

the GROUNDHOG

A Publication of the Mentone Area Preservation Association

Sam Whatley

by Mickey Strickland

Neighbor, Friend, Businessman

When Sam Whatley's father, Edward, purchased the old Cordell farm over near Alpine in order to truck farm the year was 1955 and Sam was fourteen years old. The whole family worked on the farm, including his Mother, the former, Mayford Clenderella Willingham, and Sam's three sisters, Jo, Pat, and Alice (now deceased). They raised watermelons, cantaloupes and vegetables for market; the work was hard and long.

Once, when Ed ordered one thousand baby chicks, the company offered them to the Whatleys free of charge if they would take roosters. "One of my jobs was to draw water from a windlass-operated well for all those chickens as well as the rest of the farm animals, and I thought my arms wouldn't last till I was grown!" Sam told me as he recounted his childhood. "We all worked hard, but there were a lot of good times too."

Sam's father purchased a Ford tractor which he allowed Sam to drive to school. With the help of a couple of coathangers, he would disengage the governor and coax up to 40 miles an hour out of that machine. "Thank goodness it was years before my Dad found out!" He laughed. "He would not have taken too kindly to such a thing."

Sam talked of his first automobiles: "I got my driver's license in Jerry Richey's '49 straight-shift Ford. Then my grandfather John Wade and Grandmother Rachel gave us a dark blue '47 Frazier that I was proud of. Then came a two-tone brown and tan '46 Chevy followed by a 1939 solid black Buick. These cars hold a lot of fond memories for me," he said, "they just don't make them like that any more."

In 1958, the family moved to Denver, Colorado for Ed to take a position as a construction inspector for Martin-Marietta Missile Plant. "It was a large and impersonal place" Sam recounted, "and such a change from our farm in Mentone. It was quite an adjustment for all of us."

Sam began to work for Gates Rubber Co. the morning after graduation. The year was 1959, and his Mother was already an employee there. That same year he met Rosemarie, whom we all know as Toots, and made her his wife just eight weeks later. They added two daughters, Garnet and Karen, before moving back to Mentone in 1965. A little boy, "Hoss," was born later.



(cont. on p 2)

the GROUNDHOG

Volume 4, Number 10, January, 1987

MAPA Minutes

The January MAPA meeting was called to order by Donna Bukley, Director. The minutes from the November meeting were read and approved. The treasurer's report showed a balance of \$8605.36. THE GROUNDHOG report was read showing a balance of \$170.00.

Jean McGehee reported that the sales of MENTONE, ALABAMA: A HISTORY are brisk, and that approximately two-thirds of the printing costs have already been recovered.

Harriet Crow reported on the progress being made on efforts to repair the lock wall along Hwy. 17. A motion was made and approved to conduct a fund raising campaign with a goal of \$5,000. It was also decided that a separate bank account for these funds would be established.

The guest speaker for this month's meeting was Pat Everett of the Madison Travel Agency. She gave out a number of informative brochures and described a variety of tours now available to travelers. Adapted from the minutes of Bill Riedese, Secretary.

Mountain Music

by Greg Purvis

It seems to me that the north Alabama area has much in the way of musical talent. Perhaps the group ALABAMA brought this talent out into the open by proving that small towns have a lot to offer or maybe this area is just naturally rich in musical talent.

From banjos to electric guitars, country to hard rock, there is something down our country roads for nearly everyone.

Music is a fine art, one that combines sounds and melodies with words to fix an audible and visual image in the listener's mind. Music is music, but bad music is noise. There are country groups that fill their songs with lots of getting drunk and gambling with money they stole from sheepherders which compares to certain hard rock tunes dealing with drugs and death. Both examples are bad music. There is nothing positive or entertaining about listening to the problems or illegal actions of any band, country or rock or jazz.

Although some music does not use words, such as ballets and symphonies, most modern music does utilize vocals. Vocals are used to give the listener emotion, depth, feel and to tell the story or relate the event happening in the song. The lyrics are very important in a song. If you are a music fan, aside from if the song sounds good, the lyrics should also be important. Try taking those ALABAMA records or those U2 records and reading the lyrics. You might find that the words actually MEAN something. They're not just there for looks. If a band feels something and can write down their lyrics in a poetic manner, chances are they can also play in a desirable manner.

The rock band PHANTASM is looking for a bassist and vocalist. For details call 634-4516 or 845-0352. Must have instruments and desire.

Northeast Alabama Area Adult Basic Education Program A New Beginning

Learning to read and write can mean a new beginning for many adults. Estimates vary but many experts say some 25 million American adults can't read or write. Another 45 million have trouble filling out job applications, reading directions, and otherwise functioning in society. Illiteracy occurs in all social strata and every locale and is believed to generate \$6 billion annually in unemployment and other social costs. If you are among this large group of illiterate Americans, you don't have to be stuck in that category forever. You can attend an adult reading class in your area and have a new beginning in your life. Learning to read and write can help you feel better about yourself as well as make tasks which were once a trial seem easy.

The classes are open to any adult age 18 or older. Books and materials are provided at no charge. You may enroll at any time simply by attending one of the classes when it meets. The ability to read is one of the most valuable treasures in today's world. Spread the word and help make this opportunity available to fellow citizens. For further information, call the Adult Education Office in Fort Payne at 845-0465.

Our Town

by Greg Purvis

The Mentone Volunteer Fire Department used money obtained through two Turkey Shoots, one in November and one the Saturday before Christmas, for equipment and upkeep at the Fire Hall. A fire was reported three weeks ago at a trailer in Mentone. The fire was put out within ten minutes, but the trailer sustained serious damage. No one was injured.

Mentone Citizens Celebrate New Year

A group of Mentone folks sang in the new year with a joyful note at the Casaway Club in Gadsden. Among those who attended the festivities were Sam and Leola Whitley, Frank and Mary Hall, Sybil and Darby Hopper, Sheila Johnston, Andy Kusky, Elena Fulgerson, Jessie and Marie Crow, and Charles and Donna Ruckley.

The event was made more memorable because Jeff Cook of ALABAMA fame, who is the owner of the club, made an appearance and sang with the Forever Band who were featured there that night. They sang hits from the 40's, 50's, and 60's as well as current hits. Old favorites by such greats as Patsy Cline, Buddy Holly and Chuck Berry were presented in the incomparable Jeff Cook style and made the evening really special.

It was a dress-up affair with Sheila leading the way among the fashion-conscious. At least she SAID it wasn't May 1987 full of highest expectations and fondest wishes for all Mentone citizens, whether they greeted the new year with a snore or a shout—MG.

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Town Council Meeting

On October 27 the Town Council met and approved a proposal for a feasibility study submitted by Hayes, James and Associates, Inc. The study was commissioned in order to find potential raw water sources, then examine the expenses, advantages, and disadvantages of obtaining water from these sources. The study is now complete. The results were reviewed at the January Town Council meeting. After discussing the alternatives, it was decided that the best way to obtain water would be to pump it up the mountain from a system of wells in the valley. The estimated cost of the project is 336,000 dollars. The Council is now in the process of filing an application for a Community Development Block Grant which, if approved, could provide as much as 300,000 dollars toward the construction of the water project.

Also discussed at this month's Council meeting was the problem of people drag racing through town on Friday and Saturday nights; the Sheriff's department will be asked to assist Officer Jones in patrolling the streets during these times.

The Council discussed instituting a new water policy that would raise the credit deposit from \$25.00 to \$50.00 and decrease the length of time an individual may be delinquent in payment—the increase in the credit deposit, if approved, would apply only to new water customers.

Mayor Hammond and the Council announced that under Mentone's new liability insurance policy all public officials and town employees have up to 1,000,000 dollars worth of coverage.

Post Office Window Broken

On Saturday night, December 27, one of the large panes of glass at the Mentone Post Office was broken. Postmaster Benny Goss told THE GROUNDHOG that what caused the window to break has still not been determined. It was originally thought that the Post Office had been burglarized, but after a thorough check it was found that nothing was missing. Carl James, DeKalb County Criminal Investigator, and the Postal Inspector from Birmingham both came out and inspected the damage, however, at this time there is no evidence to indicate who or what accounted for the shattered pane.

February MAPA Meeting

February 3, 1987
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Poetry In Motion

by Greg Purvis

Like most forms of art, poetry and the written words is constantly changing. Following last month's story on Poetry, I would like to give an example of old poetry, and two examples of modern poetry.

Public Pool

This is my poem, an example of modern verse. If you've ever been to the pools in our state parks or to a big city, you will catch the images. Maybe this will help bring summer a little closer.

Smell the chlorine, dank and sour
Be on time—that magical hour
The pool gates swing in the summer's breeze
Enter the rancid child, graceful, with ease
The pool waters sparkle with faint green smells
But on the concrete beach you'll find no shells
No gentle waves or waters cool and mild
Here, everywhere, is the hot-faced child
An ocean of girls in their bathing caps
Bikini'd fads with babes in their laps
Sunning beauties with skin made of copper
The closing hour, all out, we pull the stopper
And the water runs down, out and away
Until another hot summer day.

Nonnahs

This is the last poem in my story, an example of ancient verse. It is Irish in origin, and was translated from Gaelic. The name NONNAHS is probably Celtic in origin. Spelled backwards it reads "Shannon."

In fields of violets and rolling moors
Where wolves prowl and snow piles on oaken doors
Where woods grow thick and grass, like velvet, thicker
I shall go to the fields and pick her

Of Nonnahs, my life!
I must have thy color to brighten my house!
I will pick you from British soil when the
Druids turn their head
And I shall plant you where the rose is sown
I shall love you 'till the earth is dead
Buried under your purple brand, your roots caress my
body.

I shall plant you in rich earth
Where the ferns are sodden
I shall water you with my sweetest love and
Shine, the sun in my eyes, goes down
To your petals.
Nonnahs

Earth Prayer

This is a modern poem with a strange use of imagery.

Let me be a tremendous rock
Of basalt or of granite
Let me be the axis pole
To hold up all the planet
To hold the world a-stage

The Groundhog

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THE GROUNDHOG STAFF

Luther Y. Keith, Editor
Darlene C. Keith, Associate Editor
Gregory Purvis, Reporter
Contributing Editors:
Desmond Disney
Mickey Strickland

MAPA OFFICERS

Amelia Brooks, Director
Donna Buckley, Associate Director
Bill Riedesel, Secretary
Harrell Jenkins, Treasurer

MENTONE, ALABAMA: A HISTORY

by Zora Shay Strayhorn

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A Description of the Mountain
Mentone's First Inhabitants, the Indians
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Post Civil War Times
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The Camps
The Churches
Personalities and Legends
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(continued from cover)

Ed and David Millican purchased a Citgo station in Valley Head (where the Chevron is now), and saw an opportunity to acquire the station at Mentone with Sam as a third partner. The station had been built in 1955 by a Mr. Gustafsen from Florida. There were 3 rooms originally, and the Whatley's added a grease bay, storeroom, and grocery store.

Ed decided to return to farming, so the partnership was dissolved, with Sam getting the station at Mentone and David Milligan keeping the Citgo in the valley. "It took me one year to go broke," Sam said. "Toots reminds me that the last loaf of bread in the store I sold on credit. I sold the store back to my Dad, and worked for Continental Telephone Co. a year before going back to Denver to take a construction job, then one with an elevator company. Sam spoke of his return to Mentone: 'My father was in bad health and needed me to help with the business.'

"There have been a lot of changes in the business over the years," Sam reflected, "new air tools, air-charged grease racks and such. There are many new products and now people have more money to buy them. I have had a lot of credit customers, but very few have failed to pay me. At times, I've had to carry people who were going through a rough time, but most of them I could count on to come through with what they owed, even if it took a long time."

Sam told of his love for his mountain home: "I like small towns where the people I come in contact with every day are people I know and care for. I like knowing that I can count on folks who are my friends as well as my customers, and they can depend on me. I operate the wrecker service mostly just to keep my neighbors from having to send for one from far off."

Residents around Mentone know they can depend on Sam Whatley to go above and beyond the usual and to support community efforts as well. He is a member of the Mentone Volunteer Fire Department, the DeSoto Rescue Squad, helped coach PeeWee football for four years, and was elected this past June to the position of "Worshipful Master" of his Masonic Lodge. Toots also gives much to the community; for example, her contribution of \$500.00 funded half of the cost of a new scoreboard for the gym at Moon Lake.

"I could not have made it without Toots' hard work and sacrifice," Sam said of his wife's contribution to the family's efforts. "I am able to take it a little easier because of all she has done to help build up what we have now. The only reason I would consider selling the business would be to give her the opportunity to stay at home and do some of the things she would like for a change."

Sam visits his Mom and Dad in Florida often, and values the old-time traditions of family and home. "My family—wife, children, grandchildren, parents and sisters hold the most important place in my life. I used to think money was important, but it comes to mean less and less as I get older and relationships begin to mean more and more."

Samuel Grady Weldon Whatley is the kind of man who makes our town such a unique place; Mentone is loved by its residents and remembered with longing by those who have gone afar. Mentone is fortunate that Sam and his family choose to make it their home.

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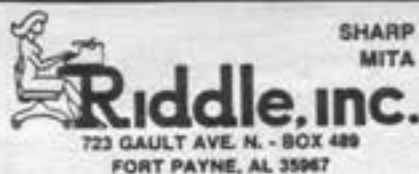
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Mountain Greenery

by Desmond Disney

Generally speaking, a properly balled and burlaped or container grown plant can be planted at any time during the year whenever the soil can be worked. This includes the winter where the soil does not freeze too hard to be dug. Bare rooted plants must be set in the ground when they are dormant—late fall through early spring.

At Nippersink and Camp Laney I usually wait until early spring to set out new trees and shrubs. This gives me time during the fall and winter to take note of "sore spots" and decide which plants will do best in different locations. Spring is also the best time for those plants that need all summer to grow so they will be well established before facing the rigors of our sometimes harsh winters.

There are advantages, however, to fall planting. The soil is more likely to be easier to dig—moist but not muddy and sticky, and since the soil is still warm new roots will sprout. The following spring these new roots will give the plants a head start over ones being planted at winter's end.

Be sure to give your trees and shrubs room to grow by setting them far apart. Place them no closer together than they will spread when fully grown. A plant that spreads 8 to 10 feet when mature should be placed 8 to 10 feet away from other trees and shrubs. When planting a shrub close to a house or other building be sure to set it far enough away so that when it matures it will not touch the wall. Space between house and plants permits good air circulation that lessens the chances of mildew and other diseases. In a sunny location it also prevents the plant from being baked dry by heat reflected from house walls. Avoid planting shrubs under an overhanging roof where rainfall might not reach the plant, and never plant directly under the drip line of a root where plants are likely to be damaged by falling icicles or clumps of snow. Sometimes it almost takes an act of faith to plant a young tree or shrub 5 to 6 feet from a building, but if it is a species that spreads 5 to 6 feet, it will need at least that much room—not only to avoid a cluttered look around the house, but to protect the health and shape of the plant.

There is more to the proper planting of trees and shrubs than just digging holes in the ground. Plants usually do not need coddling, but they will look better if they are given soil of proper acidity and texture.

Soil texture affects the root's supply of air and moisture. Even though some plants can grow in swamps and others on dry banks, most all of them do best in well drained, moderately porous soil. The best way to provide this is by adding organic matter such as peat moss, leaf mold, compost or decayed sawdust. They open up non-porous clay soils to improve drainage and admit air necessary for good root growth. Yet they are necessary in very porous earth for they retain moisture in light sandy soils that otherwise leak precious rain. If you use peat moss for conditioning soils, be sure to wet it repeatedly before using; otherwise, it will remain impermeable by water for a long time, then draw moisture from the surrounding soil to the detriment of the roots.

Since it is difficult or impossible to add organic matter to the soil (once the plants are in the ground) without injuring the roots, proper soil conditioning at planting time can make a great difference in the health of plants for years. Follow the nurseryman's adage and dig a "\$1000 hole for a \$5.00 plant," that is one twice the diameter of the rootball and one-and-a-half times its depth. To prepare the soil excavated from each planting hole use about one part organic matter to two parts soil and mix well. A light application of bone meal (cottonseed meal for acid loving plants) or dried cow manure mixed with the soil and organic matter will give a good start to the plants.

The acidity of the soil may need adjustment as much as its texture. A great many shrubs do well in soil that is very mildly acid, 6.0 to 7.0, but some shrubs, among them azaleas, bayberries, and blueberries, require soil that is more acidic, 4.5 to 5.5. For success with any trees or shrubs it is best to test the pH of your soil, either with an inexpensive kit available at garden centers, or by sending a soil sample to the county extension office.

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Mentone Resident Wins Contest

Tamra Hall, daughter of Frank and Mary Hall of Mentone, won the "Miss White Christmas" Pageant which was held in Fort Payne. Tamra is eleven years old and is a student in Mr. Bell's fifth grade class at Moon Lake Elementary where she makes all A's and B's.

She is a talented young lady whose interests include dancing, gymnastics, doll collecting, and reading. She won the DeKalb Co. 4-H Talent Show in her division at the County Fair in October.

Tamra is a cheerleader for the Moon Lake Tigers, and enjoys it very much. She would like to be a model when she grows up, and I would guess that someday she will grace the cover of Vogue and Mentone will name a street for her! Tamra, we knew you when!—MS

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