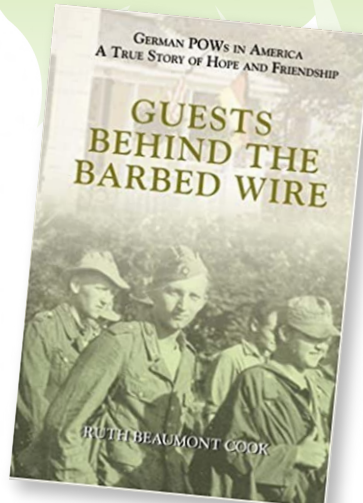


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Hoover Historical Log

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



A message from our president...

Spring has always been the harbinger of new life. This spring takes on an even more significant rebirth as we look forward TO LIFE WITHOUT COVID. I'm hopeful that our members and readers are now, or soon will be, vaccinated and ready once again to spread our wings outside of our homes. I look forward to being able to take more trips to explore the history of Alabama and to inform more people about the history of Hoover. I'm also looking forward to our program in March.

Our spring trip a few years ago was to Aliceville, Alabama, where one of the largest World War II POW camps was built. I was amazed at the stories we heard. Our speaker at the March General Meeting wrote the book on this POW camp.

As the weather turns nicer, we plan to spruce up the Folklore Center and have a school group experience a Pioneer day.

German POWs once housed at Camp Aliceville

The HHS welcomes Ruth Beaumont Cook via Zoom March 16th at 1 PM for her presentation of *Guests Behind the Barbed Wire*, the story of German POWs interned in Alabama during World War II

A reviewer described her work as "A significant and unique contribution to World War II literature, [this book] chronicles in meticulous detail the building and operation of the largest German prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in the United States in Aliceville, Alabama. This history discusses how the residents of Aliceville helped build, operate, and supply the camp, as well as become inextricably intertwined with camp life and the 6,000 German POWs held there.

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Save the Date!

March 9

Board meeting
10:00 AM
via Zoom

March 16th

POW camp at
Aliceville, AL
1 PM Zoom; vote for
officers

May 18th

Program: Tom
Bailey's new book
on the Five
Capitals of
Alabama

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Why is Hoover's Brock(s)* Gap an important historical site and in need of protection?

By Jimmy W. Langley, President HHS

The **Key** that unlocked the gateway for the founding of Birmingham is hidden in the mountain rocks, trees and bushes of Hoover, Alabama. People in this area knew as early as the 1840s that Red Mountain had red iron ore and the surrounding areas had coal and limestone. These were the necessities for making steel. But the area remained mostly farms and forests until the Civil War. Why? The area had mountains, no major road network, no navigable rivers, and most of all, no railroad to transport the rich mineral assets to markets South and North.

The L & N railroad came down from the North to Decatur. Railroads from the South were coming up from Montgomery to the Cahaba coalfields. Loaded trains could only pull a hill with a 1% grade, so Shades Mountain stood in the way. In 1854, Alabama chartered the South and North Alabama Railroad—intending to link the Gulf of Mexico to the Tennessee River through the center of Alabama. In 1858, Gov. Moore selected John Turner Milner to survey and determine routes that would allow access to the vast mineral resources of the state. Milner chose a route that went through a natural gap in Shades Mountain and hugged the topography and paralleled the Montevallo Road, the only north/south road crossing this portion of the then largely undeveloped wilderness.

On June 1, 1858, Carolinian Pinckney L. Brock purchased land on Shades Mountain. In 1860, the Alabama legislature officially adopted John Milner's recommendations for the best route for a railroad. Milner finally had funds to begin work on the railroad. The S & N bought land along the chosen route including 300 acres from Pinckney Brock at the gap. (Brock moved to Winston County because he opposed secession.) Milner began advertising for hundreds of black slaves to work laying the ties and tracks and had built the South and North Railroad from Calera to just south of Brock's Gap by 1863.

In 1863, the Red Mountain Iron & Coal Company acquired the land to build the railroad (Including Brock's Gap) into Shades Valley and access both the future Oxmoor Furnace land and the future

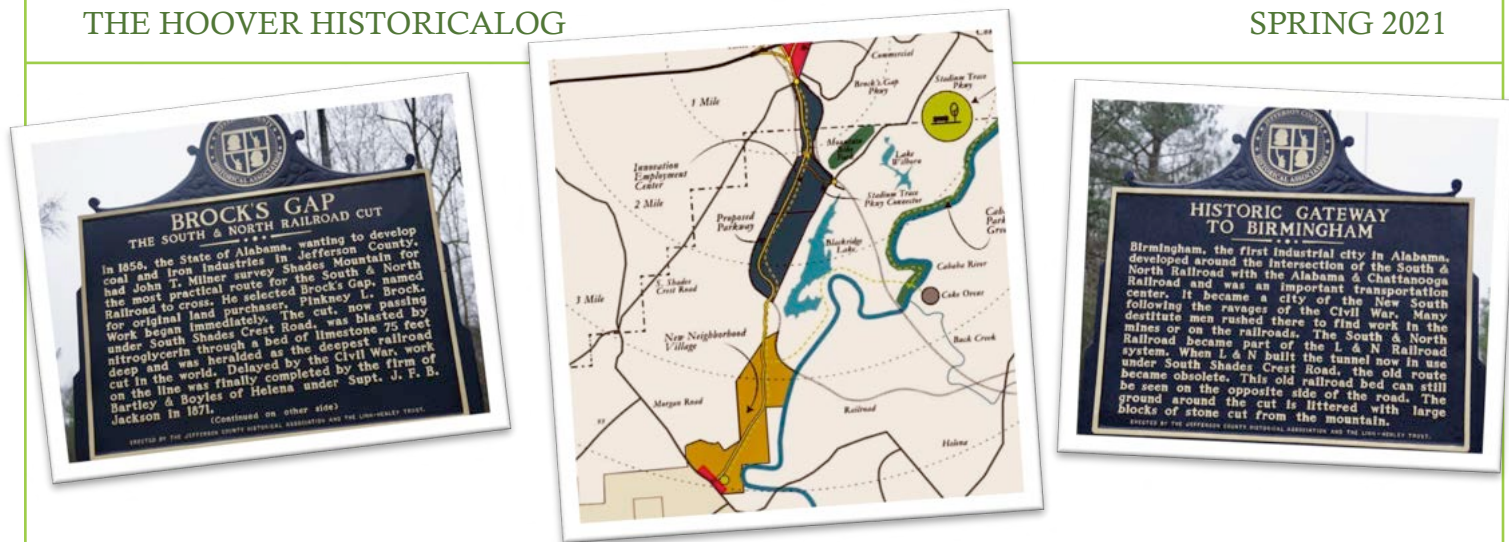
city of Birmingham. (Point of interest: The community of Oxmoor started as Ox Moor, named for the Carolina plantation and the Irish homestead of a company lawyer.) Although the Company had acquired the land at Brock's Gap, there were no explosives available to blow through the gap. Their only option was hand tools, but little progress was made trying to chisel through the hard sandstone rock. The railhead remained stuck on the south side of the mountain.

After the close of the war, efforts to build the railroad resumed. Money became tight, so Milner's new plan was to construct as cheaply as possible avoiding expensive tunneling and bridgework. The final obstacle was breached when Col. Jackson, using State of Alabama convicts, used nitroglycerin to blast a 75-foot-deep channel through the hard sandstone rock of Shades Mountain at Brock's Gap.

Thanks to Hoover's Brock Gap, the first train to run over the tracks of the South & North Alabama Railroad into Shades Valley and across the Ross Creek Culvert did so in November 1871. It arrived in the cornfields that filled the future city of Birmingham on November 11, 1871. The city was chartered a month later December 19, 1871. Birmingham, the first industrial city in Alabama, developed around the intersection of the North & South Railroad with the Alabama & Chattanooga Railroad and was an important transportation center.

The North & South Railroad became part of the L & N Railroad system. When the L & N built the tunnel now in use under South Shades Crest Road, the old route became obsolete. This old railroad bed can still be seen on the opposite side of the road. The ground around the cut is littered with large blocks of stone cut from the mountain.





Help Preserve Brock's Gap*

The Hoover Historical Society advocates for the preservation of historical sites in the City of Hoover. The steep cuts of Brock's Gap are still there just off S. Shades Crest Rd., hidden in the undergrowth and trees with large blocks of stone that were cut from the mountain scattered around. The site is highly significant to the history of not just Hoover, but to the entire state of Alabama.

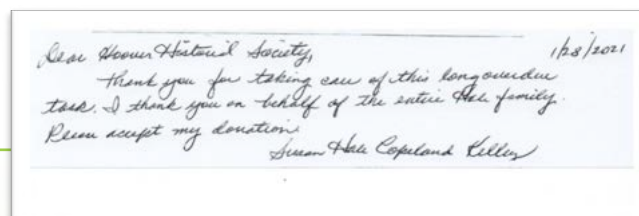
The City of Hoover has plans on the board to build a bypass road from Morgan Road to I-459. As indicated below, the proposed route goes through the area of Brock's Gap. The City Manager and planners believe that an existing road that goes through the property can be widened without destroying the rock

formations.

We would like to support the progress of better accessibility through the area, but we continue to advocate and be concerned for preservation of the site. We also support efforts to make the site more accessible to the public as a usable green space. HHS will conduct a reconnaissance of the area in the next few weeks.

— Jimmy Langley

**Brock Gap is a geographic description listed in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), created by the USGS; the more commonly used variant is Brock's Gap.*



A Message...continued from Page 1

I would also like to thank you all for contributing to the Gardner Hale Memorial fund. We now have funds to place markers on both graves of Gardner Hale and his wife Annie Susan Hale. We will plan a ceremony at Oak Hill Cemetery in the next few months. Various members of the Hale family have expressed appreciation for the Society obtaining the markers and expressed interest in a family event for the dedication.

Our nominating committee has presented the following slate: Jim Langley, President; Carolyn Kolar, First Vice President; Linda Joseph, Second Vice President; Ginny Petersen, Recording Secretary; Beverly Sublette, Corresponding Secretary; Edna McWilliams, Treasurer and Mark Swindall, Assistant Treasurer.

Please attend the March (Zoom) meeting to vote for the slate of officers or you may nominate a candidate for any one of the positions. I hope to see you in person soon.

Jimmy Langley

Shades Crest Garden Club 1935-2021

Garden club's treasure chest reveals history

While working at the Archive, I came across a newspaper article that pictured a wooden chest I recognized. I located the chest and read all the contents that told the history of the Shades Crest Garden Club. The club was founded in 1935 by Mrs. Lauden Coats and Mrs. Dan Barber. The goal the first year was to beautify the mountain and offer fire protection. One hundred forty Dogwood trees were planted and the club members, along with CCC workers, cleared the underbrush along the highway. The Schwab Swamp was drained and oiled for health purposes since it was close to the Bluff Park School. Mr. Schwab agreed to give the Lover's Leap area to the Club if they would agree to beautify it.



The wooden "treasure" chest was made to hold the yearbooks for the first 36 years. Crafted in 1971 by Ted Wohlford, husband of the Club's president, the box was decorated on top with the names of the nine charter members wood-burned into the lid and the names of the past presidents from 1935-1970 burned into the interior of the box.

During the War years, special emphasis was placed on conservation and "the desire of the members to add beauty to a war-torn world." Bulbs were planted at the hospital building at the local air base. Flower arrangements were donated to the U. S. O. as well as cookies and telephone cards to be used Christmas Day. A \$50 War Bond was purchased, and canned goods were donated to the Bluff Park School Lunchroom. Victory Gardens were promoted, and prizes were awarded to children having the three best Victory Gardens. Members made surgical dressings on Red Cross Days. "Due to gas rationing, we pooled our rides and continued our meetings in the hope that our efforts might hasten the day of victory and peace," said members.

Early projects included the establishment of a Rock Garden and painting the children's chairs at the Fresh Air Camp. A Junior Garden Club was sponsored for many years. Christmas decorations and flower arrangements were delivered to the TB Sanitarium and the Crippled Children's Hospital. In 1940, the club participated in the Alabama State Fair winning the Sweepstakes Prize with an elaborate house display—complete with bay window, picket fence, and many potted plants. Maintaining and decorating the Crawford Fire Tower was an ongoing project. Later the Bluff Park and Mountain Laurel Clubs joined in decorating and provided concrete tables and benches at the base of the tower.

The Shades Crest Garden Club erected the historic marker at Lover's Leap in 1973. We do not have yearbooks to document all the work done by the club.

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Aliceville was site of POW camp

Focusing on the relations between the captured Germans and local Americans, this title investigates the nature of war, peace, and the principles of human dignity.” —*Amazon.com*

Ruth Beaumont Cook is a native Ohioan and a graduate of The Ohio State University. She has made her home in the Birmingham area since 1970 and is the author of three books of narrative non-fiction history—*North Across the River* (1999), *Guests Behind the Barbed Wire* (2007), and *Magic in Stone* (2019). The Independent Publishers Group awarded a bronze medal for her book about the German POW camp in Aliceville during WWII in 2008. She is the author of numerous articles on history, business, and the arts for *Birmingham* magazine, *Alabama Heritage*, and other regional and national publications. Her Facebook page, *Cook's Book Nook*, currently features virtual tours of outstanding marble sculpture pieces on display at the B. B. Comer Memorial Library in Sylacauga. The *Book Nook* also posts new information about Camp Aliceville and other new information relevant to her books.

Program Description: *Guests Behind the Barbed Wire* tells the true story of Camp Aliceville in Pickens County, where as many as 6,000 German POWs were housed during WWII. It is the story not only of those prisoners but also of the 1,000 “raw recruit” American soldiers sent to guard them and the townspeople who related to them through civilian jobs and labor assignments. There are classic elements to the story—escape and death, disillusionment and despair, but also humor, hope, romance, and the surprising creativity that flourished in confinement. There is added drama when, 60 years later, many of the former prisoners and their guards began to return to Aliceville for reunions and share their memories of a time when captors went to great lengths to treat prisoners well in accordance with the Geneva Convention. This program offers vintage photos along with an overview of the story.

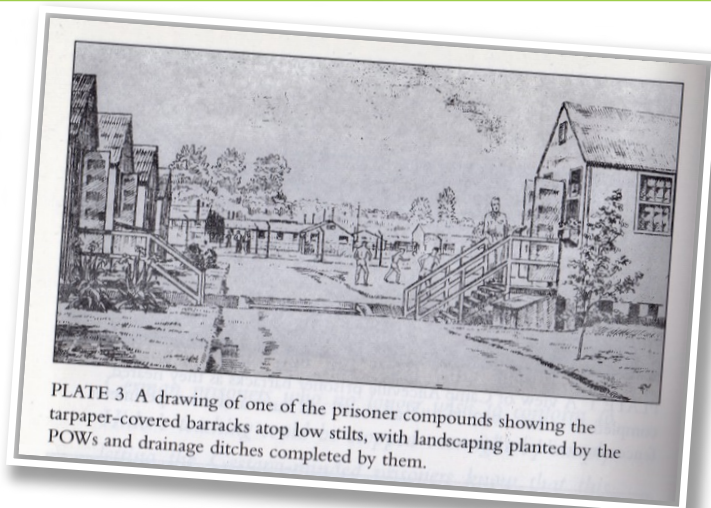


PLATE 3 A drawing of one of the prisoner compounds showing the tarpaper-covered barracks atop low stilts, with landscaping planted by the POWs and drainage ditches completed by them.

Shades Crest Garden Club

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From 1970 to 1989, Lover's Leap was a continuing project. "The Shades Mountain Landmark was to be kept clean and beautiful with additional landscaping added each year" — as recorded in one of the club's yearbooks. One of the later yearbooks described Lover's Leap as an “ongoing project.” (However, it is no longer maintained.)


The club cleared and beautified the little park in front of Crest Shopping Center and planted a Cedar tree to be decorated each Christmas.



In 1954-55, the Shades Cliff Civic Club asked SCGC to help in getting information for a new telephone directory and at the same time collected dues for the Civic Club. They were paid a small commission that was donated to the Community House.

The Shades Crest Garden Club has remained active for 86 years and some HHS members are a part of it today. It has been a tremendous asset to the Bluff Park community!

—Carolyn Kolar



HOOVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Membership Form

Make checks payable to *Hoover Historical Society*
 P.O. Box 360233 Hoover, AL 35236-0233
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Couple	\$20
Sustaining	\$50
Patron	\$100
Corporate	\$150

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Other Interests & Skills: _____

The Hoover Historical Society

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[Recipient]



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