Back Matter

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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This Back Matter is brought to you for free and open access by LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Huntsville Historical Review by an authorized editor of LOUIS.
In his book Prefaces to History, the distinguished Civil War historian Bruce Catton tells of a historian who advised his students to study their history so diligently that they could hear the people of the period talk. Those of us who are local history buffs find this thought particularly noteworthy as we begin publication of the Huntsville Historical Review. Though we will aim for factual, well-researched material for the Review, we will not insist on having authoritative articles which fall within the special province of the academically trained historian. Our pitch primarily is to give the local historian the opportunity to publish some of his material which does not reach the standards required by a more scholarly journal. Indeed, it seems to me sometimes that local historians have a special calling in life. Where the professional historian is concerned with the sweeping social, political, and economic events of past ages, the local historian is given the unique opportunity to become personally acquainted with individuals who were involved in these great forces. The historical period, thus, often takes on a larger dimension for the researcher.

Some years ago I became intensely absorbed in some research on the life of David William Baine. Through my delving, I discovered a person who is
practically lost to history, despite the fact that he exercised a significant influence on the events leading up to Alabama's departure from the Union in 1861. Baine, I found, was a political protegé of the ardent secessionist, William Lowndes Yancey. With Yancey, he stalked out of the Democratic National Convention which convened in Baltimore in 1860, thus helping split the National Party and assure the election of Abraham Lincoln as president. Later, with secession a fact, Baine was a member of the delegation which welcomed Confederate President Jefferson Davis to Montgomery for the inaugural ceremonies. He enlisted in the Confederate Army and quickly rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel of the 14th Alabama Regiment. He died on June 30, 1862, while leading a charge into a withering Federal fire at the Battle of Frazier's Farm during the Seven Day's Battles around Richmond. After the war, young Baine was briefly remembered when the Alabama Legislature established Baine County in 1866. But because this name was distasteful to the Reconstruction government which was imposed on the state in 1867, the county in 1868 was renamed "Etowah," the name which it proudly bears today.

My point is this: as David William Baine emerged from the shadows of history through my research, I found more there than mere fragments of his life. A panorama of historical events in which I had little more than a passing interest up until then began to unfold before me. As time has gone on there have been many other stimulating experiences equally as profitable to me as this one.

The Review will enable many of us to share our information about the past with each other. As Madison County Commission Chairman James Record sometimes states: "We learn to go forward by studying backwards." In this great Tennessee Valley we
are fortunate to reside in a place impregnated with a grand historical record which stretches back to the earliest settlement of Alabama. We can all profit by having a better knowledge of those who have gone before us as we write our own historical record today.

So the Huntsville Historical Review takes its first peep of modern Madison County. May it live a long life and may its influence be far-reaching.