

# Montevallo *Historical* Times

Vol. 2 No. 2

Newsletter of the Montevallo Historical Society

Spring 2018

## Bicentennial Park Dedicated at Grand Finale Celebration

A highlight of the Bicentennial Finale was the unveiling of the handsome Bicentennial Clock. While it will be permanently installed in the park at a later date, the clock attracted a lot of attention and became popular to include in group pictures and selfies. See page 6 and 7 for more coverage.



**--- Second General Meeting of 2018 ---**

**Sunday, April 15, 2018 • Parnell Library 2:00 pm**

**Program Topic: The Perry – Moore – Mahler Properties**

**--- Social Hour and Refreshments to Follow the Meeting ---**



## President's Letter

What do you love about Montevallo? Did you attend the first annual "Love Montevallo Day" on March 3? It was a great day to celebrate a lot of things, including a couple of pocket parks and the new streetscape. Owl's Cove Park dresses up the entrance to the University of Montevallo on Main and contains the American Bicentennial Capsules sealed in 1976. Did you add anything to the time capsule commemorating Montevallo's Bicentennial?! It'll be located at Bicentennial Park (located in front of the Tavern) which was dedicated in memory of Mrs. Junnie Craig, Dr. Earl Cunningham, and Attorney Mitchell Spears. And, the Streetscape—downtown's facelift—commemorates the contributions of former Mayor Ben McCrory. The makeover also includes several "namesake" trees planted in honor of other city leaders. The day marked a fitting "Grand Finale" for our city's Bicentennial Year!

So, what's new in history? The Historical Society had



**The unoccupied Thiemonge family house on County Road 73 just south of Montevallo City Cemetery is an example of the vernacular "I House" architectural style.**

a great meeting in January as Clay Nordan regaled us with the story of the life of former Alabama College professor, James Skillman Ward and the impressive way his wife and children persevered and prospered following his untimely death in 1934.



**The Mahler family farmhouse, once known as Perry Hall, was the centerpiece of the bequest by Betty Mahler of her family's property that now comprises Shoal Creek Park.**

And, we're looking forward to another terrific meeting on Sunday, April 15. No, that's not Tax Day since it falls on Sunday! We'll highlight some of Montevallo's early settlers as we focus on the Perry-Moore-Mahler properties. Our program will highlight both the historical legacy and the preservation efforts connected to that beautiful spot along Highway 119.

Other historic properties are scattered around town as well. For example, recent articles in local media have featured the Aldrich Coal Mine Museum and the preservation efforts of Henry and Rose Emfinger. Are you aware of the Powell Cemetery situated above



Big Springs in Orr Park? What about the Saylor House that faces North Boundary Street, tucked in behind Napier Hall? The Thiemonge House on Cemetery Road is an historic structure that needs some love, too. Do you know of other meaningful properties that deserve attention?

We're open to ideas, and we're looking for dedicated stewards of Montevallo's heritage. Are you interested in recording oral histories from notable residents? Do you have artifacts, newspaper clippings, or other memorabilia that help to relate our city's story? Would you like to celebrate our Founding Residents or to organize Walking and Biking Tours through various neighborhoods? We're hoping to incorporate many of these historical treasures into a cohesive whole that accurately depicts the place we call home. The possibilities are infinite!

It seems that, anytime current and former residents of Montevallo get together, the conversation eventually turns to favorite stories or nostalgic reminiscences.

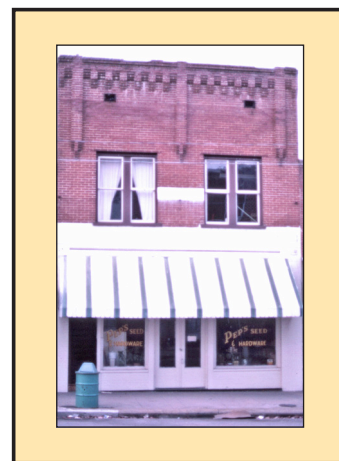
Won't you join us as we rediscover our past while looking to the future? "Love Montevallo Day" did just that. We commemorated the past, celebrated the present, and prepared for the future. Join us and share your part of the story. We'll look forward to seeing you April 15!



Henry Emfinger, at the Aldrich Coal Mining Museum, selects a miner's lunch pail from his extensive collection of artifacts and equipment from the days when men went deep underground at Aldrich Mines to extract the famous "Montevallo Coal".

*Jim Day*

p.s. We're searching for photographs of Main Street to mark change and continuity in the downtown area. Please let us know if you have a picture; we'd love to scan a copy!



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## Montevallo Historical Society

*Opening the Portals of Our Heritage*

540 Shelby Street  
Montevallo, AL 35115

[www.historicmontevallo.org](http://www.historicmontevallo.org)



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## Historical Society Publishes Memoir Excerpt

On January 21, 2018, the Montevallo Historical Society held its first general meeting of the year at Parnell Library.

President Jim Day opened the meeting by welcoming a respectable assemblage of members and visitors, then dispensed with any business in order to give the agenda over to vice-president Clay Nordan's presentation of the meeting's special program.

Clay began by introducing our visitors and explaining that our focus would

be the as-yet unpublished memoir of Montevallo native, Julia Ward Rotenberry, whose parents were former Alabama College professor of modern languages, James Skillman Ward and his wife Lillian.

Present for the meeting and presentation were Julia's two daughters, Janet Rotenberry Burnett (Julia's first-born) of St. Petersburg, FL with her husband Peter, and Lynn Rotenberry Moran of Alex City, AL with her husband Jack. In addition, we were pleased to have with us Julia's niece, Julia Ward Youngblood of Statesboro, GA and her husband Gary.

Clay explained that he and Lynn had been good friends and classmates since they entered the Alabama College nursery school together at the age of three. They made their way through the Montevallo school system, together with several other nursery school classmates, and

graduated from Montevallo High School in the class of 1967.

Clay said that he first became aware of Julia's written recollections when several passages were read at the graveside service following her death in 2013. He was impressed with not only Julia's memories as revealed in what he heard, but also the quality of expression she employed in the writing.

In spite of Julia's clearly stated wishes that her memoir not be published, Clay became convinced that it was too valuable as part of the historical record, as well as for its good story tell-

ing, not to be shared in some way with interested readers.

With his background in publishing, Clay knew that he was capable of putting Julia's manuscript into book form, so he approached Janet and Lynn, after the passage of a few years, about allowing him to prepare and preserve the memoir for posterity as digital text. They agreed to this idea and so he began the conversion process from Julia's typewritten pages.

While doing this work, he became even more impressed with Julia's writing and zeroed in on one particular chapter entitled "Daddy", because of the powerful story that she told about her father's untimely death and how she, her mother and her sisters and brother reacted and coped with this profound and sudden upending of their world.

With a little persistence, Clay was able to make his case that this

story should not be kept inside the family, so Janet and Lynn agreed to review the chapter and identify any editing that they thought necessary.

When the Montevallo Historical Society got going in early 2017, it occurred to Clay that publishing the "Daddy" chapter under the auspices of the Society would be the ideal way to get it in front of appreciative readers.

He returned to Janet and Lynn with the idea of putting the chapter into pdf format and making it available to readers through the Historical Society website. In conjunction with the January 21 meeting, the "Daddy" chapter was made available online for the first time at [www.historicmontevallo.org](http://www.historicmontevallo.org).

After explaining the backstory of this project to the audience, Clay proceeded to offer, with the aid of an extensive slide show, a biographical summary of the life and accomplishments of James Skillman Ward, his wife Lillian, and his talented children.

The premature death of her husband left Lillian with four children, Madie, Julia, Evelyn, and David, ranging in age from five to fourteen.



**Julia Kiber Ward Rotenberry**



**James Skillman Ward**  
1885 - 1934



Skillman and Lillian had come to Alabama from Texas, and she considered uprooting her family and heading home to take advantage of the support of her relatives.

Instead, she made the difficult decision that her children were so entrenched in their life and home in Montevallo that she would spare them the disruption involved in such a dramatic move and figure out a way to support them.

Lillian, a former Home Economics teacher at the college level back home, enrolled at Montevallo to pursue a new degree in English. Upon graduation, she was hired as an instructor in the Alabama College English department, which allowed her to give her children the economic base they needed to prosper.

The accomplishments of all four children stand in tribute to Lillian's commitment to their education and success as adults.

Madie followed in her father's footsteps and became an expert in linguistics and modern languages. She ended her academic career as interim president at Plymouth State College in New Hampshire.

Julia earned her Masters degree in Library Science and served with distinction for 29 years as a librarian at the University of Montevallo's Carmichael Library.

Evelyn studied Secretarial Science at Alabama College, graduating in only three years. She was successful in this field as well as in her role as a wife and mother of four children.

David (father of our guest Julia Ward Youngblood) also took the academic route, becoming a noted historian, author, and professor at Georgia Southern University.

**You can view a video of Clay's presentation on Julia Rotenberry's memoir and the Ward family at [www.historicmontevallo.org](http://www.historicmontevallo.org). The "Daddy" chapter is also available to read or download at the same web address.**



**Descendants of James Skillman Ward and their spouses were on hand for the announcement of the publication of Julia Ward Rotenberry's memoir excerpt and the program honoring their family. (L-R) Jack Moran, Lynn Rotenberry Moran, Peter Burnett, Janet Rotenberry Burnett, Gary Youngblood, Julia Ward Youngblood.**



**Directors Bill & Mae Glosson welcome Mrs. Phyllis Davis.**



**Old friends Ann Nathews Griffin and Debbie Pendleton prior to the meeting.**



**President Jim Day kicks off the meeting at Parnell Library on Jan. 21.**





(Above, left) Kirk Lightfoot reads the names memorialized by donors of Bicentennial banners that were displayed throughout the town. At the end of the event the banners were picked up by each donor. (Above, middle) Patricia Honeycutt demonstrates proper handling of the time capsule. (Above, right) Pam Phagan with Montevallo's first female mayor, the Honorable Sharon M. Anderson, as she dedicates the Bicentennial Oak Tree in honor of mayor Anderson.



Pam Phagan kicks off the Grand Finale by welcoming visitors to the event.



The new clock was an instant hit.





(Right) Mayor Hollie Cost welcomes the large crowd to the Grand Finale and recognizes the contributions to the Bicentennial effort by the Bicentennial Committee, the Bicentennial Park Committee, the MCDC Committee, and the citizens of Montevallo. (Above, left to right) The Bicentennial Committee: Steve Gilbert; Sharon Gilbert; Patricia Wyatt Honeycutt, vice-president; Kirk Lightfoot, treasurer; Pam Phagan, president; Hunter Lawley and Janice Seaman.



The festivities concluded with the ceremonial ribbon cutting, indicating the official opening of Bicentennial Park.





## Witness to History The Saylor House



**The black and white photos you see on these pages were made from glass negatives from the early years of the college at Montevallo when this historic house was a student boarding house and residence for the E.S. Lyman family.**

This unassuming two story, Federal Style white columned brick building with stacked porticoes, tucked behind Napier Hall on North Boundary Street is easy for passers-by to take for granted. But its importance to local history is long and impressive.

Erected by local citizens in 1858 on a lot carved out of the Edmund King estate, the structure is one of three antebellum buildings on the University of Montevallo campus (the others are King House and Reynolds Hall).

It served initially as part of the Montevallo Male & Female Institute, established in February of that same year by the Cumberland Presbyterian church. The young men were schooled here while the young women studied in the building now known as Reynolds Hall.

The school closed during the Civil War, and it is believed that Union troops used the house for living quarters or kitchen facilities during their occupation of the town.

When the Alabama Girls Industrial School (AGIS) was established at Montevallo, in 1896, the house was brought back into the service of education with Home

Economics classes meeting in what had also become a boarding house for students as well as the residence of the family of Judge E.S. Lyman, a founder of the school.

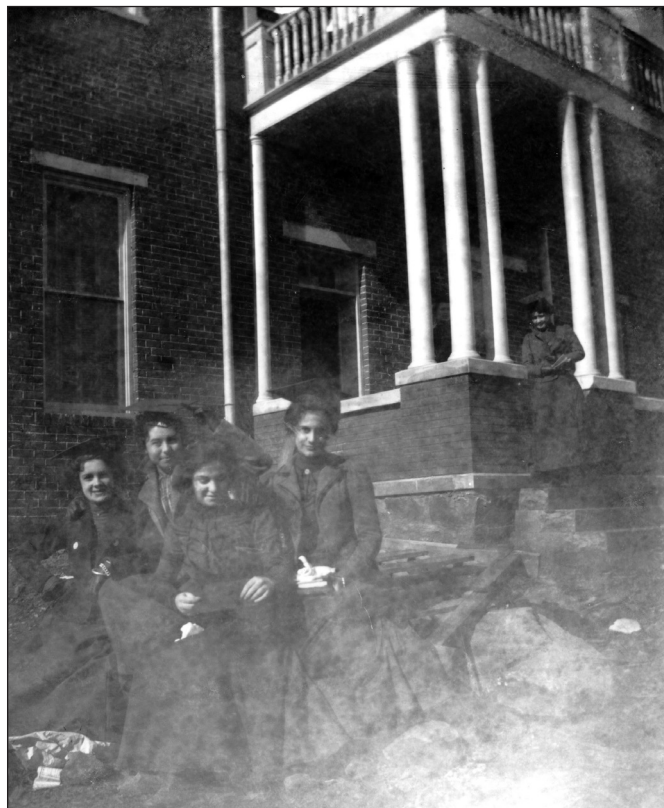
Over time, the house became known as Lyman Hall and the family continued to live there until the 1940's. Alabama College purchased Lyman Hall in 1952 for use as faculty housing.

The next year, after completing a major renovation and construction of faculty apartments in the building, the college honored a much loved and recently deceased faculty member, Edythe Saylor, by naming the house for her. Since then, the structure has been known as "Saylor House".

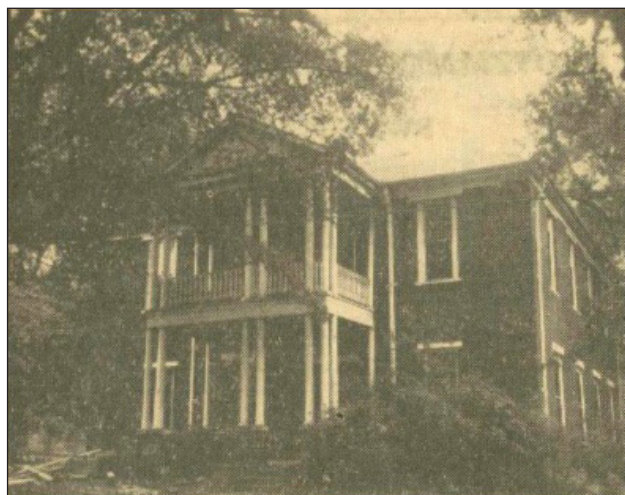
UM faculty members, such as Betty Louise Lumby, Joseph DiOrion, and iconic Montevallo High School teacher, Miss Susie DeMent, were long-time residents of Saylor House apartments in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's.

Today, the future of Saylor House is unknown, but the significant part it played in the historical development and growth of Montevallo cannot be denied.





Photos from glass negatives courtesy of Marty Everse



## Lyman House Purchased by Alabama College

Alabama College now owns the old Lyman house. Located across the street from the campus, the two-story, columned brick house has been uninhabited for several years. There are now four small newly-furnished apartments on the top floor. Plans have not been completed as to what will be done on the first floor.

Suggestions have been made to make a nursery school on the first floor of the house. The school has been granted \$15,000 for a nursery school, and plans for the downstairs of the Lyman House are contingent on what is done about providing a better nursery school.

The four apartments upstairs are made up of a large living-bed-room combination, and a small kitchen and bath. Blond modernistic furniture blends in nicely with pastel walls. Kitchens are fully equipped with stove, sink, refrigerator and plenty of cupboard space.

The upstairs hall will be furnished with a bright red sectional sofa with corner tables in blond.

Reprinted from the Alabama College student newspaper, *The Alabamian*, September 26, 1952.

**Edythe Saylor was an Associate Professor of Physical Education at Alabama College from 1928 until 1951. Following her untimely death in 1951, several scholarships in her name were established for Alabama College students.**



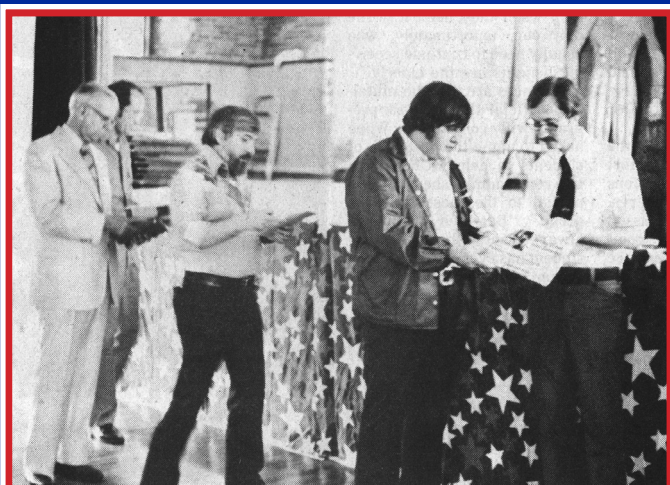
### Sources:

Montevallo, *The First Hundred Years*, Eloise Meroney; *Alabama College, 1896 - 1969*, Lucille Griffith; *Years Rich and Fruitful, University of Montevallo, 1896 - 1996*, Mary Frances Tipton; *Bulletin of the Alabama Girls Industrial School*, January 1908, a short history of Montevallo by E. S. Lyman.

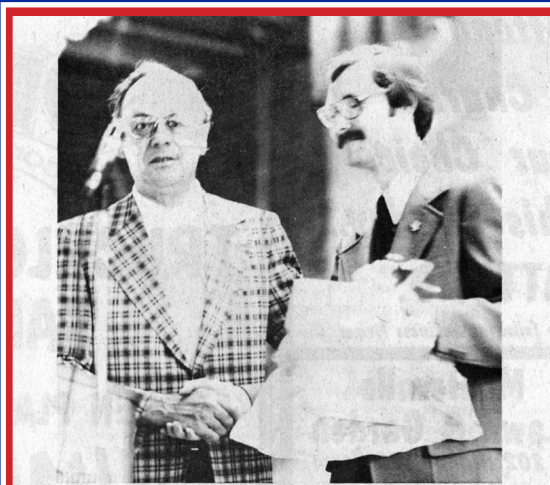
## Remembering **A Previous Bicentennial**

The United States Bicentennial was a series of celebrations and observances during the mid-1970s that paid tribute to historical events leading up to the creation of the United States of America as an independent republic. The Bicentennial culminated on Sunday, **July 4, 1976**, with the 200th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence and Montevillo participated in the observance along with the rest of the nation.

The city had a newspaper, **The Shelby News Monitor**, for several years in the 1970's and they devoted an entire page to Bicentennial coverage in their paper published on Thursday, July 15, 1976. The photos in that paper recorded contributions being made to the Time Capsules that were closed and sealed at that time. They will soon move to a new repository at Bicentennial Park along with the new 2018 Montevillo Bicentennial Time Capsules.



**NEWS— MONITOR EN ROUTE TO TIME CAPSULE**



**MAYOR SEARS PRESENTS GIFT TO BICENTENNIAL CHAIRMAN DANNY COOPER**



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..... **Ads From the Archives** .....



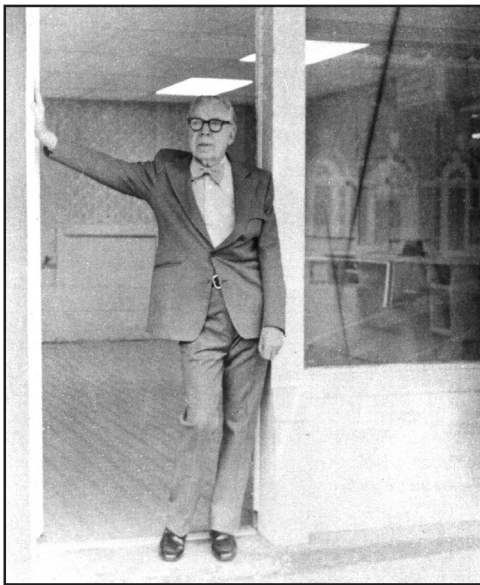
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Advertisement from October 31, 1931 edition of *The Alabamian*, Alabama College Student Newspaper



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**GOING FISHING ?**

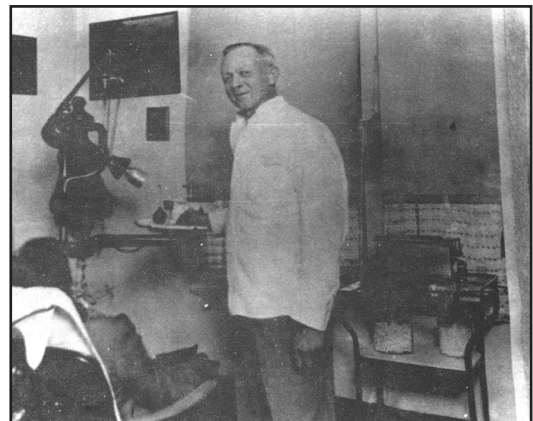
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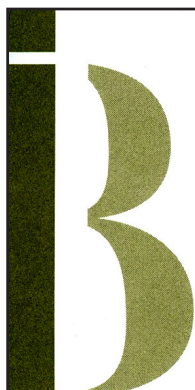


Advertisement found in an issue of the *Montevallo Times* from April 1940 – Photo excerpted from *Good Morning Yesterday*, Thompson High School, 1977.

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