

The September Meeting The Thomas E. McMillan Museum Tuesday, September 25, 2012, 3:00 p. m.

The Program:

Show and Tell

Always one of the best programs, members and guests enjoy bringing family heirlooms and memorabilia to share with the group. Plan on bringing any item that you want to show and tell its story: pictures, clothing, house hold items, tools, equipment, parts of collections, quilts, books, newspaper articles, weapons, jewelry, uniforms, yearbooks, catalogues, programs, mementos of graduations, weddings, other family events, even items you have questions about.

The item or items (you can certainly bring more than one if you wish), do not have to be old or valuable.

Show and Tell: The Beginning

“Show and Tell” programs by members seemingly began with an idea by historian Annie Waters for a program for June 28, 1977, described as “Tell-It-All, an informal program with group participation.” The editor at that time for Escambia ECHOES, Carolyn McLendon, introduced the program in the newsletter this way:



A 1937 Radio and Parts brought to a Show and Tell Program by Alan Robinson.

“Mrs. Annie Waters had this idea for an amusing and interesting informal program which everyone should enjoy taking part in. We all have memories of strange and unusual events for which there was never an explanation, a supernatural happening, family legend or tradition, frightening cemetery episodes, unbelievable sights, or some mischief-

(Continued on page 2)



Wooden, Handmade Game Called Mancala

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September 2012

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**The October Meeting
October 23, 1012
Program TBA**

Mancala

At the far left, pictured, is the board for the game Mancala which was played with river rocks. This game board was brought to a Show and Tell Program by ECHS member Beverly Starke

Show and Tell: The Beginning *(continued)*

(Continued from page 1)

vous act for which the perpetrator was never identified. This is our opportunity to ‘Tell-it-all.’”

The ghost stories basis for “Tell-It-All” was used for some October programs. The emphasis on the program now, of course, has changed to those highlighting family mementos and their history, not just ghost stories. The program did lead to some interesting stories as reported by Ed Williams, ECHS member and Auburn University Professor of Journalism. From his column in the Montgomery Advertiser-Journal, Ed, then State Editor with the paper, wrote:

Ghosts, witches, haunted grave-yards, spooky noise coming from abandoned houses. Each county, town and community in the state has its share of strange and supernatural phenomena. Escambia County is no exception and since Halloween was approaching, members of the county historical society got together recently to share supernatural events they’d heard about or experienced.

“Show and Tell” type programs are common at the monthly meetings,” said Carolyn McLendon, historical society president.

Mrs. Aquilla Simmons told the other members about an orange-colored object her husband had spotted in Kirkland Swamp near Brewton. Mrs. Simmons said her husband, along with about 20 other men, went to the swamp one night to witness the strange object. “My husband really did see it,” Mrs. Simmons related to the group, “and I believe anything he says.”

Lots of Alabama ghost stories originate in the swampland, and some are explainable. Take Ambrose Riley’s story for instance. Ambrose said he was walking through an Escambia County swamp late one evening when he saw a white object drifting



ECHS President Tom McMillan is shown during a Show and Tell Program with the Winchester Rifle, 1873 model, which Leonard McGowin used to kill Railroad Bill on March 7, 1896.

Railroad Bill was known to have killed Tom’s great grandfather Sheriff McMillan.

among the tree branches. “It turned out to be a white-face cow,” Ambrose laughed.

Mrs. Annie Waters said she had a great aunt who, as a child, was able to foresee the future. But folks back then didn’t think her supernatural ability was much out of the ordinary since the aunt was born with a membrane, medically termed a “caul,” covering her head. “In those days, any child born with a caul was thought to be able to see supernatural things,” Mrs. Waters explained.

Thunderstorms also seem to invite the supernatural, and Mrs. Doris Bruner told of a personal

experience that occurred on a stormy night several years ago. “There was a glow coming from my pillow,” she told the historical society members. “It wouldn’t go away, so I took the pillow and eased it into the closet and shut the door. Needless to say, the glow was gone.” Mrs. Bruner said, “I didn’t sleep that night.” The next day there was no evidence of the experience of the night before. She never found an explanation for the incident but “it must have been brought out by the thunder and lightning.”

Mrs. Emmett Brooks told a story of two young men who thought the world was coming to an end when it began getting dark in the middle of the day. “They kneeled down and prayed, and then it started getting light,” said Mrs. Brooks. “They’d never heard of an eclipse,” she laughed.

Near the end of the meeting, when the supply of stories was about exhausted, 90-year-old Sally Davison said she’d never seen a ghost “but I’m about to believe in them now.”

And Mrs. Betty Campbell agreed—she’d never seen an honest-to-goodness ghost, either. But she did have a fitting comment to close the meeting. “There aren’t any witches in my family,” she said, “and no skeletons in my closet” (ECHOES, October, 1977). €

News and Announcements



The Alabama Genealogical Society Fall Seminar

Yvonne Crumpler, 1st Vice President, of the Alabama Genealogical Society has notified us that the Seminar will

be Saturday, October 13, 2012, 9:00 A.M.- 1:45 P.M. at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, 624 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36130.

The title of the program is, Three Anniversaries. The lecture topics will be: 1. War of 1812 Era Research, 2. The Basics of Researching a Civil War Ancestor, 3. World War I Research and Other Military Records After the St. Louis Fire.

Seminar Fee: \$40.00 for non-members and \$35.00 for members. Lunch is available for those who register by October 11, 2012.

For addition information please go to <http://www.algensoc.org/main/seminars.html> or e-mail Yvonne Crumpler at ags-seminar@algensoc.org



Speaker for the Program, Robert Scott Davis, Jr.

Her most recent books are Hey, America, Your Roots Are Showing and Who Do You Think You Are?: The Essential Guide to Tracing Your Family History, companion guide to the NBC series.

In the morning sessions, her topics will be Right Annie, Wrong Annie and Trace Your Roots with DNA. After a lunch break, Megan will speak on Find That Obituary! Online Newspaper Research, and Honoring Our Ancestors.

Re-enactors Ceremony for Placing A CSA Marker at Old Mason Cemetery

Donald Keiron McGowin is announcing this service to honor his great, great Grand-

father Cpl. Jacob Lewis McGowin (1836-1899), Company I, 15th Confederate Cavalry.

This service will be held on Sunday, October 14, 2012, at 2:30 p.m. The Old Mason cemetery where the ceremony will take place is located on U. S. HWY 29 about half way between Brewton and Andalusia.

Mr. McGowin sends a special invitation to members of the SCV and DCV and those interested in county history as well as, of course, family members.

There will be refreshments after the service for visitors and re-enactors.



The West Florida Genealogical Society Fall Seminar

The Program is planned for Nov. 3, 2012 at the Washington High School Auditorium, 6000 College Boulevard, Pensacola.

Registration is from 8:00-9:00 a.m.. The program is from 9:00 a. m. – 4:00 p. m. with a break for lunch. Those attending are on their own for lunch.

The speaker (shown) will be Megan Smolenyak, a well-known author and speaker on genealogy.



Family History Workshop at Alabama Department of Archives and History Monday, October 15, 2012 9:00 a. m.—3:30 p. m.

Archivist Nancy Dupree will be in charge of this workshop which will emphasize leaning how to use the best websites and on-line resources to help uncover Alabama ancestors.

The activities will explore the wealth of on-line Alabama records now available at Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, the ADAH digital archives, and

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News and Announcements *(continued)*

(Continued from page 3)

other internet sources.

There will be an emphasis on learning the most effective search strategies.

An optional tour of the Archives research room and storage areas will be offered following the workshop.

Registration Fee (includes lunch): \$30 for Friends of the Archives members and \$40 for non-members

Ghosts at Rikard's Mill

6:30 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Trail opens at 7:00. Friday, Oct 12 & Saturday, Oct 13 at Rikard's Mill Historical Park just north of Beatrice, AL.

Admission \$5.00 per person. Food vendors will be available.



Enjoy costumed storytellers as they entertain with scary tales at the Covered Bridge, Millhouse, Pioneer Cabin, Carriage House and Barn at Rikard's Mill.

Those brave enough to enter the Haunted Swamp Trail can visit the Villain's Cemetery, encounter ghosts, ghoulies, werewolves, zombies and other creatures of the dark as you walk the spooky path.

Children under 12 allowed on the Trail only if accompanied by an adult. Contact Monroe County Heritage Museum at mchm@frontiernet.net or 251-575-7433, or Rikard's Mill at 575-789-2781.



Bolivia—Altiplano Area Alpaca Herd Grazing

CD's/DVD's of Darryl Searcy's Trip to Bolivia Available in the Alabama Room

The picture to the left is just one example of the beautiful and infor-

mative pictures on these CD's/DVD's Darryl has said the slide show is free for anyone who would like to have one, but ECHS will be glad to take a donation for the videos if you wish to make one.

The CD's play only on a computer but the DVD's can be played on a TV or computer.



ECHS Member Ed Williams To Retire from Auburn University

Ed plans to retire as a Professor of Journalism at the end of this school year. Honored with many awards for his achievements as a journalist and educator, for 23 years. he was also the advisor to The Auburn Plainmen, the university's newspaper which won many awards, including the Pacemaker Award an award for college newspapers equal to the Pulitzer.

In his announcement, Williams said, "Newspaper reporters used to write '30' at the end of a news story to denote 'the end.' Please don't think of my retirement from Auburn University as the end for me.

"I plan to be making contributions for years to come. I know that God will open new doors in my life" (From the Alabama Associated Press Website at <http://www.alabamapress.org/2012/08/28/williams-to-retire-after-30-years/>).



Gov. Bentley Views the Preserved Portion of Floor from Original Courthouse

Re-Dedication Of Baldwin County's First Courthouse at Blakeley Park

Governor Bentley spoke at this ceremony in Blakeley State Park where the small (29 by 34 ft) two-story brick structure was built

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News and Announcements *(continued)*

(Continued from page 4)

circa 1832/33. A portion of the original brick floor of the courthouse is now protected by the structure shown in the picture. The roofed building protects the floor from the weather and the iron bars around the actual ruins allow visitors to view the floor but keeps vandals from stealing pieces of the ruins.

Archeologists from the University of South Alabama who worked on the excavation point out that bricks on the floor were laid out in an intersecting diagonal pattern that was labor intensive and rare in frontier Alabama, a herringbone pattern that has been found only once before, in the Globe Hotel in old St. Stephens.

An article from the Mobile Press-Register by Guy Busby adds details about “court sessions” in the frontier town of Blakeley. Before the courthouse was built, the first traveling circuit judges who came to Blakeley convened court at temporary locations, including a tree known as courthouse Oak.

Other court locations were the Alabama Hotel and Exchange Coffee House, according to a descendant of the county’s first judge, Harry Toulmin. The first courthouse was said to have cost \$2,000.00 (“Baldwin County’s Frontier Blakeley Courthouse Remains on Display” <http://www.mashpedia.com/Baldwin_County,_Alabama>).

Baldwin County’s Moveable County Seat: From McIntosh Bluff to Blakeley to Daphne to Bay Minette



Removal of the County Seat from Daphne to Bay Minette

This mural painted by Hilton Leechi in 1939 hangs in the post office in Bay Minette (encyclopediaofalabama.org//face/Multimedia.jsp?id=m-6741).

Post office murals such as this were executed by artists who worked for the Section of Fine Arts which were part of the Treasury Department. These murals have been mistakenly attributed to the WPA Division (<http://www.wpamurals.com/alabama.htm>).

The following account of the history of the county seats in Baldwin County is taken from the article Various Historical Compilations about Baldwin County, Alabama, at the Baldwin County website in the section titled “County Seat”:

An undercover scheme carried out in the dead of night is responsible for making the City of Bay Mi-

nette the County Seat of Baldwin County, Alabama.

In the first days of Baldwin County, the Town of McIntosh Bluff (now in Mobile County, Alabama, West of Baldwin County) on the Tombigbee River was the County Seat.

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Baldwin County's Moveable County Seat *(continued)*

(Continued from page 5)

After being transferred to the Town of Blakeley in 1810, the County Seat was later moved to the City of Daphne in 1868. In 1900, by an Act of the Legislature of Alabama, the County Seat was authorized for relocation to the City of Bay Minette; however, the City of Daphne resisted relocation.

In order to relocate the County Seat to the City of Bay Minette, the men of Bay Minette devised a

scheme. To lure the Sheriff and his Deputy out of the City of Daphne, the men prefabricated a murder.

While the law was chasing down the fictitious killer during the late hours, the group of Bay Minette men stealthily traveled the thirty (30) miles to the City of Daphne, stole the Baldwin County Courthouse records, and delivered them to the City of Bay Minette - where Baldwin County's County Seat remains to this day (http://www.baldwincountyal.gov/PageView.asp?edit_id=156). €

Alabama Historical Association 2012 Fall Pilgrimage

The 2012 Fall Pilgrimage will be October 13-14 at Livingston, AL. The pilgrimage will be hosted by the Center for the Study of the Black Belt and the University of West Alabama. The program planned includes informative speakers and a tour of the historic buildings and locations in Livingston and the surrounding area.

The registration form and accommodation information, as well as access to the Association's current newsletter can be found at

<http://www.archives.state.al.us/aha/ahanews.html>.

The newsletter gives the program for the event as well as the history of Livingston, pictures of the sites to be visited on the tour, and a history for each site. €

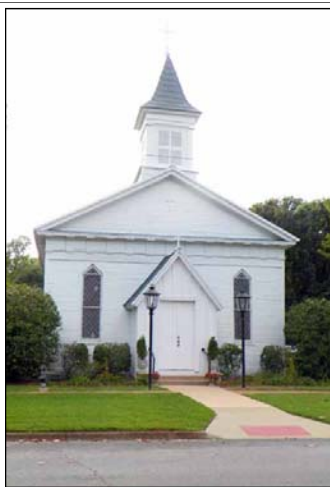
On the Tour at the Fall Pilgrimage



**The Alamuchee-Bellamy
Covered Bridge**



**Elizabeth Presbyterian
Church**



**St. James Episcopal
Church**



**Christian Valley
Baptist Church**

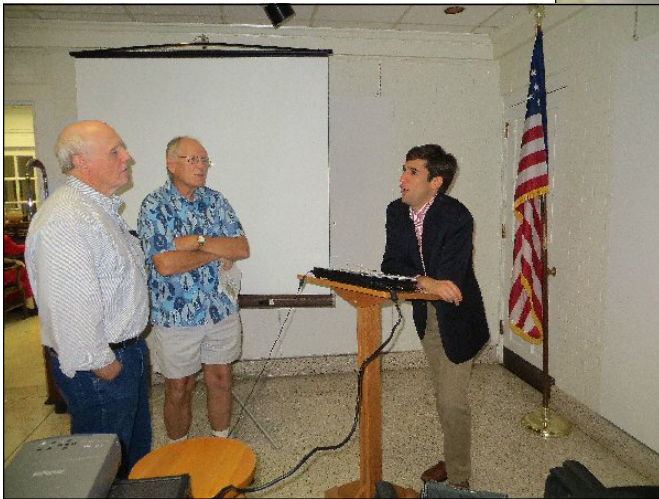


The Hagood House

Snapshots of the August 2012 ECHS Meeting



Snapshots of the August 2012 ECHS Meeting *(continued)*



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The ECHS *Journal* Section

Ezra Plumb: Master Carpenter of the Antebellum Era

The following article is a reprint of the Journal Staff Writer Jerry Shriver's article, "A Craftsman: Museum Rescues Ezra Plumb's Handiwork," Montgomery Advertiser-News-Journal, Dec. 29, 1980.

It (Ezra Plumb) is an appropriate name for a master carpenter and cabinet-maker who spent his career making a number of the area's pre-Civil War mansions fit just so with the Victorian architectural style of the time. Wealthy landowners in Brewton, Evergreen, Brooklyn, Nymph and elsewhere, bearing still-familiar family names, hired Plumb to build their elegant plantation palaces. Both were well-rewarded. Researchers say Plumb's expertise in middle Victorian design and building was an important influence on building styles in the Alabama-Florida region between the years 1835 and 1870.

Fire and time have ravaged much of his handiwork but the tools of his trade are being rescued from decay today by a team of workers at the Thomas E. McMillan Museum on the Jefferson Davis State

Junior College campus in Brewton.

An entire chest full of Plumb's tools, which museum director John Powell describes as "among the most outstanding collection of carpenter and cabinet making tools in the state" was donated to the museum earlier this month by descendants of Andrew Jay who owned a Plumb-built plantation near Evergreen "These tools, which date back to at least 1842, represent an important period in the tool manufacturing transition from hand-made to machine-made." Powell said.

The 100-piece collection was found deteriorating in an outdoor shed in Evergreen recently and is being restored at the museum's conservation laboratory (*Note: the article was written in 1980*). The assortment of files, rasps, planes, bits, branding irons, nails and chisels is expected to not only reveal a great deal about the impact of the industrial revolution on the area, but also will add to the museum's growing stature.

(Continued on page 11)



Ezra Plumb Display

The picture shows the exhibit of Ezra Plumb's tools in the Thomas E. McMillan Museum. The exhibit was created by the museum's second curator, John Powell.

To the left are photos about Andrew Jay and the plantation house which Ezra Plumb built for him.

Photos of the exhibit courtesy of Jerry Simmons, museum coordinator.

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Ezra Plumb: Master Carpenter of the Antebellum Era *(continued)*

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The facility, which opened in June 1979, houses the nation's largest collection of Andrew Jackson artifacts as well as prehistoric Indian relics, antique lumbering tools and 19th-century housewares, Powell said.

"We're trying to show who lived here in the area and what did they do for all those thousands of years," said Powell, who also teaches the only museum science course offered in the state.

"Families here have retained great quantities of historically valuable materials which we would like to get samples of so we can educate the public. Brewton appears to be a town that drew people here then kept them."

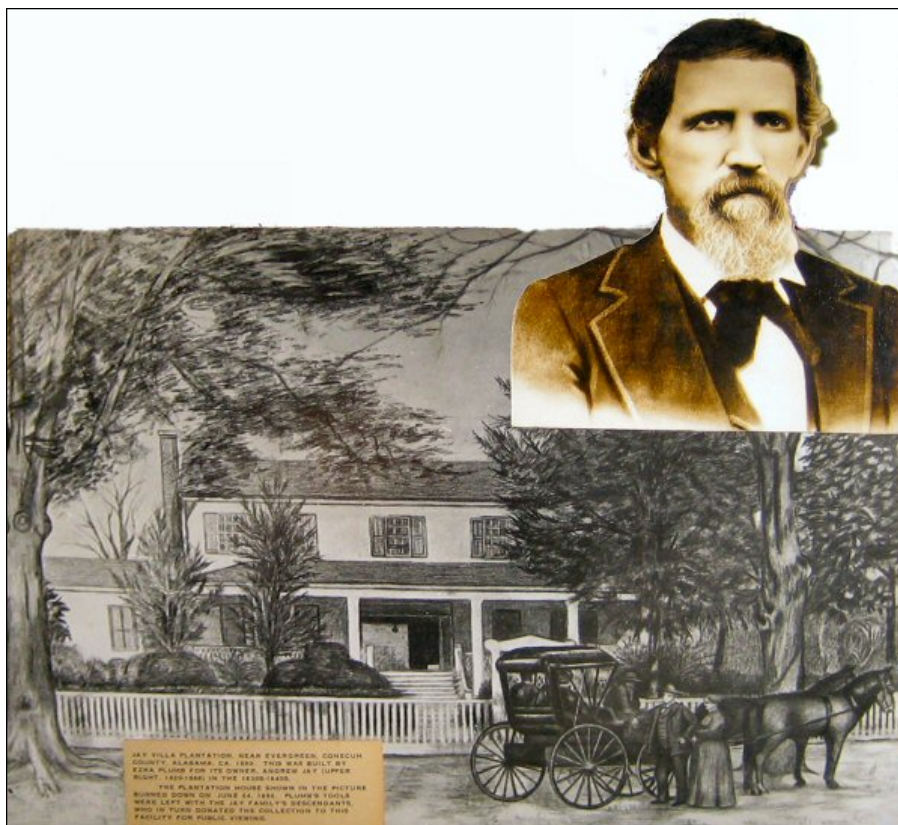
Powell said the 50-mile radius around Brewton is ripe with Civil War treasures waiting to be discovered, "In the North, where there were many immi-

grants, families and historians are more concerned with saving material objects. In the South the emphasis is on family history and genealogy because they want to remember their roots. They forget the three-dimensional objects. They might throw away a Civil War gun but keep the family Bible because of the records it contains."

Researchers hoping to preserve examples of by-gone ways of life in the South find themselves in a losing race against the wear and tear of the environment and ever-growing land development, according to Powell. Fortunately, in the case of the Plumb collection, the quality of the tools was "extraordinary" and they have held up well over the years.

"The quality of these tools, most of which date back to at least 1842, was the finest money could buy. Some of them were made in Sheffield, England and others in Massachusetts and Connecticut and

(Continued on page 12)



The pictures to the left show the plantation house called Jay Villa which Ezra Plumb built for Andrew Jay (pictured in the upper right hand corner) soon after Ezra arrived in the area in 1835. The house burned in 1892.

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Ezra Plumb: Master Carpenter of the Antebellum Era *(continued)*

(Continued from page 11)

some he made himself from scrap iron he brought with him when he moved here from the East. There are some really rare pieces such as the adjustable plow plane. These are tools that probably are not duplicated anywhere else in the country, except maybe New York.

"When we got them, most of them were in dismally poor shape. The metal was rusted, there was worm and beetle damage to the wood and they were generally dirty and filthy. Without removing any wood or metal, we tried to bring them back to a condition that would be aesthetically pleasing and we preserved them to make sure they got no worse."

The cleaning process involved air abrasion techniques (a delicate form of sand-blasting), electrolysis and uses of oils and waxes. "They came back fine. Only the finest woods were used. Also they used the finest cast and forged steel money could buy. And Plumb kept them well-oiled when he used them."

Powell said little is known about Plumb's background in carpentry. "It seems he just came here from Connecticut with no reputation about 1835 and

said, 'I can do it. Pay me.' He was very young, in his early 20s. He was put under contract by Andrew Jay to build the Jay Villa Plantation near Evergreen. That house burned in 1892. He also built the Leigh-McMillan home, which stood where the college is today. It seems he worked for only the wealthiest people in the area."

Among the Plumb-built structures still standing are the Hawthorne-McCreary home in Belleville, Ala.; the Kaleb and Asa Johnston home in Johnstonville, Ala.; and the Stephen Miller house near Evergreen.

By the time Plumb retired, about 1870, the lumber boom had hit the Brewton area and the more ornate late-Victorian architecture came into vogue. Numerous examples of the homes built during this period can be seen along Belleville Avenue in Brewton.

"Some of the new affluent people did copy some of his stuff, but he was obsolete by the time he retired." Plumb died in Conecuh County in the 1880s, leaving no progeny.

"He seemed to be very much a finish man, a detail man. I can imagine him as being very picky, because he kept his tools with care. He left the heavy stuff, the rough stuff to someone else." €



The Asa Johnston Farm-House
Photography and narrative on the house courtesy of
Mark Tisdale, from the website
[Mark Tisdale Photography](http://www.marktisdalephotography.com/2012/02/rustic-alabama-asa-johnston-home/)
<http://www.marktisdalephotography.com/2012/02/rustic-alabama-asa-johnston-home/>

The Asa Johnston Farmhouse, constructed in 1842 by Ezra Plumb, is architecturally significant as an excellent example of a mid-nineteenth century spraddle-roof dogtrot dwelling. It retains distinctive decorative details, including the only documented example in Alabama of a vaulted dogtrot ceiling.

Asa Johnston was among the early settlers of Conecuh County, arriving in 1818, the year the county was created, and became one of the area's wealthiest antebellum planters.

The ECHS *Journal* Section

Railroad Bill

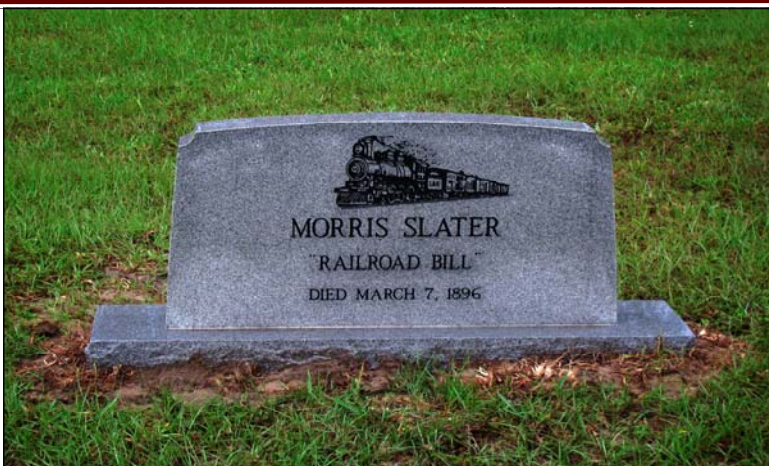
The following article by Ben Berntson of Auburn University comes from the online Encyclopedia of Alabama.

The legend of Railroad Bill arose in the winter of 1895, along the Louisville and Nashville (L&N) Railroad line in southern Alabama.

Based loosely on the exploits of an African American outlaw known as "Railroad Bill," tales of his brief but action-filled career on the wrong

side of the law have been preserved in song, fiction, and theater. He has been variously portrayed as a "Robin Hood" character, a murderous criminal, a shape shifter, and a nameless victim of the Jim Crow South. He was never conclusively identified, but L&N detectives claimed he was a man named Morris Slater, and some residents of Brewton believed him to be a man called Bill McCoy who was shot by local law enforcement.

Stories about Railroad Bill began to surface in early 1895, when an armed vagrant began riding the L&N boxcars between Flomaton and Mobile. He earned the nickname "Railroad Bill," or sometimes just "Railroad," from the trainmen who had trouble detaining the rifle-wielding hitchhiker. On March 6, 1895, railroad employees attempted to restrain a man they found sleeping on a water tank along the railroad. The man fired on them and escaped into the woods after hijacking a train car. This incident sparked a manhunt by railroad company detectives that led a posse to Bay Minette on April 6, 1895. When detectives confronted an armed man there, he killed Baldwin County deputy sheriff James H. Stewart in the ensuing gunfight and evaded capture



Monument for Morris Slater's Grave at St. John's Cemetery in Pensacola

Larry Massey, who is writing a book on Railroad Bill sent this photo of the monument which he has had placed at the grave. He notes in the email sent with the photo, "On the nose of the locomotive is 74. According to a deputy who hunted Railroad Bill, he often liked to catch Freight Train No. 74 as it approached Bay Minette, Alabama."

again.

The deputy's killing wung the full attention of law enforcement and the media toward Railroad Bill. A notice for a \$500 reward posted in Mobile identified him as Morris Slater, a convict-lease worker who in 1893 had fled from a turpentine camp in Bluff Springs, Florida, after killing a lawman. Slater had been nicknamed "Railroad Time" for his rapid work pace.

Railroad Bill crossed into Florida where, on July 4, 1895, Brewton Sheriff E. S. McMillan tracked him to a house near Bluff Springs. As the sheriff approached the dwelling, the fugitive opened fire and disappeared into the woods, leaving McMillan fatally wounded.

The killing of McMillan marked a turning point and greatly expanded the efforts in both Alabama and Florida to hunt Railroad Bill down. Despite the increase in manpower, the outlaw remained at large, robbing trains and reportedly selling goods to impoverished people for prices lower than the local merchant stores, as well as engaging in occasional shoot-outs with lawmen and L&N authorities. All the while, his legend grew, especially in Alabama's African American community. Although the majority of blacks condemned Railroad Bill's actions, many also admired his courage and audacity. Some people attributed supernatural powers to him, maintaining that he was able to evade capture by changing into animal form and was only vulnerable to silver bullets. Other tales said that he had the power to

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Railroad Bill (continued)

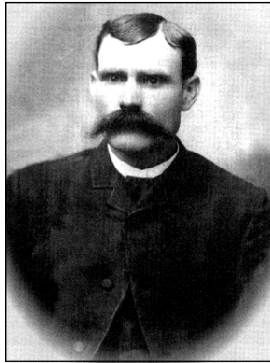
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disable the tracking abilities of the bloodhounds on his trail. One such tale, recounted by Carl Carmer in The Hurricane's Children: Tales from Your Neck o' the Woods, describes a lawman chasing Railroad Bill:

So the sheriff decided Railroad Bill must be hiding under the low bushes in the clearing and he began looking around. Pretty soon he started a little red fox that lit out through the woods. The sheriff let go with both barrels of his shotgun, but he missed. After the second shot the little red fox turned about and laughed at him a high, wild, hearty laugh—and the sheriff recognized it. That little fox was Railroad Bill.

By the summer of 1895, the L&N Railroad, the state of Alabama, the state of Florida, the town of Brewton, and Escambia County had pooled together a reward of \$1,250 for Railroad Bill's capture. A host of bounty hunters from places as far away as Texas and Indiana descended on southwestern Alabama and the western swamps of Florida. They were joined by operatives of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, L&N detectives, lawmen, and vigilante posses.

Many innocent African-Americans soon found themselves paying heavily for Railroad Bill's crimes, as questionably identified suspects were brought in for the reward, or were accused of being accomplices. Some of the men arrested suffered beatings or whippings, and others were murdered. On July 16, the Pine Belt News in Brewton ran a headline



**Sheriff McMillan,
Killed by Railroad
Bill**



**Sheriff McMillan's Gun
A Colt Lightning .41 c&4
revolver, smaller.**



**McGowan's Rifle Used to
Kill Railroad Bill
(Rifle second from top)
Pictures and Information
on the guns courtesy of
Jerry Simmons**

that stated "The Wrong Man Shot," and other reports from Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and Texas filtered in about men killed after being misidentified as Railroad Bill. By August 2, the Montgomery Daily Advertiser was reporting that those hunting the fugitive had become a "small army" numbering "at least one hundred men here loaded for bear."

Death of Railroad Bill The hunt for Railroad Bill persisted until March 7, 1896, when a man was gunned down by a host of law enforcement officials at Tidmore and Ward's General Store in

Atmore, a depot town along the L&N. Accounts of the final episode in Railroad Bill's bloody career widely differ. Some say that authorities surprised and killed the man as he sat on an oak barrel eating cheese and crackers. Other accounts say that he engaged the lawmen in a shoot-out in front of the store, and still others contend that he walked into a trap at Tidmore and Ward's.

Railroad Bill's body was placed on public view in Brewton, and crowds of curious spectators gathered to get a glimpse. Many Brewton residents recognized the man as Bill McCoy, a local troublemaker who had threatened local saw-mill owner T. R. Miller with a knife at around the same time Morris Slater was working in the turpentine camp in Florida. Souvenir hunters paid 50 cents for a picture of Constable J. L. McGowan, believed to have fired the fatal shot, standing rifle in hand over the corpse of Railroad Bill strapped to a wooden plank. After a few days in Brewton, the

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The ECHS *Journal* Section

Railroad Bill *(continued)*

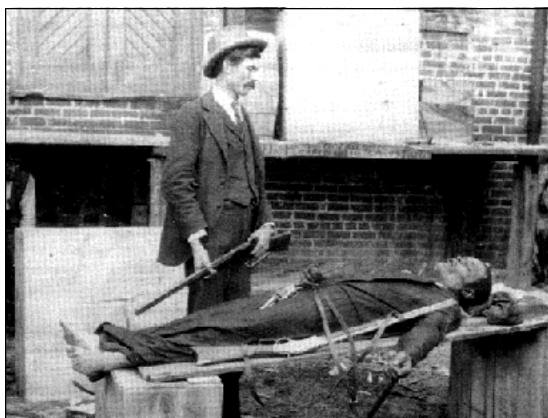
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body was taken by train to Montgomery and later to Pensacola, Florida, for public display. So many people came to see Railroad Bill in Montgomery that authorities charged an admission fee of 25 cents. His body's final resting place is unknown (NOTE- Now thought to be St. John's Cemetery, Pensacola).

Railroad Bill was a symbol of the racial and economic divide in the post-Reconstruction Deep South. During this period of increasing legal segregation in Alabama and the rest of the South, the hunt for Railroad Bill became a theatrical white supremacist saga in local newspapers. The outlaw's legacy has been passed down through generations in many cultural representations. Railroad Bill blues ballads began circulating in the early twentieth century; one was recorded by Riley Puckett and Gid Tanner in 1924. Musicologist Alan Lomax recorded a version of Railroad Bill by Payneville native Vera Ward Hall in 1939. Blues singers have used "Railroad Bill" as a stage name, and the popularity of the ballads exploded during the folk revival of the 1950s and 60s. In 1981, the Labor Theater in New York City produced the musical play Railroad Bill by C. R. Portz" (<http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1258>).

The following is one of the many ballads written about Railroad Bill. This one comes from the Encyclopedia of Alabama

Railroad Bill, Railroad Bill
He never worked, and he never will,
And it's ride, ride, ride. (This chorus after each verse)



This image of Constable J. L. McGowan standing, rifle in hand, over the corpse of "Railroad Bill" strapped to a wooden plank, sold for 50 cents in the days following the notorious outlaw's death in March 1896.

Railroad Bill's a mighty mean man
Shot the light out of the poor brakeman's hand

Railroad Bill, up on a hill
Lightin' a seegar with a ten-dollar bill.

Railroad Bill took my wife,
If I didn't like it, gonna take my life.

Goin' on a mountain, goin' out west
Thirty-eight special stickin' out of my vest.

Buy me a pistol just as long as my arm
Shoot everybody ever done me harm.

Got a thirty-special in a forty-five frame,

I can't miss 'cause I got dead aim.

Railroad Bill, he ain't so bad
Whipped his mama, shot his old dad.

Early one morning, standing in the rain
Round the bend come a long freight train.

Railroad Bill a-comin' home soon
Killed McMillan by the light of the moon

McMillan had a special train
When they got there they was prayin'

Kill me a chicken, send me the wing
They think I'm workin', Lord, I ain't doin' a thing.

Kill me a chicken, send me the head,
Think I'm workin', Lord, I'm layin' in bed.

Gonna drink my whiskey, drink it in the wind
The doctor said it'd kill me but he didn't say when.).€

ECHOES
THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 276
 Brewton, AL 36427
 Phone: 251-809-1528

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