



The June 2023 Newsletter
The June Meeting will be Tuesday, June 27, 2023
at 3:00 p. m. in the Meeting Room
of the McMillan Museum
on the College Campus.



Framed arrow heads, estimated from 2,000 to 3,000 B. C. E. ECHS Show and Tell, Oct. 2012.

The Program. Show and Tell.
Bring your treasures, share your tales!

A “Show and Tell” program invites you to revisit items that trigger memories or lead to the discovery of forgotten history or unique cultures or customs. Items to bring can be photos, letters, postcards, unique flea market finds, collections from your travel, a hobby that has taught you something you would like to share with others. Think of family heirlooms, items that bring back family or area history

These personal stories and special objects will be fun and fascinating to hear about.

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Snapshot from the May Meeting: Left to Right, John Angel, Tom McMillan, Dick James, Guess Speaker Kim Brooks, Don Sales, Cady Lynn, and Richard Lynn.

The July Program

Author, historian, Dale Cox of Two Egg, Florida will present a program on New Discoveries about Fort Crawford. He has presented several programs for ECHS, most recently on the Fort at Prospect Bluff, FL



Two Women on a Porch in Montevallo, 1890’s.

**Volume 50 No. 6
June 2023**

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The Program

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“Show and Tell” programs are important because they remind us of the importance of preserving the past. The Verona, New Jersey historical society reports that one member joined just because of the “Show and Tell” programs: "To preserve the living memory of the past," he said of his reasoning to join, "that so many others are so willing to throw away



At Left, Alice Cushman Darling and James Macky Darling, great grandparents of ECHS member Barbara Page. Barbara is shown holding the guest book which was auto-graphed at the 35th wedding anniversary party of this couple.



A wooden, handmade game board for Mancala, a game popular around the world.



An Iron Pot from the Fort Mims Area Bought to a “Show an Tell” Program by Jeff Ross.



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



At left, tools, some of them used for shoeing a horse.



An Early kitchen item brought by Lydia Grimes.



A grain cradle used to capture grain shafts and let the chaff fall out.

News and Announcements



The Fall Pilgrimage for the Alabama Historical Association will be at Sylacauga, Ala. on Oct. 27-28, 2023.

The Association comments that meetings such as the Fall Pilgrimage offer the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with other individuals who share an interest in Alabama state and local history.

Sylacauga

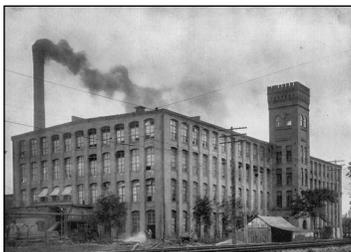
Sylacauga is known as the Marble City because of the marble quarries located there. Sylacauga marble was first made famous by Italian sculptor Giuseppe Moretti, who established a marble works and studio in the area. The Vulcan Statue in Birmingham was made from Sylacauga marble by Moretti.

Stone from local quarries has been used to construct other major works, including the Lincoln Memorial and the U.S. Supreme Court building. Alabama marble is among the highest quality stone in the world.

Sylacauga was also the location of the Avondale Mills, a major textile manufacturer for Alabama. The Mill in Sylacauga operated from 1897 until it closed in 2006. The building burned to the ground in 2011.



Marble Quarry in Sylacauga, 1935



Historic Photo of Avondale Mills, Sylacauga.

Other Attractions



Kymulga Covered Bridge This quaint bridge was once a main access route for settlers and pioneers relocating to the area from other regions of the U.S.



The Isabel Anderson Comer Museum & Arts Center The Museum, which opened in 1985, showcases a wide range of memorabilia, historical artifacts, and photographs of the local area. There are sculptures carved from locally quarried marble for which the city is famous, plus several displays of early settlers and Native Americans who lived in the area.



The Old Gantts Quarry Post Office Building, once located in town of Gantts Quarry, now a ghost town, was moved to Sylacauga.



Virtual Volunteer Opportunities at Alabama Department of Archives and History

Alabama Supreme Court Case Files

In October 2020, the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) launched a project to provide online access to the case files of the Alabama Supreme Court from 1820 through 1877, which include lower court rulings, interrogatories, exhibits, motions, and other details not included in the published rulings of the Court.

The ADAH needs virtual volunteers to transcribe selections from the the handwritten documents. The transcription project utilizes FromThePage, an online platform the ADAH has used for several years to successfully conduct similar crowdsourced projects. This work is done on a standard web browser and requires no special software or equipment. Anyone with an Internet connection can participate.

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News and Announcements

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Civil War and Reconstruction Governors Papers

The ADAH has also been digitizing the official papers of the eleven men who served as governors of Alabama from the eve of the Civil War through the Reconstruction period. These administrative records include documents such as correspondence, appointments, proclamations, pardons and paroles, and more. They are valuable records documenting a tumultuous and transformative period of history from the perspective of Alabama's chief executive. The initial phase of this project was recently completed. Approximately 28,000 documents are now available online in the ADAH's Digital Collections. They represent the following administrations: Andrew B. Moore, 1857-1861; John G. Shorter, 1861-1863; Thomas H. Watts, 1863-1865; Lewis E. Parsons, 1865; Robert M. Patton, 1865-1867; Wager Swayne, 1867-1868; William H. Smith, 1868-1870; Robert B. Lindsay, 1870-1872; David P. Lewis, 1872-1874;

George S. Houston, 1874-1878; Rufus W. Cobb, 1878-1882.

Questions? Contact Meredith McDonough, ADAH Digital Assets Coordinator



America in Bloom Committee Members Visit Brewton, Impressed with the McMillan Museum

Founded in 2001, America in Bloom (AIB) promotes nationwide beautification through education and community involvement by encouraging the use of flowers, plants, trees, and other environmental and lifestyle enhancements. The organization is based in Columbus, Ohio.

Don Sales says that when committee members visited Brewton in 2022, they asked to see the Museum and were impressed with its content and organization. The Committee members who visited this year on June 19 also requested a tour of the Museum and were impressed especially with the pre-history exhibits.

Escambia's Gopher Farm

Compiled by Mrs. Annie Crook Waters From ECHOES for Feb. 1974

In the January 7, 1909 Pine Belt News, there appeared an article on a very unique farm. It was operated by Robert Emmons, who was nearing his eightieth birthday, and was located three miles northwest of Flomaton, Alabama. Mr. Emmons relates his story:

"When I first moved here, fifty-nine years ago, I found seven gopher eggs. They all hatched and every one lived, This year one of them ran away. That leaves me with only six of the originals. My largest gopher got caught in a steel trap not many days ago. I think he was fully seventy years old. Kilby Wiggins gave him to me something like five or ten years before the Civil War and the animal was five or ten years old when he brought him in.

"My oldest gophers are older than all my children except two and I have 80 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren, and the gophers are not grown. I have heard that they live 150 years, but my opinion



Gopher Tortoise

is they live longer than that. It takes any animal about one-third of its natural life to get fully grown and matures. Now, if the gopher requires eighty years to get grown, in my judgement he will live at least 200 years or more

"He comes just as near eating anything as anything you ever heard of. grass of any kind, cotton, watermelons,

peaches, plums, potatoes, corn, and all garden vegetables. He has a peculiar fondness for the Indian potato. He thrives better on pusley (*known in Florida as a trouble turf grass weed*) than anything else. He might take a chow of tobacco if you passed it around.

"I draw water and pour it in a hole like a hog wallow and they come and drink like horses or any other stock. Gophers have some funny ways. When you see one throwing dirt out of his cave you may know that it will rain in twenty-four hours. I have never seen it fail in 50 years. In my judgement, he piles the dirt at the mouth of the cave as a dam to keep the water out. When it thunders, he is sure to go to the

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Escambia's Gopher Farm

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bottom of his cave and when he comes out again, you may rest assured that weather is settled.

“He goes to sleep in winter like the snake and the frog and never makes his appearance in spring until all cold weather is past. I have never seen any frost after the appearance of my gophers.

“All the mother does for the young gopher is to lay the egg at the mouth of the cave about six inches deep in the sand. When they hatch, they go to the bottom of the cave and from that time on shift for themselves. All young gophers have a soft place in the middle of the breast like the baby's head. You can hold a one year old gopher between you and the sun and easily see his internal organs at work.

“I have about 300 gophers, and have eaten about 50 this year. That is what I raise them for. I don't use him as an ornament. He is a failure in that line. They have paths like hogs to the well and all around the place. I can go to any den and call the inmates out like so many pigs.” He demonstrated to the writer by going to the mouth of the den, patting on the ground and calling to them. They knew his voice and came out, but run from strangers.

“When I am gone I want my posterity to take these original gophers and keep them as long as they live. I want them to fully determine the actual life of the animal.”

I wonder if any of Mr. Emmons' descendants can fill us in on the outcome of the original gophers. An editor of a north Alabama paper who read the article in the Pine Belt News wrote the editor and asked, “As a native of north Alabama, I have never seen or heard of a gopher; what kind of an animal is he? Does he have a skin or scales?” Editor Sowell answered his query explaining that he was a burrowing land tortoise with a hard shell, and invited the northern editor down to enjoy some gopher gumbo. For some time thereafter there was a running joke between the two editors.

Some Interesting Facts about Gophers or Land Tortoises

- **Scientific name:** *Gopherus polyphemus*
- **Conservation status:** It is threatened to endangered
- **Size:** 9 to 11 inches as adults (23-28 cm), 10 pounds (4.5 kg)
- **Lifespan:** 40-60 years in the wild, 90 in captivity
- **Shell color:** Tan, brown, or gray
- **Their range:** extends from southeastern

Louisiana to southeastern South Carolina and southward through Florida.

- **The burrows:** are found in dry places such as sand hills, flatwoods, prairies and coastal dunes or in human-made environments such as pastures, grassy roadsides and old fields.
- **The gopher tortoise is a keystone species:** meaning its extinction would result in measurable changes to the ecosystem in which it occurs. Specifically, other animals, such as gopher frogs, several species of snakes and several small mammals, depend on tortoise burrows.
- **For the gopher tortoise to thrive:** the animal generally needs three things: well-drained sandy soil (for digging burrows), plenty of low plant growth (for food) and open, sunny areas (for nesting and basking).
- **Females lay an average of six eggs:** but can lay from three to 14 eggs, depending on their body size. They lay one clutch of eggs per year, and it takes about 100 days for the eggs to incubate.
- **Sex Determination:** Like many other reptiles, gopher tortoises have temperature-dependent sex determination. That means that when the eggs are laid, they are neither male nor female.
- **The sex of the offspring:** is determined by the temperature of the sand or dirt where the nest is incubating. For gopher tortoises, if the temperature is above 30° C (85° F), the hatchling tortoises will be females. Temperatures below 30° C produce males. Tortoises are 3 – 5 cm (1.5 – 2 in.) long at hatching and grow very slowly, less than 2.5 cm (1 in.) per year. They have soft shells that leave them extremely vulnerable to predation by raccoons.
- **Gopher tortoises are primarily herbivorous:** although they will eat bones from dead animals, presumably to get calcium. Their primary food sources are low growing grasses and herbs.
- Examples of their favorite foods are gopher apple and saw palmetto berries. They will eat the pads, fruits, and flowers of prickly pear cactus.
- **The Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola:** is home to a population of the gopher tortoise.
- **During the Great Depression:** many people ate tortoises when they couldn't afford any other kind of meat.

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Escambia's Gopher Farm

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- **Some people still consider gopher tortoises a delicacy:** and mistakenly believe that eating tortoise flesh can help with some medical problems.
- **Illegal hunting of tortoises for food:** has wiped out entire colonies in some places.
- **“It has a texture like beef:** but it has a taste all its own,” said Salters, 49, who now lives in Leesburg. “Back then, we were poor and didn't have much choice. There are other ways now.” That was a long time ago, before the killing of gopher tortoises was made illegal in Florida. Interview Feb 10, 2004 (<https://www.ouddooralabama.com/turtles/gopher-tortoise#>).
- **Gophers Were Sold in Neighborhoods in Pensacola during the 1940's & 50's.:** ECHS member Paul Merritt remembers seeing a

medium size truck with high sides on the back and carrying a bin full of tortoises to sell in Black neighborhoods. The driver would stop the truck and honk his horn so the women would come out to buy tortoises. The driver would climb into the back and hold up tortoises, selling them for 10 to 25 cents, even a dollar for a really big one, the price dependent on the size.

There would be an exchange of money and tortoises and the women would take them home, clean and cook them, perhaps in a soup, a stew or gumbo. Often those buying would call out to their neighbors to come out because the tortoise man was in the neighborhood.

Paul says he once climbed up the side of the truck and saw as many as fifty tortoises in the bin in the back. The tortoise man would come around usually once a month.

A Bit of Railroad History

By R. W. Brooks, Atmore, (about 1930).

A note from Carolyn Pugh McLendon, editor of newsletter of ECHS at the time: The following item was submitted by Mrs. Lillian Dixon Morgan of Evergreen, daughter of the late Charles Rufus Dixon of Pollard. Mrs. Morgan, one of our new members, state that Rev. R. W. Brooks was a Baptist minister who, with his wife, managed a large hotel at Pollard, near the railroad Station.

From the ECHS Newsletter August 14, 1973

When the original Alabama & Florida Railroad came through from Montgomery to Pensacola in 1857 or 1858, it meant history for that section of the country. Especially as this advantageous to their products. Other towns sprang up as the result of the railroad being operated. There was only one town in existence at the building of the railroad. This town was Greenville, located in Butler County.

Later, probably the most prosperous town was Sparta, two miles from where Evergreen is now located. Its prosperity was due to the fact that it was situated ideally between the cotton fields of East Alabama and the cotton shipping points.

The first town that originated because of the new railroad was Pollard, which got its name from Charles T. Pollard, the first president of the newly laid railroad. This new town was the junction point for the Pensacola and Mobile Sections. Railroad shops were located here, also the “turntable” which in those days used to turn trains around.

During the Civil War the Southern soldiers tore up

the railroad track from Pollard to Pensacola and burnt the bridges. When the line was to be restored, the builder or engineer found it would be cheaper to turn off the main line below where Century, Florida is now. Thus, Pollard no longer was the junction point.) (This line later became part of the Mobile & Montgomery Railway and in 1900 became the property of the L&N., which operated it under lease for the previous 20 years.)

There was a telegraph line running on the Old Stage Road from Montgomery to Stockton and it was taken down and moved to the railroad. C.N. Edwards, from the North, was made the first operator at Pollard and he remained in service until he was deemed too old perform his duties.

Pollard, the first town on the first railroad in this section, is almost on the bank of the Escambia River, with its beautiful magnolias, and wide spreading Cypress trees that would be the envy of any artist. On the south runs Little Escambia Creek whose clear limpid waters would have made Ponce de Leon think he had found the fabled Fountain of Youth. There is one feature about Pollard that distinguishes it from other towns in the state. It is noted for its flowing wells.

Many fine homes of by-gone days are still there, and some people, as fine as the country affords, still live there, and remember the prosperity of a few years back.

The ECHS *Journal* Section

How Did We Survive? (Confessions of a Dumb Kid)

A few weeks ago I was in a laundromat using one of their oversize washers to wash my sleeping bags. For lack of anything better to do, I was reading the many warning labels on the side of the washing machine. I came across one that said, "Do not operate with people inside."

My first reaction was, "What has the world come to? We now have to warn people that it is unsafe to operate a washing machine with someone inside." Later, I began to think back about some of the things my friends and I did when we were kids. I concluded that, yes, climbing into a large washing machine and going for a ride was well within the realm of possibilities. That would have been minor compared to some of the things we actually did and, of course, a warning label wouldn't have made a bit of difference.

I had a wonderful childhood. I grew up before the electronic age, before there were computers, video games, iPhones, DVD's, or any other electronic entertainment except radio. My family didn't even have a television until I was a teenager. Today, my granddaughters often ask how we survived back then, and I tell them that we just went outside and played. But, sadly, they have no idea what I'm talking about. Think about it, when was the last time you saw a bunch of kids playing outside?

We didn't just play, we created adventures, we explored, we role played, we made up games, we invented, and we improvised. "I'm bored" was definitely not part of our vocabulary. It was not unusual to go out to play early in the morning and not come back into the house until well after dark. Our parents had a general idea where we were but they pretty much left us alone to entertain ourselves. Looking back, I think they probably trusted us far more than they should have because we sometimes took our play well into the danger zone. We did many things we shouldn't have, and I realize now, we were lucky to have survived. Here are just a few of those things that I will confess to, and I would not confess to most of these, even today, if my mom was still alive.

We played with guns. Now, this was long before you could get expelled from school for just drawing a picture of a gun. We took guns to school to play with at recess. Every kid had cap guns and water guns, but many of us had REAL guns to play with. We had a bunch of old, worn-out pistols and even a few war souvenir Japanese rifles. I don't know if any

of them actually worked or not. Of course, every boy, and many girls, had 22 caliber rifles they could take out any time they wanted to do some real shooting. The only time I remember getting into trouble involving guns was when I accidentally fired my cap gun during the preacher's sermon one Sunday morning.

We always had a big supply of bullets and shotgun shells. I don't know where they came from; we just seemed to always have them. We knew that if you hit the rim of a 22 caliber bullet, it would discharge. We would stick bullets in the ground and then shoot the rim with our BB guns. The bullet would explode and then we could dig the lead slug out of the ground. We didn't give any thought to what was happening to the brass casing when we did this. But, one day I fired a BB at a bullet, and when the bullet exploded, the casing went whizzing by my ear, through the screen door behind me, and rattled around on the back porch. I'm sure that many times we came close to being shot, not by the slug of the bullet, but by the casing. I remember throwing shotgun shells against a brick wall until they would break open so we could get the powder out. We made bombs from the gunpowder.

We played with fire. We didn't just make little campfires, we made roaring infernos and experimented to see what all would burn. We had kerosene heaters in our home so we always had kerosene available to help get a fire going. I would make little bombs by putting kerosene in jars and throw them into a fire just to watch the blast. I remember one time pouring a line of kerosene all the way across our yard and lighting it to watch the flame race across the yard. I had seen an old Laurel and Hardy movie where Laurel (the little dumb one) could light his pipe by rubbing his fingers together and somehow have flame come out of his thumb.

I asked my mom how he did that and she said he probably had some kind of lighter fluid on his thumb and a flint concealed in his fingers to create a spark. Naturally, I had to give it a try. I got some lighter fluid, doused my thumb, and stuck a cigarette lighter to it. My thumb ignited with a whoosh and it was hot, very hot. For some reason I thought the fluid would burn without any pain to my thumb. I was quite wrong. Fortunately, I was able to cover the

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The ECHS *Journal* Section

How Did We Survive? (Confessions of a Dumb Kid)

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flame with my jacket and put it out before doing any permanent damage.

We chased after crop duster planes. Whenever we spotted a crop duster operating nearby, we would jump on our bicycles and race to get as close as possible. We actually tried to get underneath the path of the plane so we could feel the mist falling. We probably got drenched with DDT, a pesticide that was later banned, but this was no worse than the DDT that we sprayed all over our homes.

We smoked "rabbit tobacco." If you are under sixty years of age you have probably never heard of rabbit tobacco. This was a weed that grew (still does) along the road and in fields and when it was dry the leaves could be rolled into cigarettes and smoked. It had a pungent aroma which was easy to recognize. None of us knew what it really was or if it was harmful or not. Our favorite wrappers were brown paper bags. This made it look like we were smoking big brown cigars. All our parents had warned us of the dangers of tobacco and none of us kids smoked real cigarettes, but this was just rabbit tobacco; it didn't count. We also smoked dried corn silks and petunia stems. After smoking, we would chew a handful of pine needles to freshen our breath.

We had chemistry sets. I don't think you can buy chemistry sets anymore, at least not the kind we had. Our chemistry sets came with dozens of bottles of assorted chemicals, test tubes, beakers, hoses, and alcohol burners. You could create all sorts of reactions, some of them not so good, by mixing the chemicals we were provided. I can't imagine a parent today telling their kid, "Go to your room and experiment with your chemistry set." I set up my chemistry lab in an old outhouse which we also used for storing hay. This was not a good place to be experimenting with flammable materials. The directions weren't in the instruction book, but with a little research I learned to make gunpowder. To put the gunpowder to good use I built a pipe cannon that shot china-berries. It would fire china-berries cleanly through a cardboard box.

We played with electricity. I had a toy car that had a little electric motor that operated off a 1 ½ volt battery. I figured the motor would run a hundred times faster if I connected it to 110 volts, so I wired

the motor into an extension cord and plugged it into a wall outlet. My little motor disappeared in a cloud of smoke and the room went dark because I had blown a fuse. There was an electric power line that ran through a magnolia tree on the edge of our yard. We kids would take turns climbing the tree so we could put our ear near the line and listen to it hum. Curiosity got the best of me one day and I touched the line with my cap gun to see what would happen. I don't remember much of a shock, but I do remember my gun flying out of my hand and off through the tree. We would sometimes turn every electrical device in the house on to its highest setting, then go outside to watch how fast the electric meter was spinning.

We imitated crazy things we had seen in the movies. I once took a flying leap off the roof of our garage with an umbrella in my hand, expecting to be lowered gently to the ground. I had seen a character in a cartoon jump off a cliff, open his umbrella, and then come floating slowly to the ground. It didn't work that way in real life. I hit the ground with a thump and sprained an ankle. We would ride horses at full gallop under an overhanging tree limb, reach up and grab the limb, pull ourselves out of the saddle, and try to swing up into the tree. Cowboys did that in the movies. We got a lot of thumps from that trick too.

We played on the railroad tracks and on trains. We would walk for miles along the railroad tracks and play on any train cars parked along the way. For many years, Swift Lumber Company operated their own railroad system with an old steam locomotive. One of my friend's dad was an engineer on the locomotive and it was a great thrill to go over and hitch a ride in the cab with him. Back when there were potato sheds all over Atmore, there were many more rail spurs than there are now. Trains would shuffle slowly back and forth on these spur lines all day. Kids would run along beside the train and climb aboard to ride for a few blocks. A few years later, when I was a teen, a friend and I climbed into a boxcar here in Atmore one night and rode all the way to Mobile. We then had to hitch-hike back home the next morning. But, that's the subject for another story.

We played in the dump. The Atmore city dump was once located where the National Guard armory is now. It wasn't a landfill, it was strictly a

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How Did We Survive? (Confessions of a Dumb Kid)

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dump and nothing was burned or buried there. What a great place to play. We would climb over the piles of garbage, play on old trucks or machinery, or just rummage through the trash. Occasionally we came across some pretty messy stuff, but mostly it was harmless. Often we would find things we considered worth keeping and would strap them to our bicycles to take home. I still have some of those treasures which were scrounged from the dump.

We didn't wear shoes. For most of us boys about the only time we ever wore shoes was to church on Sunday, and then, only because our moms made us. I went to school bare-footed until I was in the eighth grade. I remember walking bare-footed through frost in the morning on my way to catch the school bus. In the summer time, the bottoms of our feet would get as tough as boot leather as we walked on the hot roads and sidewalks. We did occasionally step on a rusty nail or get some bad cuts from broken glass or sharp metal, but I don't remember anyone ever getting a tetanus shot.

We made spears, knives, and bow and arrows. I once took a six foot length of galvanized pipe and hammered and filed one end until it was extremely sharp. I practiced with my new spear by throwing at our wooden garage door from across the yard. The spear was sharp enough to stick in the door and sometimes go all the way through. I ended up destroying the door and it had to be replaced. I got a spanking for that little prank. I made a powerful bow that would shoot an arrow at least 150 yards. One evening, just before dark, I shot a sharp tipped arrow straight up into the air. I immediately lost sight of it, and then it dawned on me, it was going to come back down and I didn't know where. I just stood where I was and the arrow plunged into the ground about three inches from my foot.

We played with fireworks. We had big firecrackers and cherry bombs which were probably ten times more powerful than what you can get today. A little game we played was to hold a lighted firecracker in our hand and see who would hold it the longest before dropping it as it exploded. It had to happen, one of my friends held one a little too long and it exploded in his hand. He got a nasty burn, but fortunately, didn't lose any fingers. Another friend lost

part of a front tooth when he bit into a firecracker he mistakenly thought had gone out. When we played war (yes, we played war) we would make hand grenades by sticking a firecracker or cherry bomb into a potato. When it exploded near someone, they would get splattered with potato shrapnel.

We rode in the back of pickups. Sometimes it wasn't a choice but a necessity. A truck was the only means of transportation for many, and whole families would crowd into the back of their truck to go to town or to church. I've ridden in the back of a truck with my grandparents many times. We had hayrides where we would pack as many kids as possible into the back of a truck and would cruise around the back roads at night. I do think I was pressing my luck though, when I would sometimes ride on the tailgate with my legs hanging off the back.

We played in outhouses. My neighbors had an outhouse that was built protruding out over a deep ravine. I can't believe we did it, but we kids played a game where we would crawl through the toilet seat, grab onto the framework below, and climb down to the ground. We would take turns doing this over and over. That game ended abruptly one day when one of the girls lost her grip and fell to the ground directly under the seat. I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

We climbed things. Anything that could be climbed, we climbed. This included utility poles (they had little steps on them back then), fire towers, railroad bridges, flag poles, buildings, windmills, and, of course, trees. There were several huge mimosa trees on the playground of the old Rachael Patterson School. Mimosa trees have flexible branches that bend easily without breaking. We would climb about 15 to 20 feet up into the tree and then work our way out toward the end of a large branch. When we got far enough out, if we were lucky, the branch would bend down far enough for us to reach the ground. Several of my friends got broken arms from this little game, one of them on two different occasions. Our teachers would sometimes be right there watching. Some of us have climbed to the top of the Atmore water towers.

We rolled down hills inside barrels or big tractor tires. The centrifugal force would keep you pinned inside as you rolled head over heels. Of course, you never knew for sure where you were go-

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How Did We Survive? (Confessions of a Dumb Kid)

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ing, but running into a tree or into a ditch was part of the fun. I remember hitting a tree one day and my wooden barrel came all to pieces.

We sniffed gas and glue. We didn't do it to get high or anything like that; in fact we didn't know anything about drugs or getting high. We just liked the way it smelled or we were curious about what it did. I sometimes stood behind trucks and inhaled diesel fumes just because I thought it smelled good. One day I was smelling the gas in my grandfather's outboard motor and the next thing I remember was waking up on the other side of the yard. I had, apparently, staggered across the yard and passed out. That was the end of my gas sniffing experiments.

We played in the sewers. I attended the A.C. Moore School the first year it opened and there was still lot of work going on for the drainage system in the area. Some of the manholes were still under construction so it was easy to climb down into the drainage pipes. Sometimes, after school, a bunch of us would climb down and crawl all around under the streets. Fortunately, it never rained while we were playing in the pipes.

We had BB gun wars. I hate to admit it, but we did shoot BB guns at each other. Usually it was from behind a tree and from a distance so the likelihood of being hit was small, but occasionally it did happen. I was hit in the forehead by a BB one day and a big red knot developed. I knew my mom would see it and want to know what had happened. I purposely bumped my head into a tree so, technically, I would not be lying when I told her I had run into a tree. I only engaged in these BB wars a few times. Even I knew that this was too dangerous.

We had knives. Every boy I knew had a pocketknife and a few even had big switchblades. Many of us also had hunting knives which we wore on our belts and we wore them everywhere, including to school. We had sharpening stones and sometimes would just sit around sharpening our knives. We spent hours practicing throwing our knives until we could throw them at a target and have them stick, just like the cowboys in the movies did. Sometimes we played with machetes, bayonets, and real swords.

We played in gravel pits. There were several big gravel pits near where I lived and this was the

nearest thing we had to the mountains of the Wild West. The high cliffs and dirt piles of a gravel pit made for a great place to play and many of us have spent the day exploring, climbing, jumping, and digging. This was the perfect setting for war games. We threw ropes from the top of cliffs and rappelled down the side, we dug paths along the ledges, and we dug caves. Digging caves into soft gravel wasn't a good idea. Some of our caves fell in on us.

We rode bicycles. We rode everywhere, all over town, day or night. Now, riding bicycles wasn't inherently dangerous, but sometimes we got a little carried away. We would find the steepest hill and see how fast we could get going. Then we would try it with no hands or standing on the seat. We would ride off bridges into a creek or ride down the railroad tracks or down Main Street with a friend sitting on the handlebars. Probably the most dangerous thing we did was to ride up beside a moving truck, grab hold, and get pulled along until we figured we were going too fast. We have even attached a ski rope to a car and had an older friend tow us around on our bicycles. Of course, bicycle helmets had not yet been invented.

We didn't wear seat belts. We didn't wear them because we didn't have them. The first time I remember being in a car with seat belts, I was 22 years old. When I was small, I rode standing on the front seat. I often climbed up on the deck behind the rear seats so I could take a nap during long trips. One night I was riding upside-down (don't ask me why) in the front seat with my feet on the seat and my head on the floor. It was raining and the windshield wipers were running. For some reason, I stuck my hand up under the dash and my fingers got caught in the wiper motor. It crushed my fingers and the wipers came to a stop, forcing my dad to bring us to a screeching halt off the side of the road. Another spanking. This is also the subject of another story.

We boxed and played tackle football. Several guys had boxing gloves and we often staged neighborhood matches, complete with a rope ring. We didn't just play box, we really boxed, with the objective of knocking the other guy out. I don't recall anyone actually being knocked out, but there were lots of bloody noses. We played tackle football, and without pads. A few of us had helmets but I think they were

(Continued on page 11)

The ECHS *Journal* Section

How Did We Survive? (Confessions of a Dumb Kid)

(Continued from page 10)

mostly toys and provided little real protection. We blocked and tackled as hard as we could. A favorite move was the flying body-block where you threw your body into a runner's legs with the hope of up-ending him. We got a few broken teeth and bones from our football games, but mostly just a bunch of scrapes and bruises.

We played in the woods and in the swamps. We would disappear into the woods for the entire day and find a million things to do. We would climb trees, swing from vines, blaze new trails, dig holes, build tree houses, wade in creeks or ponds, catch critters, eat hickory nuts and bullises (a type of wild grape), or just rake up a pile of pine straw and lay in the sun. We hunted snakes and would probe into the murkiest areas we could find looking for them. Of course, we were barefoot much of the time. I have

accidentally stepped on a few snakes but was never bitten, though I'm sure I came close many times. Even today, there is not much I would rather do than wander around in the woods. I often explore the same woods where we played when we were kids.

These are just a few of my recollections. I could go on for hours and I'm sure my friends could add many more. Parents, don't let your kids attempt any of this stuff. Many of the things we did back then were not only very dangerous; much of it was downright stupid. We WERE lucky to have survived.

We weren't bad kids. We never intended to break anything, hurt anybody, or cause any problems. In fact, I was considered one of the best behaved kids in town. You can imagine what the bad kids must have been up to. We were just kids and we were having the times of our lives. We didn't realize it at the time, but we were also creating lots of wonderful memories.

Cassava and Its Part in the History of Our Area

From the ECHS Newsletter August 14, 1973

Sept. 21, 1899, the Pine Belt News Cassava as a Food Crop

The cassava plant is being experimented with extensively in this vicinity this year, with gratifying results. It grows to a height of from 4 to 6 feet, the tubers, some as large as a man's arm, branching out in every direction in the ground. Our loose, sandy soil is especially adapted to its growth. The stalk is saved for seed for next year's planting, having joints and eyes somewhat like sugar cane. The raw tuber is excellent food for hogs, chickens and stock.

The best variety of tapioca is made from cassava, which takes the place of our potato in South American countries and the West Indies. Like some other articles of food, the root is poisonous when raw. The poison, however, is easily driven out by heat, and the boiled root is not only harmless but very nutritious. As a starch producing plant, cassava is said to have no equal.

While the experiments here are being made with a view to the location at Brewton of a great starch



Cassava or
Yuca,
Plant &
Tuber.

factory, those who are growing small crops of cassava will find it useful for feeding to stock as well as a table delicacy, and no doubt large crops will be grown each year hereafter.

April 19, 1900, the Pine Belt News Starch Factory

A meeting of the stockholders of Brewton Land and Cassava Company is called to meet at the court house in Brewton at 18:00 a.m. Saturday, June 10, 1899. The purpose of the meeting is the consideration of a proposition of the town of Brewton to purchase the property of the company, to be used in furtherance of the factory project, and any other business

which may properly come before it. A full attendance of the shareholders, in person or by proxy in writing, is desired. By order of the Board of Directors, James M. Davison, President.

Editor's Note

The Cassava Starch Factory was never built at Brewton, but why is it that it is no longer grown as a crop, especially as food for livestock. Until last month's newsletter, the word had probably not even been mentioned in these parts in 73 years. Some things just pass into history, perhaps it is for the best.

ECHOES
THE NEWSLETTER FOR
THE ESCAMBIA COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

251-809-1528 or
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Books Available by Contribution

	Regular	Mailed
History of Escambia County, Alabama	\$90.00	\$96.00
Headstones and Heritage	\$20.00	\$26.00
Escambia Historical Society Cookbook	\$10.00	\$15.00
Wildflowers of The Conecuh/Escambia River Basin CD	\$10.00	\$15.00
History of Brewton and E. Brewton (SC)	\$40.00	\$46.00
Flomaton Centennial Scrapbook	\$30.00	\$36.00
Addendum to Headstones and Heritage	\$20.00	\$26.00
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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 or call 251-809-1528.

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