

The Montgomery County Arts Council
presents

HILL•FIRE

Lead Me to the Rock

An original folk life play based on the memories
of Rebecca Weed Patterson and her family and the book
"Honeysuckles and Sweet Tea" written by Latoya Heard

Sponsored in part by the Mississippi Development Authority

Performing Arts Center
208 Summit Street, Winona, Mississippi



October 6, 2018 @ 7PM
October 7, 2018 @ 2PM
October 11, 2018 @ 7PM
October 13, 2018 @ 7PM



P.O. Box 644, Winona, MS 38967

www.hillfire.org * Facebook - facebook.com/hillfireproductions * Twitter - [@mcarts38967](https://twitter.com/mcarts38967)



PRODUCED BY
Montgomery County Arts Council

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
Elizabeth Eldridge

INSTRUMENTALISTS
Brian Hadley, Melissa Weed, Judith Brown
& Laverne Palmertree

SETS
Paula McCaulla, Cody Harvey, Aiden Kilburn,
Gracie Kilburn, Tabitha Merchant &
Jeremy Saffold

VIDEO
N-Focus, 57 Ridge Road, Kosciusko, MS 39090

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Welcome to Hill Fire

Welcome to Hill Fire! Come on in. Sit right down. Make yourself at home and get ready to experience Hill Fire.

Hill Fire is a folk life play produced in April and October by the Montgomery County Arts Council. It is based on the real stories of people who live in the South. A new play is locally written each year from collected stories and written history that depict the lives and traditions of Southerners and their families.

This season's play is called "Lead Me to the Rock." The story is based on a 2002 interview by free-lance reporter Susie James with Rebecca Weed Patterson and on the book "Honeysuckles and Sweet Tea" written by Latoya Heard. Rebecca's story is told in her own words as the interview is conducted. Her memories come to life in flashbacks during the interview. The memories of Latoya Heard are intertwined with Rebecca's and seamlessly tell a tale of loving families, heartbreaking loss, life lessons, and endearing friendships.

The cast and crew of Hill Fire want to take this opportunity to thank you for being here. We hope you are captivated by the rich history projected in the written words of this play and that you leave feeling like you have spent a couple of hours with family and friends. Please enjoy "Lead Me to the Rock."

*We hope you enjoy
LEAD ME TO THE ROCK
as we 'set these hills on fire!'*

**Emmett Chassaniol &
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CAST

Older Rebecca.....	<i>Bootsie Weed</i>
Younger Rebecca.....	<i>Kaylan Goasa</i>
Hazel.....	<i>LaKeadra Coffey</i>
Susie.....	<i>Stevie Myers</i>
Della.....	<i>Hazel Knight</i>
Cary.....	<i>Charlie Brown</i>
Leona.....	<i>Gracie Kilburn</i>
Mary.....	<i>Sassy Avant</i>
Sarah.....	<i>Sara Evans</i>
Kitty.....	<i>Kimberly Wilkerson</i>
Cooper.....	<i>Aiden Kilburn</i>
Belle.....	<i>Riley Brooke Rainey</i>
Albert.....	<i>Payton Avant</i>
Bessie.....	<i>Kay Emmons</i>
Frank.....	<i>Larry Emmons</i>
John Frank.....	<i>Aiden Kilburn</i>
Annette.....	<i>Ah'Kerria Newman</i>
Ian.....	<i>Ty'Landis Newman</i>
Ricky.....	<i>Ty'Landis Newman</i>
Latoya.....	<i>Ah'Kerria Newman</i>
Tony.....	<i>Ty'Landis Newman</i>
Grace.....	<i>Sassy Avant</i>
Eleanor	<i>Sara Evans</i>
Ann Marie	<i>Zanice Jenkins</i>
Announcer	<i>Dan Myers</i>
Madge	<i>Kimberly Wilkerson</i>
Townsperson	<i>Zanice Jenkins</i>
Cathy.....	<i>Kaylan Goasa</i>
Lee.....	<i>Aiden Kilburn</i>

SCENES

WELCOME

SONG: *ECHOES*

SONG: *LOOK ON THE SUNNY SIDE*

ACT 1

THE GOSSIP BENCH - WEDDING GIFTS

SONG: *DAUGHTER OF A SOUTHERN MOTHER*

THE INTERVIEW - MEETING REBECCA

THE ROCK - REBECCA'S BIRTH-DAY

THE INTERVIEW - TOMATO SANDWICHES

THE HOMESTEAD - TOMATO CLUB

DELLA'S HOUSE - SETTING HAZEL STRAIGHT

THE INTERVIEW - FINISHING LUNCH

THE COUNTY FAIR - RIBBONS AND MUSIC

SONG: *APPLE OF MY EYE*

THE INTERVIEW - CALLING IT A DAY

ACT 2

THE GOSSIP BENCH - MAKING PLANS

THE INTERVIEW - GETTING STARTED AGAIN

THE HOME PLACE - LOSING JESSE

DELLA'S HOUSE - A BEAUTIFUL DAY

SONG: *A BEAUTIFUL DAY*

THE INTERVIEW - MOVING FORWARD

THE HOME PLACE - GETTING ON WITH LIFE

DELLA'S HOUSE - THE DILEMMA

THE INTERVIEW - MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

THE HOME PLACE - LOST AND FOUND

THE INTERVIEW - TYING UP LOOSE ENDS

DELLA'S HOUSE - A GRAND GESTURE

THE ROCK - REBECCA'S BIRTHDAY

FINALE

SONG: *LEAD ME TO THE ROCK*

SONG: *AMAZING GRACE*

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The Music

ECHOES
© Steve Lester

*In the town of Eskridge near the old Weed home
Back deep in the woods there's
a moss-covered stone
Where a century ago on his sister's birthday
A boy named Cooper carved
his name and prayed*

*Listen to the voices, listen to the echoes
Telling all the stories of our lives
Pray our children's children won't let our memo-
ries die
Listen to the stories of our lives
Listen to the stories of our lives*

*She is Grandma to her sweet grand girls
They love her more than all the world.
Della's house smelled delicious \
as the family was fed
Her caramel cake and southern cornbread.*

*So full of life she was feisty and free
She loved her church and her family
Rebecca showed grace with all she was given
And lived to the age of a hundred and seven.*

LOOK ON THE SUNNY SIDE ©Elizabeth Locke Eldridge

*Women, men and children, too
Like to talk and misconstrue
Everything they see and hear each day.
But spreading gossip is a sin
As tangled tongues blow in the wind.
Be careful what you do and what you say.*

CHORUS:
*Look on the sunny side
Look on the sunny side
Look on the sunny side with me
Don't go down that rabbit hole
'Cause you don't know what it beholds
Look on the sunny side with me.*

*Keeping a promise, two or three
Can gain the trust of so many
And build good character through and through
But break a promise and you'll see
Just how quickly your friends will flee
Trust should be something that you value.*

*Finding fault in everything
Someone does can surely bring
A rift between close kindred and with friends.
So best be on your p's and q's
Be mindful of all that you'll lose
Your attitude can dictate how this ends.*

About the ...STORY 'Like a Rock' - Touching Three Centuries

By Susie James
Special to the Clarion-Ledger - April 17, 2002

JACKSON, Miss. -- In spite of the fact that family members address Rebecca Weed Patterson in anything but hushed tones, the Montgomery County native responds gently when a visitor asks how she is doing. It's a sunny, crisp afternoon, and it's nearly her 106th birthday.

She taps the glistening metal of her walker and says, "I think I do mighty well for my age. I use this as a precaution."

Dressed neatly in a soft, two-piece suit of black and red, Patterson removes the mechanical device that has for years helped her to hear what's going on around her and shakes it in frustration.

"I broke my hearing aid," she adds, but at the urging of her daughter-in-law, Leona Patterson, with whom she has made her home on Ridgewood Road since she was 102, she puts it back in her ear. "I'm too old to get stove up. I can't half hear and don't see too good ... but I do pretty well." Daily, she takes one baby aspirin and one vitamin pill. That's all. April 19 is her birthday. When she turned 100, friends gave her a big party down at her church, Alta Woods Methodist, but this year it's going to be quieter, Leona Patterson says. "I'll have a cake for us and for whomever drops by," she adds, "although -- she loves ice cream."

In Montgomery County, where she lived until 1960, when she moved to Jackson in order to be closer to her only son, the late John Franklin Patterson and his family, the centenarian has left an indelible mark. This is due not only to her inimitable personality, but also quite literally to something an older brother did the year she was born, 1896.

Looking at a layout the paper back home did a couple of years ago about what the late Cooper Weed carved on a huge sandstone atop what's likely the highest hill around Eskridge, Patterson shakes her head. "No, I don't think I ever saw that rock," she says. It's helped make her famous, anyhow. Weed's carving is still visible.

Her brother, who was born in 1878 and who finished out his years at the farm that became the Weeds' home place in 1901 in the Bethlehem Methodist community east of Winona, carved his name in the sandstone, along with the date, 1896. "It's always come down in the family," says great-nephew Jerry Hudson of Winona, "that he carved it there the day she was born."

Across the hills and the marshy lowland fed by springs from that lichen-enhanced projection, was the old Eskridge house in which Patterson's mother, the late Bessie Belle Dockery Weed, gave birth to her that April so long ago. The land is currently owned by Don Holmes, an Eskridge descendant, but the old house burned in the mid-1980s.

Patterson remembers nothing, she says, of the Eskridge days. If she's asked those probing questions someone might wonder to ask a person who has lived as long as she has, and with her faculties still perking nicely, Patterson's frequent response: "I'll have to study that up."

The childhood memory she plucked out concerned membership in a "tomato club you had to be 10 to join. I planted a fourth of an acre in tomatoes and canned them. I used them for different purposes. I bought me a little canner and



Rebecca Weed Patterson at 102 years old.
(Photo submitted)

put up tomatoes in number 3 jars. I don't remember how much money I made. It was a right smart trouble to do."

Before she married farmer Jesse Patterson in 1917 -- she's been a widow since 1948 -- her adventures included teaching at a one-room school in the Delta, near Ruleville. She got malaria and went back to Montgomery County. Later, she clerked in local stores.

Yet, she was always a woman of the land, creating outstanding vegetable and flower gardens, digging sweet potatoes by hand, always looking swell, too.

Ask her now and she'll say she prefers country living. "I just like it, I guess because I was brought up young in the country, and I've always lived there except for the last few years I've been out of Montgomery County," she agrees. Leona says lately her mother-in-law has been asking if it's time to plant onions.

Before she was 102 and fell inside her home in south Jackson, unable to get up, Patterson was a chronic gardener and repeatedly won yard of the month. In 1998 she was granted an honorary life membership by the Alta-Raymond Garden Club.

"When I got into anything I always tried to do my best, from the time I was young," Patterson says. She often won awards.

A "whole room," she says, was named in her honor at Alta Woods Methodist. Her buddies, however, have faded away, though Patterson is not forgotten back home. Tee Golding, Montgomery County Chancery Clerk, says he wishes Patterson a happy birthday. "She's a character," he says, "a fun person, with a lot of wit about her. She enjoys life."

Patterson preferred a horse and buggy to horse-back riding. She's not one to hold onto the so-called "good old days," though. Asked which she'd rather use, a horse and buggy or a car, and she snaps readily, "A car, of course!"

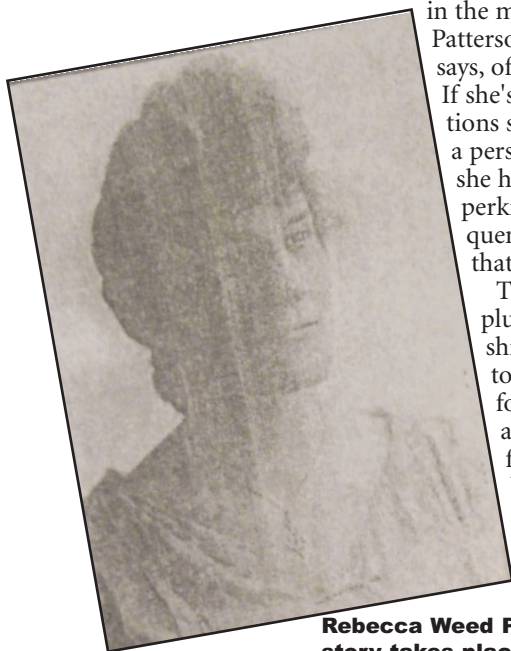
Birthday plans, she agrees, will include a cake. "They make a right big to-do over my birthday now," she says. Her living descendants include three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

The longevity question is an easy one for her to explain, though she phrases her responses differently from time to time. "I look on the sunny side," she says. "It's because of how I've lived."

Has she ever drank alcohol? "No."

Has she ever smoked? "No."

Do you cuss? There's an honest hesitation, then a forthright, "Cussing? Cussing? Well, I've done more lately than I used to."



Rebecca Weed Patterson at the time our story takes place. (Photo submitted)

About the ... **STORY**

Excerpts from 'Honeysuckles and Sweet Tea'



The Della Young family. (Photo submitted)

A remembrance of sweet tea and discovering the presence of God

By Latoya Heard

Sitting with my grandmother a few years ago when I was visiting back home in Mississippi, she told me a story about her childhood - a story I had heard before, but was excited to hear again. One thing that I learned from my grandparents and my elders is that it doesn't matter if they tell the same story 100 times, there is a new lesson each time they tell it.

My grandmother worked in the field when she was a child, along with her siblings and other family members. They would work day after day for long hours in the hot sun. She told me about a time when she was about 14 years old and she had been working all day in the heat. She explained to me how hot it was on that particular day. A few of the words are paraphrased, but I will try to quote her words as best as I can remember.

"I remember working in the field. It was so hot and dry, the sun was just beaming down on me. I felt like I was just going to die from the heat. I prayed to God and told Him that I didn't think I was going to make it and I asked Him to just send a breeze to cool us off. Right after I prayed, a cool, gentle wind started blowing my way, out of nowhere. It was so refreshing. And it was in that moment I knew, at the age of 14, that there was a God."

My late grandfather, Cary Young, my dear Paw Paw, made the best sweet tea

ever! I've tasted some delicious sweet tea over the years, but I have yet to come across any as good as his. What I loved most about him, more than his sweet tea, was the fact that he was just as sweet - if not sweeter. He helped to make my childhood one filled with many fun adventures and the most pleasant experiences. He always let me be a kid and would let me get into almost anything as long as I wasn't "bothering anybody". I guess if you could actually see love, it would look a lot like him.

Grandma Della would call us inside to eat around noon. They had a huge garden, so she always cooked lots of vegetables. She would cook fresh corn in the skillet and I loved it! We would have homemade sweet tea compliments of my Paw Paw. He made the best sweet tea that side of the Mississippi! There wasn't much talking at the table, but there was a whole lot of smacking going on! When we were done eating, we would go right back outside and play again until evening came.

As a child, I was very inquisitive and I asked a lot of questions. Funny thing is, even as an adult now, I still do. Whenever I saw my Uncle Ricky get ready to leave, I would ask him where he was going and he would always reply, "Going to see a man about a dog." At that age, I didn't understand that what he said actually translated to some place he didn't want me to know about. Basically, it meant none of my

business. But I had no idea, so I would always picture him talking to some man about possibly purchasing a dog from him. And whenever he came back home, I was always puzzled as to why he never brought a dog back.

I remember participating in Cake Walks at the Kilmichael Community Center. It was kind of like playing musical chairs, only you were walking around on a circle of numbers. Whenever the music stopped, every person would be standing on a number. Each cake had a number taped to it, so if you were standing on the number that was called, you would get the cake with the particular number. People rarely bought cakes back then. They were mostly homemade from scratch, so we took those cake walks seriously! I always wanted to win my Grandma Della's homemade caramel cake, and so did everyone else!

As a child I would always enjoy looking at pictures of my parents' childhood and my relatives' younger days. I would point at the pictures and ask questions about the people in them and about what they were doing. My grandmothers would always be so excited to tell me the stories behind the photos. Any moment when family history and good memories could be shared, it was a blessing to them and to me. We would turn pages and pages, sharing stories and laughter as we reminisced on the good ole days.

The Music

DAUGHTER OF A SOUTHERN MOTHER

© Elizabeth Locke Eldridge

*Well she bought her cousin's daughter
A real nice toaster oven
One with buttons that you push to do all things
Then her cousin said "that's nice dear"
I'm so glad you dropped it off here
So I can show you all of her nice things.*

*She had linens and some silver
Glass stem ware and fine china
Placed on tiers she draped in silk and organdy
Then her cousin said "run along dear"
There is nothing else to see here
The chapel's full, I can't ask you to stay.*

*I can't believe what I am hearing
She had no proper rearing
No one acts like that who has good etiquette*

*I think I know what could have happened
That lady was no lady for
Her mother could not be a Southerner.*

*Chorus:
I'm a daughter of a Southern mother.
Our virtues aren't like any other.
We are taught from the age of two
Just precisely what to do
We are daughters of Southern mothers.*

*I'm a daughter of a Southern mother
Who loved us more than any other
We learned at mother's knee
About the cross she bore for me
We are daughters of Southern mothers.*

A BEAUTIFUL DAY
© Elizabeth Locke Eldridge

*What a beautiful day it's been
The sun came up and got me out of bed.
Making coffee as the rooster crows.
Starts a beautiful day.*

*What a beautiful day it's been
A storm came up and chased the sun away
The air smelled sweet as the rain fell down
Making a beautiful day.*

BRIDGE -

*Doesn't matter if a storm breaks out
Doesn't matter if a cloud hovers overhead
Just remember there's a heaven above
All the darkness that you see.*

*What a beautiful day it's been
Sit back and listen to the katydids
They're making music soft and low
To end a beautiful day.
What a beautiful day.*

About the ...STORY

The Legend of the Rock



Don Holmes at the rock in Eskridge. (Photo submitted)

Sitting high atop a hillside, overlooking the Eskridge community in northwest Montgomery County, closely guarded by tall timber reaching toward the heavens, is a rock that holds a unique spot in Montgomery County history.

The rock is a site in itself standing almost six feet tall, 15 feet wide and 20 feet long. Bright green moss covers the rock in splotches, but hasn't hidden a rough inscription chiseled in one corner of the huge stone. The chiseled work clearly reads, "Cooper Weed 1896" and it is here that this story begins.

The 310 acres where the rock is located were purchased from family members in 1987 by Don Holmes. Don was born in Eskridge but moved to Clinton, Louisiana in 1945 with his family as his father sought work in the sawmills. Don never lost touch with his native home and couldn't pass up the opportunity to purchase the property when the opportunity arose.

Don had heard stories of the huge rock when he was a child but had never seen it for himself. His father had talked about it and the writing on it but never took him to see it before the family moved to Louisiana.

Don, his wife, Frances, and his son, Tim, had hunted the land for years searching for the rock, never finding it until one memorable day in 1989. Don and Tim were standing at the top of a ridge when they heard a buck snort. They began to follow the sound and all of a sudden there the rock was right in front of them. Tall brush had almost hidden it completely, but they worked their way through and knew immediately that it was the same rock they had heard so many stories about throughout their lives.

The two climbed up on the rock and found the writing, but Don struggled to read the name. Cooper Weed had signed his name with a backwards "D" making the name appear to be "Weece". The name didn't ring a bell and Don began to research who Cooper Weece might have been.

Don hadn't made much progress in revealing the identity of the unknown inscriber when the story found its way to Frank Weed in Winona. Frank called Don in Louisiana informing him that his Great Uncle Cooper Weed had written on the rock.

Montgomery County Arts Council

The Music

LEAD ME TO THE ROCK
© Steve Lester

*When my troubles seem too great – Lord I stop to kneel and pray
And I lift my soul to you – and your amazing grace
Through my burdens and despair – You comfort me through prayer
And you lift me up – on that rock – that is higher than I.*

*Lead me to the rock that is higher than I
Lead me to the well that will never run dry
Heal my heart – bring back joy – to my soul
Lord please take me by the hand – lift me up and help me stand
Lead me to the rock! – to that rock! – That is higher than I!*

*Like a ship lost on the sea – I seek harbor for my need
I long to come to You – for comfort, rest and peace.
Then You calm all of my fears – and I feel you oh so near
Lead me home – to that rock – that is higher than I. (chorus)*

*Then one day not long from now – We will hear that trumpet sound
And we will know the time has come – peace will be found
You are the rock that we have sought – no more battles will be fought
Because you are the rock – you are the rock – that is higher than I. (chorus)*

Don was so excited he made the drive from Louisiana that same evening. He and Frank climbed the hill to the rock. Frank showed Don where Cooper was buried along with the rest of the family and everything finally fell into place.

Cooper Weed supposedly wrote his name on the rock on April 19, 1896, the day his younger sister, Sarah Rebecca Weed Patterson, was born. Don was surprised and excited to learn that Rebecca was still alive. He met with Rebecca before returning to Louisiana finding her in very good health at the age of 105.



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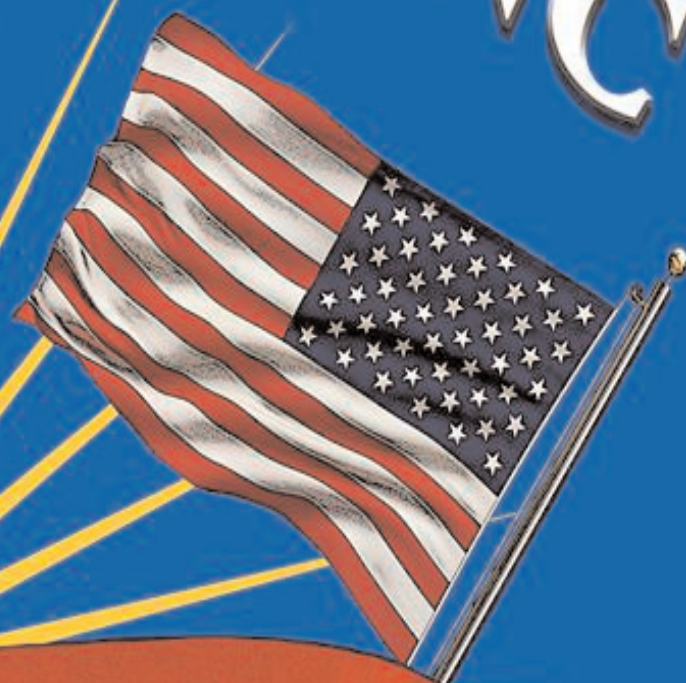
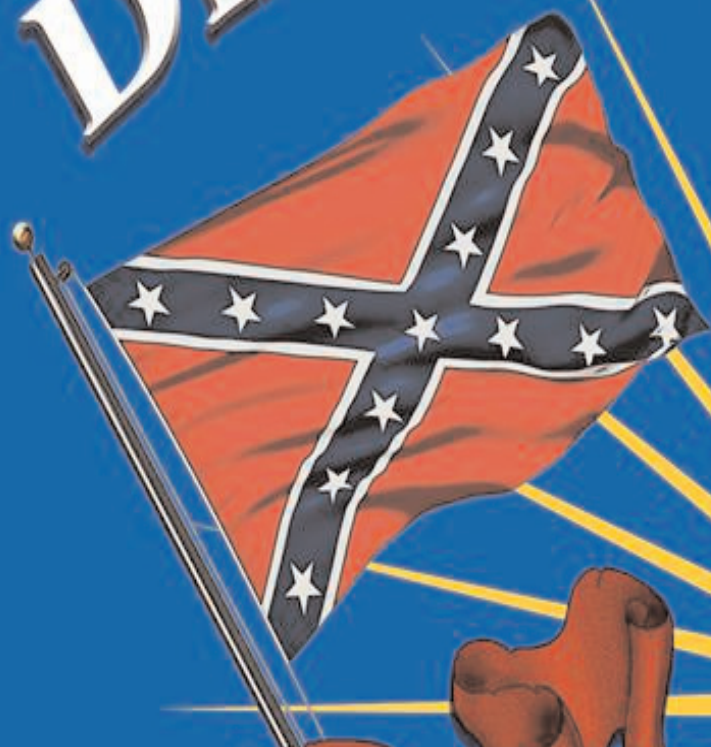
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