

# THE VOICE

of the *Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and  
Cobb Memorial Archives*

## THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Malinda Powers*

Normally, our front page is reserved for information concerning our upcoming program. But these are not normal times. In light of the unforeseen consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are necessarily postponing our program originally scheduled for April 26 until the Fall. At our quarterly meeting on October 25, Dr. Steve Goodson of the University of West Georgia in Carrollton will be speaking on the life and times of Hank Williams. One of Alabama's most beloved native sons, Williams' short but legendary career is a favorite topic of Dr. Goodson, longtime history professor at UWG.

Another consequence of the current national emergency is the postponement of our sixth annual Bus Trip. Instead of June, we have rescheduled our trip for October 10 – 14. By that time, this current crisis will hopefully be behind us and we can enjoy cooler weather and colorful fall scenery as we drive through North Alabama and Tennessee! Another advantage to

postponement is having more time to recruit additional participants. At this time, we are booked at two-thirds of our capacity of 40, and we'd love to fill up the bus! These trips serve as our annual fundraiser to support certain projects that we otherwise would not be able to undertake. Please consider joining us this year, or recommend us to a friend who enjoys travel. The hallmark of our trips is an emphasis on history! We deep-dive into specific topics, such as this year's "Creek Indians in Alabama" and provide on-board resources and unique opportunities to learn and have fun along the way! Check out our website for more information. Deadline to register is August 31st.

Due to the growing success of the Bradshaw Library's Summer Reading program, they are no longer able to host our summer program due to meeting space constraints. Last year marked our first experience with our off-site summer program at the Fredonia Community Clubhouse and New Hope Rosenwald School. It was

a resounding success! This year, we're planning another offsite program in July. Details will be on our website by the end of May and will be published in our Summer Edition of "The VOICE".

Finally, our Board of Directors will work this year to formulate a long-range plan for our organization. CVHS was founded in 1955, which means we have a special 75th anniversary coming up in ten years. During this calendar year we'll be launching our framework for the future: "2020 Vision". We not only want to endure, but we want to continue to thrive as we proactively seek opportunities to preserve, promote and protect our local and regional heritage.

We'd love to hear from you! Contact me with your questions or suggestions at [president@cvhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:president@cvhistoricalsociety.org).

*We are doing our part to protect the health of our CVHS members and local community by cancelling our spring quarterly meeting. Together, we must all make an effort to stop the spread of this virus by following the current recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).*

### **NO SPRING QUARTERLY MEETING.**

*Please protect yourselves and others from the COVID-19 virus by practicing social distancing.*

*Stay home, and stay safe.*

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## 1918 FLU EPIDEMIC TOOK TOLL IN VALLEY by Ron Williams

*Editor's note: The following article was originally published in the Valley Times-News many years ago, at the time Ron Williams wrote a weekly column, "Past Times", on local history. Because we are currently enduring a pandemic, we wanted an article in this issue about the 1918 experience to give a local perspective for current events. From home, we searched for information through the Alabama Virtual Library available through the Bradshaw Library and decided Ron's article was the most informative for our place and time. We appreciate his permission to reprise his timely article in our newsletter.*

On Nov. 11, 1918, at 12:00 noon, the spindles of Riverview Mill came to a screeching halt. Men and women filled the streets, converging in front of the new store to celebrate the end of World War I. A newspaper account of the day states, "This was followed at 2:30 by a victory parade over the village headed by Old Glory, the band, and the 'Kaiser's Goat', and followed by all the people in Riverview that the 'flu' would let loose."

Those were the two big events in the Valley, as well as across the world, in 1918. The Great War and the flu. They were closely related.

Spanish Influenza was the flu of the epidemic that swept America and the world in 1918 and 1919. It was thought to have originated in Spain, but recent studies indicate that the pandemic started on a spring day in Kansas at the Fort Riley Army Base, where over 100 men fell ill by noon on March 11. It was the beginning of the worst epidemic that America had ever known.

The War was not the number one killer of man that year. All of the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century combined do not match the death toll of the Spanish Flu. Six hundred seventy-five thousand Americans died. In New York, on one day alone, 850 people succumbed. The U.S. was hardest hit in the month of October, when 50,000 men and women perished.

Closer to home, we put faces to those numbers. The cemeteries tell the story. The number of aging stone markers engraved with death dates of 1918 is staggering. The flu was no respecter of persons. Young mothers,

old men, children- all were victims. As I scan period newspapers at the Cobb Memorial Archives in Valley, I notice the obituaries: "Mrs. E.J. Gilbert died Sunday. Mrs. Gilbert leaves to mourn her loss her husband and five small children, one of whom is dangerously ill of pneumonia (a complication of the flu)." "Mrs. Emmett Workman died Monday morning at her home two miles south of Fairfax of influenza. She leaves a husband and five children." There was Mrs. James A. Weaver, Mrs. W. Griggs Shaefer, and many, many more.

Valley schools were closed for weeks to prevent spread of the dreaded disease. It was considered your patriotic duty to cover your nose and mouth when you sneezed or coughed. If you were in the presence of someone who did not follow this rule, it was suggested that you immediately cover your own face and leave the premises. G.S. Harris, superintendent of Lanett Mill, issued this warning, "This disease is not one to be toyed with and I now warn those people who have been fortunate so far that unless you are extremely careful you may go down within the next twelve hours." He went on to instruct people to avoid needless crowding, to keep cool when they walked and warm when they rode or slept. "Do not hang around the streets exposing others if you have influenza," he said, "Go to bed, and warn your neighbor."

The late Minnie Hodnett, who lived through those days, remembered that you could hear the screaming and crying in the Fairfax Village when death came to a loved one. She said that so many were dying that the automated hearse

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Find us on Facebook and visit our website at <http://cvhistoricalsociety.org>

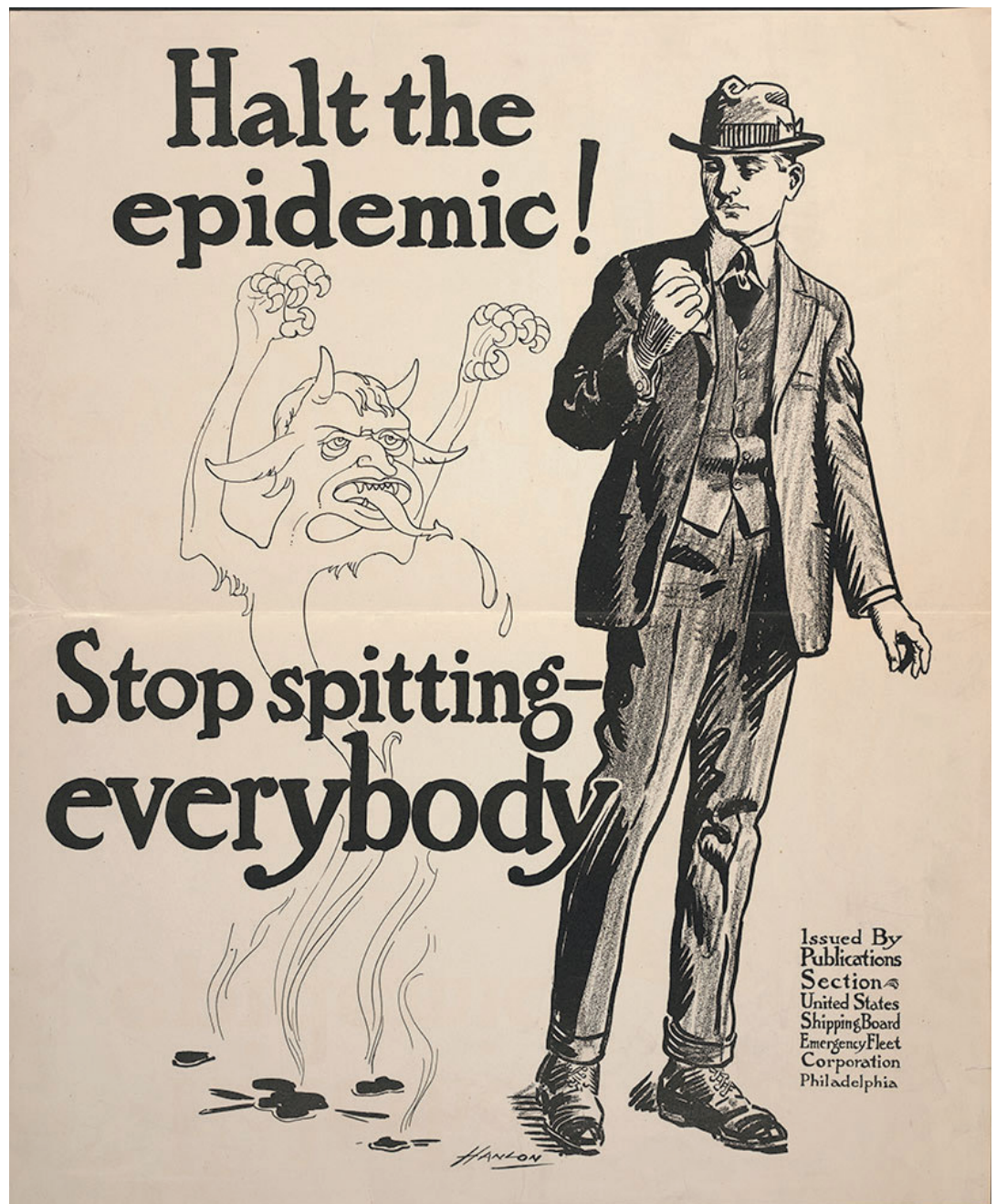
**MISSION STATEMENT:** As a non-profit membership organization, the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society seeks to preserve and promote the history and heritage of Chambers County, Alabama, West Point, Georgia, and the greater Chattahoochee Valley area. CVHS produces and sells historical books and media, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and presents programs with speakers on historical topics of local and regional interest.

**VISION STATEMENT:** Having been in continuous operation since its founding in 1953, the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society strives to uphold the vision of its founders while posturing the organization for growth in the 21st century.

was too busy to assist everyone. Bodies had to be carried to the cemetery in wagons. A Langdale woman remembered the wagons, "filled with coffins," going by each day. Doctors were scarce, as they were needed for the war effort. Lafayette Lanier Jr., went to Montgomery to plead with them to let Dr. Morgan return to Fairfax since they had no doctor at all. He was allowed to stay on until the sickness had subsided. The epidemic vanished in 1919 as quickly as it had begun. The disease had not been limited to the U.S., however. It had been carried all over the world in the lungs of the "dough boys" sent to fight in the Great War. It is estimated that 20 million died worldwide. Some state that 20 million died in India alone, bringing the possible total to an unbelievable 40 million people. The Spanish Flu had taken its toll on the world.

1918 United States poster created in response to the flu epidemic.

*Editor's Note: Trails In History, published by the Lee County Historical Society, this month contains an article by Teresa Paglione entitled "The Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 in Alabama." Teresa noted that the first reported case in Alabama was in Huntsville, on September 28, 1918. By October 5, more than 300 cases had been documented in north Alabama with seven deaths in twenty-four hours. By October 13, Huntsville was under siege and sending appeals to Montgomery for health professionals from druggists to physicians to come to the aid of Huntsville. By October 22 Montgomery reported more than 12,000 cases and health officials had established a curfew. By October 31, Wetumpka was expressing fears that labor due to the flu was not available to harvest the large corn crop. Florence, Alabama reported that its lumber mill was running three shifts a day to supply lumber for coffins.*





## FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS-

### *A Reflection on Englishman Mike Gee's Recent Visit to "The Valley" By Malinda Powers*

It all began with a letter. Jack Gee sat at the small desk in his private bedroom at the Magnolia Club, former guesthouse of West Point Manufacturing Company. On the club's letterhead stationary he penned a quick letter home to wife Nora before retiring that evening in the late spring of 1949.

*Tuesday, May 31<sup>st</sup>/49*

*My dear Nora,*

*I'm sitting on my bed in this lovely house that is owned by the Wellington Sears Co., (Boston-based sales agency for WPMC) one of the biggest groups of Cotton Mills in USA. They insisted on putting us up for the night here and my word what a wonderful place it is. I couldn't possibly describe it to you in a letter. Brown (his traveling partner) is having a cold bath, so I thought I would just write you a few lines. We came down to Atlanta on Sunday...then came on here this AM. It's terribly hot 85 in the shade today but I'm standing it alright. I'm having a wonderful experience something that money couldn't buy. We've been through a shed today with 2500 looms all under one roof (most likely Lanett Mill).*

*Tell Barbara (his young daughter, obviously interested in cotton plants) I'm sorry her cotton plant is only about 8 inches high now round here...they don't pick here until July. I'm going back to New York tomorrow and shall arrive there on Thursday night (via the Southern Crescent railway). I may not post this until I get there but I just felt like writing to you. Goodnight love.*



*Larry Duncan (center) welcomes Mike and Roz Gee to his home in West Point, formerly known as the Magnolia Club.*

For whatever reason Jack's letter was never posted. Upon the conclusion of his fact-finding tour of the U.S. textile industry, he returned to his home in Manchester, UK, where he eventually rose to Senior Manager with Fothergill & Harvey, one of England's premier textile manufacturers. When he passed away in 1969, his letter and several WPMC booklets from his visit to West Point two decades earlier were stowed away with other memorabilia in a trunk.

Upon going through his father's effects, son Mike—who was only eight years of age at the time of his father's visit here—discovered the letter and determined the brochures should be returned to our locale. To that end, he contacted CVHS, which ultimately led to his visit here several weeks ago.

I met Mike Gee and his lovely wife, Roz, at the former Magnolia Club in downtown West Point on a Friday afternoon. Having been painstakingly restored and exquisitely furnished with antiques and artwork, it is now the private residence/office/seasonal Bed & Breakfast of longtime CVHS supporter Larry Duncan. During the

tour, Larry pointed out the bedroom in which Mike's father most likely stayed, with a lovely view of the Chattahoochee River. It was touching to watch Mike sit upon the bed, quietly imagining his father writing to his mother seventy years earlier. Afterwards, several of us entertained our English guests with true Southern hospitality, thanks to a wonderful home-cooked dinner at the home of my mother.

The next morning fellow CVHS board member and veteran Valley Times-News writer Wayne Clark and I led our guests on a guided walking tour of downtown West Point. Among the points of interest were the Chattahoochee River, the railroad, and the former headquarters of West Point Manufacturing Company on Third Avenue. We told them of the history of the railroads, the floods, and the cyclone that destroyed the Opera House, which was located on the third floor of the Lanier Bank Building, directly above the WPMC corporate office! A visit to Fort Tyler helped our visitors understand the effect of the Civil War on our nation.

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Mrs. Crowder (far right) hosts a Southern dinner for guests (left to right) Wayne Clark, Malinda Powers, Roz and Mike Gee, and Eddie Lanier



Malinda Powers with Roz and Mike Gee at the Powerhouse on the Langdale Mill site



The Gee's at Fort Tyler



Taking a souvenir photo at Langdale Mill

Afterwards, we drove down the Valley, passing former mill sites and driving through the former mill villages. We pointed out Shawmut Circle and drove around Boulevard in Fairfax, noting how the “company” built schools, stores, post offices, scout huts, and lodge halls for each mill town. In every town a “union” church was built, rotating Sunday meetings for the different congregations until each eventually grew large enough to construct its own building. Perhaps the most appreciated amenity provided in this paternalistic society was that of recreation teams, leagues, and facilities. Sports was, is, and most likely forever will be, a hallmark of the Valley. In each town we pointed out the operative houses forming the residential sections of each village. These were built by the company and leased to mill workers until the 1950’s at which time the occupants had a chance to purchase their houses outright. The Gees were most impressed by the generous size of the yards and the distances between the houses. In England, they said, mill village houses were basically row houses with only a small strip of yard between them.

We concluded our tour at the former Langdale Mill site, currently in the process of being demolished. Mr. Gee was born in Lancashire and a longtime resident of Manchester, the heart of England’s centuries-old textile industry. He commented that while some of the old mills had been razed, a considerable number had been spared and repurposed. He talked proudly of the Helmshore Mills Textile Museum in Lancashire where residents and visitors today can learn about their vanishing heritage that once shaped not only their island nation but the entire world during the Industrial Revolution. Google this museum and watch its amazing video. Lancashire represents what communities *can* accomplish to preserve and share their heritage: Begin with a noble vision, nurture with deep-seated dedication, and be willing to invest lots of hard work. A daunting challenge for sure. But, isn’t it worth it to at least try?





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# THE VILLAGE BEAUTIFUL

By Wayne Clark

In 1920, Lanett Cotton Mills and the Lanett Bleachery and Dye Works produced a brochure entitled “The Village Beautiful.” It was well illustrated with photographs. Some of the homes, apartments, and downtown business block that were featured in the publication are recognizable today.

The business block, also known as the Fraternal Hall and Stores Building, was built by WPMC in 1906. In 1920, Swint’s Pharmacy, the C. I. DeLoach Dry Goods Store, the Lanett Post Office and the Chambers County Creamery were on the Ground Floor. A fledging Little newspaper known as the Chattahoochee Valley Times was on the top floor.

No doubt kids from the day loved to come to the downtown area. Across the street from the business block, where the Lanett City Schools administrative office is located today, was an indoor swimming pool.

According to “The Village Beautiful”, mill village homes were well ventilated, heated and lighted. The Company made efforts to keep them up to date with the most modern Conveniences. “Modern industrialism recognizes the fact that the human element is paramount,” the brochure reads. “Every effort should be made to safeguard the health and happiness of our employees.”

“Lanett is justly proud of its baseball team,” The Village Beautiful continues, “because of the games won, the high caliber of team play and the clean manly sportsmanship of the players. On the team are players who have played at Auburn, Georgia Tech and LSU, along with some home-grown boys.”

“When you arrive here,” reads the brochure, “you are made to feel at home and quickly become one of us. Nothing but a stubborn old turtle could stay inside his shell in this village.”

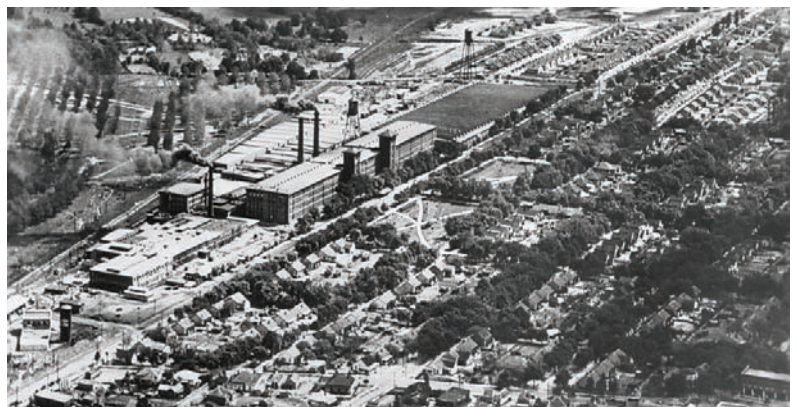
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*The Modern House of a Manager in Lanett Mill*



*The Modern House of a Worker at Lanett Mill*



*Aerial View of Lanett*



*Fraternal Hall and Stores Building Lanett with Lanett Business Men*

Join us for a truly Unique Travel Opportunity!

**October 10 – 14, 2020**

# **The Creek Indians in Alabama:**

## **A Five-Day Motor Coach Immersion Experience**

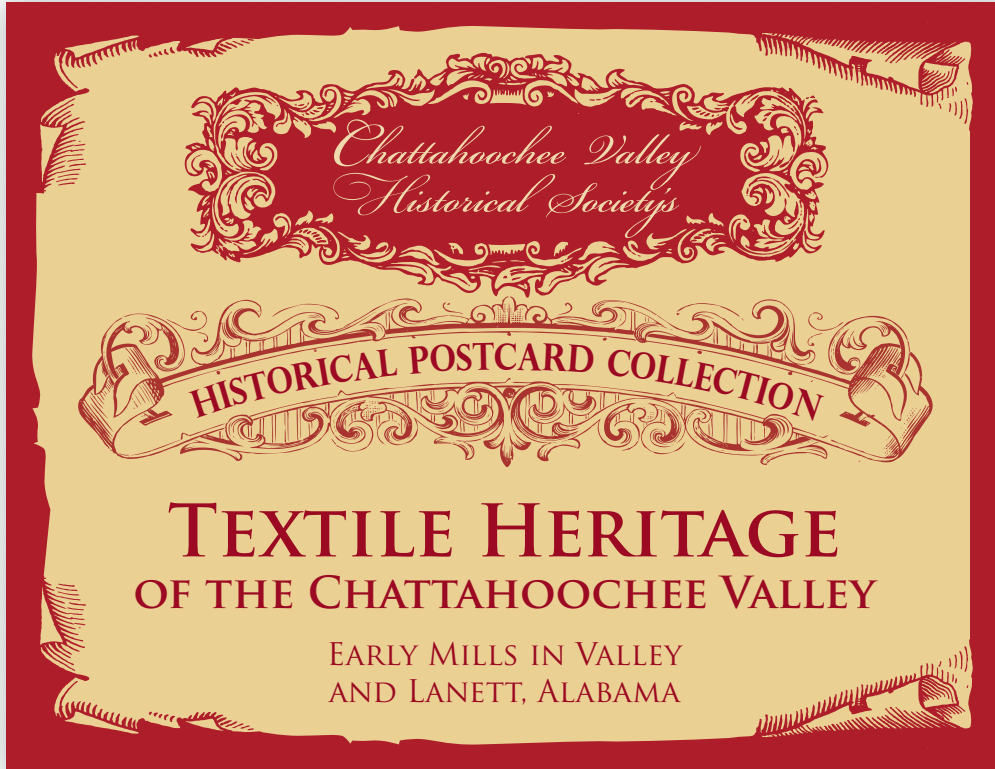
*From nationally prominent sites to country back-roads, we'll explore the people, places and amazing stories that transformed two nations over two centuries ago!*

### **Featuring**

- Ancestry of the Creek People at **Russell Cave National Monument** and **Moundville Archaeological Park**
- A visit with modern-day Creeks at the **Poarch Creek Indian Reservation and Museum**
- Re-created **Fort Mims, Fort Mitchell, and Fort Jackson**
- **Chattahoochee Indian Heritage Center** commemorating the *Trail of Tears*
- The **Hermitage**, Tennessee home of General Andrew Jackson
- Southwest Alabama museums in **St. Stephens** and **Clark County**
- **Holy Ground Battlefield Park**
- Driving tours of **Autosee** and **Calabee Creek** battlegrounds
- Overnight at **Wind Creek Casino & Hotel** in **Atmore**

**For full itinerary go to [www.cvhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.cvhistoricalsociety.org)**

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