

TRIBUTARIES

The cover features a complex quilted design. A central figure, a woman wearing a yellow hat and a multi-colored patterned dress, holds a large red umbrella. The background is a patchwork of various patterns, including floral motifs with red centers, geometric shapes, and sections filled with small, illegible text. The color palette is rich, with reds, yellows, greens, and browns.

JOURNAL OF THE
**Alabama
Folklife
Association**

17

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ON THE COVER

Jump Start quilt made by Earamichia Brown (front cover) and... *and the flowers bloomed* quilt made by Tony Jean Dickerson (back cover), featured in the *Soul of Zora: A Literary Legacy through Quilts* exhibit honoring the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston | *Courtesy of Zanice Bond and Tony Jean Dickerson*

DESIGNED BY Valerie Downes

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Five of the feature articles in this volume were authored by Cauthen Fellows: community and academic researchers awarded funding from the Alabama Folklife Association to conduct original research on an Alabama folk tradition. Learn more at alabamafolklife.org/fellows

Alabama Folklife



ASSOCIATION

Alabama Folklife

Folklife includes cultural products and artistic expressions passed down through the generations via families, communities, and work life. It includes genres like music, dance, food, stories, clothing, and traditional arts like pottery, quilting, and basketry. Folklife is comprised of living traditions that evolve as new groups arrive, environments change, and individual personalities leave their mark.

Alabama holds a rich array of folklife that includes both rural and urban traditions and contributions from diverse cultures and art forms. Alabama's geography, including the Gulf Coast, Black Belt, Tennessee Valley, Shoals, Wiregrass, and Appalachia, yields folkways representing distinct environments and histories.

Alabama folklife includes practices as wide ranging as shrimp net building, piñata making, old time fiddle, herbal remedies, gospel singing, the Vietnamese lion dance, storytelling, Indigenous finger weaving, hanji, brass bands, Greek dancing, pine needle basketry, Rangoli, duck decoy carving, layer cakes, and much more.

TRIBUTARIES

Alabama's waterways intersect its folkways at every level. Early settlement and cultural diffusion conformed to drainage patterns. The Coastal Plain, the Black Belt, the Foothills, and the Tennessee Valley remain distinct traditional as well as economic regions today. The state's cultural landscape, like its physical one, features a network of "tributaries" rather than a single dominant mainstream. **JIM CARNES** | 1994 | *TRIBUTARIES NO. 1*



The Fiddles of Earnest Mostella

BURGIN MATHEWS

Who can take a piece of wood and make it talk?

EARNEST MOSTELLA

“I can’t sleep most of the time,” Earnest Mostella told a reporter, at the age of seventy-eight: “I think of something I should be making. If I can’t roll over and go to sleep, I get up and start working.”¹

Mostella was prolifically, endlessly creative. He was a musician, a heavy laborer, a lay preacher, and a craftsman; a bearer of long family tradition; a prodigious, animated talker and singer; and a beloved presence in his native community of Ashville, Alabama. He was a rare practitioner, too, of southern Black fiddle traditions — both fiddle-playing and fiddle-making — surviving into the twenty-first century. “The fiddle was just handed down, and it’s a gift that a man has got,” he said, explaining his family’s history with the instrument. “We’re just gifted to music.” His great uncle was a fiddle maker, he explained, and his grandfather a legendary local musician. Mostella himself made his first fiddle around the age of eight, with wood he cut from a black gum tree. Many more would follow. By the time I met him, in the summer of 2000, Mostella was in his nineties and full of excited vitality, still wielding a chainsaw to carve his instruments, still bursting with laughter, spontaneous sermons, and song.

Black fiddlers had once been an integral part of America’s musical landscape, performing across the South for dances and other social functions as early as the eighteenth century. In the 1930s, when workers with the Federal Writers’ Project recorded the life histories of formerly enslaved Americans, many from Alabama and other southern states recalled the fiddle-driven dances that helped sustain their communities before the Civil War. But what had once been a flourishing tradition had largely faded by the time Earnest Mostella entered adulthood; by the time he reached old age, Mostella was a unique living link to a legacy that appeared to have vanished.

*“You know how many fiddles I’ve made?
Ten thousand ... six hundred ... and fifty. And there’s
a lot of them might have slipped my remember.”*

Steeped in his distinctive family heritage, Mostella was nonetheless a singular, innovative craftsman. A Mostella fiddle is an unwieldy contraption and unlikely source of music, each with a look and dimensions of its own: rough, clunky blocks of fresh timber carved with a chainsaw, hollowed out with a knife, and strung with wire, nylon, or twine, huge tuning pegs extending from either side, the whole thing held together by a homemade glue made from egg white and yellow poplar sawdust. A fiddle might have four strings or five, even as many as eight; the head of the instrument might be longer than the instrument’s body or neck; on some, the long tuning pegs might stretch from the front and back of the fiddle head, rather than its sides. In addition to fiddles, Mostella made banjos, mandolins, enormous guitars, and unclassifiable hybrid inventions, guided by the materials at hand and by his own imaginative vision. As much as musical instruments, they were idiosyncratic and compelling works of visual art — though Mostella acted mystified that people bought them not to play but to hang on their walls.

In truth, Mostella himself may have been the only musician who knew how to coax a tune from one of the things. But like his great uncle and grandfather before him, he knew how to find the music in something: how, in the first place, to see the instrument in the rawest and most ragged of materials, how then to take that instrument and make it sing, how to find and pull the melody from it.

“I *might* be wrong,” he allowed in 1995 at the age of eighty-eight, but “I’ve counted. I’ve got pretty good memories. I was counting how many fiddles I’ve made ... You know how many fiddles I’ve made?” He spoke the number slowly, as if making a final tally in his head. “Ten thousand ... six hundred ... and fifty. And there’s a lot of them might have slipped my remember.”

Earnest John Mostella was born in 1908 on Beaver Creek Road outside of Ashville, Alabama and lived his whole life within three miles of the spot. His parents, sharecroppers Marion and Lillie Cochran Mostella, had ten children in all, and their lives were defined by family, music, and work. There was no formal schooling, and Mostella never learned to read or write. “There were twelve of us,” he said, “and we worked on a farm and played in a family band. Our daddy would always give us the Fourth of July off from field work and we were so glad; we’d eat cookies and cakes at picnics and play our music.”

His grandfather, Gus Cochran, was himself a great fiddler, “the fiddlingest man that ever was. Granddaddy was the true fiddle playing man,” Mostella said. “Why, he could lay flat on his back, half drunk and still play away—outplay ’em all.”



Cochran was born in slavery and secretly taught himself to play on the fiddle of his enslaver: he whittled a key, the story goes, to open the cabinet where the instrument was kept under lock. In time he grew into a celebrated musician, playing parties all over St. Clair County for both Black and white dancers. “All these people knew him, near and far. They’d go and get him and take him from one place to another to play for ’em.” Mostella’s grandmother – a fiddler, herself – “didn’t always like it when granddaddy went off to play. Sometimes he’d be gone for quite a spell and she’d be good and mad when he did come in ... But folks would give him money for his playing and he’d turn it over to grandmomma, that’d stop her fussing for a while.”

Cochran’s legend loomed large in Mostella’s memory. He stood six foot, nine (by other accounts, seven foot, three), weighed more than 300 pounds, was “good looking” with “a great long moustache,” and lived to be ninety-nine. “We used to sit at his knee and watch him play,” Mostella recalled. “In my younger days, we’d gather round the porch in the evenings and make music. There were some white folks in the valley that’d join us. They played the fiddle pretty good but none of ’em could touch Granddaddy. He was the champion.”

Cochran, Mostella explained, created his melodies from everyday expe-

rience. “He set one day and heard a mockingbird sing and made a tune on the fiddle of that bird’s song. Another time, he took a train to Arkansas and when he got off the train he had a song about it.” Some of the tunes Mostella learned from Cochran remained central to his repertoire all his life: “Mockingbird” and “Slow Train”; “Drunken Hiccups”; “The Star Spangled Banner.” “That song’ll put the life back in you,” Mostella said, singing a few bars of one old tune. “My Granddad Gus used to stand up and play it at the end of dances. I guess it sounded so good he just couldn’t sit down.”

Cochran continued making music to the end: even as he lay on his deathbed, a waltz came to him in a dream. “He reached under the bed and got his bow. He commenced to playing ... and that’s the sweetest sound that ever was.”

Mostella sometimes dreamed tunes, too, like the one he called “The Life of Honey.” Like his grandfather, he would play them late into the night. “In the middle of the night,” he said, “everything sounds better.

“Don’t it?”

“I can make anything out of wood,” Mostella bragged. It wasn’t just instruments: he made and sold butter molds, bread trays, rolling pins, axe and hoe handles, cabinets, canes, and bowls. He made chairs and rockers with woven bottoms and ladder backs. (“There ain’t nobody around here knows how to bottom a chair,” he told an interviewer in 1977, mourning an otherwise lost local tradition: “That’s gone.”) He made water witches from forked tree limbs, balancing

a dime on the end of the stick; wherever that stick began to bob, he’d start digging. (There were precious minerals in the earth all over St. Clair County, he explained, and sooner or later it would all come to light. “The Lord fixed it for people to find all this stuff.”)

As a boy he learned to make baskets from a man named Henry Smith, who taught him to split long slats of white oak, then soak the pieces until they were pliable. Smith’s baskets, Mostella marveled, were so sturdy they could hold 350 pounds, were woven so tight they could carry a load of seeds without dropping one. Mostella tagged along with the older man, helping “tote the timber” and learning his technique. The two worked together for fifty years, and Mostella continued making the baskets long after his mentor’s death. “I still go up to his grave sometimes —



*For the bows, as with the baskets, white oak was best,
since “you can bend it every which way.”*

he’s buried up at Ashville — and study on the things he taught me.”

Mostella could hold forth at length on the virtues of various trees and their wood. “I know all the timber,” he said. For the chairs, handles, and canes, he used hickory; for the baskets white oak; for the water witches, apple, hickory, or peach. Sugar maple was best for rolling pins (“The dough won’t stick to that”). As for the fiddles: “Cedar makes a pretty fiddle, but walnut makes a better fiddle. Field pine makes the most lasting fiddle; you drop it and you can’t bust it.” (Those field pine fiddles, he said on another occasion, “will last longer than *you*.”) Hickory fiddles “sound good and loud, but get ‘em around heat and they’ll crack.” For the bows, as with the baskets, white oak was best, since “you can bend it every which way.” In practice, though, Mostella would work with whatever he could get his hands on, even scraps of treated lumber donated by a neighbor.

On weekends, Mostella would search the woods near his home for the best materials. “I go down near the Coosa River and cut down trees with a chainsaw,” he explained, “then haul them [home] in my pickup ... I put them out in the backyard in the shed to dry, and in about three weeks they’re ready to cut on.” After that, a fiddle did not take long to put together. “It ain’t hard to do, really,” he said, describing his unlikely method of carving the components with a chainsaw. “It’s like coming out of a skid in a car: if you try to brake, you’ll lose it every time, but if you just give it a little gas and keep your wits about you, you’ll come out all right.” Next he hollowed out the body of the instrument with a knife — even a dulled kitchen knife would do — then he assembled the pieces with his homemade, sawdust-and-eggwhite glue, the recipe passed down from his great uncle, fiddle-maker Jerry Cochran. He took special pride in the sound post he fixed inside the instrument’s body. “That’s the life of a fiddle,” he said of the small cylindrical piece — and not even the world’s most prestigious luthiers knew where and how to best position it, according to Mostella.

“Those fiddles you get from across the water,” he said: “they’re pretty, but that’s all.”

*You can sing, Mostella sang:
You can moan all you want to
But that won’t stop my heart a-thinking
Over Huckleberry Ridge.*

As a singer, Mostella tapped another deep well of tradition, preserving a unique window into the music of the past 150-plus years. His repertoire included spirituals, shape note and gospel hymns, “frolic” tunes, patriotic songs, topical ballads, and his own, often improvised compositions. With running commentary, he belted out lyrics passed down by his grandfather and uncles, some of



them dating to the days before Emancipation; he sang early twentieth century ballads on the sinking of the Titanic and the scourge of the boll weevil. Singing without instrument, he mimicked with his voice the part of fiddle (“da de deedle dee”) or guitar (“pom pom pom”). Concluding a sacred song, he might challenge his listener, “I dare you to sing that. I dare you to!” The sheer breadth of his repertoire provided remarkable access to local music history, and his easy blending of traditions — he might transition from a song of slavery into a 1940s radio hit — resisted stereotypes of rural, traditional music.

“We’ll meet in the great beyond where trouble won’t come,” Mostella sang in one tune, then explained: “This is a mournful song in C minor that I wrote for Bobby Kennedy ... but it has a pickin’-up to it like a love song.” Mostella’s singing evoked particular moments in time, was steeped in old relationships and memories. A verse of “Careless Love” might bring to mind his brother Erskine, who used to play the tune for dances on a homemade guitar. “Erskine could *play* that tune,” Mostella recalled. “Them preachers would dance. Turn their derbies around. Be a-waltzing with them women. Be a-waltzing — yes, sir.” Particularly poignant, late in life, were songs inspired by his late wife, Rozetta. At night, alone, he sang to her, disappearing into the words: “I feel the love,” his voice rang out, “from the dewdrops of your heart.”

Entertaining a visitor or himself, Mostella often strung together old songs with loose chains of association, interspersed with his own poetic, freeform improvisations. His conversation worked the same way, jumping from one association to another but somehow coming back suddenly, surprisingly to where it started: he would preach on Noah and the Ark and somewhere, mid-monologue, the Ark would become the Titanic, leading him to speak of John Jacob Astor, rich men’s drowning maids, and “Nearer My God to Thee”; then he would be talking again of the people and animals

“A violin, a fiddle, guitar is just what you make of it. If you keep it tuned high and practice sacred music on there and ask the Lord to help you with it, songs will come to you.”

saved in the Biblical flood. Along the way, his speech would be punctuated with snatches of song, with quotations and interpretations of Scripture (friends and neighbors marveled that this man who neither read nor wrote could quote the Bible at length), and with his emphatic, infectious laughter.

Inspiration came easily. “A violin, a fiddle, guitar is just what you make of it,” he said, gesturing across a room full of sawdust, wood scraps, and projects-in-progress. “If you keep it tuned high and practice sacred music on there and ask the Lord to help you with it, songs will come to you.”

Mostella took pride not only in his artistry and music but in a life of physical labor. “My daddy and granddaddy both used to run a blacksmith shop and make wagons, and I came up doing this [kind of work],” he said. “Back in the day, we’d shoe mules. I’d stay around the shop, and I’d make gun stocks and fix shotguns ... In cotton picking time I have picked up to 600 pounds of cotton in a day.”

He stayed on the family farm into his forties, when he got a job with the county road department. He worked for two decades in the mines around Acmar and Margaret, criss-crossing St. Clair County on foot, coming to and from the job. “Every time I see a shovel, I think of working those mines and breathing that black powder. I worked hard and crawled on my knees a lot, but I never got a scratch.” He worked another twenty years in a pipe foundry.

Mostella often extolled the virtues of work. “Hard work will not hurt a man,” he said at the age of eighty-three. “He’s built to work. When a man retires and goes home to sit, that’s it. He’s dead.” Mostella left the foundry at sixty-two but stayed busy through his eighties: cleaning wells, digging graves, cutting wood, jacking houses. In 1987, a writer for the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* came across Mostella and his younger brother Walter, aged seventy-nine and seventy-three, cleaning a twenty-two foot well near Mostella’s home. The brothers reported they cleaned thirty-five or forty wells a year, at \$150 a well — sometimes as much as \$250 if the well was especially deep (“their record is about 65 feet,” the writer noted).

The work was dirty and dangerous. First, they lowered a flame into the well to check for gas. (“If you don’t hold your breath, you won’t last five minutes.”) Next, Mostella made his way to the bottom, scooping mud into a plastic pickle bucket. Sometimes there were surprises underground: once he happened upon a couple of rattlesnakes, which he shot dead, then carried to the surface before their blood could contaminate the water.

For many who knew him, Mostella was an irrepressible force of nature and a constant in his community. For years, he was a dependable presence at Ashville’s John Looney House, an historic two-story dogtrot home built

“People tell me, ‘We don’t know what we’ll do when you leave us.’ But I’m gonna crack that sky right open one of these days. If you follow the Lord, you’ll be joining me.”

in 1818 and maintained by the St. Clair County Historical Society; at their annual fall festival, Mostella would set up and sell baskets and fiddles. On other occasions, he would head to downtown Asheville, play his fiddle and sell his wares. (His longstanding asking price for the instruments was \$25, with the price rising to \$35 only in his very last years.) On Sunday mornings, neighbors — who knew him, fondly, as “PaPa” or “Preacher” — could hear him walking to church, calling out for others to follow him.

“People tell me, ‘We don’t know what we’ll do when you leave us,’” he said, a few years before his death. “But I’m gonna crack that sky right open one of these days. If you follow the Lord, you’ll be joining me.”

Mostella never received wide recognition for his work as a craftsman or musician, but for years he was a favorite subject of area reporters and photographers, even for visual artists who created his portrait in ink or paint, moved by his own contagious artistry. Writers frequently introduced Mostella with a picturesque first impression. A 1990 article begins with a portrait of the fiddler sitting in the shade of an oak tree beside Highway 231 in Asheville. “From a large woven basket he pulls out a rustic, handmade fiddle and bow,” then “a smile crosses his face” as “his worn hands ... begin a gentle tune,” filling the air “with scratchy yet unmistakable music.” An *Anniston Star* article the next year opens with Mostella breaking to pieces an enormous tree, almost 200 years old. “Although it’s only mid-morning, the man hired to slice it up has been laboring since early light with his chainsaw, splitting ax and three steel wedges. At first glance it’s hard to tell which is older, the oak or John Ernest [sic] Mostella.” Only after hours of labor does Mostella finally lay down his ax, settling into “a lengthy oratory on infidelity, the moon, modern youth and Genesis.”

A final profile of Mostella appeared in the *Birmingham News* in April 2000: “An old man sits in a plastic lawn chair and communicates with God,” writer Kathy Kemp begins. Mostella, by then, was ninety-two years old. Speaking of his fiddles, he told Kemp: “I reckon, in my life, I’ve made 3½ million of them things.”

Earnest Mostella’s fiddles, baskets, and other creations are still scattered today in homes all over St. Clair County, where they are often held as treasured objects; some have migrated with their owners to homes across the country. A local museum and archive in downtown Asheville keeps a Mostella fiddle on display at its entrance, along with an artist’s rendering of its maker. Another fiddle hangs in City Hall, on the wall of the mayor’s office: it’s a poignant tribute to this grandson of enslaved people, a man who never learned to read or write, who never traveled far beyond the spot where he was born,



but who carved a unique and powerful legacy from his ninety-five years.

“He was always ‘Uncle Earnest’ to me,” says Asheville mayor Derrick Mostella. “I was primarily raised by my great grandparents, and Walter Mostella, my great grandfather, was Earnest’s brother. So Saturday mornings, sometimes Sunday afternoons, we’d go over there to see him, and he’d be coming out of the woods with almost a whole tree on his shoulder, lugging it out of the woods. And that was just natural for me. I didn’t start to understand, really, the historical and cultural significance behind him and what he was doing until I got a little older. We went to the Looney House, which is located in Asheville: they had a display in there — he was still living at the time — with pictures of my uncle, and fiddles, and he used to do baskets and chairs, and all of that other stuff. That was the first time I had a little bit of inclination that, hey, this is pretty cool, and folks recognize what he’s doing. As I got older and was able to have conversations with him and let some of that stuff soak in, I really, *really* started to understand how impactful what he was doing [was], carrying on that lineage and carrying on those old skills.

“He’s a jewel in our family,” Mayor Mostella continues. “We all love him to death. And there’s not very many people in the city of Asheville, past a certain age, that don’t have fond recollections of Uncle Earnest, and have stories to tell about him.” ○

NOTE In 2021, I set out to locate and document as many of Earnest Mostella’s creations as I could find, a project generously supported by the AFA’s Cauthen Fellowship. By creating a visual catalogue of Mostella’s work, my hope is to celebrate the legacy of this unsung artist and the world that shaped him, showcasing the variety and innovation of his art. If you have a Mostella fiddle (or guitar, banjo, basket, etc.) that you are willing to have photographed for this project, please contact me at burgin@southernmusicresearch.org. Abundant thanks are due to photographer Sean Patheseama for his strikingly beautiful images — and to Mr. Mostella’s many family members, friends, neighbors, and admirers who shared their memories or loaned their instruments for this project.



Taking Root

Sacred Harp at the Shady Hill Free Will Baptist Church

BETH MCGINNIS

The Shady Hill Free Will Baptist Church is on Hog Foot Road in Covington County, Alabama. It's a dirt road. The small brick church building sits level with the flat ground. A simple porte cochere shelters the front entrance, and black benches sit on either side of the front door. White sand peeks through the grass. Hog Foot Creek, just down the road, is where I learned to swim. In the foot-deep water I could walk on my hands and let my body float. Eventually I discovered I didn't need my hands on the creek bed. My father grew up swimming in Hog Foot Creek too. Even after the family moved to Montgomery, Daddy would come home summers to work in the fields with his cousins. After a hot day they would jump off the Hog Foot bridge into the water. Seven years ago, my family sprinkled Daddy's ashes off that bridge.

Lately, when I drive through the woods "downhome" (my father's word for where he grew up), I think of Suzanne Simard's work. Simard is the ecologist who recently rocked the forestry world with her research on the complex, vast, interconnected social life of trees—what Simard calls the "wood-wide web."² Within this web, Simard has identified Mother Trees, the oldest, largest trees who supply shelter and nourishment, store carbon, and oversee the flow of water for the rest of the forest. There are also nurseries of young trees whose elders not only feed but also shade them to prevent them from growing more rapidly than they can build the strong structures needed to survive. In the Conecuh National Forest "downhome," the USDA Forest Service helps protect forest health through prescribed burns to remove underbrush and dead wood that would escalate wildfires.³ These burns were partially responsible for the clean, dappled piney landscape I remember from trips downhome when I was a child.

Recently, I came back to this forest with my mother, Ruth Rowell, for homecoming, Sacred Harp singing, and dinner on the grounds at Shady Hill on the first Sunday in June, the same day it is held every year.⁴ I was with my mother, but it was a visit to my Father Tree, my first in forty years. All

I came back to this forest with my mother for homecoming, Sacred Harp singing, and dinner on the grounds at Shady Hill on the first Sunday in June, the same day it is held every year. I was with my mother, but it was a visit to my Father Tree, my first in forty years.

his life, my father went to homecoming at Shady Hill whenever he could. Occasionally, my mother accompanied him, but my siblings and I only came once. Now, I teach musicology at Samford University. My research focuses on vernacular music in Alabama. I knew the Sacred Harp singing at Shady Hill would be a rich resource, not only for my academic work, but also for my personal life.

Mama and I arrived at Shady Hill at 9:20 in the morning on June 4, 2023. Ours was the fourth car there. I met Natalie McCarver, who has come back with her family to Shady Hill to help revive the church. She and her mother, Linda McVay, maintain the Facebook page. Natalie's mother is a Bass, the daughter of one of my father's first cousins. That means Natalie's mother is my second cousin and Natalie is my second cousin once removed.⁵ Natalie is part of a younger generation that is consciously reinvesting in Shady Hill. The older generation is still strong. Wavie Lee Bass Mims, my father's first cousin, had arrived before anyone and was sitting on the bench by the front door waiting. Mama and I went to say hello. Wavie Lee laughed, hooted, and hollered when she realized who Mama was. They chatted on the bench while I started introducing myself to the singers who were starting to arrive.

There were two distinct groups at Shady Hill that day: family reunion people and singing people. Some overlapped, but many of the family members never came inside for the singing; they just set up tents and camp chairs, enjoyed the dinner on the grounds, and visited. The singers were people who regularly attend Sacred Harp singings. One woman from Pensacola said she goes to singings about twice a month. That sounded typical. She had also attended Camp Fasola, a Sacred Harp summer camp, several times along with her children and grandchildren.⁶ Almost all the singers mentioned other upcoming singings to me at some point during the day. Family members who come to Shady Hill for the reunion may participate in Sacred Harp singing that one time every year, but it is part of the singers' daily lives. I was there as both a family member and a researcher. When I met someone, I wanted to know how we were related. I also planned to record the singing for my podcast, *Hear in Alabama*. Both groups showed hospitality that made these goals easy to accomplish.

Of the singers, Stanley Smith was the person everyone recognized as the leader. He brought a box of loaner songbooks. Alto Jamie Kelly told me that Stanley had composed several of the songs in the book, and that Stanley has

a penchant for minor keys, which Jamie prefers. Gary Padgett was the chairman. He kept the schedule on track and made sure the customs were observed: instructions, prayers, the memorial lesson in which singers who have died are remembered and a memorial song is sung, the closing song, and so forth.⁷ My grandmother's maiden name was Padgett, and my mother and I had seen plenty of Padgett headstones in the Zion Rock Cemetery the day before. If Gary and I are related by blood, I don't know it. I believe he was there mainly as a singer, not as family, but we were both there, and that makes us related even if not by blood.

Chairs for a Sacred Harp singing are set up at the front of the sanctuary in a "hollow square": Altos sit directly in front of the pulpit facing the congregation. Tenors occupy the front of the center aisle facing the altos and the pulpit. If you face the pulpit, trebles sit on your right side and basses on your left.⁸ John Bealle has observed that the hollow-square seating arrangement "reflects the abundant democracy of the music—all parts are of relatively equal melodic interest and all singers are given the opportunity to lead."⁹ True to the democratic nature of Sacred Harp, at Shady Hill most of the people in the pews sang along. Sometimes Stanley Smith would remark that there was "good singing in the house on that one."

Ken Kelley recorded the minutes and organized the song leaders. He kept a list of who would lead and announced each person and who would be next. He and Stanley gave the pitches. This process brought my dual roles as family member and researcher into sharp focus; I was constantly translating for my own classically trained ear. For major keys, Stanley and Ken started on "Sol," then a perfect fourth up to "Fa" (to classical musicians, the tonic), then a major third up to "La" (the third of the key). For minor keys, they started on "Fa" (tonic), then a minor third up to "La," then a major third up to "Sol" to outline the minor triad. As they did this, the singers would hum or sing their starting pitches to find their places. Whoever was leading would decide which verses to sing and whether to repeat on the last verse or chorus.¹⁰ The group ("class") would sing "the notes" (shapes) first, then the words. Stanley and Ken would often



The hollow-square seating arrangement “reflects the abundant democracy of the music — all parts are of relatively equal melodic interest and all singers are given the opportunity to lead.”

JOHN BEALLE

beat time along with the leader. Both the leader and Stanley would hold up two or more fingers to remind everyone which verse would be next. When a particular section had a solo, the leader would often turn to that section.

I was singing and recording from the second pew, but Gary invited me to try recording from another position. After the break, I moved to the corner between the altos and basses. Jamie Kelley was holding up the alto section all by herself with no trouble at all, but when she invited me to join and sing alto I gladly accepted a place within the square. After dinner, I moved the recorder to the floor in front of me, right in the hollow center of the square.

From this position, I could achieve better balance among the voice parts, since the recorder was roughly equidistant from all of them.

Mama and I did our best to sing along the whole time. During the first break, Jamie, a schoolteacher, helped by explaining a mnemonic device for remembering the shapes. “Sol” sounds like the letter “O,” a circle, and is round. “Fa,” a triangle, looks like a triangular pennant flag (“F” for “flag”). “La” is like two letter L’s coming together to form a square. “Mi,” a diamond, is like putting your hands together in a diamond shape at your heart (“me”). Another singer, Mary Amelia, was there with her father, Tim. He had introduced her to Sacred Harp singing when she was young, but she didn’t really get interested until she



was in graduate school. She pointed out that the way singers learn shape-note singing is by musical intervals (the distances between pitches). Singers learn how the different shapes relate to one another in the scale, so they can sing the intervals by the shapes. Tim said his sister was classically trained and had trou-

ble seeing the music in one key but singing it in another. He explained that the singers pitch each song in a range they can sing. That day at Shady Hill, occasionally the singers did ask Stanley and Ken to adjust the initial pitch lower or higher. One time we even sang a whole verse before deciding to pitch it lower.

My mother could relate to Tim’s sister’s perspective. Mama is a classically trained musician with a degree in piano pedagogy and decades of experience teaching piano, directing choirs, and administering church music programs. It is disorienting to her when Sacred Harp singers pitch a song differently than the written music indicates. When Mama sings Sacred Harp, she transposes constantly in her mind. My father, on the other hand, learned Sacred Harp by acculturation. He read shapes fluently but “round notes” just barely. My parents’ story is something of a microcosm of the evolution of Sacred Harp as John Bealle tells it in his review essay of the 1991 revision of *The Sacred Harp*.¹¹ “By the close of the 19th century,” Bealle writes:

“better music” crusaders advocating European styles and pedagogical methods—as well as the familiar “round-note” system of notation—successfully displaced shape-note music from the American musical mainstream. Indeed, the absence of Sacred Harp music or shape-note pedagogy in Alabama school and college curricula is likely the result of this “better music” movement ... The significance for Alabama lies in the fact that this round-note campaign was least successful in the South. Shape-note books, with the spiritual candor of their songs, followed the spread of evangelical religion in the South. Consequently Alabama and Georgia, especially their rural independent churches, have played pivotal roles in a somewhat systematic disregard of the better music boosters, serving ultimately as custodians of this once-national tradition.¹²

My mother grew up and attended college and then seminary almost entirely in North Carolina. She remembers “Stamps-Baxter hymns” from her childhood—also part of southern evangelical religious culture. She sang bass in a women’s gospel quartet in high school. She learned to play piano both by ear and from notation, but her formal education centered on the “European



Ruth Rowell and
Wavie Lee Bass Mims

Opposite: Sacred
Harp songbooks

(Courtesy of
Beth McGinnis)



Shady Hill singing school, 1892
(Courtesy of Beth McGinnis)

styles and pedagogical methods” Bealle references. To her, reading shape-note music is like speaking another language.

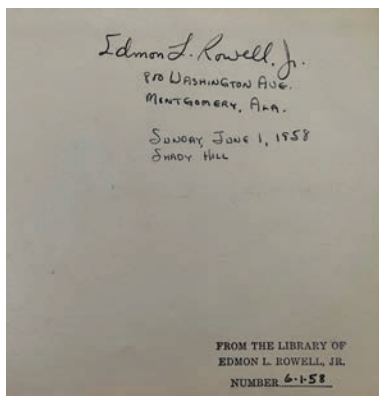
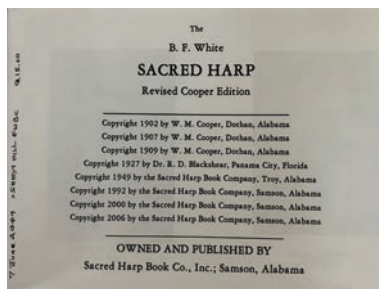
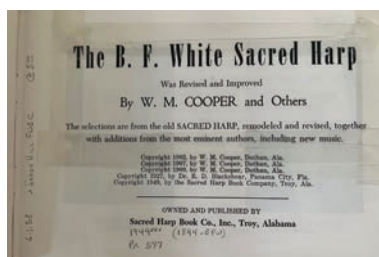
More exactly, it is a different pedagogy, one that ingeniously combines music reading and singing by ear. As Mary Amelia explained, shape-note singers develop a gapped scale of musical intervals in their minds’ ears. When they read shape-note music, they automatically produce the intervals. Whereas a shape-note singer reads intervals, or pitch relationships, my mother sees individual notes on a musical staff and interprets them as exact pitches. To me, the different ways my parents learned to read printed music reveal a central truth about Sacred Harp: it has music pedagogy at its core. Having evolved from early American singing schools, the tradition continually regenerates itself not only through regular singings but through educational programs such as Camp Fasola. The Shady Hill singing has its roots in singing schools. On the foyer credenza at homecoming there were framed photographs from 1892, 1906, 1945, and 1997. In the 1892 picture, several individuals appear to be holding wide-paged Sacred Harp books.

My father, Edd Rowell, and his family are some of the “custodians” of this self-perpetuating tradition.¹³ The 2022 “Minutes” list three of my father’s cousins as song leaders. Of the nine people Gary Padgett remembered in the memorial lesson that year, eight

It is a different pedagogy, one that ingeniously combines music reading and singing by ear.

were my relatives.¹⁴ I have several Sacred Harp books from my father's collection. Most bear his name and inscriptions detailing where and when he acquired the books and how much he paid for them. The oldest is a Cooper revision he picked up at the Shady Hill singing on Sunday, June 1, 1958, when he was twenty-one. He signed the front page and included his home address, which at the time was on Washington Avenue in Montgomery. He had just completed his freshman year at Howard College in Birmingham—now Samford University where I teach—having matriculated there on the G.I. Bill after service in Korea. He paid five dollars for the book. In addition to the front inscriptions, he wrote his name in big block letters across the tops and bottoms of the pages. I suspect he did this to keep someone else from inadvertently picking up his book. Several pages, including 451 (MARTIN), have been dog-eared, then carefully flattened later.¹⁵

From 1975 to 1980, my father was pastor of Livingston First Baptist Church in Livingston, Alabama. His Denson revision is dated April 26, 1980, when the church held a singing—the “first annual S.H. singing,” according to his notes. He paid five dollars for the book.¹⁶ A 2006 Cooper revision is inscribed “7 June 2009 > Shady Hill FWBC @15.00.”¹⁷ He bought it fifty-one years after he bought his first Sacred Harp book and four years before he died.¹⁸ This book is newer and less worn, but still has a few neatly dog-eared pages. Tucked inside are the Minutes of the Sacred Harp Singing Convention of 2008.¹⁹ Stanley Smith is listed in the singers' directory in the back, as is my father's cousin, Edd Bass, who kept the Shady Hill singings going for years. (Gary Padgett remembered Edd Bass in the 2023 memorial lesson). The 2008 calendar of singings lists the Shady Hill singing as a “Home Coming Sing” and specifies



that Shady Hill is “17 miles south of Andalusia, AL.” The Minutes record that on June 1, 2008, Edd Bass served as Chairman. Song leaders included Stanley Smith and Butch Kelley, whom I met in 2023. They also included my relatives Coy Bass, Frank Bass, Edd and Learvene Bass, Wavie (Bass) Mims, and my father Edd Rowell. Daddy led numbers 164, 451, 136, and 358 from the 2006 Cooper revision. Of these, 451 (MARTIN) is the one I remember him leading when I was a child. The text is “Jesus, Lover of My Soul.”

I knew before I came to Shady Hill that I would ask to lead a song, and that it would be MARTIN. I had practiced the shapes and the strong, swinging down-up conducting pattern beforehand. (MARTIN is in a relatively fast triple meter. I found it easiest to conduct in one: down one measure and up the next. I believe—hope—this is correct according to tradition). After singing the notes, I forgot that we had not yet sung the words of the first verse. I held up two fingers to indicate verse two, but quickly caught Stanley’s eye and corrected myself for verse one. After MARTIN, Stanley and Ken said I had another choice, since each leader can lead two songs. I had not chosen or prepared another one, so they picked “How Firm a Foundation.” It was a good choice for me, well-versed in hymns such as FOUNDATION but not (yet) in my inherited Sacred Harp tradition. Had I been better prepared, I would have chosen PROMISED LAND as my second song. If my mother ever led a song, it was that one.

As I led, the forest imagery came to my mind. Here I was in the forest nursery, with the elder trees offering shade and structure through their patient guidance. (Stanley and Ken are not much older than I, but they are certainly my elders in this tradition). The stump of my Father Tree, deceased ten years now, was still intricately connected through the web of relationships and memory. The songs themselves became Suzanne Simard’s network of fungi holding everything together under the forest floor.

And not just the songs. Dinner on the grounds occupies a central place in both Sacred Harp singings and southern family reunions.²⁰ Shady Hill, at the nexus of these two traditions, is no exception. The last time I attended Homecoming at Shady Hill was about forty years ago, when I was thirteen. The food and setup were much as I remembered. There were probably a hundred dishes. There was every kind of casserole you could imagine. There was watermelon and other fresh fruits and vegetables. There was a twelve-layer cake and at least fifteen other desserts. There was ham, sweet tea, and lemonade. The families sat outside in their camp chairs and the singers sat inside at tables in the kitchen and fellowship room.

Mama said the fried chicken was the tenderest, most delicious she had ever had. Somebody else said the creamed corn was the best they had ever had. The lady from Pensacola loved the pepper jelly. I ate field peas, cabbage, creamed corn, grilled vegetables, cornbread stuffing, sweet potato casserole, green beans, and I’m not sure what else. I don’t want to offend anyone whose delicious dish I left out.

Wavie Lee fainted, and people led her to the enclosed room under the pavil-

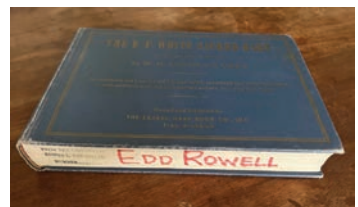


ion. They called an ambulance, and the paramedics came to check her out. Wavie protested loudly that she wasn't going to the hospital; she was going home. The lady from Pensacola suggested that Wavie might have gotten dehydrated. Later, I talked with two of my father's cousins, Herman Bass and Coy Bass. They thought the singing had sounded better than at any time in recent years—that it was better “tuned.” They joked that the improvement might have had to do with the fact that their sister Wavie was not singing.

In my conversation with cousins Herman and Coy I found myself once again at an intersection in the web of connections. I wanted to learn what some of the elders thought about the singing that day, but more than that I wanted to hear stories and laughter from my cousins. I came to Shady Hill partly as a researcher, but mostly to reconnect with my own roots in that Lower Alabama forest. Sacred Harp singing is part of the underground “wood-wide web” that connects me to my Parent Trees, my Cousin Trees, my Aunt and Uncle Trees. My best response to that network is to push down my roots and grow. ○

Ralph Bass sprinkling Edd Rowell's ashes into Hog Foot Creek, using Ruth Rowell's sugar scoop (Photo by Edmon L. Rowell III)

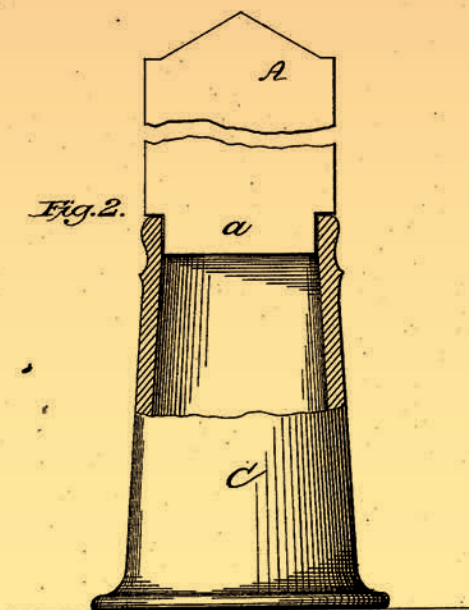
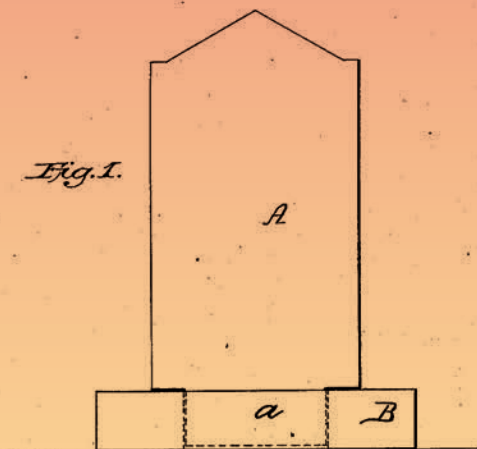
Beth's father, Edd Rowell (1937-2013), began his working life as a Baptist pastor but spent the last thirty years of it as editor of Mercer University Press in Macon, GA. People who knew him still remark on the breadth of his knowledge, academic and otherwise, and though he moved in some wide and learned circles, his favorite spot in all the world was always that little Shady Hill church. — JIM BROWN



W. P. & W. D. LOYD.
Tomb-Stone from Potter's Clay.

No. 216,427.

Patented June 10, 1879.



WITNESSES

John Allen
D. C. Allen

INVENTORS

W. P. Loyd *W. D. Loyd*
By *H. J. Ennis*

ATTORNEY

Absolutely Imperishable

The Loyd Family's Ceramic Tombstones

SARAH BRYAN AND HAL PUGH

Nineteenth-century southern folk potters were, like those who came both before and after them, entrepreneurs as well as artisans. Ceramic grave markers associated with the Loyd family of potters in Alabama and Mississippi are examples of a folk art spread not only through the traditional paths of family and community, but also by formal licensing and franchising. The Loyd family and associated potters only manufactured this form of “tombstones” (as they were referred to in contemporary sources) for a short span of years, but the markers, with their attractively spare geometrical design, their abundance, and their longevity, are a distinctive part of the folk material culture of much of western Alabama and eastern Mississippi.

In the years between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the twentieth century, a growing number of southerners chose to mark their loved ones' burial places with grave markers made of ceramic and other previously unconventional materials. As in other regions, stone had long been the material of choice, and in the early South this typically included rough fieldstones, hewn slate, soapstone, sandstone, marble, and other readily available local rock; and — especially in coastal areas, and in wealthy communities well connected to the wider world by trade — stones shipped from other regions. Wooden markers — slabs, posts, bedstead-style markers — were also common in past centuries, but few survive, the vast majority having decayed or been removed.

Both ceramic and iron markers existed before the Civil War as well, though apparently in very small numbers. Piedmont North Carolina potter Solomon Loy (born 1805) made tablet-style ceramic markers, one of which survives today.²¹ An African American cemetery near Edgefield, South Carolina, once held several alkaline-glazed tablet markers with lettering in white inlaid slip.²² It is impossible to say

Illustration from William P. and William D. Loyd's 1879 patent application showing how tabbed marker fit into turned base.

with certainty how many antebellum ceramic markers may have once existed that have been destroyed or removed over the last 150 years. Nor can we know how many iron memorials might have been removed for scrap metal during the Civil War or World War II. It's safe to assume that there were more non-stone markers in those days than we're now able to document. However, from what can be observed from surviving pieces, it seems to have been during the Reconstruction era and the decades immediately afterwards that the South saw the most marked rise in the popularity of both metal and ceramic funerary art.

Despite this apparent increase in ceramic grave markers from the 1870s on, such markers still remained comparatively rare in most parts of the South. Many were turned vessels in a closed dome shape, inscribed with the deceased's name and other information. At Union Grove Cemetery in Randolph County, North Carolina, the grave of three-year-old Flora Teague was originally marked at the head and foot with turned, salt-glazed domes with minaret-like finials, presumably made shortly after her death in 1895. In Georgia, members of the Stephens family of Haralson County are memorialized with full-length, arced ceramic grave covers, attributed to Stevens Pottery in Baldwin County, Georgia. (The Stephens and Stevens families were connected by marriage, and as the authors have yet to identify any similar grave covers outside of Haralson County, we believe that these were probably custom creations for relatives rather than a marketed product.)

One part of the South where ceramic grave markers were anything but rare, however, is in western Alabama and eastern Mississippi, in a territory served by the Loyd family and associated potters,

and other shops licensed to produce markers in their signature style. A distinctive regional tradition, Loyd-style "tombstones" are common in late-nineteenth century white graveyards throughout the area along the state line, stretching towards the center of both states; they can also be found in at least three African American graveyards in Mississippi.

In 1879, father and son potters William Payne Loyd and William Dickinson Loyd received a patent for their "Improvement in Tombstones from Potters' Clay."²³ The product they patented was the pairing of a slab-built upright marker and a turned pottery base. The markers paired with such bases were cut in at the bottom to form a tab, which was inserted into the base's slot. This form of memorial can be considered an outgrowth of the slot-and-tab tradition of the upland South. However, whereas stone slot-and-tab markers, often



Loyd patented tombstone with a base similar to the patent application diagram, Oktibbeha County, MS (Courtesy of Deedee Baldwin)

The Loyds' pairing of a ceramic slotted base and tabbed marker offered a more affordable alternative for families of limited means, one which could be assembled easily by one person and required no specialized building knowledge.

part of a larger box tomb, would have required considerable expense and physical labor to place, the Loyds' pairing of a ceramic slotted base and tabbed marker offered a more affordable alternative for families of limited means, one which could be assembled easily by one person and required no specialized building knowledge.

Subtle variations exist in Loyd-style markers' forms and decoration, though overall they adhere conservatively to a tightly defined set of design elements. The slab component —the "tombstone" itself — is usually around an inch thick, 6¼ inches wide, and 10½ inches tall, with a simple, pointed arch, and a roughly 1½ inch tab. Some variations exist, likely due to the variety of makers. The vast majority are salt-glazed, creating a fine orange-peel effect on the exposed surfaces of the gray clay. Impressed inscriptions, made with stamped letters and numbers, are filled in with cobalt, as are, often, border lines running close to the edges of the markers. On a small number of examples, a brief epitaph is inscribed in cursive. The tympanum, usually delineated, is sometimes left plain, and at other times features the beginning of the inscription, or, in rare cases, a decoration. Many Loyd-style markers have an accompanying footstone, a much smaller echo of the headstone's form, sometimes with impressed initials.

The slot (or base) piece is a turned cylinder roughly 10 to 12 inches in height. At the top, the cylinder is compressed to form a slot, into which the tabbed tombstone is inserted. Many bases are stamped with patent dates, and with other numbers perhaps identifying the custom orders. While the majority were left plain, some are decorated with incised combed bands, ribbed bands, and finger grooving. When partially buried, the bases provide sturdily weighted support for the upright markers. (The authors found no bases for footstones, which are light enough not to require the stabilizing piece).

In 1888, the *Vicksburg Evening Post* described the manufacturing process:

Elongated base with patent date and numbers likely used by the potter to keep up with inventory; partially broken base with patent date and incised design made by a serrated rib tool, Itawamba County, MS (Photos by Sarah Bryan and Hal Pugh)





Broken base showing decorative ribbed bands; elongated Loyd-style base with patent date and bands made by pressing fingers into wet clay (photo shows modern repair with tape); top view of a patented base, showing flattened opening for marker tab, Itawamba County, MS (Photos by Sarah Bryan and Hal Pugh)

Parties in Itawamba county Miss. have been for some years carrying on a novel industry, i.e., the manufacture of tombstones out of the excellent potter's clay that abounds in East Mississippi. These slabs are carefully moulded and the inscriptions are easily impressed before the clay goes to the oven. They are neat in appearance and absolutely imperishable.²⁴

The Loyds' patent specifications reinforce this description: "... a tombstone or slab, made of potters' clay, suitably molded into shape. It is then partially dried and the inscription sunk into the face of it. The letters are then colored with a suitable potters' colored glaze, and the article glazed and burned in a proper kiln."

As of this writing, the authors have identified 1,339 Loyd-style markers still (or at least until recently) extant. Of those, 204 are in Alabama, and 1,135 in Mississippi. The greatest concentration is found in a wide swath extending from Fayette, Lamar, and Marion Counties, Alabama, through Monroe, Itawamba, Tishomingo, and Prentiss Counties, Mississippi, up to the Tennessee line. Another large swath runs from the area around Ackerman in Choctaw County, Mississippi, in a north-northwesterly direction to the Mississippi-Tennessee line around Benton and Tippah Counties, and joins the main band in northern Pontotoc. An outlying band can be found just to the west of Birmingham, in Shelby and St. Clair Counties, Alabama.

The Loyd family's history exemplified the fitful east-to-west migration of many contemporary white southern potters and their kin. Stephen Loyd (1752-1821), W. P. Loyd's grandfather, who was likely born in either Virginia or North Carolina, moved from the area of Huntsville, North Carolina, in present-day Yadkin County, to Lincoln County, Tennessee, where he purchased land in 1814. While it is not known which generation of the Loyd family first made pottery, the fact that Stephen lived in Huntsville, where at least two other potters were active at the time, suggests that the Loyd family may have been engaged in the profession while living there.²⁵

Stephen's son James (1797-1841) was a teenager when the family moved to Tennessee. In 1820, James married Charity Payne, herself a member of a family that had migrated to Lincoln County from the North Carolina Piedmont. His life was cut short in the spring of 1841 when he fell into a well, and died of his injuries.

Despite a lack of documentation, it seems very likely that James

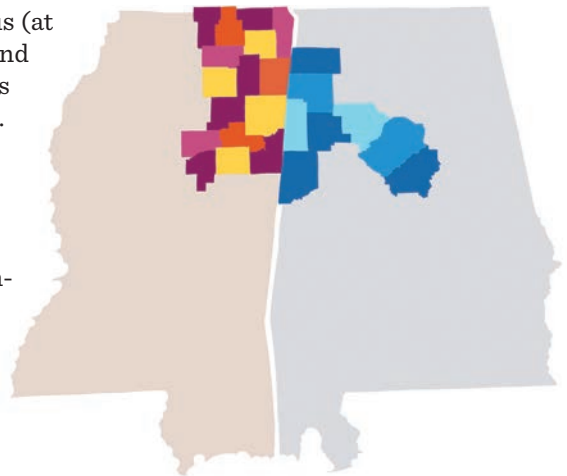
was a potter, as six of his own sons (William Payne Loyd, b. 1820, Stephen Carroll Loyd, b. 1822, Lawson Lancelot Loyd, b. 1825, Isham James Loyd, b. 1831, Sanford Marion Loyd, b. 1835, and Mack Wilson Loyd, b. 1839) and one son-in-law (David I. Guthrie, b. 1829, husband of Charity Elvira Loyd, b. 1833) were potters. This would also be a likely explanation for why the widowed Charity Payne Loyd and her children migrated to the pottery-making hub of Marion County, Alabama.

William Payne Loyd, James and Charity’s oldest son, was a young married man when the family made that move to Alabama. His wife, Thursa Ann Martin Loyd, was a member of another pottery-making family; her older brother George Martin, who also migrated from Tennessee to Alabama and then to Mississippi, was a potter as well.

Joey Brackner has written that members of the extended Loyd family, W. P. Loyd’s brother Isham in particular, may have made ceramic tombstones as early as the late 1860s.²⁶ It is especially difficult to determine the earliest date of manufacture, because once production was underway, some customers commissioned backdated markers for relatives who had died long before. The earliest date on a Loyd-style marker identified in this research (excluding those made by the Falkner shop, mentioned below) is December 11, 1842, on a marker in Franklin County, Alabama, which presumably was made forty or so years later.

One attribute that, while not necessarily exclusive to the markers made in Loyd-family shops, is nonetheless notable in those that are directly attributable to the Loyd potters, is the quality of the text — the accuracy of spelling, and the literary nature of some of the epitaphs. William Payne Loyd was a minister, and as such was likely both to be well read and to have access to a variety of sources for eulogies, epitaphs, and hymns. J. B., William Payne Loyd’s grandson who worked as a salesman for Guthrie & Loyd, seems to have been well educated too, appearing in the 1880 census (at age twenty-two) as a student, and later working as a bookkeeper as well as the shop’s traveling agent. Tombstones of the late nineteenth century — not only those made in small shops or by nonprofessional carvers, and mass-produced low-cost markers, but also expensive monuments from prominent stone carving companies — frequently feature misspellings, stray punctuation, and other textual errors. That few

Counties in Mississippi and Alabama where a total of 1,339 Loyd-style markers have been identified



Sterrett Locals.
June 18, 1880.

Our farmers have been fighting a desperate battle with king crab for several days past, and have about rescued their crops from his tenacious grasp. Crops that have been properly worked are looking well, and all are looking well for their chance.

There is some sickness in our land. We had quite a nice shower of rain last Friday.

Mr. James Elliott killed a blue crane the other day, which he says was six feet high, and measured six feet two inches from tip to tip; quite a large bird.

Log rollings are still in order. Some of our farmers are still planting corn.

Mr. W. H. Falkner has purchased the right to manufacture and erect tombstones made of potter's clay, to Shelby, St. Clair, Jefferson and Talladega counties. We wish him success.

—•••—

Mr. J. B. Dorsey is traveling agent for Guthery & Loyd, selling tomb stones. We take pleasure in recommending him to all who are so unfortunate as to need them, as well as the firm of Guthery & Loyd, who are worthy and energetic gentlemen, and our own county men of whom we, (if necessity required) would be sure to patronize. ED.

—•••—

Notice from a July 1880 edition of *The Shelby (AL) Sentinel*; Advertisement from the January 16, 1880 edition of *The Vernon (AL) Clipper*

Opposite: Alkali-glazed tombstone showing handmade Masonic compass and square, attributed to the William H. Falkner pottery. Compass design appears to have been impressed using an open safety pin. Shelby County, AL (Courtesy of Victor McGuire, Jr.); A double Loyd-style tombstone for infant siblings, Choctaw County, MS (Courtesy of Pam Metzger Gammill and Teresa Shumaker McMinn)

such anomalies are found on Loyd-style markers speaks to the makers' erudition, as well as to their rigorous standards of quality.

It is difficult to identify how many Loyd-style markers were actually made by members of the Loyd family, and which were made by other potters who had acquired rights to make them using the patented process. A notice that appeared in the Lamar County newspaper, the *Vernon Clipper*, several months after the Loyds' patent was formalized, gives insight into how the Loyd-style tombstone was marketed through family networks, gradually expanding outwards to other markets.

Mr. J. B. Dorsey is traveling agent for Guthery & Loyd, selling tomb stones. We take pleasure in recommending him to all who are so unfortunate as to need them, as well as the firm of Guthery & Loyd, who are worthy and energetic gentlemen, and our own country men of whom we, (if necessity required) would be sure to patronize. —Ed.²⁷

The Guthrie (Guthery) & Loyd mentioned in the clipping were Mack Wilson Loyd (1839-1905) — William Payne Loyd's youngest brother — and David Isham Guthrie, a potter whose association with the Loyds was long established. (He appears in the 1850 census as a resident in the household of Mack and William P.'s brother Steven Carroll Loyd). The traveling agent J. B. Dorsey was Mack Loyd's nephew, the son of his sister Mahulda Loyd Dorsey (1828-1869) and her potter husband William Sanford Dorsey (1830-1863).

Another method of commercial dissemination of the Loyd style is revealed in an 1880 clipping from the *Shelby (AL) Sentinel*.

Mr. W. H. Falkner has purchased the right to manufacture and erect tombstones made of potter's clay, to Shelby, St. Clair, Jefferson and Talladega counties. We wish him success.²⁸

While Loyd and Guthrie were making salt-glazed tombstones, William

... Expensive monuments from prominent stone carving companies frequently feature misspellings, stray punctuation, and other textual errors. That few such anomalies are found on Loyd-style markers speaks to the makers' erudition, as well as to their rigorous standards of quality.

Hilliard Falkner (1838-1907), working well over 100 miles away in Sterrett (Shelby County, Alabama), departed from the typical Loyd style in coating his tombstones with a clear alkaline glaze instead of salt-glaze. The authors have identified forty-nine Falkner alkaline-glazed tombstones located in fourteen different cemeteries in three counties in eastern Alabama. The earliest back-dated Falkner tombstone is marked May 3, 1841, and the latest date observed is March 10, 1885.

Other than Falkner's use of alkaline glaze, the most conspicuous variations found across the overall tradition of Loyd-style markers tend to fall into two categories: double-tombstones, and the occasional appearance of small figurative illustrations in the tympana. Several graves of children in Mississippi are marked with double tombstones—a wider version of the typical Loyd form, with two peaks, memorializing two siblings. The width of these markers apparently provides enough stability that bases were unnecessary. Designs in illustrated tympana draw from the symbolic vocabulary typical of nineteenth-century American tombstones, with examples that include willows, flowers, pointing hands, and Masonic emblems.

The most elaborate markers are those that the Loyds made for members of their own families. Some family monuments are significantly larger than the standard size, as large as 1¼ inch thick, 10½ inches wide, and 23 inches tall, excluding the tab. The tombstone of Steven Lawson Loyd, son and brother of the patent holders, who died of consumption at the age of eighteen in 1880, features a ten-branched willow tree with roots, and a twelve-line epitaph in verses adapted from hymnodist Benjamin Clark's "Say, why should friendship grieve for those ..."²⁹



HE SLEEPS BENEATH HIS NATIVE EARTH,
AND NEAR THE PLACE THAT GAVE HIM BIRTH,
HIS YOUTHFUL FEET TROD FLOWERS THAT BLOOM
IN BEAUTY O'ER HIS EARLY TOMB

HE RESTS BENEATH HIS NATIVE EARTH,
WITH GRATEFUL HEARTS WE'LL SING HIS WORTH.
HIS GENTLE WAYS SHALL EVER DWELL,
IN HEARTS THAT KNEW AND LOVED HIM WELL.

AND OFT WE'LL LIFT THE TEARFUL EYE
TO HEAR HIM CALLING FROM THE SKY.
OH! HOW COULD WE HIS ABSENCE BEAR,
BUT THAT WE HOPE TO MEET HIM THERE.

Just over a year later, William Dickinson Loyd, the younger of the two patent-holding Williams, died as well, a month shy of his thirtieth birthday. His marker is of the Loyd style, with a stamped design of a flower with two blossoms — one in full bloom and one still a bud — sprouting from a vessel that looks like a Loyd tombstone base. The inscription is long and elaborate, lovingly executed, but some lines are crooked and the spacing somewhat awkward. One wonders if he himself had been the artisan usually tasked with arranging the lettering,



and when he died, the job was left to someone with a less expert hand.

The three-stanza epitaph on W. D. Loyd's marker is assembled from a variety of sources, including "Dear is the spot where Christians sleep," also attributed to Benjamin Clark. (The closing phrase, "not lost, but gone before," is believed to have appeared first in Welsh theologian Matthew Henry's *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, possibly inspired by a similar phrase from Seneca. The words appear frequently on tombstones, mourning jewelry, and other funerary art from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.)

DEAR IS THE SPOT WHERE MY HUSBAND SLEEPS.
AND SWEET THE STRAINS THAT ANGELS POUR
OH! WHY, SHOLD [sic] WE, IN ANGUISH WEEP?
HE IS NOT LOST, BUT GONE BEFORE.

THIS PRECIOUS MOUND, TO ME HOW DEAR,
FOR ALL MY HOPES ARE BURIED HERE
HOW LONELY I, AND LITTLE CHILDREN
NOW BEREFT OF THEE MY DARLING:

BUT OFT WE'LL LIFT A TEARFUL EYE,
TO HEAR THEE CALLING, FROM THE SKY,
OH! HOW COULD WE, THINE ABSENCE BEAR?
BUT THAT WE HOPE, TO MEET THEE THERE.



"Say, why should friendship grieve for those ..." and "Dear is the spot where Christians sleep" appear on the same page of the 1870 American hymnal *Songs of Devotion for Christian Associations*, suggesting that that book or a close derivative was the Loyds' source.³⁰

Although Loyd-style markers were, and remain, numerous in the region, their stylistic vocabulary did not become a wider tradition in the area. Some of the economic factors that made them a successful product may have changed by the late 1880s, and there may also have been reluctance on the part of other potters to adopt elements of a product whose copyrighted status was so obvious (despite both of the original copyright holders' deaths before 1890). Even so, isolated examples of ongoing Loyd influence can be found.

Two markers in an Itawamba County (MS) cemetery, one for Burnetta Thompson, who died in 1870, and the other for Thomas White, who died in 1877, stand out from the examples around them in the comparatively simple, less confident decorations and lettering. The markers are both salt-glazed, with a simple painted floral design on the tympanum of each, and uneven lettering and numbering (despite visible guide lines). Near one lies a fragment of a base

Loyd-style tombstone with epitaph in script, "Suffer little children to Come unto me and forbid Them not." Tippah County, MS (Courtesy of Dana Beeler)

Opposite: Front and back view of salt-glazed tombstone and base for William Loyd's son, Stephen Lawson Loyd, Itawamba County MS (Photo by Sarah Bryan and Hal Pugh)

Residents of northwestern Alabama and northeastern Mississippi, when faced with the need to mark a loved one's grave, must surely have noticed that the Loyd family potters marked their own relatives' graves with the family's craft, the strongest possible endorsement of a product.

with similar decoration. Clearly made in the same shop, though perhaps at a different time (some of the letters are impressed with the same stamps on both markers, others with different stamps), they may be the Loyds' prototypes for the ultimate patented form. Alternatively, they may have been made by a later generation of potters, to replace original markers that were lost or destroyed.

In other cemeteries around Itawamba County there are a small number of grave markers with a distinctive form quite different from the Loyd-style markers — two stacked vessels, with a disc attached to the lower vessel and inscribed with the deceased's name and dates. Some, made by potter Ephraim P. Kennedy, have a dark brown glaze, but another one nearby, made by potter Jim Humphries, blends the Kennedy marker form with the color combination used by the Loyds, a light background glaze with cobalt decoration.³¹

In the 1980s, potters Titus and Euple Riley of Peppertown Pottery in Itawamba County produced tombstones referencing the Loyd aesthetic — pointed tablet markers, with writing and decoration in cobalt over a light glaze. Two are found in the Keyes Cemetery of Itawamba County, at the graves of Levi Clouse, "Confederate Soldier," and Elizabeth Clouse. There are more than ten original Loyd-style markers in the cemetery, and the Rileys may have made these two markers to replace earlier ones that had been broken.

The latest Loyd-style tombstone identified by the authors, which was placed in memory of a newborn or stillborn girl who died in 1888, is found in an African American cemetery in Choctaw County, Mississippi. It was probably made by Lawson Lancelot Loyd, who lived and worked in neighboring Winston County.³² William W. Dickinson, a member of the Loyd family by marriage, had joined the family business by 1884, and he, Lawson L. Loyd, and licensees are likely the makers of most of the very late examples, as by 1888, William D. Loyd had died and William Payne Loyd had migrated to Texas. Though Loyd-style tombstones are very rare in Black cemeteries, six survive in the Choctaw County graveyard. Five of the markers are for babies, and the sixth is for a man who lived to the age of forty-five. They range in dates from 1869-1888. Some are likely backdated, and it is quite possible that all of the tombstones were ordered at the same time by family members in 1888. Only two other African American cemeteries are known to contain Loyd tombstones.

Residents of northwestern Alabama and northeastern Mississippi, when faced with the need to mark a loved one's grave, must surely have noticed



that the Loyd family potters marked their own relatives' graves with the family's craft, the strongest possible endorsement of a product. Of the six potter brothers who came south from Tennessee in the mid-nineteenth century, the two who died youngest — Stephen Carroll Loyd (1822-1868) and Lawson Lancelot Loyd (1825-1880) — received family-made markers, as did their mother, Charity Payne Loyd (1805-1858), and two of William Payne Loyd's sons, among others.

William Payne Loyd settled in Hill County, Texas. He outlived his son, namesake, and business partner, but not by much, dying in Texas during the summer of 1886. Mack Loyd went west as well, settling in Indian Territory, and died in 1905 in present-day Sequoyah County, Oklahoma. Sanford Loyd lived in Monroe and Lee Counties, Mississippi, and then settled in the James Creek community of Itawamba, living until 1907. Isham, the longest-lived brother, died in Alabama in 1915, at the age of 84. All four potters' graves are marked by substantial, well crafted, but stylistically unremarkable granite and marble tombstones. Like many expensive stone grave markers made in that era, they have grown more difficult to read over the last century due to weathering and accumulated lichen and debris.³³ The intact ceramic markers that the Loyds made, however, have so far lived up to the claim of imperishability, their surfaces seemingly impervious to wear, and their messages of remembrance still bold and clear. ○

Cobalt weeping willow decoration on the tympanum of Stephen Lawson Loyd's tombstone; cobalt floral decorations on the tympana of Loyd-family tombstones, Itawamba County, MS
(Photos by Sarah Bryan and Hal Pugh)

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A Memory Quilt for My Father

ZANICE BOND

*Will the circle be unbroken by and by
Lord by and by?
There's a better home awaiting in the sky
Lord, in the sky.*

FROM "WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN" | A. P. CARTER, LYRICIST

Less than two weeks after turning eighty-eight, my father, Maltimore Bond, died. He had valiantly battled Parkinson's for nearly twenty years, and on November 1, 2021, he was laid to rest.

The drive from Auburn, Alabama, to Brownsville, Tennessee, was uneventful. I made it to West Tennessee and together with my mother, brother, and two sisters, began preparing for the funeral. As fourth-generation funeral directors, my siblings and I were intimately aware of the rituals and customs of funeral service. Still, the support of extended family members and funeral home personnel was essential. Knocks on the door of my parents' house brought condolences—flowers, food, cards, kind words. Telephone calls reconnected us with familiar voices and allowed us time away from our grief to hear old stories about Daddy on the family farm, or in college as a civil engineering student, or even in Tokyo as a surveyor in the army with Mt. Fuji in the distance.

We aimed to document every call, every visit, every gesture of sympathy extended to us because we appreciated the outpouring of love and wanted to remember Daddy through the eyes and hearts of others who loved him as we did. The pandemic motivated us to plan a graveside service rather than a traditional church service. Daddy was very religious and actively participated in organized worship services until he simply



could not. Still, public health and safety made his homegoing celebration an outdoor event. The weather was especially warm for November. The sun glistened on the bronze vault as the standing U.S. flag waltzed with the tender breeze. We were surrounded by flowers, family, friends — and at Rosenwald Cemetery — we were a stone’s throw from both the house we grew up in and our maternal grandparents’ home just a few yards away.

Days earlier, a neighbor had asked my brother if he could release his doves, symbols of peace, at the end of the funeral. Of course, my brother agreed. So, at the end of the service, our neighbor released his doves, and they flew enthusiastically into the sky until they suddenly stopped and landed in one of the nearby trees in the cemetery. They were supposed to *fly away* — like the song. Instead, we were left holding our collective breath, heads to the sky — watching to see what the doves would do next — when my brother wittily remarked from the crowd, “Well, you know, Daddy never did like to get too far away from home.” We all laughed — grateful for the truth wrapped in his comic relief.

Days after the funeral, I would go to the cemetery and have breakfast — kind of *with* Daddy. I was toying with the idea of having a quilt made using his clothes and maybe some of his ties. I really wasn’t sure what to call it: A bereavement quilt? A mourning quilt? Memory quilt? I knew my father and his nine siblings always slept under quilts my grandmother and great-grandmother had made together, and I had heard about my great-aunt, on my mother’s side, mailing fabric to a quilter who would make quilts and ship them back to her. My great-aunt even included those quilts (about forty of them) in her will, and they were distributed among her nine children.

Still, I didn’t know very much about mourning quilts. According to Gail





Andrews Trechsel, quilt expert and director emerita of the Birmingham Museum of Art, “mourning quilts provided ... a tangible memorial to the departed ... and appear to have been more common in America during the second half of the nineteenth century than earlier.” She distinguishes the “Memory Quilt” “as a type of mourning quilt ... made from the deceased’s clothing”³⁴ The first time I recall seeing a bereavement quilt — well, a quilt-made-from-a-deceased-person’s-clothing — was the quilt Mrs. Polly Evans made using some of my maternal grandfather’s ties. I named the quilt *Community Ties in Life and Death* because my grandfather, C. A. Rawls, was a local businessman who founded Rawls Funeral Home in 1933. It became a parent company to several other businesses that provided career opportunities and support for Black residents who were denied access to resources and excluded from full participation in society by Jim Crow and its progeny. The first location of the funeral home was at 201 North Bradford Street in Brownsville, Tennessee, the home he shared with my grandmother, Maude Crofton Rawls, a Tollette, Arkansas native, and his widowed mother, my great-grandmother, Texanna Love Rawls. Early on, it was clear that, for my grandfather, family and business were inextricably linked.

When he died, the town turned out to commemorate him, a beloved citizen and friend. My mother gave Miss Polly some of his ties — probably to give to her grandsons for church — and a few months later, Miss Polly returned to the funeral home with a quilt. I like to think of that quilt as a gift from the entire community with the neckties symbolizing my grandfather’s business acumen, grounded in the pursuit of economic freedom for Black farmers and churches, aspiring homeowners, and professionals. Mrs. Gustava Maclin Vance, an African American, was Brownsville’s first female pharmacist, and she worked at the Service Sundry Drugstore my grandparents owned.

Cemeteries, Quilts, & Country Blues

In the days following my father’s passing, I continued to contemplate

Community Ties in Life and Death quilt made by Polly Evans in honor of C. A. Rawls (Courtesy of Zanice Bond)

Opposite: Quilts by a Mississippi quilter, commissioned by Willie Bell Rawls and made with fabric Rawls sent to Mississippi (Courtesy of Zanice Bond)

how to memorialize my father with a quilt. While leaving my father's grave one morning (with Miss Polly's quilt in mind), I called Dr. Renee Tatum Walters, a quilter I knew in Montgomery, Alabama. Renee was gracious and sweet. She offered her condolences, and we began to talk about our fathers. Her father, Rev. Rashia Tatum, a minister and farm owner from Spearsville, Louisiana, died in 2013, and she had made five quilts — one for each sibling — that included pieces from her father's suits, work clothes, ties, and pajamas. Her mother, Mrs. Piccola Mae Wayne Tatum, taught her how to quilt, and she recalled the fun she had as a child playing with her friends under the wooden quilting frame they all called the quilting horse as her mother and sister-quilters worked. The children — especially those who knew how to listen carefully — mastered the art of eavesdropping during these gatherings. There was food, camaraderie, and a growing sense of community.³⁵

Renee and I had met a few years earlier at Tuskegee University (TU) during a quilting workshop — not so unlike the gatherings she remembered from childhood — for at its core, this workshop promoted quilting and community. This event was a part of a two-year National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant entitled *Literary Legacies of Macon County and Tuskegee Institute: Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph W. Ellison, and Albert Murray*. Quilter Jan Hollins, a California native living in Atlanta, Georgia, led the workshop at TU's Legacy Museum. Participants, both seasoned and novice quilters, worked together — cutting, sewing, ironing, and designing their own quilt squares — amid the amazing quilts Jan brought with her from Atlanta and those from the *Soul of Zora: A Literary Legacy through Quilts* exhibit that honored the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston, a folklorist, anthropologist, and Harlem Renaissance writer, born in Notasulga, Alabama. These

Zora quilt by Lola Jenkins, featured in the *Soul of Zora* exhibit; right: *Days Gone By* quilt by Jan Hollins (Courtesy of Zanice Bond)



Different quilters adhere to their own personal guidelines when designing such quilts... Some quilters would never mix fabrics belonging to a deceased person with a person who is still alive.

quilts were certainly not bereavement quilts, nor did they include clothes Zora had worn. However, the quilts memorialized her as a griot, writer, and child of Alabama who was taught to “jump at de sun.” The quilters featured in the exhibit that surrounded us were inspired by Zora’s words as well as her iconic womanist character Janie Crawford from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. They wove together their understanding of Hurston’s ideas, southern landscape, and Black vernacular into quilts inviting the community to know Zora Neale Hurston as they had.

My father’s passing and my desire to have a quilt made of his clothing sparked a more formal inquiry into Alabama’s rich quilting history. This preliminary exploration of bereavement or memory quilts in Alabama has led me to several observations. First, the term for a quilt made from clothes, ties, or fabric from a deceased person is not necessarily referred to as a bereavement quilt (though it appears often in a Google search), and different quilters adhere to their own personal guidelines when designing such quilts. For example, some quilters would never mix fabrics belonging to a deceased person with a person who is still alive, and some quilters (or quilt consumers) are more practical than purist. Purist quilters (or consumers), for example, (a description I would associate with those who want *only* fabric from the deceased to be part of the quilt) might be willing to sacrifice or compromise fabric durability, standard patterns, or color schemes that practical quilters or consumers would not. Next, quilts that commemorate a deceased person using clothes or other personal items might not be a traditional quilt at all. Instead, memory quilting practices may take the form of bears, dolls, rug mugs, or other creative expressions that use quilting techniques and continue to keep the memory of a loved one alive.

Finally, my early findings suggest that quilting has always been connected with building community, and twenty-first century quilting not only binds us to a long quilting tradition, but also provides unique opportunities to strengthen the tattered social fabric of our (future) communities, our state, and our nation. In fact, deepening the social fabric between those engaged in quilt talk is as important as the fabrics and patterns quilters use in their art. Quilting, too, in the age of the Anthropocene and climate change, is a socially conscious and environmentally responsible act — especially when old clothes are recycled (rather than being dumped in landfills), when rags become works of art, or when quilts become, as Phyllis Biffle Elmore, author of the memoir *Quilt of Souls*, has called them, a “balm” or “talisman” that heals.³⁶

... For both men, the ties represented respectability,
and both quilts reflect their important legacies.



If Ties Could Talk quilt made by Sandy Johnson in honor of her father, Edmund L. Detering (Courtesy of Zanice Bond)

I returned to Auburn in November 2021, several days after my father's funeral. However, I did not release his clothes to Renee until September 2022. At that moment, we formally began to stitch our lives together through quilt making and quilt studies. We would not meet again until March 6, 2023, the day she finished the memory quilt for my father.

If Ties Could Talk

On Monday, October 19, 2022, I led Auburn University's Osher Life Long Learning Institute (OLLI) Brownbag at the Boykin Community Center in Auburn, Alabama. This public talk allowed me to share preliminary findings from my research and engage with community members interested in quilting. That afternoon I met several quilters, including Ms. Sandy Johnson, a prolific community quilter, who consented to an interview. We met about a month later in her home in Auburn, Alabama, to discuss the gorgeous quilt she had made of her deceased father's ties, a piece of art that had been exhibited at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art in Auburn. Unlike many quilters who learned to quilt from a mother or grandmother, Sandy began quilting as an adult after taking classes.³⁷ She also credits plane geometry classes as among the most useful and foundational for her as a quilter. Her bold leap into quilting provides a glimpse into her creative and independent spirit. In 1988, she became a charter member of the Cotton Bowl Quilters (CBQ) in Auburn. Founded with about eight members, CBQ now has sixty members, and Flavin Glover, an internationally known quilter, is among them.³⁸

Then in 1998, Sandy's father, Dr. Edmund L. Detering, died. He was a remarkable talent who lived a rich and varied life. He also collected neckties (bowties, too). In fact, he amassed about 2,000 ties — some were gifts, some were purchases — and as Sandy shared, "He never wore the same tie twice."³⁹ The colorful and truly striking work of art Sandy named *If Ties Could Talk* is made of a *mélange* of ties from her father's necktie collection, and that concept — *If Ties Could Talk* — provided an important framework for our conversation.

First, the quilt qualified as a "bereavement" quilt though Sandy had never really heard the term in quilting circles and certainly never used it when referring to this quilt. Being quite practical, Sandy wanted to do something productive or useful with her father's ties. She surely did not want them languishing in the back of a dark closet.⁴⁰ So, drawing on her precision and keen aesthetic sensibilities, she made a quilt — a vibrant work of art. The ties continued to *talk* through a quiz Sandy prepared that accompanied the quilt. Admirers are challenged to find selected items in the quilt, such as a Rotary International pin, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, flowers, the Chiquita banana, a matador, a zebra, a lighthouse, a keyboard, an image of an Aztec man, dancers, beehives, and an elephant.⁴¹

Taking the quiz was a fun way to build and strengthen the social fabric between us. For example, her father, born in 1913, was on the International Board of Rotary and traveled extensively across the globe with the club for fifty

years. In fact, he amazingly maintained perfect attendance for all those years.⁴² My grandfather, C. A. Rawls, born in 1905, was also a Rotarian, the first African American in Haywood County (TN) invited into the organization. We laughed together as I told the story of my grandfather's dilemma when he was preparing for his first Rotary picnic. He was always either at home in his matching pajamas and robe or dressed for work in a suit and tie. He had no casual clothes.

We also discussed the quilt Miss Polly made of my grandfather's ties which were not particularly fancy or expensive. Some were gifts from employees or family members. There were no matadors or Aztec progenitors. One tie even had a cigarette burn on it from my grandfather smoking while multitasking at the office. Still, for both men, the ties represented respectability, and both quilts reflect their important legacies. Dr. Detering had been a college professor and earned his Ph.D. from Washington University in St. Louis. He was an elementary school principal, and his school was the only one with a marching band in all of St. Louis County. He was also a professional musician and a central part of the musicians' union.⁴³ Sandy clearly admired her father and respected his noteworthy contributions.

Following a different path, C. A. Rawls graduated from Gupton Jones School of Mortuary Science with honors. He organized the Rawls Burial Association which inspired country blues legend Sleepy John Estes to write "Al Rawls," a song commemorating that meaningful community work. This year, Rawls Funeral Home is celebrating its ninetieth year of continuous service to West Tennessee. The two men, contemporaries who lived in different racialized, yet sometimes overlapping, worlds, met for the first time through their descendants and their talking ties.

Women of the Bend
doll made by Betty
Anderson (Courtesy
of Zanice Bond)



Women of the Bend Dolls

As I pursued my research on memory quilts, I stumbled across quilters whose work broadens the legacy of quilting and goes beyond traditional quilts. Alabama's Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center is a collaboration that provides space and support for area artists to share their work.⁴⁴ In December 2022, artists participated in a Black Belt Treasures event at Pebble Hill in Auburn. While browsing through the rooms, I spotted Ms. Betty Anderson and her collection of *Women of the Bend Dolls*. She was busy at work

making dolls as she greeted passersby. I selected a doll and she shared its genealogy with me. The hat was from her grandmother's yo-yo quilt. The bodice was made from one of her father's ties, and the skirt was from the discarded denim overalls of her neighbor Sulynn Creswell's father.⁴⁵ The doll's pipe cleaner arms and hands held a worn section from Miss Betty's great-grandmother's quilt. The doll embodies four generations from her family tree, including her great-grandmother, an enslaved ancestor. According to the doll's label, "Each doll is one of a kind and tells the story of generations of talented, women quilters from Gee's Bend, Alabama. Betty stitches together her ancestors' rich history and culture with a mix of vintage and contemporary materials, quilt pieces, and found objects."⁴⁶

Ms. Anderson, who also owns the Camden Shoe Shop & Quilt Museum, was advised to increase the price of certain dolls made with heirloom pieces that had more historic significance, but she did not.⁴⁷ Though artists like her must be paid fairly and equitably for their work, her primary motivation is not financial. She is, however, motivated to conserve and repurpose the "raggedy" pieces of quilts and other fabrics into art — art that ultimately preserves the rich history and honors the humanity of Alabama's Black Belt. Once, while she was living in New York, a woman saw her on the subway making one of her dolls and approached her about buying it. She didn't have a price, so the woman gave her \$10. Shortly after that encounter, a representative from *Women's Day* magazine contacted her about selling her dolls in a special campaign to fight Alzheimer's. The campaign was successful, and Ms. Betty was no doubt proud of her contributions to a worthy cause. Now back in Alabama, she continues her parents' legacy through her work as director of the museum that celebrates quilting as well as artifacts from her father's shoe shop.⁴⁸

Quilt of Souls

Another quilt lover I interviewed emphasized the spiritual essence of memory quilts. Mrs. Phyllis Biffle Elmore, a writer with deep family ties in Alabama, has been on a national tour promoting her memoir, *Quilt of Souls*. As her book reveals, Phyllis moved to Livingston, Alabama, with her grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Edgar (Lula Young) Horn when she was four years old, and she remained in Alabama for nine years. Her grandmother's quilts became an integral part of her life in Livingston. She received her first quilt when she arrived, and it consoled her as she adjusted to life in Alabama without her mother. Oddly enough, the quilt was unfinished, so additional fabric with more history, familial relationships, and stories were to come.⁴⁹

Phyllis recalls neighbors bringing sacks of clothes that belonged to deceased relatives to her grandmother so that she could make quilts for them. When an individual died, Phyllis recalled community members removing the mattress from the house and keeping it outside, preferably in the sun so that the spirit of the deceased person could make passage to the next horizon. Her grandmother did not own a sewing machine, but she was a community quilter who

Quilt of souls reflects not only the soul of the quilter who has lovingly prepared the quilt and the soul of the receiver who is comforted and sustained by it, but also refers to the quilt itself having its own soul, bound together with the deceased.

skillfully measured fabric using her hand. After a quilt was complete, Mr. Horn would typically take it to the family's home. Phyllis said her grandmother never expected payment, but asked only that the quilt be respected as a family heirloom and handed down to the next generation. Phyllis later coined the phrase *quilt of souls* to refer to the quilts her grandmother made. This reflects not only the soul of the quilter who has lovingly prepared the quilt and the soul of the receiver who is comforted and sustained by it, but also refers to the quilt itself having its own soul, bound together with the deceased.⁵⁰

Like other quilters I have met, Phyllis does not use the term bereavement. In fact, she suggests that bereavement is the time before one is ready to release a deceased loved one's clothes to a quilter. According to Phyllis, the creation of a quilt made of a deceased relative's clothing should bring "closure" to that family. She uses such words as "talisman," "gift from ancestors," and "cathartic" when describing the quilt of souls.⁵¹ The deep emotions and kinship ties she feels toward the quilt of souls could be explained by the extreme care her grandmother took with the fabric she used. Further, she never mixed clothes from a deceased person with an individual who was still alive, believing it would prevent the soul of the deceased from moving on. While some quilters are more preoccupied with color combinations or patterns, Mrs. Horn's principal focus was on the lives the fabric represented and piecing those in blocks together. For example, as told in *Quilt of Souls*, Mrs. Horn used fabric from her deceased sister Ella's wedding dress — a dress Ella was never able to wear as she did not survive a brutal attack before her wedding. Next to the fabric from Ella's dress are pieces from her fiancé Jeremiah's shirt.⁵² The family stories and history sewn into the quilt give it intrinsic value and meaning, just as the quilts in Alice Walker's short story, "Everyday Use," became Johnson family treasures:

One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.⁵³

Keeping connections alive is important to Phyllis and her family. Her great-grandfather Josh Horn, born in 1854, was among the formerly enslaved individuals in Alabama interviewed by Ruby Pickens Tartt during the



Federal Writers' Project. Her aunt Annie Grace Horn Downson's field songs were recorded and are housed at the Library of Congress. These important documents, including quilts of souls, confirm her ancestors' existence and their experiences as Black people in the South while simultaneously connecting them to their descendants. Through ancestry.com, Phyllis recently found descendants of her grandmother's siblings who were sold from the Alabama plantation on which the family lived. Her grandmother never met her three older siblings as they were auctioned off before her birth. Still, Phyllis was able to offer a final gift of love and closure, though posthumously, to her grandmother. The newly discovered relatives who shared her maternal grandmother's DNA gave Phyllis pieces of fabric that belonged to them and some shared ancestors. Then Phyllis added fabric from her grandmother's old housecoat to the pieces that became a quilt members of a New York quilters guild made for her.⁵⁴ This quilt was a true reunion of souls, a quintessential *quilt of souls*.

Phyllis Biffle Elmore's
Quilt of Souls
(Courtesy of Phyllis
Biffle Elmore)

Airing of the Quilts

My search for the practices that shape quilters' thinking about memory quilts in Alabama led me to the community made famous by its internationally recognized quilters. On Saturday, October

8, 2022, the inaugural *Gee's Bend Airing of the Quilts Festival* was held in Wilcox County, Alabama. This festival follows the tradition families observed each year as the weather changed. Quilts that had been packed away for the summer were taken out of storage and hung in the sun for a day or two before being used again.⁵⁵ As a first-time visitor to Boykin, Alabama, I



was thrilled to begin my pilgrimage across this quilting mecca, and what an ideal time to walk the streets. Quilts were hung outside the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy Heritage Center and in the yards of most homes. Clusters of quilts blew in the wind sending geometric bursts of color that brightened and enlivened an already sunny day. While in Gee's Bend, I met Ms. Marlene Bennett Jones, who began quilting at age eight.⁵⁶ We stood talking in front of her family home, one she lived in with her thirteen siblings. One of the most beautiful quilts she had on display was a memory quilt. Like Renee Tatum Walters in Montgomery, she, too, made quilts for her siblings after her father died. In addition to the geometric shapes and

the robust patterned grays, reds, and blues, Ms. Bennett Jones's memory quilt included buttons and pockets from her father's shirts. She also pointed to her sibling's name on the quilt displayed in the yard that day. She personalizes each memory quilt made for her siblings.⁵⁷ Like Ms. Bennett Jones, Walters, the Montgomery-based quilter commissioned to design the quilt for my father, brings very special touches to her memory quilts.

PeePaw's Quilts

When Renee Tatum Walters's father Rashia Tatum died, she waited until all of the male relatives had selected the items they wanted from his closets — brothers, nephews, grandsons, even cousins. Then she, the youngest of six, asked her eldest sister if she could take a few items so that she could make a quilt. Renee decided to make a quilt for each of her siblings since, as she laughingly confessed, she didn't want to have to "hide" the quilt when her siblings came to visit. She went in birth order, so her oldest brother was first. She knew each quilt would include her mother's favorite pattern — the pinwheel. So, every quilt would be an homage to Mr. Rashia (or PeePaw as he was affectionately called) and Mrs. Piccola, too.

Renee knew the quilt for her oldest brother would become a family quilt, so she considered her brother's wife and children before deciding on butterflies. They became the central part of the quilt, and she used fabric from one of her father's ties as the center of the butterfly. As fate would have it (or just good ole quilter's mojo), she had selected a tie her brother had given to their

father one Father’s Day. With a big smile on her face, she beamed, “Oh — my stock really went up with him. I became his favorite after that.”⁵⁸ One of her sisters, Delia Tatum Miller, was so impressed with the first quilt she insisted that Renee skip some of the other siblings and do her quilt next. After all, this sister had a full-time job but was also caring for the family farm. So metaphorically, she was knee-deep in cow manure — tendin’ to the Tatum cows — and balin’ hay. Thus, she announced, “I want an ‘ugly’ quilt.” She wanted her quilt to reflect the “grunt work,” the manual labor of a farmer that was a part of her father’s legacy.⁵⁹

Mr. Tatum was an impeccable dresser, but of course, as a farmer, he had work clothes. So, Renee selected khakis, denim, and “plain” clothes for the next quilt. Though her father typically wore “dark conservative suits,” she came across a hideous light-colored suit with odd pinstripes, and had no trepidations about cutting into it. Using this suit was a calculated design choice as it was very sturdy and its light colors could “offset some of the denim.” This was a suit her father rarely wore. So, no one even recognized it, and Delia adored her “ugly” quilt. Renee continue to make quilts with her father’s clothes. She mixed fabric bought in fabric stores with her dad’s clothes, ensuring that his clothes would “enrich” each quilt. One memory quilt she made included her dad’s “sleeping clothes” (as he used to refer to them). They were expensive silk pajamas her husband brought him from Saudi Arabia, and they became his

Opposite: Caroline Gebhard, Marlene Bennett Jones (quilter), and Zanice Bond at the inaugural *Airing of the Quilts Festival* in Gee’s Bend, 2022 (Courtesy of Zanice Bond)

Memory quilt made by Renee Tatum Walters for her sister, Delia Tatum Miller, in honor of their father, Rev. Rashia Tatum (Courtesy of Renee Tatum Walters)



favorite pair of pajamas.⁶⁰ Renee observed how people of her dad’s generation used to really value their clothes. People kept them, shared them, or wore them out.⁶¹ Giving or receiving hand-me-downs (or gently worn clothes) was standard practice — even in families who could afford new clothes. Quilting then is a reminder not to discard clothing so quickly as it helps to conserve clothing, make fashion statements, and remember ancestors.

I’ll Be Seeing You

Renee completed my father’s quilt on Monday, March 6, 2023. It features some of his ties, shirts, handkerchiefs, one pair of overalls, and his pajamas. Near the



end of his life, he wore pjs every day, so there were lots of pajamas — even some with velcro when he had trouble with buttons. The quilting was done using a long arm quilting machine and includes three patterns: diamonds, hourglasses, and of course, pinwheels, Renee’s mother’s favorite. The quilting is celebratory. I imagine Louie Armstrong singing *What a Wonderful World* across the quilt squares.

Renee never met my father. So, I had tried to introduce her to him, hoping as she brought her aesthetics to the quilt, she would understand his simplicity — his beautiful rural southern self. I shared pictures of him in his overalls, in his tuxedo going to galas with my mother, in his uniform after he was drafted into the army, on vacation in Venezuela with my mother and their friends. I even sent a picture of him as a boy with his mother, my grandmother JoJo, and his four sisters (with one in utero). She knew how he loved pockets — how we only bought him shirts with pockets since he kept



his calculator and a pen handy, how he was fiscally conservative, sarcastic sometimes, and how he could get tickled from a story someone told and laugh until he cried. His face would turn red, he’d take off his glasses, and then wipe his eyes with the handkerchief in his pocket.

While making the quilt, Renee was drawn to my father’s white

Maltimore Bond as a boy next to his mother with his sisters; memory quilt made by Renee Tatum Walters in honor of Maltimore Bond (Courtesy of Zanice Bond)

shirts and those handkerchiefs. He had helped to grow our family businesses and was an active member of several community boards, so he wore a suit and tie sometimes seven days a week — if we had funerals. Renee said she imagined my father wearing his “white, pristine, well-starched shirt” and being like her father a “generous spirit who treated everyone well.”⁶² Yes, she had read the clothes right. (It’s that quilter’s mojo again.) He was a good guy. I like that he always washed his hands when he first entered a house. I admired his discipline and how even though he loved lemon meringue pie, he was content with just one piece. He prayed *without ceasing* as he had been taught. I respected him. I was proud (and surprised) when he said a woman should have the right to choose. That is certainly not to say that he didn’t teach his three daughters about abstinence. He loved his family. Even though he and my mother worked together every day, I doubt there was anywhere else he’d rather be than with her. In the winter (when we were still eating pork), my brother and I would grab our coats and race to the car headed to Jojo and Dad’s once we knew Daddy had gotten the call that Jojo had made hog maws. (My mother always passed on those culinary outings.) Sometimes during income tax season, farmers and other community folk would pay him for preparing their tax returns with fresh produce from their gardens. He loved his community and his southern roots.

My father was a thinker — an intelligent man with a head for numbers and details: he was our institutional memory. His curiosity kept him in the know at home and at the office. Even as his health declined, he kept his sense of humor. He still wanted to be with Mama and asked my brother and sister for updates on the businesses. It is painful to imagine how he must have felt battling Parkinson’s — the abyss that would inevitably consume him bone by bone, cell by cell — each day growing physically weaker— struggling to walk, to move, to speak, to swallow, and finally, to think, to know, to remember. I suppose we were all grateful that Parkinson’s was merciful — that his mind was spared until the end. Or maybe that was not mercy at all? Bereavement looms in the shadows in this conversation on memory quilts. Yet the quilt provides a space for mourning as well as celebration where memory may be embraced in all its splendor and regret. My father’s quilt reflects the existence of a man who lived his life and met the vicissitudes of that life like a champion. He lived up to his childhood nickname “Big Man”: a big, wonderful, wacky, brave, sweet, smart, funny, handsome, no-rhythm-having, protective, chivalrous, inquisitive, faithful man, and Renee’s beautiful quilt becomes loving arms we may wrap ourselves in and remember.

Godspeed, Daddy. ○

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G. MAY
— & —
SONS
FURNITURE



A River of Time

Jewish Memory Practices in Rural Alabama

DANIEL J. LEVINE

On a bright winter day, Hamm takes [her son] Chad to stand over the markers for her grandparents and shows him that rocks have been left on the headstones: a sign in Jewish cemeteries that loved ones have visited. She tells Chad, “Our faith is as strong as these rocks.”

ROY HOFFMANN, *ALABAMA AFTERNOONS* (2011)⁶³

In 1892, Wolf Israel opened a furniture and clothing store in what is now West Blocton, Alabama, some thirty miles east of Tuscaloosa. Formally incorporated in 1901, West Blocton had all the makings of a boomtown, supplying coal and coke to steel mills in Birmingham and Bessemer. In 1903, the town got its first telephones and built its first public school. By 1920, its main street boasted some sixty businesses and served a regional population of about 12,000.⁶⁴

A native of Kobryn — then a district town in imperial Russia, now in western Belarus — Israel first came to rural Alabama as an itinerant peddler in 1884.⁶⁵ He returned to Kobryn two years later to start a timber business. That business failed, however, and in 1888 he was back in Alabama — this time, with his family in tow. He was, it seems, deeply pious. With eldest son Samuel Baer and neighbor John Krenzman, Wolf founded the town’s first and only synagogue, or *shul* — Congregation *Ah Goodies Ah Chem* — in 1905.*

* That is, *אגודת תדריגא* — “the league/association of brothers,” as rendered by the congregation’s founders. While likely faithful to the way Wolf would have pronounced the name, the transliteration makes for awkward reading. Following contemporary practices, I will render the name as *Agudas Ahim* from here on.

Regular Sabbath services were held until about the First World War, with High Holiday and Passover services continuing irregularly into the 1930s.

For all its growth, West Blocton might seem a far cry from Kobryn — the latter, a town of about 10,000, of whom some seventy percent were Jews. The community was then at least three centuries old. Its age and relative prosperity could be seen in the grandeur of Kobryn’s Great Synagogue — a vaulting brick structure adorned with brightly-painted murals.⁶⁶

By contrast, the West Blocton *shul* was a modest affair: a two-room, wood-framed structure. Even so, it seems to have incorporated some old-world touches and sensibilities. Onetime parishioner Elmo Ellis Israel recalled the colorful paintwork that adorned its small sanctuary — “yellow, brown, green, smokey gray,” further, that space was set aside for women who wished to sit apart during prayer — but that only ‘old-timers’ made use of it.⁶⁷

While much of the town’s commercial district — including Wolf’s first store — was destroyed in a 1927 fire, the synagogue’s structure seems to have survived until 1936, when a storm blew it off its foundations. As its membership was by then in decline, the building was demolished and never rebuilt.⁶⁸ Samuel Baer held holiday services in his home until his death, but the community continued to dwindle. In 1992, the last Jewish resident of the town left for relatives elsewhere. The lot stood empty until sold in

2015, cared for by friends and former neighbors. The proceeds of that sale were donated to the University of Alabama, where an undergraduate Jewish Studies scholarship fund was established.⁶⁹ That was how I first learned about the *shul*, and why I wished to know more about the community that built it.

For many decades, small, rural Jewish communities like West Blocton remained underrepresented in historical and literary accounts of American Jewish life. These centered on large cities, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest. New York enjoyed pride of place here, initially with novels like Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) and Mike Gold’s *Jews without Money* (1930), and later with a range of historical and/or reflective works: Stephen Birmingham’s *Our Crowd* (1967), Irving Howe’s *World of*



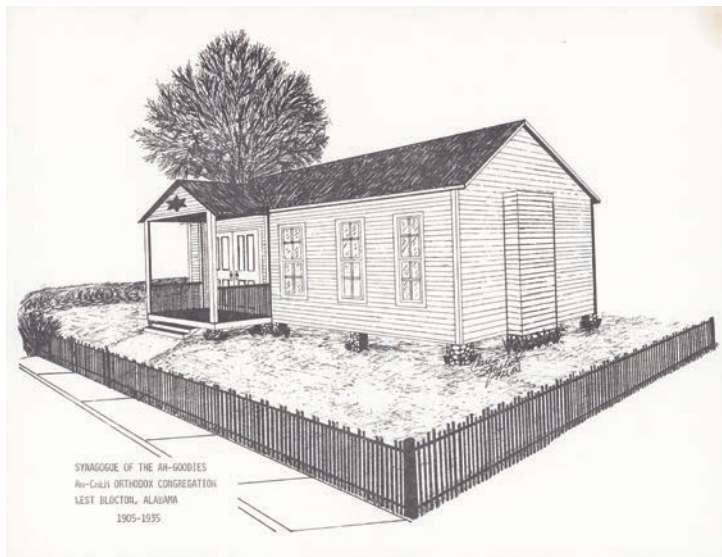
The only known image of *Ah Goodies Ah Chem* shul in West Blocton, AL, behind Frank and Libby Jean Israel, circa 1914 (Courtesy of Elmo Israel Ellis and published in *Blocton: The History of an Alabama Coal Mining Town* by Charles Edward Adams, University of Alabama Press, 2012)

Our Fathers (1976), Alfred Kazin's *New York Jew* (1978), and Deborah Dash Moore's *At Home in America* (1981).

To be sure, the movement of Jews to the 'boomtowns' of the post-Civil War South and West was recognized — as were Jewish communities that predated the 1880s. But those stories remained secondary.⁷⁰ Even now, much of the published material on the Jews of West Blocton owes its existence to a chance celebrity connection: several of Wolf's grandchildren had long, successful careers in commercial radio. One attained national celebrity as the "Voice of the Yankees" — Mel Allen — first hired by CBS Radio New York in 1939.⁷¹ Much of what appears here draws on biographical accounts written about Allen, or by him.

Systematic historical writing would begin to fill in these gaps in the late 1990s.⁷² In broad terms, such writing locates Jewish migration to the American South and West within three interconnected "master narratives." The first follows what historian Deborah Weiner has aptly called the "peddler-to-merchant paradigm" — immigrants from Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia's "Pale of Settlement" seeking opportunity and freedom from persecution.⁷³ Reconstruction, westward expansion, and rapid industrialization created unprecedented demands for labor in the US, while economic, political, and demographic upheaval at the frontiers of Central and Eastern Europe provided ample incentive to brave the journey.

Similarities between these frontiers meant that some immigrants possessed skills and community networks that could be reproduced in the US — in some cases, to greater effect and at greater scale.⁷⁴ In both Eastern and Central Europe, and the American South and West, rapidly-expanding



Rendering of Ah Goodies Ah Chem shul, West Blocton, AL
(Courtesy of University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections)

Competition and overcrowding in large industrial cities induced many to seek their fortunes farther afield ... Small-scale family and community credit networks placed retail, family-run businesses within reach, while slowly expanding rail networks created a window of opportunity, which such businesses could fill.

states competed for access to land and primary resources. Whole populations were uprooted and replaced — impelled by a mix of ostensibly “spontaneous” ethnic-racial violence and calculated policy.⁷⁵

Once in the US, competition and overcrowding in large industrial cities induced many to seek their fortunes farther afield. While excluded from formal banks, small-scale family and community credit networks placed retail, family-run businesses within reach, while slowly expanding rail networks created a window of opportunity, which such businesses could fill. Similar stories can be (or have been) told about many other such communities: Selma, Huntsville, Dothan, and Bessemer in Alabama; Hattiesburg, Port Gibson, and Brookhaven in Mississippi; Devil’s Lake, North Dakota and Bozeman, Montana.⁷⁶ Nor were Jews the only immigrant group to take up these opportunities.

While a full consideration of the similarities and differences between the American and European frontiers exceeds the present discussion, one major difference bears emphasizing. While Jews certainly suffered from antisemitism in the American context, they were not the primary targets or objects of the violence described above. In the ‘bloodlands’ of Central and Eastern Europe, of course, they were.⁷⁷

That difference may explain a second narrative thread in historical accounts of communities like *Agudas Ahim*: ambivalence regarding both antisemitism and anti-black racism. Both are acknowledged — the question is *how* they are. As regards antisemitism, awareness was tempered with a kind of relief — even a sense of gratitude — for the fact that things were not a great deal worse. Regarding anti-black racism, the emphasis is often on personal acts of decency, alongside a larger sense of helplessness or complicity. Violence against African Americans seems to have struck familiar chords with many Jewish immigrants. But those feelings may have informed a kind of ethnic, small-community *realpolitik*. Violence against pariah communities, such thinking might hold, was simply a fact of life; if one happened to be in a place where that violence was directed primarily at others, well — such was what passed for luck. If there was a sense of guilt, perhaps it followed from this: that one’s own relative peace is being ‘paid for’ by another.

Some might, of course, dream of a world without any such violence; or



pray for it; or even agitate for it. But one did so — if one did so — the way that some Jews prayed for the coming of the Messiah: quietly, and without definite expectations. Stella Suberman, author of *The Jew Store* (1998), described her immigrant father’s ambivalence regarding Jim Crow in such terms: “What he did was keep quiet about it, and do the best he could do.”⁷⁸

A third — smaller, and more newly-emergent — narrative thread follows what happens after the economic ‘boom’ is over — in the decades following the great expansions described above. Here, the focus is on challenges faced by small, “remainder” communities.⁷⁹ These include handfuls of individuals and families — such as Sarah Hamm and her son, quoted in the epigraph above — facing a river of time and forgetfulness.⁸⁰

Such efforts are heroic, in the classical sense: they place individuals and communities before all-but-insuperable external forces. In the present context, two sets of such forces bear consideration.

The first carries forward the historical-economic narrative set out above. The window of opportunity that sustained small, family-owned retail businesses along rural main streets closed long ago. A latter-day Wolf Israel would have to compete against

Main Street, West Blocton, AL, circa 1934
(Courtesy of Library of Congress)

a growing host of discount chains and big box retailers. The numbers here speak for themselves. While never especially large, the Jewish community in Alabama has contracted considerably over the past century: from a high of some 13,000 in 1927 to some 9,000. This, even as the overall population of the state has nearly doubled. Its distribution has also shifted away from small towns. Some 90% of the state's Jewish residents now live in its four largest cities: Birmingham, Montgomery, Huntsville, or Mobile.⁸¹

Viewed regionally, the shift is even more marked—though it tells a somewhat different story. Overall numbers of Jews in the American South and West have grown considerably over the past century, both in relative and absolute terms. But that growth centers on large metropolitan areas — “global cities,” like Atlanta, Houston, Miami, or New Orleans.⁸² Alabama has no cities of comparable scale. What appears regionally as a demographic shift from country to city looks locally like a story of decline and disappearance: the gradual “emptying out” of the countryside.

This phenomenon is not unique to Alabama, as the work of community non-governmental organizations like the Jewish Community Legacy Project shows. A 501(c)(3) organization, the JCLP serves “diminishing Jewish communities,” with a particular emphasis on small towns: helping to effect the orderly transfer of property and religious articles; arrange long-term care for aging community members; establishing legacy endowments to maintain graveyards and community structures; and — crucially, for present purposes — helping these communities decide how they wish to document and preserve their history and memory.⁸³

In describing these communities, the JCLP studiously avoid terms like *decline*. Even so, there is a certain pathos to their work. In part, that is inevitable: “endings are difficult for most people.”⁸⁴ Yet the pressures that inform their efforts could be seen decades earlier. Allen's biographers — and his own, largely tongue-in-cheek, memoir (*You Can't Beat the Hours*, 1963) — allude to them. Allen's paternal grandfather, Wolf Israel, had founded West Blocton's synagogue. His maternal grandfather, Abraham Leibowitz, was by all accounts also deeply pious — a cantor, who had been employed for a time at one of the Jewish congregations in Birmingham. In some ways, biographer Curt Smith quipped, young Melvin seems to have taken after his mother's father. Both were vocally and musically gifted — talents which each cultivated to advantage. But there, the similarities ended. Where Liebowitz had “chanted the *Kol Nidre*” — a demanding liturgical arrangement, sung on the Day of Atonement — the only religion that seemed to interest young Melvin was the all-American church of baseball.⁸⁵

The joke works because it plays upon what was by then an established Yiddish literary-theatrical trope: the ‘wayward cantor’ — or the pious cantor's wayward son. At issue is the Janus-faced nature of musical talent.⁸⁶ When safely confined to the prayer hall, such talents are a gift: they bring one's fellow believers closer to God. But when those confines begin to chafe — say, when a

*The commandment to remember figures centrally
in Jewish ritual and practice.*

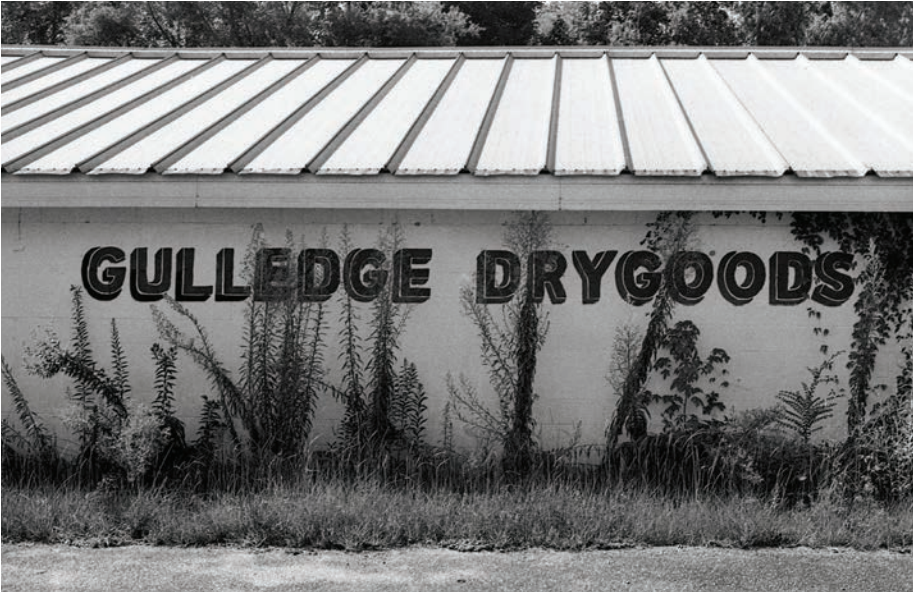
cantor indulges a desire for stardom — talent becomes a liability.

Just how powerfully this anxiety was felt can be discerned in the real-life example of Yosef “Yossele” Rosenblatt (1882-1933). Certainly the most famous cantor of his age, Rosenblatt gained national attention in 1918, when he turned down an invitation to appear in an operatic production. Though the funds — \$1,000 per performance — were slated for charity, and though the libretto was on a Jewish theme, Rosenblatt felt his “sacred position... [did] not permit him to enter the operatic stage.”⁸⁷ The plot of *The Jazz Singer* (1927; remade in 1980) — in which Rosenblatt did appear — treaded essentially similar ground.⁸⁸

In fact, the ‘wayward cantor’ trope was older still. It began, film historian J. Hoberman has argued, with a real-life cantor from Vilnius known affectionately as the *Vilner Balebosl* (1815-50). It seems the *Balebosl* abandoned his wife, took up with a paramour, and ran off to Vienna in pursuit of greater opportunity. Things did not go as planned, and spiritual self-destruction was only the beginning of his fall from grace. Committed to an asylum, he died destitute and friendless at the tender age of thirty-five. By the time Allen had signed with the Yankees in 1939, the *Balebosl’s* story had been reworked perhaps a dozen times: in theatricals, films—even a novel by Shalom Aleichem.⁸⁹

There is, to be sure, nothing particularly American — or particularly Jewish — in *fin de siècle* literary representations of the big city as a place where material opportunity and spiritual peril come hand-in-glove.⁹⁰ That, precisely, is the point. The roads that lead from Vilnius to Vienna, and from West Blocton to the Bronx, run parallel.

A second set of forces is tied to the specific ways in which Jewish memory is sustained and transmitted. As the historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi has noted, the commandment to remember figures centrally in Jewish ritual and practice. At the same time, Jews have historically lacked centralized mechanisms and fixed territorial bases from which to preserve and disseminate such memory: the Jewish “homeland,” as George Steiner put it in 1985, was the text.⁹¹ Written in Hebrew and Aramaic — languages that no one actually spoke — and accessed through highly challenging “reception traditions,” access to those texts demands a considerable educational infrastructure.⁹² One should not underestimate the challenge this poses even to large, well-established communities.



Former Gullede
Drygoods, Clayton,
AL (Photo by Emily
Rena Williams)

For this reason, anxiety about the preservation and propagation of such memory — what is sometimes called Jewish continuity — is longstanding. “The world makes many images of Israel [i.e., of Jews and Judaism]” noted the historian and public intellectual Simon Rawidowicz in 1967, “but Israel makes only one image of itself: of a being constantly on the verge of ceasing to be, of disappearing.”⁹³

Anyone who has attended a *Seder* — the ceremonial meal that takes place at the beginning of Passover — may have a sense of this. The meal combines historical-narrative texts and commentaries related to the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt with particular actions. Bitter and salty foods are prepared and eaten in a particular order to evoke the bitterness and tears of enslavement. At other times, one reclines ceremonially to mark the ease and comfort of freedom. Unleavened bread is eaten — and leavened bread is not — to commemorate the haste and disorder of the Exodus; because the bread prepared for that journey had to be baked before it could rise.

Such reading-and-doing does two distinct kinds of work. First, it connects the present-day “doer” to the past that is being commemorated: a chain of transmission that crosses the generations. “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Holy One Blessed be He took us out from there,” the Passover liturgy explains. Were it not for that, “then we, our children, and our children’s children would be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt, even to this day.”⁹⁴ Second, and equally significant, these acts connect participants to one another *in the present*: the doer finds herself in “imagined community” with others — here

and elsewhere — who are doing the same things in a similar way.⁹⁵

Problems began to arise, Yerushalmi argued, when these two functions began to work at cross purposes. At about the same time as the “great transformations” described above were playing out, a new form of historical awareness also emerged. This new awareness drew partly on the Protestant Reformation and partly on the German and French enlightenments, and involved an effort to carry out a reform within Judaism along broadly analogous lines. To that end, traditional memory practices, justified by tradition, revelation, or clerical authority, were subjected to systematic, historical scrutiny.⁹⁶ The aim was to identify ‘correct’ — that is, factually and/or historically-grounded — beliefs, while winnowing out what was derided as superstition or deviation.

Whatever their merits, such efforts did not — and could not — produce anything like consensus.⁹⁷ But that was not the only problem. Those who embraced the ensuing reforms found they shifted the grounds of their religious experiences. The Passover Seder example can again serve here: suppose one concludes that the traditional-liturgical account of the Exodus — the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna from heaven, etc. — have no firm evidentiary or historical basis. They are simply myths — no different than the origin stories of any other nation, people, or faith.

One can still take part in the *Seder* — lots of Americans eat turkey, succotash, and cranberry sauce, even if they disbelieve much of the traditional story about “the first Thanksgiving.”⁹⁸ But now, the words of the traditional Passover liturgy — assuming one keeps to them — take on a different cast. One is saying them not to renew, preserve, or transmit one’s connection with one’s *actual* ancestors and their experiences. Rather, one says them simply because that is what Jews *do* — it is what links a community together in the here and now.

That’s one thing if — like Thanksgiving in the US — one is engaged in a practice together with a great many other people. But what if one must do these things in relative isolation — with perhaps only a few dozen others, within a larger society that neither understands these rituals, nor is even fully aware of them?

Perhaps one feels less a sense of imagined *community* than of isolation, marginality, or irrelevance. Writing in 1993, Eli Evans called this “loneliness of soul;” a feeling that was, he continued, “epigrammatic of the emotional terrain of Jews who arrived in the small towns of the South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”⁹⁹

Loneliness of soul can be the basis for an imagined community, but it requires considerable moral determination — again, the point with which this essay opened. One must make a friend of such loneliness. Such courage might have something to teach many of us, given that our own era is characterized both by its own great transformations and by new, no less powerful, forms of political and social alienation.

This congregation might not have remembered quite enough of that to fill up a service, but they wished to observe the Sabbath anyway. So they did, fashioning one out of the words and melodies they had ready to hand. I found this remarkable, and still do.

Thinking through such courage, I was reminded of a religious service that I attended shortly after moving to Alabama. The regular prayer leader was not there, and the congregants had to make do with whatever they knew and could remember: bits and pieces from the hymnal, melodies, and the like. When these had been sung through, one congregant suggested “Sunrise, Sunset,” from the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Perhaps we could think of *Fiddler* as not-quite-canonical, as liturgy-adjacent.: a lovely song, which encourages a certain awareness of time, an appreciation for the small blessings of life and community — and which has — to borrow from Richard Newton’s work on *Roots* in the African-American community, a certain middlebrow status.¹⁰⁰ It *felt* appropriately Jewish. No less important, it was *accessible*: everyone knew it. The official liturgy, remember, is hard: it must be taught, and that demands time, attention, and infrastructure. This congregation might not have remembered quite enough of that to fill up a service, but they wished to observe the Sabbath anyway. So they did, fashioning one out of the words and melodies they had ready to hand. I found this remarkable, and still do. There was no awkwardness, no sense of guilt or anxiety at the thought one might be “doing it wrong.”

Such anxiety was very much a part of my upbringing — though we had many more resources at our disposal. Jewish readers of a certain age may remember a short story that was widely circulated in Sunday-school classes and youth group meetings in the 1980s. Entitled “The Last Jew,” it was written as a short, fictional confession, set in 2124 — at the time, about 150 years in the future.¹⁰¹

“My name,” the narrator says, “is not important.” What matters is *what* he is, and *where* he is: a living exhibit, housed in the Smithsonian Institution. Around him, a host of artifacts is also on display: “a [prayer shawl], a *Torah*, the books of the Talmud.” But he is the star — the world’s last living Jew. All day long “[p]eople pass my way ... staring, pointing, and sometimes even laughing.”

The last Jew? How can that *be*? After all, only a few decades earlier there were thriving Jewish communities in the US, in Israel, and all over the

world. That question, the narrator continues, has consumed him for years. “I contemplate the reasons, I recall the events, and I search for an answer.” He is writing now because he believes he finally knows.

I now believe that I know how the Jews ... disappeared ... [F]amilies stopped attending [Sabbath] services, the parents stopped sending their children to religious schools, Hebrew High School, day schools, and Bar Mitzvah classes. [Sabbath] candles were never lit ... To attend a Kol Nidre service became a chore, not an honor—to hold a Seder became a task, not a joy. The rituals and observances of Judaism began to vanish.¹⁰²

The final blow, the narrator announces, came when a nuclear sneak attack had wiped out the State of Israel and its population in an instant — this was, after all, the height of the Cold War, the decades between the 1973 War and the first Palestinian *Intifada*. Rather than shake American Jews out of their apathy, that loss deepened it. “Really,” most said, “what could I have done?” Assimilation continued. Now, he is the last. “In less than twenty years, I too, will die ... never again will another ... set foot on this planet.”¹⁰³

At the time, none of this seemed especially distant or fantastical. Fear of nuclear war was a staple of the period, and hadn’t the Nazis planned a museum sort of like that?¹⁰⁴ If anything, then, it seemed rather *too* real. Human exhibitions of this sort *had, in fact, already happened* — though neither, it must be said, to Jews, nor in Europe.¹⁰⁵





Fred May of
Jasper, Alabama
(Photo by Emily
Rena Williams)

That is the problem to which “The Last Jew” points but cannot resolve. There had been a time when it seemed that the very survival of Jews and Judaism — notwithstanding periods of greater or lesser suffering — was *itself* miraculous. It was proof of God’s abiding love and care. The historian Simon Dubnow (1860-1941) — perhaps the most admired Jewish historian of the modern era, and a distant relative of Mel Allen — had famously called the Jews an *Am Olam* — an “eternal people.”¹⁰⁶ Dubnow meant to suggest that the great transformations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were no more the end of Jews or Judaism than had been the transformations of previous centuries and eras. Yet in 1941 — some two years after Mel signed with CBS — he was murdered in the Riga ghetto. What would each have made of the other’s fate?

What matters now is not the stories we tell, but the raw materials from which such stories might yet be made.

I do not presume to have an answer for this. I am by training a student of power politics — of strategy and interest, war and peace — in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Much of my research deals with that conflict in its formative, pre-state decades, when these questions were no less alive than they are now.

Students of such topics often take a tragic, deeply secular view of human affairs. Divine provenance matters less than the choices made by wise leaders, and the initiative shown by citizens possessed of a common heritage and a shared vision for the future. Chance, fear, and contingency are a part of life, this tradition holds; one must learn to live with them. Perhaps that's why I found the kind of determination with which this article opened — those who continue to observe, even when one's community, or one's words, are not entirely there — so arresting.

What might help those “remainder” communities, in the here and now? Surely, they do not need anyone to tell them what words they should use, or what their community — past or present — should or could mean to them. Perhaps what is needed are tools by which they can preserve, or recover, such words *on their own*.

For this reason, I have been involved with other historians, archivists, and folklorists to help support the creation of an archive for Jews and other small religious communities in Alabama. My hope is that this work will achieve two goals. First, by gathering up and preserving those evocative bits and pieces that can be used to reconstruct some measure of our past and present, it allows individuals to find the words and stories they wish to use — whether now, or in the future.

Second, in assembling the materials for future storytellers, we affirm the possibility that such storytellers *might someday come into being* — despite all the forces arrayed against them. One dares to believe. By stipulating the possibility of a future, one roots oneself in the present, with others who believe the same. What matters now is not the stories we tell, but the raw materials from which such stories might yet be made. Such work has its own long and honorable tradition.¹⁰⁷ ○



Healing from the Roots

The Folk and Life of Willie Pace

SHARI WILLIAMS

A seed and the sun are powerful things.

WILLIE PACE, WARRIOR STAND, ALABAMA

Willie James Pace, my dear departed third cousin, possessed an idiosyncratic knowledge of folk medicine and a penchant for telling tall tales. He was born in 1949 in Chicago, Illinois to a family that included seven siblings. Willie's grandparents and great-grandparents raised him in Warrior Stand, a sparsely-populated, unincorporated rural village located about twelve miles south of Tuskegee in Macon County, on the eastern side of Alabama's Black Belt.

After high school, Willie worked at a textile mill in Columbus, Georgia until 1969 when he returned to Chicago to work at a molding company. He also lived and worked in construction and hospitality in California and Nevada before returning to Warrior Stand in the 1990s. After his passing in 2019, I wanted to know more about Willie's quiriness so I asked a few of his close friends and loved ones to share their memories of him. From their recollections, I learned that Willie's oddities emanated from a mosaic of near and distant ancestral folk and folk practices that he embodied.

For one thing, Willie was famous for those beloved "isms" or sayings that originate with salt-of-the-earth country folk like my southern grandparents, a constant presence in my childhood in Akron, Ohio. My favorite Willie-ism, "A seed and the sun are powerful things," attests to his upbringing surrounded by hardworking farmer relatives and being nourished by the fruits of their labor.

Willie and I first met around 2008. I had already lived in the South for nearly thirty years and had recently moved to Columbus, Georgia from Douglasville with my husband and family. I was elated to be in close proximity to the probate record office in the Tuskegee courthouse and visited regularly to research my Macon County ancestors. During one visit, a cousin introduced



Willie Pace (Photo by Jocelyn Zanzot, courtesy of The Ridge Macon County Archeology Project); Willie Pace demonstrates making sassafras tea to fourth graders in Macon County, 2014 (Courtesy of Shari Williams)

me to Willie. We compared family trees and discovered that we were cousins too. Real blood cousins. We shared phone conversations and visits while getting acquainted. That's when I learned Willie was kind and generous, a jack of all trades, but also a little unusual according to my city-girl way of thinking.

During one phone call, Willie advised me to collect rainwater and bathe in it for my health. On another call, he informed me that he was relaxing in a milk bath, a favorite in his repertoire of home remedies. My maternal grandmother used a few home remedies, but none like Willie's. When he mentioned the milk bath, I visualized him in a tub submerged under and completely covered by an opaque blanket of milk that stretched from toe to chin. I thought, *Cousin or not, this guy is really eccentric.* A close friend of Willie's told me that Willie was the last in a long line of root doctors on both sides of his family, tracing back to one and two generations removed from slavery. This was a new revelation, so I researched enslaved root doctors to learn more.

Scholars offer various reasons for root doctoring among enslaved people, including a continuation of West African folk medicine practices after arriving in the Americas, and that enslaved people did not always receive adequate health care so they took control of their own health and well-being by using home remedies. Enslaved root doctors used their constant proximity with nature to visit the woods and observe plants and trees. They learned about the medicinal and hygienic properties encased in indigenous plant life and melded Native American and European medicinal practices with their own to develop culturally syncretized remedies to heal injuries, treat symptoms, and cure illnesses.

From childhood, they observed folks using spider webs and chimney soot on wounds, peeling twigs from sweet gum trees as toothbrushes, and making deodorant from sassafras roots.

During Willie's formative years in the fading decades of Jim Crow segregation, rural, southern African Americans still typically lacked access to adequate health care. Black medical doctors were scarce and white doctors who treated Black patients did not always provide an equitable standard of care. Willie's friend recollected that from childhood they observed folks using spider webs and chimney soot on wounds, peeling twigs from sweet gum trees as toothbrushes, and making deodorant from sassafras roots. Though I appreciate the challenges Willie and the ancestors faced, it does not overshadow my unfortunate experience with a tea brewed from the yellowroot plant that he once prescribed. This too occurred not long after we met.

Willie advised me to drink the tea after I complained that I felt sick but didn't know the cause. He said I could find the tea locally, so I visited a family-owned grocery store in Tuskegee expressly to search for a bottle. To my delight, the store carried the mysterious bottle of bright yellow liquid. Once home, I opened it immediately, poured a shot, and took a sip. Ugh! So bitter! I spit it out—hard and fast, not caring that it just might work. From then on, I hesitated to tell Willie about my ailments because I knew by then that he had an evangelical fervor for home remedies and I was in for a long lecture if I did.

Willie's partner experienced that fervor when he insisted she apply hot sauce to her arthritic knee. He encouraged me to do the same after I complained of knee pain. Recalling the yellowroot tea, I thought, *No way am I ever putting hot sauce on my bare skin.* But his partner insists that the hot sauce relieved her knee pain. Skeptical, I conducted cursory internet research and learned that Willie was absolutely right about using hot sauce and yellowroot tea for certain ailments, and about the moisturizing properties of milk. But some experts question the benefits of bathing in rainwater and milk.

Modern-day proponents of Willie's rainwater prescription claim that it has an alkaline PH that is beneficial to hair and skin, while detractors say that environmental pollutants infuse rainwater and make its use harmful. Experts caution people with sensitive skin to avoid milk baths because milk contains lactic acid, a potential irritant. The ancient Greeks and Romans supposedly used spider webs to heal wounds, but modern scientists have conflicting empirical evidence that either supports or refutes webs' antimicrobial properties.

Even so, there are some proven medicinal plants. Yellowroot, for example, a plant indigenous to the eastern United States, is widely acknowledged for its antibiotic and anti-inflammatory medicinal properties. The renowned explorer and horticulturalist William Bartram is credited with discovering the yellowroot plant sometime during his travels through Georgia in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries. Supposedly, Native Americans used it for both utilitarian and medicinal purposes. Hot sauce contains capsaicin which can help reduce pain upon topical application because it stimulates pain receptors in the body. Sassafras, like yellowroot, is found in abundance in the Southeast. It is known for its astringent properties. Whether or not it is supported by empirical evidence or derived from ancient practices, African, Greek, or Roman, the folk medicine practiced by Willie and his ancestors was self-validating. They believed and witnessed that it worked, so few questioned its benefits.

Willie's paternal grandparents, Abb and Essie Donner (née West), and his maternal great-grandparents, George and Annie Pace (née Robinson), were all born near the beginning of the twentieth century. They raised Willie and most likely passed down their knowledge of home remedies gained from their ancestors. Medical treatment was scarce, although Warrior Stand pioneer and village doctor William A. Reynolds (1830-1901) may have offered them treatment.

As a young man, Reynolds migrated from North Carolina to Warrior Stand with his family during the 1800s Alabama Fever land rush. The quest for cotton-economy prosperity brought nearly a half-million white settlers and enslaved people into Alabama, many via the Federal Road, which cut right through Warrior Stand. Whether Reynolds used plant medicines in treating patients on either side of Emancipation is unknown.

Another white settler, Dow Levi Perry (1846-1922), migrated to Warrior Stand at the tail end of Alabama Fever (between 1850 and 1860) from Baldwin County, Georgia and became the village herbalist. Perry studied the volumes written by A.B. Strong, M.D. and published in 1849, entitled *The American flora: or history of plants and wild flowers: containing their scientific and general description, natural history, chemical and medical properties, mode of culture, propagation, &c., designed as a book of reference for botanists, physicians, florists,*

gardeners, students, etc. Using knowledge gained from his readings and assisted by Dr. Reynolds' wife Fannie, Perry foraged in the woods to find herbs to mix medicines that he sold to make extra money. Written records thus point to Warrior Stand having at least one white village doctor, one white "pharmacist," and one white "pharmacist's assistant" during the 1800s and early 1900s, but it is unknown whether Afri-



can Americans had easy access to them or to the flora volumes.

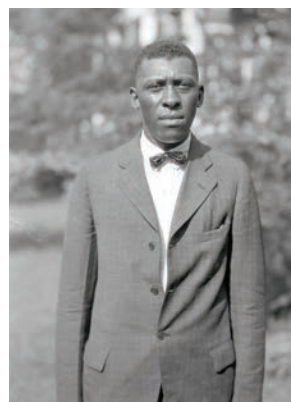
The next documented access point for Black Warrior Stand villagers was the Tuskegee Institute Moveable School, established in 1906 and carried out initially through the Jesup Wagon, established by George Washington Carver.

Jesup Wagon staffers from the Institute traveled to rural villages to teach Black farm owner-operators, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers scientific agricultural and home economics practices. In 1906, Thomas M. Campbell, an African American, began supervising the Moveable School after he graduated from Tuskegee Institute and was appointed to be the very first Cooperative Extension Agent in the United States. Campbell was assisted by nurses who also traveled with the Moveable School to Warrior Stand to provide much needed (albeit intermittent) medical treatment and instruction on hygiene and sanitation.

By the time Willie was born in 1949, the number of Black physicians had increased nationally but the overall number was still miniscule. The Black doctors nearest to Willie practiced in Tuskegee (twelve miles away). With this history in mind, it is apparent that folk medicine helped to fill the gaps created by lack of access to Black medical professionals before and after the Moveable School. The gaps shrank during the second wave of the Great Migration of African Americans to cities in the North, and as Black residents who stayed in Warrior Stand bought vehicles and could travel more easily. When the Black population dwindled, the demand for root doctors diminished accordingly, but not completely.

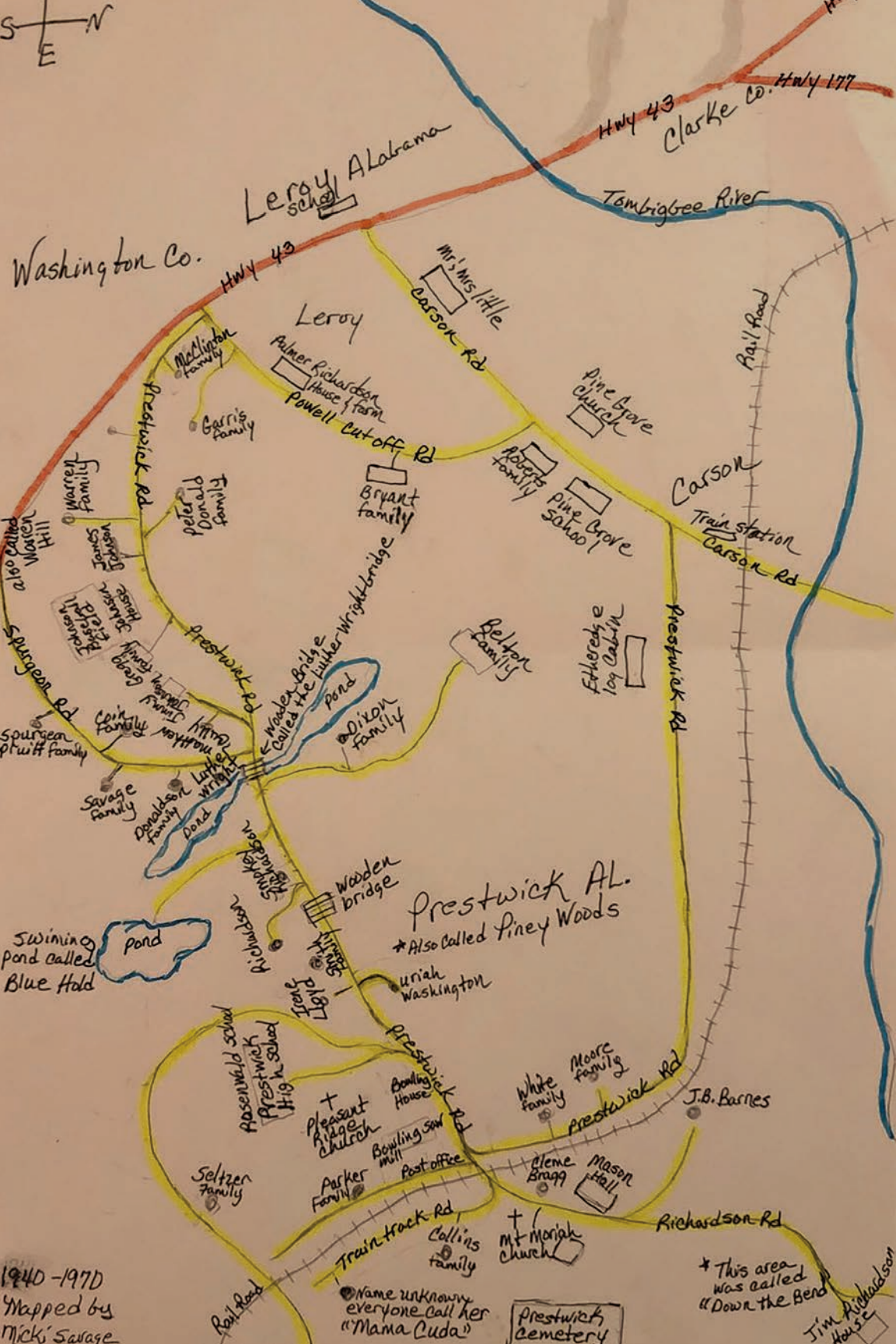
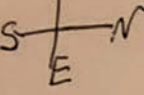
Willie must have known that he was among a dying breed of practicing root doctors in Warrior Stand. He often lamented the disconnect between Black youngsters and the ancestral knowledge of agricultural and natural remedies. Optimist that he was, he shook off his complaints and moved on to discussing other topics. Willie talked a lot and storytelling seemed to be his way to make people laugh, which seemed to lift his spirits, too. His grandfather Abb once owned a general store where I am told that men from the community gathered and told tales. I suppose that is how Willie learned the art of storytelling. He once told me an incredible tale about being accosted in the woods by a gigantic snake that raised up taller than a man and hovered above him. Willie claimed that he miraculously slayed the creature or escaped. Memory fails me as to the conclusion of Willie's snake story. I wish I could likewise forget the bitter taste of yellowroot tea. Regardless, I will always have fond memories of Willie.

My love and appreciation grew over the eleven years I knew Willie, though I admit he talked my ear off at times. I sometimes tuned him out and missed the generous anthropological information he shared that would answer the gnawing questions I now have about Warrior Stand folkways and history. This I deeply regret. On a brighter note, in 2014, Macon County officials bestowed a "Making A Difference" award to Willie. The award honors him for having the best intentions when using his talents to do good deeds and when sharing fervently about folk medicine to help others. Me included. ○



Thomas M. Campbell, Tuskegee Institute, 1926 (Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, Auburn University Libraries)

Opposite: Jesup Wagon loaded with demonstration materials, circa 1906 (Courtesy of Tuskegee University Archives)



Washington Co.

Leroy Alabama
Leroy School

Clarke Co. Hwy 177
Hwy 43

Tombigbee River

McClinton Family
Garris Family
Warren Family
Savage Family
Donaldson Family
Seltzer Family

Leroy
Palmer Richardson House & farm
Powell cut off Rd
Bryant family

Mr & Mrs Little
Carson Rd

Pine Grove Church

Robert Family
Pine Grove School

Rail Road
Carson
Train station
Carson Rd

Spurgeon Rd
Spurgeon Pluff Family
Savage Family
Donaldson Family
Luther Wright

Prestwick Rd
Woodsy Bridge called the Luther Wright bridge
Pond
Dixon Family
Wooden bridge
Richardson

Bellon Family

Etheredge log cabin

Prestwick Rd

Swimming pond called Blue Hold
Pond

Prestwick AL.
*Also called Piney Woods

Uriah Washington

Assembly school
Prestwick High school

Pleasant Ridge Church
Bowling House
Bowling saw mill
Post office

Prestwick Rd

White Family
Moore Family

J.B. Barnes

Seltzer Family

Parker Family

Alene Bragg
Mason Hall

Richardson Rd

Train-track Rd
Collins Family

Mt Moriah Church

1940-1970

Mapped by Micki Savage

Name unknown everyone call her "Mama Cuda"

Prestwick Cemetery

* This area was called "Down the Bend"

Jim Richardson House

Mapping the Black Experience in South Alabama

JUSTIN RUDDER

In their April 2023 article, “Mapping Africatown” in *The Paris Review*, Nick Tabor and Kern Jackson discuss novelist Albert Murray’s 1969 visit to his home community north of downtown Mobile. Murray grew up close to survivors of the Clotilda, the last known slave ship to arrive in the US, who built the community known as Africatown. Murray based his character “Unka JoJo” in his 1975 novel, *Train Whistle Guitar*, on recollections of meeting Clotilda survivor Cudjo Lewis. Unfortunately, a massive paper factory described by Murray as a “storybook dragon disguised as a wide-sprawling, foul-smelling, smoke-chugging factory,” had overtaken Africatown in the time since Murray last visited, and he drew a map to preserve a record of Africatown’s geography before the influence of industrialization. Murray included both fictitious and real names in his map and later referred to Africatown as “African Hill” in *Train Whistle Guitar*.¹⁰⁸

Kern Jackson’s assessment of Albert Murray’s work was more than just an outsider’s observation. Jackson has ancestral ties to the Africatown community where his grandmother and aunt both taught at the Mobile County Training School.¹⁰⁹ Jackson also produced a map of Mobile’s Black communities in his 2004 dissertation, “Listening to the Wise Ones,” documenting a uniquely Black American cartography witnessed not only in Albert Murray’s 1969 map but in Cudjo Lewis’ map of his family’s capture in West Africa, which he produced for Emma Roche’s *Historic Sketches of the South* in 1914.

Since the beginning of colonial mapmaking in Alabama, Black Americans have played complex and contradictory roles in society and in the maps that represent them, both as free and enslaved persons. While official maps were largely published by

Map of Black settlements in the Prestwick area of Washington County, AL by Micki Savage



Principal I. J. Whitley with the 1921 graduating class of the Mobile County Training School in Plateau, Alabama. (Courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History)

Opposite: Map Drawn by Kazoola in *Historic Sketches of the South* by Emma Langdon Roche, Knickerbocker Press, 1914.

white elites and white-owned land companies, African Americans often supplied the knowledge and labor to create these documents. Further, Black memories and mapmaking skills, passed down through African oral tradition, both preserved and informed the maps created in South Alabama. This article traces the multiple ways Black citizens in South Alabama were mapped by others, and the ways they mapped themselves. Thus, it provides a more complete picture of how the Black Towns of today's Alabama came to be and how some remain hidden.

Published in 1914, Emma Roche's *Historic Sketches of the South* features a "Map Drawn by Kazoola." Kazoola or Oluale Kossola — renamed Cudjo Lewis for easier pronunciation by white landowner Timothy Meaher — was one of 110 individuals brought from Africa to Mobile on the *Clotilda*, the last slave ship to enter the US (illegally) in 1860, to settle in what became known as Africatown. For Roche, Kazoola drew a map recalling the Dahomeyan empire's capture of his Yoruba village named "Tarkar Village." He then recalled how the Yorubas were led through several settlements including Eko, Budigree, and Adache, until they reached their destination at Whydah. The Yorubas crossed a river to reach the Atlantic coast, where they were sold to William Foster who captained the Mobile-built ship

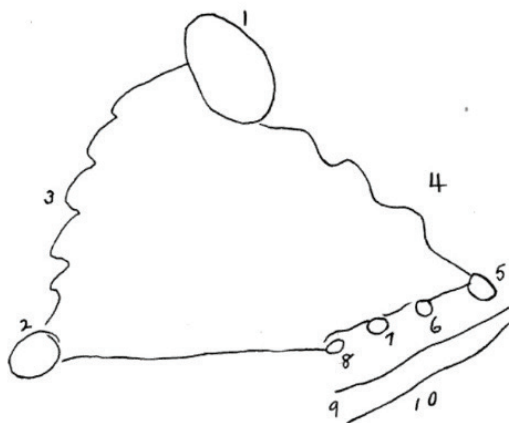
Clotilda. Additional research indicates Abomey in Benin as the Dahomey capital, a Tarka settlement that may be the former “Tarkar Village” near the Nigerian city of Makurdi, Eko as the Benin name for the Nigerian city of Lagos, Badagry as a Nigerian city, Ajashe as the Benin capital of Porto Novo, and the Badagry Creek separating mainland Benin and Nigeria from the Atlantic coast.¹¹⁰

The accuracy of Kazoola’s map reflected the traditions of West African kingdoms like the Luba, who created *lukasas* or memory boards from 1585 to 1889 to be used by the elders to preserve and share their history with citizens. Similar maps of the Niger River, the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria, and Central Africa were produced by African Islamic leaders Mallam Musa and Muhammad Bello for British explorer Hugh Clapperton from 1824 to 1826.¹¹¹

This same spirit of mapmaking indirectly influenced Kern Jackson, Director of African American Studies at the University of South Alabama and co-writer of *Descendant*, the 2022 Netflix film on Africatown. In 2004, Jackson completed a dissertation entitled “Listening to the Wise Ones,” which highlighted experiences of segregation during Mardi Gras in Mobile and noted the names of local Black communities. Jackson incorporated maps sketched by his wife, Stephanie Wells Jackson, including a “Map of Neighborhoods of the Wise Ones” and a parade route map of the African American-led Mobile Area Mardi Gras Association. The Jacksons’ work documented local Black oral history as a written record in the form of maps and a set of toponymies or place names.¹¹²

The maps produced by ancient African kingdoms, Kazoola, and the Jacksons are often defined as “memory mapping,” “narrative mapping,” and “post-representational mapping.” Such mapping techniques, as well as their toponymies or systems of place-naming, stem from the mapmaker’s recollection of landmarks, and also describe series of events that occur in a particular area. Such cartographic methods are often associated with underrepresented groups who tell hidden histories of a region outside of the official narrative, but all maps essentially are memory maps.¹¹³

However, most memory maps of regions like present-day



Map Drawn by Kazoola.

- (1) Tarkar Village. (2) Dahomey’s Land. (3) Wavering line showing stealthy march of Dahomeyans through forest.
- (4) Route by which captive Tarkars were taken to the sea. (5), (6), (7), (8), Eko, Budigree, Adaché, Whydah, towns through which Tarkars passed. (9) River. (10) Beach and sea.

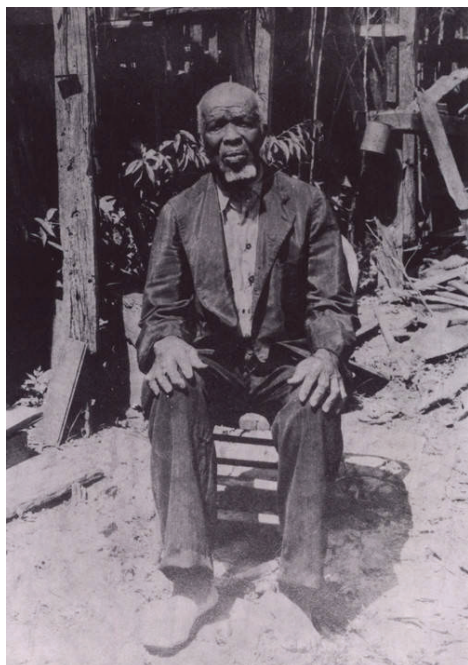
The accuracy of Kazoola's map reflected the traditions of West African kingdoms like the Luba, who created lukasas or memory boards from 1585 to 1889 to be used by the elders to preserve and share their history with citizens.

South Alabama reflect the perspectives of the elites of the period. Nevertheless, maps produced in the European colonization of the Gulf Coast, the development of the Mississippi Territory and Alabama Statehood through the 1860s, the rise of the railroad and timber industries throughout the Gulf Coast and Wiregrass regions of the late nineteenth century, and county and municipal histories

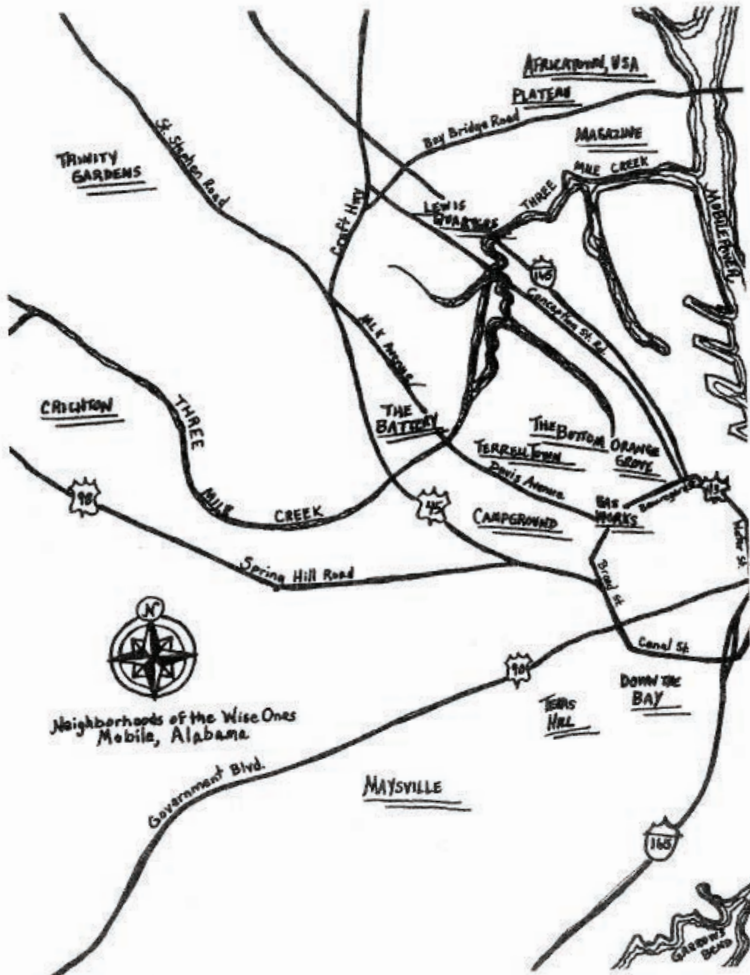
produced largely by white scholars through the mid-twentieth century provide at least a subdued depiction of Black and Indigenous communities.

The earliest recorded birth of a Black citizen in what became South Alabama was Anthoine, born October 26, 1707 to Francois Jacemin (a man enslaved by Antoine Le Moyne de Chateauquay) and Marie (a woman enslaved by Antoine's brother/Mobile co-founder Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville). Antoine Le Moyne named the "Bayou Chateauquay" immediately south of present-day Africatown.¹¹⁴ Although the earliest maps of the Gulf of Mexico produced by French cartographer Guillaume DeLisle in 1718 and Herman Moll in 1720 failed to note the presence of Africans in America, both men produced some of the first maps of the African continent by using "scientific cartography" or firsthand

reports from diplomats, slave and ivory traders, and missionaries, as well as hearsay from Indigenous people regarding the names of African settlements.¹¹⁵ Moll noted the Sahara Desert, the *Negroland* region referencing the area of transition between the Sahara to the north and savannah to the south, and the *Guinea* region including the Grain Coast or Windward Coast (Liberia), Gold Coast (Ghana), and Slave Coast (Benin and Nigeria).¹¹⁶ Although uncertain whether they worked in the presence of DeLisle and Moll, an illustration



Cudjo Lewis, 1933
(Photo by Mary Ellen
Caver, courtesy of
Alabama Department of
Archives and History)



entitled “Slaves Assisting a Surveyor, Barbados, 1722” reveals those of African descent did participate in the early mapping of their lives in the Americas.¹¹⁷

Mobile commandant Baron Henri de Poilvilain de Cresnay, British superintendent of Indian Affairs David Taitt, and Dutch navigator Bernard Romans also produced maps noting British and French settlements and plantations, as well as Choctaw and Creek villages, from 1733 to 1775. All three men note the presence of Africans on the Gulf Coast in their writings. Cresnay refers to “negro volunteers” in the Louisiana province and Taitt to “a slave race” in Pensacola.

Romans, who mapped most of the interior of West Florida between 1770 and 1772, acknowledges a free Black man named Pompey near Pensacola as a “curious herbalist.”¹¹⁸ However, Romans’

Map of Neighborhoods of the Wise Ones by Stephanie Wells Jackson from “Listening to the Wise Ones: Personal Narrative as a Window into Traditional Black Neighborhoods in Mobile, AL,” doctoral dissertation by Kern Jackson, Indiana University, 2004.

Since the beginning of colonial mapmaking in Alabama, Black Americans have played complex and contradictory roles in society and in the maps that represent them, both as free and enslaved persons ... While official maps were largely published by white elites and white-owned land companies, African Americans often supplied the knowledge and labor to create these documents.

view of African descendants and Creek and Choctaw people in his *Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (1776) was overwhelmingly derogatory. He refers to Indigenous people as “savages” and states that Black citizens “are different species ... Anatomy has taught use, that the bone of a Negroe’s skull, is always black, that besides the Tunics of which our skins are composed, they have an additional one, consisting of numerous vesicles, filled with a black ink-like humour.”¹¹⁹

Evidence exists, however, of free Black citizens living in South Alabama at this time. Nicolas Mongoula, a mason, militia captain, and property owner by the time of his death in May 1798, probably lived as both enslaved and free in the Mobile and Gulf Coast region. *Mongoula* was a Mobilian Choctaw word for “my friend,” and Mongoula interacted regularly with Indigenous people.

In 1798, Spanish governor Manuel Gayoso de Lemos granted land in Mobile to other free Black citizens, including “Angelica” at the corner of Conception and St. Francis Streets, Eusophine Andry at the corner of Royal and St. Jago Streets, “Joseph” on Conception Street, and Julia Villars at the corner of St. Charles and St. Francis Streets. Villars had two sons with “good character and of industrious habits”; a man named Philip purchased his freedom through his “great industry and ingenuity” and aimed to construct a small house before marrying; and a carpenter named James Harnan survived on the goods “produced by his own labour.”

Nevertheless, the reports of white mapmakers Charles Trudeau who produced the 1780 “Riviere de la Mobbille” map and Vincente Pintado who produced maps of Mobile and the Gulf Coast in 1815 reveal that slavery remained significant in Mobile and the surrounding colony of Spanish West Florida.¹²⁰ In 1807, Trudeau reported to New Orleans mayor James Mather that City Hall was distanced from the cries of whipped slaves and opposed the influx of free Blacks.¹²¹ After the War of 1812, Pintado worked with British Admiral Alexander Cochrane to return enslaved runaways to US soldiers and to Andrew Jackson.¹²²

Several free families of Color continued to inhabit South Alabama by 1830, but the Mississippi Territory’s slave code of 1805, the federal cession of Indigenous land through the Creek Wars of 1813-1814 and 1836-1837, and



Alabama's slave code of 1833 greatly restricted the mobility of Black and Indigenous people. During and after the Civil War (1861-65), railroads transporting timber and bringing in northern land speculators continued to racially segregate populations of the Gulf Coast and Wiregrass regions. The official mapmakers for South Alabama during this time included Samuel Lewis, Mathew Carey, Francis Shallus, John Mellish, and John LaTourette, as well as railroad companies including the Central of Georgia and Louisville and Nashville. Lewis produced one of the first maps of the Mississippi Territory in Aaron Arrowsmith's *New and Elegant General Atlas* in 1804. His map of the Mississippi Territory highlighted the Georgia, Tennessee, and Upper Mississippi land companies, alongside Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Creek-designated lands, but did not note the presence of African Americans.¹²³

The Mississippi Land Company created by George Washington with permission from the British crown in June 1763 insisted that land along the entire Mississippi River "be protected from the Insults of the Savages."¹²⁴ Little documentation notes how the land company and its surveying influenced the treatment of free or enslaved Black citizens, though some records refer to them as "trusted members of surveying parties." While illiterate, it is possible "that some slaves learned the tasks of recording distance and direction and their work was recorded under their masters' names."¹²⁵

The most well-known Black surveyor of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was Benjamin Banneker, born either

Woman standing near the empty lot where her home used to be on Bay Bridge Road in Plateau, Alabama, 1986. Her house was demolished to make way for the construction of the Cochrane-Africanatown USA Bridge. (Photo by Phaedra Taylor, Mobile Press-Register, donated by Alabama Media Group, courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History)

to free black parents (Mary Banneky and Robert, a man from Guinea), or to a white woman (Molly Welsh) and enslaved African man (Banneka). Banneker may have learned the concepts of astronomy and geographic orientation from Banneka as well as through his West African Dogon heritage.¹²⁶

Banneker's interests were further developed by his work with Major Andrew Ellicott, surveying the land surrounding the District of Columbia in 1791.¹²⁷ Banneker left Ellicott to pursue other interests in 1792, but Ellicott may have employed Black labor when constructing the Ellicott Line in 1799 along the boundary separating land north of the 31st Parallel for the Mississippi Territory from Spanish West Florida to the south. Spanish astronomer William Dunbar from Natchez initially joined Ellicott's work by bringing sixty personally enslaved laborers, but Dunbar quickly returned to his plantation to tend to personal matters.¹²⁸ Another man of Color, Barthelemy Lafon, produced a map of the Orleans Territory in 1806 highlighting the bays of Minette, Bon Secour, and Mobile, the city of Mobile, and the Mobile and Tensaw Rivers.¹²⁹ Lafon is also credited with naming many of the streets in the city of New Orleans.¹³⁰

In 1806, Philadelphia mapmaker Mathew Carey produced a map of the Mississippi Territory which shows roads connecting Natchez to St. Stephens and roads connecting Augusta, Georgia to interior towns of central Georgia, all of which resulted from the US Treaty with the Creeks of 1805.¹³¹ Through the treaty, the US acquired a large portion of central Georgia to create a postal route from Athens, Georgia to Fort Stoddert on the Mobile River. The construction of the Old Federal Road began in April 1806 and brought more planters and enslaved people into the Mississippi Territory.¹³² Though his map ultimately fueled the slave economy, Carey proclaimed an abolitionist spirit in his Prayer of an American Citizen in November 1787:

May servitude abolish'd be,
As well as negro-slavery,
To make one LAND OF LIBERTY.¹³³

Mathew Carey also produced the well-known print featuring the Men's Room, Boys' Room, Women's Room, and Girls' Room used to hold enslaved people on slave ships in his abolitionist work of May 1789, *Remarks on the Slave Trade*.¹³⁴ However, Carey also criticized Black communities and blamed Black citizens in Philadelphia for the spread of yellow fever in January 1794.¹³⁵ In 1832, he authored a pamphlet entitled *Reflections on the Causes that Led to the Formation of the Colonization Society*, advocating for funding to establish a Liberian colony following the Nat Turner revolt that killed 55-65 whites at Virginia's Belmont Plantation in August 1831.¹³⁶

Another Philadelphia cartographer, Francis Shallus, created an 1810 map entitled "The State of Mississippi and Alabama Territory": one of the first to

The most well-known Black surveyor of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was Benjamin Banneker ... [who] may have learned the concepts of astronomy and geographic orientation from [his father] as well as through his West African Dogon heritage.

document the political boundaries of counties in the Mississippi Territory and future South Alabama, including Adams and Pickering (1799), Washington (1800), and Baldwin (1807). These were named after John Adams, Timothy Pickering, George Washington, and Abraham Baldwin, all white men who influenced policies that dictated the mobility of Black and Indigenous people in the Mississippi Territory.

In these counties in the early 1800s, both enslaved and free Blacks are documented in a mix of racial regulations. In March 1802, Israel Waters requested an attested copy of "Certificate or Evidence of his freedom" in Adams County.¹³⁷ An 1803 territorial "Act Concerning Marriages" forbade marriages between white people and people of Color. 1805 acts "Preventing the Liberation of Slaves" and "Respecting Slaves" prevented enslaved Blacks from bearing witness against whites in court, carrying weapons, and owning property.^{138 139} While an 1810 census indicated twenty-six free blacks in Baldwin County, geographer Amos Stoddard in 1812 claimed "in no part of the world are slaves treated better than in the Mississippi Territory." Stoddard also wrote that Creoles of mixed white and Black ancestry were "rather peaceable in their dispositions ... educated in the habits of obedience to the laws."¹⁴⁰

Cartographer John Melish was born in Scotland in 1771 and arrived in the southern US in 1806. In *Travels through the United States of America* (1812), Melish cites 17,088 enslaved and 240 free Black citizens as well as over 40,000 Indigenous people. Melish viewed slavery as evil, stating "the existence of slavery is a damper upon the operations of the white people, 'who will not work if they have slaves to work for them,' and, idleness being the parent of vice, society degenerates."¹⁴¹

Melish's map, *For General Jackson's Campaign against the Creek Indians, 1813 & 1814*, produced in 1815, noted several US fortifications including Fort Stephens and Fort Stoddert. These forts were involved in a war between US settlers who opposed the British and Spanish economies on the Gulf Coast and Creek citizens who relied on access to supplies from the British and Spanish companies like Panton, Leslie, and Company.¹⁴² In December 1812, the US acquisition of Clarke County (honoring Georgia governor and US Indian agent John Clarke) and Mobile County (referencing the Choctaw verb *moeli* indicating "to skim") increased restrictions on Creek access to supplies.¹⁴³

In retaliation, Creek leaders Peter McQueen and William Weatherford led an attack on Fort Mims, owned by Creek settler and US supporter Samuel Mims, on August 13, 1813.¹⁴⁴ Black citizens living in the region were divided in their loyalty between the US and Creek nations, and a monu-

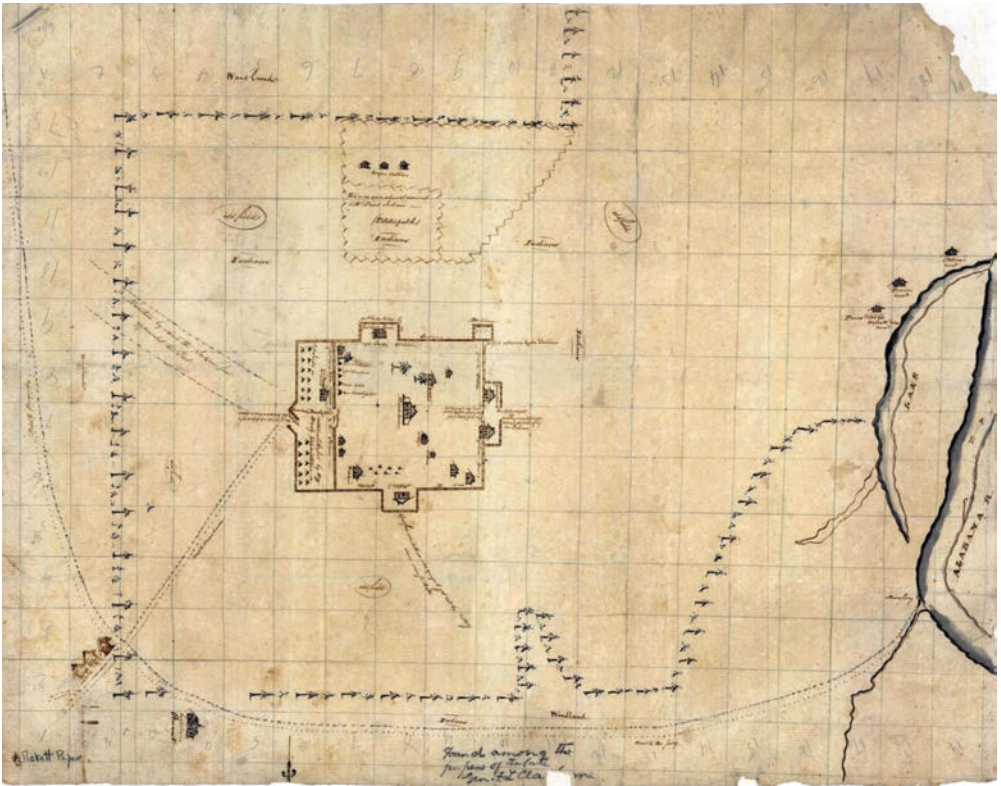
Interestingly, the white Baptist Church in Mobile organized in March 1835 but having no house of worship, met in the courthouse and “for a time they met in the house belonging to the African Baptist Church.”

ment to the dead at the site indicates that forty enslaved people died and thirty survived in the attack.¹⁴⁵ A Black woman named Hester who was shot in the breast brought the news of the attack to Fort Stoddert to notify General Ferdinand Claiborne.¹⁴⁶ An 1813 map of Fort Mims produced by US General Ferdinand Claiborne indicated “negro cabins” north of the entrance to the fort, in close proximity to a “potato patch ... almost covered with Dead Indians.”¹⁴⁷

The terms of the August 1814 Treaty of Fort Jackson ending the first Creek War required transfer of 22 million acres of Creek land to the US, extending from the present-day southern border with Florida north to the Tennessee River Valley of Alabama. The annexed land was named for white men and Creek language (Monroe, Montgomery, Conecuh, and Butler counties), with no representation of Black people or Black history.

Cartographer John La Tourette created “A Map of the Choctaw Territory in Alabama” in 1833, “A Map of the Creek Territory in Alabama,” a map of the City of Mobile in 1838, and maps of Alabama and West Florida in 1837 and 1856.¹⁴⁸ La Tourette likely came to Alabama from Staten Island, New York, between 1820 and 1830, settling at Centre-Port in Dallas County. His association with the prominent Bibb family likely resulted in his commission to map the state. Though La Tourette enslaved Black workers, his use of enslaved people in his cartography remains unknown.¹⁴⁹

La Tourette’s 1838 “Map of the City of Mobile” notes an “African Church” on St. Michael Street between the intersections of Lawrence and Hamilton Streets.¹⁵⁰ Interestingly, the white Baptist Church in Mobile organized in March 1835 but having no house of worship, met in the courthouse and “for a time they met in the house belonging to the African Baptist Church.”¹⁵¹ La Tourette’s map gave a partial glimpse of free Black society in the 1830s that Carter G. Woodson would later enumerate, noting 113 free Black families in South Alabama by 1830, thirty-two of whom enslaved other Black people.¹⁵² An 1837 Mobile city directory cited free women of Color including shopkeeper R. Alexander, confectioner Madame Clara, and washer Edy Cooper, as well as free men of Color including waterman William Belfore, carpenter Alex Boaddre, and bricklayer Peter Charles.¹⁵³ Censuses from 1820 to 1860 indicate the number of free Blacks rose from 633 to 2,690.¹⁵⁴ However, La Tourette’s 1848 Map of Louisi-



ana featuring plantation lands along the Red and Mississippi Rivers as well as his 1856 map of Alabama showed that enslaved populations exponentially outweighed free populations. Louisiana held 47,699 free people and 283,419 enslaved workers; Alabama held 2,448 free people and 371,290 enslaved workers.¹⁵⁵

Alabama maps of the 1830s not only provided insight into the lives of free and enslaved Black citizens but also foreshadowed the role railroads would play in shaping Alabama society leading up to the Civil War and throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The earliest railroads in Alabama were likely the Tuscumbia Railway developed in 1832 in North Alabama and a railroad developed by Abner McGhee and Charles Pollard from West Point, Georgia to Montgomery, Alabama in 1851. At least eighty-four enslaved workers were purchased to build the latter.¹⁵⁶ In 1836, William R. Palmer mapped a proposed Columbus and Pensacola Railroad – possibly the first to link communities in South Alabama including Blakeley in Baldwin County, Brooklyn and Sparta in Conecuh County, and Montezuma in Covington County.¹⁵⁷

La Tourette’s 1856 map of Alabama indicates the consideration

Map of Fort Mims and its environs, hand-drawn map from the Pickett family papers, 1813 (Courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History)



Gandy dancers performing railroad work songs at the Alabama Folklife Festival in Montgomery, AL, 1991 (Courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History)

Opposite: Abraham Parker displaying his railroad watch during a gandy dancer reunion at the Heart of Dixie Railroad Club in Calera, Alabama, 1988 (Photo by Maggie Holtzberg, courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History)

of a railroad through South Alabama, to extend from Pensacola to Montgomery.¹⁵⁸ Construction did not begin until November 1861 with the Mobile and Great Northern Railroad connecting to the Alabama and Florida Railroad at the Pollard settlement in present-day Escambia County. This new railroad helped to distribute imported goods and locally-milled timber throughout the Confederacy as the US increased its naval blockade of southern US ports.¹⁵⁹ It remains unknown how many enslaved laborers worked on the Alabama and Florida Railroad, but in May 1862, Alabama Governor John Gill Shorter requested 300 enslaved workers to work on Confederate railroads throughout the state.¹⁶⁰ He also named John Milner as a superintendent and overseer of “negro workers.” Later, Milner and associate William Hampton Flowers used enslaved labor at a timber-harvesting operation at Bolling in Butler County, cutting railroad ties to be used across South Alabama.¹⁶¹

Beginning in 1879, the George F. Cram Company of Chicago began producing Alabama maps indicating the increasing prevalence of railroads in South Alabama. By 1894, Cram’s map showed the Alabama Midland and Central of Georgia Railroads crisscrossed through Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Crenshaw, Dale, Geneva, and Henry counties. The Alabama Great Southern Railroad crossed through Clarke and Washington counties; the Louisville and Nashville Railroad crossed through Baldwin, Butler, Conecuh, and Escambia counties; and the Mobile and Ohio

He was viewed as a Black Jesse James, inspiring lyrics about Railroad Bill that carried through and evolved in blues ballads sung by construction gang workers known as gandy dancers.

Railroad crossed into Alabama from southern Mississippi, each meeting in the city of Mobile.¹⁶² A 1912 Rand McNally map of Alabama indicated the new Alabama, Tennessee and Northern Railroad crossed through Choctaw and Washington counties and that the city of Dothan was now a hub for the Atlantic Coast Line and Central of Georgia Railroads.¹⁶³

Morris Slater — nicknamed “Railroad Bill” — inspired a legacy and story that made him one of the most salient folk heroes of Alabama. Slater robbed Louisville and Nashville trains and gave the food he stole to poor Blacks, until he was killed near Atmore in 1891. He was viewed as a Black Jesse James, inspiring lyrics about Railroad Bill that carried through and evolved in blues ballads sung by construction gang workers known as gandy dancers.¹⁶⁴

Railroads also profited from Black-owned land, including that of formerly-enslaved Nancy Lewis who owned forty acres in Baldwin County but was pressured by the Fairhope Industrial Association to “surrender all her claims” for \$250 in 1895.¹⁶⁵ The Chicago-based Magnolia Springs Land Company produced a pamphlet in 1901 entitled *Pleasant Homes and Profitable Farms in the South* which advertised to potential northern settlers that Magnolia Springs was blessed with an absence of mosquitoes, no swamps, and “comparatively few negroes” while “they are not allowed at all” in the eastern end of the county.¹⁶⁶

However, timber camps utilized to design these “ideal” locations for white investors required a great deal of Black labor. Maps of camps such as Riderwood in Choctaw County, Poley in Covington County, and Falco in Covington County indicated segregated quarters for Black and white workers.¹⁶⁷ Grady Baker’s 1920s and 1930s memories of nearby McDavid, Florida cite the layout of the L and N Railroad, the flow of the Escambia River, the Till Gandy “negro” home, and L and N Railroad “negro” section houses and church.¹⁶⁸ In addition to maps, camp newsletters documented segregated life in the camps. The September 1951 edition of the W. T. Smith Lumber Company’s *Lumbering Along* depicts the first day of school in the company town of Chapman in Butler County, Alabama. White student, Grant Brown, is described as “well equipped but very reluctant,” while Black student Ollie Jean Brown





Students participating in a summer physical educational class at the Mobile County Training School in Plateau, Alabama, circa 1920s (Photo courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History)

shows little enthusiasm but knows “school is serious business.”¹⁶⁹

Local histories like J. A. B. Beeson’s *History of Eufaula* in 1875, as well as regional political works by white authors such as Hilary Abner Herbert’s *Why the Solid South?: Or, Reconstruction and Its Results* (1890) and Benjamin Franklin Riley’s *White Man’s Burden* (1910) created elitist nostalgia for plantation culture where both whites and Blacks reportedly lived peacefully in their places. William Joseph Simmons — Opp’s first Methodist minister in 1901 and founder of the second movement of the Ku Klux Klan in November 1915 — produced a map of his own in the 1916 Klan guidebook entitled “Diagram of Klavern,” documenting the process by which a Klan candidate entered from the Outer Den into the Inner Den and finally the Klavern.¹⁷⁰ After Simmons’ death in 1945, *The Opp News* recalled that “he possessed an unusual imaginative mind when young which was cultivated by the thrilling stories of the original Klan as told him by Aunt Viney, his colored mammy.”¹⁷¹ Marian Acker Macpherson’s *Etchings of Old Mobile* (1943) edges closer to a white lens accurately capturing Black society but still relegates Black citizens to daily common activities in descriptions of residents in the “Darkeytown” neighborhood, a “Washerwoman,” and Black fishermen at the “Waterfront.”¹⁷²

Histories and prose produced by Black authors in South Alabama counteracted white supremacist narratives. These include Charles Octavius Boothe's *Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama: Their Leaders and Their Work* (1895), H. G. Ruffin's *Colored Country Poet* (1896) produced in Choctaw County, and Annie L. Burton's *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days* (1909) written about Barbour County. Foot soldiers in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, including Chester Higgins of Coffee County and Uriah J. Fields of Washington County, also produced priceless documentation in Fields' *The Montgomery Story: The Unhappy Effects of the Montgomery Boycott* (1959) and Higgins' *Student Unrest, Tuskegee Institute: a Chronology* (1968).

However, the vast majority of Black geographies in South Alabama reside in works and memories that typically did not include maps. In *Jubilee* (1966), Margaret Walker traces her grandmother's pilgrimage from slavery on the Dutton plantation in southwest Georgia through the Alabama towns of Abbeville, Troy, Georgiana, and Luverne, before finally settling in Greenville. In their works, Toni Morrison and Mary Monroe also note ancestral homes in Greenville and Choctaw County, and the attempt by later generations to find a better life outside of Alabama.

Albert Murray may provide the only literary map of South Alabama by a twentieth century writer in *Train Whistle Guitar* (1975), a work of historical fiction in which the childhood experiences of Scooter, the main character, mirror Murray's own near Africatown on Mobile Bay. Scooter can see the wreck of the Clotilda, the tracks of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, and the Cochrane Bridge from a tall chinaberry tree. He also spends time in the neighborhoods of Buckshaw Flat, Hog Bayou, and Meaher's Hummock.¹⁷³ Murray also grew up near Africatown in the latter years of Cudjo Lewis' life and modeled the character of "Unka JoJo" on Lewis' mannerisms.¹⁷⁴



Eva Jones, descendant of enslaved people on the Clotilda, at her home on Burneys Lane in the Plateau neighborhood of Mobile, Alabama, 1986. (Photo by Victor Calhoun, Mobile Press-Register, donated by Alabama Media Group, courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History)

It is easy to say these leaders mirror the West African tradition of the griot who acts as the local historian, storyteller, praise singer, poet, or musician. However, the French developed the term griot or “servant” as an overarching term for the storyteller, and each culture’s storytellers manifested in different ways including the jali or “musician” in the Mali Kingdom and arokin or “narrator” in the Yoruban kingdom.

Cudjo Lewis’ 1914 map of the Dahomeyan capture of his Yoruban people that led to their forced migration into Mobile Bay, Albert Murray’s mapping in the late 1960s of his childhood in Africatown, and Kern Jackson’s 2004 map of Mobile’s Black neighborhoods are among the few publicly known maps produced from the Black perspective throughout the history of South Alabama. Other works like Beatrice native Charlie J. Black’s *After the Fact: 20/20 Hindsight* (1987) lack physical maps but note communities including the Black Settlement, Isaac Hill, Cooper Settlement, Andrews Quarter, and Tabernacle Quarter named for the families who lived in or the social structures that occupied those areas.¹⁷⁵ Researchers can compare these writers’ interpretations of local areas to present-day street names and other landmarks to reconstruct the location of neighborhoods.

Fortunately, the older leaders of predominantly Black areas throughout the Gulf Coast and Wiregrass regions of South Alabama continue to pass down the information they received from their ancestors including place names and geographic locations. It is easy to say these leaders mirror the West African tradition of the griot who acts as the local historian, storyteller, praise singer, poet, or musician. However, the French developed the term *griot* or “servant” as an overarching term for the storyteller, and each culture’s storytellers manifested in different ways including the *jali* or “musician” in the Mali Kingdom and *arokin* or “narrator” in the Yoruban kingdom where Cudjo Lewis and his family originated.¹⁷⁶

In the same way, storytellers in the Black communities of South Alabama cannot be labeled with a single overarching term. Each storyteller comes from a unique background that includes church leader, educator, news editor, and politician, and may use different mediums to share Black history locally including radio, social media, and book publishing. Agnes Windsor — who passed away in July 2022 during the writing of this article — helped to establish Slocomb Public Library and preserve the history of the Cotton Box community in Geneva County.¹⁷⁷ Willa Martin-Hall not only led the development of markers for Abbeville’s Black community, Girard, but manages Facebook pages including *Historical Research & Preservation Group of*



Henry County, which highlights the history of local Black organizations as well as educational videos on a variety of topics. Deborah Rankins-Robinson manages Rankins Files Publishing and helps other community leaders in Clarke County publish their family histories, including Dr. Edwina Fluker-Hart's *The Fluker Family: God is Cruising Us to Regality* (2021).¹⁷⁸

Building trust with these Black community leaders often uncovers traditions of mapping, including Micki Savage's mapping of Black settlements in the Prestwick area of Washington County. Much of this history remains in oral memory and must be brought to light in a world where ancestral knowledge is disappearing, but Black leadership continues to grow. Time is of the essence to record and share the history of these Black communities and those that remain hidden throughout South Alabama. ○

Cudjo Lewis in his home in the 1930s (Courtesy of Erik Overbey Collection, The Doy Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama)

BOOK REVIEWS

Quilt of Souls

A Memoir

BY PHYLLIS BIFFLE ELMORE

REVIEW BY DESTINY WILLIAMS LEVY

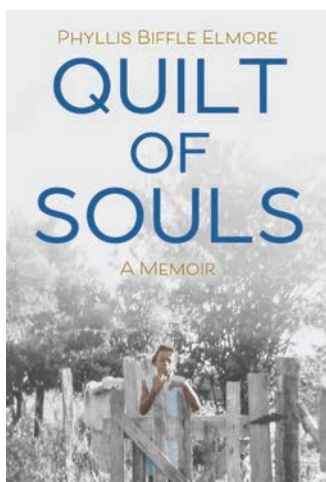
We were on a family road trip heading to Florida. I was deep into my latest read when I read a passage that I just had to share with my aunt who was behind the wheel, driving her leg of the trip. We broke into light conversation about the book and related topics when, at some point during our chat, my aunt inquired, “So Black Americans really don’t have a culture, do they?” I paused in wonder. *What do you mean by that?* I initially thought. However, I left the dialogue open and invited her to delve deeper into her views.

We engaged in an hour-long discussion about the African roots of Black American culture and the blurred lines that integrate Black American culture into the broader scope of American culture, which then stimulates popular culture with little, if any, acknowledgement of its roots in Black culture. Our conversation was an enriched exploration of the dilution of the Black experience by the dominant society. Yet I was mostly perplexed that this admirable Black woman — who is nearly forty years my senior, a highly skilled retired educator and the daughter of sharecroppers — was so accustomed to her southern lifestyle that the unique beauty in Black art forms and traditions, kept alive in our own backyard, in some way eluded her.

As she recalled her early life, and the everyday activities of living on a farm in the 1950s and 1960s with eleven siblings, it dawned on me that my aunt was about the same age as the author of the book that I was reading, Phyllis Biffle Elmore. They grew up mere miles apart, but my aunt had no idea of the powerful narratives woven into *Quilt of Souls: A Memoir*, Phyllis’s recollection of stories told to her as a young girl while growing up in Livingston, Alabama.

My aunt has a couple of unfinished patchwork quilts tucked away in a closet but knows little of how highly regarded African American quilting traditions have become, largely due to Gee's Bend quilters who also reside in the Alabama Black Belt about two hours east of my aunt's hometown of Tarentum, Alabama. Being a southerner, I get how all the rich history, both kept within my aunt's heart as well as surrounding her, could feel somewhat irrelevant. However, only when Black culture is juxtaposed with the stories of Black ancestors, and all they did to maintain their humanity and, ultimately, to protect future generations, can we see the truly marvelous nature of these traditions and expressions.

Quilt of Souls is an invaluable anthropology, grounded in an African storytelling tradition, giving voice to a mighty generation of women who were the cornerstone of Black families in the South. Women like Phyllis's Grandma Lulu were the keepers of Black culture, demonstrating traditional religious beliefs along with practices of cooking, farming, and quilt making which were passed down through Phyllis's maternal lineage.



As Black people endured chattel slavery, Black culture was transformed by the nourishment of America's rich landscape as well as the brutalities of patriarchal white supremacist racism. In the early days of Phyllis's time in the South, her feelings of abandonment were soothed by simply stepping out onto the front porch. The abundance of life in the South— from the breathtaking nature all around, miles of piney woods and sycamore trees along with a variety of four-legged creatures grazing the farm, to her grandmother's southern cooking, fish fries

and breakfasts laid out beyond the stretch of her imagination—was her safe haven. Southern living healed Phyllis's broken heart and helped her to see wonderful possibilities beyond the city-life that she had become accustomed to.

Phyllis was deep in the South, under the care of a community of women who stood strong with "straight spines" against a racist, sexist culture that threatened their freedoms, that attempted to degrade them and regarded them as inferior. Efforts to undermine the role of Blackness in the fabric of American history and culture are not new; however, books like *Quilt of Souls* are essential discourses that epitomize how Black people strive incessantly to maintain their dignity and remain rooted in their heritage.

Each story that Grandma Lulu told strikes against the erasure of Black American history. The American canon of literature would caution against trusting the book's opening narrator, a four-year-old little black girl, as credible. But Phyllis balances the chronology of her life events with the fact that her grandmother retold these same stories to her, countless times. Phyllis's recounts are hyperbolic and animated, so much so that I felt myself sitting uncomfortably on a milk crate with my ears perched and eyes fixated on Grandma Lulu as she revived the deceased with endless tales filled with bravery, defeat, love, heartbreak, wittiness, and deception. *Quilt of Souls* is a staple of contemporary Black history, a must read for genealogy enthusiasts like me, and a journey of piercing, yet nostalgic, reminiscence for people like my aunt who are Phyllis's peers.

Phyllis's records are a rare privilege. At four years old, she could not have known the transformative life events that would follow her transplantation to the Deep South from Detroit, Michigan. She knew nothing about the South, and, rightfully, she felt apprehensive and afraid to arrive at a new home with grandparents she had never met before. Over the years, Phyllis would be shaped by these most memorable moments: quilting alongside her grandmother, visiting neighbors in the community and commuting into town with her grandfather while hearing the stories of predecessors, many of which were her ancestors whose clothing would be woven into an eclectic quilt for her keeping. Although her southern rearing would stay with her as life molded her into the incredibly accomplished woman that she is today, it was late in her life before she committed herself to documenting the untold living history that was bestowed upon her: firsthand accounts of life in the antebellum south one generation removed from enslavement.

Phyllis Biffle Elmore was born in Detroit, Michigan in the early 1950s. She was one of eight children born to two southern native parents who followed the wave of the Great Migration: the relocation of Black southerners en masse to northern and western states searching for a better quality of life. Unfortunately, Phyllis's parents, like many others, found that large families were difficult to provide for in the North. So, they decided to send Phyllis back south to be raised by her grandparents. Phyllis enjoyed a loving, enriched home life with her grandparents. Living in the South made her "a country girl" where she learned to live off the land and was instilled with wisdom beyond her years.

Phyllis returned to Detroit a disgruntled teen and navigated years of hardship as she struggled to acclimate to an environment and a family she had long forgotten. Following her junior high years, Phyllis's family relocated to Cleveland, Ohio where she finished high school before embarking on an impressive military career, being one of few women who served in

three major military conflicts from Vietnam (1975) to Operation Desert Storm (1991) to Operation Enduring Freedom (2003).

In between her years of military service, Phyllis attended the University of Maryland, earning her Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and Social Work. She became a counselor for incarcerated youth, women affected by domestic violence, and individuals combating alcohol and substance abuse. After retiring from the armed forces, Phyllis turned her attention to memories of her youthful days living in the South. She received her Master's Certificate in Creative Writing from the University of Denver and dedicated herself to organizing the numerous fascinating stories collected during the nine years she lived with her grandparents. More than half a century after leaving her life in Alabama, Phyllis compiled her experiences into the work of literature we are fortunate to enjoy as *Quilt of Souls*.

Phyllis's encounters with her grandmother were a rare privilege. Grandma Lulu openly sharing stories of the past is not typical of Black southern elders who almost never vocalize the painful terrors of living in the late nineteenth-century South. Therefore, I admit, if it were not for my own experiences growing up in the South and insight into Phyllis's heritage, I would have deemed her sensational accounts fictitious, simply too remarkable, too atrocious to be true.

Nonetheless, the heart-wrenching story of Phyllis's great aunt, Ella Young, reassured me that the eerie sequence of events that follows Phyllis's ancestral lineage, in a way, predestined Phyllis to write *Quilt of Souls*. Phyllis regards snippets of Ella's wedding dress as the central heartbeat of her quilt which was made over the years by Grandma Lulu with her help. Ella and Grandma Lulu were both "miracle babies," latecomers born to Phyllis's great-grandmother Emma in her forties, years after her first three infants were sold into slavery at birth.

Ella and Lulu were born free in East Mississippi, within two decades after the Civil War, to ex-slave parents who sharecropped on the plantation of their former bondage. Ironically, the supernatural birth and tragic death of Ella mark the beginning and the end of the mystical fortunes that befell Phyllis's great-grandparents.

Shortly after Ella was born, Mr. Young and his wife, the plantation owners, showed Ella great favor, giving her family a home and farmland of their own. Ella was recognized at birth for her promise of healing powers and, sure enough, a few years later, young Ella would begin to mix herbs into highly potent tinctures, potions, teas, and salves that reportedly healed Mr. Young's consumption.

Mr. Young's gratitude for Ella's healing touch spared her from working in the fields and paved the way for Ella to learn how to read and write, skills she then taught to Lulu and other Blacks nearby. Grandma Lulu clung to her sister Ella's

hip, following her every move and studying her with deep admiration. Lulu and Ella sat alongside their mother Emma, stitching elegant quilts — under strict orders to never mix new fabrics of the living with old fabrics of the deceased — into intricate patterns for hours into the night with precise accuracy.

Ella was born free, and because of her special gifts, she was granted “special privileges” by the white plantation owner; however, her freedoms and the comforts of her family were enjoyed at the price of Ella’s unwavering loyalty to Mr. Young. The day that Ella chose to embark on a life of her own, leaving the South to follow her true love to New York, was the day that Grandma Lulu’s family ended as she knew it.

The story of Ella is an empowering, yet heartbreaking, tale of the Young family’s plight from the favored to the fallen at the will of an entitled, racist white supremacist who refused to value Black lives beyond the services they provided him. Through Mr. Young’s dehumanizing acts of pure hatred, he stole Ella’s youthful vibrance, eventually claiming her life, and repossessed the house and land that Lulu’s family had cultivated into a home. It was not long after what felt like Ella’s tragic fall from grace that Grandma Lulu’s happy family of four was reduced to one — leaving only her to carry the family’s legacy. Just as Grandma Lulu’s mother and sister guided her, giving her the strength to see beauty amid turmoil and inspiring her to lead with love and faith, Grandma Lulu instilled these same qualities in Phyllis, reinforcing her lessons with stories and an heirloom quilt in memory of a family that she would otherwise have never known.

It would be a great disservice to the ancestors not to cherish *Quilt of Souls*, especially knowing all that occurred to bring it to fruition. This book took me on an emotional rollercoaster of uncertainty, pride, agony, joy, shock, and satisfaction. I closed the book with a deep sense of gratitude for Phyllis’s work and a yearning to know my aunt, all my ancestors, more fully. *Quilt of Souls* was an escape from a society that perpetuates a narrative of Black expression, intelligence, and innovation as “seasoning” to rather than sustenance of the American experience. This wonderful book reinforced my own ancestral truths and helped me grapple with my southern Black identity.

Quilt of Souls is an elixir, healing parts of the African American community left void by the displacement of chattel slavery. It is a remedy to our search for belonging, reminding us that our ancestors are with us in spirit and that we should hold dear the artifacts they leave us as symbols of the multifaceted lives they lived. It is also a call to action, encouraging Black elders to open their hearts and share their truths while urging Black youth to become curious about our family histories and to engage our elders while they are still living.

To the reader who is on a journey of self-discovery, in need of the strength

to carry on, seeking to disrupt the monotony of the dominating rhetoric in American society, or simply missing a loved one who passed away, I highly recommend reading Phyllis Biffle Elmore's provocative, awe-inspiring book, *Quilt of Souls: A Memoir*.¹⁷⁹

Antigodlin Stories of the Sacred Harp

BY JOHN LAWRENCE BRASHER

REVIEW BY DAVID IVEY

Rev. Dr. Larry Brasher paints descriptive scenes of Alabama rural life from the nineteenth century into the twenty-first in *Antigodlin Stories of the Sacred Harp*. He achieves this through keen observations of southern life based on summer childhood visits to North Alabama in the 1960s and 70s and from recorded interviews with elders. Brasher's documentation of family history while seminal forbears were still living is key to his delightful stories. The many historic photographs make these stories come alive even more for readers.

As a child, Brasher resided in the New Jersey suburbs of New York City with his parents and sister, but the family made extended visits to North Alabama every summer ("seven miles on backroads" from Attalla) with grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles (88). It was during one of these summer trips that he first encountered Sacred Harp shape note singing that he describes as "loud and strident, yet blended, almost like being inside an organ pipe chamber" (102).

Brasher weaves stories from interviews of his relatives to describe life in the North Alabama hollers and mountains back to pre-Civil War times. His rich family history particularly shines in interviews with his Methodist preacher grandfather, Rev. John Lakin Brasher (1868-1971). These were conducted in his grandfather's tenth decade, and since he was the youngest of eight children, he drew on stories told to him by elders born in the eighteenth century, stretching back to Revolutionary War days.

The book captures country/folk terms such as "antigodlin," a word I had never encountered, "buttermilk rangers" and "Jerusalem crickets" and explains their colorful usage. Brasher experienced coon hunting, hog killing, frog gigging, and drinking spring water from a tin water dipper. He recounts the old practice of holding funerals months after deaths so that the weather would be better for transportation and attendance. The book

keeps alive characters like Hurst Matthews (1913-1978) of Greasy Cove, “a bachelor most of his life” who plowed his fields with oxen and even traveled the local roads in an ox wagon alongside modern automobiles in the twentieth century (230).

Brasher’s accounts capture the history of Methodist meetings and revivals as recounted by his grandfather, who rode horseback in his first decades and circuit preached the gospel through 1969, his 102nd year. His stories illumine conflict and tragedy during the Civil War and before it, when next door neighbors chose sides between the Union and Confederacy and exacted violence on each other for doing so.

Brasher observed shape note Sacred Harp singing for the first time at the Oneonta Civic Center during a summer trip when he was thirteen years old. He was struck, even as a teenager, with the hardy folk whose lives were intertwined with others in their community through the songs whose words are direct and plain in describing our mortality, sin, and redemption. Brasher has continued to participate in these community singing events, usually in country churches, some of which were associated with cemetery decoration gatherings and family reunions, through most of his life.

In addition to family members, Brasher also describes people like Hatter Bill Reneau (1763-1851), a singing school teacher and also a trapper, who “was a familiar figure with his beaver hat at singing conventions with dinner on the ground” (52). Brasher heard stories about Hatter Bill from his great-great-grandson, Cap Maynor of Blount County, and even though most of the passed-down stories seem true, others are obviously stretched or misinformed. This is a lesson to readers on how family stories can be a combination of essential truths with some enhancements through years of oral tradition.

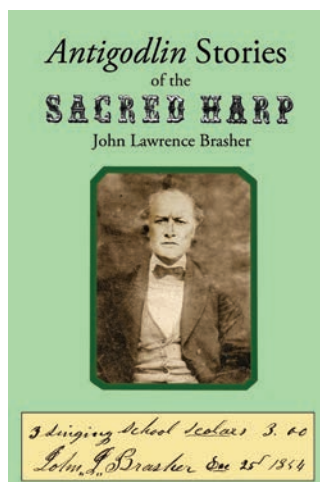
Brasher uncovered a lovely unpublished account of a Sacred Harp singing from the 1940s by Jo Copeland Giles (1934-2013) that included the following acute observations made by a young girl:

“All the ladies wore hats and gloves” (106).

“... because the visiting singers were our guests ... the ladies ... had to ‘put on the dog’ [with a feast for dinner on the ground]” (106).

“After they sang the notes, they then sang the words. They sounded like a bunch of crows cawing in harmony” (107).

“The singing always ended with the singing of ‘Amazing Grace.’



It was not sung as it is today. Every word was drawn out. At the last syllable, the altos and trebles really rang out with their distinct twang, and this was repeated all through the song. I will have to admit the old folks did things to that song that are not equaled today even by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. It did your heart good to hear them, each creating their own harmony, oblivious to the voice next to them” (108).

I particularly enjoyed the story of the Bennett William and Mattie Tressie Gibson Odom family of Shoal Creek Valley near Ashville. This family, which included eight daughters and one son, tenaciously held on to its tradition of singing from the much less popular J. L. White Sacred Harp songbook even as this four-shape singing territory was surrounded by Denson songbook singings. Perhaps I appreciated this story because I attended Sacred Harp singings on Sand Mountain in the 1970s and 1980s with their daughter, Nora Odom Collett, and her husband Jethro.

Brasher writes, “The Warrior River [Sacred Harp] Convention was our home convention,” then lovingly fills a chapter with reminiscences of this community and now discontinued event (165). Especially touching are the stories of the interconnections of the Sacred Harp families of this area who supported the “convention.” I really appreciate Brasher’s insightful definition of convention:

“The convention was a kinship community. There were no strangers. It was an extended family, and those not related by blood or marriage were joined by long-standing association and custom. The inter-layering of making and trading in their self-provisioning farm life was how people knew each other. Exchanges of work and crops and attendance at church and singings formed friendships and courtships. Families of the convention touched and interwove like roots and branches of trees in an old-growth forest. Follow a branch, often not far, and you would find it crossing another in marriage to another family tree” (166).

The Sacred Harp family names of this area at the corner of Blount, Etowah, and Saint Clair counties are: Alexander, Battles, Blakeley, Brothers, Conn, Galbreath, Gilliland, Green, Hopper, Hullett, Hyatt, Keener, Lowe, McClen-don, Matthews, Moody, Murphree, Odom, Phillips, and Smith. I personally knew singers from all of these families except two, so it was a real treat for me to read about their histories and connections.

Brasher brings all of these paths and recollections together in the final chapter, which describes the changes in Sacred Harp singing, changes that continue because “even traditions change, caused subtly by the life experiences of new generations or sometimes directly by conscious choices” (243). To me, this statement captures the essence of how singing communities experience both modern change and continuity of longstanding folk traditions.

PODCAST REVIEW

Hear in Alabama

A podcast about Alabama's rich music cultures

BY BETH MCGINNIS | WWW.HEARINALABAMA.COM

REVIEW BY JERRILYN MCGREGORY

Hear in Alabama: A podcast about Alabama's rich music cultures is hosted by Dr. Beth McGinnis, a musicology professor at Samford University. *Hear in Alabama* offers a trove of musical traditions and the folk and popular arts chiefly within her home region of Alabama, from Perry County to Birmingham. The first episode aired in August 2020 and since then, McGinnis has produced three seasons that coincide with the academic school year. The entire series features eighteen episodes that are generally forty minutes long and drop weekly.

What is most admirable about *Hear in Alabama* is McGinnis' dedication to giving voice to the cultural producers themselves. Each episode becomes a lesson on the power of personal experience narratives, favoring in-depth coverage of people's lives.

The inaugural episode, "The Song was Moving through Them," features Lloyd Bricken, co-producer of the Great Crossroads Project, a team of Brazilian and Alabama poets and performers. McGinnis found these artists by happenstance, meeting them by serendipity in Perry County, and it is this encounter that catalyzed the entire podcast. Located in Alabama's Black Belt, Perry County holds a large African American population and severe economic challenges, as a relic of the plantation system.

Entitled "Spiritual Nutrients," the second episode features an interview with Brazilian member, Salloma, a scholar and professor of Afro-Brazilian music, with a translation looped in from a conversation with the audience following a performance in Birmingham. The remainder of this episode

was slightly esoteric, and could have benefited from additional context and explanation.

The third episode, “ProveWell Baptist Church: ‘When they throw it out you just have to return it’” is most memorable. Frances Ford and Dr. Pilar Murphy prove to be key informants, steeped in African American church decorum and sacred music traditions that include lining hymns (also known as Dr. Watts or common music hymns). The two also articulate their variant spiritual experiences and share vernacular usages such as “throwing out a hymn.” McGinnis coupled with the interviewees personifies Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s concept of traditional intellectuals (academics) and organic intellectuals (those marginalized), capable of elaborating on their cultural productions as a set of general principles. This episode sparked my determination to listen to every single episode of *Hear in Alabama* to date.

The remaining seasons offer equally expansive opportunities to consume other exemplary performative genres along with McGinnis’ instructive use of cultural pedagogy in the classroom. For instance, the “Band Partnership” episodes engage her students at Samford University (originally located in Perry County) in conducting interviews. *Hear in Alabama* constitutes an excellent audible tool within the digital humanities, particularly for Alabama audiences.

In this social media age, podcasting has become a common form of storytelling. Its eclecticism functions as a medium to unite so many fascinating and infrequently exalted cultural realms. For instance, as McGinnis signs off after interviewing two band directors in Perry County, she announces Season Two, to feature “some of the musicians I know here” in Birmingham including “Walker Burroughs, who was a finalist on American Idol, the world renowned euphonium player, Dr. Demondrae Thurman, and members of a brass band called The Mutton Chops.” Overall, McGinnis’ objective to express how music makes us, and in so many different ways, shines throughout this series.

On its official website, *Hear in Alabama* also provides additional resources for educators and communities, as well as lists of music, books, and film. Actually, I opened this tab first to access and assess the Educator Resources and was impressed. The study questions for Season One are practical for pedagogical inspiration, relying on tried-and-true techniques.



The “Two Truths & a Lie Discussion” link was especially appealing in offering a practical means to fully engage students in the learning process. Interactive learning is a proven strategy, maximizing the benefits of active learning that teachers can readily incorporate into any class session.

The season that I have yet to discuss, Season Three, includes two parts focusing on folk artist extraordinaire, Thornton Dial, Sr. of Emelle, Alabama – also located in the western part of the state. These episodes should thrill any and all listeners; the body of Dial’s artistry has incredible breadth, enhanced by the insights of family members interviewed by McGinnis. The Community Resources tab offers additional, quintessential material, including *Souls Grown Deep*, which uplifts “the work of Black artists from the American South” and includes a remarkable exhibition, “Thornton Dial: High and Wide (Carrying the Rats to the Man).” I will leave this tidbit to encourage readers to become listeners of *Hear in Alabama* and to share with others what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, and striking about what you hear. ○

ENDNOTES

- 1 Quotes from Earnest Mostella, along with biographical details, come from a wealth of newspaper articles, 1976-2000, many of which are collected in the files of the Ashville Museum and Archives, located in downtown Ashville, Alabama. Additional quotations are taken from a 1995 interview with folklorist Aimee Schmidt and from my own interviews with Mostella, 2000-2002. Sources include:

“A fiddle-making man,” *The Huntsville Times*, December 11, 1988.

“Basketmaker speaks through his hands,” *The St. Clair News-Aegis*, June 13, 1976.

Bill Edwards, “Mostella brothers’ life getting down and dirty,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, November 8, 1987.

Carolynne Blackwell Scott, “Earnest Mostella,” in *Country Roads: A Journey Through Rustic Alabama*, 1977, 143-145.

Earnest Mostella, interview with Aimee Schmidt, Alabama State Council on the Arts / Alabama Folklife Association, October 24, 1995.

Earnest Mostella, interview with Burgin Mathews, 2000.

George J. Tanber, “It’s the old men and the tree,” *Anniston Star*, November 17, 1991, 1C-2C.

Jan Fink, “St. Clair Fiddle Man: Ernest Mostello [sic] is living history in Ashville,” *St. Clair News-Aegis*, June 14, 1990, 5-A.

Kathy Kemp, “The music man,” *Birmingham News*, April 4, 2000, 1D, 3D.

Murphy Evans, “Fiddle maker carrying on long tradition,” *Anniston Star*, October 23, 1984.

Phil Pierce, “It’s in his blood: Ashville preacher spends time making fiddles, music,” undated clipping.

Russell Helms, “Photographer captures millennium’s first year,” *St. Clair News-Aegis*, Feb. 3, 2000.

Wayne Ruple, “Ernest Mostello [sic] keeps family tradition,” *St. Clair News-Aegis*, July 16, 1981, 1-B.
- 2 Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest* (New York: Knopf, 2021). Among many others, Simard’s research inspired Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. Jane Billinghurst (Vancouver/Berkeley: Greystone Books, 2016). For a brief introduction to Simard’s research, see Richard Schiffman’s interview “‘Mother Trees’ Are Intelligent: They Learn and Remember,” *Scientific American* 14 May 2021, www.scientificamerican.com/article/mother-trees-are-intelligent-they-learn-and-remember/.
- 3 See Leada Gore, “USDA burning 111,000 acres in Alabama’s national forests: Here’s where and when,” *AL.com* 3 February 2023, www.al.com/news/2023/02/usda-burning-111000-acres-in-alabamas-national-forests-heres-where-and-when.html.
- 4 The annual Shady Hill singings are listed on the Sacred Harp Singing in Alabama website, <https://fasolahsv.weebly.com/june.html>.
- 5 Recollections are based on my fieldnotes from 4 June 2023. To hear selected recordings and a podcast episode featuring the Shady Hill 2023 Sacred Harp singing, visit my website, www.hearinalabama.com. “Hear in Alabama” is also available on various podcast platforms.
- 6 Camp Fasola is an annual summer camp sponsored by the Sacred Harp Musical Heritage Association. Participants of all ages learn to read and sing shape notes and experience a full immersion in Sacred Harp traditions. See Jonathon M. Smith, “Camp Fasola: Teaching ‘Tradition,’” *Tributaries: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association* 12 (2010): 28-44. Also see <http://campfasola.org/>.
- 7 On the tradition of memorial lessons, see Kiri Miller, “‘Like Cords Around My Heart’: Sacred Harp Memorial Lessons and the Transmission of Tradition,” *Oral Tradition* 25/2(2010): 253-81.
- 8 For a diagram of the hollow-square formation, see Miller, “‘Like Cords,’” 254.
- 9 John Bealle, “New Strings on the ‘Old Harp’: The 1991 Revision of *The Sacred Harp*,” *Tributaries*:

- Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association 1* (1994): 35. On the standard of silence that has “evolved over time to encompass whatever realms of discourse are most likely to divide participants,” see Nathan K. Rees, “The Sacred Harp ‘Minutes Book’: Centering Tradition for an Expanding Community in the Digital Age,” *American Periodicals* 30/1 (April 2020): 70-71.
- 10 As a classically trained church organist I use the terms “hymn” and “stanza.” In Sacred Harp it is proper to use “song” and “verse.”
- 11 John Bealle, “New Strings on the ‘Old Harp’: The 1991 Revision of *The Sacred Harp*,” *Tributaries: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association 1* (1994): 22-44.
- 12 Bealle, “New Strings,” 23.
- 13 Bealle, “New Strings,” 23.
- 14 “Minutes of the Sacred Harp Singing Convention 2022” (Newton, AL: 2022).
- 15 W. M. Cooper, et. al., eds., *The B. F. White Sacred Harp*, 1949 revision (Troy, AL: Sacred Harp Book Company, 1949). When I showed the inscription to Mary Amelia, she exclaimed, “I work on Washington Avenue in Montgomery.”
- 16 Hugh McGraw, et. al., eds., *Original Sacred Harp: Denson Revision*, 1971 ed. (Cullman, AL: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1971).
- 17 Cooper, et. al., eds., *The B. F. White Sacred Harp*, Revised Cooper Edition (Samson, AL: Sacred Harp Book Company, 2006).
- My inherited collection also includes the following: 1. Judge Jackson, *The Colored Sacred Harp*, rev. ed. (Montgomery, AL: Paragon Press, 1973). My father paid the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers \$2.00 for this book on April 30, 1977. He signed not only his name but my mother’s, my siblings’, and mine. 2. John G. McCurry, *The Social Harp*, ed. Daniel W. Patterson and John F. Garst (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1973). My father bought this from the publisher on July 27, 1982, for \$7.50, which represented a 40% discount off the list price of \$12.50. 3. M. L. Swan & W. H. Swan, *The New Harp of Columbia, A Facsimile Edition with an Introduction by Dorothy D. Horn, Ron Petersen, and Candra Phillips* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001). Bill Adams, who I presume was with the publisher at the time, gave the book to my father October 15, 2001, probably at the American Academy of Religion/Society for Biblical Literature conference. My father was a publisher in the second half of his career and attended the AAR/SBL conference every year. 4. William Walker, *The Southern Harmony & Musical Companion*, ed. Glenn C. Wilcox (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987). My father bought this from the publisher in 2002 for \$30.00.
- 18 The 2009 singing was probably my father’s last. He had cancer for seventeen years, and it is a testament to his devotion that he continued to come to Shady Hill until the last three of those years. He died in May 2013.
- 19 “Minutes of the Sacred Harp (Cooper Book) Singing Convention 2008” (Samson, AL: Sacred Harp Book Company, 2008). For an insightful analysis of how Sacred Harp minutes define traditional practice, see Rees, “The Sacred Harp ‘Minutes Book,’” 60-80. Rees focuses on the publication *Minutes of Sacred Harp Singing* (available, downloadable, and searchable from 1995 to the present at <https://fasola.org/minutes/>) but notes that “a handful of Sacred Harp communities publish their own minutes; notably, the group of singers who use *The Sacred Harp*, revised Cooper edition” (78 note 4). Shady Hill is part of this Cooper-revision community.
- 20 To contextualize the Shady Hill dinner on the ground, see Kathryn Eastburn, *A Sacred Feast: Reflections on Sacred Harp Singing and Dinner on the Ground* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), which contains both pictures and recipes. Also see Jonathon M. Smith, “Camp Fasola: Teaching Tradition,” *Tributaries: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association 12* (2010): 37; Stephen E. and Samantha McCluney Criswell, “You Got Family Here’: Family Reunions in Lower Alabama,” *Tributaries: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association 6* (2003): 21, 24; and John Bealle, “New Strings on the ‘Old Harp’: The 1991 Revision of The Sacred Harp,” *Tributaries: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association 1* (1994): 39.
- 21 Zug, Charles Gordon, III, “Remember Me as You Pass By”: *North Carolina’s Ceramic Grave Marker*. Exhibit catalog, 2011, North Carolina Pottery Center.
- 22 Toussaint, Corbett. “Edgefield District Stoneware: The Potter’s Legacy” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*. Vol. 42-43, 2021-22.
- 23 US Patent Office, “Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 216,427, June 10, 1879; application filed April 1, 1879.”
- 24 *Vicksburg (MS) Evening Post*, Wednesday, June, 20, 1888.
- 25 Compton, Stephen C. *North Carolina’s Moravian Pottery: The Art and Mystery of Pottery-Making in*

- Wachovia. Charleston: America Through Time (Arcadia) 2019. 103-104.
- 26 Brackner, Joey, *Alabama Folk Pottery*. University of Alabama, 2006, p. 280, 183.
- 27 *Vernon Clipper*, January 16, 1880.
- 28 *Shelby Sentinel*, July 1880.
- 29 https://hymnary.org/person/Clark_B1, accessed June 10, 2023.
- 30 Doane, William Howard, *Songs of Devotion for Christian Associations*. Biglow & Main, New York, 1870.
- 31 Bennett, Sherry, *The Jug Shop District of Itawamba County*. 2021, p. 160.
- 32 Bennett, Sherry, correspondence with the authors, June 12, 2023.
- 33 www.findagrave.com/memorial/66822503/william-payne-loyd, www.findagrave.com/memorial/33940671/sanford-marion-loyd, www.findagrave.com/memorial/67945148/mack-wilson-loyd, www.findagrave.com/memorial/30466242/isham-james-loyd, accessed June 11, 2023.
- 34 Gail Andrews Trechsel, "Mourning Quilts in America," *Uncoverings 1989. American Quilt Study Group (AQSG)*, Volume 10, (1989): 139-158.
- 35 Walters, Renee Tatum. Interview with Zanice Bond. November 3, 2021.
- 36 Elmore, Phyllis Biffle. Interview with Zanice Bond. February 20, 2023.
- 37 Johnson, Sandy. Interview with Zanice Bond. November 21, 2022.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 *Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center*. Camden, Alabama. <http://blackbelttreasures.com> accessed December 20, 2022.
- 45 Anderson, Betty. Interview with Zanice Bond. December 3, 2022.
- 46 Label in possession of author
- 47 Anderson, Betty. Interview with author.
- 48 Blejwas, Emily. "Lye Soap, Herbs, and Stick Dolls." Alabama Folk Podcast Alabama Folklife Association. September 27, 2022. Accessed December 29, 2022. alabamafolklife.org.
- 49 Elmore, Phyllis Biffle. Interview with author.
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- 51 Ibid.
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- 53 Alice Walker. "Everyday Use." *Backpack Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing*. Edited by X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, 12th edition, Pearson, 2013, pp.491-96.
- 54 Elmore, Phyllis Biffle. Interview with author.
- 55 For more information about this event, see Airing of the Quilts Festival Gee's Bend, AL www.geesbend.org.
- 56 See Nina Johnson's post on Marlene Bennett Jones at <https://ninajohnson.com>.
- 57 Bennett Jones, Marlene. Interview with Zanice Bond. October 8, 2022.
- 58 Walters, Renee Tatum. Interview with Zanice Bond. March 6, 2023.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Roy Hoffman: *Alabama Afternoons* (Alabama, 2011), 169.
- 64 Rhoda Ellison: *Bibb County: The First Hundred Years* (Alabama, 1999), 129-40.
- 65 Steve Borelli: *How About That! The Life of Mel Allen* (Champaign, IL: Sports Publishing, 2006), 3-4; Curt Smith, *The Voice* (Lyons Press, 2007), 7-8.
- 66 While the community was destroyed during the Second World War, the structure of the synagogue remains largely intact. The paintwork does not, though descriptions and photographs remain. See Betzalel Schwartz and Israel Chaim Biletzki: *Sefer Kobrin: Megillat Haim ve-Hurban* (Tel Aviv, 1951; English translation at www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kobrin1/kob141.html#Page147) and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Online Catalogue of Jewish Art: <https://cja.huji.ac.il/browser.php?mode=set&id=5973>.
- 67 Adams, *Blocton*, 61.
- 68 Charles Edward Adams: "The Great West Blocton Town Fire of 1927." Alabama Heritage 49 (Summer,

- 1998), 34-40; "Defunct for Eighty Years, West Blocton Shul Leaving a Legacy of Jewish Learning," *Southern Jewish Life* (July, 2015) 11-12; "West Blocton, Alabama," *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*, www.isjl.org/alabama-west-blocton-encyclopedia.html, nd.
- 69 College of Arts & Sciences, University of Alabama: "Former West Blocton Congregation Establishes Judaic Studies Award Fund" *The Collegian* 24:1 (2015), 31; *Southern Jewish Life*, 11-12.
- 70 Eg, Stephen Birmingham: *Our Crowd* (Harper & Row, 1967), 53-4. For notable exception, see Eli Evans: *The Provincials* (New York: Atheneum, 1973) and Stephen Whitfield: "The Braided Identities of Southern Jews" *American Jewish History*, 77 (March, 1988), 363-387. On the construction of Jewish collective memory, see Beth Wenger's: *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton, 2010) and her co-edited volume (with Hasia Diner and Jeffrey Shandler), *Remembering the Lower East Side* (Indiana, 2000).
- 71 Born Melvin Israel, Mel changed his name in 1939. "1978 Ford C. Frick Award Winner Mel Allen." *National Baseball Hall of Fame*, <https://baseballhall.org/discover-more/awards/frick/mel-allen>. The Israel family also actively maintains its own inter-generational private/family history, portions of which can be publicly accessed; see <http://www.israel-family.net>.
- 72 This has since grown into a considerable literature. See Deborah Weiner: "The Jews of Keystone: Life in a Multicultural Boomtown" *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999), 1-23; Terri Barr: "A Shtetl Grew in Bessemer" *Southern Jewish History* 3 (2000), 1-44; Leonard Rogoff and Margaret Anne Goldsmith: "Four German-Jewish Families and the Built Environment of Huntsville, Alabama" *Southern Jewish History* 20 (2017), 33-67; Dan J. Puckett: *In the Shadow of Hitler* (University of Alabama, 2014); Lee Shai Weissbach: "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September, 1997): 231-262; Anton Hieke: "The Transregional Mobility of Jews from Macon, GA." *American Jewish History* 97:1 (2013), 21-38; Jarrod Tanney: "Between the Borsht Belt and the Bible Belt: Crafting Southern Jewishness Through Chutzpah and Humor." *Southern Jewish History* 15 (2012), 119-167. For a recent, synoptic survey, see Mark Bauman: *New Vision of Southern Jewish History* (Alabama, 2019), 312-60 and passim.
- 73 Weiner, "Jews of Keystone," 1; Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism* (Yale, 2004), 67-75; and Hasia Diner: *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (Yale, 2015). Compare to Yuri Sletzkine: *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, 2004). On the Pale of Settlement, see YIVO's *Online Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/pale_of_settlement.
- 74 See John Klier: *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-82* (Cambridge, 2011); Steven Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (Norton, 2018); Israel Bartal: *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881* (Penn, 2011); and Gur Alroey: *An Unpromising Land* (Stanford, 2017).
- 75 This is an enormous literature, which I cannot reproduce here. In Jewish-historical circles, see for example Steven Zipperstein: *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History* (Stanford, 1986); Benjamin Nathans: *Beyond the Pale* (California, 2004); Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern: *The Golden Age Shtetl* (Princeton, 2017); Jeffrey Veidlinger: *In the Shadow of the Shtetl* (Indiana, 2013); and Kenneth Moss: *Unchosen People* (Harvard, 2020).
- 76 "By the end of the nineteenth century there were small but thriving Jewish communities...in Canton, Clarksdale, Cleveland, Greenville, Greenwood, Vicksburg, and Yazoo City...as well as Brookhaven, Columbus, Jackson, Meridian, and Natchez." Leon Waldoff: *A Jewish Experience in Mississippi* (University Press of America, 2018), 32. For a broad survey, see the Institute for Southern Jewish Life's online *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*, www.isjl.org/encyclopedia-of-southern-jewish-communities.html.
- 77 Timothy Snyder: *Bloodlands* (Basic Books, 2010); Annemarie Sammartino: *The Impossible Border* (Cornell, 2010). Compare Snyder's analysis to Jonathan D. Sarna: "The 'Mythical Jew' and the 'Jew Next Door' in Nineteenth Century America." In Haim Gerber (ed.): *Anti-Semitism in America* (Illinois, 1986), 57-78.
- 78 Here cited in Clive Webb: "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow." *Southern Jewish History* 2 (1999), 55-80, 55. To be sure, some Jews did nothing at all – or worse. For a range of accounts, see *inter alia* Mark Bauman and Berkley Kalin (eds.): *The Quiet Voices* (University of Alabama, 1997); Cornel West and Jack Saltzman (eds.): *Struggles in the Promised Land* (Oxford, 1997); Clive Webb: "A Tangled Web: Black-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth-Century South" in Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (eds.): *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (Brandeis, 2006) 192-209; Eric Cohen: *The Price of Whiteness* (Princeton, 2006), 138-64 and Stephen Whitfield: "Merchants: The Marrow of the Southern Jewish Experience," *The Jewish Merchant Project*, <https://>

- merchants.jhssc.org/narrative/merchants-the-marrow-of-the-southern-jewish-experience/, last accessed 12 August 2023. Privately, Suberman recalls that her father was more outspoken. Thus, she notes, his dislike of Al Jolson's performances in blackface: "Was it not too much? To make fun of people already so *auf tsores*, already so full of woe?" Cited in Waldoff, *Jewish Experience*, 82.
- 79 Amy K. Milligan's: "The 'Jewish Zealots of Tobacco Land': the Circuit Riding Rabbi Project's Impact on Small Town Jews in North Carolina, 1950–1980." *Jewish Culture and Society* 20 (2019), 62–79 is nonpareil; see also Rogoff and Goldsmith, "Four German-Jewish Families" and R. Barbara Gitenstein's: "A Manhattan Jew in a Small Alabama Town." *Southern Jewish History* 24 (2021), 123–75. For Alabama-based collective memory projects, see the *Jewish Mobile Oral History Project* (https://jagworks.southalabama.edu/jewish_oral_hist/), and Temple Beth-El's *Civil Rights Experience* (<https://templebeth-el.net/education/beth-el-civil-rights-experience/>), and ongoing work by Selma's *Mishkan Israel* (www.selma-temple.org). Roselle Kline Hartok's *Jewish World of Elvis Presley* (McKinstry Place, 2020) also bears consideration here, as does the photography of Emily Rena Williams.
- 80 I owe this metaphor to Bradford Vivian's account of *Lethe* ('forgetting/concealment'). In classical mythology, *Lethe* was a river said to pass through Hades. Souls who wished to be relieved of their earthly memories would drink its waters. *Infra Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (Penn State, 2019), 19.
- 81 In 1920–21, the *American Jewish Year-Book* listed a total of 23 Jewish congregations in Alabama. All, save three, reported fewer than 200 members. Decatur's Beth El Synagogue reported 22; Tuscaloosa's Emanu-el, ten; Eufala's B'nai Israel, six. *American Jewish Committee* (1919–20), 337–9. For demographic surveys, see Ira Sheskin: "Dixie Diaspora" *Southeastern Geographer*, 40:1 (2000), 52–74; Lee Shai Weissbach: "Community and Subcommunity in Small-Town America" *Jewish History* 15 (2001), 107–18; Pew Research Centers: *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* (Washington DC, 2013); Dale and Theodore Rosengarten (eds.): *A Portion of the People* (South Carolina, 2002), 185–94; and Stuart Rockoff: "The Fall and Rise of the Jewish South," in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots*, 284–303.
- 82 Saskia Sassen: *The Global City* (Princeton, 2013).
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Contributor Biographies

Zanice Bond served as a Cauthen Fellow for the Alabama Folklife Association (2022-2023). This fellowship supported her research on memory quilts in Alabama and allowed her to begin an in-depth study of these artifacts that occupy a broader quilting tradition. During her fellowship, she presented her work in Auburn, Alabama, at *Every Stitch a Story: A Symposium on Quilts in Alabama* that was hosted by the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities, and she was guest speaker for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) Brownbag where she presented *A Death in the Family: Quilts, Memory, and Bereavement*. This year, Bond was selected to serve as a lecturer for Auburn University's Draughon Seminars in State and Local History. She is scheduled to present *Memory Quilts in Community Spaces* in selected cities across the state. In 2019, she was guest curator of *The Soul of Zora: A Literary Legacy through Quilts* at Tuskegee University's Legacy Museum. Bond earned her Ph.D. in American Studies at the University of Kansas in Lawrence and is currently an associate professor of Southern Literature at Tuskegee University.

Sarah Bryan is a folklorist and author, and the Executive Director of the Association for Cultural Equity. Previously the director of the North Carolina Folklife Institute and editor of the *Old-Time Herald*, she lives in Durham, North Carolina. She and Hal Pugh are co-writing a book on the history of southern folk pottery, forthcoming from the University of North Carolina Press.

David Ivey is a lifetime Sacred Harp singer. He is co-founder and Director of Camp Fasola, an innovative summer camp for teaching Sacred Harp music and traditions. David was recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts prestigious National Heritage Fellowship award in 2013. David presently serves as Chair of the Revision-Music Committee for The Sacred Harp, 1991 Edition, which will be its sixth revision since 1844. David is a Past President of the Alabama Folklife Association and has served on its Board of Directors since 2014.

Daniel J. Levine is the Aaron Aronov Associate Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Alabama. His scholarly training is in international politics, political philosophy, and security studies, and he holds degrees from John Hopkins University, Tel Aviv University, and the University of Chicago. His book, *Recovering International Relations*, was published

with Oxford University Press in 2012, and received the Sussex Prize in International Theory and the Yale H. Ferguson Award. His current work explores the interconnections between fear, rhetoric, memory, and political theology, with a particular emphasis on Hebrew and Zionist writing in the 1930s and 1940s. He has published in *Global Security Quarterly*, *the AJS Review*, *the European Journal of International Relations*, *the Journal of International Political Theory*, and *Perspectives on Politics*; and has chapters forthcoming in edited volumes with the University of Michigan Press, Cambridge University Press, and the University of Minnesota Press. He thanks Yahm Jupiter-Levine for research assistance. He also thanks Noah for being a mostly-good dog (mostly), and Christine Field for her love.

Destiny Williams Levy resides in Montgomery, Alabama where she coordinates partnerships for the Alabama River Diversity Network and serves as strategic partnerships and project director for Blackyard, LLC. Destiny has a background in English education, African American historic preservation, and project management. Destiny is also an artist whose music, poetry, and spoken work explores the sociological, economic, and cultural elements of the Black experience in the African diaspora.

Burgin Mathews is the founding director of the nonprofit Southern Music Research Center (southernmusicresearch.org) and host of The Lost Child, a roots music radio hour broadcasting weekly on Birmingham Mountain Radio. His new book, *Magic City: How the Birmingham Jazz Tradition Shaped the Sound of America*, is available from the University of North Carolina Press.

Beth McGinnis is Associate Professor of Musicology at Samford University, where she was honored to receive the 2021-2022 Buchanan Award for Excellence in Classroom Teaching. She is also Organist at Vestavia Hills Baptist Church. Her podcast and website, Hear in Alabama (www.hearinalabama.com), explore the rich musical cultures of her home state. She holds a Bachelor of Music in Piano from Samford University, a Master of Music in Musicology from Texas Christian University, and a Ph.D. in Musicology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Jerrilyn McGregory is a recently retired professor of Folklore in the English Department at Florida State University. She is the author of *Wiregrass Country, Downhome Gospel: African American Spiritual Activism in Wiregrass Country* and “*One Grand Noise*”: *Boxing Day in the Anglicized World* (Winner of the Chicago Prize in Folklore).

Hal Pugh has been a working potter for the past 52 years. A historian and author, he has written about the pottery traditions and history of North Carolina, and has worked as a consultant concerning historical ceramics. Hal lives in North

Carolina and is the appointed Historic Landmark Commissioner for District 4 in northern Randolph County. He is currently co-writing a book with folklorist and fellow author, Sarah Bryan on the history of southern folk pottery, forthcoming from the University of North Carolina Press.

Justin Rudder is a Digital Asset Archivist at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. He also freelances through his Digital Grassroots initiative—researching and creating websites and short films that highlight untold stories throughout Alabama and the rest of the southeastern US. Justin has written for *Alabama Heritage*, the *Alabama Review*, and the Encyclopedia of Alabama on slavery, civil rights, and African American geography and historiography. He is currently developing a manuscript entitled *Black Towns of Alabama*.

Shari L. Williams, Ph.D. is the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in History from Auburn University. She is a social and cultural historian who researches the Modern American South with a focus on the past, present, and future of rural historic landscapes, cultural traditions, and folk-life in Alabama's Black Belt through the lens of race, gender, and class. Dr. Williams is a public history practitioner through her work as the founder and executive director of The Ridge Macon County Archaeology Project based in Warrior Stand, Alabama, and through various board of director memberships and community-based historic preservation projects.

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The Alabama Folklife Association

The AFA was founded in 1980 to document, preserve, present, and promote the folkways of Alabama through research, education, and programming.

To share folklife broadly statewide, the AFA supports a variety of work including community and school programs; hands-on workshops; the Alabama Folk podcast, the Alabama Community Scholars Institute; exhibits; interviews and oral histories; the Archive of Alabama Folk Culture; performances, festivals, and events; and the annual publication of *Tributaries*.

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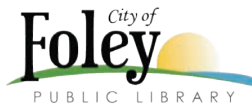
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