

# TRAILS IN HISTORY

*Official Newsletter of the Lee County Historical Society*

Volume 41, Number 2

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**LCHS Museum, Loachapoka, Alabama  
Sunday, April 13, 2008, 2:30 pm**

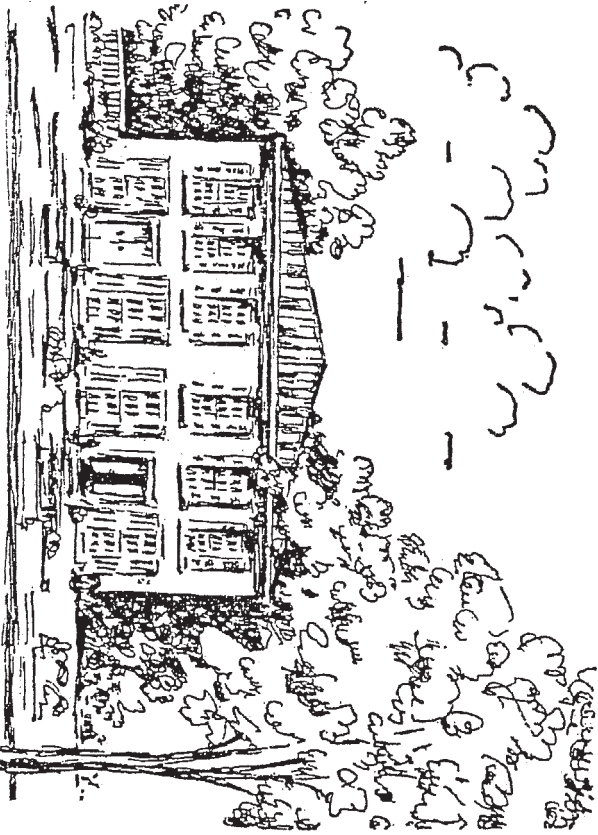


**Speaker: William E. (Bill) Goss**

**The History of the  
Cotton Textile Industry  
in Southern Alabama**

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Lee County Historical Society  
P. O. Box 206  
Loachapoka, AL 36865



**LEE COUNTY HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**  
P. O. BOX 206  
LOACHAPOKA, AL 36865

Organized October 25, 1968, chartered as a non-commercial, non-profit corporation under the laws of the State of Alabama, Charter filed with Probate Court, Lee county, Alabama, November 8, 1968.

**OFFICERS**

President: Carl Summers, Jr.  
Vice-President: Charles C. Mitchell  
Treasurer: Janet Sugg  
Secretary: Jeannette Frandsen  
HCC Delegate: Carl Summers, Jr.  
Trails Editor: Janet Sugg, pro-tem

**TRUSTEES**

Term expires December 31, 2010  
Dottie Marcinko  
Arvle Marshall  
Deborah McCord  
John Ross  
William Wilson  
Jim Witte

Term expires December 31, 2009  
Doyle Keasal  
Charles H. Mitchell  
Betty Patterson  
Janet Sugg  
Peggie Webster  
Barbara Gosser

Term expires December 31, 2008  
Ruth Ann Bond  
Kay Campbell  
Pat Conover  
John Sugg  
Zack Sprayberry  
Marty Hoerr

**MUSEUM CALENDAR**

**April 1** - Village Garden Club  
**April 2** - Opelika Study Club  
**April 12 - Second Saturday**, 10am-5pm - Dairy Day: Churning Butter and Making Cheese  
Dulcimer Players - 2-4pm  
**April 13 - LCHS Meeting**, 2:30 pm  
William E. (Bill) Goss, *History of the Cotton Textile Industry in Southern Alabama*  
**June 2** - Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Auburn University  
**June 8 - LCHS Board Meeting**, 2:00 pm  
(program to be announced)  
**June 14 - Second Saturday**, 10 am - 5 pm - Spinning, Weaving, Backsmithing, and Crops Garden  
Dulcimer Players - 2 - 4pm  
**July 13 - LCHS Meeting**, 2:30 pm  
(program to be announced)  
**October 25 -LCHS Meeting**  
**37th Lee County Historical Fair**

**LCHS ANNUAL  
MEMBERSHIP DUES**

Due: January 1 of each year  
Individual: \$20 per individual  
Family: \$30 (spouse and children living at home)  
Friend: \$50  
Patron: \$100  
Benefactor: \$250

All memberships and donations to LCSH are tax deductible. Please send your check (payable to LCHS), your mailing address (and e-mail address if applicable), to P. O. Box 206, Loachapoka, AL 36865. Members receive the LCHS quarterly publication *Trails in History*.

*In Memory*

**George Webb Rowell, Sr.**  
**1916 – 2008**

Funeral services for George Webb Rowell, Sr. age 91, of Loachapoka, Alabama, were held on February 9, 2008, at the Loachapoka United Methodist Church. Rev. Scott Greenwood and Rev. Issac Kervin officiated. Mr. Rowell was interred in the Loachapoka Cemetery. Serving as pallbearers were Larry Rowell, Rick Rowell, Earnie Rowell, Tim Rowell, Tommy Tatum, and Bill Tatum.

Mr. Rowell was born May 31, 1916, in Loachapoka to the late Walton Allen and Luvenia Bell Mullican Rowell and died February 5, 2008, in his family home in Loachapoka.

Mr. Rowell served his country in the United States Army during WWII 1941-1945 and was part of the European Invasion. He was awarded the Silver Star.

Mr. Rowell was preceded in death by three sisters and four brothers: Florence Spencer; Annie Lou Nunn; Lois Daughtry Britton, Howell Rowell, Willie Rowell, Joe Rowell, and Woodrow Rowell.

Mr. Rowell is survived by his wife, Winifred Akin Rowell; his son George Rowell, Jr. (Deena); his four daughters Linda Rowell Darnell, Deborah Rowell McCord (Allen), Shirley Sue Ward (Douglas), and Janet Rowell Frandsen; his brother E. P. "Peck" Rowell; his grandchildren Allen Darnell (Ashley), Kelly Darnell Knowles (Drue), Jonathan Rowell (Leigh Ann), Matt Rowell, Joshua Rowell, Taylor Ward, Wes D. Frandsen and Nikki Frandsen; his great grandchildren, Jack Darnell and Haley Rowell.

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*Cane Syrup continued from page 14*

Thought from Slavery to Freedom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of Commerce: Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1913), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Mitchell. Interview by author. Sound recording. Loachapoka, Ala., 23 Nov. 2007.

<sup>4</sup> W.O. Pope, "Making Sugar Cane Syrup in the Kettle, Southern Matters, November 2002, <[http://www.southernmatters.com/sugarcane/bulletins/cane\\_syrup.pdf](http://www.southernmatters.com/sugarcane/bulletins/cane_syrup.pdf)> (12 November 2007), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Pope, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Eliot Wigginton, ed. "Sorghum," in Foxfire 3: animal care, banjoes and dulcimers, hide tanning, summer and fall wild plant foods, butter churns, ginseng, and still more affairs of plain living (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1975), 425.

<sup>7</sup> Department of the Interior, Census Division, Abstract of the Eleventh Census: 1890 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1896), 141.

<sup>8</sup> Wigginton, 426.

<sup>9</sup> Wigginton, 426.

<sup>10</sup> Wigginton, 434.

<sup>11</sup> Paul L. Mask and William C. Morris, "Sweet Sorghum Culture and Syrup Production," Alabama Cooperative Extension System, <<http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docx/A/ANR-0625/ANR-0625.html>> (12 November 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Mask and Morris.

<sup>13</sup> Mask and Morris.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Schafer, "Loachapoka," Syrup Sipping: Loachapoka, Alabama, <<http://65.108.206.109/syrup/index.html>> (11 November 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell. .

<sup>16</sup> Levine, 5.

*Cane Syrup* continued from page 13 person drained off the finished product with another valve. This approach's continuous-flow design not only yielded more product per day than the previous technique, but it also produced a higher quality of cane syrup than before.<sup>11</sup>

With a few modifications to accommodate health codes and to optimize product quality, syrup manufacturers continue to employ the pan method today. They even use the same equipment; in the 1990s one extension agronomist wrote, "All the mills in operation today are old—many with patents dating before 1900."<sup>12</sup> In the same publication, he described the current recommended specifications for production, including an updated design of the evaporating pan, the ideal times for skimming impurities, and a method for determining the syrup's density.<sup>13</sup> When compared to the original plans for syrup-making, this newer version simply expounds upon the same techniques which farmers used a century ago. By adapting to fit today's manufacturing standards while maintaining a few elements of its original design, this process remains a thriving part of Alabama culture and history.

The system of making cane syrup does not merely survive in streamlined production lines—the tiny community of Loachapoka, Alabama maintains it as a celebration. Thirty-five years ago, the Lee County Historical Society dedicated an entire festival to this hand-me-down ritual. The "Syrup Soppin' Day", along with the annual Historical Fair, now draws more

than 15,000 people annually to see its three mills and its cookhouse in operation.<sup>14</sup> One might wonder why such an ordinary process is still so attractive. Dr. Mitchell, who also serves as the Historical Society's vice president, explained, "The Historical Fair doesn't get people excited, but when you have the mules out here turning the mills ... the kids just love it."<sup>15</sup> He described several events which actively involve the younger generations in the fair, such as harvesting sugar cane from the garden and tasting fresh "cane juice lemonade". By educating children about Loachapoka's syrup history in a fun and memorable way, adults ensure that this cultural staple remains a part of the local heritage, thereby helping it to adapt to this ever-changing society.

Alabama has changed dramatically from a rural to an urban state; from an agricultural to an industrial society. This process of change may have drastically

altered the structure of syrup-making in the state, but it remains an integral part of the local economy in towns like Loachapoka. This small East Alabama community shows how syrup-making has the "ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation."<sup>16</sup> By adapting the

same technology and techniques as farmers did two centuries ago to fit today's standards of production and packaging, manufacturers become a part of the "product of interaction between the past and the present" as a cultural process.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk*

*continued on page 15*

## Vice President's Report

Charles C. Mitchell, LCHS Vice President

Writing this report for the *Trails* is not something I wished to do. Our President, Carl Summers, had a nasty fall back in February that required extensive surgery to repair broken bones in his face. Jessie Summers, who has also been our de facto curator at the museum, has been with Carl since the accident. In their absence, we have been trying to function normally. Reports are that President Carl is recovering nicely but slowly. In the meantime, we wish him well and hope that he can write the "President's Report" in the summer issue of the *Trails*.

The LCHS Pioneer Living Program, directed by **Deborah Rowell McCord** is gearing up for more school visits. Last fall, over 500 school children visited the museum. This spring we expect to host more. Each school visit requires

at least fourteen volunteers to staff the various stations. Thanks to all those who have volunteered their time and worked to make this program a success.

The LCHS has requested a marker from the Historic Chattahoochee Commission to honor those who founded LCHS. On one side it will commemorate Dr. Alexander Nunn, the founder most instrumental in securing the original property, and on the other side it will list the names of the other founding members.

The LCHS Board is in the process of getting estimates on extensive restorations to the Trade Center building (the main museum) in Loachapoka. This may very well be the oldest, commercial structure in Lee County (circa 1845). It

*continued on page 4*



*March 18th, 2008, members of LCHS recognize Auburn University President and Mrs. Jay Gouge for their support of Alabama Arts and Crafts. Bill Wilson, representing LCHS, presented an original railroad spike letter opener, created by Shannon Hogg and Jim Witte, blacksmiths. Pictured above: Bill Wilson, Dr. Jay Gouge, Dr. Jim Witte, Shannon Hogg.*

## Vice President's Report

*continued from page 3*

was well built for its time and has served its many tenants well, but the stucco and stone walls are in need of repair after more than 160 years of weathering Alabama's hot summers and wet winters. New gutters and downspouts need to be installed on two sides of the building. The doors and windows need to be replaced with period replicas, and the floors must be repaired and refinished. Insulation needs to be installed in the ceiling, and air conditioning, heating, and humidity controls need to be installed to protect our exhibits. Although very necessary, this renovation will be the largest expense ever encountered by LCHS.

**Bill Wilson, Charles H. Mitchell** and the Facilities Committee have been planning a fund-raising effort to support this project. President Carl already received a grant from the Alabama Historical Commission that could get us started on this major renovation, but we have far to go.

**Bill Wilson, Charles H. Mitchell, Allen McCord** and their crew of volunteer carpenters are about ready to rebuild the old Loachapoka Calaboose. The original structure was found under a mass of vines and privet behind where the McClain building is today. The 2-cell wooden jail collapsed when the vegetation was removed. It will be rebuilt near the Gin Office and scales.

On Second Saturdays the museum and grounds are open to the public, free of charge. Second Saturdays have been enjoyed by the re-enactors, but the number of visitors has been small. We need to do a better job of advertisement and public relations. I'd guess that we average around 20 to 30 members and

visitors for each event. If you haven't been out, mark your calendar for the next Second Saturday and stop by for a visit to your LCHS Museum. Something different is happening each month.

Although all LCHS members and guests are welcome to participate as demonstrators and re-enactors, there have been a few dedicated members and volunteers who show up regularly on Second Saturdays or who have pitched in on special occasions. These include:

**Jim Whittey, Shannon Hogg,** and **Joe Moquin** always attract a crowd in the Blacksmith Shop and they forge some unique crafts from rough metal.

**Lee Humphrey** renders lard, makes soap and candles, and does lots of other historical reenactments and looks the part in his late 18<sup>th</sup> Century attire.

**Gerry Melsheimer** cooks over the hearth and serves up a fantastic, period lunch on every Second Saturday.

**Doris Melsheimer** showed us how to stuff sausage in authentic German tradition in February.

**Arvle Marshall** also dresses the part and demonstrates woodworking by hand. We wish Arvle a speedy recovery so he can re-join the group this spring.

**Esther Marshall** takes care of the spinning and weaving in the log cabin. We've missed her while she has been out with Arvle.

**Charles C. Mitchell** takes care of the gardening activities while all the other Second Saturday events are happening.

**Deborah and Allen McCord** have organized the dulcimer players that add a nice, historical rhythm to the Saturday afternoon activities.

**Jessie Summers** has always been there taking care of the Trade Center museum. We have missed her during President Carl's recovery. **Ruth**

a sort of harvest festival for those involved; whoever owned a mill moved it from one place to another so that everyone in the area could grind the cane stalks and make syrup, and families enjoyed each others' company as the syrup cooked.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, farmers used this method of syrup making because it produced the amount needed for a few families at a time. This condition changed in the mid-1800s as Alabama became more industrialized and urbanized. Although the total number of families living on farms in Alabama quadrupled between 1850 and 1880, manufacturing industries tripled their average number of employees

in only one decade.<sup>7</sup> Fewer people actually worked on farms than before. For instance, Loachapoka, a small town near Auburn, turned into Lee County's regional trade center in 1870 because of its position as the easternmost stop on the railroad which ran through Montgomery; this caused its population to peak at just over a thousand residents. Fewer people had time to grow sugarcane, much less make their own syrup; however, since cane syrup was still a staple of the Southern table, some of them adapted this process to the new situation by turning the former family chore into a family business.

In order to generate the volume of syrup necessary to run a business, the producers needed a more efficient cooking system. They optimized their yield when they extracted the cane juice soon after harvesting the stalks,<sup>8</sup> but the "kettle method" limited the total amount of syrup produced because the stalks

could dry out or the juice could sour before they could cook it.<sup>9</sup> Syrup-makers reasoned that if they could take advantage of the time normally used to clean out the kettle between batches, they could cook more syrup in the same

amount of time, thereby increasing their productivity and profits. From this theory came the "pan method", which worked like an assembly line and greatly improved yield capacity.

Instead of a cast iron kettle, this process made use of a deep copper pan that measured approximately three feet by twelve feet. Dividers in the pan, called baffles, split the container into

four compartments through which the liquid flowed as it cooked. The operator slightly elevated one end of the evaporator (as the pan was also known) and tilted it to one side so that the syrup would move from the lower end to the upper end as it cooked and eventually pour into a barrel at the upper end.<sup>10</sup> When the fire in the rectangular cookhouse came to the proper temperature, the procedure began. One person introduced the raw juice into the lower end by way of a controlled valve. While in the first two compartments, the temperature rose to a boiling point and the water began to evaporate. The thicker liquid flowed up to the next section, where impurities came to the surface. Another person, using a tool known as a "skimmer", removed them from the syrup. Once the dark brown liquid reached the fourth compartment, a third

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*The "kettle method" limited the total amount of syrup produced because the stalks could dry out or the juice could sour before they could cook it... the "pan method" worked like an assembly line and greatly improved yield capacity*

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# Cane Syrup: A Tradition that Sticks With Us

By Deborah M. Cox

*Deborah Cox, a freshman pre-pharmacy student at Samford University, has enjoyed attending historical fairs like the Syrup Soppin' Day for several years. In her hometown of Athens, Alabama, her family taught her to appreciate the way things used to be; so well that she often describes herself as being "born in the wrong generation". This is her first historical publication.*

Alabamians have a strong sense of pride in their heritage; they do their best to keep traditions of rural Southern culture alive in today's urban environment. While some may downplay their efforts as well-meaning yet futile attempts to resurrect dead practices, others recognize that these same rituals are never "dead" until *no one* is left to perform them. As historian Lawrence Levine once wrote, "Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and the present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined not by a culture's ability to withstand change...but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation."<sup>1</sup> One such tradition is the process of making cane syrup. From its earliest practice on 19<sup>th</sup> century family farms to 21<sup>st</sup> century businesses, cane syrup manufacturing has adapted to the industrial and societal changes in this state and remains a valuable part of its legacy.

Before industrialization, Alabama's agricultural economy provided an environment that was conducive to small-scale syrup manufacturing. Most of Alabama's population worked on farms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the 1850 census re-

ported that approximately 50,000 farms existed in the state, in which approximately 70,000 families lived.<sup>2</sup> According to Dr. Charles Mitchell, an extension agronomist of Auburn University, people made syrup to use as a sweetener because refined sugar was too rare and expensive. The climate and rela-

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*The climate and relatively mild winters made South Alabama a good place to grow sugar cane, and nearly every farming family in Lee County grew its own crop and made its own syrup every autumn.*

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tively mild winters made South Alabama a good place to grow sugar cane, and nearly every farming family in Lee County grew its own crop and made its own syrup every autumn.<sup>3</sup>

The process of cooking syrup was labor intensive with the whole family working for several days to produce the final product. Before the first frost, farmers harvested their sugar cane and squeezed the light green juice out of it using a mule-powered mill. While one group of people did this, another group built a fire inside a circular brick "cook house" which contained a cast iron kettle. They poured the juice into this kettle and cooked it until the excess water evaporated away, all the while skimming impurities off of the liquid's surface.<sup>4</sup> Once it became thick enough, the workers poured the finished product through straining cloths into buckets or jars.<sup>5</sup> This annual ritual became

Gynther was the docent for the museum in March during Jessie's absence.

## Donations

**Tom Corley** donated three large Camellia's to replace the one that had to be cut next to the back steps of the Trade Center. The varieties are 'Mary Corley', 'Frank Houser variegated', and 'Royal Velvet'. These have been blooming since they were planted in January.

**Ken Rogers** donated four camellias, named 'Flossie Goodson', 'Katie', 'Harbin's Seedling', and 'Charming Betty'. See if you can find these on the museum grounds.

**Allen McCord** delivered several trailer loads of cross-ties which were donated by CSX railroad. These will be used to make raised beds in the new herb garden on the west side of the McLain Building.

**Charles H. Mitchell** broke the ground for the new Grandma's Garden and in the Crops Garden.

**I.D. Williams** donated a leg vice, a corn sheller, cotton scale, tongs, 2 large wooden cradles for harvesting grain, and assorted old farm tools. **Zack Sprayberry** secured and delivered this donation.

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## Historic Marker to Honor Dr. Alexander Nunn and the Founders of LCHS

The LCHS will erect a Historic Marker honoring the founders of the LCHS and Dr. Alexander Nunn. Committee members Carl Summers and Bill Wilson worked with Peggie Webster and Ruth Ann Nunn to compose the wording for the two sides of the marker (see below). The marker request has been submitted to the Historic Chattahoochee Commission for approval. A special ceremony for the unveiling will be arranged when the marker is delivered.

### Lee County Historical Society

The Society was organized in 1968 to study the history and traditions of Lee County and to preserve the findings; to collect records, books and items relating to its history, to mark historic sites, and to promote and preserve buildings and objects of historical value in and around Lee County. The First Trustees were: Alexander Nunn, Chairman; T. J. Peddy, A. B. Williams

Jr., Prince Webster, Jimmy H. Graves, J. G. Adams, James Noel Baker, Mrs. Carolyn Dixon, James Trammell. The First Officers were: T. J. Peddy, Pres.; M. H. Hawkins, Vice- Pres.; Mrs. J. G. Adams, Sec.; Robert H. Slaton, Treas.

### Dr. Alexander Nunn

Dr. Nunn was born in Loachapoka on September 17, 1904. Beginning in 1924 he contributed to and edited the *Progressive Farmer Magazine* for 43 years. He helped to start *Southern Living Magazine*, retiring in 1967 as executive editor and executive vice president. In 1968 he was a founding member of the Lee County Historical Society and was appointed Lee County's first official historian. He wrote two books and numerous articles about Loachapoka and the communities nearby. He believed in education for all people and contributed liberally to scholarships for black youth. He died on January 6, 1985.

## Scenes from Second Saturdays

On the second Saturday of every month, LCHS volunteers gather at the LCHS Museum in period attire to demonstrate their arts and crafts. Blacksmiths are usually working at the forge, spinners and weavers are in the log cabin, and someone is always cooking up a meal in the fireplace or outdoors. The Museum is always open on Second Saturdays. What a great opportunity for LCHS members and visitors to visit the museum! If you have a skill to demonstrate or just would like to help out on Second Saturdays, just dress up in 19<sup>th</sup> Century attire and join the fun. It's kind of like a mini-Historical Fair throughout the year!

In 19th Century Alabama, you just didn't run down to WalMart to buy a bar of soap or laundry detergent. If you wanted suds, you had to make them



*Lee Humphrey discusses the intricacies of soap making with observer Jude Hosey.*

**The next  
Second Saturday event is  
April 12, 2008  
(10 a.m. to 5 p.m.)**

***Special activities will  
include churning milk to  
make butter and making  
simple cheese.***

***Dulcimer Players  
meet to practice from 2-4  
pm in the museum.***

yourself. This involved slaughtering a fat pig or beef, rendering the fat/tallow, leaching lye from fire place ashes, gathering herbs if you wanted fragrance, and cooking the mixture in a large kettle over an open fire. If the recipe was right, you hardened the lye soap in wooden frames, cut it into blocks, and used this for everything from washing clothes to bathing.

February's Second Saturday was "Lard Rendering Day". We rendered pork fat into lard over an open fire and also made sausage. March's Second Saturday was soap making day.

For the upcoming April Second Saturday, we'd talked about having a "Dairy Day", but while every 19th century home-

- Fairfax: West Point Mfg. Company
- Geneva: Geneva Cotton Mills, Inc. and Riverview Mills, Inc.
- Greenville: Alabama Mills, Inc.
- LaFayette: Avondale Mills
- Lanett: West Point Mfg. Company
- Langdale: West Point Mfg. Company
- Montgomery: Montgomery Cotton Mills, West Boylston Mfg. Co. of Alabama and Adams Cotton Mills
- Opelika: Opelika Textile Mills, Inc. and Pepperell Mfg. Company
- Opp: Micolas Cotton Mills, Inc. and Opp Cotton Mills, Inc.
- Ozark: Cowikee Mills
- Prattville: Prattville Mills-Gurney Mfg. Company, Prattville Cotton Factory, and Lehman Mills
- Riverview: West Point Mfg. Company
- Roanoke: W.A. Handley Mfg. Co., Rock Mills/Wehadkee Yarn Mills, and Rosedale Mfg. Co.
- Selma: Mathews Cotton Mill Company
- Shawmut: West Point Mfg. Company
- Sylacauga: Avondale Mills
- Tallassee: Tallassee Mills of Mt. Vernon Mills, Inc.
- Union Springs: Union Springs Cotton Mills and Cowikee Mills
- Wetumpka: Russell Manufacturing Company

In small towns in Southern Alabama, generation after generation, have earned a living in the textile mills. What is the future of the textile industry in Alabama? With the inception of the free trade agreements, about 10 years ago, many textile

jobs in Alabama were lost to China, India, Pakistan, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica. What will the future hold for the textile industry in Southern Alabama?

## ***Cotton Textile Industry***

*continued from page 9*

mill; a frame weave shed was built on the old gristmill site; and a three-story machine shop was built near the millrace.

The Tallassee Mills operated from 1844 until 2005. They produced products for eight wars—the Civil, Spanish-American, World War I, World War II, Korean, Vietnam, Lebanon/Grenada, and the Gulf War. When they closed in July 2005, they were the oldest continuous operating cloth textile mills in the United States.

From 1895-1900, a large program of expansion was designed and completed by the Tallassee Mills. A railroad, chartered in 1895 as the Tallassee and Montgomery Railroad, to connect Tallassee with the Western Railway of Alabama at Milstead, in Macon County, was completed. Other improvements included a bridge across the Tallapoosa River at Tallassee, a new and larger dam, a new power plant, and a new mill on the east bank of the Tallapoosa River, in Tallapoosa County. When the twentieth century began, the Tallassee Mills had grown to 76,200 spindles.

In southern Alabama, cotton mills were established in these cities:

- Alexander City: Avondale Mills and Russell Mfg. Company
- Clanton: Alabama Mills, Inc.
- Dadeville: Alabama Mills, Inc.
- Enterprise: Bama Cotton Mills
- Eufaula: Cowikee Mills and Eufaula Cotton Mills

The depression years of the 1930s brought hard times to Tallassee as they did elsewhere. There were few business failures in Tallassee and the Tallassee Mills continued to operate, although on reduced schedules.

The 1940s were great years for Tallassee and the Tallassee Mills. During World War II (1939-1945), Tallassee Mills' war-time production began in December 1941. It supplied the U.S. Armed Forces with cotton duck for tents and cots, cotton drills, twine, and rope. It operated 24/7 to meet the emergency demands of the Armed

Forces. The Tallassee Mills increased production by 225 percent and employed 4,500 workers. During this same period, over 2,500 Tallasseeans served in the Armed Forces and more than 50 were killed.

In 1850, there were twelve cotton factories in Alabama; thirty years later, in 1880, there were eighteen. In 1891, the number of cotton mills in Alabama had grown to thirty-five. In Alabama, the total capital invested in the textile industry in 1890 was about \$2.9 million, and a decade later the amount had risen to \$11.6 million.

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*Tallassee Mills' war-time production began in December 1941. It operated 24/7 to meet the emergency demands of the Armed Forces. The Tallassee Mills increased production by 225 percent and employed 4,500 workers.*

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*Gerry Melsheimer cooks over the hearth and serves up a fantastic, period lunch on every Second Saturday.*

*Blacksmith Joe Moquin (below) prepares to use hand forged tongs to pull heated metal from the fire.*

stead had a dairy cow, we were hard pressed to find one in the 21st century that we could borrow.

Instead, this Second Saturday, April 12, we'll be churning whole milk into butter, and making some simple cheeses that would have been popular 100 years ago.

Work will be on-going in the Crops Garden and in the new "Grandma's Garden". This year's Crops Garden will include cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, sweet sorghum, sugarcane, peanuts, broomcorn, and squash.

**Dulcimer Players:** In addition to all the other Second Saturday activities at the museum, the dulcimer players will be practicing at the museum from 2-4 p.m. on every Second Saturday. If you've ever wanted to learn to play this authentic American instrument, come join the group. Contacts are Deborah and Allen McCord (821-1301).



*Doris Melsheimer demonstrates how stuff sausage in the authentic German tradition.*

LCCHS Spring Meeting  
Sunday, April 13, 2008, 2:30 pm  
Speaker: William E. (Bill) Goss



William E. (Bill) Goss was born in East Tallassee, Tallapoosa County, Alabama, on February 13, 1930. He graduated from Tallassee High School in 1948, and received a Bachelor of Science degree in History and English in August 1951 from Troy State Teachers College (now Troy University). He earned a M.Ed. degree in secondary school administration from Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) in August 1958. He has done further graduate work at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

For forty years, Bill Goss taught history, social studies, English, and journalism to high school students, and served as a school administrator in schools in Alabama, Germany, Turkey, Georgia, and Florida.

During the Korean War, he served four years in the U.S. Air Force and was stationed at bases in Texas, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Morocco, and Florida.

After an absence of 47 years, Bill returned to Tallassee in December 1995.

Bill is currently the historian of the Talisi Historical Preservation Society, commander of Tallassee American Legion

Post 118, historian and tour guide for the City of Tallassee, a genealogist, preservationist, and community leader. He is a member of the Greater Tallassee Area Chamber of Commerce, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, The Genealogical Society of East Alabama, and the 2008 Tallassee Centennial Committee. In 2000, he was awarded the Francis Wagon Award, presented annually by the Greater Tallassee Area Chamber of Commerce, for volunteer service in the community.

He has written more than 50 historical and feature articles, about Tallassee and its people, which have been published in the *Lake Martin Living* magazine and *The Tallassee Tribune*. In February 2008, he was the guest editor of a 64-page Centennial Edition of *The Tallassee Tribune*.

Bill has a live Wednesday morning radio program, on 1300 WTLS-106.5 FM, Tallassee, about the historic sites, events, and people in Tallassee.

Bill is co-author of a new visual history about Tallassee titled *Images of America: Tallassee*, which will be released nation-wide on April 21, 2008 by Arcadia Publishing.

## Cotton Textile Industry in Southern Alabama

by William E. (Bill) Goss

In 1818 and 1832, two small cotton mills, the first in Alabama, were built in Madison County, on the Flint River, in North Alabama. The first mill, the Charles Cabiness & Company, had a spinning factory near Huntsville, which began operating in the early part of 1818. It manufactured only yarns and would exchange thread for raw cotton.

The first textile mill, in Alabama, to manufacture cloth was the Bell Factory, on the Flint River in Madison County. It was the earliest cotton cloth-manufacturing mill in Alabama. It had three thousand spindles and one hundred looms and was operated by water-power—by damming the water of the Flint River and forcing it over a wheel or turbine. A large bell was used for signals; hence the name “Bell Factory.” Slave labor was used almost exclusively in its operation. This was the first cotton manufacturing company of any consequence in the South.

The second cotton mill in Alabama was the Tallassee Mill, know as Barnett and Marks. It was built on the west side of the Tallapoosa River and chartered by the Alabama General Assembly “at the great falls,” on December 31, 1841.

It began operating in 1844, with 1000 throttle spindles and 40 looms and “all other machinery necessary for cleaning, spinning, and weaving cotton and bleaching and dyeing the same in a factory.”

Later, the Tallassee Mill was known as Barnett, Micou and Company. After the second mill was built in 1852,

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*The Tallassee Mills began operations in 1844. They produced products for eight wars—the Civil War, Spanish-American, World War I, World War II, Korean, Vietnam, Lebanon/Grenada, and the Gulf War. When they closed in July 2005, they were the oldest continuous operating cloth textile mills in the United States.*

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the Tallassee Mills were known as The Tallassee Manufacturing Company. In 1854 both cotton and woolen goods were made at the Tallassee Mills. By 1870, the Tallassee Manufacturing Company mills became the largest cotton mills in Alabama.

As a result of the economic panic of 1872, the Tallassee Mills in 1874 went into the hands of receivers. They operated the Tallassee Mills until 1878, when they were sold at auction in Montgomery.

In 1878, the Tallassee Mills were incorporated under the name of The Tallassee Falls Manufacturing Company, with new owners. Under the new leadership many additions and improvements were made at the Tallassee Mills. A fifth story was added to the 1852 Mill; a four-story “duck” mill was added to the 1852

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