

Montevallo *Historical* Times

Vol. 8 No. 3

Newsletter of the Montevallo Historical Society

Summer 2024



Ralph and Marcia Sears formed quite the dynamic duo in Montevallo and Shelby County in the 1950's and 1960's. They came to town in the late 1940's when Ralph accepted a position in the Alabama College Speech Department and was soon coordinating the college's public relations efforts as well as it's news bureau.

Marcia put most of her attention into raising a young family as they put down roots a long way from their native Nebraska, but when the opportunity came along, she threw herself into the role of editor of the *Shelby County Reporter* and never looked back.

At Alabama College, Ralph established a professional quality radio station and was instrumental in engineering an impressive series of twenty-six 30-minute broad-

casts of organ music from Palmer Hall entitled *Music from Montevallo* that were heard around the world. The success of this effort soon led to his purchase, operation, and participation in daily broadcasts from Shelby County's first radio station, WBYE.

On April 28, Sally Sears presented an impressive line-up of examples of these accomplishments that the new Media Archive in their name now offers online to the general public. She regaled the assembly with sound recordings of Ralph's many broadcasts and showed photographs and mementos from the Shelby County Reporter and annual family trips from which Ralph made reports to the folks back home. You can see a video of this interesting program at www.historicmontevallo.org.

Next MHS General Membership Meeting

Sunday July 21, 2024 • Parnell Library • 2:00 pm

Co-authors and University of Montevallo professors Carey Heatherly and Clark Hultquist will introduce their recently released second book devoted to Montevallo's History. "Montevallo – Past & Present" compares vintage local photographs with contemporary images so as to demonstrate how the effects of the passage of time may or may not be apparent to an observer. Following the program, books will be available for purchase and the authors will be happy to sign them.

President's Letter

Dear Friends:

As you can see in our active member list on the next page, five new members of the Montevallo Historical Society have joined our organization since our last newsletter went out in April. I would like to offer my thanks to them all for showing their support and interest in local history and in the goals and mission of MHS.

We are particularly grateful to the new members who elected to join at the Jesse Wilson and Patron membership levels. Having money in the bank enables us to continue to put out a top-notch quarterly newsletter, bring in the best speakers and presenters for our quarterly meetings, and maintain the richly varied website that helps us keep Montevallo's history alive for visitors on a daily basis.

I would like to remind all of our active members that your dues payment each year is tax deductible, so please consider increasing your dues payment when we collect again at the end of the year so that you can benefit from a larger deduction.

We are grateful to Sally Sears and her family for the contributions they have made to establish the Ralph and Marcia Sears Media Archive as the latest substantial addition to the already extensive Anna Crawford Milner Archives and Special Collections at the University of Montevallo's Carmichael Library.

Sally partnered with our program coordinator, Clay Nordan, at our quarterly meeting this past April to introduce the new archive that honors the memory of her parents and preserves in digital formats a variety of audio, visual, and print artifacts from their careers in public relations, broadcasting, journalism, and advertising in Shelby County during their lifetimes.

I was particularly pleased that Charlotte Ford, the Director of the Carmichael Library, Carey Heatherly, assistant professor and university archivist, and members of their staff were able to be with us for Sally's presentation.

You can explore the impressive variety of material that is in the Sears Media Archive by going to www.historicmontevallo.org. Also, if you missed our April meeting, there is a link on the site to a YouTube video of Sally's program.

On December 14, 2024, through the *Wreaths Across America* program, the Montevallo Historical Society will once again sponsor the laying of wreaths on graves of veterans buried at Montevallo City Cemetery.

For the third year in a row, we are offering holiday wreaths for veterans' families and friends to purchase so as to recognize their sacrifice and record of military service to their country.

We will ensure that the more than 400 veterans buried at Montevallo are honored with a wreath, but we want to remind everyone that you can help out in this noble and patriotic effort by going to www.historicmontevallo.org to

purchase one or more wreaths for only \$17 each.

MHS volunteers will place each wreath following a brief memorial ceremony at noon on December 14 but anyone who purchases a wreath has the option when ordering online to reserve a wreath to personally place on the grave of any specific veteran.

We very much appreciate everyone who participates and comes out for this very meaningful holiday observance.



Local vets honor specific branches of the military.

Officers

John E. McCulley
President

Bill Nathews
Vice-President

Judy Duda
Secretary

Clay Nordan
Treasurer

Montevallo

Historical Society

Opening the Portals of Our Heritage

P.O. Box 411
Montevallo, AL 35115

www.historicmontevallo.org
email: montevallo1817@gmail.com

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Directors

Tara Brantley
Marilynn Donoho
Martha Eisenberg
Billy Mack Lee
Melinda Nix
Anne Thomas
Sherry L. Vallides
Anita Williams

FOUNDING DIRECTORS:

Dr. James S. Day • Kenneth Dukes • Marty Everse • Mae Glosson • William Glosson • Susan Godwin • Dr. S.M. Mahan, Jr. (1934 – 2018)
John McCulley • Norman McMillan • Melinda Nix • Clay Nordan • Debbie Pendleton • Janice Seaman • Anne Thomas • Sherry Vallides

Montevallo Historical Society

Roster of Active Members – July 2024

KROELL BUSINESS MEMBERSHIPS (\$250)

C&V Painting, Inc.
Sherry Vallides
Central State Bank
Mitt Schroeder
Smitherman's Pharmacy
Sammy Shunnarah

.....

JESSE WILSON SOCIETY (\$250)

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Karen Czeskleba
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Lois Doyle
Robert Doyle
Judy Lien Duda
Helon Everse
Marty Everse
Catherine Griffin
Clay Nordan
Sally Sears
Adelle Simpson

Danny Wyatt
Rose Mary Wyatt

.....

PATRON LEVEL (\$100)

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Sharon Anderson
David Bennett
Patricia Bennett
Charlie Binion
Laurie Binion
Beth Jeter Bishop
Randy Bodine
Linda Cicero
John Cox
James Day
Renè Day
Patty DeBardeleben
Marilynn Donoho
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Yvonne Kroell Graham
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Charles Kaiden Kroell
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Bob Lightfoot
Gene Lightfoot
Michael E. Malone
Guy Milford
Jack Moran
Lynn Rotenberry Moran
Barbara Morris Nabors
Melinda Nix
Rusty Nix
Laurie Gene Orr
Mildred Bolton Orr
Sara Pankaskie
Emily Pendleton
Debbie Pendleton
Douglas Rodgers
Libby Rodgers
Randie Sears Rosenberg
Molly Sears Rosenberg
Andrew J. Rosenberg
Sandra Scott Small
Anne Thomas
David Thomas
Daniel Thornton
Jonne C. Thornton
Becky B. Thornton
Barbara Vance
Clare Vance
Sid Vance
Barry Woodham
Dee Woodham
Peggy Davis Woods

SINGLE & FAMILY LEVEL (\$25 OR \$40)

Ron Albright
Deanna Anderson
Ellen Andrews
Mary Arledge
Steve Arledge
Phyllis Bailey
Cathy Barber
Brenda Bates
Rebecca Beaty
Gary Bell
Courtney Bennett
Lee Binion
Cheryl McClure Blackmon
Becky Holcombe Bolton
Tara Brantley
Becky Brown
Jim Brown

Jane Watson Bullock
Janet Rotenberry Burnett
Tad Cairns
Glenda Terrell-Cairns
Pam Campbell
Pat Clark
Martha Eisenberg
Judy Robinson Feagin
Barclay Fisher
Priscilla Fisher
Bryan Fowler
Nancy Fowler
Randy Fowler
Bruce Fraser
Danny Gamble
Sarah Garcia
Mae Glosson
William Glosson
Margie Hardin
Carey Heatherly
Jim Hermecz
Barry Hocutt
Clark Hultquist
Ben Ingram
Debbie Ingram
Kitty Keener
Karen Kelly
Peggy Hurt Kent
Kathy King
John Kirby
Carolyn Kirby
Jimmy Lawley
Linda Lawley
Susan Ledbetter
Billy Lee
Brenda Lewis
Carol Lightfoot
Kirk Lightfoot
Eddie Lovelady
Kathleen Lovelady
Luci Lovelady
Elizabeth Chism Ludwig
Scott Martin
Bruce McClanahan
Jane McClanahan
John McCulley
Mary McCulley
Jerry McGaughy
Larry McGaughy

Nancy McGaughy
Susie McGaughy
Jan McKinnon
John McKinnon
Joan McMillan
Norman McMillan
Laurie Middaugh
Barb Milstead
Herb Milstead
David T. Morgan
Judy Morgan
Bill Muehlbauer
Courtney Parker Murphy
Bill Nathews
Joan Pickett
Mike Pickett
Bill Plott
Atticus Plott
Sandra Albright Rogers
James A. Salter
Steve Sears
Alma Sears
Madeleine Sears
Bobby Joe Seales
Diane B. Seales
Janice Seaman
Teresa Shell
Lonnie Shell
Luke Smith
Eddie Spears
Maureen Spears
Plesia Spears
John Starks
Jackie Starks
John W. Stewart, Jr.
Kathy Stewart
Carolyn Frost Turnbull
Scott Turnbull
Marilee Turnbull
Hubert Van Tuyll
Susan Wilder-White
Bill White
Anita Williams
Bradford Williams
Andrew Wilson
Nancy Wilstach
Bobby Wyatt
Jan Wyatt
Julia Youngblood
Gary Youngblood



Helia

WAS HER NAME

by Clay Nordan

I first knew her as “Mrs. Montgomery.” That’s what everyone called her when I was a young whippersnapper hanging around my grandparents’ newspaper office and print shop in the old Masonic Building on Main Street. Mrs. Montgomery was in the shop every day and performed whatever tasks needed to be done to get printing jobs such as business cards, booklets, or blank invoices finished and out the door to customers.

I remember that her status in the shop was well es-

tablished because she was responsible for collecting and putting together all the local news that was submitted for inclusion in that week’s edition of the *Shelby County Times-Herald*. (formerly known as the *Montevallo Times*).

I also remember her as a small, wiry, chain-smoking older woman with frizzy gray hair. I helped her once as she assembled and folded the printed sheets of the newspaper and applied address labels to copies intended for mailing.

Perhaps my most indelible memory of Mrs. Montgomery was the handsome circa 1950 Pontiac she drove to work every day and parked out front. As I got older I came to realize that Mrs. Montgomery’s close friendship with my grandmother pretty much made her a part of Mack and Vedic Wyatt’s family.

Mrs. Montgomery owned a big gray two-story house on a corner of prestigious Highland Street a block from the college campus. It was set up as a duplex with a small apartment on one side that she lived in and the other side with an upstairs was large enough to accommodate an entire family. She always had renters for this space because new faculty families came to Montevallo at the beginning of every school year and needed places to live.

The house was on one of the routes I took to walk home from the nearby elementary school and I often wondered how someone like Mrs. Montgomery came to own this large and impressive house.

Until recent years, I had essentially forgotten about Mrs. Montgomery. My grandparents died in 1966 and 1971, at age 74 and 71 respectively, so I had no knowledge of whatever happened to her.

Then, when the Montevallo Historical Society began its “Wreaths Across America” program for Montevallo City Cemetery in 2022, I happened to notice during one of our many forays into the cemetery to identify graves of Montevallo veterans, two side-by-side grave markers near my grandparents’ plot.

They appeared to be a married couple named Montgomery. I wondered if one of the markers could possibly be Mrs. Montgomery, because she was the only Montgomery I had ever heard of who lived in Montevallo.

I did not recognize the name of the husband at all and it was no help that I did not know Mrs. Montgomery’s first name or whether or not she had ever been married. It did register on me that the wife’s birth/death dates (1898 - 1982) would be about right and make her 84 when she died. I decided to file away the thin information from this discovery into my memory banks for later retrieval and use.



Vedic Wyatt (left) and Mrs. Montgomery assemble booklets in the binding and finishing area of Montevallo’s Times Printing Co. sometime in the 1950’s.

Montevallo Local News

Office Phone 5101

(Mrs. W. E. Montgomery)

Res. Phone 7189

A TREASURE TROVE OF PHOTOS

Thanks to one of our MHS founding directors, Marty Everse, we amateur Montevallo historians have at our disposal two remarkable photograph albums containing nearly 400 black and white snapshots made around 1915. We know that one of the albums was put together by a Montevallo teenager, Dionetta Kroell. Dionetta was the oldest daughter of one of Montevallo's prominent merchants and entrepreneurs at the time, Pat Kroell.

The albums came into Marty's possession from Ken Penhale, a friend and dedicated local historian from Helena. Marty says that Ken came by them from a cousin who probably purchased them at a yard or estate sale. Marty immediately appreciated the importance of these photo collections and the need to protect and preserve them. Before donating the originals to the Alabama Department of Archives and History, he made high resolution digital scans of each album page and each photograph and then transferred copies of his scans to the Montevallo Historical Society for safekeeping and future use as well as to the archives at Carmichael Library at the University of Montevallo.

At the time the photographs were made, Pat Kroell and his wife, Frances, were raising eleven children in a rambling two story house on Highland Street. The house was located where Carmichael Library stands today and is remembered fondly by many local people for later becoming the first home for the college's nursery school,



The Pat Kroell house on Highland that the college later purchased for a nursery school attended by local children.

child development, and teacher training programs.

The photos had been shot outdoors using one of the Kodak "Box" roll-film cameras that were introduced and became popular around 1900. These cameras would only work well when used in daylight but were capable of taking sharp, clear photos when conditions were right and the photographer maintained a prescribed distance between the camera lens and subject.

Photo finishing services available through most drug stores and photo shops processed exposed black & white film and produced snapshots printed on glossy paper for their customers.

To make her photographs, Dionetta used her siblings and Highland Street neighborhood friends for subjects and often turned the camera over to someone else so that she could capture images of herself as well.

The pictures are what you would expect from a group of kids, mostly teenage girls. They show Dionetta with her friends and siblings aping for the camera, often in their Sunday best, sometimes in costumes, and for

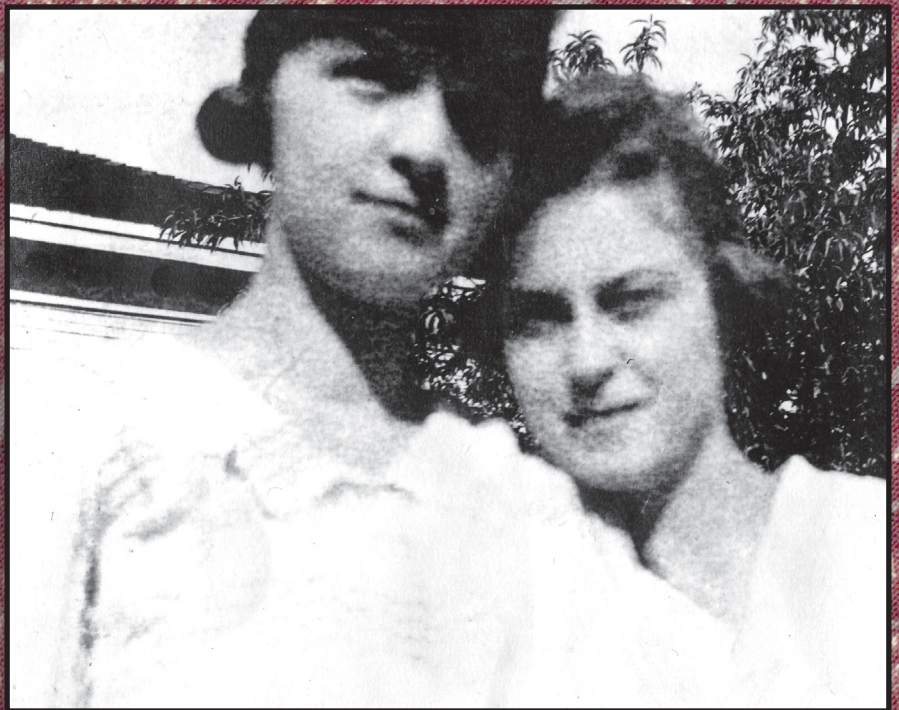
reasons known only to them, dressed in mens' suits, ties, and hats. When it snowed, they bundled up and made lasting winter-time memories in pictures.

The open area in front of the Kroell house was a prime location for this photography and they also made use of other locations in the Highland Street neighborhood. The nearby college campus and its buildings attracted these shutterbugs, as did various locations all over town, such as Shoal Creek and Big Springs.

To her credit, Dionetta had the presence of mind to organize her photos and mount them into the kind of black-paper photo albums that were in vogue at the time. As was the custom, she used white ink written with a fountain pen on the black paper to make notations of identification or for snide or humorous comments about her subjects that would be typical from any generation of adolescents.

Throughout this wealth of photographic documentation of their young lives, one uniquely beautiful teenage girl shows up now and then who often presents an air of innocence but sometimes has a look of mystery or secrecy. Without fail, Dionetta identifies this girl with a simple notation, "Helia."





Helen Kroell



A SLIDE SHOW OF MORE KROELL ALBUM PHOTOGRAPHS

HELIA COMES INTO FOCUS

Once I had gotten the digital scans of Dionetta Kroell's photo albums from Marty Everse, I inspected them carefully out of my natural curiosity about anything having to do with Montevallo. There was also a strong interest in the possibility of recognizing some of the people and places in the pictures so as to make use of them for stories for our *Montevallo Historical Times* newsletter and our historical society website.

When I began studying the albums, my knowledge of Montevallo's storied Kroell family was woeful. I knew a few names and had even gone into *Owl's Cove* (the gingerbread palace built by George Kroell on Main Street in 1900) at the time of the family estate sale in 1967.

Since then I have made it my business to learn as much as I could about this important Montevallo family. From various sources I would get juicy tidbits of information that often produced "Ah-Hah!" moments for my understanding.

One of the most important tidbits came from a book published by a class studying local history at Thompson High School in 1977. In an interview with one of Dionetta's five sisters, Mamie Kroell Gunlock, they say, "Mrs. Gunlock's family's home was where the University of Montevallo library now stands."

I already knew that Pat Kroell once had a handsome brick house on Highland Street on the lot where the Catholic Student Center is today. I had read newspaper accounts of the fire that completely destroyed that house in 1937. But this was the first time I ever heard that Pat Kroell's family had lived in what to me was the old nursery school house on the college campus.

With this knowledge, I had a new reason to go back and study Dionetta's albums. Sure enough, I recognized the Highland Street neighborhood near the college in some of the photos and could now better synthesize what they told me in the context of their location.

Then in 2020, while exploring the online archives of the *Shelby County Reporter* on "Newspapers.com" researching a different subject, I stumbled across a 1932 human interest story by Flora B. Surles (Alabama College Publicity Secretary) about a married couple named Yeager who had been operating a photography business and studio out of their house on Highland Street since 1912.

This article really grabbed my attention because I had seen the Yeagers' ads in old Alabama College yearbooks, in back issues of *The Alabamian* (the student newspaper), and the weekly *Montevallo Times*. I had scratched my head more than once about the fact that their ads often said the studio was located on Highland Street, which I knew to be a strictly residential part of Montevallo. The only exception I knew of was the Jones & Hardy Construction Co. that operated an office out of a small garage apartment just off Highland on Wadsworth Street in the 1950s and '60s.

I remained completely baffled for a long time by this until the discovery of Miss Surles' article. It included three photos showing the evolution of Yeager Studios

over the years. One of these pictures was a complete revelation to me because it left no doubt that the Yeager Studio did business from the house that I knew to be the one owned and lived in by Mrs. Montgomery in the 1950s and 1960s and probably beyond.

Miss Surles also provided considerable detail about how in 1928 Mrs. Montgomery's house had replaced the original two story frame house that the Yeagers' business had operated from for nearly 20 years. The new house was constructed to specifications developed by Alice Yeager to meet her needs for running a photography studio on the premises as well as a place for her to live comfortably.

I found the discovery of the newspaper article about the Yeagers to be so interesting and unique that I immediately decided to reprint the story, along with my own embellishments, in the upcoming Spring 2020 issue of the *Montevallo Historical Times*. Although I fully appreciated the association of this house with who I knew was its later owner, Mrs. Montgomery, I didn't realize at that point that there were more key facts yet to come to light.

My final "Ah-Ha!" moment in this quest came when I was again perusing online newspaper archives researching another subject.

By sheer dumb luck, a short item caught my eye in the *Montevallo Advertiser's* November 8, 1919 edition entitled: "Card of Thanks". It was a note of appreciation to the community from *Alice Yeager* and her daughter, *Helia*, for the many expressions of sympathy they received at the time of the sudden death the previous month of Alice's husband and *Helia's father, James E. Yeager*.

Instantly the pieces of the puzzle came together to explain who this curious and vaguely mysterious girl, simply known as Helia, was to Dionetta and the other "Highlanders". With the aid of the 1932 newspaper article about the Yeagers it was now certain that Helia's parents were J. E. and Alice Yeager and that she must have grown up in the house they used for their photo studio that they also called home just a block away on Highland from the Kroells.

Then, the next thing I had to know was did the Mrs. Montgomery I knew have a connection to the Yeagers or did she buy the house sometime after Mrs. Yeager's death in 1949?

In retrospect, after learning the answer to that question, I have questioned my own ability to see and appreciate the obvious. In one of my return trips to the Montevallo Cemetery not all that long ago, I stopped by Mrs. Montgomery's grave once more, and paid attention to not only her last name, but also finally comprehended the first name and middle initial engraved on her stone. The identifying inscription on her stone marker reads, *Helia Y. Montgomery, 1898 - 1982*.

The girl in the photos was Helia Yeager all along and the way she came to own the house is just as obvious now. To say that I could have kicked myself for not realizing this sooner is the understatement of the century.





Helia's parents are buried together in the older section of the Montevallo City Cemetery. They are the only occupants of a spacious plot situated under one of the cemetery's large mature magnolia trees.



There are clues in a short 1928 article found in the Shelby County Reporter archives that Helia had met and married William E. Montgomery, a Birmingham native, by that year and they had been living in Denver, CO and Iowa. Bill Montgomery's obituary from 1952 says that he worked as a salesman for the Western Newspaper Union and died at age 56 at his home in Montevallo after standing up to answer the front door. Bill and Helia had a son, Robert Montgomery. The Western Newspaper Union was a service that provided pre-prepared material and advertising for local newspapers to run in their weeklies to fill space without the usual expense and labor of creating new stories and articles. Both Bill and Helia had careers in the newspaper business and may have met as a result.

Helia Yeager Montevallo, Alabama

"By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady."

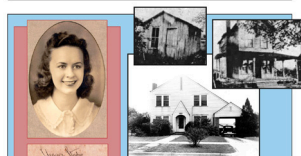
From the 1919 Technala. The Yearbook of Alabama Girls Technical Institute



In Greek mythology, Helia was the female personification of the Sun itself. Revered and worshiped by the Ancient Greeks, the name's significance stems from the importance of the sun as a celestial entity that provides life, warmth, and light to the world.

News From Montevallo

BY FLORA B. SHELLEY



Yeager Studio—Residence, Montevallo

This story on Yeager Studio, a commercial photography business that operated in Montevallo for 23 years (from 1907 until 1930), appeared in a 1932 issue of the Technala (Shelby County Reporter).

Typical of Town
Perhaps the town of Montevallo is best known for its beautiful buildings. The Technala has a photograph of the town of Montevallo during the past 20 years which is typical of the town in the picture shown.

Building Progress
The Technala has a photograph of the town of Montevallo during the past 20 years which is typical of the town in the picture shown.

Yeager Studio
The Technala has a photograph of the town of Montevallo during the past 20 years which is typical of the town in the picture shown.

When in Montevallo call on YEAGER STUDIO. Work for Schools and Colleges a Specialty. We make the pictures for TECHNALA and A. C. T. I.

Before his death, Mr. Yeager did much of the work connected with making cards, postcards, but all his work was done in the studio.

Large Tenement
The Technala has a photograph of the town of Montevallo during the past 20 years which is typical of the town in the picture shown.

Overgrowth of Natural Talent
The Technala has a photograph of the town of Montevallo during the past 20 years which is typical of the town in the picture shown.

Children's Portraits

"In-Between" Summer Season

\$1.00
each



Week of
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Yeager's Studio

HIGHLAND AVE.—PHONE 5936

The Spring 2020 issue of the Montevallo Historical Times containing the 1932 newspaper article on Yeager Studio is available at www.historicmontevallo.org under "Newsletters". There is also a direct link to the story on the website's home page.

When in Montevallo
call at

Yeager Studio

Work for Schools and
Colleges a Specialty

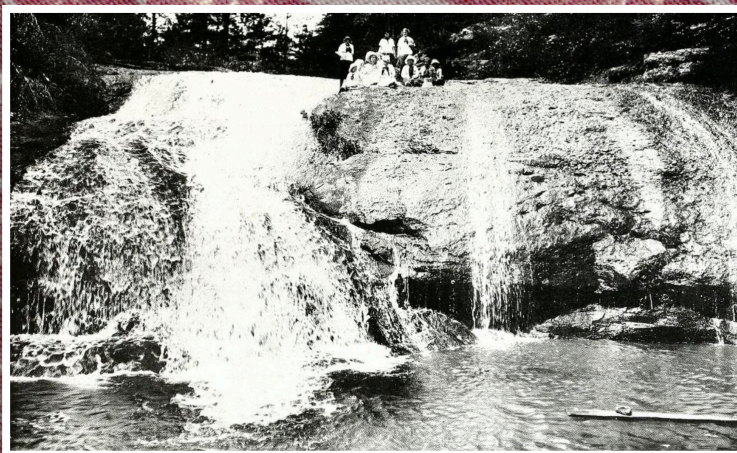
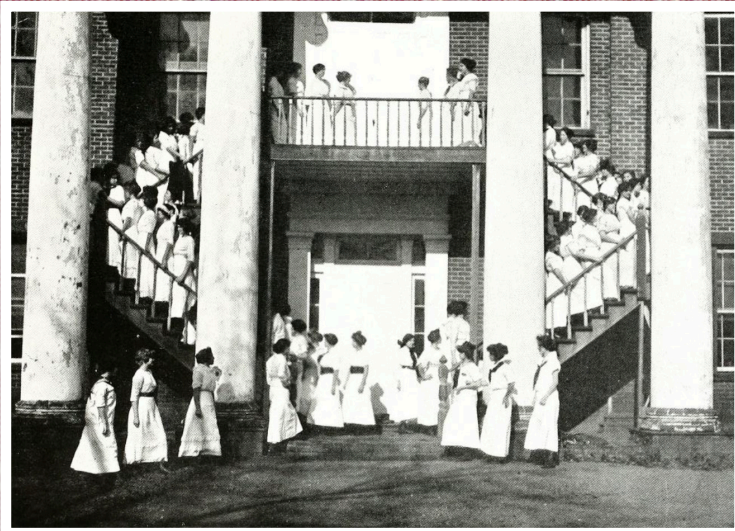
We make the pictures for
TECHNALA and A. G. T. I.



Distinctive Portraits

Yeager Studio

Montevallo, Alabama





Yeager Studios opened their photography business in 1912 and quickly became a reliable resource for the Alabama Girls Industrial School. Until J. E. Yeager's death in 1919, Alice Yeager was the portrait artist while J. E. Yeager took care of group and outdoor photography for the school. The photos you see on these pages are just a few examples of many similar photos by the Yeagers that can be found in A.G.T.I catalogs and annual yearbooks. Alice Yeager closed her 35 year-old business in 1947.



This glamorous portrait of Dionetta Kroell was made by Alice Yeager in her Highland Street Studio sometime in the 1920's.



Montevallo Historical Society
2907 Virginia Road
Birmingham, AL 35223-1253



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IS DECEMBER 14, 2024

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