

Montevallo *Historical* Times

Vol. 4 No. 4

Newsletter of the Montevallo Historical Society

Fall 2020



Montevallo Historical Society directors close ranks just long enough to take this group photo. (L-R) Clay Nordan, Bill Glosson, Mae Glosson, Janice Seaman, Debbie Pendleton, Melinda Nix, Anne Thomas, Susan Godwin, Sherry Vallides, John McCulley.

Historical Society Endures as Insidious Corona Virus Lingers

It was a warm, sunny Sunday afternoon on October, 18, 2020 – just what the doctor ordered – for the board of directors of the Montevallo Historical Society to come together at the Fox and Pheasant Inn on Shelby Street to hold their first meeting since the beginning of the year on February 9.

Like so much of contemporary life, the Montevallo Historical Society has been thrown into a kind of paralysis due to the unprecedented effects of the corona virus and the infectious Covid-19 disease that has afflicted millions of Americans and

killed 200,000+ as of this writing.

President Susan Godwin organized this meeting for a much needed and much appreciated reunion of the society's leaders, but with safety uppermost in her mind, she was explicit with her requirements that the meeting be held outside and that each attendee wear a mask and observe social distancing while in session.

Ten of the eleven currently serving directors were present and, prior to calling the meeting to order, Susan distributed a printed agenda that listed a number of topics that individual directors reported on in turn.

Among these were updates on finances, membership, newsletter mailing problems, our Montevallo High School yearbook digitization project, various potential fund-raising efforts, and planning for future projects and history-related involvement in the community.

In many ways, the meeting was a kind of reset for the board that produced a renewed commitment to resume quarterly directors meetings (conducted safely) that will preserve the continuity of the historical society and ensure its continued viability when better times return.

Please Note: Quarterly MHS Meetings & Programs are Suspended Due to the Pandemic

President's Letter

Dear Friends,

As you have seen from the photo on the front page of this issue of the *Montevallo Historical Times* and the story that accompanies it, your Montevallo Historical Society has come out of hibernation recently and managed to have a masked and socially distanced "in-person" board of directors meeting.

Following the onset back in the spring of the dangerous corona virus pandemic that has so significantly impacted our lives in 2020, the board of directors decided to take the precaution to suspend all gatherings that would have brought our members together in a group.

This was a move that we all regretted having to make because we had established such an impressive and enjoyable line-up of program topics and speakers since the inception of MHS as an organization in 2017. Even so, the safety of our members has remained our number one priority and we will continue to employ this strategy for as long as it seems necessary.

However, following the October board meeting referred to above, the directors made a commitment to each other to continue to have safety-conscious quarterly meetings going forward to insure that our organization remains viable and will be ready to hit the ground running whenever we are able to resume "normal" operations, hopefully in the near future.

By the same token, we remain committed to publishing our quarterly newsletter, the *Montevallo Historical Times*, for which we receive much-appreciated compliments with every issue. Clay Nordan, our vice-president, edits and produces the newsletter, and we are most fortunate that he devotes so much of his talent and professional experience to providing this valuable and educational outreach for our members and interested readers.

I would also like to encourage any of our members to feel free to contribute written stories or story ideas

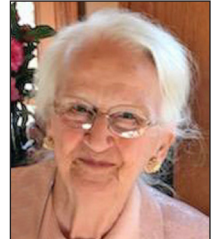
for the newsletter. Since we are not currently able to conduct the sort of programs at general meetings that we had become accustomed to, the newsletter becomes a great outlet for topics that might otherwise provide material for live presentations. If you have a subject you'd like to write about for a future issue, feel free to contact Clay at [cnordan@me.com].

We have a great example of a member contribution in this issue, starting on page 6. In conjunction with the 100th anniversary this year of the ratification of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women their long-sought right to vote, Montevallo native, Becky Holcombe Bolton put together a story about her mother registering and voting in Montevallo for the first time back in 1920.

Becky's submission led to a general tribute to this important anniversary in the history of women's rights that extends over several pages and also includes a fascinating women's suffrage story that Henry Emfinger, owner and curator of the Aldrich Coal Mine Museum has spoken and written about for many years in his tours and speaking engagements.

We in Montevallo are indebted to both Becky Bolton and Henry Emfinger for everything they have done for many years to preserve Montevallo's history and tell its story to succeeding generations.

I hope you enjoy this issue and that you will remain supportive and interested in everything we are doing during these unusual times.



Susan

Officers

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



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Directors

Marty Everse

Mae Glosson

John E. McCulley

Melinda Nix

Debbie Pendleton

Anne Thomas

Sherry L. Vallides

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

Montevallo Historical Society

Roster of Active Members – 2020 / 2021

KROELL BUSINESS MEMBERSHIPS

C&V Painting, Inc.
Central State Bank
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
Jane Watson Bullock
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
Catherine Griffin
Hershel Hale
Margie Hardin
Jim Hermecz
Barry Hocutt
Cecily Orr Hullett
Margie Scott Jones
Kitty Keener
Bill Keller
Jeanetta Keller
Karen Kelly
Billie Lacey
Stanley Lacey
Jimmy Lawley
Linda Lawley
Eddye Lawley
Bill Lawson
Mary Lawson
Susan Ledbetter
Brenda Lewis
Carol Lightfoot
Kirk Lightfoot

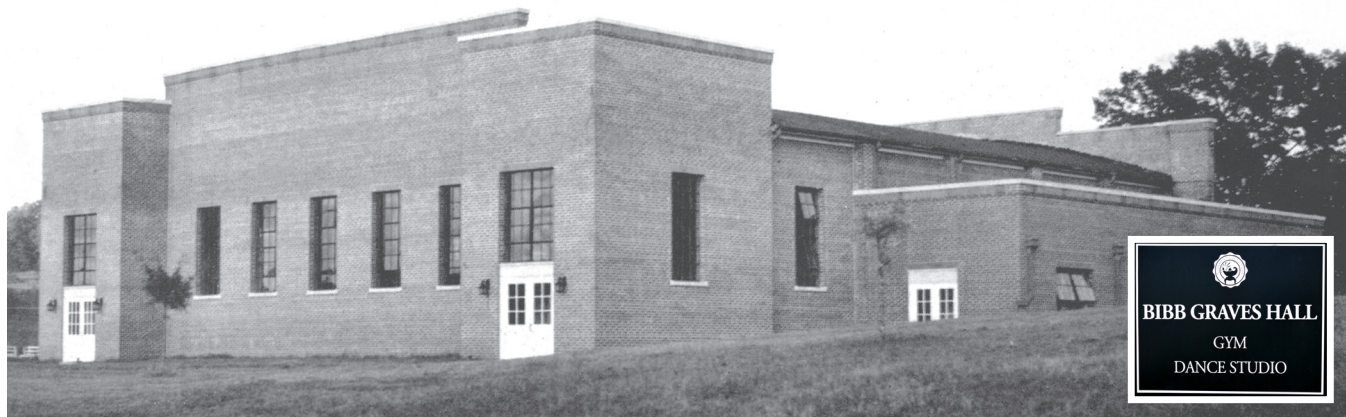
Bob Lightfoot
Gene Lightfoot
Luci Lovelady
Elizabeth Chism Ludwig
Michael E. Malone
Peggy Whaley Marshall
Scott Martin
Bruce McClanahan
Jane McClanahan
John McCulley
James McDonald
Jerry McGaughy
Susie McGaughy
Jan McKinnon
John McKinnon
Joan McMillan
Norman McMillan
Laurie Middaugh
Guy Milford
Barb Milstead
Herb Milstead
Jack Moran
Lynn Rotenberry Moran
David T. Morgan
Barbara Morris Nabors
Bill Nathews
Clay Nordan
Melinda Nix
Rusty Nix
Mildred Bolton Orr
Laurie Jean Orr
Sara Pankaskie
Michelle Pawlik
Emily Pendleton
Debbie Pendleton
Joan Pickett
Mike Pickett
Bill Plott
Atticus Plott
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 Tuyl
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

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**We would like to thank all new and renewing members for their financial support of the
Montevallo Historical Society for the 2020 / 2021 membership year.**

The Long, Strange Saga of Bibb Graves Hall



In June of 1930, the Olmstead Brothers firm of landscape architects from Brookline, Massachusetts (famous for their designs for the city of New York's Central Park and Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC) submitted to the administration of Alabama College president O.C. Carmichael (1926-1935) a complete and detailed plan for future growth of the institution.

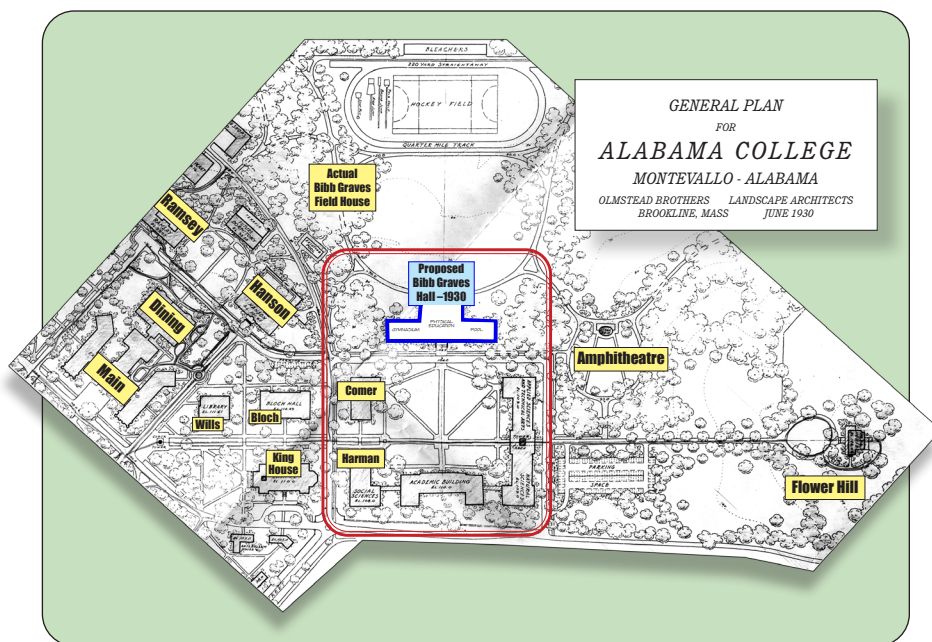
A major feature of the plan was the establishment of an additional quadrangle to be created between existing buildings and the president's home. An ambitious component of this concept was a massive new Physical Education building, located in such a way as to serve as the visual terminus of the new quad and form the west boundary of the college's academic district.

At the time, the school's student publication, the *Alabamian*, was a monthly feature and news magazine. They reported in the December 1929 issue that the AC board of trustees, in a special meeting in November, accepted the plans and specifications for a new health and physical education building. They authorized the letting of bids for the immediate erection of the building, and announced that the approximate cost would be \$200,000.

This news was welcomed enthusiastically by the *Alabamian* writer who observed, "In our time there has been renewed the promotion of health and recreation for students, not in a one-sided development but as a completing factor to the well rounded college education".

Bibb Graves, Future Gymnasium

Apparently in this same meeting, the decision was taken by the board to name the new Gymnasium and Health building for then serving Alabama Governor, Bibb Graves, who was a close friend of



future AC president Arthur Fort Harman (1935 - 1947) and was an energetic supporter of health education, as well as higher education in general throughout the state.

The *Alabamian* reported that the chief architect for the building would be William T. Warren of the Warren, Knight, and Davis firm in Birmingham which had designed Wills Hall, Bloch Hall, and Ramsay Hall, and the soon to be completed and dedicated Palmer Hall.

The plans for the building called for it to follow the general type of construction on campus – Georgian design, using red brick and stone trimmings. The entrance would be an impressive balustrade similar to Bloch Hall.

One wing of the building included a large gymnasium and an additional small gymnasium for corrective and oth-

er special work. The other wing housed a beautiful swimming pool of graduated depth. In addition, ample office and classroom space was provided for as well as lockers and showers. Looking to the future, the large gym included a balcony for spectators and would meet the expected needs of an enrollment of 1500 or more students.

Longer Than a City Block

The *Alabamian* quoted Mr. Warren as saying that this will be "one of the most imposing educational buildings in the state of Alabama of the group making up Auburn, the University of Alabama, the Normal School near Huntsville, and Montevallo. It will be the largest building among the state educational buildings, being 14 feet longer than an ordinary city block".

The *Alabamian* concluded with a

statement that a dedication ceremony for the finished building was planned and expected by president Carmichael for Founder's Day, October 12, 1930.

Ethel Barnett from the Class of 1932, the writer of the *Alabamian* article, expressed the hope of her fellow students that the resources of this magnificent new building on their campus would lead them to "the attainment of the highest possible order of vigorous, dynamic bodies of grace and physical enthusiasm."

Dreams Shattered by the Crash

In early 1930 the site was cleared and ground broken for the inspiring and much anticipated new Physical Education building, Bibb Graves Hall.

But much to the chagrin and disappointment of students, faculty, and administrators alike, the project, including the new quad, was abruptly halted and never resumed due to the consequences of the 1929 stock market crash the previous September and the ensuing worldwide economic Depression that followed.

Normal sources of funding for this as well as other potential construction projects on campus dried up overnight and didn't return for years. But the Physical Education Department still needed a building.

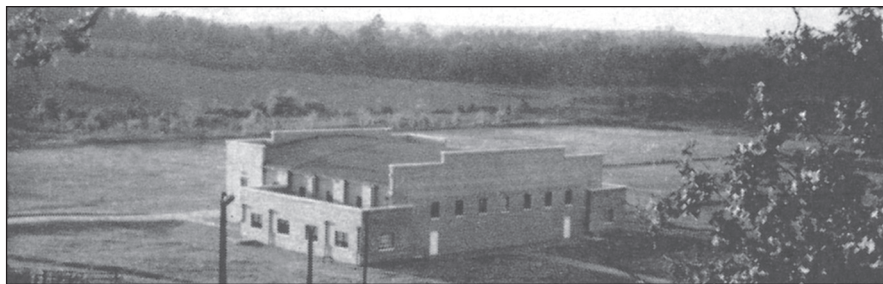
Any Port in a Storm

As president Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal" began to take shape, federal money for many kinds of structures became available, but not for gymnasiums. Since there were funds available for airplane hangars and the college had a landing strip, Alabama College applied for a hangar. Work on it began March 23, 1935. The total cost was \$16,209.08, all of which was borne by the federal government. By 1938, work had been completed to convert the hangar into the much needed "Field House" for the college.

The conversion consisted of a substantial addition to the front of the building. This addition, combined with the space of the hangar, resulted in a large hardwood indoor court with dimensions of 80 by 90 feet adapted to indoor athletics.

At the same time, classrooms and offices were added to either side of the existing building as well as a dance studio at the rear.

While not the realization of the original ambitious dream for a campus building to meet the athletic needs of the college for the present and the foreseeable future, Bibb Graves Hall became a reality and was, at the same time, a tribute to the ingenuity and creativity of an administration determined to meet the needs of its student body.



The make-shift grass landing strip that ran in front of the Alabama College Field House was never properly finished, so the federal authorities authorized college administrators to use the space in any way they chose. It became necessary in 1946 for president Harman to place an item on the front page of the *Montevallo Times* announcing that, "no part of the college campus or its surrounding property is a landing field for publicly owned or privately owned airplanes". The landing strip was ideal for various outdoor sports, such as tennis, field hockey, volleyball, and archery. A short golf course extending the length of the field was built in the late 1940s before the college constructed a larger course a mile to the west a few years later.

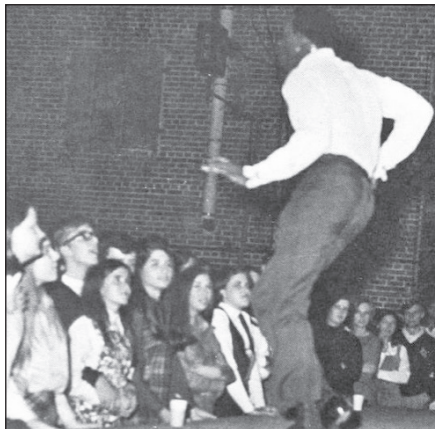
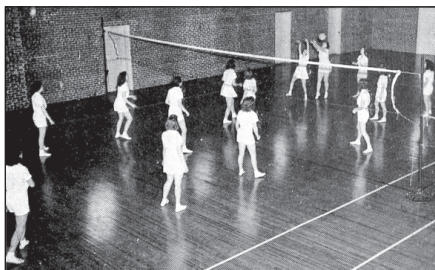
And Now ... ?

Today, this odd-ball gymnasium that rose from the shell of an airplane hangar in the 1930s is still with us and ready to be used for whatever is needed, after 80+ years of service.

During its lifetime it has hosted uncounted basketball games, volley ball matches, dance rehearsals, P.E. classes, intramurals of all kinds, and the occasional formal dance, sock hop, or rock & roll concert.

But the times have caught up with the old gym in a way that could not have been predicted. In the summer of 2020, the UM board of trustees voted to rename Bibb Graves Hall along with another building on campus, Comer Hall, because of their namesakes' association and advocacy for white supremacy and segregation as influential Alabamians.

So the name of the often drafty and sweltering old Field House enters Montevallo legend and lore, only to linger within memories of the years when it was known to all as Bibb Graves Hall.



A Homegrown Suffragist

by Becky Holcombe Bolton

My mother, Idalee Moody Holcombe of Montevallo, Alabama, first cast her vote in 1920, the first time that women were allowed to vote in a national election in the United States of America. Now, 100 years later in 2020, I celebrate this by telling the story of her first vote, and a few other historical events that she saw in her 100 years of life.

Mama was born in a time when female participation in political matters was thought to be “unladylike” by the men. Every state denied women the right to vote in 1807. In the mid 1800s ladies began to question this. In the United States, the women’s suffrage movement was beginning, and by the late 1800s it was growing stronger. In 1911 women joined together in Washington D.C. and marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to be recognized for the right to vote. They came from all across America to join in, wearing long dresses and hats, which was the style at that time. They carried signs that said, “No Nation Can Rise Above Its Womanhood,” “Votes For Women,” and more. Some folks in the crowds were saying to the marching suffragists, “Go home and watch your babies!!” Even President Wilson was against women voting. Finally, in 1920 the headlines of the papers read, “Women Can Vote,” and the amendment to the constitution was ratified on August 18, 1920.

In 1920 my mother, Idalee, was anxious to cast her first vote. Arthur, my father, did not wish to take her. He said, “Idalee, the polls are no place for a lady, and I do not plan to take you there.” Mama mentioned this to our good neighbors John and Ora Bridges. They offered to take her with them. At that time Daddy thought that he was protecting Mama, but later on he was also very proud of her choice. Idalee was twenty-four years old when she first cast her vote in 1920 and she continued to vote for the next seventy-five years of her life.


So many other changes came about during Idalee’s

100 years. She was born in 1896, when corn-shuck mops and brush-brooms were used for cleaning, old smoothing irons had to be heated in the fireplace for ironing clothes, and ice had to be delivered to keep food cold. Sears and Roebuck had just begun printing catalogues for mail ordering. Horse-drawn, mail wagons began to be used in rural parts of Montevallo by 1913, meaning people living there could finally order and receive packages. Over the course of her life, my mother witnessed so many changes in technology and infrastructure: from telegraphs to telephones, trails and dirt roads to multi-lane interstate highways, 10 mile-per-hour Model T motorcars to outer space exploration.

The city of Montevallo saw many changes during these 100 years as well. Idalee was a baby in her mother’s arms on October 12, 1896 when the present University of Montevallo held its grand opening. At that time the college was a girls’ school called The Girls’ Industrial School of Alabama. Idalee’s father, Frank Moody, moved his family to Montevallo to serve on the University of Montevallo’s first board of trustees, and as its first treasurer. Grandpa Moody bought 57.5 acres in and adjoining Montevallo not long after moving here. My mother grew up beside the university campus, and knew each of the University college presidents. Dr. Robert McChesney, who was president from 1992 - 2006, even attended her 100th birthday party.

Mama told us many things from her growing up beside the university campus. One of my favorite stories was about the first time she saw a car in Montevallo. The

Moody’s had a cotton patch where Flowerhill was later developed. One day, Mama and her sister Lillie were picking cotton there when suddenly, they heard an engine. They dropped their cotton sacks and ran down to the road to watch as Dr. Givhan, a local physician, rode by in one of the first cars in Montevallo. At that time, dirt roads were poor, but by 1908 some towns and cities started laying down concrete pavement. Horseless carriages were emerging and were referred to as “Locomobiles.” The first automobile show was in New York City in 1901. Oil in Texas and California was gushing up, and the Ford Motor Company had begun marketing the low priced “Model A.” People began to see those early car tires for sale in horse harness shops that sold equipment for driving horses.



On August 26, 1920, U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby received formal notification from the Legislature of the State of Tennessee that it had approved the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, becoming the 36th and final state needed for ratification. Passage of the amendment finally gave women in the United States the right to vote after decades of agitation for this fundamental American right. 2020 marks the 100th year since this historic achievement and we are pleased to present this story on Montevallo’s role in the women’s suffrage movement as our way of commemorating the anniversary.



Frank S. and Laura Moody family portrait, 1896. Idalee Moody is the baby in her mother's lap.

Seeing that first car was quite an event for Idalee, as she had only traveled by short train trips and horse-drawn carriages. The first time she rode in an automobile was in 1917. She told me about how she took a train ride to Childersburg to visit her older brother. Her niece and she were the same age, and they double-dated with two young men. They took an automobile drive to Talladega Springs. She said, "the car didn't go very fast, but it made me feel dizzy." When my parents married in 1918, Daddy had a car. Mama tried to drive it, but she almost ran into the well and never tried to drive again.

Before she met my father, Idalee studied at the Alabama Girls' Technical Institute, as the school at Montevallo was now known (now the University of Montevallo) and majored in Domestic Science. She had just finished her degree at Montevallo when World War I began in 1917. After graduating, she saw so much progress being made through technological innovations for use in the home. Washing machines, refrigerators, air conditioning, electric stoves, dishwashers, vacuums, and electric sewing machines that could even work button-holes were all making women's lives easier.

Shortly after graduating from college, my mother

met my father. During this time, communities and small towns formed baseball teams and played games against each other. People came from all around and sat on blankets under the trees to watch. Young ladies in the area prepared picnic baskets to share with all of the players following these games. It was at times such as this that my parents met in Montevallo. My father, Arthur Hoyt Holcombe, was known to be one of the best baseball players in all of Shelby County at that time. This dear friendship led to their marriage in 1918. Our family of eight children was blessed with a good home and caring parents. Before Daddy died in 1943, he asked Mama to read aloud a chapter from the Bible to us each night for all to hear. What a great gift that was. I can still hear her voice when hearing scriptures read.

When I was born in 1931, the Great Depression was under way. Unemployment had skyrocketed, and formerly wealthy people who had lost everything were standing in soup lines for a little bread. Franklin Roos-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



The grounds and president's home, today known as "Flower Hill" on the University of Montevallo campus, was part of Frank Moody's 57.5 acre property and where his daughters Idalee and Lillie were picking cotton when Dr. E.G. Givhan drove by in the first automobile they ever saw.

The receipt at right is from the personal archives of Montevallo Historical Society vice-president, Clay Nordan. It's a family memento of the first time his great-grandmother, Phairaba Robinson Wyatt, registered to vote following the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. She lived with her family in the Providence community in Chilton County near what is today Lake Mitchell.

THE STATE OF ALABAMA, <u>Chilton</u> COUNTY.	
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION	
THIS IS TO CERTIFY that <u>Mrs. Phairaba Wyatt</u>	
who was born on the <u>29</u> day of <u>Aug</u> , 18 <u>92</u> ,	and who
resides in Precinct No. <u>14</u> , District No. <u>1</u> , has registered as provided by the laws of this State.	
Given under our hands this <u>22</u> day of <u>Oct</u> , 192 <u>0</u> .	
<u>J. E. Givhan</u> Chairman	} Registrars.
<u>J. P. ...</u>	

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

evelt became president in 1933. I remember our family gathering around an early static battery radio and listening to his "fireside chat," as he announced the New Deal. We heard promise of jobs with the Public Works Program, which was relieving to Mama and everyone else.

Many improvements in infrastructure began in Montevallo and throughout the United States, providing income to many people. In Montevallo, workers built the viaduct, bridges, improved our school buildings, and added rooms onto the high school. They landscaped our college campus and laid the brick roadways. All across America, workers built parks, airports, city halls, libraries,



Idalee Moody Holcombe in February 1996 with UM president Robert McChesney on her 100th birthday.

Moody St

Montevallo's Moody Street, near the UM campus, is named for Idalee Moody Holcombe's father, Frank Moody, who was on the board of trustees of the Girl's Industrial School of Alabama and served as its first Treasurer. The street is located in a residential neighborhood on a section of the old Moody acreage.

post offices and many other public buildings. Many years later, we are still enjoying the work that was done by the Works Progress Administration and the New Deal.

During the Great Depression, my mother worked through many hardships while caring for her family's needs. For example, cow feed and flour came in large, cloth bags at that time; Mama would wash the empty bags and make underwear for

her children from the white cloth. From the larger, printed-designed squares, she made us little dresses and gowns. She always made the best of everything with that which was available.

Idalee also saw her family – and our nation – through several wars. She had three children in the service of our nation during World War II.

My brother, Arthur Hoyt Holcombe, and two sisters, Mary Nita Holcombe (Collins) and Ann Holcombe (Hill). My brothers Ed and Pete Holcombe also served our country. Through all of this, our nation preserved the "Big Four Freedoms" that we heard President Roosevelt articulate in 1941: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear.

So many events of major change occurred during my mother's lifetime, including the right to vote. She went about living with a knowledge of so many things, but these things didn't always require explaining. I learned so much just by listening and watching her throughout my life. But, if I asked, she always helpfully answered my questions. She'd often say, "Where there's a will, there's a way," and she was always there to help me find the way.



Becky Holcombe Bolton was born and raised in Montevallo in the Ebenezer / Moore's Crossroads community north of town. She is a local historian and the author of one book on her ancestral roots entitled **Ebenezer** and another on veterans from Montevallo entitled **Hometown Heroes**. She is an active member of the Montevallo Historical Society and lives in a retirement community in Vestavia Hills, Alabama.

Pay Poll Tax

February 1 is the last day for payment of poll tax.

Citizens should remember that votes upon important state questions will be called for this year.

You will not be allowed to express yourself if your poll tax is not paid up to date.

This notice ran on the front page of the January 26, 1939 edition of the Montevallo Times.

For Collection Period Beginning Oct. 1, 1948 and Ending on Feb. 1, 1949	
POLL TAX RECEIPT	
COUNTY OF JEFFERSON, ALA.	1-26 1949
RECEIVED OF <i>Smaragdi H. Spanos</i>	Male <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
XXXX One and 100 Dollars (\$1.50)	
For Poll Taxes at \$1.50 per year for the following years: 19	
01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48	
District No. _____	Precinct No. This Year <i>9</i> Precinct No. Last Year _____ Color _____
Countersigned By <i>John Draves</i>	<i>John Hamilton</i> Tax Collector
State Comptroller.	

Women may have been granted the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, but, along with male voters, they could not cast a ballot in the "Jim Crow" South without paying their POLL TAX – just one of the "legal" obstacles devised by government officials at the time to discourage African-Americans from exercising their electoral franchise. The receipt shown here for payment of poll tax from Jefferson County authorized Toni Nordan's mother, Smaragdi H. Spanos, to vote in Alabama elections for the year 1949.

Montevallo's Remarkable Link to a National Suffrage Leader and Women's Rights Pioneer

A fascinating anecdote has circulated, mostly by word of mouth, for many years in Montevallo about the visit of the famous 19th century suffragist and women's rights crusader, Matilda Joslyn Gage, to Rajah Lodge in Aldrich, two miles west of Montevallo.

Gage had worked with and become a good friend of Josephine Cables Aldrich when they both lived in up-state New York prior to Josephine's marriage to William F. Aldrich, owner of the Montevallo Coal Mining Co., and her subsequent move to Alabama.

The exact date of the visit is not known, but since we know that the Aldrichs' marriage took place in 1889, when Josephine was 46 and William was 36 years of age respectively, a little deductive reasoning leads to the conclusion that the window of opportunity was a seven year period from 1889 to 1896.

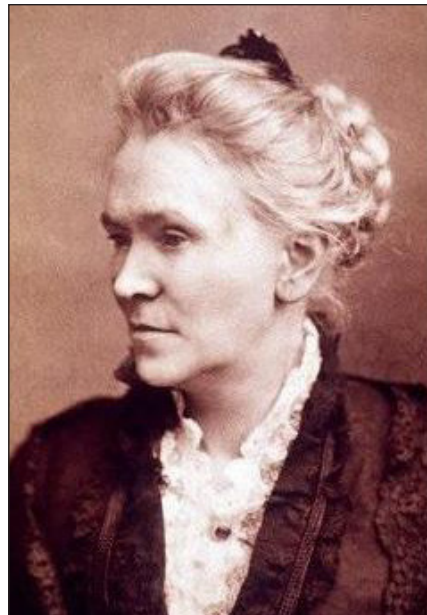
Gage died in 1898 at the age of 71, and there is biographical information about her indicating that she was beset with a chronic illness in 1896 that led to a fatal stroke two years later.

The Winter 2019 issue of the *Montevallo Historical Times* (which is still available as a pdf at www.historicmontevallo.org) presented an extensive feature on the Aldrich Coal Mine Museum that included the story of William and Josephine Aldrich.

William also had roots in upstate New York and he left the north for Alabama in 1873 to join his brother, Truman Aldrich, in the coal business. Within a few years, he had bought his brother's share of the famous Montevallo mines, which had provided coal to the Confederacy during the Civil War.

He proceeded to establish the village of Aldrich, and named it after himself and his brother. He soon developed Aldrich into a model mining town whose conception and execution ran completely counter to the rough and tumble organization commonly found in similar industrial encampments.

In building this humane place for



Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898)

his miners to live and work, he also built what can only be described as a "mansion" for himself right in the middle of it all. The four-story "Rajah Lodge" was the result.

From all accounts, Josephine adapted well to her marriage to this affluent industrialist and the comfortable and extravagant lifestyle he provided. And she found Rajah Lodge to be quite to her liking and an ideal place to raise her adopted children.

Originally from Connecticut,



Josephine Cables Aldrich (1843-1917)

when finally able to break away from the two grandmothers who raised her, Josephine settled in Rochester, NY and established herself as a respected spiritualist, Theosophist, editor, and publisher.

Adopting the Golden Rule as the best maxim for morality and happiness after her punishing childhood, she turned her Rochester home into a sort of Mecca for advanced thinkers, not only from the U.S. but for pilgrims who came from Europe, Asia, and Africa to confer with her.

In 1882, she began publishing "The Occult World", a paper devoted to advanced thought and reform work. Her editorials focused on liberality, justice, and mercy. She also became secretary of the Theosophical* Society of the U.S.

Traveling in these circles led her to meet Matilda Gage, one of the most active and prolific writers, lecturers, and reformers for women's rights and suffrage then operating in America. This relationship led Josephine to work as publisher for Gage's book "The Liberal Thinker".

Gage lived in nearby Fayetteville, NY with her husband and children, so a strong friendship began from their professional relationship and grew from their shared interests and like-minded views on spiritual topics and women's issues.

Since the Rochester / Buffalo region of upstate New York is notorious for its arctic-like winters and incredibly deep snow, it is highly likely that Ms Aldrich invited Ms Gage (then in her sixties) to come to Alabama for a respite from the cold.

An Alabama winter would be paradise for someone who had endured many Rochester, NY winters, and even if a severe cold snap did descend on central Alabama, the Aldrich's guest could depend on a house full

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

* **THEOSOPHY** teaches that the purpose of human life is a spiritual emancipation and claims that the human soul undergoes reincarnation upon bodily death according to a process of karma. It promotes values of universal brotherhood and social improvement although it does not stipulate particular ethical codes.



of numerous fireplaces roaring with fires fueled by Montevallo coal.

A choice detail about Gage's visit that has been kept alive in the telling over the years is that during her stay, she spent considerable time drafting one of her most important speeches that was to be delivered at a New York forum upon her return.

Apparently she did much of this work while tucked away in the "Tree House" that was accessible by a wooden cat-walk from one of Rajah Lodge's upper balconies. No doubt, the solitude and peace found in her perch among the tree branches was conducive to thought, concentration, and inspired composition.

Anyone interested in learning more about the life and work of Matilda Joslyn Gage can open the door to an enormous body of information through a simple online Google search.

JANICE SEAMAN
BROKER

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Montevallo Historical Society Financial Statement • November 2020

Balance brought forward 9/30/2020 \$11,505.35

EXPENSES

Officers and Directors Insurance Premium 750.00

Balance as of 11/01/2020 \$10,755.35

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New Sign for Theron Fisher Stadium

Montevallo Historical Society members Bill Nathews, Kirk Lightfoot, and Clay Nordan, along with fellow Montevallo High School alumni Patricia Wyatt Honeycutt, Judy Lien Santa Cruz, and MHS football coach, Blake Boren, formed a committee this past summer looking into acquiring a new sign for the school's football stadium. The stadium has remained unmarked since a renovation some years back.

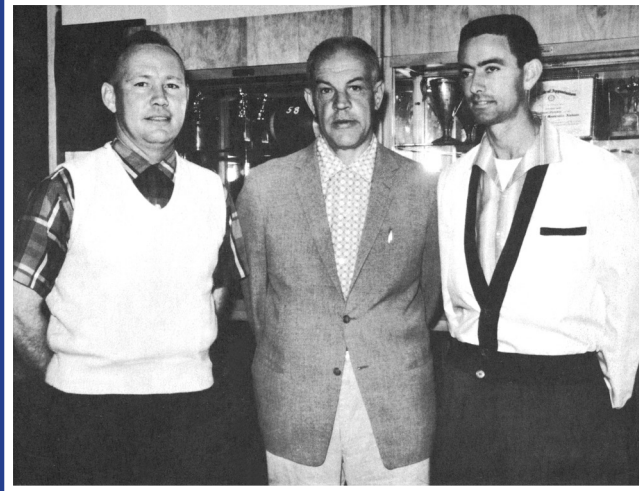
Bill volunteered to chair the committee and has carefully organized socially distanced meetings that have produced an effective fund-raising campaign, the selection of a highly capable and professional sign company, and multiple options for signage designs and locations.

The stadium was named in 1977 for the school's much-loved and highly successful 19-year head coach and teacher, Theron K. Fisher.

Coach Fisher came to Montevallo in 1947 and coached football, baseball, and basketball, and taught Alabama History and Civics. He passed away in 1968 after several years of ill health.

Theron Fisher stadium was built in 1964 and the first home game played there was a 21-0 loss to Vincent on September 11 of that year. It has served as the home of the MHS Bulldogs for 56 years.

The committee would like to express its gratitude to the board of directors of the Montevallo Historical Society for their willingness to share the society's mailing list, which became the foundation for the stadium sign fund-raising campaign. Response from the society's members has been enthusiastic and gratifying. At this point, there is every indication that Theron Fisher Stadium will have a colorful and impressive new sign before year's end.



Montevallo High School coaching staff (1958 – 1959 school year).
(Left to right) Charles Martin, Theron Fisher, W.C. "Cratie" Corbett.

72 cash donations in varying amounts were forwarded to committee chair, Bill Nathews, in response to a mail solicitation and word-of-mouth outreach by members of the committee. The interest and generosity of these donors has been key to achieving success for the project.

FOLLOWING IS A SELECTION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS SENT IN BY DONORS WITH THEIR CHECKS

"Thank you for doing this collection for Coach Fisher".

Tommy Baker '66

Montevallo, Alabama

*"Thanks for your help in honoring Coach Fisher.
Warm wishes."*

Sandra Scott Small '65

Birmingham, Alabama

"I played baseball for Coach Fisher and Ruelane was a cheerleader."

James H. "Corky" Bice '52

Ruelane Peters Bice '57

Brierfield, Alabama

"Coach Fisher wore many hats and was instrumental in the development of many young men and women in Montevallo. Thanks for including me."

Joe Lovelady '70

Daphne, AL

"I'm happy to help and intend to brush up on my failing memory of Alabama counties and county seats, so thoroughly ingrained by Coach Fisher. Thanks for doing this."

Sally Sears '71

Atlanta, Georgia

"Such a worthy project. I remember Coach Fisher well!"

Peggy Whaley Marshall '67

Atlanta, Georgia

"Thanks to the committee for doing this!"

Nancy Barclay '71

El Centro, California

"I enjoyed knowing and being taught by Coach Fisher. I'm glad to contribute to "his" sign."

Janet Rotenberry Burnett '65

Hancock, Maine

"What a great idea and project this is. I am delighted and proud to donate to such a wonderful endeavor in honor of Coach Theron Fisher."

Alan Barclay '66

Anderson, North Carolina

"Some things Coach Fisher did/thought/believed in remain with me to this day: discipline, consistent effort, fundamentals, preparation! I wonder if he had any idea of the gifts he gave us."

David Bennett '69

Somerville, Tennessee

"I have nothing but great memories of my time in Montevallo. It was a fantastic "village" where I was looked after by the fine people I got to know. Best of luck with the project."

Johnny Starks '63

Simpsonville, South Carolina

"I cannot tell you how much this means to our family."

Barclay Fisher '59

Kingwood, Texas

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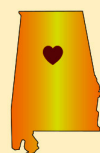
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