

Montevallo *Historical* Times

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Newsletter of the Montevallo Historical Society

Fall 2018

The Funeral for Stanley Michael “Doc” Mahan

July 28, 2018 • by Clay Nordan



Given that Mike “Doc” Mahan had been a larger-than-life character during his lifetime, and one of the most loved, hated, influential, and charismatic people to ever come out of the Montevallo area, I expected that his funeral would be large, involved, and memorable. But my expectations were greatly exceeded when I attempted to park in the parking lot on the University of Montevallo campus near the First United Methodist Church. A large Montevallo fire truck was blocking the entrance to the lot and a uniformed firefighter turned me away with the words, “I’m full”.

What I soon realized was that an army of fire fighters and an armada of fire fighting apparatus was on hand to honor Mike, a second generation firefighter and fire chief and arguably one of the most effective advocates for the build-up of fire departments and modern fire fighting techniques in central Alabama over the past 50 years.

I learned afterward that I had come late to the party because it had begun the night before with a “men-only” wake at Montebrier, dubbed “Have a Drink With Doc”. Apparently, various old friends and fire-fighting compatriots held an all-night vigil in Mike’s parlor with him lying in state within one of the most handsome caskets you will ever see.

The following morning, when it came time for

the funeral service at the Montevallo First Methodist Church, the casket containing Mike’s body was loaded by members of the Brierfield Volunteer Fire Department onto one of their big fire engines and hauled to town, escorted by a bevy of additional fire engines representing other fire departments from the surrounding area.

It was this colorful collection of local fire-fighting apparatus that prevented me from getting the choice parking spot I had anticipated.

What I also learned during the service was that everything we were about to see and experience had been orchestrated and choreographed in advance and in detail by Mike himself.

Why was I not surprised?

The first thing I noticed when I entered the sanctuary, after realizing that this was going to be standing room only, even 20 minutes prior to the official start time, was that there was a seven piece band setting up behind the pulpit. Local Dixieland trumpeter, Chuck King and his “Friends” were obviously going to play a big part in what was to come.

Anyone who knew Mike Mahan understood the major part that music played in his life. He played trumpet

in the Montevallo High School band. At Auburn, he played in the marching band that performed at football games. While on the Plains, he took up the stand-up bass (bass viol) and started playing in jazz and dance bands. The first of his many academic degrees was in music. He became a symphony orchestra performer and continued to play in dance



President's Letter

As I begin this quarter's letter, I'd like to acknowledge the dedication and contributions of two of our members – Dr. Mike Mahan and Ms. Corinne Miller. Both were lifetime friends and long-time citizens of Montevallo. They were charter members of the historical society, and it's a privilege to celebrate their lives and legacies. Each will be missed.

On a brighter note, I'm pleased to report that we've made progress toward preserving some historic structures in and around our city. Discussions with Dr. John Stewart and Ms. Mary Ellen Heuton of UM have been both positive and productive. Certainly, we're a long way from restoration projects on the Saylor and Calkins Houses, but it's nice to be considering options together. In addition, Montevallo's Historic Preservation Commission is working with the Shoal Creek Foundation and Shelby County officials to further preservation/restoration efforts on the Mahler House. I understand, too, that Marshel Roy Cunningham and his relatives have some new insights on the exact location of Jesse Wilson's original log cabin and the nearby "big spring."

That's positive news, certainly, but now comes the hard part – funding these revitalization projects! Consider the basic options available to any owner of an historic property: (1) Demolition is the easiest and least expensive option, but destroying the structure erases that portion of our history and heritage. (2) Protecting a building by keeping a good roof and sound floors and walls may serve as a temporary solution, but buildings, like automobiles, need to be used to remain viable. My

experience suggests that attempts to maintain the status quo equate to moving backwards. Therefore, (3) renovating and/or restoring old structures remains the ideal solution, albeit the most expensive of the options. That process ensures preservation and provides opportunities for continued use. In effect, we add another chapter to "If These Walls Could Talk"!

Within that context, it's good to note that we're moving closer to being granted 501(c)3 status by the Internal Revenue Service. John McCulley prepared the initial documents, and we've provided additional information as requested by the IRS. We expect to receive our official non-profit status notification letter in the next few weeks, and that will open the way for various fund-raising opportunities. On a personal note, Rev. Robert Moore reminded me at a Montevallo First Baptist Church reunion that, as a young teenager, I started a bus fund by donating five dollars. The church designated a budget line item for a bus, and the project came to fruition as other members added varying amounts. That seems like a good plan to emulate, so, when I renew my historical society membership for 2019, I'm going to add a little "seed money" so we can start our own preservation fund. That way, we as MHS members and as current/former citizens of Montevallo can show our resolve in preserving our treasured historic buildings and sites. Will you join me?!



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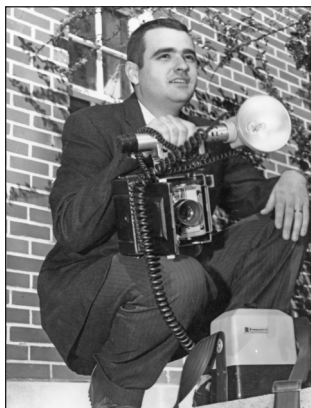
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DISTINGUISHED FOUNDING DIRECTOR
Dr. S.M. Mahan, Jr. (1934 – 2018)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



bands for many years. He even met his wife Linda while a member of the Columbus, GA symphony orchestra.

At one point in his life, Mike worked with a colorful Armenian man from Florida who traveled

around the U.S. maintaining, repairing, and restoring pipe organs. As a consequence, a life-long love for the organ took root inside Mike, that eventually led him to install two pipe organs in the main room of his beloved Montebrier.

The organ technician that Mike worked for specialized in the famous Skinner and Skinner Aeolian organ. At the time of its installation in 1929, the Skinner in Palmer Hall on the Alabama College campus (it is said that the building was actually built around the organ, due to its size) was the second largest in the South. Mike's employer visited the Palmer organ regularly and instilled in Mike a love for this particular brand and style of organ.

So it is fitting that when the First Methodist Church of Montevallo needed to replace an aging instrument, Mike learned that the Presbyterian Church in Selma, AL had a small Skinner that needed restoration and a new home. He convinced the Montevallo congregation to purchase, restore, and install the Selma Skinner, and that is the organ that is heard regularly on Sundays today at Montevallo Methodist.

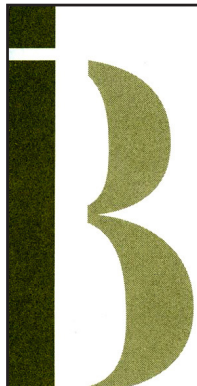
So nothing could be more appropriate to begin Mike's personally scripted "Congregational Singing" at his funeral than the singing by all in attendance of "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty", accompanied by the powerful and melodic Skinner organ, with Laurie Middaugh at the keyboard, that Mike had been instrumental in securing for his home church.

Listed in the 8 page funeral program were a

mix of 10 hymns and songs to set the tone for the "celebration". They varied from somber, joyous, bombastic, and sentimental, to true New Orleans style "second-line" funeral music. Some had organ or piano accompaniment, and others had the full-throated dixieland style band led by Chuck King and Friends.

The music program concluded with a stunning trumpet duet – a prelude entitled "Toccata and Fugue in D Minor" – played by King and University of Montevallo trumpet professor, Joe Ardovino, with strong support from the Skinner organ.

Interestingly, the casket holding Mike's body had



Wesley Wyatt

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not been brought into the sanctuary prior to the beginning of the service. At this juncture, a formal "Entrance" took place that involved the pallbearers as well as a military style color guard from the Pelham Fire Department.

The casket was rolled into the area in front of the altar as the trumpet duet came to a conclusion.

Then, a typical Protestant funeral service ensued, but with the participation of five ministers who led prayers, scripture readings, and recitation of the creed.

The service next transitioned into what the program called "Celebrations of Life", or what amounted to several people close to Mike coming before the congregation and offering words of remembrance and appreciation.

The first of these was Mike's close friend, Marty Everse, who partnered with him for many years as they established and operated the two local iron-works state parks, Tannehill and Brierfield. Marty's remarks were entitled "My Friend Mike". His words were well crafted, poignant, and entertaining, offering the perspective of someone who knew Mike, warts and all, and obviously a friend who loved him and will miss him very much.

A musical interlude followed Marty's moving tribute. It consisted of a Flute, Oboe, and Piano performance of Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring".

Mike's wife, Linda, gave a short and humorous account of her years living with Mike, saying at one point that there were more things than she had ever expected that he got her involved with that she said, "I hadn't really signed up for." But, she gratefully admitted, that Mike had always supported her 100% in anything she became interested in or wanted to

do. She ended her remarks with a short poem professing the love she had felt for Mike all their married life.

After Linda came Mike's daughters, Stann and Miki who, with appropriate anecdotes, lovingly remembered their often "over the top" and "one-of-a-kind" father. They shared with the congregation a number of personal messages they had received from Doc's friends, family, patients, and employees since his passing.

Following the family, the entire staff of Doc's dental clinic came to the podium and several told poignant and memorable stories of how influential and persistent he had been in encouraging them all to grow and make more of themselves than they ever thought possible.

Doc's successor at Mahan Creek Dental Clinic, Dr. Derrick Mendez concluded this portion of the remarks and, also spoke of how grateful he was to have known and trained with Doc Mahan and to be in what he viewed as the enviable position of following in his footsteps and keeping his unique and valuable practice alive and serving all comers.

Another minister, Mike Ratliff, a former minister of the Montevallo Methodist Church, then came to the pulpit and offered his own eulogy of sorts, providing many personal episodes of receiving often unsolicited advice and suggestions from his parishoner, Mike Mahan. Rev. Ratliff at one point said that he had been skeptical of Mike's insistence



about holding what he called “Jazz Communion” but he went along with what seemed like a hairbrained idea, and it worked!

The service concluded with Chuck King, supported by his band, performing his popular imitation of Louis Armstrong singing “What a Wonderful World”.

Eight members of the firefighter color guard then entered the sanctuary and lined up on either side of the casket. They then proceeded to lift and fold the American Flag in unison in the custom of military funerals. When they were done, the flag passed to two local fire chiefs who presented it to Linda and offered their condolences while on bended knee.

As the benediction by the current Methodist minister, Lawton Higgs, came to an end, the band swung into a rousing postlude of “When the Saints Go Marching In”. The congregation was encouraged to stand and clap along with the music as the casket was rolled out of the church and taken to the street.

Once outside, the fire apparatus escort resumed. This time, Montevallo’s first fire truck, a 1938 Chevrolet, nicknamed “Little Red”, served as the hearse. Led by the phalanx of fire trucks from all over the area once again, a mostly red procession of large shiny trucks headed south on Alabama Highway 25 toward Brierfield.

Everyone who had attended the funeral was invited to come to Montebrier and enjoy a catered



The procession from the church to Montebrier passed this impressive American Flag tribute to Doc Mahan set up by the Fire Department from Calera at the intersection of Highways 25 and 139 just south of Wilton.

lunch and the company of friends and family. In the meantime, “Little Red” took Mike’s body to the circa 1865 Brierfield Cemetery nearby, where the Mahan clan has buried their dead for generations.

Mike had previously marked the location for his grave with a marble marker engraved with his initials, “S.M.M.” Following the well attended luncheon, held inside and outside at Montebrier, Mike was laid to rest in a private service attended by his family and close friends.

In an article that ran in the Shelby County Reporter a few days later, Mike “Doc” Mahan was referred to as a “Montevallo Icon”. A more accurate term could not be employed to describe this native son who did so much for his hometown, the area where he lived, the state he loved, and the people he served.



Montebrier (1866)
Brierfield, AL

Local History Hiding in Plain Sight – The E.W Powell Cemetery



On a modest promontory behind a solitary frame house on the edge of Orr Park at Big Springs lies the scattered ruins of what appears to be a venerable but formerly well-cared-for family cemetery.

The old burying ground is just a stone's throw from the city's Johnny Holsomback Park & Recreation Building, and overlooks the right field foul pole of the Montevallo High Bulldogs baseball field in the park. The grass and weeds have recently been cut back and there are remnants of short poles that once supported a protective chain link fence.

A first-time visitor's response to this scene is simply, "What a shame"! After some rudimentary research about the occupants of this place, that impression is not only confirmed but wholly inadequate in describing what has become of this living link to early settlers of Montevallo.

This is the family burial plot of the Edward W. Powell family, and, as can be seen from the list on this page, it's earliest known burial occurred in 1836. The next year, E.W. Powell himself, who was born in 1779, went to his eternal rest in this place.

There are elegant and artful headstones and grave markers strewn haphazardly around the site, and a fragment that is clearly the marker for E.W. himself lies in a pile with others.



The Powell Cemetery has to rank with the very most important tangible historical

Partial Census of E.W. Powell Cemetery Montevallo, Alabama

Information copied by John Reese in 1981.
He said there were 13 marked graves and several others unmarked.

Edward W. Powell
Age 58 years, 2 months, 12 days
Born 1779
Died December 1837

Mary Powell
Wife of E.W. Powell
Born January 1796
Died July 13, 1878

Thomas E. Powell
Born June 23, 1848
Died August 5, 1902
Not E.W. Powell's son since
E.W. died in 1837

Daughter of T.E. and N.E. Powell
Died October 6, 1893

Infant son of T.E. and N.E. Powell
Died February 26, 1889

Mary E. and Anne Sevier
Infant children of E.E. and
Matilda D. Sevier
No Dates
Matilda D. Sevier was a
daughter of E.W. Powell

Edward W. Lewis
Age 15 months, 12 days
Died September 3, 1836

Mary E. Nelson
Wife of Alexander Nelson
Daughter of E.W. Powell
Born June 22, 1827
Died February 7, 1890

Edward Alexander Nelson
Born September 1, 1845
Died July 22, 1846
Age 10 months, 21 days
Son of Alexander and
Mary E. Nelson
E.L. Nelson
Born October 22, 1852
Died August 22, 1890

...

Samuel Johnson Hale
Born May 21, 1821
Died December 1888
Born in East Tennessee
Martha Hale
Wife of Samuel J. Hale
Daughter of E.W. Powell
Born January 24, 1825
Died May 13, 1888

Edward Douglas Hale
Infant son of Samuel J. and
Martha H. Hale
Born September 2, 1853
Died October 25, 1854

THANKS TO MARSHEL ROY CUNNINGHAM FOR SUPPLYING THIS INFORMATION

legacies we have in the Montevallo area, and it's doubtful that there is any other one that is in more need of proper conservation, restoration, and preservation.

If you have any interest in becoming involved with protecting and maintaining this valuable connection to Montevallo's earliest years, either with the gift of time or treasure, please contact any officer or director of the Montevallo Historical Society.

There is precedent in Montevallo for preserving and then perpetually caring for historic cemeteries for the benefit of future generations.

PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE





The XAT fraternity completed their self-appointed mission of cleaning up and restoring King Cemetery 50 years ago. Since then the University of Montevallo has done a fine job of keeping it maintained and viable for the future.



October 10, 1968

THE ALABAMIAN, Alabama College

King Cemetery To Be Restored

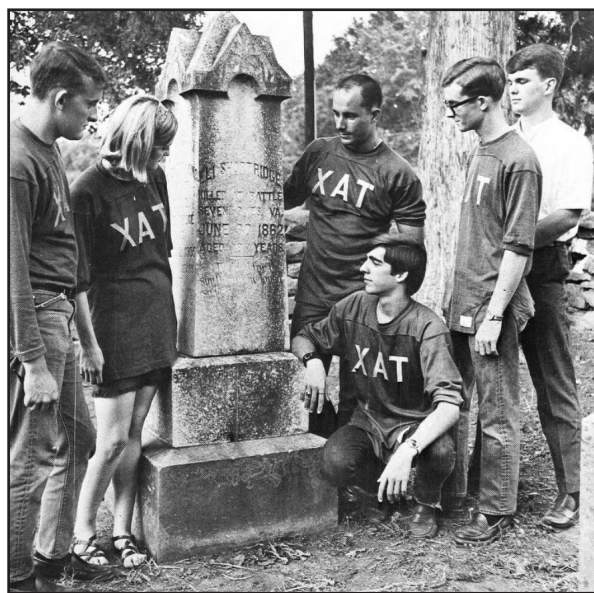
By Keith Harrelson

The members of Alabama College's newest fraternity, Chi Alpha Tau, have taken tools in hand and have made definite plans for their first real service project. The King family cemetery, located behind the Home Economics Lab, has fallen into such a state of disrepair that no one seems to have much respect for it anymore. The gate has rusted from its hinges, the dead leaves have buried the slab markers, and time's stain has obscured the inscriptions. The degree of insolence has even reached the point where the Home Economics people are now hanging their wet string mops over the wall to dry.

But, deep in the noble hearts of the brothers of Chi Alpha Tau lies a throbbing respect for the historically deceased. They have recognized the need expressed by the ghost of Edmund King, who lies twiddling his bony thumbs in displeased insomnia. He is kept awake by the creaking of the gate, the rustling of the leaves, and the constant dripping of the mop.

XAT has seen the opportunity to put this fine man and his

relatives back into their state of eternal slumber. Therefore, negotiations are proceeding to procure tools and materials needed to return the cemetery to a decent condition. The project calls for careful cleaning of markers, repairing and replacing of wall masonry, repair of broken tombstones, fixing of



the gate, and possible re-sodding of the grass. All this work will be done in a manner that will ultimately insure the retention of the graveyard's historical appeal and charm.

Work is scheduled to begin very soon, and it is likely some of Chi Alpha Tau's upcoming pledges will have an opportunity to scrub inscriptions by midnight moonlight. In any case, though, the fraternity will soon be hard at work – most of them are dying to get busy.

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--- Fourth General Meeting of 2018 ---

Sunday, October 21, 2018 • Parnell Library 2:00 pm

Program Leaders: Clark Hultquist & Carey Heatherly
Co-Authors of Images of America – Montevallo

Topic: “In the News”

Montevallo Media & the Crafting of Local Identity

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



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