

# Montevallo *Historical* Times

Vol. 5 No. 2

Newsletter of the Montevallo Historical Society

Late Summer 2021

## New Stadium Sign All Set for 2021 Season

As the result of a strong commitment and determined effort by a loosely organized group of Montevallo High School alumni, Montevallo's football stadium now sports a first-class sign that can be seen clearly by anyone approaching from either direction on Island Street.

And the sign leaves no doubt that the stadium was named in 1977 to honor the career and memory of long-time MHS coach and teacher, Theron Fisher.

The stadium had been without any kind of identifying signage since before a renovation project that was completed some years back.

Working closely with current MHS football coach, Blake Boren,

the committee enlisted the talents and expertise of Amber Cicero and her team from Knight Sign Industries of Tuscaloosa to develop a design that is not only highly functional but a strong expression of school spirit and community pride.

The idea sort of came out of nowhere in the summer of 2020 and the committee quickly formed around a strong motivation to make something happen as soon as possible. Fundraising became "Job-1".

Thanks to the Montevallo Historical Society's generous loan of its member mailing list to jump start the effort, the committee was able to quickly put together an effective fund raising mailer that resulted in

impressive donations from nearly 75 different sources.

While getting off to a great start, little did they know that all sorts of clearances, permissions, and production and installation details would lead to the proverbial "hurry-up-and-wait" situation that often bedevils any modern-day construction project.

But here we are a year later with a shiny new sign in the ground and only a little landscape work remaining as a finishing touch. And what a fitting tribute it is to a man who was such a strong influence on so many.

TURN TO PAGE 4 TO SEE THE MHS SPOTLIGHT COVERAGE OF THE STADIUM DEDICATION BACK IN SEPTEMBER OF 1977.



The new sign for Theron Fisher Stadium, home of the Montevallo High School Bulldogs, was installed on July 23, 2021 after the alumni committee pictured above collaborated for nearly a year to bring this striking visual marker to the stadium entrance. (Left to right) Clay Nordan, Bill Nathews, Patricia Wyatt Honeycutt, Judy Santa Cruz Duda, Kirk Lightfoot.

Quarterly MHS Meetings & Programs Remain Suspended Due to the Pandemic

# President's Letter

Dear Friends,

As I'm sure you know so well, the strange and unconventional era of Covid-19 and its new variants that we have endured for more than a year continues unabated and apparently is getting worse.

We can at least rejoice in the fact that we now have effective vaccines as well as treatments for those testing positive that offer protection for our fellow Alabamians who take advantage of them.

Consequently, it goes without saying that the activities and programs of the Montevallo Historical Society that we were so recently accustomed to remain curtailed. The last thing we want to do is give the Delta variant a fresh opportunity to infect an assembly of our loyal and highly valued members.

In spite of this sense of caution, ten out of the eleven currently serving MHS directors managed to get together for only our first meeting of 2021 on July 25.

The meeting took place at the end of a summer lull when virus infections were finally at a lower ebb. But even so, mask wearing was the order of the day and we confined the meeting to a single hour.

It was certainly good to see everyone again in person and I'm happy to report that we had a productive meeting and caught everyone up on a number of topics and projects that have been in the works for a while or are in line for take-off just as soon as a semblance of normalcy returns to our lives.

During the meeting, vice-president Clay Nordan (who last year took over the management of our membership roster and dues collection) reported that he made the decision back in May to delay our usual dues collection effort due to the curtailed level of activity of the society resulting from the continuing pandemic.

As things have evolved since the formation of the

Montevallo Historical Society in 2017, we established our annual dues collection time-frame as the two months of May and June. Dues paid during the collection period insured "active" status for the current year as well as the following year and until the start of the next annual collection period (i.e. 2020-2021).

What Clay proposed at our meeting in July was a permanent change from May/June to a November/December collection time-frame. Making this change at the end of this year would not only give all currently active members a few more months in "good standing" in 2021, but also compensate for our inability to deliver everything this year that is normally expected from membership in the Montevallo Historical Society.

He also pointed out two additional benefits that will accrue from this adjusted collection period. First, it will streamline our accounting and tax prep by coordinating dues collection with the end of our fiscal year. And second, by asking members to pay their dues, which are tax deductible, at the end of the year we can more efficiently provide receipts for them to use as documentation.

Dues paid by our members represents the primary source of income for MHS, and we greatly appreciate every member who renews. You will receive a notice by U.S. Mail in late October that includes a convenient pre-addressed envelope to use for mailing your check.

If you would like to go ahead and make your payment sooner, the membership renewal form is easy to find on our website home page at [www.historicmontevallo.org](http://www.historicmontevallo.org). Just fill it out and send to the address on the form along with your check.

Here's hoping for better days ahead and a more normal 2022 for us all.

*Susan*

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Susan Godwin  
*President*

Clay Nordan  
*Vice-President*

Bill Glosson  
*Secretary*

Janice F. Seaman  
*Treasurer*

**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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Mae Glosson

John E. McCulley

Melinda Nix

Debbie Pendleton

Anne Thomas

Sherry L. Vallides

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DISTINGUISHED FOUNDING DIRECTORS  
Dr. S.M. Mahan, Jr. (1934 – 2018)  
Dr. James S. Day

# Montevallo Historical Society

## Roster of Active Members – 2021

### KROELL BUSINESS MEMBERSHIPS

C&V Painting, Inc.  
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Fox & Pheasant B&B Inn  
Shoal Creek Realty  
J & P Building Co.  
Smitherman's Pharmacy  
Wayne Davis Construction

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Ellen Andrews  
Mary Arledge  
Steve Arledge  
Phyllis Bailey  
Veronica Bailey  
Brenda Bates  
Rebecca Beaty  
Wayne Beaty

### Barbara Belisle

Gary Bell  
David Bennett  
Patricia Bennett  
Charlie Binion  
Laurie Binion  
Lee Binion  
Beth Jeter Bishop  
Cheryl McClure Blackmon  
Becky Holcombe Bolton

### Jim Brown

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Janet Rotenberry Burnett  
Tad Cairns  
Glenda Terrell-Cairns  
Pam Campbell  
Linda Cicero  
John Cox  
Marshel Roy Cunningham  
Ed Czeskleba  
Karen Czeskleba  
Phyllis Davis  
James Day

Rene Day  
Marilynn Donoho  
Paul Doran  
Sara Lacey Erwin  
Helon Everse  
Marty Everse  
Judy Robinson Feagin  
Bryan Fowler  
Nancy Fowler  
Bruce Fraser  
John Galloway

Mike Galloway  
Sarah Galloway  
Danny Gamble  
Mae Glosson  
William Glosson  
Susan Godwin  
Ann Nathews Griffin  
Catherine Griffin  
Hershel Hale

### Anne Caley Hamilton

Margie Hardin  
**Miki Mahan Heaton**  
**Hud Heaton**

Jim Hermecz  
Barry Hocutt  
Cecily Orr Hullett  
Debbie Ingram  
Ben Ingram  
Margie Scott Jones  
Kitty Keener  
Bill Keller  
Jeanetta Keller  
Karen Kelly  
Billie Lacey  
Stanley Lacey  
Jimmy Lawley  
Linda Lawley  
Eddy Lawley  
Bill Lawson  
Mary Lawson  
Susan Ledbetter  
Brenda Lewis

Carol Lightfoot  
Kirk Lightfoot  
Frank Lightfoot  
Bob Lightfoot  
Gene Lightfoot  
Luci Lovelady  
Elizabeth Chism Ludwig  
Michael E. Malone  
Peggy Whaley Marshall  
Scott Martin

Bruce McClanahan  
Jane McClanahan  
John McCulley  
James McDonald  
Jerry McGaughy  
Susie McGaughy  
Jan McKinnon  
John McKinnon  
Joan McMillan  
Norman McMillan  
Laurie Middaugh  
Guy Milford  
Barb Milstead  
Herb Milstead  
Jack Moran  
Lynn Rotenberry Moran  
David T. Morgan  
Courtney Parker Murphy  
Barbara Morris Nabors  
Bill Nathews  
Clay Nordan  
Melinda Nix  
Rusty Nix  
Mildred Bolton Orr  
Laurie Jean Orr  
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Emily Pendleton  
Debbie Pendleton  
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Mike Pickett  
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Richard Robinson  
Sandy Robinson  
Douglas Rodgers  
Libby Rodgers  
Randie Sears Rosenberg  
Molly Sears Rosenberg  
Andrew J. Rosenberg  
Sally Sears  
Steve Sears  
Alma Sears  
Spenser Sears  
Don Simmer  
John Simmer  
Nancy Simmer  
Adelle Simpson  
Jeanne Sledge  
Luke Smith  
Eddie Spears  
Maureen Spears  
Plesia Spears  
Carolyn Frost Turnbull  
Marilee Turnbull  
Katherine S. Turner  
Anne Thomas  
David Thomas  
Jonne C. Thornton  
Becky B. Thornton  
Hubert Van Tuyll  
Aimee T. Vance  
Sid Vance  
Barbara Vance  
Susan Wilder-White  
Bill White  
Nancy Wilstach  
Dee Woodham  
Barry Woodham  
Bobby Wyatt  
Jan Wyatt  
Julia Youngblood  
Gary Youngblood



Friday, September 9, 1977

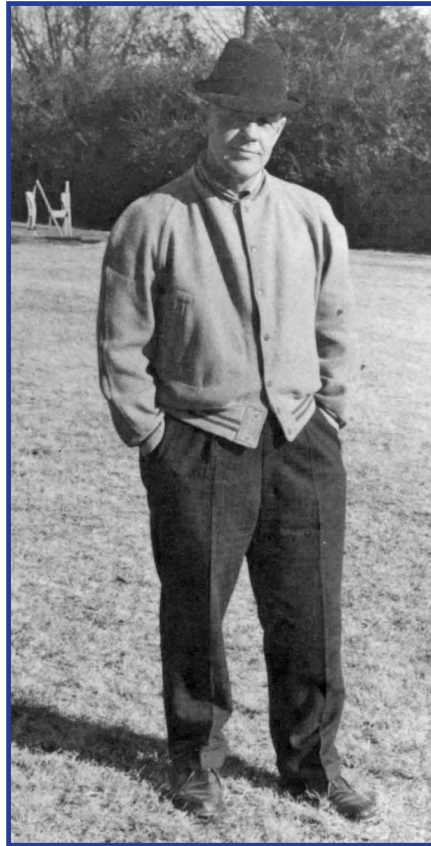
# Football field will be dedicated

IN HONOR OF FORMER COACH THERON FISHER

MHS's football stadium will have an official title in two weeks. It will be named Fisher Stadium in honor of the late Mr. Theron Fisher who served as coach at MHS for almost twenty-two years. The dedication ceremony is set for Friday night, Sept. 30, at 7:15 before the Montevallo-Jemison football game.

Mr. Cliff Harper, associate commissioner of the Southeastern Conference in Birmingham will be guest speaker. Mr. Fisher and Mr. Harper were classmates and football teammates at Birmingham Southern College.

Mr. Fisher began work at MHS in 1947 as a coach. He was later appointed head coach and then athletic director, the capacity in which he served until his



death in February 1968.

While at MHS he also taught civics and Alabama history and worked with the town's summer recreation program.

His widow, Mrs. Bonnie Fisher, resides in Montevallo and works at the University of Montevallo. She will unveil the sign bearing Mr. Fisher's name during the ceremonies.

Coach Fisher's son Barclay ('59) and daughter Elaine ('61) are MHS graduates. Barclay lives in Georgia and Elaine in North Carolina.

Members of the dedication committee who are planning the event, sponsored by Bulldog Boosters, are Principal W. C. Corbett and teachers Frances Anthony, Don Benton, and Susie DeMent.

Friday, September 23, 1977

## Field will be Fisher Stadium

DEDICATION NEXT FRIDAY

In a special pre-game ceremony next Friday, MHS's football field will be dedicated to a former coach, Theron Fisher. The stadium will officially become Fisher Stadium as Dr. Bill Fancher, chairman of the school's trustees, announces the name and Mrs. Bonnie Fisher, widow of the late coach, unveils the sign atop the scoreboard.

SEC associate commissioner Cliff Harper will give the dedication speech. Others included in the ceremonies are Coach Fisher's sisters Mrs. Mildred Pinion and Mrs. Belle Bowers; and his children, Elaine and Barclay.

### Platform Guests

Among invited platform guests are Dr. Charles Gormley, school director when Mr. Fisher was coach; Mrs. Elaine Hughes of the Board of Education, Superintendent of Shelby County Schools Elvin Hill, University of Montevallo President Dr. James Vickery; and Dr. Joe Brindley, executive assistant to the UM president.

MHS Principal W.C. Corbett, who coached with Mr. Fisher at MHS, will coordinate the ceremonies. School trustee Grady Parker will give the invocation.

Special guests

On hand also as special



guests will be Coach Fred Cameron, the only coach remaining in the county whose teams played against Coach Fisher's; Athletic Booster President Mary Ross; Montevallo Mayor Ralph Sears, State Representative Curtis Smith, Senator Lister Hill Proctor; and Shelby County Probate Judge Tommy Snowden.

Friday, October 7, 1977

# MHS Stadium gets a name

OFFICIALLY IT'S FISHER STADIUM

Numerous dignitaries, former MHS athletes, and Bulldog fans witnessed the dedication of the football field to the late Coach Theron Fisher last Friday night.

The program took place in a special pregame ceremony with Mr. Cliff Harper, SEC associate commissioner, as guest speaker. Mrs. Bonnie Fisher, Mr. Fisher's widow, unveiled the sign which proclaimed the field to be

Fisher Stadium; and his son Barclay gave a brief speech of appreciation.

The MHS Marching Troubadours opened the program with the National Anthem and closed it with the Alma Mater.

The new signs are located on top of the scoreboard and on the back of the press box so passersby can see them from the street.

Mr. Bobby Hughes a mem-

ber of the Athletics Booster Club arranged for the construction and mounting of the signs.

"It was very fitting to name the stadium for Coach Fisher for he gave so much dedicated service to the school and had such a favorable influence on the lives of so many young men," comments teacher Susie DeMent, who worked closely with Mr. Fisher for 21 years.

## Records tell story

by Jeff Lucas

After dedication ceremonies next Friday night, MHS's football stadium will bear the name of one of the school's most outstanding coaches - Mr. Theron Fisher.

Coach Fisher is well remembered at MHS for fine records in all three major sports. Of special note are:

### Football

Shelby County title, 1957 to 1959

Mid-State Conference title, 1959

3A State title, 1959

2A State title, 1960

Mid-State Conference title, 1961

Coach Fisher was very dedicated to coaching baseball and was highly respected state-wide for his know-how in this field. Besides coaching a Shelby County championship team the majority of his years, almost every season one member from his team was an area representative to the East-West All-Star game in Birmingham. In 1950 his Bulldogs won second place in the state in baseball.

In 1956 his MHSers claimed the North Alabama title and in 1959, the Mid-State Conference.

### Outstanding Person

"It was a real privilege to have worked with Coach Fisher for 13 years. He was a coach, teacher, and an outstanding person who influenced the lives of many."

"Besides time, energy, and knowledge, he actually gave himself to the youth of this community for over twenty years," says Principal W.C. Corbett.

### Disciplinarian

Mr. Charles Martin, drivers-ed teacher and former MHS head football coach adds, "He was a fine coach and a stern disciplinarian. He had the highest of moral values."

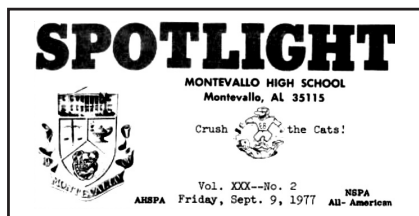
"He could beat you in an honest way. I am proud the stadium is being named for him."

Born in Sparta, Tenn., Mr. Fisher moved to North Alabama at an early age.

After finishing Rison High School in Huntsville, he attended and was graduated from Birmingham Southern College. There he played first base on the baseball team and tackle in football.

He began his coaching career in Frisco City, where he coached his first state high school championship football team in 1935.

Other places he coached before he came to Montevallo are Flomaton, LaFayette, Dadeville, Ensley, and Greenville.



Montevallo High School's award-winning student newspaper, the **SPOTLIGHT**, anticipated the dedication of the school's football stadium with extensive coverage in the weeks prior to and the week after the ceremony on September 30, 1977. The articles about the dedication and coach Theron Fisher's influence during his years of service to the school are reprinted here.





**When the Darling Family rolled into Mayberry from the nearby hills, everyone welcomed them for their toe-tapping music but not the inevitable headaches they caused Sheriff Taylor.**

## Typesetting Tunes

by Terry Barr

The machine engulfed Travis, but he didn't seem to mind. Travis chainsmoked unfiltered Camels, and one was always burning at his side as he pressed the buttoned keys for all the letters to appear, just as I had originally typed them. Sometimes, yes, he made mistakes but not often. And anyway, when the words appeared in print, I was the editor; I was the responsible party.

And so I never mentioned Travis or his work to anyone.

He was frail and hunch-backed. Stooped just in the form you'd expect from one who spent eight, maybe ten hours each day typesetting others' words, making sure others' ideas or suggested messages came out cleanly, appropriately, and of course, without error.

So Travis, naturally, knew all the secrets, the stories.

Yet I never wondered what he thought about the simple panty raids, the SGA proclamations striking down women's curfew, or the "startling exposes" that exposed administrative corruption and the juggling of academic data to pacify and satisfy accrediting agencies and the U.S. News and World Report. I wondered if Travis read what he typed at all, or did he simply concentrate on those little keys, putting each in its appointed place?

I visited Times Printing only on those occasions when I dropped off the copy and then, once Travis was

**Editor's Note:** Terry Barr was the editor of the University of Montevallo campus newspaper, *The Alabamian*, in 1976. He is a professor of English at Presbyterian College in South Carolina and contributed the feature on Harvey Lee Riffe to the Spring 2021 issue of the *Montevallo Historical Times*.

finished, picked up the mock-ups. I was nineteen and didn't much know how to make small talk with a man in his 70's, a man who did not have the privilege or benefit of attending university. Still, I'd try sometimes:

"Hi, Travis. How does it look today?"

Most often he wouldn't look up, and only rarely did he pause at all. But when he would, I think it was more due to his need to inhale the Camel again than to respond to me. So at best, I'd get "Good. She's good,"

And then back to his work.

I knew back then that men of his age took work seriously; they didn't live for their breaks and try to stretch fifteen minutes into thirty, as I did in my summer job. But one day, when I came to pick up my copy, Travis stopped his work. He rose up from the cramped space and looked directly to me:

"That band you wrote about that's coming next Friday. It says they play bluegrass. Is that real bluegrass or just what they think is bluegrass?"

More words in one smoky breath than he had uttered in two years.

"It's real bluegrass, Travis. It's The Dillards, you know the band that's 'The Darlin' Family' on Andy Griffith?"

"You say it's real? Maybe I'll go."

"I'll get you tickets, Travis."

I dropped the tickets off the next day, though he was at lunch, and so I left them with his boss, Pat Wyatt.

"Travis asked for these?" he said.

"Sort of," I said. "Anyway, he wants to go."

"Hhmm."

When I got to the auditorium that Friday night, not only was Travis there, he was on the third row aisle seat, all alone.

"Hey, Travis! Can I sit next to you?"

"That's all right," he said.

The Dillards put on a lively show for the crowd of 500 students and one old man. It took about two songs before Travis was dancing in his place, clapping his hands in the air, and singing along to "Rocky Top" and "Dooley." After the fourth song, he smiled at me:

"They're all right!"

I remember so little about that night really, at least what was happening on stage. But what I do remember, and what I can still see so clearly now, forty years later, as I set my own type, is Travis, with his old-timey horned-rimmed glasses, his stooped shoulders, and still in his uniform. And especially his fingers, the ones that were his trade, the ones stamped equally with black ink and yellow cigarette burns.

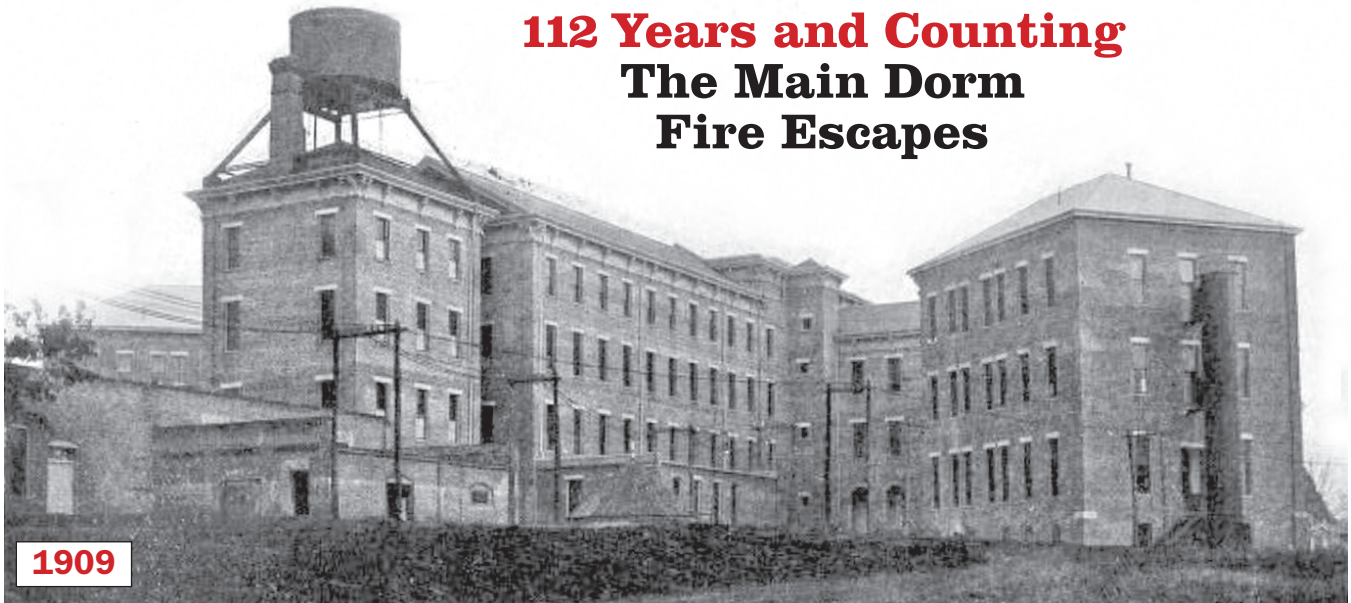
The ones he held so high as he clapped his way into my life.



**Travis Killingsworth setting type on a Linotype machine in the 1960's at Times Printing Co. in Montevallo. To learn more about the Linotype, go to [www.montevallohistorictimes.com](http://www.montevallohistorictimes.com) and click on the "Times Printing" tab.**



# 112 Years and Counting The Main Dorm Fire Escapes



1909

Construction on the West Wing of Main Dorm began in 1897 and the East Wing was available for the fall session of 1907. The Kirker-Bender sliding fire escapes serving both wings, although never used in an emergency, have remained on duty ever since.

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Following the completion of Main Dormitory a recurring entry in the Alabama Girls Industrial School annual catalog after 1909 justifiably boasted about the large brick building consisting of three wings connected by cross halls. It proudly hailed the building's two-hundred and twenty-five double bedrooms – all lighted by electricity and heated by steam.

The administration went out of its way to reassure parents of potential students that, in the event of a fire “there are fourteen exits” and a modern cylindrical “Kirker-Bender” fire escape is placed at the end of both residence wings.

They concluded with these reassuring words: “the danger from fire is reduced to a minimum, but in case a fire should occur, the ways of egress are so numerous that there would be no trouble about making an escape.”



1909

While always ready for fire drills and to evacuate student residents if needed, the slides of the Main Dorm spiral fire escapes became a great source of entertainment and fun for generations of college students and local children alike.



1955



2021



1943





## A Rocky Relic on Shelby Street

One of the more intriguing memories from Dr. Mike Mahan's book, *No Hill Too High for a Stepper*, is his account of a visit to the old house on Shelby Street from which Charles T. Acker, M.D. saw and treated patients in need of medical care.

Following Dr. Acker's death in 1956 at age 78, the house was torn down shortly thereafter, but the substantial rock wall that defined and protected the perimeter of the lot was left intact.

At some point, Dr. Acker's lot at the corner of Shelby and Island Streets merged with the old Reid

property on its east side to take on its current function as a parking lot for Montevallo First Baptist Church.

But the old rock wall remains.

While most people passing by today probably never give a thought to this stony reminder of an earlier time, anyone taking a moment to notice it will also immediately appreciate the break in the wall for steps that once led to the doctor's clinic within.

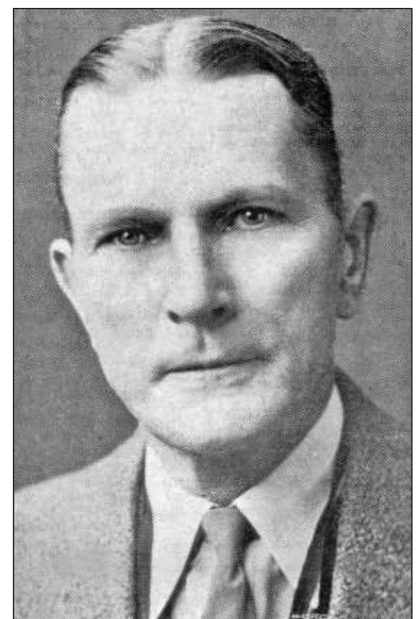
Nearby, a massive southern magnolia adds to the mystique of a place that seems to have not changed at all since the heyday of Dr. Acker and those who sought his assistance.



(Above) The old house where Dr. Acker practiced medicine is in the background of this photo from the 1950's.



(Above) The stone steps that led to the doctors' office entrance. (Right) Dr. Charles T. Acker was described in a 1946 newspaper article as "the most brilliant man and one of Montevallo's most charming personalities". He served a single term as mayor of Montevallo from 1936 to 1940. Before him, his father, J.W. Acker, a former surgeon in the Confederate Army, had also been a much loved Montevallo physician. Charles never married and continued to live until his death in his father's old house just across the Shoal Creek bridge on the right below city hall. Both father and son are buried in Montevallo Cemetery.



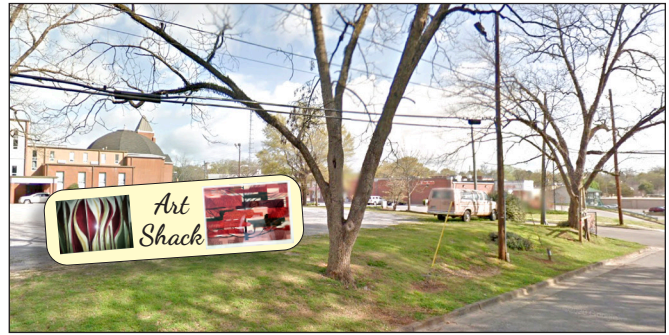


## Chicken House Becomes Art Gallery

From chicken coop to art gallery – that's the story of the Art Shack. The shack, the result of the ingenuity of John Self, is located on Island Street in Montevallo. John, a senior at Alabama College, rented a chicken house this summer and redecorated it into a place which would make any "Chick" flip.

No one would ever take this miniature palace for a hen refuge now, at least not on the inside. Some of its luxury items include: wall-to-wall carpeting, modern furniture, stereo, television, and last but not least, an exposed beam ceiling.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The story you see here is reprinted from the October 29, 1960 edition of the AC student newspaper, the *Alabamian*. The chicken coop in the story was on the lot next to Dr. Acker's office and faced Island Street. It had been used by the Reid family to house their laying hens. The Art Shack became known around town as a beatnik "hipster-pad", and if the window shutters were down, an off-beat atmosphere inside, made by various colored lights, could be seen from the street at night. One of the former students who made and displayed art at the Art Shack has recently confirmed to us that AC coeds were often entertained there but had to be back to their dorms by curfew.



Although these items are nice, the main attraction is, of course, the paintings. They are the work of John and other Alabama artists.

John, an excellent painter has exhibited often in Birmingham. These paintings are abstract expressionism, but many pictures done in the traditional style are on display also.

So, if you're in the market for a good painting, come to the Art Shack. Or, if you just want to look or you're out of places to take your date, or if you want to see something different, come to the Art Shack. In case you don't know where it is, it's one block back of the Baptist Church to the right.

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This ad was recreated from the original that ran in the Sept. 26, 1946 edition of the *Montevallo Times*.

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## Barbara Mayweather Belisle 1936 – 2021

Former Montevallo teacher and Montevallo Historical Society member #90, Barbara Belisle, is remembered as a well-respected educator, compassionate mentor, and loving mother.

By Emily Sparacino

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If a building can bear witness to the immeasurable difference a person makes in others' lives, then Montevallo High School was such a place for the late Barbara Belisle, a long-time educator and pillar of her community for many years. Belisle was known for her concern for students, often sitting on the front steps of MHS and talking to them about their days and sharing stories of her own.

Current MHS teacher and coach Tena Niven was among the students who flocked to those steps to listen to Belisle, even though Niven was not yet in her class when she first met her in the ninth grade. "All of the students would just gravitate toward her, and I gravitated toward her, also," Niven said, noting Belisle's trademark smile. "She seemed genuinely concerned and welcomed me right into her little group in the afternoons. She made everything personable. She wanted to get to know you, but wanted you to get to know her as well."

Mike Jones also felt the depth of concern she had for her students. Jones credits Belisle with helping him overcome his shyness and learn how to speak to people with confidence, a skill that has allowed him to thrive as a minister and educational leader. "I had the privilege of telling her years ago I would not be in education myself without having her mentoring and guidance," Jones said. "She helped me find my voice, just like she helped other people find their voice. She saw the best in everyone."

Leading the way Jones and his wife, Joyce Jones, also emphasized Belisle's courage in becoming the first Black teacher in an all-white school in Shelby County during integration in the late 1960s. Belisle's memory of walking past angry people outside of the school on her first day there was something she openly shared with her students, an experience with great significance locally in the course of the civil rights movement. "Not

many people could have done what she did when she did it," Joyce said, adding Belisle's poise and grace under such pressure were inspiring to her as a young Black girl. "It was always her challenge for us, for me, to rise. To not feel like you

were inferior. She always told me, 'You can do better.'" Similar to her husband, Joyce said Belisle helped her learn how to speak in public, urging her to recite poems and perform other speaking exercises on stage, as well as run for Student Council offices in high school.

"Her love for children and people in general was the overwhelming characteristic of her life," Joyce said. "I just don't think there are enough good things you can say about her."

Former student Ahrian Dudley described Belisle as a motherly figure in her life who showed her and others how valuable they were as individuals. "For someone who wouldn't have a lot of self-confidence, she would teach them to value themselves," Dudley said. "She wouldn't let you slip through the cracks." But Dudley said Belisle's care came with a measure of accountability. "It was a loving hand, but it was a firm hand," she said. "You did not go to her class unprepared. You did not act up." Like Niven, Dudley recalls the meaningful conversations Belisle had with her students. "She would sit down and address issues head-on," Dudley said. "She would treat us like we were adults."

Belisle was the longest-serving original member of the board of trustees for the Smith Scholarship Foundation, for which Dudley serves on the board of directors. Describing her as sophisticated yet down-to-earth, Dudley remembers Belisle wearing silk shirts with blue jeans and drinking milk out of a wine glass with dinner because, as she would say, "Why not?" "I've always said she was the most beautiful person I've ever known," Dudley said. "I don't know what I would have done or where I would be without her. She was definitely a well-loved woman."

An excellent role model, Belisle's former colleagues shared equally complimentary remarks about her, using words like "phenomenal" and "outstanding" to describe a woman who commanded respect without needing to ask for it. "She was the ultimate professional," said former teacher and coach Bobby Piereson, who got to know Belisle when he started working at MHS in 1982. "She was a very mild-mannered person. I can't ever remember being in her presence and she raised her voice. The kids loved her. She is one of those jewels that MHS has had the luxury of



1979



1966



having. I call her the queen.”

Johnny McClain, a former coworker and long-time friend of Belisle’s, said she had a “great relationship” with everyone – school administrators, faculty members, students, parents and many others in the community. McClain worked with Belisle at MHS from 1969 to 1985, when he became principal at Montevallo Middle School. “As a person, she was outstanding,” McClain said. “She was a beautiful, sophisticated lady and a phenomenal teacher. All of the students loved her. You had respect for her for the way in which she carried herself.” McClain said although she was a private person, Belisle never hesitated to help anyone who reached out to her. “I admired her,” he said. “She was an outstanding example of an excellent teacher. She was an excellent role model for the students. She was all those things that I tried to be.”

McClain also described Belisle as “well-rounded,” a Renaissance woman of sorts because of her talents in areas outside of teaching, such as singing and writing. “We have a group in Montevallo called the Main Street Players, and she would sing for the group,” McClain said. “She said she would have liked to be a jazz singer in another life.”

Belisle authored several books, and after retiring from the Shelby County school system, she worked at

the University of Montevallo’s Carmichael Library for nearly 20 years before retiring again. Regardless of her job status, Belisle remained accessible to her former students, communicating with them regularly and offering support when needed. “She touched individuals even after they graduated from high school,” Pierson said. “She continued to mentor and talk to them.” Leaving something in people.

Perhaps no one can speak to Belisle’s impact on others in her 84 years of life more than her three children, Sonjia McCary, Dr. William Belisle, and Cathy Belisle Gaddis. “She meant the world to us,” Gaddis said. “She was everything you could ever ask for in a mother. I have nothing negative to say about her. She was very special, and we truly will miss her.”

Gaddis said the same was true of Belisle; she never spoke negatively about anyone, instead using her positivity to lift up those around her. Even in trying situations, such as the first day she walked into MHS during integration, Belisle demonstrated steadfast compassion for all. “After everything she went through, she loved every one of those students, and they all loved her,” Gaddis said, thanking those who were a part of Belisle’s life and who have shown the family support following her death. “Someone once said, ‘Legacy is not leaving something for people. It’s leaving something in people.’ That she did.”

## Obituary

Bobbie Jean Mayweather Belisle was born to the late William Mayweather and Betty Mayweather on September 21, 1936. (Later in life she changed her name to Barbara.) She accepted Christ at an early age at Ward Chapel AME Church in Montevallo where she sang in the choir and was a member of the YPD. She later became a member at a Catholic church in Birmingham, Alabama, then St. Paul Lutheran Church in Birmingham, AL. Later she moved to New Orleans, Louisiana where she attended Trinity Lutheran Church. After returning home to Montevallo, she rejoined Ward Chapel AME where she remained a faithful servant of the Lord.

Barbara graduated from Prentice High School (now Montevallo Middle School). She went on to attend Alabama A&M University, LSU-NO (now the University of New Orleans) and Miles College, where she graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in English. She went on to further her education and attended Alabama State University and the University of Montevallo, where she received her Master’s degree in English.

While living in New Orleans, she worked as a librarian for New Orleans Public Library. She later returned to Montevallo where she worked at Calera High School as a librarian.

In 1966, at the beginning of integration, she joined the faculty at Montevallo High School, bravely becoming the first Black teacher employed at an all-white Shelby County school. She taught successfully at MHS for 28 years before retiring.

She went on to work as the Night Manager of Circulation at Carmichael Library at the University of Montevallo where she retired after 20 years.

During her teaching career, she received one of Alabama’s first Golden Apple for the Teacher awards, was listed in Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers, was selected as Teacher of the Year at her school, and was presented the

Community Service Award. She also won the WENN Radio Favorite Teacher contest where students in Shelby and surrounding counties called in to the radio station and voted for their favorite teacher. She won with over 1,000 votes.

She will forever be remembered and loved by her children: Sonjia (Ronnie) McCary, William Belisle, and Cathy Belisle Gaddis. Her grandchildren: DeShawn Goode, George (Deeanna) Yelder, III, Taylor (La’Starshia) Gaddis, Rudi (Eric) Williams, Veronica McCary, Timothy Strong, and William R. Belisle. Great grandchildren: Patience, Lyrice, Noah, and Daniel Yelder; Francina, Jordan and Dylan Goode; Timothy Strong, Jr.; Jaden Whiting; and Nola Grace Gaddis. Sisters: Margaret Mayweather and Tennie Mae Mayweather, Montevallo, Alabama. Sister-in-law: Dorothy Mayweather, Stone Mountain, Georgia; Aunt: Willie Mae Cottingham, Montevallo, Alabama; Uncle: Morris (Brenda) Cottingham, Bronx, New York; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and friends. Lifelong partner of 50 years: Elbert Thomas, Birmingham, Alabama. Special friends: Emily Pendleton, Sadie Burns, Pleasia Spears, Ahrian Davis Dudley, and Ethel Mae Thompson and Gloria Beasley.

A Celebration of Life was held at 2:00 pm on Sunday, February 14, 2021 at The Good Shepherd Funeral Home followed by burial in Montevallo Cemetery.



1990

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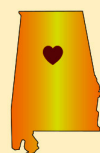
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