

---

# CHILTONIAN

---

Volume 20, Number 1

January 2000

---

## QUARTERLY MEETING

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society will be held Sunday, January 9, 2000, at 2:00 PM in the Clanton Public Library. All members are encouraged to attend.

We are delighted to have as a guest speaker for our meeting, Mr. Ned Jenkins, the Park Curator and Head Archaeologist for Ft. Toulouse. We have indications that Mr. Jenkins will wear a living-history costume to add emphasis to his talk. In any case, you can be assured of an interesting and informative meeting.

### Query

Seeking descendants of John M. and Farmer Jackson "Jack" Parker. My grandfather, William W. Parker, was their oldest brother. John and Jack were born in Macon County and moved to Chilton around 1880. Their parents were James A. Parker and Catherine Angeline Angwin. Catherine died in Pratt City, AL, in the home of her only daughter, Sarah Elizabeth "Lizzy" Aaron; Catherine is buried in New Salem Baptist Cemetery near Thorsby in an unmarked grave. Is husband James buried there, too? If descendants would like to exchange information, contact me (Jane Fazio) at 1704 Manchester Place, Escondido, CA 92027-3721, (760) 747-5350, or E-mail [sandydidit@aol.com](mailto:sandydidit@aol.com).

## Historical Society Officers

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

*Chiltonian* is a quarterly publication of the Chilton County Historical Society & Archives, Inc., a non-profit organization.

## MEMBERSHIP RATES:

Annual: Individual \$9, Couple \$12, Student \$5  
(Dues payable in January). Lifetime: \$100

-----

[The following is the first of a multi-part article submitted by Ms. Linda C. Walker. The subject of her article, Mrs. Roberta Murrah, will be 104 years young this month. It is our pleasure and privilege to include Mrs. Murrah's story in the Chiltonian.]

## *The Life and Times Of Mrs. Roberta Robinson Murrah*

By: Linda C. Walker

Mrs. Roberta Murrah was born on a cold winter night in a log cabin on January 4, 1896, in the Union Grove Community in Chilton County, Alabama. Her mother and father were proud to have a little girl. They were hardworking people struggling to have a better community and place for their children to live and grow in. As they looked at their baby girl, they did not know that her life would touch so many people. Even though this little girl was so simple, she reached so far. *(continued, next page)*



Her father's name was James Monroe Robinson, but everybody called him "Doctor." His aunt named him before she died. She knew she was not going to see him. She told his mother to name him James Monroe, but everybody was to call him Doctor, so that is what they did. He was born on November 30, 1862.

This was a time when our country was beginning to take the form which it has today. It was a hard time. Many people called it "the good old times," but people like Doctor helped make it the good times as we have it today. Doctor's grandfather, Mordcai Robinson, was the first Probate Judge of Chilton County [named Baker County at the time, ed. note]. He is buried in the Mineral Springs Church Cemetery. Mrs. Murrah said, "For a long time he did not have a tombstone. The people of Chilton County went together and got him one." I asked her how he died. She said, "I think that a horse threw him and he never got over it."

Mrs. Murrah's mother, Loura Ann Henley, was born on a hot night on July 19, 1859. Loura Ann was just a small child when her father, Allen Henley, left for the Civil War. He and Williams Robinson, the father of her future husband, were in the war together. They went to Georgia to fight in the War Between the States. Like everyone else, they thought it was the right thing to do. They were doing their duty for the State of Alabama.

They were captured by the Union soldiers and taken to Illinois. They were in a Union prison camp there. Like all prison camps, it was very bad. Mr. Henley got sick and Mr. Robinson took care of him. One night Mr. Robinson left Mr. Henley and when he went back the next morning to see about him, he was dead. Mrs. Murrah's mother never knew where he was buried. Mrs. Murrah told me, "Ma always wanted to know about her father."

When Loura Ann was very young, her mother remarried, but her new husband was not a good father to Loura Ann. When Loura Ann was eight years old, her mother died, and the child went to live with relatives. She later went to live with the Mims family. They were George Murrah's grandparents. They were old and needed help. She lived with them until she married.

She was a very good mother who loved her children. She stayed at home and raised seven children. She also did her part to help her husband get through the hard times. She took care of her children and made sure that they had the best that they could afford. She taught them to be productive adults. She taught them things like how to love and be loved and how to have a friend and how to be one.

As Mrs. Murrah grew up, she had many fond memories of her childhood. We have sat for hours talking about her family. She has told me many stories.

(to be continued...)

## Value Plus

Give a copy of *Cemeteries of Chilton County*

To someone you know...  
**SOLD OUT**  
\$36.00 + \$2.50 S&H

Or

*Old Schools of Chilton County Alabama*

By Lorene LeCroy  
\$15.00 + \$2.50 S&H

Or

*Baker/Chilton County Marriages, 1870-1893*

\$22.50 + \$2.50 S&H

Mail check or money order

To

Chilton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 644

Clanton, AL 35046-0644

## The Heritage of Chilton County

It now appears that this long-awaited book will be delivered to the Book Committee for final edit before the end of January.

The book contains almost 500 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.

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 or you'll have to wait for the second printing.

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



---

# CHILTONIAN

---

Volume 20, Number 2

April 2000

---

## QUARTERLY MEETING

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society will be held Sunday, April the 9<sup>th</sup>, at 2:00 PM in the Clanton Public Library. All members are encouraged to attend.

Our guest speaker for the meeting will be Ms. Linda Overman, who does records and paper preservation for the Department of Archives and History. Also, we have a number of business issues to decide at the meeting, so we look forward to seeing you there!

### Historical Society Officers

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

*Chiltonian* is a quarterly publication of the Chilton County Historical Society & Archives, Inc., a non-profit organization.

### MEMBERSHIP RATES:

Annual: Individual \$9, Couple \$12, Student \$5  
(Dues payable in January). Lifetime: \$100

-----  
[The following is the second of a multi-part article submitted by Ms. Linda C. Walker. The subject of her article, Mrs. Roberta Murrah, was 104 years young this past January. It is our pleasure and privilege to include Mrs. Murrah's story in the Chiltonian.]

## *The Life and Times Of Mrs. Roberta Robinson Murrah*

By: Linda C. Walker

### (Part II)

Her father was a jack of all trades. He taught himself much of what he knew. She said, "I don't remember him being a math teacher, but one time we went to visit an aunt and uncle on the Coosa River. We went to a little school house called Stooping Pines for a debate. Pa told me that at one time he taught math there." They did not have grades, so she did not know what level of math he taught.

She told me that her father started a cotton gin and a grist mill in the Union Grove Community when she was very young. She said, "I have a picture of me sitting in a high chair, and Ma and Pa and the other children and Grandpa and Grandma and some other people that were there and wanted their picture made with us." It was not long afterward that her father started a saw mill. They moved around with the saw mill. They lived in mill shacks. Her father ran the mills and her mother kept boarders that worked at the saw mill. Mrs. Murrah had to help her mother with the cleaning, cooking, washing and anything that needed doing.

At one time they lived for seven years about three miles from Mineral Springs in what is now the Pleasant Hill Community. They had to carry water up a hill to do all the cooking and cleaning. They carried the clothes to the spring where they washed them. She had to use a wash pot and scrub board to clean the clothes. She told me, "I have rubbed overalls with turpentine in them until I would rub the skin off my hands." She sighed with relief and said, "When we moved back to the Union Grove Community, it was so good to have a well of water on the porch."

When they lived at what is now Pleasant Hill, the only thing there were woods and two graves. There was a little narrow road. The two graves were between two trees. She said, "We never did know who was buried there. Everybody around called it the Blow graveyard." (continued, next page)



(continued from previous page)

One day her father and an old man named Mr. Ben Martin were talking. Mr. Martin said to Mrs. Murrah's father, "You know, Doctor, we need to build a church here." Doctor said, "You are right. It is so far to go to Union Grove." Mr. Martin said, "Well, I will furnish the trees if you will saw them up." So, they worked together and built a church although they were not Christians. They were just trying to help the community. The church that they built was a one-room church that was used until the tornado came in 1932.

Mrs. Murrah told me that Collins Chapel was called Piney Woods. She said when they would go there they would say, "We are going to Piney Woods." She said, "From Mineral Springs north was called Stumps Hills."

One of Doctor's business ventures was a resort that he and Dr. McNeal built at Mineral Springs. The resort had five cabins, a 16-room hotel, and a dining room. Three of the cabins were on one hill and two on the other hill, and the dining room was in the middle. The hotel was on the hill above the springs.

Mrs. Murrah worked some in the kitchen when she was 13 years old, but soon had to go home and help her mother. The water for the resort was down a steep bank, so Doctor and some of the others built steps up the hill to walk up with the water. They would build some steps and then they would build a platform so they could rest, because the hill was so steep. The hotel is now a boys' home.

Mrs. Murrah told me about one time that her father's bird dog followed him to Clanton. He was taking a load of lumber to Clanton on a mule-drawn wagon. Another man got the dog. Doctor took the man to court. She said, "That trial lasted so long. I sure was glad when it was settled. Pa won the case. The Judge asked him to tell them about the dog. He told them that the dog had a black toe nail. That was enough for him to win the case."

When Mrs. Murrah was 14 years old, her father sold the saw mill and moved back to the farm at Union Grove. He had built a good home there. They stayed at the farm for a few years and then moved to Clanton, where he started a machine shop near the present Clanton Cleaners. Later he bought a place on Second Avenue North. He and his son were partners in this business.

One day Mrs. Murrah heard some people talking about her father. One man said, "If it can be fixed, Doctor can fix it." After that she told me that someone had a sausage grinder and she said, "They wanted Pa to work on it, but one of Pa's cousins said, 'If he fixes that old grinder, I will eat it.' You know what? Pa fixed that old sausage grinder. Pa could work on anything." Doctor fixed clocks, watches, anything that anybody wanted him to work on.

Her mother and father did not join the church until her mother was 60 years old. She said, "Ma was waiting on to join. One day we all went to church and after church a Mr. Goodgame came out and talked to Ma and Pa about joining the church. When we got home that day, Pa said to Ma, 'It's time we joined the church.'" (continued, page 3)

## Value Plus

Give a copy of *Cemeteries of Chilton County*

To someone you know...  
**SOLD OUT**  
\$30.00 + \$2.50 S&H

Or

*Old Schools of Chilton County Alabama*

By Lorene LeCroy

\$15.00 + \$2.50 S&H

Or

*Baker/Chilton County Marriages, 1870-1893*

\$22.50 + \$2.50 S&H

Mail check or money order

To

Chilton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 644

Clanton, AL 35046-0644

## The Heritage of Chilton County

It now appears that this long-awaited book will be delivered to us in June.

The book contains almost 500 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.

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, or you'll have to wait for the second printing.

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



*(continued from page 2)*

On a cold January morning, Mrs. Murrah got up and did everything as she always did on Sunday morning, but this was no ordinary morning. She got dressed in her best dress. George Murrah came to get her to go to Sunday School, but instead they went to Cousin Edward Honeycutt's home. You see, Cousin Edward was a Methodist preacher. He married Roberta Robinson to George Washington Murrah in holy matrimony on January 26, 1913. They left there and went to George's mother's house where they lived for six months. Then George built a home at Collins Chapel.

I asked Mrs. Murrah where she went on her honeymoon after she eloped. She said, 'Pshaw, nobody knew anything about going on a honeymoon. The only thing they knew about was having a dinner the day after someone married. It was called an In-Fair, but I did not have that.'

She said, "Not too long after we got married, we went down to a neighbor's house. He had a syrup mill, so we went down there to drink juice. The neighbor said, 'Nobody can get married this year.' We asked him why, and he answered, 'Because we have a democrat for a President.' He was talking about Wilson. But as you see, we got married anyway."

I asked her why did she elope, and she said, "Ma didn't want any of us to get married. She worried so much about us. All of us ran away and married except Irona. Ma was so upset when I got married that Pa said, 'Honey, don't worry. Just think. I will save a barrel of flour next year.'"

One year after they married, they had their first child. She was born on January 7, 1914, when Mrs. Murrah was 18 years old. They named her Eunice Juanell Murrah.

It was still hard times. George was a farmer, and they had a hard time trying to make a living. Mrs. Murrah told me, "One year the boll weevils got in the cotton and all we had was one bale of cotton for the whole year."

I asked Mrs. Murrah what all they raised on the farm, and she said, "We had corn and cotton mostly, but we also raised some strawberries, okra, and watermelon, and we raised some livestock too. It was just a plain old farm."

Mrs. Murrah told me about one time George had a lot of cane to strip, and he did not know how he was going to get it done. She said, "I told him when Pa had a lot of corn to shuck, he would have a

corn shucking, and George said, 'Roberta, that's a very good idea.' So we invited a group of young people over for a cane stripping. I parched some peanuts to serve, and we all had a very good time."

Mrs. Murrah told me that one day she had to leave Eunice asleep while she went to milk the cow. Eunice, like any child, woke up scared because she could not find her mother. So she went to look for her. Mrs. Murrah came back from milking the cow and found Eunice gone. She was frightened, because Eunice was only about two years old. She looked everywhere for her. She said, "I just happened to think that she might have tried to go to the cotton patch, because that was where I stayed most of the time." Sure enough, that was where she found Eunice. "You see, it was not like it is today. Most people don't even know what a cotton patch is. Back then, I was the cotton picker."

Mrs. Murrah told me that one year George was going to hire someone to gather corn for him. She said, "I thought about that, and I thought how much I wanted my teeth fixed, so I told George that if he would pay me, I would gather the corn. He said, 'Alright, if that's what you want.'" Like the whole family on both sides, they all were struggling to make this a better place to live.

One day two small boys came to stay with the Murrahs on the farm. Mrs. Murrah told me, "I think Alfred was about eight years old and George was five years old." This was one of the ways that Mrs. Murrah reached so far. Little did they know at the time how Alfred Murrah would affect this whole nation. You see, Alfred grew up to be the famous judge that the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City was named for. They called Alfred's brother, George, "Little George." Mrs. Murrah said there were three Georges in the family.

On March 13, 1916, George and Roberta had a son. They named him William Alton Murrah. George was please to have a son. While they were getting him cleaned up, George could hardly wait to see him.

One day some four years later, George came in and said, "Roberta, guess what has happened?" He was very excited. "This is one of the proudest days of our lives. Get dressed! You are going with me!" When asked what he was so excited about, he said, "Roberta, you are going to register to vote!" She told me, "I can't remember where we went for me to register. All I can remember is I did not..."

*(continued on next page)*



...understand and, at the time, did not care anything about this. But George was so proud." Later, everyone realized that Mrs. Roberta Murrah was the second woman in Chilton County to register to vote. Her sister was the first. At present, she is the oldest registered voter in Chilton County.

On March 14, 1922, another son was born to Roberta and George. His name was Aurelius Wyndol Murrah. Mrs. Murrah said a woman in Thorsby named him. Alton was proud to have a baby brother. This six year old boy would look after his brother, make sure he would be all right, and would teach him everything he knew. The little eight year old Eunice thought, "Well, I have another brother to help take care of." All during this time, Doctor and Laura Ann were still involved in the life of Roberta and helped in every way they could to make her life a little easier.

Many things happened during the next few years. George was busy trying to make a living for his family, and Roberta was busy helping him and seeing after her family. She told me, "I had so much to do that the Lord raised my children for me. I didn't."

On March 20, 1930, Peggy Lou Murrah was born. Little did Roberta and George know what this little girl would face in her lifetime and, through it all, what she would also give to the community and to the people whose lives she would touch. Wyndol waited weeks before he would look at his sister, because he did not like having a baby sister. He didn't realize how much he would come to love that little girl.

One night in 1932, Mrs. Murrah was feeding Peggy, and George was walking the floor. You see, there was a bad storm coming up, and George was always afraid of bad weather. She told him, "George, you are going to hear about this storm." Little did she know how much that storm would affect them and other family members and friends. She said, "I was trying not to be afraid. I always thought every storm would go around, because Ma would tell us that every time a storm would come. She wanted to keep us from being afraid." But this storm did not go around. It damaged George and Roberta's house, and one of Roberta's sisters was hurt badly in the storm.

It was the worst tornado to ever hit Thorsby, Collins Chapel, and Union Grove communities. She said, "I don't remember how many were killed. I do remember that an R. S. Chandler and his daughter-in-

law and two grandchildren were killed. His daughter-in-law and her children were buried in the same grave. Martha Willis, Elaine Cleckler, and two other women were also killed. Some people found a baby that could barely walk hanging on a barbed wire fence. It was a little girl. Jesus was so merciful. The little girl lived."

The next day people came from all around to see what the tornado had done. The damage caused by the storm was extensive. Many people lost their lives, homes, businesses, and everything they had. But the people could not give up. They rebuilt their homes and lives and helped to make a stronger community.

One day George came in and told Roberta, "We are going to move to Clanton." When she asked why, he said, "Dudley wants me to be his deputy sheriff, and I have accepted his offer." Dudley Collins was George's brother-in-law.

Mrs. Murrah told me that one day they went to vote. She said, "I didn't want to vote the way George wanted me to vote. I did not like the ones that were running. So George told me to just make a cross mark all the way down. I did not understand. He wanted me to vote that way, because he was planning on running for sheriff. Pa got so mad at George, because he tricked me into voting the way he wanted me to, but Pa soon got over it." George did run for sheriff but lost.

The Murrahs moved back to the farm and stayed there for a while. After a few years they moved back to Clanton, because Will Culp was elected sheriff and wanted George to be his deputy.

Mrs. Murrah said that George always liked to scare people. For example, one time the neighbors yelled for George and Roberta to come to their house. When they got down there, the neighbor's dog was having a fit. He was about over it when they got there, but the people were scared. They wanted George and Roberta to spend the night, and so they did. Mrs. Murrah said that they had to cross a long hall to get to the bedrooms. The neighbor went to the kitchen, and he made his wife go with him. Roberta said, "George hid in the hall and when they came up the hall going back to the bedroom, George almost scared those people to death. Another time he got under the bed and grabbed a man's leg and scared him. George was always full of life!

*[To be concluded in the next issue.]*