau in March and Truk in the latter part of April. The ship called at the Admiralty Islands shortly after their invasion and fueled fleet units that were assaulting Hollandia. Early in May, the Escambia called at Port Purvis and Tulagi in the Solomons, while returning to Espiritu Santo. There the ship remained for a few months in a reserve status for an operation that was later cancelled.



The Conecuh/Escambia River as it flows across state line between Alabama and Florida

On 3 June 1944, the first commanding officer, Commander John M. Paulsson, USNR, was relieved by Lieutenant Richard Goorgian, USNR. In late August and early September, many of the large groups of ships assembled for the invasion of Palau were fueled by the Escambia. The ship then moved to Seeadler Harbor in the Admiralty Islands, from which base the forces making the preliminary assaults on the Philippines

were fueled at sea.

In October, the replenishing base was advanced to Ulithi Atoll, in the Western Carolines. From there, several trips were made to fuel the units assaulting Formosa, Leyte, and other islands of the Philippines. While at Ulithi, in November of 1944, a typhoon sideswiped the Atoll, loosening some mines left behind by the Japanese, and the ill-fated fleet oiler Mississinewa was sunk by a midget Japanese submarine.

During the previous months of fueling, engineering difficulties had been experienced on an increasing scale. After a round trip to Eniwetok Atoll in the Marshall Islands, the Escambia was ordered to the Todd Shipyards at San Pedro, California, for overhaul, arriving there on 27 December 1944. Leaves were granted to all hands.

On 1 March 1945, the vessel left San Pedro once again bound for Pearl Harbor. Early in April, she was ordered on to Ulithi, from which base she sailed immediately to join the Logistic Support Group backing up the invasion of Okinawa and the strikes on Japan. A three-day trip into Hagushi Beach and Kerama Retto was made late in April, and the Kamikaze boys were successfully evaded.

Continuing through the summer of 1945, the Escambia remained as part of the Logistic Support Group that operated in the vicinity of Japan. The powerful groups of Task

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History of the U.S.S. Escambia (continued)

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Forces 38 and 58 were fueled repeatedly. The ship remained at sea for long periods, returning to Ulithi only for oil and the many other supplies and mail to be carried to the fleet. Early in June of 1945, a violent typhoon was encountered at sea and was successfully weathered. Operating a few hundred miles from Tokyo, and while fueling Task Force 38 (on 15 August 1945), the exciting news of Japan's surrender was received.

In the first part of September, 1945, the Escambia was again at Ulithi, but soon departed for Buckner Bay, Okinawa. From there she was destined for a fueling group in the Yellow Sea, but was not called. On the 16th, a typhoon struck, and she was forced to remain in the harbor. The ship rode out the storm at anchor. Again on 27 September, another typhoon was approaching the area. The Escambia sortied with other ships in the harbor to avoid it, remaining at sea for three days.

On 1 October, in Buckner Bay, the Escambia awaited further orders. Her company was content with the knowledge that they and their ship were an important unit of the Logistic Support Group that enabled the world's greatest Navy to bring an enemy power to its knees.

Continuing where the Captain left off, the Escambia left the harbor again on 7 October 1945 and some of the storm hit her, but when she returned to Okinawa on the 11th, the crew found that the Island had been flattened. The Escambia left Okinawa on October 13 and arrived at Wakayama in Japan on the 15th.

She left Wakayama on the 21st and arrived at Tokyo Bay on the 23rd. The ship was anchored 30 miles out and the crew could clearly see Yokohama on the horizon. LSTs (Tank Landing Ships) escorted the Escambia in for crew's liberty in Tokyo and Yokohama.

The Escambia left Tokyo Bay on 4 November 1945 and sailed the Great Circle Route to San Francisco (a great



U. S. S. Escambia

circle route is the shortest distance between two points on a sphere and is used to plot ship and plane routes). The 4,536 mile journey took 14 days. The Golden Gate Bridge was sighted at 0600 on November 17th. The ship moved to explosives anchorage at Hunter's Point on November 19 to unload all ammunition, after which the Escambia moved to her old anchorage off Angel Island to await space at a dock for decommissioning.

Men with 41 points were transferred to Treasure Island Intake Station headed for military discharge and home! Anchor was finally lifted on February 4th (after 2 months and 18 days) and the ship docked in Richmond Shipyard to be decommissioned. The ship's crew and officers moved to the YPB-21 during decommissioning operations.

The U.S.S. Escambia was finally decommissioned on 20 February 1946. The remaining skeleton crew were transferred to Treasure Island for leave and reassignment!

The U.S.S. Escambia (AO-80) was the first of a series of fast Fleet Oilers known as Escambia Class. Other ships in this class were Kennebago (AO-81), Cahaba (AO-82), Mascoma (AO-83), Ocklawaha (AO-84), Pamanset (AO-85), Ponaganset (AO-86), Sebec (AO-87), and Tomahawk (AO-88).

The Escambia was 523' 6" in length, 68' beam, 30' 10" draft, and 15-knot speed. She was at sea 321 days from November 13, 1943 to November 17, 1945. She fueled 389 ships of the fleet, 231 of them at sea, without a serious accident.

The Escambia's Last Chapter

The U.S.S. Escambia had a rather interesting second life after decommissioning and moth balling on 20 February 1946. She was reacquired by the U.S. Navy and reinstated on the Naval Vessel Register 26 January 1948 and

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History of the U.S.S. Escambia (continued)

(Continued from page 10)

assigned to Naval Transportation Service, then reassigned to Military Sea Transport Service on 18 July 1950 as USNS Escambia (T-AO-80) and transferred to MARAD in 1957 for lay-up and struck.

She was acquired by the Army in May of 1966 and converted to a Mobile Army Emergency Power Plant in the Todd Shipyard at Seattle, with Vinnel Corporation as the commercial contractor. Her main deck was loaded with lumber, refrigerated containers, a trench digger for electrical lines, and other supplies.

She sailed for Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, arriving in late 1966 and was assigned to Qui Nhon RVN to supply power to shore installations. The U. S. Army left her there when pulling out of Vietnam. The Vietnamese used her until March 1971, and scrapped her in August of that year. She retained her original name throughout her years of service.

The following information was obtained from the Department of the Army, Virgil Grier, and Paul A. Olson, a Vinnel Marine electrician. Olson was aboard the ship from Seattle to Vietnam and took the following picture of his shipmates.

In his words, Virgil Grier says, "It gave me a strange feeling to see pictures of her 20 years after decommissioning, and some of her deck men may drop a tear to see the rust on her deck and rails, but the hull looked good when leaving Seattle. However, the pictures of her in Vietnam will show missing paint from the bow and lower hull."

Lieutenant Harry R. White's Parting Thought

"For most of us, it was our first encounter with a totally new way of life and the ever-present possibility of instant annihilation. As some philosopher has said 'What doesn't kill you, strengthens you'. We think you'll agree that our



U. S. S. Escambia Officers

experiences, good and bad, aboard the USS Escambia left us all a bit stronger in spirit and better able to cope with the ups and downs of civilian life."

World War II Pacific Theatre Operations

After a December 1943 voyage from the U.S. West Coast to Pearl Harbor with oil cargo, the Escambia departed San Francisco on 21 January 1944 for

Maiuro, arriving on 9 February. For the next month, she fueled ships at Roi Namur and Maiuro as the Marshall Islands were assaulted. From 15 March to 30 August, she sailed out of Espiritu Santo, fueling the fast-carrier task force in their raids on the Palaus and during the Hollandia operation.

Pictured standing left to right are Ben Patterson, QM1c, Virgil Grier, Ye01c, Clark Franklin, RT1c, and kneeling are Ray Kragness, Ye02c, Mark Davies, QM3c.



Supporting the invasion of the Philippines,

The Escambia arrived at Manus 14 September 1944, and sailed out of this port to rendezvous at sea to fuel the carriers as they launched the air strikes preliminary to the assault on the Philippines. She sailed on to Ulithi 25 October, and at this vast fleet anchorage, fueled the carrier task forces as they continued their operations in the Philippines. After a voyage to Eniwetok to reload oil, she sailed from Ulithi 11 December for a west coast overhaul.

The oiler returned to Ulithi 18 April 1945, and for the remainder of the war used this as her base as she fueled the carrier task forces supporting the Okinawa invasion

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History of the U.S.S. Escambia (continued)

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and raiding and bombarding of the Japanese home islands. Escambia paid calls to Okinawa and Wakayama Wan to fuel ships at anchor there until leaving Tokyo astern, homeward bound, on 4 November.

She was decommissioned 20 February 1946, and transferred to the Maritime Commission for disposal in June. Re-acquired in January 1948, she performed no further commissioned service, and was transferred to the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) on 18 July 1950. The Escambia received five battle stars for her WW-II service.

“Disney Dave” and Virgil Grier

From the web site navalhistory.com, and internet sources for military stories, an article was written by a person who identified himself only as “Disney Dave,” “Dave” mentions the writing contributions of Virgil Grier. The article stated that the river for whom the Escambia was named flowed through Georgia and Florida. Aside from correcting that minor misstatement, the following information is as it appears on the web site.

“The image in this post has very special meaning to me. Here is the story of how I was given the original art for the U.S.S. Escambia and more importantly, how I was truly blessed to come to know one member of a generation that is quickly fading into history.

“Several years ago, I made contact with a WW-II veteran named Virgil Grier. Virgil and I corresponded for several years via email and although I never met him in person, we had many great conversations through the magic of the Internet.

“My initial contact with Virgil came through an Internet search for Disney combat insignia. The link to his web page was one of many I clicked on that night. Dur-



U. S. S. Escambia Insignia designed by an Artist with Walt Disney Studios

ing the course of our friendship, Virgil wrote to me about his life in the Navy and of his love, wife June, whom he married in San Francisco just days before he set sail for the South Pacific to do battle with the Japanese.

“Virgil was trained at the Hutchinson Naval Reserve Aviation Base in Kansas. When he finished his training, he was assigned to the U.S.S. Escambia, a fast fleet oiler and fuel carrier that served the needs of the American Navy and her aircraft in the South Pacific. The U.S.S. Escambia carried several types of fuel including high-octane aviation fuel and bunker oil.

“Virgil gave me his December 1943 issue of the Hutchinson

NRAB's newsletter, which had a Jiminy Cricket insignia on the front cover designed by a Disney artist. This item arrived unannounced on my doorstep one day and I had no idea of its existence. Virgil said the item deserved to be part of my collection, where it now proudly resides.

“Virgil also owned the original Disney insignia art featuring Jose Carioca, the parrot that starred in the Disney feature, The Three Caballeros, that was created for his ship. Disney made the film for the South American market at the request of Nelson Rockefeller, who was the head of the Office of Inter-American Affairs.

“Rockefeller was in charge of flooding South America with various forms of American entertainment. The reasoning was that American films and music would help counter pro-Axis sentiment in the region.

“I received an email in March 2006 from Virgil's daughter. She told me Virgil had passed away suddenly on Valentine's Day. He had been diagnosed with liver and throat cancer only two weeks prior. My last contact with him had been in early January and I was deeply up-

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History of the U.S.S. Escambia (continued)

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set by the news.

“Virgil's daughter also told me in that email that her father wanted me to have the original Jose Carioca insignia art and a couple of other related items as he knew I would appreciate them.

“When the package containing the art arrived, I was overcome with emotion. Also in the box was an American Pottery ceramic statue of Jose Carioca. The statue had a repaired foot. Virgil told me in one email that during a typhoon in the South Pacific his ship rolled back and forth and pitched violently in the wind and waves. During the storm, Jose fell off Virgil's desk and crashed to the floor. The foot was reattached a day or two later. Virgil said he always thought Jose should have been awarded a miniature Purple Heart for his injury.

“Virgil told me, ‘In February 1945, Executive Officer Richard Stephens requested a friend working at Walt Disney Studios [Gene Armstrong, who worked in the Cutting Department] to suggest a “trade mark” for our ship. He designed this “floating service station” with a pump and hose on a floating barrel of oil, with Jose Carioca ready to fuel the next ship coming by. Ken Hackett reproduced the insignia on each side of the bridge, where it drew admiring chuckles from the crews of ships we refueled. Jose Carioca was expected to become more famous than Donald Duck, but Jose didn't achieve star status except on the AO-80!’

“The insignia for the U.S.S. Escambia was created in March 1945. A second fast fleet refueler, the U.S.S. Winnoski, also requested and received a Disney insignia during the war – their design features the likeness of Little Hiawatha.

“I am saddened at the death of my friend, honored that he thought of giving me the items, and I will miss our conversations. This piece has very special meaning to me and will never leave my collection.”

AO-80 U.S.S. Escambia Specifications

Escambia class Fleet Oiler:

Displacement: 21,880 tons

Length: 523'6"

Beam: 68'

Draft: 30'

Speed: 15.5 knots (max); 13 knots (econ)

Armament: 1 5"/38 DP, 4 3"/50 DP, 4x2 40mm, 4x2 20mm

Complement: 267

Capacity: 140,000 barrels

Turbo-electric engines, single screw, 8,000 hp

Maritime Commission T2-SE-A2type

Built at Marinship and commissioned 28 Oct 1943

Escambia Class Fleet Oiler Historical Dateline

Laid down in December 1942, as a Maritime Commission type (T2-SE-A2) tanker hull, under a Maritime

Commission contract at Marinship, Sausalito, CA

Launched, 24 April 1943 Commissioned USS Escambia (AO-80), 28 October 1943

Decommissioned, 20 February 1946

Struck from the Naval Register (date unknown)

Transferred to the Maritime Commission for lay up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet

Reacquired by the Navy, 26 January 1948 Operated under contract to Naval Transportation Service

Placed in service by the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) as USNS Escambia (T-AO-80),

18 July 1950 Placed out of service

Struck from the Naval Register, 1957

Laid up in the National Defense Reserve Fleet

Final Disposition, acquired by the US Army in May 1966 and converted to Mobile Army Emergency Power Plant assigned to Vietnam service

Scrapped by Vietnam Government in August 1971.

**THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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We're on the web!
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<u>Escambia Historical Society Cookbook</u>	\$10.00	\$ 5.00
<u>Wildflowers of The Escambia CD</u>	\$17.50	\$15.00
<u>Pictorial History of Brewton</u>	\$40.00	\$35.00

**Clip the following form and send to ECHS
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ECHOES, The newsletter for the Escambia County Historical Society is published monthly except November. Comments are welcome. You may email the Society at escohis@escohis.org or call 251-867-7332, or 251-809-1528.

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