

THE VOICE

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

"FORGOTTEN ALABAMA" *Presenter Glenn Wills*

The Summer program of CVHS will be held virtually on July 24th, at 3:00 PM (EDT). Our presenter will be Glenn Wills. Mr. Wills is one of the founding administrators of the Facebook page "Forgotten Alabama™". This page was purposefully created for Facebook users to post photographs of various places in the State of Alabama that are now in states of disrepair or neglect. "Forgotten Alabama™" is one of the largest, most interactive pages of its kind on Facebook, with over 284,600 members as of June 2022.

While born out of state, Glenn Wills has spent nearly all his life in Alabama (his mother being a native of Lee County). He grew up in Huntsville, AL, attending S.R. Butler High School and later graduating from the University of Alabama at Huntsville. He then went on to work in the media industry in Birmingham (originally as a part-time tape editor and later a videographer). Eventually, he was hired by the local NBC-affiliate in Birmingham, Alabama, as a satellite truck engineer. As these trucks frequently traveled throughout the state, Glenn spent a lot of time getting acquainted with the architecture and scenery of the entire state (both rural and urban areas). It was his appreciation and concern for

the many dilapidated and neglected buildings that he encountered in these travels that gave him the idea to create a Facebook page to encourage their restoration, preservation, and appreciation.

The page that is now "Forgotten Alabama™" was originally founded as a "fan page" in 2013. By September of 2014, however, Wills modified it to a "group page", which now anyone on Facebook can join. The page currently has over 284,600 members (as of mid-June 2020). It is the largest Facebook group of its genre in the entire United States. The page has a group of administrators who oversee membership and review all submitted posts. Users can upload pictures of any ruined or neglected historical landmark in Alabama (pending administrator approval).

In addition to his management of the Facebook page, Mr. Wills is also the author of several books. His published books (in order) include *Forgotten Alabama* (Strange Wonderful Bird Press, 2016), *More Forgotten Alabama* (Strange Wonderful Bird Press, 2017 OoS), and *200 Years of Forgotten Alabama* (Blue Rooster Press,

2019). He is currently finishing a fourth book entitled *Finding Forgotten Alabama*, to be released by Blue Rooster Press in August of this year.

Our virtual presentation will last approximately one hour (with Glenn's power points lasting approximately 45 to 50 minutes). He often presents to different groups and organizations throughout Alabama and usually focuses specifically on the area in which he is presenting. For this presentation, Glenn is especially knowledgeable about this area. His mother is an Auburn native, and much of her family came from Lee and Chambers County.

Join us for this very informative and interesting presentation on July 24th.

To attend this virtual meeting email ccpowers02@gmail.com prior to 12:00 PM noon (EDT) on Sunday, July 24th. You will then be sent the Zoom link with instructions regarding how to join the meeting.

THE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY MEETING

Sunday, July 24th, 2022

3:00 p.m. EDT (2:00 CDT)

VIRTUAL MEETING

CORNERSTONES FOR EARLY COTTON MILLS

The following articles relate to a red-letter day in the southeastern corner of Chambers County, Alabama. It is the day the cornerstones of both Riverdale and Langdale Mills were laid. This day was a big boost for the area which was just recovering from the Civil War. This day would impact the Chattahoochee Valley like no other and would impact the history of the communities for well over 100 years.

Rome Tri-weekly Courier, Tuesday Morning, August 7, 1866

“Manufacturing in the South

We learn with pleasure that on the first of August instant, a grand affair came off near West Point, Georgia. The corner stone of the Chattahoochee Manufacturing Company (Langdale Mill) and also of the Alabama and Georgia Manufacturing Company (Riverdale Mill), was laid on the same day by the Masonic Fraternity. Most worshipful Deputy Grandmaster Boyd, acting for the Grand Master of the state aided by the West Point Lodge, and a large number of the fraternity from Alabama and Georgia, many of them in full regalia, officiated upon the occasion. The ceremonies were admirably performed, and the occasion will long be remembered by the immense concourse of people who assembled to witness them.

These two cotton factories are located in a remarkable healthy and picturesque section of the country, a few miles below West Point, near the railroad, on the Chattahoochee River. The waterpower which is easily controlled is sufficient to turn one hundred thousand spindles at either locality, and the water of the dams furnishes slack water navigation to West Point, thus making them admirable locations for manufacturing purposes.” –*Columbus Enquirer*

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The Columbus Daily Enquirer on Sunday August 5, 1866, added the following detail of the day of the laying of the cornerstones:

“Dinner being announced, the people returned to an immense boarding house just erected for the orphan children to be connected with the factory, where a repast of the richest viands was spread adequate to feed at least

three thousand people, and where, in answer to the prayer of Grand Master Boyd, in laying the corner stone, ‘the people were blessed with the corn of plenty, the wine of refreshment, and the oil of joy,’ and we might add with plenty of good pound cake and ice lemonade thrown in. So passed the joyous day, until the evening was come, when the young people retired to the residence of the gallant officer, Col. George Huguley, whose excellent lady gave them a large party, and the ‘old folks’ went home to fix up for subscribing for company stock.”

NOTE: The orphan children mentioned, I believe, would be reference to the many children orphaned by the Civil War, which had ended just a year earlier. It was said that no Southern family was left untouched by the Civil War. I, personally, had never heard this bit of local history before in regard to the boarding house being first considered for orphans.

Also, child labor was used in cotton mills until after the turn of the 20th Century.

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The below article is of interest as well. I did not realize that almost 3 years after the laying of the cornerstones, that the mills were still being built.

The Lagrange Reporter, February 5, 1869

“West Point Enterprise

Bridge over the Chattahoochee, A female College, Two Cotton Factories in Progress of Erection, All Since the War Ended

It is a matter of interest and pleasure to every true friend of progress to witness the innumerable manifestations of progress which are being made all over the South, a

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Find us on Facebook and visit our website at <https://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 newspaper, 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.

section of this great country so long weighed down by its impoverished condition. But recently emerged from a disastrous and destructive war, in which they lost the great bulk of their property, the people of the South are showing to the world a vitality unprecedented in the annals of history—no people having ever shown a greater determination, being in a similar condition, to rise from the dust of humiliating poverty. It would seem that which appeared to be our greatest disaster in the destruction of a certain species of property, will result as the cause or means of our greatest prosperity. As a Georgian, we feel proud of the advanced position our beloved old state has taken towards becoming really independent. —She is truly entitled to the distinction given her being the “Empire State of the South.”—Our people are moving on to an advanced position in the race of progress, and in a few years the evidence of wealth and prosperity will be seen all over the state.

We are led to the foregoing reflections by a visit to our sister town of West Point, on Friday and Saturday last—two days pleasantly and we hope profitably, went among friends and acquaintances. Unpretentiously, but steadily and perseveringly, her people have striven, since the war ended, to better their condition, by building up the trade and commerce of their town. The closing of the war found them with nothing but their homes, some of their land, and others with naught but strong arms and willing hearts to work out their future destiny. Their bridge, spanning the river and dividing the town, was burned by Federal Forces. Undaunted, they set to work to rebuild it by a union of effort and purpose—by small subscriptions from the citizens of the town and of the vicinity, both in Georgia and Alabama.

In three months after the plan of raising the means for the erection of the bridge, costing nearly \$15,000.00, the work was completed and the people were passing over it.

They have also erected a large and spacious Female College in their midst, which now affords accommodations for a large and flourishing school under the direction of A.A.C.

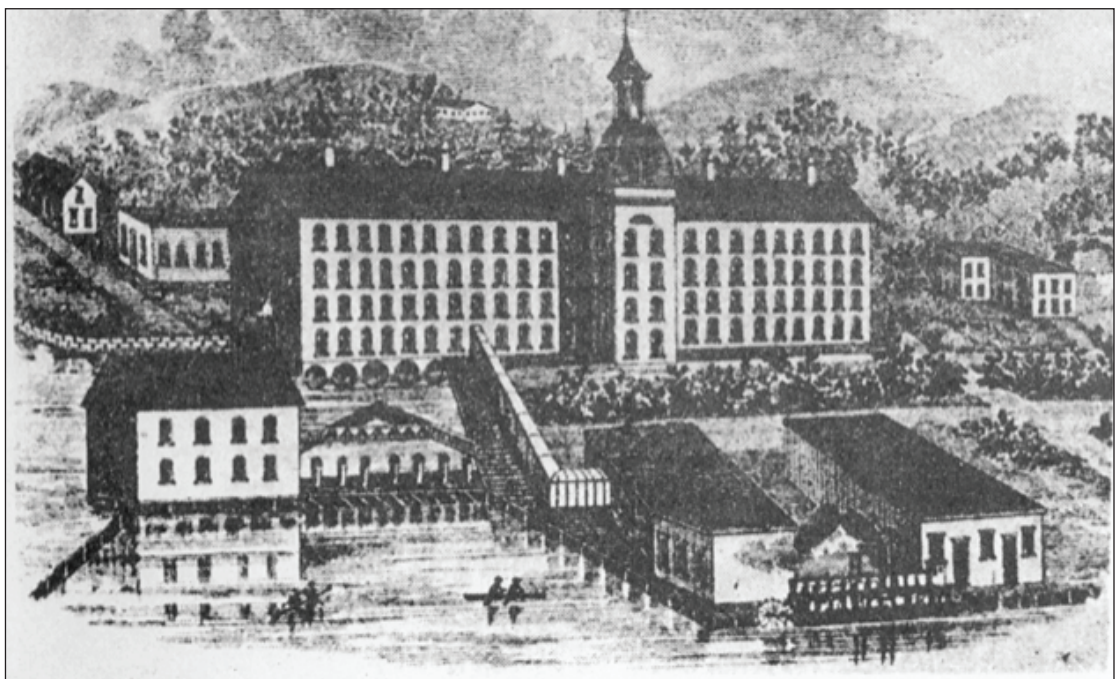
The Alabama-Georgia Mill, later known as Riverdale Mill, in the 19th Century.

Thompson, a gentleman long and successfully engaged in his profession.

But the two enterprises which shall have our most immediate attention in this article, are two cotton manufacturing companies, which were organized in March 1866, with capital stock, at present, amount respectively to \$100,000 and \$60,000. The factory building of the first is completed—the walls, roof and joists, &c, of the other are up and ready for the flooring, and we hope will soon be completed.

Alabama and Georgia Manufacturing Company (Riverdale Mill)

The buildings of this company are located between six and seven miles below West Point, on the West side of the Chattahoochee River. —The high water mark being the state line on that side of the river, and the building for the machinery being erected upon a foundation below that mark, the factory is located in Georgia, while the tenements for operatives, offices, &c are in the State of Alabama. The finger of Nature seems to have pointed out this locality as particularly adapted to, and intended for, manufacturing purposes. There is no better site to be found in this world. A shoal begins just above, while the prong of the river, running around the west side of 143 acres of land known as Campbell's Island, sub divides and forms a smaller island. Here in the main current of the stream, upon a solid rock basis, the foundations of the building are laid across the stream, the upper base wall forming also the dam, throwing the surplus water over a substantial dam into the lesser channel of the river, affording a head water of nine feet. The prong of the river on the west side of Campbell's Island is



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a natural canal taking in the greater bulk of the water, and therefore will afford sufficient power to propel a dozen factories in the driest season of the year.

As we have said, the upper base wall of the building, which is 210 feet in length, by 50 in breadth, forms also the dam, in which five extra eyes have been left for propelling as many more factories. These stone walls are of solid masonry, laid with cement, and are eight feet thick for several feet above the highest water-mark.—The thickness of the brick walls are graduated as they rise above the stone wall from four feet to eighteen inches in thickness.

The building is four stories in height, and is already completed, ready for the machinery to be put in. A tower had been run up with the building, on the upper side, for winding stairways, leaving the whole space in the main body of the building for machinery. The architecture has been designed with an eye to strength and durability as well as beauty. The floorings are well supported by heavy girders which are also sustained in the center with upright post along the whole length of the building. The flooring is doubled—first laid with 3 inch plank in the rough, and that floored over with well-seasoned and neatly dressed 2 inch flooring 4 inches in width—this making the whole strong enough to bear the heaviest machinery and capable of sustaining the severest jars or shocks. The whole building is well ventilated with large glass windows.

The tenant house for the operatives, seven in number, all ready for occupation.—There is also a large boarding house for operatives, containing 18 rooms and 17 fire-places.

The architect of this factory building is Mr. William Gabbett, of Atlanta; J.J. Harris, of Oak Bowery, Alabama, builder; and the masonry by M.F. Echols, of Opelika, Alabama. About \$77,000 have been, so far, expended by this company with the water wheel and the machinery yet to be purchased and out in position. When completed this will be one of the best cotton factories in the South, if the same judicious care is observed in the purchase and arranging of the machinery that has been in selection of the location and erection of the building.

We are informed that about \$30,000 of additional stock can be taken in this company by proper persons. The present

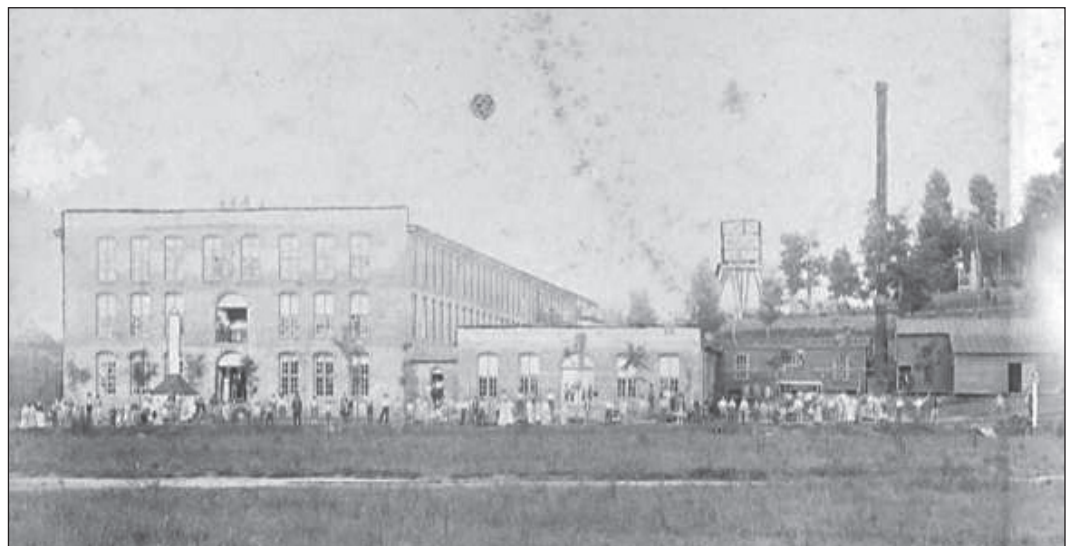
stockholders are not anxious to let in any more— preferring to have as few stock holders as possible, as we are certain it will be readily taken up by sagacious men, when it is known that additional stock will be received. The present stockholders are George Huguley (Father of George W. Huguley), M.T. Walker, Wm. H. Huguley, A.F. Kendrick, George W. Huguley, Wyche S. Jackson, Thomas F. Nolan, B.L. Turner, W.C. Lanier, B.L. Harris, A.H. Finley, and the estate of A.T. Zachary.

Chattahoochee Manufacturing Company (Langdale Mill)

The location of this factory is considered by some to be as favorable as its twin sister below. It is about 3 miles below West Point, on the same side of the river. Though not quite so large, it is nevertheless the equal of the other in point of structure of the building, &c.

It is four stories high, 162 feet in length, and 50 feet wide. It is covered in, the joists in position and flooring dried and ready to be laid. It also has a splendid water power, being situated on a descending shoal and built in the same style of architecture with the one below. Here we find the water inexhaustible. This company has a large boarding house ready for occupation costing about \$3,600, containing about 18 rooms. So far about \$45,000 have been expended. More stock can also be taken in this company and will be a splendid investment for any who have the capital. The water wheel has already been received and is a Leffel American Double Turbine.

The stockholders are: Elisha Trammell, L.B. Lovelace, N.L. Atkinson, Benjamin Johnson, W.C. Darden, A.H. Finley, James T. Moore, E.G. Richards, Lewis Schuessler, Jonathan Ware and B.L. Harris.”



A 19th Century Photo of the Langdale Mill, previously known as the Chattahoochee Manufacturing Company.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Malinda Powers*

Summer is now in full swing, having recently celebrated our nation's most patriotic holiday, the signing of our *Declaration of Independence*. As you know, what history records as the "American Revolution" began in the spring of 1775, when the first shots were fired at Lexington, Massachusetts. Over a year later, delegates from thirteen British colonies assembled in Philadelphia to declare their independence. Viewed as a seditious act by the Crown, these patriots were painfully aware they were risking everything—including their own lives—in pursuit of liberty and freedom. History records that the majority of these signers endured severe hardship, loss and deprivation for their audacious affront to the King. But for their courage, however, we might never have gained our independence. And so we celebrate!

Memories of past celebrations flood my mind. I grew up in the Fairfax community, where the majority of residents worked for "the company". Most of you will remember that each year the mills would shut down for an entire week, aka "Vacation Week".

For many, this meant an annual pilgrimage to Panama City Beach. Reservations had been made a year in advance. Family fun included the Miracle Strip Amusement Park, arcades, and "Goofy Golf". The highlight for adults, however, was to dine at Captain Anderson's Restaurant, home of the absolute best seafood on the planet according to most. Families would have "saved up" all year to splurge on an entire week of paradise!

My father, however, opted to avoid the crowded beach scene and, instead, planned a week-long work project each summer for our family to accomplish. Usually, this involved home improvement, such as building a gazebo or patio arbor. Poor man was never blessed with boys, but it is amazing what three little girls could get done.

For those families who enjoyed "Vacation Week" at home, the mill company's recreation



Rev. Hodgen and Mrs. Salley Sims at the yearly watermelon cutting during Vacation Week. Cobb Archives Collection

departments went all out with fun activities for all ages. There were tournaments and prizes galore! From community Bingo games to barnyard golf tournaments to watermelon seed-spitting contests, fun times abounded in the mill villages. The ultimate challenge, however, was to retrieve the dollar bill at the top of the "greasy pole". It was difficult to tell who had more fun, the determined young climber or the cheering bystanders!

These traditions are now only distant memories. Today, we can thank our local governments for helping keep this holiday special by providing amazing fireworks displays on the Fourth. Each year my family hauls our fold-up chairs to Valley to witness the extraordinary pyrotechnics. May God continue to bless America as we move forward!

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Yearly watermelon cutting in the Shawmut Community. Cobb Archives Collection

A bargain in fun

Vacation week events draw all ages

MANY budget-minded families divide their vacation week schedules between trips away and staying at home. Some remain nearby the entire time.

For all these families West Point's Department of Community Recreation offers one of the best summertime bargains available anywhere. It's the well-planned, well-rounded program of activities which goes into high gear when local textile machines stop for the annual Fourth of July holidays. Again

this year, recreation staffs in each of The Valley communities served a full course of interesting and entertaining events for both youngsters and grown-ups. And hundreds of mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters turned out to take part in them.

The vacation week schedule annually is a significant high point in a year-round industrial recreation program already recognized as the best in the nation. Some examples are shown here.



WATERMELON parties always attract good crowds. This year's cutting in Langdale was no exception. Biting into this big slice is little Lura Reed.



← **POOL** at Lanett spiced its vacation week schedule with penny scrambles, innertube races, watermelon tussles, diving contests, and freestyle races.

YUM! Yum! Some more Langdale watermelon eaters are Robert Hale, Sonny Atkins, LaVonne Brown, Barry West, Ken Norman, Randall Peacock. →

KEN Norman really likes watermelon. And this photo helps prove the point. Ken's father, Davis, is employed in the Langdale Mill weave department.



SHUFFLEBOARD players, enjoying Lanett's varied recreation facilities, are Shirley Duck (left) and Debby Broach.



MEASURING the toss during a boy's washer tournament in Fairfax are players Tommy Johnson and Frank Redd Jr.

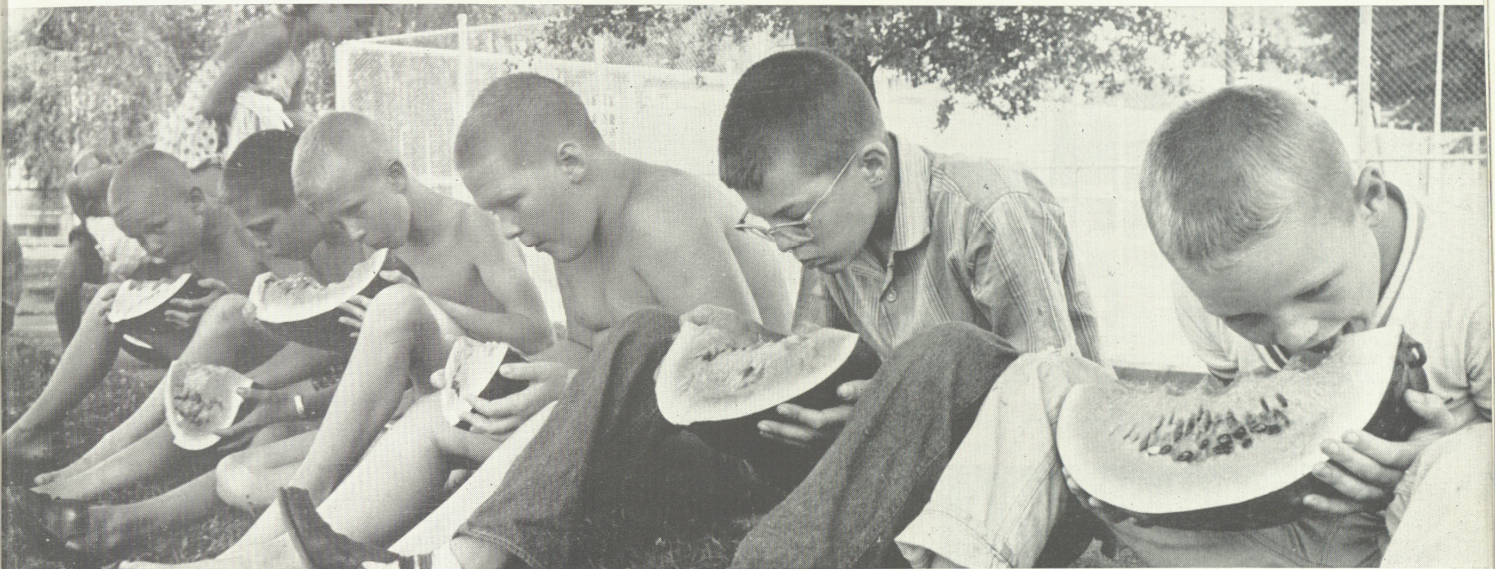




ROOK game keeps these boys busy in Lanett. Pictured clockwise are Johnny Boyd, Tommy Fields, Don Barker, Robert Burgess, Steve Willingham, Butch Arrington, and Skeeter Anderson.



DOMINO playing challenges Mike Farr, Chris Shaw, Charles Strother and Jerry Baldwin. They concentrate here during a tournament in Shawmut gymnasium. Looking on is Barry Farr.



DABBLING in the sand in Lanett, and enjoying it fully as much as those engaged in more rigorous activities, are (l. to r.) David Wayne, Dale Wayne, Tony Willingham, and Robert Davis.



FOLLOW-through is an important point in washer throwing. Here Frankie Waller shows good form during a tournament in Fairfax. To his left are William Ware and Tommy Johnson.

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LIBRARY TRAVEL EXHIBIT *by Wayne Clark*

VALLEY — Bradshaw-Chambers County Library has a current exhibit that's appropriate for the summer season, the time of year when people take the trip of a lifetime. Compiled by archivist Robin Watson, the exhibit is entitled "Going Places: Tales of Travel and Adventure Both Near and Far!!"

It fills the library's main display cases and will be on view for the remainder of the summer. It's worth a trip to the library to see it.

One exhibit recounts the mountain climbing experiences of Valley native Hugh Morton, who made trips to the earth's seven continents to achieve his goal of completing the Seven Summits Challenge. He started with Kilimanjaro in Africa in 1988 and finished with Vinson Massif in Antarctica in 1999. The climbing was the hard part, but getting there and returning was an adventure.

One of the cases tells of the trip people from Ireland made to the Valley in 2001. The Parnell Society made a trip to America to see the places where Charles Stewart Parnell visited in America. He's been called the uncrowned king of Ireland, and one of the places he visited in the 1870s was the peach farm of his older brother, John Parnell, which was located off River Road.

The current exhibit tells the story of Sally and Willy Creigh, two sisters from Mobile who traveled to see exotic places early in the 20th century. There's a photo of them riding camels with the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid of Giza behind them. The Creigh sisters were related to Virginia Glover Cook, wife of Batson-Cook founder Edmund Cook.

"They went to Egypt in 1907," Watson said. "This was well before King Tut's tomb was discovered. They were interesting people and had lived in Europe for a time."

Watson said she loved the photo of the two women on camels wearing the Edwardian fashions of the day.

Watson knows what it's like to be on a camel's back. She rode one in Jordan several years ago on a trip to the Middle East with retired Southern Union speech instructor Louise Cox.

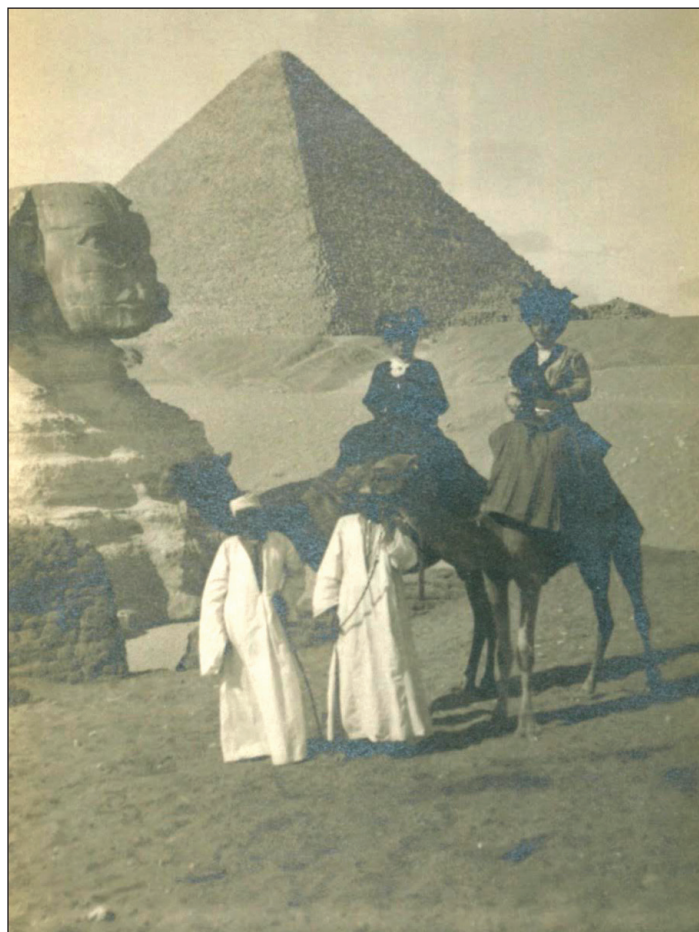
The display recounts the story of two local missionaries who traveled far and wide. Their names were Virginia Atkinson and Margaret Cook, youngest sister of Ellison "Dad" Cook, who wrote a popular column for *The Chattahoochee Valley Times*. By the 1930s, Cook and two other women from West Point, Mary Poer Oslin and Mrs. A.D. Ferguson, had tour businesses.

These tour directors would handle all the details for tours to places like Washington, D.C., New York City, Niagara

Falls, Canada, and far west destinations such as the Pacific coast where visitors could see the giant Redwood trees, the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone and the Sequoia National Park.

There's information on the first documented trip to the Valley by an American of European heritage. Benjamin Hawkins, an Indian agent for President George Washington, kept a journal of his trip along the west bank of the Chattahoochee in the fall of 1798. He crossed over streams the native Creeks knew by such names as Hal-0-wak-ee, O-soo-nip-ah and O-soon-a-wa-hatchee (now known as Moore's Creek). Hawkins described an impressive view of the river in what's now Langdale. One gets the same view today from the third floor of EAMC-Lanier Hospital.

One of the more interesting stories in the display is that of Arthur Mitchell. He was to politics what Joe Louis was to sports. Both Louis and Mitchell were born in the



*Sally and Willy Creigh visited Egypt in 1907.
Cobb Archives Collection*

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LaFayette area and moved north as part of the Great Migration in the early portion of the 20th century. Joe Louis went with his family to Detroit and became famous as one of the all-time greats as a boxer. Mitchell (1883-1968) grew up in Alabama and graduated from Tuskegee Institute before heading north. In 1934 he became the first African-American to be elected to the U.S. Congress as a Democrat. He served four terms and illustrated the shift among black voters to the Democratic Party. African-Americans who had previously been elected to Congress were Republicans. Mitchell was the only member of Congress who was African-American from 1935 to 1943. He was a strong supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and gave a seconding speech in support of FDR at the 1936 Democratize Convention.

Mitchell is in the current travel exhibit due to a trip he took by rail in 1937. He was traveling from Chicago to Hot Springs, Arkansas on the Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. He began the trip in a VIP Pullman car near the front of the train. He had boarded the train with two first-class tickets for the entire journey, but when the train crossed the Mason-Dixon line he was ordered onto a passenger car near the back of the train that had been reserved for blacks. Mitchell sued the railroad over this, and after being denied in lower courts fought it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where in 1941 he won in the now-famed Mitchell v. United States court case. The high court ruled that black passengers had a right to the same accommodations and treatment whites were given. Mitchell hailed the decision as "a step in the destruction of Jim Crow himself." Even so, the Interstate Commerce Commission did not prohibit segregation on interstate buses or trains and in the public waiting rooms of railroads or bus stations until 1955.

The exhibit has information on a trip West Point Manufacturing Company President George H. Lanier made to Rotary International's Convention in 1921. It took place in Scotland.

Around the same time, Shaefer Heard of the West Point Lions Club represented local Lions at the national convention in Oakland, California.

Many local people will remember a trip taken by two local men in the 1970s. Freddy Hamby and Charles "Seagull" Dailey qualified for a new record in the Guinness Book of World Records. The category they entered was the world's longest taxi ride. They began the journey in West Point, Georgia with a goal of going through towns named West Point in a number of different states. They had to cut their planned trip short when one of the two men became ill, but they traveled far enough to qualify for the record. It's

been broken many times since, but Hamby and Dailey had it for a time.

Anyone who was taught by Joe Hall at Valley High in the 1960s and 1970s know what an exceptional teacher he was. He was ambidextrous. When he was writing something on the left side of the chalkboard he would do it with his left hand, and when he was on the right side he write with his right hand. Mr. Joe always talked to his students about wanting to do some traveling when he retired. They took care of it for him, arranging trips by Greyhound bus out west and even a plane flight to Hawaii. Mementoes from those trips are in one of the display cases.

Such trips were well deserved. Hall had served as a chaperone on many trips taken by VHS seniors to Washington and New York.

The exhibit tells an interesting story about a woman from Standing Rock named Virginia Hines. In the 1930s, she was part of something known as the Georgia Caravan, which took bus trips with students to the western U.S. They would travel by day and camp out during the night. "She went on all kinds of neat trips when she was older," Watson said.

There's a bit of humor in an exchange between early 20th century editors of The LaFayette Sun and The Roanoke Leader.

Mr. Stevenson of the Roanoke paper poked some fun at Sun editor Sam Oliver, who had just gotten a new car in 1907. "While spinning the thing around the courthouse square, the pesky thing threw a wrench at him, mashing his mouth," Stevenson wrote. "Better trade it in for a mule."

This drew a response from Oliver in the next edition of The Sun. "Thanks for the advice, Brother Stevenson, but I'd rather run the risk of being struck by an automobile than being kicked by a mule."

Watson said she really enjoyed getting the exhibit together. "From start to finish it took a couple of months," she said. "We wanted to do something for the summer season, and we first needed to settle on a theme. We went back to collections to see what we had on the subject of traveling. We had no trouble in filling up nine display cases."

The vertical case has the uniform Carol Wood of West Point wore when she was a ticket agent for Eastern Airlines in Atlanta.

■

PASSENGER PIGEONS WINTERED HERE *by Ron Williams*

On September 1, 1914, Martha died.

Though in her youth she was well traveled, the last years of her life she resided solely in Cincinnati. Martha was the namesake of Martha Washington and her lineage dated back to before the Mayflower.

She was preceded in death by both parents and all siblings. She left no children.

The body was prepared, and visitation has been held from 9:00am-5:00pm for over 100 years at the Smithsonian Institution.

Martha was the last of the passenger pigeons. She was found dead in the corner of her cage at 1 o'clock on that September day at the Cincinnati Zoo, bringing an end to the struggle to preserve the species.



*Passenger pigeon by John Henry Hintermeister, 1908.
Published by Church and Dwight company.*

Passenger pigeons, not to be confused with carrier pigeons, were native to America. They get their name because they migrated; they were birds of passage.

Early American explorers were astounded at the vastness of the flocks, which frequently numbered hundreds of thousands and sometimes reached into the millions. Some migrating flocks reportedly took three days to pass overhead and left paths of destruction in their wake sometimes compared to violent storms.

Their numbers at one time are estimated to have grown to five billion, and the path to their extinction is still baffling.

The bird, which was as large as a chicken and somewhat resembled a mourning dove, though its call was shrill and scolding rather than beautiful, is described in a 1961 edition of *American Heritage* as “tapered at both ends like a bobbin, with its long, pointed tail accounting for nearly half its length, which was between 16 and 17 inches. It measured about 2 feet between the tips of its similarly tapered and pointed wings... The male passenger pigeon had a rich bluish-slate back and a ‘wine-colored’ or ‘reddish fawn’ breast with sheens of golden bronze and purple bronze on the sides of its neck. The female was less vivid. Set in the characteristically mild physiognomy of a dove, its eyes... were brilliantly fiery orange.”

The loud cries of the birds could be heard miles away, and as people approached a nesting site they would be forced to scream to communicate. The trees would be covered with birds like bees in a hive for miles. It would be dangerous to walk in the forest for fear of being killed by huge falling limbs and trees.

“With the departure of the pigeons, wrote Charlton Ogburn, Jr., in *American Heritage*, “a scene of weird devastation remained. Every plant was killed. Droppings to a depth of several inches covered the ground which was further littered with limbs; for miles upon end the forest would appear to have been struck by a violent hurricane.”

The Valley area in the early 19th Century served as a roosting site. In an 1897 article from the *Opelika Post* written by T.J. Tillery, who was interviewing pioneer John Floyd, the following eyewitness account is recorded of a roosting that took place on Halawalka Creek at Bean’s Mill in Lee County, Alabama:

“In 1838 for four or five nights the pigeons were so numerous that branches were broken by them where they roosted, and tall hickories a foot in diameter bent like twigs. This caused great excitement, and the birds were killed at night by the thousands. They could be heard two or three miles away and made a canopy that hid the stars.”

The vast numbers of the pigeons demanded large, forested areas if the birds were to survive. As the land gave way to

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farms, the days of the passenger pigeon were numbered. Hunting also hurried their demise.

It is said that Indians camped on the edge of nesting areas, and they kept hundreds of gallons of pigeon oil which they used as butter. The settlers followed suit, but it is believed that normal hunting would not have diminished their numbers. In the 1870s, professional hunters followed the birds, hunting them with nets, and providing feasts for large cities. One writer observed that the pigeons were so common in the home, at the inn and in the restaurant that the very mention of the name was sickening.

The flocks became smaller and smaller until finally everyone thought that they had just gone somewhere else. The unbelievable truth was that the birds that once blackened the sky for days, the flocks that accounted for up to 40% of birds in America were gone.

After the 19th Century drew to a close, small nesting flocks were so rare that they were reported in newspapers, and of course the hunters converged.

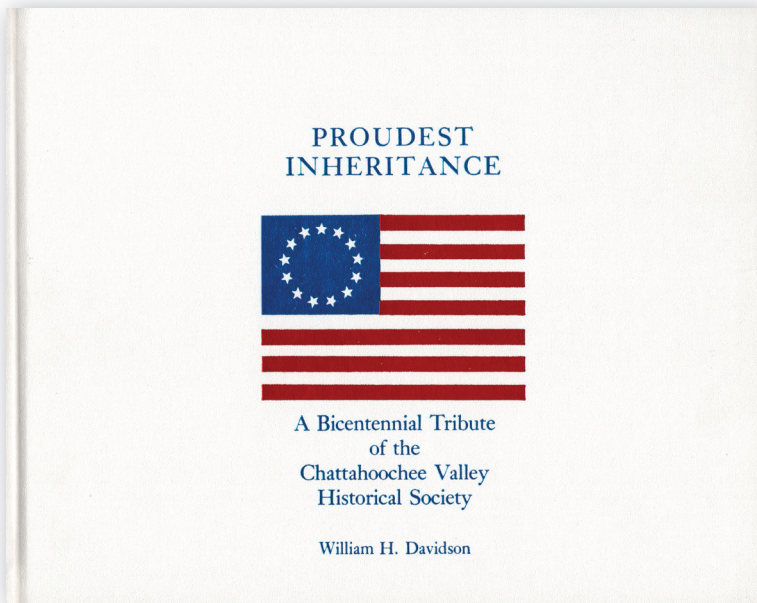
On March 24, 1900, the 14-year-old Press Clay Southworth, of Ohio, got permission to shoot a bird in the field that was eating the corn. As an old man, he remembered, "When I took it to the house, Mother exclaimed, "It's a passenger pigeon."

It was the last recorded killing of a wild pigeon in America. There were sightings in Alabama, near Abbeville, as late as 1909. A few were reported in Georgia in 1910. It is believed that the pigeons could only survive in vast numbers, which would not fit in with our modern world.

In 1947, Aldo Leopold, the poet, wrote, "Men still live who, in their youths remember pigeons. Trees still stand, that in their youth were shaken by a living wind: But a few decades hence only the oldest oaks will remember, and at long last only the hills will know..."



Winter sports in northern Louisiana: Shooting wild pigeons. Sketched by Smith Bennett. The Illustrated sporting and dramatic news, July 3, 1875. p. 332



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