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# CHILTONIAN

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Volume 19, Number 1

January 1999

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## QUARTERLY MEETING

As previously announced, the regularly scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society will be held Sunday, January 10, 1999, at 2:00 p.m. in the Clanton Public Library. All members are encouraged to attend this important meeting, at which new Society officers will be elected for the coming year.

Guest speaker at the meeting will be Dr. Frederick Smith, who will present "Fireside Stories," a collection of tales told to him by his grandfather. His presentation will include slides of the historic Prattville area.

## NEW FORMAT

As we begin the New Year, we intend to experiment with some new formats for the Society Newsletter. If you have comments or suggestions, please send them to us at Post Office Box 644 in Clanton.

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We earnestly solicit *your* inputs for future Newsletters. It is our intent to continue publishing various lists of data, such as births, deaths, and marriages; however--with your help--we also will expand the content of our Newsletter to include such things as feature articles on churches, schools, businesses, military units, individuals, etc. In addition, it is our current plan to publish family Bible data, old newspaper articles, and a limited number of genealogical queries each quarter.

But before we can publish such things, we need *your* inputs. Please send us a copy of any historical information you would like to see in the Society Newsletter, and we'll do our best to publish it--for you and for all other members of the Society.

## Walnut Creek Church

*By Coby Moatts*

In 1820, Walnut Creek Church was founded at its current location (at the time, in Autauga County) as a Methodist Episcopal Church. The original church building was a rectangular log structure, reported to have had musket ports for use in the event of attack by hostile Indians. The county road (CR-458) on which today's church is located, formerly was known as the Montevallo-Montgomery Highway, a public road that saw heavy use by drovers herding cattle and other livestock to market in Montgomery. In more recent times, the road also was known as the Old Dake Mill Road.

Reverend Arthur T. Love was the church's first pastor, and the church's original cemetery was called Love Graveyard. Abandoned sometime after 1870, the old cemetery is located less than a mile south of today's church. The current cemetery already was in use by 1844.

During Union Reconstruction (1869), the first Circuit Court session in newly formed Baker County was held in Walnut Creek's log church. The Baker County courthouse at "Grantville"--less than a mile northwest of today's church--had not yet been completed in accordance with the State Legislative mandate. It was not unusual for such an event to take place at Walnut Creek; because so many of the local area's "founding families" and leading politicians were members at Walnut Creek, the church was a center of political and social activity for over a century.

In 1875, the original log church was replaced by a beautiful white frame building; newspaper accounts indicate this structure was replaced in 1884 by Anderson Baker, a local builder and one of the original "Election Commissioners" of Baker County. A new brick building was erected in

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1935 and "reconstructed" into its present form in 1967. The land on which the church is sited was officially given to the congregation on April 4, 1880, by Elijah and Martha Mims, "For and in consideration of the love we bear for the cause of Christ and from an earnest desire to promote His heritage on Earth... ."

Organizationally, Walnut Creek became Methodist Protestant in 1828, affiliated with The Methodist Church in 1939, and became United Methodist in 1968. Today, Walnut Creek Church has an active Sunday School and Youth Program, and the congregation maintains its historic focus on prayer, Bible study, and service to the local community.

#### CREDITS:

*Chiltonian* is a quarterly publication of the Chilton County Historical Society and Archives, Inc., P. O. Box 644, Clanton, Alabama 35046-0644. (A Non-Profit Organization)

#### MEMBERSHIP RATES:

Annual: Individual \$9, Couple \$12, Student \$5  
(Dues payable in January)

Lifetime: \$100

Chilton County Historical Society  
P. O. Box 644  
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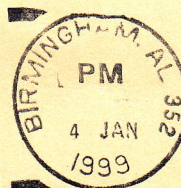
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# CHILTONIAN

Volume 19, Number 2

April 1999

## QUARTERLY MEETING

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society will be held Sunday, April 11, 1999, at 2:00 p.m. in the Clanton Welcome Center at Peach Park. All members are encouraged to attend this important meeting.

Special guest speaker will be the Director of Confederate Memorial Park, Bill Rambo, an expert on the Civil War and a Confederate reenactor.

At our January meeting, new officers were elected, and they are listed on the back page of the Newsletter. In recognition of his years of contribution and service to the Society, Ben Roberts was elected President *Emeritus* for Life. Well done, Ben!

### *The Lost Cemetery...*

Mr. W. A. Gentry of Jemison has made known to us a heretofore unidentified cemetery in Chilton County. Mr. Gentry found the site while turkey hunting in the Talladega National Forest, and he estimates that it contains 100-150 graves of mostly adults. The graves are generally lined up in rows (suggesting military origin); all heads are to the west and feet to the east (Christian burial); the graves are not sunk in (no coffins used?); and, each is marked head and foot with slabs or chunks of a locally available conglomerate rock.

Mr. Gentry escorted John Glasscock and Colyn Moatts to the site on January 31, 1999. We personally observed about a dozen readily visible graves, one of which had been dug into some years ago, leaving a moss-covered rectangular hole.

The cemetery is located in the NE 1/4 of Section 20, T21N, R11E, and Mr. Robert Pasquill, the US Forest Service's Heritage Program Manager, has flagged the site to ensure it's not disturbed by future activity. If you have any information about the origin of this cemetery, please contact the Historical Society at P. O. Box 644.

## Loris Gaynell Nelson Thomas

5 July 1927 - 26 February 1999

Loris G. "Nell" Thomas was born in Chilton County, the daughter of William Monroe and Lola B. Johnson Nelson. She was buried Monday, March 1, at the Liberty Hill Baptist Church cemetery. Nell leaves a devoted husband, a loving family of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, plus hundreds of friends and acquaintances who will miss her greatly.

Nell was a founding member of our Chilton County Historical Society and one of the most knowledgeable genealogists in the County and the State of Alabama. When I first became the Society's treasurer, I succeeded Nell in that function, and one of my new duties included picking up and distributing the mail from our Post Office box. Early on, I received a letter from some lady in Texas, who wanted to know how she was related to a line of Mimses in Chilton County.

Not knowing where to begin with such a vague request, I consulted Nell. Her response was classic: "Oh, don't worry about that. That lady's not related to *this* line, she's related to a different line. I'll write her a letter. And any time you get any of these queries in the mail, just pass them to me, and I'll take care of it."

And she did take care of it, as well as many other requests we received from as far away as California. Now that Nell has left us, we're going to have to scramble if we're even to come close to filling her shoes. Besides being such a nice person, Nell was a storehouse of family knowledge and County history, and the Society is diminished by her passing.

But the thought occurs to me that Nell has achieved her life's victory, and now the family lines in her genealogy charts are complete--all the way back to *Adam*! She must be experiencing a special kind of joy, and you know she's smiling from ear to ear!

Farewell, Dear Nell. We all hope to see you again soon.

## Clanton's Old L&N Depot

The famous Louisville & Nashville (L&N) Railroad was a descendant of the original South & North Alabama (S&NA) Railroad that opened through what was then Baker County in 1870. And the old green L&N depot at 721 Second Avenue, North, is a descendant of the original structure that the S&NA purchased from Alfred Baker when that railroad finally agreed to make Clanton an official "stop" on their line.

The L&N depot was constructed in 1907 when railroad passenger service was a very important means of transportation. The structure was enlarged and renovated in 1913 and 1917, serving as both a freight and passenger station. But, as personal transportation by private automobile increased, the interstate highway system developed, and large transfer trucks generally superceded many of the railroad's freight delivery functions, the L&N--like most other major rail lines--was forced to abandon many of its "smaller" stops.

The old depot continued to function as a freight station until the early 1970s, but it finally went the way of so many other depots in small towns across the Nation and was closed. The structure itself was saved in 1975 when Mr. H. D. "Buck" Bice purchased it and the surrounding land from the railroad.

A condition of the sale stipulated that the railroad would maintain a cleared 50-foot right-of-way, and the depot intruded into this space by some 14 feet. Mr. Bice wanted to use the structure as a storage warehouse for his seed and feed business, so, instead of demolishing the structure, he decided to move the entire building to the east.

The move was quite an operation. First, the building was "jacked up" off its foundation of numerous wooden pillars and, in some cases, brick piers. Then, solid oak "roller poles" were placed underneath to facilitate the actual movement. Perhaps most critical, a dozen or more "wrecker" trucks and their winches were lined up, connected to building "strong points," and their movement precisely coordinated so they wouldn't destroy the structure they were trying to save.

Slowly--often only a few inches at a time--the building was moved a total of 17 feet to the east, a distance that gave Mr. Bice a 3-foot "cushion" off the railroad right-of-way. After being moved, the building was jacked up enough to allow the placement of new concrete-block piers, and it began its "second life" as a storage warehouse, a function it serves to this day.

*Submitted by Colyn C. Moatts*

### New Officers

President	-	Colyn Moatts
Vice Pres.	-	John Glasscock
Secretary	-	Cathy Popwell
Treasurer	-	(VACANT)
Programs	-	Glynis Thomas
Historian	-	Marian Mims
Reporter	-	Betty Collins

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# CHILTONIAN

Volume 19, Number 3

July 1999

## QUARTERLY MEETING

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society will be held Sunday, July 11, 1999, at 2:00 PM in the Clanton Public Library. All members are encouraged to attend.

At the time of newsletter publication, the guest speaker had not been confirmed. Even so, you can be assured of an interesting and informative program.

## SPECIAL REQUEST

John Glasscock requests that anyone who has an article, query, etc., for the *Chiltonian*--and who has access to E-mail--please contact him at his E-mail address: [jondavid@scott.net](mailto:jondavid@scott.net).

### Society Officers

President	-	Colyn Moatts
Vice Pres.	-	John Glasscock
Secretary	-	Cathy Popwell
Treasurer	-	C. Moatts (acting)
Programs	-	Glynis Thomas
Historian	-	Marian Mims
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## Camp Clanchilala

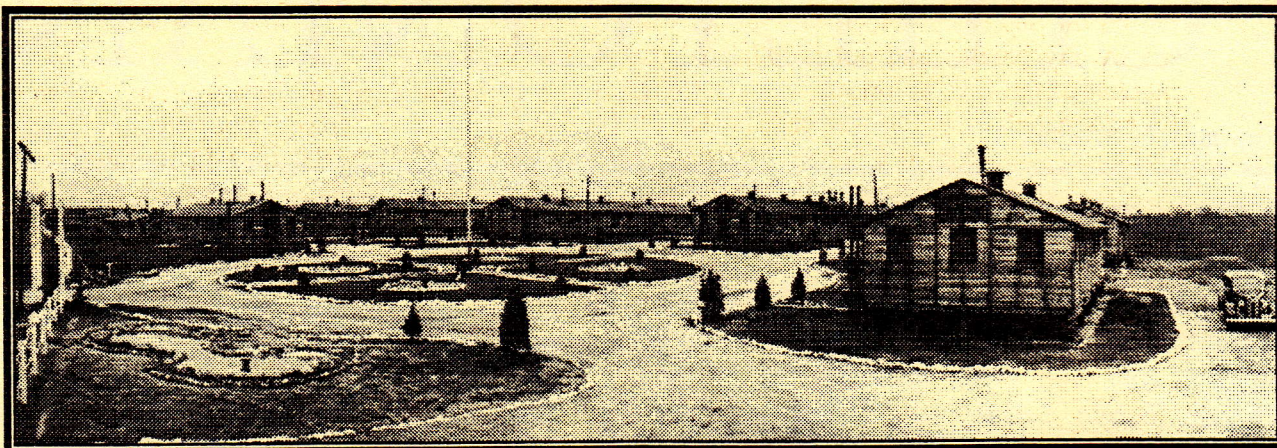
Organized in April of 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of President Roosevelt's "New Deal" initiatives to provide employment to young men during the Great Depression. At the program's peak, there were over 500 CCC camps across the Nation, and, over the years of its existence, the program provided jobs and training for more than three million young men between the ages of 18 and 25. Run by the Army, the CCC provided the men a place to sleep, clothing, medical care, and three square meals a day. Each man also was paid the lofty sum of \$30 per month, \$22 of which was required to be sent home to his family. In exchange, the men constructed buildings, forest roads, and bridges; fought forest fires; planted trees; and, participated in a variety of soil conservation and flood control activities.

Clanton's "CC" camp--most folks around here dropped one of the Cs--was named "Camp Clanchilala." It was located on the north side of Alabama Highway 22 and immediately east of present-day 17<sup>th</sup> Street North. It consisted of barracks buildings, a kitchen/mess hall, a large vehicle storage shed, a vehicle maintenance area, an administrative headquarters building, a craft shop, a reading room, and several miscellaneous support structures. The primary mission of the Clanton CC camp was soil conservation; therefore, the men did a lot of terrace work in our area, built retention ponds, constructed drainage ditches, planted trees, etc. Apparently, the Clanton camp also served as a centralized vehicle maintenance facility for some of the CCC's "portable" field camps that were tasked with specific projects.

Interestingly, the staff physician assigned to the Clanton CC camp was brought in from South Alabama, and his name was William Colyn Golden. As most older people in this area know, the popular Dr. Golden decided to remain in Clanton after the CC camp closed, making the town his home and the seat of his medical practice.

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### Camp Clanchilala, Looking West

As late as July of 1940, the CCC's new national director, James J. McEntee, was pushing for the Corps to be made a permanent program; however, once the military draft began in earnest and the US officially declared war, the fate of the CCC was clear. The Army had plenty of jobs for men between the ages of 18 and 25, and, as a result, the CCC program was terminated in 1942.

But the end of the CCC was not the end of our CC camp--far from it. By the late fall of 1942, British prisoner of war (POW) camps were filled to capacity with captured Axis soldiers. With the Allied victory in North Africa in November of that year, the US became the new destination for increasing numbers of German and Italian POWs. Alabama became the site of five large POW base camps and 33 smaller auxilliary POW camps. With barbed wire, an electric fence, and guard towers installed, Clanton's old CC camp became one of those auxilliary camps. Opening on May 27, 1944, the Clanton POW facility was a satellite of a larger main camp--probably the huge base camp at Aliceville in Pickens County, which was known as "the largest POW camp in America." The Clanton camp had a capacity of 250, while Aliceville held more than 6,000 prisoners.

Wartime censorship prohibited any publicity about the camp; however, *The Union Banner* published at least two brief snippets

related to the camp, both appearing late in the war. The first was in the issue of April 5, 1945, when the *Banner* noted the death of "soldier Woodrow Thorsen [who] drowned at Log Cabin Beach Sunday. He was 28, from California, and a guard at the Clanton Prisoner of War Camp." The second mention came in the issue of July 5, 1945--when the war with Germany was over--with the simple statement that "Chilton County has 206 German Prisoners of War."

There apparently was an initial period of hostility toward the POWs, and they were pretty well kept away from the public. But after the hostility eased a bit and the US War Manpower Commission had published rules for their employment, local people began "using" the POWs in many of the same ways they had "used" the CCC boys. After a person established with the US Employment Service a legitimate need for POW labor, certified that his working conditions would be the same as for local civilian labor, and agreed to pay prevailing labor rates, a detail of POWs would be sent out--under armed guard, of course--to paint the barn, plant some trees, fix a road, etc. The Clanton POWs probably saw this as a pleasant change to their principal work of harvesting timber and sawing lumber. Each prisoner was allowed to keep 80 cents per day out of the wages paid, and the remainder went to the US Treasury.

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The Clanton POW camp was officially closed on September 11, 1945. Stories told to me by my parents and others indicated that a number of the German prisoners did not wish to be repatriated when the war ended. It's likely that most of those had homes in the Soviet-occupied portion of Germany and simply feared what they might face upon return. Others probably had developed a genuine fondness for this country and its people, and regretted having to leave. (Interestingly, there was a small number of successful escapes from the national network of POW camps. The last escapee--Georg Gaertner--remained at large until he surrendered to US authorities in 1985!)

As children, we often played in the ruins of the old CC camp. Back when some parts of the building walls were still up, I remember seeing POW graffiti with German words that I couldn't make out. But the graffiti I remember best was a hand-drawn cartoon of Hitler: he was pointing and yelling--with an obvious noose around his neck.

Only during a research interview for this article did I hear the story that there might still be unexploded land mines in the area of the camp, which the Army never got around to removing when the camp was finally closed. If I'd heard that story as a child, I'm not sure I ever would have seen the POW's cartoon of Hitler!

Submitted by Colyn C. Moatts

Sources: "The CCC and National Defense," article by James J. McEntee; "NAZI Prisoners of War in America," book by Arnold Krammer; Alabama Department of Archives and History; files of the Military Police Museum at Ft. McClellan; interviews with Mr. P. F. Singley, Mr. Joe Smith, Rev. Cecil Little, and Mrs. Nell Klinner; family stories; personal experiences.

### Enjoy the Article?

Let us hear from you. Send us your own articles, photos (copies please, not originals), genealogical queries, etc. We'll do the rest.

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Chilton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 644

Clanton, AL 35046-0644

## The Heritage of Chilton County

This long-awaited, elegant, hardbound book is being reviewed and edited by the Chilton County Heritage Book Committee and will soon be at the publishing house. It is projected to be delivered to us within the next two or three months.

The book contains almost 400 stories about past and current families and individuals who have helped make Chilton County what it is today. It also contains hundreds of "topical" stories about churches, schools, politics, historic sites, businesses, organizations, and old traditions--for example, a "how-to" story on making "poke salad."

Most of the photographs included in the book have never been published, so many folks will want extra volumes to pass along as gifts to their children and grandchildren. You can save the \$5 shipping and handling cost by purchasing your books and picking them up at the Clanton Public Library. But when their arrival is announced, act quickly lest you must wait for the second printing.

Single volume, \$55.00      Tax + S&H, \$9.40

Chilton County Historical Society  
P. O. Box 644  
Clanton, AL 35046-0644



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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# CHILTONIAN

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Volume 19, Number 4

October 1999

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## QUARTERLY MEETING

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society will be held Sunday, October 10, 1999, at 2:00 PM in the Clanton Public Library. All members are encouraged to attend.

At the time of newsletter publication, a guest speaker had not been scheduled. Even so, you can be assured of an interesting and informative meeting.

### *Special Announcement*

The Chilton County Historical Society is pleased to announce that the new book, *Baker/Chilton County Marriages, 1870-1893*, is at the printer and will soon be delivered. Sale price is \$22.50 plus \$2.50 for shipping and handling of mail orders. Order your copy today!

### Society Officers

President	-	Colyn Moatts
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Secretary	-	Cathy Popwell
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## *The Hot Well Hoax*

In the early 1880s, Chilton's county seat became a popular health resort as a result of the discovery of a "hot well" in South Clanton. Because of the reported curative powers of the "hot mineral water," people came from all over the country to drink the water as well as take baths in it. According to an article in *The Mining and Manufacturing Journal*, which was reproduced in the *Chilton View* newspaper on November 5, 1885, Mr. S. A. Blasingame (owner of the property where the well was located) claimed cures of "many bad cases of paralysis, rheumatism, and scrofula."

At the time of the well's advent, Clanton's population was about 600, and many of the local businessmen were seeking ways to attract people (and their money) to the area. The hot well served that purpose admirably, and, once the word got out, traffic was sufficient to justify construction of a nearby boarding house. The proprietor was R. P. Wooley, probably a partner of Blasingame, and he advertised: "Within a few steps of the hot well... Good and comfortable quarters at low rates."

Every opportunity was capitalized on to reinforce the well's reputation. When an earthquake hit the area on Tuesday, August 31, 1886, "Mr. Minor Wooley at the Hot Well said the steam from the well Wednesday morning was of unusual density."

Until the spring of 1887, the money being made was from the room and board at the "Hot Well House." In the March 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of the *Chilton View*, Mr. Blasingame published an announcement "to inform the public that after the 15<sup>th</sup> day of March the free use of water from his hot well will be discontinued." The earnings potential attracted the attention of Dr. A. J. Massey, a traveling dentist from Rockford in Coosa County. He was so convinced of the well's authenticity that he leased two lots from Mr. Blasingame for ten years at \$1,000 per year, then proceeded to construct two boarding residences.

Many local people doubted the well's validity, and Dr. Massey obviously heard the rumblings. In the *Chilton*  
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View issue of July 21, 1887, it was reported that Massey had ordered a pump "to pump out the well and allow the general public to investigate should it so desire; we hope he will satisfy the doubters yet."

Then, in the August 25<sup>th</sup> (1887) *Chilton View*, Dr. Massey issued a formal invitation: "There will be a basket dinner at the Hot Well on Friday September 2<sup>nd</sup>, at which time Dr. Massey proposes to demonstrate the genuineness of the well by withdrawing the water. Everybody from far and near is invited to be present... Efforts will be made to obtain special low rates on the railroad for the day."

A special "Investigating Committee" was formed to certify the outcome of the well de-watering exercise. Committee members were: a Dr. Green of Opelika; Robert Douglas, a "mineralogist"; W. R. Holder and W. W. Wadsworth of Mountain Creek; and, James M. Ponder.

The results of the test were published in the *Chilton View* of September 8, 1887: "After three days of investigation and deliberation, the committee conducting the hot well test gave it as their opinion that the water was originally cold and had been heated by artificial means." The source of the heat, which sometimes got up to 162 degrees and was "hot enough to cook eggs," was a one-inch metal pipe that connected to the boiler of Mr. Blasingame's nearby steam-powered sawmill.

Dr. Massey lost much of his investment, later selling his interest in the property to local businessman Alex G. Dake. According to Eugene Wyatt's book, *Chilton County and Her People*, the property eventually fell into the hands of Mr. Terry Frazier, whose family lived on it for many years. Long afterward, the South Clanton area was called "Round O," a reference to the 10-foot diameter, 35-foot deep hole in the ground once known as Clanton's "Famous Hot Well." Mr. S. A. Blasingame lived to age 80, dying in 1921. He is buried in the Clanton Cemetery.

Submitted by Colyn C. Moatts

Sources: Newspaper files of the Clanton Public Library; *Chilton County and Her People* by T. E. Wyatt

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