

Montevallo *Historical* Times

Vol. 3 No. 2

Newsletter of the Montevallo Historical Society

Spring 2019

Susan Godwin Named Historical Society President

At the March 10, 2019 meeting of the Montevallo Historical Society's board of directors, currently serving director Susan McGlown Godwin was chosen as the society's new president, succeeding Jim Day who stepped down from the position at the end of 2018.

Susan was one of fourteen "Organizing Directors" who were instrumental in getting the society off the ground in 2017 and has continued to serve in that capacity ever since.

She grew up in Montevallo and graduated from Montevallo High School. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Houston as well as a Master's degree in Community Planning from Auburn University.

Susan has lived, studied and worked in a number of locations around the country and her work experiences include several decades in the music industry, work



as a professional artist, as well as involvement in education and the Bureau of the Census.

In the last decade, Susan's strong interest in architecture, design, construction, historic preservation, along with environmental and urban planning have led her to become involved in research and the pursuit of advanced de-

grees that encompass these areas. She has served as a preservation consultant for a number of cities and communities.

These days, Susan calls Montevallo home and lives in the house where she grew up on Parkway Circle in the old Arden Subdivision. She has two daughters, one of which also lives in Montevallo and the other lives just down the road in Clanton.

She says that she feels she has a deep understanding of the values embraced by the Montevallo community and an abiding sense of the "pride of place" shared by its residents.

Susan also said that she is humbled and honored to be selected as the new president of the Montevallo Historical Society and is eager to get to work with the directors and members as we pursue projects and initiatives that highlight and preserve our town's rich historic heritage.

Nordan Speaks to Shelby County Historical Society

Before he left office in January of 2019, president Jim Day was contacted by the Shelby County Historical Society to find out if a representative of the Montevallo Historical Society could present a program for their Winter meeting at the Shelby County Historical Museum and Archives in Columbia.

Based on vice-president Clay Nordan's weekly contributions on behalf of MHS in the past year to Montevallo Main Street's "Throwback Thursday" series, Jim asked Clay if he thought he could make an interesting pro-

gram out of his work telling the story of Montevallo Main Street merchants and businesses over the years.

Clay agreed to put something together for the presentation, so on Sunday, February 3, 2019, he was introduced to about 30 attendees by director David Nolen at the society's quarterly meeting.

Using his own descriptions and anecdotes, as well as projected photographs and graphics, Clay took his audience on a stroll down Montevallo's Main Street from Farrington Bridge almost to Middle Street. Stories and legends stretching from Montevallo's earliest days fascinated his listeners during the one-hour presentation.

Each subject discussed during



the program came from one of the "Throwback Thursday" postings. Since the presentation, eight more have been added to the collection, all of which can be seen at a special website accessible from a link at www.historicmontevallo.org. A video made during the program can also be found at the MHS website.

President's Letter

I think we are all very glad to welcome spring each year, so it's only appropriate that this first message from me as the new president of the Montevallo Historical Society would come at this time of rebirth and renewal.

Those of us who have been serving on the MHS board of directors since the inception of the society regretted to learn that our founding president, Jim Day, made the decision, for personal and professional reasons, to step down as an officer and director at the end of 2018.

I want to offer to Jim, on behalf of the board as well as myself, the thanks of a grateful group of organizing directors for his leadership and wise counsel as we built this organization in a single year from nothing to a vital and substantial historical society committed to the study and preservation of the rich and varied

heritage of the town of Montevallo and its environs.

As Jim's recently elected successor, I obviously have very large shoes to fill, but I want you to know that I relish the opportunity to continue to take us down the ambitious path that he set us on.

Fortunately, I am not alone as I begin this journey. Our able vice-president, Clay Nordan, remains in that position and will be someone I look to regularly for ideas, guidance, and continued hard work as he puts our best foot forward with our newsletter, website, and general membership meeting programs.

Also retaining office is MHS Secretary Norman McMillan. I will continue to rely on Norman for his great skills as a listener and recorder of discussions and actions taken at meetings of the board. He is not shy about challenging or clarifying dubious statements made in the course of a debate and provides admirable precision in the minutes he keeps of each proceeding.

Janice Seaman, our Treasurer, is another director who will continue to serve us as an MHS officer. She has done a fine job managing our finances as she keeps an eye on dues collections, ex-

penses, and our overall account balances.

As your new president, I plan to educate myself about the by-laws, policies, and general operating procedures that have been developed since the earliest days of the Montevallo Historical Society.

I also applaud the continued interest and hard work of our Board of Directors. At my request we met several times in February and March to evaluate the innovative project ideas you submitted last year.

This is a great opportunity to get every active MHS member involved in something enjoyable and worthwhile. We will be ready to introduce some of these projects at our next general membership meeting on April 28th.

Please join us prepared to reach out with friends and neighbors as we work to focus local awareness on the history of our town.

Best regards, and thanks for your continued support for the Montevallo Historical Society and for your love of Montevallo's rich historical legacy.

Susan Godwin

Financial Report

Bank Balance 1/1/19	\$7502.35
Income	
Dues Collected.....	1725.00
Expenses	
Winter Newsletter	684.14
Bank Balance 4/1/19	\$8543.21

Respectfully submitted - Janice Seaman, Treasurer

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Montevallo
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Powell Cemetery Listed in Historic Register

Montevallo Historical Society members will recall that a story appeared in the Fall 2018 edition of *Montevallo Historical Times* that explained the history and current condition of the 1830's era Powell Cemetery, located on a low promontory adjacent to Orr Park and Shoal Creek.

In November of 2018, one of our charter members, Scott Martin of Alabaster, in a personal effort to establish the existence and historic nature of the cemetery and begin the preservation process, submitted an application and supporting documentation to the Alabama Historical Commission for listing the cemetery in the Alabama Historic Cemetery Register.

A month later, Scott received a letter from Hannah Garmon, the Architectural Survey, Alabama Register, and Cemetery Preservation Coordinator for the Historical Commission. In the letter, Ms Garmon, congratulated Scott on receiving a favorable review for Powell and informed him that it is now listed in the Register. She explained that the Register is honorary and "a prestigious listing of historic cemeteries in Alabama. Selected cemeteries are worthy of both recog-



This view of Powell Cemetery shows the historic site's condition and close proximity to Orr Park's ball fields.

nition and preservation."

She further stated that Powell Cemetery is the 28th cemetery in Shelby County to be listed on the Register, which now features 812 cemeteries statewide.

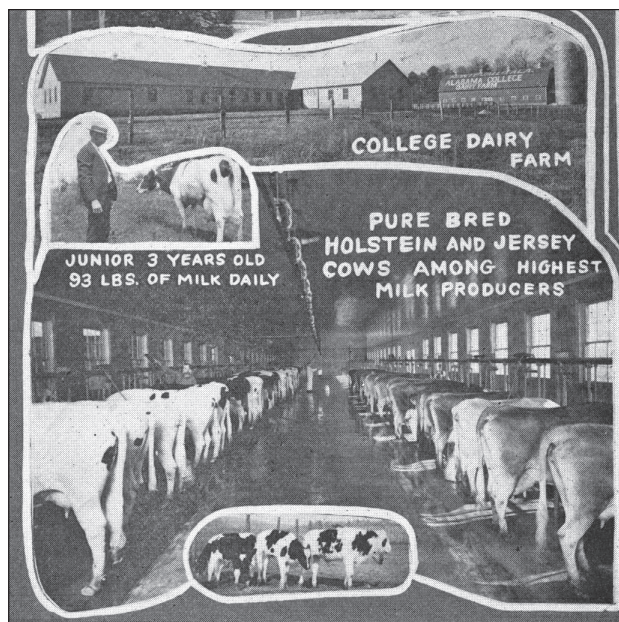
The Historical Commission sponsors a historical marker program to publicly recognize unique cemeteries in the state. With it's listing, Powell is now eligible for one of their markers or plaques, which can be purchased through their office.



From the earliest years of Alabama Girls Industrial School, a herd of cattle was maintained on campus to supply milk and other dairy products for consumption by students and faculty of the school. Initially, the herd was allowed to freely roam the campus to graze and was kept in by a fence that encircled the property. The cows were milked in a barn on the back side of campus and dairy operations were viewed as just one of several self-sustaining endeavors, such as the coal-fired power house that generated steam for electricity, heat, and laundry, and the private campus water system. Pasteurized milk was delivered to the dining hall in sterilized glass bottles and the contents (usually with a half-inch of rich cream floating at the top) were sealed and protected by a waxed paper stopper. Anna Irvin dining hall earned a much deserved reputation for the delicious ice cream they made every day. President Thomas Waverly Palmer was particularly passionate about the dairy herd, and there are records in the archives showing trades and purchases of cows and bulls with other colleges in the southeastern United States.



This photo from 1915 shows the dairy herd grazing at mid-day on the "quad" in front of the old president's home. By 1928, a full-fledged 200 acre dairy farm had been established on college property on the west side of Davis Creek in the area where the golf course pro-shop is today.



A House for All Seasons:

The Storrs House



According to an article in the December 2018 issue of "Chamber Chatter", written by

MHS director Marty Everse, John Storrs was a Vermont native, lawyer, and budding industrialist. He was a slave-holding resident of Montevallo prior to the Civil War who operated a tan yard on the banks of Shoal Creek.

In the Winter 2019 issue of *Montevallo Historical Times*, a story featured a 1904 photograph of Dr. Francis Peterson and his family, seemingly made on his daughter's wedding day in front of the old president's home on the Alabama Girls' Industrial School campus. The house seen in the background appears to be John Storrs' old house when it was still located on the future site of Palmer Hall.

In the early days of the school, according to historian Lucille Griffith, the Storrs house was used successively as a teachers' residence and then a temporary dormitory for students. To make way for the construction of Palmer in 1929, the house was moved one block east on Oak Street and **situated** on the corner across from the high school (Carmichael Library parking lot today). For a number of years it was used for the high school Home Economics Department until, due to a lack of maintenance, it was declared unsafe and torn down. In 1951-1952, employees of the college carpentry shop dismantled the house and re-used the lumber to construct a faculty club house overlooking the brand new 28 acre college lake located not far from the college dairy.

According to the student newspaper, *The Alabamian*, from November of 1950, the faculty house was to have a large 20 by 40 foot gathering room with screened and glassed-in porches on three sides and a kitchen. It was sited on a picturesque bluff that offered wonderful western views of the lake and the setting sun.



Photo courtesy of Marty Everse.

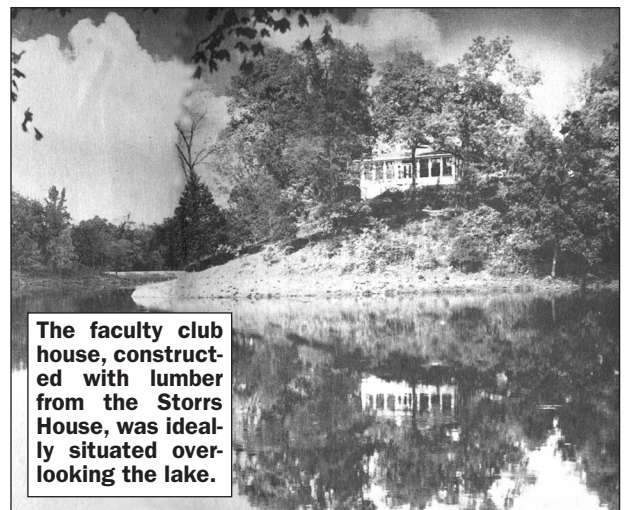
The Storrs House after it was moved from its original location on the site of the future Palmer Hall to a vacant lot at the corner of Oak and Bloch streets. After becoming unsafe, it was torn down and the lumber used to construct the new faculty club house at the college lake.



New faculty club house opens – Official opening of the new faculty club house overlooking the campus lake at Alabama College, Montevallo, was held Wednesday. Shown, left to right are: Dr. Willena Peck, college physician; Mrs. Clayton Nordan; Ralph Sears; Mrs. James Wyatt; Mrs. Minnie Lou Warnke, and Dr. Walter H. Trumbauer. From the Birmingham News, 1951.



The faculty club house served its purpose for about 50 years. At the end of its life, it was essentially unused and in need of expensive renovations. This 2016 photo shows where it once stood.



The faculty club house, constructed with lumber from the Storrs House, was ideally situated overlooking the lake.

Alabama Highway 119 runs through downtown Montevallo with its southern-most point ending south of town at it's intersection with Alabama Highway 25. Over the years, 119 has been known locally as Main Street, Ashville Road, and the Siluria Road. Heading north out of town, 119 makes its way 38 miles to Leeds by way of Alabaster, where it intersects with U.S. Highway 31 and continues in tandem with 31 to the Indian Springs area. Here it veers right and completes the journey to downtown Leeds. It's northern-most point ends here as it converges with U.S. 78. U.S. 411 picks up east of the 119/78 crossing and makes a path all the way to Ashville (1822) one of the two county seats in St. Clair County. This route from Montevallo to Ashville began as an Indian trail that was widened by Andrew Jackson's troops and became the stage coach route between the two towns in the earliest days of 19th century settlement. The Leeds Historical Society has erected a number of commemorative markers in their vicinity along highways 119 and 411. The Montevallo Historical Society recently received a suggestion from Kevin Thornthwaite that similar signage



be placed along 119 in the Montevallo area. The MHS directors have endorsed this idea and invite any members who want to spearhead, or participate in the planning and completion of the project to let them hear from you.

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--- Second General Meeting of 2019 ---
Sunday, April 28, 2019 • Parnell Library 2:00 pm

Program Leader: David Morgan
University of Montevallo Emeritus Professor of History and
Author of "Alabama: Living in the Land of Paradox"
plus other works of history, religion, and fiction.

TOPIC: MONTEVALLO: A Place for Famous People and Colorful Characters

What brought George H. W. Bush, Dean Rusk, Gordon Wood, Studs Terkel, and other celebrities to Montevallo? What other city of its size can boast of colorful characters like "Doc Mahan," dentist, history buff, and musician and "Moon" Thornton, a high school teacher who did his best to know everybody in town and keep up with EVERYTHING that was happening.

Hear the behind-the-scenes story about these and others.

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

The Runway Was Just the Beginning

A Maid of Cotton remembers her journey
from the crown to the classroom.

by Valerie Fraser Luesse

Beauty pageants are indigenous to the South. We love our tiaras and ballgowns, both of which play well on the runway, so it's a natural fit.

But to the young women who have donned those ballgowns and walked those runways, pageants are more than an opportunity to smile and wave and pose for the judges. Especially for small-town girls like Tommie Mowery Harrison, 1960 Maid of Cotton for Shelby County, Alabama, pageants can open doors and provide an education, either through college scholarships or real-world experience. They help contestants build their self-esteem and confidence by schooling them in the social graces and introducing them to public speaking.

I first "met" Tommie in a photograph. The pretty ambassador for the 1960 crop was posing in a snow-white cotton field with my Great-Uncle Clyde in Harpersville, Alabama—smiling at me from an image identified only as "Clyde Wyatt and the Maid of Cotton." Years later, I shared some family farm

pictures with my friend and fellow *Southern Living* alum Clay Nordan, who recognized the 1960 Maid. Fast-forward a year or so, and Clay put the two of us together. On a Saturday morning in Alabaster, Alabama, I sat with Tommie in her home, and we talked about her pageant days.

"I don't remember all of my speech, but I remember one line from it," she says with a smile. "The last line was, 'And if cotton is king, I want to be his queen.' Is that not corny?"

Back in 1959, she was sponsored by the Harpersville One Variety Cotton Community for the Shelby County pageant, held in Columbiana, Alabama. The self-described "outdoor girl," said she practiced the required speech while she cut her parents' grass with a push mower.

Her father was a World War I veteran, and the family lived on his meager pension in rural Wilton, Alabama. Money was beyond tight. Tommie would have to enter the Maid of Cotton pageant in a borrowed evening gown, but the former Homecoming Queen of Montevallo High School had seen success in other pageants, so she made up her mind, she said, to put her best foot forward and enter the Maid of Cotton. She won the crown that night in Columbiana.

"Unfortunately, there were no scholarships tied to it," Tommie remembers. "But I received a beautiful white cotton brocade ball gown. I also got a dress, a pair of pants and a blouse, that black hat you saw me wearing in the photograph with your uncle, some shoes, and maybe a purse. But besides all the new clothes, I got some training in the social graces. And I needed it. That opened the door for future things."

A Home Demonstration Agent named Marian Cotney took Tommie under wing and taught her how to handle herself at all the speaking engagements and public appearances she would be making as Maid of Cotton. "She was single, and she was a

Cotton farmer Clyde Wyatt of Harpersville, AL shows 1959 Shelby County Maid of Cotton, Tommie Mowery how to pick cotton the old fashioned way.



This article was specially commissioned and first appeared in the "Show Book" produced for the 2018 Red Power Round Up, which is the annual national show for International Harvester Collectors, Worldwide. The theme of the show was cotton culture and cotton growing equipment. The show attracted visitors from all over the world and was held on the grounds of Garrett Coliseum in Montgomery, Alabama from June 13-16, 2018.



Looking radiant in the white cotton brocade ball gown she received as the pageant winner, Tommie strikes a formal pose for a photograph promoting the cotton industry in Central Alabama. A few years later this same gown became her wedding dress.

Cotton Exchanges of Memphis, New York, and New Orleans. Until 1986, contestants had to be born in a cotton-growing state or one of the cotton-growing counties in Illinois or Nevada.

At first, Maid of Cotton hopefuls would apply directly to the national organization to enter the pageant, but over time, a system of county and state pageants developed. The national pageant was held in Memphis until the mid-80s, when it moved to Dallas, and it annually crowned a Maid of Cotton, who traveled—all expenses paid—to major cities as an ambassador for the industry. The program ended in 1993.

For Tommie Mowery, the local Maid of Cotton crown brought lasting rewards that would influence the rest of her life. “The first benefit, I think, was just recognition, which I needed,” she remembers. “And the Maid of Cotton pageant was a stepping stone because it got me interested in public speaking. I had a loud voice, and I projected because my mother could not hear. I went on to minor in speech because I was motivated by this little

fireball,” Tommie remembers. “She started grooming me, and I know I was a rough stone. Not everybody in my family finished high school. I remember riding in her car and she would teach me, prompt me about how to act, what to say—she taught me manners and etiquette, especially table manners. She polished me. And I’m very grateful for that.”

Tommie wasn’t the first Shelby County Maid of Cotton—or the last. According to the website for the National Museum of American History, the pageant began in 1939, sponsored by the National Cotton Council, the Memphis Cotton Carnival, and the

little speech-making opportunity from the pageant. Also, it was very rewarding to meet people like your great-uncle. My family was not connected to cotton, so when I won this contest, it was an education for me because I was really interested in learning. I remember asking Mr. Wyatt lots of questions about the gin. He spent a whole day with me, educating me about the process of growing and ginning cotton—just as nice as he could be.”

Tommie never lost her desire to learn and continue broadening her horizons. After high school, when her pageant days ended, she worked a →

Maid of Cotton Tommie Mowery "up to her ankles" in recently picked cotton.



During her daylong visit to Clyde Wyatt's cotton fields in Harpersville, the Maid of Cotton also spent some time helping out at the local gin.

series of jobs to save up enough money for books and tuition and then caught rides to her classes at Alabama College, now the University of Montevallo.



One of the duties of a Maid of Cotton was to demonstrate fashionable women's clothing that could be made from cotton fabric. With a cotton bale in the background, Tommie is the center of attention in another promotional photograph.

After two years in school, she dropped out to marry her high school sweetheart, Leslie Harrison. She got married in that white brocade Maid of Cotton ball gown, adding cap sleeves to the tank-style bodice so it would be more suitable for a church wedding.

As the Harrisons followed Leslie's military assignments, they moved to Michigan, then Missouri, and later Colorado. But when their Army days were over, Leslie and Tommie returned to Alabama and agreed to take turns putting each other through school. Both of them went into education.

Tommie completed her undergraduate degree in history and speech at Montevallo in 1966. She would later earn a master's degree in history and education there, and she completed her doctorate in history and education at the University of Alabama in 1982. After teaching history at Thompson High School in Alabaster, Alabama, for 17 years, she became an assistant principal at Thompson Elementary and later principal at Creek View Elementary, also in the Alabaster area.

"I always wanted students to have fun, and I believe in experiential learning," Tommie says. "I believe children learn best when they learn by doing."



(L-R) Defford Morris, Clyde Wyatt, and Harold McCranie (on picker) all grew and picked cotton in Harpersville, Alabama until their retirement. McCranie had just taken delivery of a new IH cotton picker in 1960 when this photo was taken. At right is Shelby County Extension agent, A.A. Lauderdale.

As a high school teacher, she began arranging trips abroad—five countries in seven days—working with a tour company to accommodate as many economically challenged students as she could and helping students earn their spending money for the trip. Later, when she moved to elementary education, she started taking children to Washington, D.C.

“To this day, I’ll run into former students on the street, and they’ll say, ‘I don’t remember what you taught me, but I sure remember those trips!’” Tommie says. “Travel is a great way to learn.”

She and Leslie have done a bit of traveling themselves, and she still gets a laugh from some of their misadventures: “Years ago, we saved up to spend one night at The Cloister on Sea Island, Georgia, and something in the information we received about the resort said ‘black tie.’ So I packed a black tie for Leslie.”

The Harrisons are retired now, with two grown sons, both married, and two grandsons. Both Leslie and Tommie served as onsite coordinators for the Elderhostel at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, coordinating educational trips for seniors and their grandchildren.

Tommie has volunteered at Oak Mountain Wildlife Center, the Albert Scott Library, and Shelby Baptist Medical Center. She inspired her history stu-

dents to produce the book *Good Morning Yesterday: A Salute to the Past*, and she is the author of *Wilton: Sketches of the Past*.

Step inside her home, tucked into the woods near Alabaster, and you can see a creative mind still very much at work. One wall in the living room is covered with her paintings. The sunroom is filled with artfully arranged collections of books, birdhouses, and seashells. Her latest creative endeavor, calligraphy, covers the dining room table, where she is making cards for her Master Gardeners group. (Did we mention that she’s a Master Gardener?)

Tommie continues to volunteer. She keeps up with her former students on Facebook. And she has never stopped exploring. Not long after our visit, which was more of a bonding experience than an interview, I received an email from her: “Can you recommend any books that might help me with my writing?”

Who could’ve known, when she was crowned back in 1959, that this Maid of Cotton was just getting started.

Valerie Fraser Luesse is an award-winning writer and a senior travel editor for *Southern Living* magazine. Her first novel, *Missing Isaac*, was published in 2018. She lives near Birmingham, Alabama.

Jade Higgins Is Named Maid of Cotton

A pretty 20-year old Alabama College senior, Jade Elizabeth Higgins, Montevallo, was named Shelby County Maid of Cotton at the contest held in the Shelby County High School auditorium last Thursday evening.

Carol Bray, Helena, an 18 year old University of Alabama Junior was named alternate maid.

Jade is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James B. Higgins of Montevallo. She is majoring in retail economics at Alabama College. She was sponsored in the contest by the Montevallo Chamber of Commerce.

Other contestants were Jerry Boockholdt, Norma Lee Nabors, and Shirley Faye Sims, Columbiana; and Amelia Frost, Calera.

The 1958 Shelby County Maid was crowned



MISS JADE HIGGINS

Shirley Stewart, Birmingham.

Each of the cotton maid candidates were required to make a brief talk on why they would like to represent the county as Maid of Cotton.

In her talk, Jade told the audience that she was interested in the cotton industry and in what it means to the county and state. She said her grandfather owned one of the first cotton gins in central Alabama.

Following the contest she said. "I'm thrilled with the honor. I want to be the best Maid of Cotton the county has ever had. I'd like to thank everyone who has been so nice to me in this contest."

*From the Shelby County Times-Herald
September 4, 1958*



News photo—Luther McGiboney

ANOTHER CROWN FOR TOMMIE MOWERY
... 1959 maid, Elnora Lester, crowns new queen

She's Tommie Mowery—

Wilton honey-blond Shelby Cotton Maid

BY LUTHER MCGIBONEY
News Correspondent

COLUMBIANA, Ala. Aug. 26—Tommie Mowery, 19-year-old honey-blond from Wilton, was named Shelby County Maid of Cotton here last night.

Linda Ellis of Columbiana was named alternate.

The new maid was selected from a field of eight contestants who were sponsored by various clubs over the county.

The new Shelby County maid is a graduate of Montevallo High School and Nancy Taylor Modeling School. She is now a sophomore at Alabama College.

Miss Mowery was homecoming queen at Montevallo in 1959. She was a member of the National Honor Society, and a former band member and majorette in high school.

SHE WAS selected Miss FHA and Miss Holiday, and two years was a representative to Girls' State. She also attended Girls' Nation one year in Washington.

In 1959 she finished in the top 10 in Alabama's Miss Universe Contest. She represented the Montevallo Chamber of Commerce in the Queen Bess Contest two years.

The new maid is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Paul R. Mowery of Wilton and was sponsored by the Harpersville One Variety Cotton Community organization.

Miss Ellis is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ellis of Columbiana and is a sophomore at Auburn University. She was sponsored by the Columbiana Culture Club.

Elnora Lester of Columbiana, last year's Maid of Cotton, crowned Miss Mowery.



Photo from "No Hill Too High for a Stepper". Courtesy of Marty Everse.

Another beauty from Montevallo, Joanna Sharp, was crowned Alabama's Maid of Cotton for 1956. In this photo she waves to spectators who line a parade route along Main Street in downtown Dothan, Alabama.



Alabama College Maid of Cotton June McQueen

Lovely June McQueen should captivate judges with her engaging smile and beauty in the Alabama Maid of Cotton contest. October 1-2, as Alabama College's representative.

Judges in Birmingham will first see Alabama College's Maid of Cotton at a buffet luncheon for all contestants Wednesday at 12:30 p.m. in the Tutwiler Hotel. That afternoon, in the Peacock Ballroom, June will ap-

pear before the judges in the bathing suit review.

This campus beauty will make her second appearance before the judges in the Peacock Ballroom Thursday morning. For this occasion June has chosen a brown velvet suit, with rhinestone-sprinkled lace insertion, and stand-up collar. Brown velvet accessories will complete her outfit.

June's choice for evening gown competition Thursday afternoon in the Peacock Ballroom is a white cotton, strapless ballerina dress with accordian pleats. Decision of the judges will be made that night at the Alabama State Fair.

June was selected from four finalists to represent the College in the state contest. Other contestants were: Julia Bruce, Carolyn Frizzle, Ethel Rattray, and Chita Hodges.

From the Alabama College "Alabamian", 1952.

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