



The March Newsletter: The March Meeting will be Tuesday, March 26, 2024, in the Meeting Room of the McMillan Museum on the Brewton College Campus.



**Kathy
McCoy**

The Program: Historian, Author Kathy McCoy Will Present a Program on the History of Monroe County.

From an introduction to a book signing at the Ol' Curiosities and Book Shoppe in Monroeville, this introduction to our speaker:

Born in Kentucky, Kathy McCoy has traveled extensively throughout the United States and Europe, and is a student of a wide variety of cultures and characters, but of all the places she's been, she's been truly intrigued by just a few.

Kathy has spent extensive time participating in

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John Powell's daughter, on the left, and her cousin recently brought their children to visit the McMillan Museum.

Refreshments at March Meeting

If you choose, bring your favorite finger food for refreshments after the program. The Society will provide drinks. It will be nice to start again enjoying refreshments and visiting with members and guests after the program. So plan on staying for refreshments at the March meeting.

The April Program

Dr. Brett Chancery, history professor and ECHS member who is assisting Don Sales in forming the student Historical Society at the Coastal Alabama Community College, Brewton, will present the program. Brett will base his program on the subject of his dissertation and the article in Alabama Heritage on Brewton native - novelist and screen writer, Michael McDowell.



Franklin Methodist Church
Franklin, Monroe County

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The Program

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Native American life at the Western Navajo Reservation near Flagstaff, Arizona, and also spent time in West Berlin, Germany.

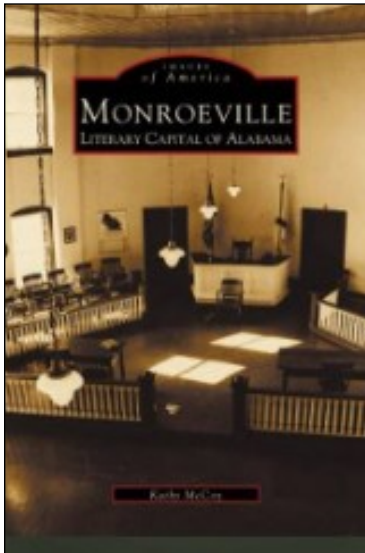
It can also be said of Kathy McCoy that she may just know as much about Monroeville, AL, the literary capital of Alabama, as anyone else who has ever lived or worked in the small town.

Kathy was the original executive director for the Monroe County Heritage Museum in Monroe County, Alabama, where she worked for fifteen

years. While in Monroeville, Kathy also acted as the director of the annual To Kill a Mockingbird production beginning with the play's development in 1991 and serving 16 years in that capacity, during which she and the actors and actresses involved have toured nationally and internationally.

The Chicago Tribune has referred to McCoy as "Arguably the world's foremost expert on To Kill a Mockingbird." She is best known for writing Monroeville: Literary Capital of Alabama, Crossroads: the Early Years of Monroe County, and Riley's Crossing.

Books About Monroe County by Kathy McCoy



From the good reads website, this comment on the book, Monroeville: Literary Capital of Alabama:

Monroeville is the county seat of Monroe County, a county older than the state of Alabama itself. Located in what was the western Creek Nation, Monroeville became the center of county business in 1832, eighteen years after the surrender of the Creeks to Andrew Jackson. Monroeville soon became a powerful political base in the state.

In the 20th century, it hosted visits from Big Jim Folsom as well as George Wallace, a powerful young orator who would change the face of American politics.

Today, Monroeville is known as the childhood home of internationally known authors Harper Lee and Truman Capote. Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel To Kill A Mockingbird was set in a small southern town based on Monroeville.

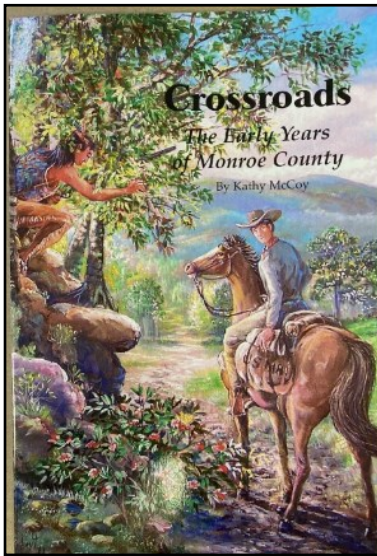
Many of Capote's short stories and novels were drawn from his Monroeville experiences. Visitors from around the world come to the town that still remembers when Truman rented the town's only taxi for the weekend and drove around for days visiting.

Townfolk like to talk about the time Gregory Peck came to town to meet many of the people who were inspirations for the characters in To Kill a Mockingbird. As other writers from Monroeville emerge, such as Mark Childress and Cynthia Tucker, one wonders how many more stories the town holds, as well as what is so special about a small, rural southwestern Alabama town called Monroeville (<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1141404.Monroeville>).

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Books About Monroe County by Kathy McCoy

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Old Monroe County Courthouse

From Monroe County History:

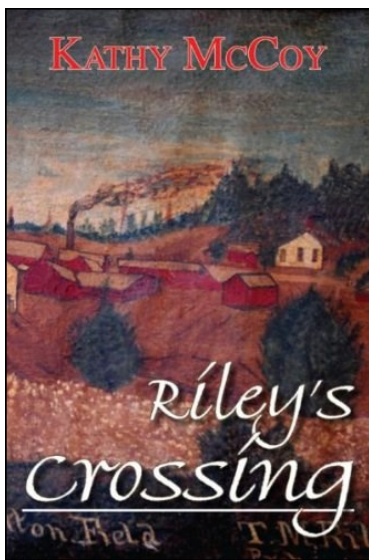
Monroe County was founded in 1815 on lands ceded by local Native American tribes.

Monroeville, once known as Centerville, was renamed for James Monroe and incorporated on April 15, 1899.

However, there is record of the first municipal election being held January 23, 1858 to incorporate the town of Monroeville with a 14 to 0 vote in favor of incorporation.

A crossroads community just outside the plantation region of the Black Belt, the Community was largely Agricultural.

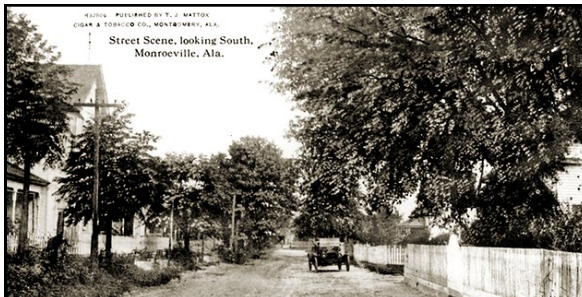
*Text and photo from Monroe County History
<<https://www.monroevilleal.gov/monroeville-history>>.*



From ABE Books: Riley's Crossing is the story of a courageous man, in both his public and private life, during the Civil War and second half of the 1800's.

Thomas Mercer Riley went against all odds to live with, and love a forbidden woman and their family. It is also the story of a community that, despite the racial intolerance of the times, "looked the other way," and still remembers Captain Riley as "a good Man."

What made his story, and the story of his family, is part of the Southern history of this nation (<https://www.abebooks.com/9780615421285/Rileys-Crossing-Kathy-McCoy-0615421288/plp>).



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CIGAR & TOBACCO CO., MONROEVILLE, ALA.
Street Scene, looking South,
Monroeville, Ala.

At Left, Street Scene, looking South, Monroeville, Ala.

At Right, James Dellet House, Claiborne, built between 1835 and 1840 by lawyer, politician, plantation owner James Dellet, first Speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives in 1819.



News and Announcements



ECCHS Member Clay Lizenby Named Brewton "Citizen of the Year."

From the article in the *Brewton Standard*, "Lizenby Named Citizen of the Year," by Lisa Tindell:

Chamber President Hal Whitman presented the award to Lizenby for his tireless efforts in helping to make events and happenings in Brewton the best they can be. "He is always there for anything we may need," Whitman said.

"He was the person responsible for bringing us PorchFest and it has become one of our biggest events. He was also a founding member of the Rodeo committee and I could go on and on about what he has done for our community."

ECCHS has also been a beneficiary of Clay's willingness to help with anything we, ECCHS, ask of him. He produces and distributes both the hard (print) and electronic copies of the ECCHS newsletter. He is also a Publicity Officer for the society.

Read more at <https://www.brewtonstandard.com/2024/03/05/lizenby-named-citizen-of-the-year/>.



76th Annual Meeting Huntsville, Wednesday, April 10-Friday, April 12, 2024.

For Information about the meeting, go to <https://www.alabamahistory.net/meetings>.

From the Historical Association, a note about the dates: We are trying an experiment for the 76 annual meeting – moving our dates for the meeting to Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. This change allows us to receive a more competitive rate for the hotel to keep costs affordable for our attendees, as well as assists us logistically with tours of downtown sites in Huntsville.



What's New at The Alabama Department of Archives and History?

Research Rundown

Type of Program: History and Genealogy
Presented On-Line

Subject: Joseph Wilkinson's Diary of the Siege of Fort Morgan: An Eye Witness Account From Mobile Bay.

Date: Monday, April 2, 2024

Time: 12:00pm CST.

Cost: Free

Presenter: Reference Archivist Kayla Scott Gurner will spotlight an original Civil War manuscript from the ADAH repository. Kayla will discuss the diary, the author, and the events surrounding his observations.

Food for Thought

Type of Program: In person presentation at ADAH as well as online. Videos available online at ADAH, YouTube, and ADAH Facebook.

Subject: Book by Mike Bunn, *The Battle of Fort Blakely: Mobile's Last Stand*.

Presenter: Author Mike Bunn

Date: April 18, 2024

Time: 12:00 CST

Introduction: From the ADAH website: On the afternoon of April 9, 1865, some sixteen thousand Union troops launched a bold, coordinated assault on the three-mile-long line of earthworks known as Fort Blakeley. The charge was one of the grand spectacles of the Civil War, the climax of a weeks-long campaign that resulted in the capture of Mobile--the last major Southern city to remain in Confederate hands. Historian Mike Bunn takes readers into the chaos of those desperate moments along the waters of the storied Mobile-Tensaw Delta. With a crisp narrative that also serves as a guided tour of Alabama's largest Civil War battlefield, the book pioneers a telling of Blakeley's story through detailed accounts from those who participated in the harrowing siege and assault.

Note: Mike Bunn presented a program to ECCHS on February 22, 2022 on his book *The Fourteenth Colony: The Forgotten Story of the Gulf South During the Revolutionary Era*.

Monroe County

The following is from the article “Monroe County” in the Encyclopedia of Alabama at <<https://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/monroe-county/>>.

Located in the southwest part of the state, Monroe County is known as the literary capital of Alabama. Pulitzer Prize–winning author Nelle Harper Lee was born and raised in the town of Monroeville, which served as the inspiration for her novel, To Kill a Mockingbird. The county was also the home of fellow Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Cynthia Tucker. Other famous writers who called Monroeville home include Mark Childress and Truman Capote. Coastal Alabama Community College’s Monroeville branch (formerly Alabama Southern Community College) is the home of the Alabama Writers’ Hall of Fame, and in May, in conjunction with a month-long production of To Kill a Mockingbird, the school conducts a major writer’s festival celebrating the state’s literary tradition.

The county is governed by an elected five-member commission and includes several incorporated communities.

- Founding Date: June 29, 1815
- Area: Area: 1,025 square miles
- Population: 19,722 (2020 Census estimate)
- Major Waterways: Alabama River
- Major Highways: U.S. 84
- County Seat: Monroeville

History

Monroe County was established by David Holmes, governor of Mississippi Territory, on June 29, 1815, from land acquired from the Creek Indians in the 1814 Treaty of Fort Jackson. Originally encompassing all the land ceded by the Creeks, the county amounted to a large portion of Alabama

It later was reduced in size, however, by the creation of Montgomery, Conecuh, and Wilcox Counties. The county was named in honor of U.S. Pres. James Monroe, who was then secretary of state under Pres. James Madison. The first settlers were largely of English descent and came from Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Some of the earliest settlements and towns were Claiborne, Monroeville, Manistee, and Perdue Hill.

Claiborne served as the first county seat of Monroe County. In 1832, the seat was moved to the more centrally located Monroeville. A year later, the first county courthouse burned and all records were lost.

A new brick courthouse and jail were constructed in the 1850s. In 1903, the Monroe County government built a new courthouse, and the old building became the county’s first bank. The 1903 courthouse, now known as the Old Courthouse, is part of the Monroe County Heritage Museum. The present-day courthouse, known as the New Courthouse, was built in 1963 and continues to serve Monroe County.

Economy

Farming was the prevailing occupation in Monroe County until well into the twentieth century. The two major crops were cotton and corn. With easy access to more than 20 river landings, the county soon became home to the largest cotton market in the state. Although farmers attempted to diversify in the early twentieth century, no other major crops proved as successful. The county’s many acres of forest along the Alabama River brought the timber industry to the area, and paper mills dotted the county by the middle to late nineteenth century.

In 1937, Vanity Fair* opened the first apparel plant in Monroeville, and the county slowly began to shift from an agriculture-based economy to an industry-based economy. During the 1970s, the county saw its greatest industrial expansion with the opening of the Georgia-Pacific Plywood Mill, Temple-Inland Particle Board Mill, and the Alabama River Pulp-Paper Mill. Today, tourism centering on Harper Lee and To Kill a Mockingbird is a significant economic driver for the county.

**Note: Vanity Fair was acquired by Fruit of the Loom in 2007. Vanity Fair no longer does manufacturing in Monroeville. In 2010 Vanity Fair Brands LP closed one of its two remaining warehouses in Monroeville.*

Claiborne

The community of Claiborne is an abandoned town located on the Old Federal Road. It was the site of Fort Claiborne, a stockade established by Gen. Ferdinand Claiborne during the Creek War of 1813-14. The fort was a stop on the Marquis de Lafayette’s tour of the United States in 1825 to celebrate the nation’s 50th anniversary. Today, visitors can tour the James Dellet plantation, the William B. Travis House, and three historic cemeteries. Just south of Claiborne, visitors can tour one of the

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Monroe County



First Monroe County Courthouse

The First courthouse in Monroe County was built in 1824 at Claiborne on a bluff high above the Alabama River using funds from a public lottery.

The upper floor was used exclusively by Masons until around 1919. The lower floor has served a variety of purposes including court room, town hall, school, and church. William B. Travis, while a resident of Claiborne, practiced law in the court room.

General Lafayette addressed the people of Claiborne from this lodge on April 6, 1825.

It served as the Monroe County Courthouse from 1824-32, when the county seat was moved to Monroeville. The structure was moved to Perdue Hill in 1884. It is the oldest building in the county,



The Old County Courthouse
The Old Monroe County Courthouse, completed in 1904, was designed by the prominent Southern architect Andrew Bryan.

Prior to the construction of this courthouse, Monroe County had lived a long time with its first “permanent” courthouse, the two-story unpretentious rectangular brick building that had served since the original log structure was replaced in the 1830s.

Today, it is a museum devoted to the history of the town and its literary heritage, including exhibits on Nelle Harper Lee and Truman Capote. The Hollywood set of the 1962 film adaptation of To Kill a Mockingbird was modeled after the courtroom in the Old Courthouse.



Monroe County Courthouse

The current Monroe County courthouse, known as the New Courthouse, was built in 1962 in the Plantation style. The Old Courthouse, which housed the county court for 60 years, was made part of the Monroe County Heritage Museum.

The Courtroom in the Old County Courthouse.



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state’s oldest buildings, the Perdue Hill Masonic Hall, built in 1823.

The now-abandoned site of Claiborne was home to three Alabama governors: John Gayle, John Murphy, and Arthur P. Bagby.

Major Cities

The county seat Monroeville is the largest city in the county, with an estimated population of 5,837. Other significant population centers include Frisco City, Excel, Beatrice, and Vredenburgh.

The ECHS *Journal* Section

The First Wagon Train – Monroe County

This article from West Alabama History is written for the Monroe County Historical Society Journal by Jerry Anderson Harlow <<https://walabamahistory.com/monroe-county-mississippi/the-first-wagon-train-monroe-county/>>.

The First Wagon Train

The first settlers were largely of English descent and came from Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Some of the earliest settlements and towns were Claiborne, Monroeville, Manistee, and Perdue Hill. First Monroe County Courthouse Claiborne served as the first county seat of Monroe County.

The traditional story on the first settlers of Monroe County is that Rev. Frederick Weaver led a wagon train of five families from Russell's Valley (Russellville, Alabama) down Gaines Trace to Cotton Gin Port in 1816. Gaines trace had evolved from an Indian trail called by the Chickasaw, "Ridge Road". In 1807-8, this trail was surveyed and enlarged by United States troops, led by Edmund Pendleton Gaines (1777-1849). The Trace ran from the Tennessee River to a point on the Tombigbee River called Cotton Gin Port, so called for the cotton gin constructed by the United States Government on the west bank of the river for use by the Chickasaws. This gin was put into use about 1801 in an effort to "pacify" the Indians. According to folklore, the Indians wanted none of the government's "pacification" and promptly burned the gin.

In 1816, when Rev. Frederick Weaver led his party down the trace to Cotton Gin Port in what would later become Monroe County, Mississippi, all of the land south of this trace and east of the Tombigbee River had just been ceded to the United States government by the Chickasaws in a treaty signed September 1816.

Not only did Monroe County not exist at this time, but Mississippi, was not yet a state, Mississippi was still a Territory until 1817.

In later years, Dorcas Weaver Hollingsworth, the ten year old daughter of the Rev. Frederick Weaver, said that she spent the Christmas of 1816 at Cotton Gin Port. At this time there was no permanent population at Cotton Gin, as it was a way station for Indian traders crossing the river and going into the villages of the Chickasaw to trade. The only permanent residents of Cotton Gin Port were the ferryman and his family.

The group of families had all lived at one time or another in Laurens District, South Carolina. They were living in Bedford County, Tennessee, at the time of the move to Mississippi. The families appeared to be inter-related in one way or another. The five families seem to have been the following:

1. Rev. Frederick Weaver, a Methodist minister (b SC c1775), his wife, Fannie, and several of their children. Frederick Weaver settled near a creek that later bore his name -Weaver Creek. In 1821, he received a patent on land in Section 30, Township 12, Range 17W. This property is halfway between present day Hatley and Parham's Store, and is on the north side of Weaver Creek. Mrs. Kelly Taylor of Aberdeen is a descendant.

2. William Wise (b SCc1765) and his wife, Catherine Gideon Wise (b SC c1775), his brother, Henry Wise (b SC c1763), his sister or sister-in-law, Elizabeth Wise, and several of William and Catherine's grown children and their families. William at first cut logs for a house and was told by Levi Colbert that he had cut on the Chickasaw side of Gaines Trace and to go back east, which he did, settling in what would later become the Quincy-Wise's Gap area.

Wise was killed by Indians when he returned to Tennessee to get more supplies and persuade more relatives to settle in Monroe County. Wise's widow received the patent to his land in Section 32, Township 13, Range 17W. on January 14, 1820. Elizabeth Wise, the sister/sister-in-law received her patent in Section 28, Township 13, Range 17W on January 14, 1820.

Old Center Cemetery is located in the section where William Wise's widow received her patent. The "gap" or "cut" through the ridge of hills in the eastern part of the county, was in the section of land where Elizabeth Wise received her patent. In the late 1880's when the KCM & B Railroad came through Monroe County, they followed this "cut" and the area.

3. The Gideon family. According to Dr. Evan in Mother Monroe, there were at least two Gideon Brothers and their families in the original wagon train. Mrs. William Wise, Catherine Gideon Wise,

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The First Wagon Train – Monroe County

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was their sister. One of the people whom William hoped to persuade to come to Monroe County, in the second year, was his father-in-law, Gideon, who was a Revolutionary War Veteran. Two of the Gideons were listed as head-of-household in the 1820 Monroe County Census.

They were Isaac Gideon (b SC c1773) and John Gideon (b SC c1785). Isaac Gideon purchased land in Section 17, Township 12S, Range 17W, just south of Gaines Trace and approximately one mile north of present day Parham Store Community.

John Gideon purchased land in Section 18, Township 12S, Range 17W, also along the south side of Gaines Trace within half a mile of Isaac's property.

4. The Booker family. At least two of the Booker sons married into the Wise family. Thomas Booker (1803-1883) married Catherine Wise (1810-1887). She was the daughter of William Wise and Catherine Gideon Wise.

Thomas Booker was the son of Shields Booker and Ann Pride. John Booker (b SC c1798) married Agnes Wise (b SC c1802). John Booker owned land in Section 7, Township 14S, Range 17W. Judge Fred P. Wright of Amory, MS is a descendant of Thomas Booker and Catherine Wise Booker.

5. Who was the fifth family? This is a good question. Dr. Evans lists the families as Weaver, Wise, two Gideons and one other. We assume the one other to have been the Bookers.

John Wise Riley (1866-1948) in an interview with Dr. Evans lists the families as . . . three Wises, two or three Gideons, Bookers, Weavers, and the Thames, who settled at the ferry . . ." (This would probably be referring to the ferry at Cotton Gin Port.)

According to tradition in the Thames family, Eli Thames was a pioneer Monroe County Settler and came in with five other families. Eli Thames settled on the south side of Cotton Gin Port. He was the town's first blacksmith. His son T. R. Thames was born at Cotton Gin Port, April 15, 1818. Eli Thames died October 4, 1824. Mrs. Bessie Lou Gwin Radde is a descendant.

We also know from other records that the Howell family was one of the earliest in Monroe County. The Howell family did have connections with Laurens District, SC.

In the ensuing decades from 1817, members of the Howell family married members of the Wise family. However they have no family tradition as having come to Monroe County with Frederick Weaver.

Megargel: My Ancestral Abode...Monroe County Is Always Near And dear To My Heart- Monroe History from 1935

This article by Peter A. Brannon is from The Montgomery Advertiser for March 10, 1935.

Introduction

Should you travel Alabama State Highway No. 11, Monroeville to Atmore, you will pass a small store-post office-filling station whose sign reads: "Megargel." Believe it or not, the community's name honors the memory of James McOrcle, a revolutionary soldier, who lived, in 1825, somewhere near Claiborne. The traditions of old Claiborne have dominated that southwest Alabama region since the Indian

War of 1814, so 'tis but natural that such should be. Unfortunate it is that the old Irishman's name is lost in such spelling, but perhaps it is just as well as few would pronounce it that way.

I have seen a list of "patriots of 76" who were to be invited to the reception in honor of General La Fayette at Claiborne, on April 6, 1825, and this James McOrcle was among them. Where he was from and where the old man was buried I would love to know. I hope that some reader whose eye shall fall on this will tell me more about him or his family. No doubt some

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Megargel: My Ancestral Abode...Monroe County Is Always Near And dear To My Heart- Monroe History from 1935

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of these “Megargels” are living in that country yet, or someone would not have “thought up” that name for a road-stop.

Mexia, Jones Mill, Perdue Hill, Monroeville, Claiborne, Uriah, McGill and several nearby “settlements” bear family names, though why a name-sake of a North-West Texas town which some of those westerners pronounce “Morehair” and which I am told should be “Me-air,” but which is in Alabama “Mexee-ah!” should be nestling in that Monroe County sand-bed I do not know.

Mount Pleasant, an interesting old settlement on the righthand road, is according to the map, on the main highway, but actually north of the road. There, quite early, the Weatherford family settled and it was there that William (the Creek Indian “Red Eagle”), died in 1829. Blacksher post office, south of Little River, bears Uriah Blacksher’s name.

The Uriah post office at the fork which leads to Atmore, is likewise to honor Mr. Blacksher who early developed the lumber industry in that pine-belt country. I recently sat in a hotel in Louisiana with a Mr. Evans whose passing friends called “Uriah,” and knowing his initials were “U. B.,” I asked him if he knew a lumberman in Alabama named Uriah Blacksher and was told that our Mr. Blacksher was an uncle and was for whom he, born at Demopolis, was named.

Perdue Hill

Perdue Hill, up on the plateau, out of the Alabama River Valley and away from old Claiborne, is so-called for a family of the name. The village is the successor of old Claiborne and the Gaillords, the Agees, Broughtons and a few others are there. No one ever thinks of Perdue Hill without recalling John Lee Marshall. Neither would one ever think of Mount Pleasant and forget that from down in that country came the Lamberts and Ferralls. When I stop at Perdue Hill, perhaps to show some one the “Hall” – that self-same Masonic Hall in which Lafayette was entertained, while he was at Claiborne – I want to ask about the Moores and the Hendersons and to call to

say “hello” to Mr. Frye and the other Gaillords. When I was last there, Dr. Broughton took me by Dr. Gaillord’s old office and I added an old drugstore shelf bottle to my collection. There are yet there some stoppers which I hope to get.

Jones Mill

Frisco City, the present rather ambitious name of old Jones Mill town reminds me always of the old hard-shell Baptist preacher who I knew quite pleasantly in the legislature of 1911. Mr. Jones had mills there as early as 1888, and started then to cutting out the timber. He prospered and with him also did others. The place was incorporated in 1909, and in 1928, the name was changed to “Frisco City” commemorative of the coming of the Saint Louis and San Francisco Railroad, the Frisco System, which a few years ago secured control of the Muscle Shoals, Birmingham and Pensacola lines and opened that locality to deep water. Repton, in west Conecuh, was formerly the “crossroads” for this section but since then bad roads and the making of new roads have detoured many travelers who formerly went from Monroeville west by Mexia to Claiborne, around by Frisco City. Repton has thus been more in the public eye. Years ago, I used to see dozens of slat-black hickory and oak chairs which they told me were made at Jones Mill.

Randon’s Ferry

There is no river crossing today at old John Randon’s farm, but in 1813 it was Randon’s “Ferry” and a road led across the Alabama there as well as at Weatherford’s Bluff, some seven or eight miles “as the crow flies” upstream. The site has two outstanding incidental connections with American history. Here on Nov. 12, 1813, James Smith, Jere Austill and Sam Dale in a small canoe, attacked nine Indians in a large dugout, killing them all, immortalizing themselves as winners of the “canoe-fight.”

Crossing the Alabama here at the mouth of Randon’s Creek on Jan. 11, 1815, Sam Dale, riding Peddy, the same pony on which he carried orders to Andrew Jackson not to fight the British at New Orleans, brought Gen. Jackson’s report of his victory.

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The ECHS *Journal* Section

Megargel: My Ancestral Abode...Monroe County Is Always Near And dear To My Heart- Monroe History from 1935

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Here also, at this Randon plantation in pioneer days, was born, Sehoj, who destiny decreed should become the wife of David Tate, born at Ten Mile Bluff, Alabama River, in 1780. John Tate's son had the blood of Sehoj in him. Sepoy, so even pioneers say, was charming and well-illustrated her background. Granddaughter of the French merchant-soldier of Toulouse and as well, directly in line, from the Indian chief at Taskigi, she figured in no small way in Alabama's early life.

John Randon met the same fate of 470 others at the Fort Mims massacre on Aug. 30, 1813, but Eloise who with David, resided at Alexander McGillivray's old Cow Pens plantation, at Pensacola trail fords, lived to a ripe old age and today is resting at old "Montpelier," in Baldwin, on that same road south to Bay Minete along which the right fork then led to Mims Ferry on the Alabama.

The main road today does not cross at old John

Weatherford's bluff, which is locally known as Agee's, but you may spin over, after you've paid the toll, on the Claiborne-Murphy bridge. Desoto put his Spaniards over at that place in October, 1540. It is not unlikely that DeLuna passed that way in 1560. Bienville noted that great bluff in 1714 and 99 years later Gen. Ferdinand Claiborne's Mississippians mounted eight guns there.

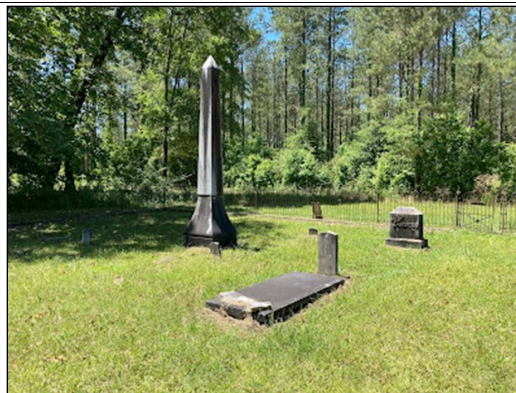
The Federal Road crossed there and those early settlers who came prior to 1812 into Clarke and Wilcox Counties reached Alabama over that roadway.

Claiborne, about which, because I love its old traditions, I have in former times written perhaps too often, is almost no more, but they are building a good road and ere long one can travel west from Monroeville to cross at that historic old fort site, go by Gov. Murphy's old plantation, on out by the graves of the old Revolutionary soldiers Thomas Bradford and William Armistead, near Amity Church and southwest to Saint Stevens.

'Riley's Crossing' in Monroe County Named after South Carolina Settlers

The following article by Lee Peacock is from his blog Dispatches from the LP-OP, Thursday, May 21, 2020 at ><https://eepeacock2010.blogspot.com/2020/05/monroe-countys-riley-community-was.html>>.

About four miles east of J.F. Shields High School in Beatrice on State Highway 21, travelers will see a green highway sign that reads "Riley's Crossing" near the crossroads where Highway 21 veers off towards McWilliams and State Highway 47 continues on towards Midway. Turnbull "Riley's Crossing" makes up the other point of the compass at this intersection as it leads motorists down into the old



Turnbull Cemetery in Monroe County, Alabama.

Turnbull community.

Despite the road sign on Highway 21, most maps list the name of this crossroads community simply as "Riley," a name that dates back to the establishment of a post office there in 1882. According to the book "Place Names in Alabama" by Virginia O. Foscoe, the Riley community was "named for a family from South Carolina, who settled in this area." Sources say that the Riley post office closed in 1911.

According to the 2010 book, "Riley's Crossing" by Kathy McCoy, the name "Riley's Crossing" traces its roots to an old

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The ECHS *Journal* Section

'Riley's Crossing' in Monroe County Named after South Carolina Settlers

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mercantile store by the same name that was owned by one of the county's most prominent citizens, Thomas Mercer Riley, who was the longtime president of the Bank of Beatrice. If you go to this place today, there is no sign of Riley's old store, which more than likely also housed the community's post office.

A few days ago, after several hours of luckless fishing at the state lake, I found myself passing through Riley's Crossing with my 11-year-old son, James. We scouted around for a few minutes to see if any old landmarks or buildings remained from the community's heyday, and we were not disappointed. As many travelers through this area will know, the most prominent building in present-day Riley's Crossing is the Savannah Missionary Baptist Church, which traces its history back to the 1880s.

According to the church's cornerstone, the church was organized in the 1880s when R.W. Russell was minister. The church has been rebuilt three times since then - first in 1907, again in 1937 and lastly in 1968. In 1983, the church was bricked and a new addition was added to the sanctuary.

Before heading home, James and I cut down Turnbull Road, and about a mile later, we pulled over at the old Turnbull Cemetery. We walked among the headstones for a few minutes, and, just eyeballing it, I'd say there are about 50 graves there. The oldest grave that we were able to find belonged to Lydia Kile, who died at the age of 17 in September 1846.

Not far from her grave, you will also find the grave of Thomas Mercer Riley, who died at the age of 95 in March 1935. During the Civil War, Riley served as captain of Co. C of the 5th Alabama Infantry and was in command of that unit when it surrendered with Robert E. Lee at Appomattox in 1865. At the time of his death, Riley was one of the few surviving Confederate veterans in all of Alabama.

Sources say that the Turnbull Cemetery is in the flood zone of Turnbull Branch, which flows just west of the cemetery. Maps indicate that Flat Creek, Robinson Creek and Stringer Creek also flow through the Riley's Crossing and Turnbull communities, and all of these freshwater sources would have been prime real estate for ancient Indians in this area. No doubt there are more than a few old village sites, and maybe Indian mounds, in this part of Monroe County.

Historic Stretch of Alabama River Flows between Claiborne Lock & Dam and Claiborne-Murphy Bridge

The following article by Lee Peacock is from his blog [Dispatches from the LP-OP](https://leepeacock2010.blogspot.com/2020/10/historic-stretch-of-alabama-flows.html), Saturday, October 3, 2020 at <<https://leepeacock2010.blogspot.com/2020/10/historic-stretch-of-alabama-flows.html>>.

You would be hard-pressed to find a more historic stretch of the Alabama River than the six-mile length of the river that flows between the Claiborne Lock & Dam and the U.S. Highway 84 bridge at Claiborne.

I recently got the chance to accompany John Higginbotham of Franklin and his son, Pearson, on a memorable kayak trip down the river between the dam and the

bridge. John and Pearson, two of Monroe County's foremost kayakers, had made this kayak trip before, and they were more than a little familiar with this part of the river. For me, this was the first time that I'd ever traveled down this part of a river in anything other than a fishing boat with an outboard motor.

According to the official flood gauge, the river was at 14.1 feet when we put our kayaks in the water at the landing just south of the dam. It was a few minutes after 9 a.m., and the temperature was in the



Bridge at Claiborne.

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Historic Stretch of Alabama River Flows between Claiborne Lock & Dam and Claiborne-Murphy Bridge

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seventies. In other words, it was an ideal morning for a paddling trip down the river.

As we left the modern concrete and steel dam in our wake, I was reminded that we were traveling down the river in much the same manner as the ancient Indians did for thousands of years before the arrival of European explorers. Long before Alabama became a state, Indians paddled up and down the river in canoes made from natural materials collected near their villages. One is left to wonder what they would think of today's mass-produced, hard-plastic kayaks.

We eventually drifted by the powerhouse at the pulp mill, and I was again reminded of how much this stretch of river has changed over the years. Gone are important landing sites like Lisbon Landing, Barefield Landing, Talberts Landing and others. Unless you know where to look, these places are now nothing more than forgotten locations on old historical maps.

Our trip down the river also took us past the mouths of Big Flat Creek and Limestone Creek. Large ancient Indian villages were said to have been located at both of these sites. In fact, sources say that near the point where Limestone Creek flows into the Alabama River, there is a prehistoric, manmade earthen mound that measures about 100 by 40 feet, with a height of 18 feet. Others say that the land between the mouths

of these two creeks was considered a "holy ground" by the Indians who lived in this area centuries ago.

On the day of our trip, there was very little boat traffic, and my mind turned to thoughts of the days when old-timey steamboats once plied the river's waters between Mobile and Montgomery. Steamboat accidents were common during those times, and a number of these riverboats wrecked and sank in and around Claiborne. Perhaps the best known of these was the Henderson, a 123-ton steamer that sank in April 1825 with a cargo load of whisky, brandy and wine. In the days before river dredging, old-timers told of being able to see the Henderson's wreckage when the river was low during severe droughts.

As we continued our trip, the Claiborne-Murphy Bridge came into sight, stretching across the river from the high bluff at Claiborne. For many years, the only way to cross the river at Claiborne was by ferry, and it wasn't until the 1930s that a bridge was built across the river at this point. Space doesn't allow for all the tales that have been told about this location, which at times was the home of another large Indian village, where sources say that DeSoto crossed the river in 1540, where the U.S. Army built a fort in the early 1800s and where the bustling city of Claiborne once stood.

In the end, it took us about an hour and a half to reach Claiborne Landing, just north of the bridge.

Few Remain Who Can Say that They Remember Riding the Old Ferry Across the Alabama River at Claiborne

The following article by Lee Peacock is from his blog [Dispatches from the LP-OP](https://leepeacock2010.blogspot.com/2022/09/few-remain-who-can-say-that-they.html), Friday, September 2, 2022 at ><https://leepeacock2010.blogspot.com/2022/09/few-remain-who-can-say-that-they.html>>.

Last week in this space I wrote about the old river ferry at Claiborne. This ferry took travelers back and forth across the Alabama River long before a bridge was built there in the 1930s. Very few living Monroe County residents remember the ferry, but there are still maybe a handful around.

Last Friday morning, my former next-door neighbor, George Thomas Jones, called me at the office to

say that he'd read my column about the ferry, and he believes that he's probably the only person left in Monroe County who can say that he actually rode the original ferry at Claiborne. George Thomas turns 100 years old later this year. (If you want to see what he looks like, glance up at the top of this page, where you'll see his picture along with the column he writes each week for the *Journal*.)

As best that George Thomas can remember, he was probably about six or seven Last week in this space I wrote about the old river ferry at Claiborne.

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The ECHS *Journal* Section

Few Remain Who Can Say that They Remember Riding the Old Ferry Across the Alabama River at Claiborne

(Continued from page 12)

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As best that George Thomas can remember, he was probably about six or seven years old when he rode the ferry across the river a few years before a bridge was built there in the 1930s. He said you would drive up to the ferry crossing and if the ferry was on the other side of the river, you had to blow your horn to let the ferryman know you needed to use the ferry. A small boat equipped with an outboard motor powered the ferry across the river.

George Thomas noted that the contract was let for the construction of the original steel frame bridge at Claiborne on Sept. 4, 1928. Vincennes Bridge Co. of Indiana was awarded the bid at a cost of



George Thomas

\$335,090.80. This bridge, which was first known as the "William Wyatt Bibb Bridge," was dedicated on Sept. 9, 1930. The bridge's name was changed to the "Claiborne-Murphy Bridge" in 1931.

An almost forgotten fact was that originally the bridge was operated as a toll bridge, George Thomas said. There were 14 other toll bridges in the state at that time, and it cost a quarter to cross one way, but if you returned that same day, you weren't charged for the second crossing. The toll was lifted in September 1936.

George Thomas and I got to talking about the dollar amounts mentioned above in today's dollars. Adjusted for inflation, the cost of the original bridge construction would be a little over \$5.8 million in 2022. That 25-cent one-way

toll between 1930 and 1936 would amount to around \$4.33 today.

The modern bridge that's at Claiborne today was built in the early 1980s. It was constructed beside the old steel frame bridge, which was just south of the present-day bridge. The old bridge, which was unsafe for modern 18-wheelers and double-wide mobile homes being towed, was officially demolished on Aug. 27, 1985.



The Old Steel Frame Bridge at Claiborne, Alabama.



**Train Depot,
Peterman, Munroe County, Ala.**



**Philadelphia Baptist Church at Tunnel
Springs, Monroe County, Ala.**

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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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