

The Hoover Historical Log

The Official Newsletter of the Hoover Historical Society, Hoover, Alabama



Happy Thanksgiving!

Mark your calendar!



Stop by our tent at the Moss Rock Festival; Sat. 10-5 and Sunday 10-4

November 12 BOARD Meeting at the Archive at the Public Safety Center, 10 AM

November 19th General Meeting at Hoover's First Baptist Church, 1:30 PM

December 8th An Old-Fashioned Christmas at the Hoover - Randle Home, Tyler Road



How Drunk Does a Badger Get?

Drinking, Fighting, and Praying on the Alabama Frontier of the 1830s

By the 1850s, Marion, Alabama claimed to be the "Athens of the South" and the enlightened center of education in the state. But twenty years earlier, Marion was anything but civilized. The town was filled with saloons, vice, violence, and rowdy young men. The vulgar antics of the high school and college-age males in the town led one observer to proclaim that the devil had a "clean bill of sale to all this country." As Marion grew wealthier in the late 1830s, local Baptists believed that a college for men might tame their hedonistic impulses. In 1842, Howard College was founded at the intersection of the Second Great Awakening and the Revival in the West—playing a key role in transforming Marion from a western frontier town to the more civilized "Athens of the South." After 70 years at its East Lake location in Birmingham, Howard moved to its current location in Homewood, officially becoming Samford University in 1965.

Continued on Page 4



Dr. Jonathan S. Bass, Samford University professor, is our guest speaker at the Nov. 19 General Meeting; the meeting is at Hoover's First Baptist Church, 2025 Patton Chapel Road, Hoover, 35216.

A Fall memory from the president...

What's your most vivid memory of Fall?

At our Folklore Center, Hoover Historical Society conducts Pioneer Days for area elementary schools demonstrating lifestyle and crafts of the early settlers in the Hoover area. One of the items that we have at the Folklore Center is an old syrup mill. In my early days, my most vivid Fall memories are from the old sorghum syrup mill on our farm. Sorghum making takes place during the period before freezing, but after those hot days of summer. The cane that was planted in June is now mature and ready for harvest. Sorghum is a sweet, dark, heavy syrup made by cooking the juice squeezed from sorghum cane, a true Southern delicacy. Occasionally sorghum is called molasses, especially by those who grew up with sorghum and always used it as molasses was used.

However, there are other uses for sorghum syrup. It was never confirmed as a fact, but one of my Father's major customers came from Mississippi and would buy much of the syrup made. The story was he had a country store and he sold the sorghum syrup there. Some said that they had it on good authority that this gentleman was the biggest bootlegger in NE Mississippi and the syrup was used for making his product.

I have many stories about sorghum syrup making. One that was passed down from my Mother involved my parents' honeymoon. When my parents married in 1933, it was sorghum cane gathering time. Since my Father had started a large crop, instead of going on a honeymoon, the newlyweds prepared sorghum cane for the mill. Sorghum is a tall cane that looks like field corn and makes a cone-shaped seed head filled with BB-sized seeds.

The seed heads were removed from the stalk so they could be dried and used for next year's crop. To remove them, a razor-sharp chopping hoe was used. Not only did my Mother start her honeymoon in the field, later in the morning, as my Father was cutting off stalk heads, the hoe slipped and hit my Mother's leg. She had to retreat from the field and spent the day minding her wound at home.

The making of sorghum syrup can become more than a farm chore if friends, neighbors and relatives alike join in the labor intensive, day-long cook-off. On our farm all helpers were well fed during the event and had a jar of homemade syrup to take home with them at the end of the day. They would lick their lips thinking about sorghum syrup with butter and a big cats-head biscuit the next morning.

One final story about my experience at the syrup mill. I usually tell this on my tours. During the cooking process, a green slime cooks to the top of the syrup. This sweet sticky slime is skimmed off and thrown into a pit behind the syrup maker. One day, my cousins and I were playing tag and running to and fro. I ran behind the cooking pan just as my Father was skimming this green slime and throwing it into the pit. His elbow caught me mid chest. I was knocked into a foot-deep pit of sticky gooey stuff. As I was pulled out, my Mother commented that it would be easier to have another child then to get me clean!

Ahhh!! The good old days!

Jim Langley



Jim Langley and City officials led a Tour of Hoover recently; (right) a farmer extracts the sorghum syrup from sorghum cane.





I found my *ROOTS* at Mars Hill

By Sue Garris Irish

Two years ago, I joined Ancestry.com and took the *Ancestry DNA* test to help find my relatives and my roots. I discovered a whole new world that brought me to Bessemer-Hoover, AL.

My paternal family surnames are Garris, Cardwell, Leach, Langston, and Scott. One item on my bucket list was to travel to Alabama and find my roots. I drove here (B'ham) from Texas and my sister flew in from Michigan so we could explore together. We wrote down every address we could find that our immediate family lived at or worked at and we plotted them on a map. We wanted to take picture of each location—regardless if it was a vacant lot or a used car lot.

Our first stop was at the Bessemer Museum-Southern Railway Depot. What an amazing place this is! The artifacts are so interesting and they have a very nice size library of old record books. There we met a gentleman named William. He assisted us in finding information about our family. We told him about our map of addresses that we were looking for and he kindly offered to give us a tour.

William told us the history of the area and showed us so much more than we dreamed of. We went to where our grandfather, Claude Garris, was an engineer at the U.S. Cast Iron Pipe and Foundry Co. until 1927. His father, our great-grandfather John W. Garris, worked in the Ore Mines (Macusa Mining I believe.) We even collected some pieces of ore from the mine. It was amazing to get out and walk on the same ground where our kin had walked over 100 years ago.

After that tour, we found the Mars Hill Cemetery in Hoover. I can't explain the feeling that came over me while standing at the foot of my relatives' graves. I was happy and sad at the same time. I felt cheated out of knowing them. I thought about how many years had passed. Elizabeth C. Langston Scott was our 2nd great-grandmother who died in 1883 and is the earliest date or marker in this cemetery. Right beside her is her daughter, our great-grandmother, Thera Dosia Scott Leach's, grave. Thera was born in 1883 when her mother passed away and died in 1932.

I kept thinking if Elizabeth is buried in Mars Hill Cemetery-Hoover, where is her spouse, our 2nd great-grandfather Eli Levi Scott? After many hours of poking around, I found him. I was so excited—yet still trying to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. Eli L. Scott, along with his second wife, is buried in the Mars Hill Baptist Cemetery in Chilton County, Jemison. There are numerous relatives in both of the Mars Hill cemeteries.

On my next trip to your beautiful state of Alabama, I am going to go to the "Old Mars Cemetery," off County Road 42 in Jemison. The interesting thing about his cemetery is that it is the original Mars and there are only a handful of graves there. One of those (the first grave) is my 4th great-uncle, William Dudley Scott, who died in 1873.

It has been a wonderful journey. Everyone we met was so nice and so helpful! I feel like I'm closer than ever to my family. I look forward to returning often as I still have more places to visit here in your wonderful community!



Ho-Ho-Hoover-Randle Celebration

The Hoover-Randle Home & Gardens, Hoover's most unique venue and home to numerous events throughout the year, will have the inaugural Ho-Ho-Hoover-Randle celebration this December. Barbara Randle, co-owner with her husband Ed, has beautifully decorated the home for over 30 years. However, since becoming a venue open to public use, she thought it would be a great opportunity for organizations throughout Hoover to help "Deck Our Halls".



Barbara Randle, left, is opening the Library at the event site for the Hoover Historical Society.

Hoover Historical Society will decorate a tree with decorations that tell the story of Hoover history. A panel of judges will judge the trees during the first week of December. There will be multiple awards available including but not limited to, Best All Around Tree, Best Story Told and Best Decorations.

Open house for the public will be Sunday, December 8, 2019, from 2-5 PM. Mayor Brocato is expected to be on hand to announce the tree competition winners. A small ticket fee will be charged and the non-profit *Hoover First* will receive profits from the tickets sales.

Local vendors will be on hand for guests to enjoy food and beverages. There will be music and fun and even a visit from Santa Claus!

BASS Continued from Page 1

November's speaker is Professor Jonathan S. Bass, Chairman of the Department of History and professor at Samford University. He earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and his Ph.D. at the University of Tennessee. He is known for his books *He Calls Me By Lightning: the Life of Caliph Washington* and *Blessed are the*

Peacemakers: Martin Luther King, Jr., Religious Leaders and the Letter from Birmingham Jail, the latter nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

Dr. Bass specializes in culture, race, religion, and law of Recent America and the South, and has served on the Alabama 200 Bicentennial Commission as a Bicentennial Scholar.



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Meet Gene, Sandra Fuller & Family!

Gene Fuller is taking over as Chair of the Hoover Historical Society's Folklore Center—stepping into Doug Harkness's mighty big shoes!

While Gene is on the HHS Board, he remains involved in the art community thanks to his artist wife, Sandra. His many interests include dabbling in antiques as well as history, having been involved with Arlington House in Birmingham. He has owned an aerospace and computer technology company since 1970—designing and supporting space shuttle and missile systems. He also developed and marketed a financial literacy program taught in high school career tech programs. He holds Bachelor and Master's degrees in Aerospace Engineering from Auburn University.

Gene was a charter member of Alabama Economics Club; has 20 years of service with Rotary Club; and was a charter member of the United Way Central Alabama Financial Education Committee. Gene and Sandra live in The Preserve section of Hoover.

Carl Elliott: The University Years

By Edna McWilliams, Part 2 of a series

Elliott was an excellent student, graduating as valedictorian in 1930, of his Vina High School class at age sixteen. In the midst of the Depression—1930—his strong desire of learning led him to begin a walk of 120 miles across the state to the University of Alabama with \$2.38 in his pocket and all his belongings in a cardboard box. A local storeowner spotted Carl and a friend walking down the railroad tracks. When he learned of their determination to attend the University of Alabama, he sent for a local minister and loaned his car to the minister to drive them to Tuscaloosa.

Initially, Elliott was told he could not enter the university due to lack of funds. The first night there, they slept under a truck. After three nights of sleeping on the ground, they found out about Maxwell Hall, the former Observatory, which was at that time abandoned. He and several others “homesteaded” there the first year. Today, his portrait hangs on the wall in Maxwell Hall.

The day after arriving, Elliott had a meeting with Dr. George H. Denny, President of the University. He was admitted, and worked many small jobs on campus from grounds keeper to stoking the furnace, and even serving meals at the President's home for special occasions. Elliott was an excellent student. After graduating in 1933, he entered law school. He was the first person to become president of the Student Government Association against the candidate of “The Machine”, a coalition of fraternities and sororities that heavily influenced campus politics. He was very active in making significant changes at the University.



By the time he was in Law School, he was a graduate assistant teaching history and grading papers for the department. One of the students he tutored was Paul “Bear” Bryant. He graduated in 1936 with a Master's degree in History, plus a law degree. After graduation, he was admitted to the Alabama State Bar. He began the practice of law knowing that ultimately he wanted to go to the United States Congress. He had a reason...a dream if you will. He wanted to make it possible for every man and woman to go to college even if they did not have the money to pay their way.

Carl Elliott served in the U.S. House of Representatives from January 1949 – January 1965. He passed significant legislation that benefitted not only citizens of Alabama but millions throughout America. True to his roots, Elliott took up the causes of the forgotten and disadvantaged.



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The Hoover Historical Society

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