



The  
Escambia  
County  
Historical  
Society,  
Founded  
1971

## The January, 2021 Newsletter There Will Not Be A January Meeting. Students Are on the Campus for the Spring Term. However, the Museum and Alabama Room Are Still Closed.

### News from the Museum and the Alabama Room

There is still no definite date for reopening the Museum and Alabama Room or a date for an ECHS meeting. However, Don still welcomes visitors to the Museum. He is there Tuesday—Thursday, 9:00 am-4:30 pm.

The museum and Alabama Room are still available to individuals who contact Don for an appointment. Address: P.O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427; Phone: 251-809-1528; E-mail: <escambiacohistoricalsociety@gmail.com>.

Remember this is the month to renew your membership to the society. The current dues are: Single, \$25 - Multiple members at the same address, \$35 - Business, \$100, and Lifetime, \$500 (per individual). You can mail payments to: \*Escambia County Historical Society, P. O. Box 276, Brewton, AL 36427.

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**Escambia Co. Medal of Honor Recipient Sidney E. Manning. Awarded medal posthumously for extraordinary heroism on 28 July 1918, while serving with Company G, 167th Infantry, 42d Division, in action at Breuvannes, France.**

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**Escambia Co. Medal of Honor Recipient William W. Seay. Awarded medal posthumously for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the 62d Transportation Co (Medium Truck), 7th Transportation Battalion, 48th Transportation Group, in action against enemy aggressor forces on a resupply mission at Ap Nhi, Republic of Vietnam, on 25 August 1968.**



The Camellia, designated  
State Flower in 1959

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### Jan Redditt, Last of ECHS Founders



#### The Birthday Celebration

From the left are Evelyn Dukes, Ann Biggs-Williams, Mark Reynolds, and Jan.

Evelyn, Ann and Mark were colleagues of Jan at Jefferson Davis Community College,

Jan Redditt passed away on December 11, 2020 at the age of 94. Jan was the first librarian at Jefferson Davis Junior College and was instrumental in organizing the Escambia County Historical Society. She was the onr of the original faculty members of the college and the last living founding member of the society.

Jan served as the society's librarian, on the society's nominating committees, and was a member of the committee to prepare the society's booklet honoring the United States bicentennial in 1975-76.

*In October of 2016, ECHOES carried this news item and photograph about Jan entitled:*

*"Founding Member of ECHS, Janel (Jan) Redditt Honored on Her 90th Birthday":*

Former colleagues of Jan honored her with lunch at the Grand Marlin Restaurant at Pensacola Beach, Florida on her 90th birthday. Jan started the ball rolling to organize the Escambia County Historical Society in her early days as Head Librarian of Jefferson Davis Community College, then Jefferson Davis Jr. College. One of the original founding members of the society, she has been enjoying her retirement in Gulf Breeze, Florida but keeps up with the Society by reading ECHOES.

### Highway Signs Honoring Escambia County's Two Medal of Honor Winners Unveiled



**The facsimile signs are shown Dec. 5, 2020 during a ceremony held in the Atmore City Hall Auditorium.**

In an email notifying ECHS of the ceremony to unveil the signs, Bobby Lanier, who helped organize the campaign for the signs, wrote, "We thank the Escambia Historical Society for their donation. It helped to get our project started."

The signs, to be placed along U.S. 31, commemorate the heroic deeds of Cpl. Sidney E. Manning and Sgt. William Wayne Seay, who earned the awards 50 years apart. Manning's heroism came in 1918, during World War I; Seay showed his mettle in 1968, in a Vietnamese jungle.

A portion of the highway between Atmore and Flomaton will now be dubbed the Cpl. Sidney Manning Memorial Highway, while a segment of the federal thoroughfare between Brewton and Flomaton will be known as the Sgt. William Wayne Seay Memorial Highway (*From the article "Heroes Highway Signs Unveiled" from the Atmore News*).



### Jefferson Davis Community College Faculty after College Is Established in Alco

**Three Members of ECHS are in this picture: Ann Biggs-Williams is on the back row on the left, Jan Redditt is third from the left on the back row, and Ranella Merritt is in the back row on the right.**

**Former Museum Director John Powell is fourth from the left kneeling in the front row.**

# From the Alabama Department of Archives and History This Week in Alabama History, January 18 - 24

## January 20, 1702 Fort Louis de la Mobile (Fort Louis De La Louisiane) Established



**Above, top, model of a fort of the period; bottom, left, monument marking original site of Mobile, erected in 1902 by city of Mobile; on the right, historical marker erected by Mobile chapter of Colonia Dames in 2001.**

January 29, 1702, French colonists, led by Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, established Fort Louis de la Mobile on a bluff twenty-seven miles up the Mobile River from Mobile Bay. The settlement, soon known simply as "Mobile," moved to its permanent site at the mouth of the Mobile River in 1711. The original site, Fort Louis de la Mobile, served as the capital of the colony of Louisiana from its founding to 1718.

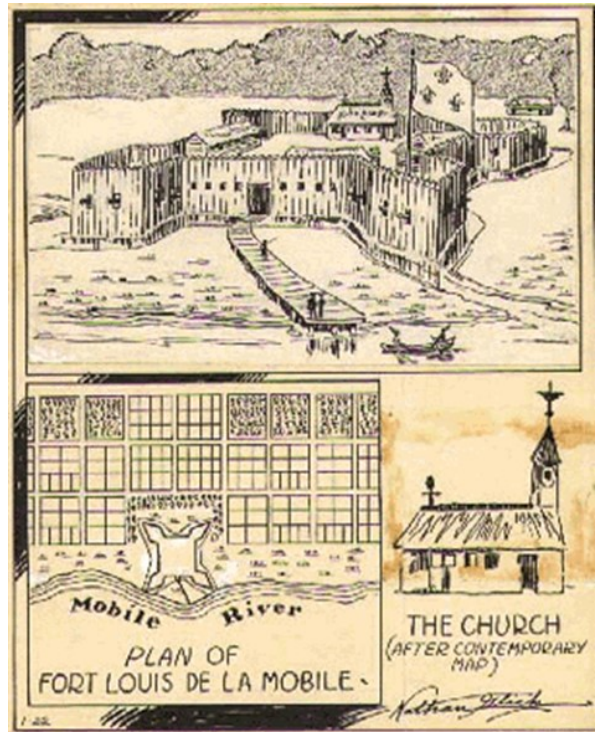
This fort, the second capital of French Louisiane, was also known as Fort Louis de la Louisiane. During the first few years, the colonists were plagued by sickness, floods, and near-starvation, but by 1704 supply ships were arriving from Canada regularly. As

more immigrants arrived, including brides for the colonists, the colony grew.

La Salle's\* lieutenant, Henry de Tonty, died at the fort during a yellow fever outbreak and was buried nearby in an unmarked grave. Most of the colonists, however, survived and stayed on until a series of floods began in 1710. A massive flood in 1711 forced the residents to seek safety in treetops and kept the houses under water for nearly a month.

It was decided to move the town and fort to a location downriver to the site of present-day Mobile where the colonists founded Fort Conde, first known as Fort Louis. The relocation was completed by mid-1712 and the structures at the earlier site were burned down to prevent use by others.

\*Note: La Salle is the French explorer who led an expedition down the Illinois and Mississippi rivers and claimed all the region watered by the Mississippi and its tributaries for Louis XIV of France, naming the region "Louisiana."



**Fort Louis de la Mobile,  
Pin and Ink Drawing by Nathan Glick.  
From Alabama Department of  
Archives and History**

*(Continued on page 4)*

# From the Alabama Department of Archives and History

## This Week in Alabama History, January 18 - 24

*Continued from page 3)*

### January 19, 1818 The First legislature of the Alabama Territory Convenes



**To the left, Indian Baths at “Old” St. Stephens Historical Park. The origin of these man-made pits is uncertain. Some say the Choctaw carved them out. Some say it was the Spanish**



### St. Stephens Courthouse in “New” St. Stephens, completed in 1854.

**The “new” town of St. Stephens, approximately three miles south of the original St. Stephens town site, was selected in 1848 as the seat of government for Washington County. In 1853 the Alabama Legislature authorized construction of the St. Stephens Courthouse.**

**The building served as the county courthouse for 53 years until the county seat was moved to Chatom in 1907.**

*Photo from the Historic American Buildings Survey 1934.*

On January 19, 1818 the first Legislature of the Alabama Territory convened at the Douglass Hotel in the territorial capital of St. Stephens, now known as “Old” St. Stephens. Attendance was sparse with twelve members of the House, representing seven counties, and only one member of the Senate conducting the business of the new territory.

St. Stephens today refers to an archaeological site and Historical Park as well as an adjoining town which are located in Washington County near the Tombigbee River, 67 miles north of Mobile.

St. Stephens is composed of two distinct sites. The “Old” St. Stephens site lies directly on the river and is no longer inhabited. Now encompassed by the “Old”

St. Stephens Historical Park, it is basically an archeological site and recreation area. It is listed, however, on the National Register of Historic Places.

Changes in the territorial capital and transportation resulted in the “Old” St. Stephens site being bypassed by development. As the “Old” or original St. Stephens declined and essentially disappeared, the “New” St. Stephens developed two miles inland around a railway station, but adjacent to the old site. It is the location of a post office, Baptist and Methodist churches, and residences. It has one building listed on the National Register of Landmarks and Heritage and another on the Alabama Register.

*In “What Was Alabama like in 1817, When It Became a Territory?” author Kelly Kazek writes:*

St. Stephens was the site of a fort and was chartered as a town in 1807. After it was named the territory capital, it began to grow quickly and, by 1819, it had more than 500 homes, 20 stores, two hotels, legal and medical offices, a theatre, a post office, a private boys’ school and the Tombecke (the original word for Tombigbee) Bank, the first in the state. The bank was founded by Israel Pickens, who went on to become the state’s third governor.

An early newspaper in St. Stephens was the Halcyon and Tombeckbe Advertiser, published by Thomas Eastin. In an early edition, he described St. Stephens as a town of elegant tree-shaded homes, spacious streets, and genteel citizens ([https://www.al.com/living/2017/03/what\\_was\\_alabama\\_ml](https://www.al.com/living/2017/03/what_was_alabama_ml)).



### The Courthouse in “New” St. Stephens Today

**The Masons, who had acquired the building in 1910, donated the building to the St. Stephens Historical Commission.**

**In 2000, the Historical Commission restored the building for use as a visitor center and local history museum.**

*Continued on page 5)*

## From the Alabama Department of Archives and History This Week in Alabama History, January 18 - 24

(Continued from page 4)

### **January 19, 1830 LaGrange College in Franklin County Chartered by Alabama Legislature**



**A painting by Jenny Eakin Rice of LaGrange College As It Appeared in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century**  
*The painting was commissioned in the 1930's by Frank King, founder of the Tennessee Valley Historical Society. (Michael E. Palmer/ Tuscaloosa News)*

Wikipedia introduces La Grange College, now the University of North Alabama, this way:

A comprehensive regional university today, the University of North Alabama traces its beginnings to the first half of the 19th century, when the Methodist Episcopal Church sought to bring learning and culture to an obscure mountain in Alabama.

From these humble beginnings, the university progressed from a poorly funded church-supported school, to a cash-strapped normal school, to a teachers college and, finally, to the state university it has become ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_University\\_of\\_North\\_Alabama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_University_of_North_Alabama)).

What is now the University of North Alabama first opened its doors as LaGrange College on January 11, 1830 (the Charter from the Alabama Legislature was not issued until January 19, 1830), in a mountain hamlet a few miles south of Leighton in eastern Colbert County, Alabama. LaGrange means "The Barn" in French. The college had twenty-one local college trustees listed in the Acts of Alabama for the Eleventh Annual Session.

*In an article in the Tuscaloosa News, Michael Palmer writes of the college's beginning:*

Alabama, higher education was born on a mountain. It started at LaGrange College, a few miles

southeast of Florence in northwest Alabama. The college opened on Jan. 11, 1830, a year before the University of Alabama opened in Tuscaloosa.

"LaGrange was the oldest chartered college in Alabama, not the first college, but the first chartered," notes Lonnie Grissom, vice president of the LaGrange Historical Association. He continues, "The college had a dorm, a laboratory, a classroom and an observatory."

The idea of starting a secular college in Alabama came from an 1826 meeting of the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Methodists built the college on Lawrence Hill on LaGrange Mountain in what was then part of Franklin County.

The college soon became the place where North Alabama aristocrats sent their sons for an education ([michael.palmer@tuscaloosanews.com](mailto:michael.palmer@tuscaloosanews.com)).

Today, a nine-ton stone monument, shown at the left, marks the former location of the La Grange



community and college. Both were burned by Union troops in 1863. However, by that point the college had moved north across the Tennessee River to Florence.

The section of Franklin County containing LaGrange Mountain is now in Colbert County. LaGrange College, which became Florence Wesleyan University in 1855, is now the University of North Alabama.



**Wesleyan Hall was constructed in 1856 to house Florence Wesleyan University, formerly known as LaGrange College of near-by Franklin County. It is built in the Gothic Revival style of architecture and influenced the style of campus buildings going forward. It remains an iconic building on the landscape of North Alabama and an exemplary example of the Gothic Revival style.**

## From the Alabama Department of Archives and History This Week in Alabama History, January 25-31

**January 26, 1839  
First State Prison**



**Main Building of the  
Wetumpka Prison in  
Elmore County, Alabama.  
A new prison, built north of  
this site, was completed in  
December 1942 and is known in  
2011 as the Julia Tutwiler  
Prison for Women.**

On January 26, 1839, Alabama's first state prison was established by legislative act. In 1842, at the Wetumpka State Penitentiary, the state's first inmate began serving time for harboring a runaway slave. The first female was incarcerated in 1850 for murder. Today, the Alabama Department of Corrections oversees a multi-facility state prison system

*From Wikipedia:*

Built on the east bank of the Coosa River in **Wetumpka**, the prison was nicknamed the "Walls of Alabama" or "Walls." For much of its operation, the prison housed both men and women, kept in separate sections of the prison.

For a period beginning in the 1920's this prison was used exclusively for women. After a new women's prison was opened a mile away in 1942, the state housed fewer prisoners at the aging Wetumpka facility.

The historic site was added to the National Register of Historic Places on May 8, 1973. All buildings on the site have been demolished since the late 20th century ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wetumpka\\_State\\_Penitentiary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wetumpka_State_Penitentiary)).

**January 27, 1840  
The Alabama Legislature Passes a Joint  
Resolution Accepting the Disputed  
Boundary Line with Georgia.**

In recognizing the line marked by a Georgia commission in 1826, the legislature stated that "a fixed and known line between this State and Georgia, is of far higher consequence to us than the acquisition of an inconsiderable portion of territory."

The line between the states had been a bone of contention, off and on, since the founding of the state. But on this day, the Alabama Legislature finally passed a joint resolution, accepting the disputed boundary line with Georgia.

Alabama was created in 1819 from a portion of land originally ceded by Georgia to the federal government in 1802. The 1802 agreement stipulated the western boundary of Georgia as the western bank of the Chattahoochee River from the Florida line to Miller's Bend (present-day West Point, Georgia) and then northward in a straight line to Nickajack, near present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee.

After Alabama became a state, Georgia officials requested that a joint survey be conducted to firmly establish the boundary, but Alabama abandoned its share of the project, leaving Georgia to complete the survey on its own in 1826. Alabama officials disagreed with some elements in the Georgia survey, but ultimately decided in 1840 to accept the results (<https://www.alabamaneewscenter.com/2019/01/27/day-alabama-history-alabama-accepted-georgia-boundary/>).



**Map of Alabama and Georgia, 1853  
(Henry Schenck Tanner, Library of  
Congress, Geography and Map Division).**

*Continued on page 7)*

# From the Alabama Department of Archives and History

## This Week in Alabama History, January 25-31

(Continued from page 6)

### January 30, 1846 Montgomery Becomes State Capital



**The first Montgomery capitol building, destroyed by fire in 1849.**

Montgomery is selected as the capital of Alabama by the state legislature on the 16th ballot.

Montgomery won the final vote largely because of promises of Montgomery city leaders to provide \$75,000 for a new capitol and because of

the emerging prominence of the Black Belt region of the state.

### January 31, 1902 Tallulah Bankhead, star of stage, screen, and radio in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, is born in Huntsville.



The daughter of U.S. Congressman William B. Bankhead, Tallulah was most famous for her flamboyant lifestyle, throaty voice, and stage role in *The Little Foxes* (1939) and her part in the film *Lifeboat* (1943). [There is some question of her exact birthdate; this is the most generally accepted.]

### January 30, 1956 With the Montgomery Bus Boycott about to enter its third month, segregationists bomb the home of boycott spokesman Martin Luther King Jr.

The home sustained moderate damage, but no one was injured. The young minister addressed the large crowd that gathered after the blast, declaring, "I want it to be known the length and breadth of this land that if I am stopped this movement will not stop."



**To the left, the house after the bombing. To the right, the house, built in 1912, which has been restored to its appearance when Dr. King and his family lived there.**

### January 30, 1966 Alabama Experiences Its Coldest Ever Recorded Temperature of -27°F at New Market in Madison County.

Lucille Hereford, postmistress and town-volunteer-weather-observer, recorded a minus '-27' degree temperature on that day. "She remembered that the sun was out and the ground was covered with 8" of new snow" (<https://whnt.com/weather/valleywx-blog/>).

Currently the average low temperature during January for nearby Huntsville is around 29°.

### January 26, 1983 Alabama Football Coach "Bear" Bryant Dies Suddenly From a Heart Attack.



Alabamians were shocked and saddened when retired University of Alabama football coach Paul "Bear" Bryant dies suddenly from a heart attack. Bryant began coaching at Alabama in 1958 and went on to win six national championships with the team.

**ECHOES**  
 THE NEWSLETTER FOR  
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| Wildflowers of The Conecuh/Escambia River Basin CD | \$10.00 | \$15.00 |
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*ECHOES, The newsletter for the Escambia County Historical Society, a 501 (c) (3) corporation, is published monthly except November. Comments are welcome. You may email the Society at [escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com](mailto:escambiahistoricalociety@gmail.com) or call 251-809-1528.*

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