

Alabama Historical Association



Join us in Tuscaloosa for
the annual meeting
April 23-25, 2009

Since 1947 the Alabama Historical Association (AHA) has supported the preservation, interpretation, and celebration of local and state history. Through research grants, awards, historical markers, an annual meeting and pilgrimage, and publication of *The Alabama Review*, the AHA helps Alabamians and the world understand and appreciate the state's rich past.

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President's Message



Recently I saw a story on the news about a man who went to see a doctor, complaining of depression. After talking to the patient for a few minutes, the doctor gave him a prescription: stop watching the nightly news on television. The man, according to the reporter, was now feeling a lot better.

It is easy these days to empathize with the depressed patient. Bad economic news leads the national news every night. Banks and businesses seem to fail with regularity. Major manufacturers are teetering on the brink of collapse. Unemployment has risen to levels not seen in many years. Consumer spending, charity giving, and travel are all down. Even here in Alabama, where times have been relatively good, we face a slowing economy, budget cuts out of Montgomery, and state proration.

At times like these, it is only natural for people to prioritize their activities and spending. As we learn in the sixth chapter of Matthew, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Thankfully, members of the Alabama Historical Association continued to find a place in their hearts for the organization and its activities last fall and winter, even as the economy worsened. While similar associations lamented declining memberships and conference enrollment last fall, we had our usual strong turnout for an exhilarating pilgrimage in West Jefferson County. I expect the 2009 annual meeting to be just as successful. As you read this edition of the newsletter, you’ll see that it definitely will be worth the trip to T-Town this April. George Rable and his Local Arrangements Committee have planned a conference that I think will be truly memorable. The Program Committee, chaired by Lonnie Burnett, offers a first-rate series of panels. The world-renowned Westervelt-

Warner Museum will welcome our members on Thursday afternoon. With great assistance from our former president, Sarah Wiggins, we will be able to tour many of the gems of historic Tuscaloosa on Friday, including campus sites no longer open to the general public. Speaking at our dinner that night will be Professor Stephen Berry, who will tell the fascinating story of Mary Todd Lincoln’s sisters Elodie and Matt, who spent the Civil War in Selma. And then you may join us Saturday morning for breakfast with none other than Pulitzer Prize-winning author Rick Bragg.

Beyond the spring of 2009, AHA will continue to work toward preserving and presenting the history of the state, come what may. Already, member initiatives launched last summer in regard to cataloging missing and damaged historical markers are beginning to bear fruit. Association committees also are at work laying the groundwork for our involvement in three major commemorations: the two-hundredth anniversary of the Creek War, the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, and the fiftieth anniversaries of several significant moments in the Civil Rights struggle. The *Alabama Review’s* financial situation sadly remains precarious, especially now that state budgets and private giving are tightening, but the Association is committed to its survival. Opportunities remain to help ensure its continued publication through targeted giving to the *Review’s* endowment.

At the end of *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald—certainly someone with an Alabama connection—writes wistfully of people as “boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past.” Come join us in Tuscaloosa as we also row against the current, but into the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Kenneth J. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tuscaloosa on My Mind

Tuscaloosa: there's just something about the name.

It all started in 1540, when Hernando de Soto's expedition reached Chief Tuscaloosa's town somewhere in south Alabama. Unlike other Indians, this chief's warriors were not about to be intimidated; instead, they lured the Spaniards into a deadly trap from which de Soto and his men barely escaped.

No one knew where exactly the town was; indeed, no one knows today. The site and the tribe disappeared soon after de Soto and his men left. But Tuscaloosa was on the maps, even if every map had it in a different spot somewhere north of the Gulf of Mexico and south of the Tennessee River. It had to be somewhere, after all. During the first Creek War (1813-1814), David Crockett took part in a raid on what he called Black Warrior's Town; Crockett believed that he was near the present site of Tuscaloosa, but he was actually many miles upstream. A few years later, Congress reserved the falls of the Black Warrior River for a town site, and at last the peripatetic Tuscaloosa stayed put. When Alabama became a state in 1819, the name was given to one of the state's first counties. Tuscaloosa was also the name of the river that ran through the region, a name that the English correctly translated from Muskogee into Black Warrior. So a town, a county, and a river all shared the name of a chief who had been dead nearly three centuries.

Not only the location, but the spelling created confusion. The Spanish and French spelled the chief's name phonetically as Tastaluca, Tascalisa, and all sorts of

variations. Alabama legislators would also spell the name differently, even within the same act. The Democrats seemed to prefer Tuskaloosa, while the Whigs liked Tuscaloosa—inconsistently, of course. One nineteenth-century citizen became so enraged at the variations that he published a pamphlet, *Eight Reasons Why Tuskaloosa Should be Spelled with a K*

Not satisfied with merely arguing over how to spell their town's name, Tuscaloosans started to invent nicknames. During the 1840s, while Tuscaloosa was the state's capital, some young men took it upon themselves to plant water

oaks in a central row down one street. The town authorities followed the lead and soon every street had three rows of water oaks, welcomed during the hot summer as a "green parasol." Tuscaloosans began bragging about their City of Oaks. Eventually the City of Oaks became the Druid City, a reference to the Celtic priests' sacred trees. Not long ago I overheard a lady in the grocery store checkout lane point to the Druid City nickname and quietly tell her friend, "You know, in the early days Tuscaloosa was run by Satanists." This modern historian was following in a grand tradition. De Soto's Spaniards had compared Chief Tuscaloosa's height

to that of the Spanish emperor, who was of medium height; but when Albert J. Picket published his *History of Alabama* in the 1851, Chief Tuscaloosa had grown into a seven-foot giant.

With the removal of the seat of government to Montgomery in November 1847, Tuscaloosa entered a



Mural by Roderick D. MacKenzie depicting the meeting of Hernando DeSoto and Chief Tuscaloosa. Used by permission of the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

long period of decline. The town kept going largely through government institutions, particularly the University of Alabama, which had opened its doors in 1831. Town boosters sought to capitalize on the University's location by referring to Tuscaloosa as the Athens of the South, a nickname which was unfortunately shared with several other Southern towns. The Civil War was particularly hard on this Athens of the South, for Yankee cavalymen burned the University to the ground in the war's closing days. But they left standing the Alabama Insane Hospital, now Bryce Hospital—a fact not lost on Tuscaloosa's detractors.

Tuscaloosa turned to developing industry and mining. Town boosters succeeded in getting locks and dams constructed so that boats could get past the miles of shoals to reach the vast coal fields that lay upriver. This time town boosters would appropriate another common nickname: the Pittsburgh of the South. It didn't work. Despite the coal mining and some rubber, paper, and steel making factories, Tuscaloosa's economic future would lie elsewhere: in the University, in medicine, and in Crimson Tide football.

Besides, all those nicknames did not capture the romance that the simple word Tuscaloosa evoked, especially among theatrical and musical performers. It may have started with the Marx Brothers. Harpo recalled getting so bored while performing here that the brothers would stop singing in the middle of a song to take bets on whether the bug crawling across the stage was a beetle, a cockroach, or a bedbug. In the movie *Animal Crackers*, Groucho played an African explorer who had trouble removing elephants' tusks because they were wedged in so tightly. "Of course," he deadpanned, "in Alabama, the tusks are looser."

Over the years Tuscaloosa has made its way into many song titles, among them: "Tuscaloosa" (from *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*), "Tuscaloosa Blues," "Tuscaloosa from Alabama," "Tuscaloosa Heart," "Tuscaloosa Lucy," "Tuscaloosa Waltz," and the oddly titled "Tuscaloosa Yo Yo

Man." At the beginning of Alfred Hitchcock's black comedy, *The Trouble with Harry*, John Forsythe's character sings "Flaggin' the Train to Tuscaloosa." In 1975 Elvis Presley recorded a live album that he entitled *From Chicago to Tuscaloosa* for where it was recorded. And these titles do not begin to include the many casual references to Tuscaloosa and the *Crimson Tide* in lyrics and movies.

The same year that Elvis released his album, an off-Broadway musical, "Tuscaloosa's Calling Me . . . But I'm Not Going," premiered and ran for 452 performances. "Honeysuckle and Southern drawls," the cast crooned in the title song, "hummingbirds and old magnolias make me sad." Somehow I think that the lyricist never had to dodge traffic at the corner of Greensboro Avenue and University Boulevard.

So welcome to T-Town (a newcomer to the list of Tuscaloosa's nicknames). Before Tuscaloosa's favorite bar closed a few years ago, you could have had a beer under the Sistine Chucker, a ceiling fresco depicting, à la Michelangelo, God giving Adam a Budweiser. You may still see some of the honeysuckle and magnolias near the Mercedes Benz plant up the road. And yes, if you visit the library you will gaze at a seven-foot statue of Chief Tuscaloosa just as Albert J. Picket described (although this chief has a headdress straight out of a John Wayne movie). With any luck you can avoid the emergency room at Druid City Hospital (whoops, now the DCH Regional Medical Center). The rows of oak trees are gone, so calling our town the City of Oaks seems dated. You will definitely hear some Southern drawls. But all that hardly matters. What matters is that the Tuscaloosa of the mind is much more fun than the Tuscaloosa of brick, mortar, and facts.

Guy Hubbs is an associate professor and archivist at Birmingham-Southern College. His books include *Tuscaloosa: Portrait of an Alabama County* and *vPvW v(uwDlvP(vuuu*. He is currently at work on another book, this one looking at four individuals whose paths crossed in 1868 Tuscaloosa. Guy lives in Tuscaloosa with his bride of thirty-two years.

Schedule of Events

Thursday, April 23

2:00 PM **Optional docent-led tour of Westervelt Warner Museum of American Art**
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6:00-8:00 PM **Reception and Registration, Jemison-Van de Graaff Mansion**

Friday, April 24

8:30 AM **Registration, University Church of Christ**

9:30 AM **General Session, University Church of Christ**

10:45 AM **Concurrent Sessions, University Church of Christ**

Session A

“‘Every man should consider his own conscience’: Alabamians’ Reactions to Lincoln’s Assassination,” Harriet E. Amos Doss, University of Alabama Birmingham

“William Lowndes Yancey and the Rights of Women,” Henry M. McKiven, Jr., University of South Alabama

“Hood’s ‘Yellow Hammers,’” Ben H. Severance, Auburn University Montgomery

Session B

“Banquet Menus of Early Birmingham,” Kelsey Scouten Bates, Birmingham Public Library

“A Star on Field and Film: Alabama’s Johnny Mack Brown,” Ken Gaddy, Paul W. Bryant Museum

“The Rise and Decline of Alabama’s Redneck Riviera,” Harvey H. Jackson, Jacksonville State University

Session C

“Preserving Local African American History: Hunter Chapel AME Zion Church, Tuscaloosa, Alabama,” Amber Baker, Lauren Trimm, and Danielle Kidwell, University of Alabama

“The History of Bryce Hospital: Start to Stickney,” H. Stephen Davis, Bryce Hospital

“Bryce Hospital: Architecture as Therapy,” Robert Oliver Mellown, University of Alabama

Noon **Lunch, University Church of Christ**

1:00 PM **Afternoon Tours (maps available at the meeting)**

6:00 PM **Cash bar and self-guided tour of NorthRiver Yacht Club**

7:00 PM **Awards Dinner, NorthRiver Yacht Club**
"Abraham Lincoln's Alabama Kin during Wartime," Stephen Berry, University of Georgia

Saturday, April 25

7:30 AM **Breakfast (must pre-register), hv(**
Rick Bragg, University of Alabama

9:00 AM **Registration, University Church of Christ**

9:45 AM **General Session, University Church of Christ**

10:45 AM **Concurrent Sessions, niversity Church of Christ**

Session A

"The Most Famous 'Good Roads' Woman in the United States: Alma Rittenberry of Birmingham," Marty Olliff, Troy University, Dothan Campus

"Lonesome and Dry as a Bone: William Logan Martin and the Enforcement of Alabama's Prohibition Law, 1915-1917," S. Jonathan Bass, Samford University

"Mobile's Political Colossus: Mayor Patrick J. Lyons, 1849-1921," David E. Alsobrook, Museum of Mobile

Session B

"'In the midst of life we are in death': Women, Religion, and Death in Civil War Alabama," Jennifer Ann Newman, Auburn University

"'I ain't no lady. I'm a newspaper woman'; The Career of Hazel Brannon Smith," Wendy Reed, University of Alabama Center for Public Television and Radio

"Emma Jones of Mobile and the Alabama-China Connection," J. Barry Vaughn, University of Alabama

Session C

"Bringing Culture to Life: The Moundville Archaeological Project," William F. Bomar, Moundville Archaeological Park

"Battle for the Southern Frontier: The Creek War and the War of 1812," Mike Bunn, Columbus (GA) Museum, and Clay Williams, Old Capitol Museum

"The Mayan Diaspora Comes to Alabama," Ciro Sepulveda, Oakwood University

Noon **Annual Luncheon Session, niversity Church of Christ**

"Alabama, We Will Fight for Thee: The Initial Motivations of Later-Enlisting Confederates," Presidential Address, Kenneth W. Noe

Westervelt Warner Museum Tours



The Westervelt Warner Museum Welcomes the AHA to Tuscaloosa!

Come early on Thursday, April 23, and enjoy docent-led tours at 1 and 3 p.m.

Admission: \$7 for Adults; \$5 for Seniors (over 55)

If you plan to visit the museum, please reserve your place by e-mailing alabamahistory@gmail.com by April 9. For more information, contact Mark Wilson at 334-844-4948.



The Westervelt Warner Museum of American Art houses one of the world's finest collections of paintings, sculptures, furniture, and decorative arts. The halls of the museum are filled with works of prominent American artists such as Thomas Cole, Duncan Phyfe, Paul Revere, Andrew Wyeth, John Singer Sargeant, Winslow Homer, James McNeill Whistler, and Mary Cassatt. Over 400 pieces of artwork weave together a story of young America that is compelling, relevant, and unforgettable.

Jonathan "Jack" Westervelt Warner is one of the premiere collectors of American Art in the world today. As the third-generation CEO of his family company, Gulf States Paper Corporation, Jack began the collection in the 1950s with his first Audubon prints. Over 400 masterpieces in paintings, furniture, sculptures, and decorative arts from the late 1700's to the early 1900's attest to his discerning eye for quality. Jack's collection expresses his passion for life and his passion for America.



*The Westervelt Warner
Museum of American Art*
2700 Yacht Club Way
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35406
205-343-4540



Tour Preview: Tuscaloosa

Gorgas House



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The Gorgas House, part of the antebellum university campus, was built in 1828 as a dining hall for students. In the 1840s it was converted into a faculty residence. After the Civil War it became the home of Josiah Gorgas, a Confederate general and seventh president of the University, and his wife, Amelia Gayle Gorgas, the daughter of Alabama governor John Gayle. The Gorgas House is the only building by noted architect William Nichols to survive on campus. In addition to designing the University of Alabama and the state capitol in Tuscaloosa, Nichols later designed the Old Capitol in Jackson, Mississippi, and the University of Mississippi campus in Oxford.

President's Mansion



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Built in 1840 and designed by architect William Nichols, the President's Mansion is one of the outstanding examples of Greek Revival architecture in the nation. It is one of four structures of the original university that survived the campus' burning during the Civil War. Legend has it that the wife of University president Landon C. Garland saved the home from destruction in 1865 by a personal confrontation with Union soldiers who were about to set fire to it.

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Battle-Friedman House

The Battle-Friedman House was built around 1835 by Alfred Battle, a North Carolina native who had come to Tuscaloosa in 1821. The exterior of the house is stucco over brick and painted to resemble red marble. The front porch has distinctively Tuscaloosa-styled paneled square columns. Inside, elaborate plasterwork decorates the walls and ceilings of the front parlours and hallways. Some of this is original to the house, but the distinctive art deco nasturtium frieze in the halls was added by the Friedman family in the early part of the twentieth century. The house also contains a fine collection of renaissance revival furniture.



Thailand Temple Garden/Chancellor's Guest House



Designed and built by Jack Warner, this unique garden contains Mexican and Spanish tile and driftwood from White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. The gazebo was built of salvaged antebellum brick, made by slaves for the Shelby Iron Works. The hand carvings on the gazebo and the temple supports are from an old Thailand Temple and were purchased fragment by fragment from a New York department store. The carvings reveal a goat, ox, rabbit, and sacred bull. The Thailand temple bird—circa 1720—on top of the gazebo is made of brass and weighs about 200 pounds.

Murphy African-American Museum



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The Murphy-Collins House is the home of the Murphy African-American Museum. The lifestyle of affluent black citizens in the early 1900s is depicted in this house built by William J. Murphy, the first black licensed mortician in Tuscaloosa. African-American contractors built the two story bungalow in the late 1920s with brick and hand-hewn sills salvaged from the old State Capitol building in Tuscaloosa. Changing exhibits of local, state and national achievements of African-Americans are displayed.

Drish House

Dr. John R. Drish, a prominent early settler, built this house in 1837 as the focal point for a plantation that bordered the city limits of Tuscaloosa. Drish remodeled the mansion in the 1850s, adding massive columns and the distinctive Italianate tower. The house remained one of the finest residences in the city until 1906, when it was converted into a public school. In later years it deteriorated and was used as a garage. Walker Evans photographed the best-known mansion in the 1930s, and “Tuscaloosa Wrecking Company” remains one of his best known photographs.



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Meeting Sites and Accommodations

Reception

The Jemison-Van de Graaff Mansion
1305 Greensboro Avenue
Tuscaloosa, AL 35403
205-758-2906

Meeting Site

University Church of Christ
1200 Julia Tutwiler Drive
Tuscaloosa, AL 35404
205-553-3001

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Accommodations

Hampton Inn Tuscaloosa - University
600 Harper Lee Drive
Tuscaloosa, AL 35404
205-553-9800
\$105— Reserve by March 23rd

Courtyard by Marriott
4115 Courtney Drive
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405
205-750-8384
\$99— Reserve by April 9th

Fairfield Inn by Marriott
4101 Courtney Drive
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405
205-366-0900
\$89— Reserve by March 23rd

Best Western Park Plaza
3801 McFarland Blvd E.
Tuscaloosa, AL 35405
205-556-9690
\$71.00—Reserve by April 16th

