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THE HUNTSVILLE HISTORICAL REVIEW

Huntsville, Alabama

Volume 2

April, 1972

Number 2

Editor
Elbert L. Watson

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LELAND R. JOHNSON is a historical research consultant in Hermitage, Tennessee, and previous contributor to the Review.

MIA TAYLOR was a long time resident of Madison County. His recollections are on file in the Huntsville Heritage Room at the Huntsville Public Library.

BESSIE RUSSELL is supervisor of the Huntsville Heritage Room at the Huntsville Public Library.

THE JAMES GANG IN HUNTSVILLE

By Leland R. Johnson

Gloomy, rainy, windy, March 11, 1881, was a typical late winter day in northern Alabama. Reconstruction had ended, memories of the Civil War had faded, but times were still hard, jobs difficult to find, and several young men from Huntsville traveled to Muscle Shoals, a few miles to the west, where the federal government was hiring men to work on the Canal project. The state of Alabama had partially constructed a canal around Muscle Shoals in the 1830's, and after the Civil War the federal government authorized the reconstruction and completion of the project. The Corps of Engineers, United States Army, began planning for the Muscle Shoals project in 1871 and initiated construction in 1875, but progress was continually hampered by repeated floods in the Tennessee River and a working force seriously debilitated by fevers. A man who took a job at Muscle Shoals risked his life, but the salary, though not great, was regular and was paid in good hard cash.¹

Men who worked on the project lived in camps located along the canal towpath, and at Bluewater Engineer Construction Camp (near the present site of Wheeler Dam), Alexander G. Smith, paymaster and receiver of materials, began his weekly twenty-mile ride into Florence, Alabama, on March 11, 1881. It

was payday, and, despite the rain and wind, Smith had to pick up the weekly payroll to keep the men at the project happy. He reached Florence before noon, withdrew the payroll from the bank, packed the gold, silver, and currency firmly into his saddlebag, adjusted the revolver dangling from his belt, and mounted up for the return trip. Smith took the bridle path which followed the line of the Canal through what was then a deserted wilderness, unbroken save by the Engineer construction camps every few miles.²

About two miles from Bluewater Camp, Smith dismounted to open a gate and was overtaken by three strangers who "presented pistols at his head" and relieved him of his revolver and the payroll, amounting to \$5240.80 in cash. The bandits rode "hell-for-leather" toward the Tennessee state line, forcing Smith to accompany them into the desolate "barrens." The men were nervous but voluble, Smith later recalled, and one courteously presented the paymaster with a calling card which read: "I am yours truly, Henry Smith, who the devil are you." Though the men were bearded and kept their slouch hats pulled low over their faces, the paymaster watched them carefully.³

After a hectic ride north to somewhere near the Tennessee state line, the men reined in their horses, dismounted, and split up the loot, generously (and true to the Robin Hood tradition associated with the James Gang) allowing the paymaster to keep his own money and gold watch. Night was approaching when they remounted and a terrific thunderstorm was beginning; one of the outlaws tossed the paymaster a coat and told him to make himself comfortable for the night. Then they left him to grope his way back to camp through the woods and blinding storm while they made their getaway.⁴

Not until daybreak was Smith able to find his way

back to camp, but when he arrived the Engineer construction crew mounted up, split into several posses, and rode hard in several directions in the hope of intercepting the bandits. The three robbers had been well-mounted and they had admitted to Alexander Smith that they were old hands at their chosen profession. Although the Engineer posses pursued the highwaymen nearly to the Cumberland River, the rainstorm had obliterated most of the tracks and further pursuit proved impossible. The Engineers returned wearily to camp.⁵

The Engineer officer in charge of the construction of Muscle Shoals Canal was Major William P. King, Corps of Engineers (U. S. Army Engineer District, Chattanooga). Major King was a Civil War combat veteran and an authority on waterways construction engineering. He interviewed the paymaster, then notified authorities in nearby cities to be on the lookout for the bandits and telegraphed the bad news to the Secretary of War. It appeared for the moment that the bandits had gotten cleanly away. However, a major break in the case occurred on March 26 at Whites Creek, Tennessee.⁶

A well-dressed stranger rode into Whites Creek, a village near Nashville, Tennessee, entered a saloon, and ordered raw oysters and raw whiskey with predictable results--he got drunk, flourished a pistol, and it took several strong men to disarm and subdue him. A search of the stranger, who told them his name was "Tom Hill," revealed that he was carrying almost \$1500 in gold coin. He was turned over to Nashville police, and the large sum of cash in his possession brought him under suspicion in the Muscle Shoals robbery. Alexander G. Smith was summoned to Nashville, where he identified Hill as one of the men who had robbed him. The cash in the possession of Hill was attached by Nashville authorities and

eventually returned to the United States government. Nashville police wired a description of the man to law enforcement agencies around the country and word came back from Missouri that "Tom Hill" was none other than William Ryan, alias Jack Ryan, known by some as "Whiskey Head" Ryan, a member of the notorious Jesse James Gang.⁷

Meanwhile, Major William P. King of the Corps of Engineers conducted a private investigation and learned that the other two bandits might still be nearby. Nevertheless, the Major was unable to get satisfaction from the authorities: the marshal refused to ride after the bandits because there was no detachment of soldiers to help him make the arrest; local police would not give chase, because, the Major believed, they feared for their lives; and Major King had no funds to furnish a reward which might encourage bounty hunters to go after the two bandits.⁸

Major King explained by telegraph to Secretary of War Robert Lincoln (son of President Lincoln) that he could get no cooperation from local officers of the law. The Secretary of War asked and received the aid of the Justice Department--the Attorney General ordered the United States Marshals to enter the man-hunt. Nevertheless, the two robbers made good their escape into Kentucky, where they had relatives and many notorious hideouts, and from thence went to Missouri (so the U. S. Marshals believed). Major King sorrowfully concluded in his official report on the affair to the Chief of Engineers, United States Army, that the "other two robbers, and, I fear, Ryan himself (for he was, at last advices, expecting to get released on bail), were doubtless engaged in the recent capture of the train near Winston, Mo., and as the governor has offered heavy rewards for them, they will probably be captured, though there is little prospect that any more of the money stolen at Muscle Shoals will be recovered."⁹

It was eventually discovered that Jesse and Frank James had lived with their families in homes in and around Nashville from about 1875 until the capture of Ryan in 1881. Except for a fondness for fast horses, which they rode at local fairs, they passed as respectable citizens, Jesse under the alias J. D. "Tom" Howard and Frank as B. J. "Ben" Woodson. Neither attracted much attention at the time, although their long absences from home were later recalled by those who had been acquainted with them. The robbery of the Engineers at Muscle Shoals and the subsequent capture of "Whiskey Head" Ryan apparently forced them to give up their hideout in Nashville, for these events had brought the United States Marshals into the manhunt. The two brothers evidently returned to Missouri, a heavy reward was placed on their heads. Jesse James, while living under his "Howard" alias at St. Joseph, Missouri, was shot by Robert Ford on April 3, 1882. Not long thereafter, Frank James surrendered himself to the governor of Missouri.¹⁰

Meanwhile, at the scene of the Muscle Shoals robbery in North Alabama, United States Marshal Joseph H. Ross, Assistant District Attorney Lionel W. Day, and others quietly gathered the evidence in the case at Huntsville. Affidavits were collected from Alexander Smith, Major King, and others and a warrant was issued against William Ryan, but the Justice Department chose to let Missouri officials handle Ryan, for proof was positive in the cases pending against Ryan there. By October, 1882, enough evidence had been collected to convince a federal grand jury in Huntsville that the members of the James Gang were the culprits. The jury brought in a blanket indictment:

"The Grand Jurors of the United States. . . for the body of said northern district of Alabama, upon their oaths present that heretofore to wit, on the Elev-

enth day of March A D 1881, in said northern district of Alabama, in the county of Lauderdale, Jesse James, Frank James, Thomas Hill alias William Ryan alias Dick Ryan and Richard Little, alias Dick Little alias Dick Liddil, alias Richard Lee, unlawfully and fraudulently conspired, combined, confederated and agreed together between themselves and with divers other evil disposed persons to the Grand Jurors unknown, to rob one Alexander G. Smith of a large sum of money.

They, with force and arms, made an assault upon the said Alexander G. Smith and then and there feloniously and violently took from the person of the said Alexander G. Smith against his will, and carried away, the said sum¹¹

Dick Liddil was arrested and brought to Huntsville in 1883 by the United States Marshals. He confessed to being a member of the James Gang, but swore that he was not present at, or party to, the robbery of Alexander Smith at Muscle Shoals. That larceny, he said, was committed by William Ryan and Frank and Jesse James. Liddil was found guilty of complicity in the crime, as a member of the gang, but the judge suspended the sentence so Liddil might be returned to Missouri to testify in cases pending there against other members of the James Gang.¹²

Frank James was acquitted in Missouri for crimes committed in that state, his case becoming a Confederate cause celebre because of his service with Quantrill's Raiders during the Civil War. In April, 1884, the United States Marshals brought James from Missouri to Huntsville to stand trial for the Muscle Shoals robbery in the Circuit Court of the United States for the Northern District of Alabama. There was considerable interest in the case, and for a time Huntsville basked in the limelight of national attention as reporters dispatched daily summaries of the events of the trial to newspapers.¹³

General Leroy Pope Walker, former Confederate Secretary of War, was chief counsel for James. He was assisted by Raymond B. Sloan of Nashville, Tennessee, and Richard Walker of Huntsville. Their fees were probably paid by a Confederate veterans' organization, though the federal government paid the expenses of witnesses for the defense because James claimed he was unable to do so. United States District Attorney William H. Smith, former Reconstruction governor of Alabama, was chief prosecutor; he was assisted by Captain Lionel W. Day, former Assistant District Attorney. Judge Harry Bruce presided impartially over what promised to be a melodramatic confrontation, for both Governor William H. Smith and General Leroy P. Walker were capable of fiery courtroom oratory.¹⁴

The trial was to begin on April 16, and the courtroom was crowded to capacity, but some of the witnesses from Nashville did not appear and the trial was postponed until the following day. On April 17 the court was again packed with spectators when the selection of the jury began. General Walker and Governor Smith immediately plunged into quarrels over legal technicalities, much to the satisfaction of the crowd, but the selection went quickly and all twelve jurors were seated in the morning. A reporter described them as "a very fair looking body, most of them evidently from the country."¹⁵

Except for a few witnesses, the only woman in the courtroom was Annie James, the wife of Frank, who was accompanied by their six-year-old son, Robert. The widow of Jesse James, Zee James, had also come to Huntsville for the trial, but she was ill and did not attend sessions of the court. Frank James, a distinguished-appearing man, age forty-one, was escorted into the room by a deputy sheriff. He was well-dressed and wore a Prince Albert coat, clothing supposedly

given him by his Confederate comrades. One reporter thought it would have been very easy to mistake him for one of the attorneys in the case.¹⁶

The weather that April was wet, too wet for planting, and farmers from the Huntsville-Madison County area flocked into town to watch the trial and catch a glimpse of the famous outlaw. His reputation as a Confederate soldier was known, and he often let it be known that he had surrendered so he could see his mother again and settle down to a life of peaceful farming. There was considerable sympathy for him in Madison County. Gifts of fruit and flowers arrived at the jail for him every day during the trial, and he wore proudly a gold ring given him by some Huntsville admirer.¹⁷

There can be little doubt that James, as Ben Woodson, had lived a respectable life in Nashville, Tennessee, because a number of substantial citizens from Nashville traveled to Huntsville to testify in his behalf. James farmed, hauled logs, and raised horses while living near Nashville, and he was well and favorably known, by his alias, to the police of Nashville and to Davidson County authorities. At Huntsville, even in jail, he was treated as a gentleman and something of a hero. A curious crowd of well-wishers trailed him each time he was moved from jail to court and back.¹⁸

After the jury had been seated, the legal skirmishing began in earnest. General Walker, whose long gray beard gave him an air of "utmost distinction," was constantly picking apart the prosecution. A reporter described him as the "most notable figure" in the courtroom. Governor Smith, chief prosecutor, called the first witness for the government, Thomas Peden, who was to identify Frank James as one of the robbers. Peden owned a saloon near Muscle Shoals Canal which was frequented by many of the visitors

who came to see the project under construction. Peden testified that on the day of the robbery three strangers, who caught his attention, visited his establishment at lunch time. He stated that Frank James was one of these men. General Walker, who was famous for his scathing cross examinations, broke the story by bringing out the fact that Peden had been taken into the jail at Huntsville before the trial, where James had been pointed out to him. General Walker had James don a slouch hat similar to those worn by the robbers on the day of the robbery, and in the most dramatic moment of the trial walk back and forth before the witness. The witness claimed that he thought James was one of the men he had seen the day of the robbery, but admitted that he could not make a positive identification under oath. General Walker had won the first round.¹⁹

The prosecution next called Alexander G. Smith, the government paymaster, to the stand. Smith explained the circumstances of the robbery and his subsequent identification of William Ryan. But on cross examination he, like Peden, could only say that he thought "James was one of the men; believe he is, but would not say positively. . ." The last witness of the first day of the trial, J. N. Wilcoxon, testified that he had met three strangers on the day of the robbery, but his description of them differed materially from that of the first two witnesses. By the end of the first day, the attorneys for the defense were confident of acquittal.²⁰

Dick Liddil was called to the stand the following morning. Liddil, previously convicted for complicity in the crime as a member of the James Gang, had agreed with Missouri authorities to testify against James in the Muscle Shoals case. General Walker objected to the admission of Liddil's testimony because Liddil had been convicted for stealing a horse

in Missouri. The prosecution replied that Liddil had been pardoned for that offense and produced the papers to prove it. Judge Bruce allowed his testimony. Liddil swore that William Ryan and Frank and Jesse James had left Nashville on March 6, 1881. He stated that the two brothers were wearing sandy beards and Ryan a black beard when they left Nashville, and when they returned several days later they were wearing only mustaches and sideburne. He testified that they remained in Nashville until they learned of the capture of Ryan, and then rode north to stay with friends in Logan County, Kentucky. These friends, Silas Norris and Sarah Hite, were brought to the stand to confirm the latter part of Liddil's testimony.²¹

By Saturday, public sentiment in Huntsville was running strongly in favor of Frank James. The trial was the only subject of discussion among the customary Saturday visitors to town. A reporter observed that the people "gather in knots on the corners and argue legal points as if they held a consulting connection with the counsel in the case." No one believed Dick Liddil. He had a shifty look about him, and freely admitted that he was being paid by Missouri officials to testify against James. Many spectators, said a reporter, "openly declare that they would not believe him on oath whatever the circumstances."²²

The prosecution presented its last two witness on Saturday. Hugh Riley, the bartender at Peden's saloon, confirmed the story of Tom Peden; Alfred Hill testified that three men stayed at his house north of the canal before the robbery and made inquiry about the date the canal employees were paid. Neither, however, could do more than say that Frank James resembled one of the men.²³

The defense then called its first witness, Sam Fields, a Nashville detective. He swore that he had known Ben Woodson (James) for several years, and

that he had seen him on the day of the robbery in Nashville. The second witness for the defense, Jonas Taylor, a blacksmith, also testified that he had seen James in Nashville on the day of the robbery and had account books which showed that James had done business with him on March 11 and 12, 1881. These were produced and submitted as evidence. The prosecution examined them and pointed out the different handwritings in which entries were made, the mutilated and smeared condition of the book, and the fact that the entries of March 11 and 12 were not made in the same column as previous entries. Taylor explained that he could not write so his books were kept for him by friends and these particular accounts had been in a fire since 1881. ²⁴

General Walker, chief counsel for the defense, was ill on Tuesday and the trial was continued until the following day. On Wednesday, the prosecution was permitted to call several more witnesses who had seen three strangers near the Canal at the time of the robbery. The witnesses described the strangers but none made a positive identification of Frank James as one of the three. Several witnesses for the defense, on the other hand, testified to the sterling character of James when he lived in Nashville as Ben Woodson and two swore they had seen him in Nashville on March 11, 1881. ²⁵

When the attorneys began their closing arguments on Thursday, sentiment in Huntsville was even more favorable to James than when the trial began; a reporter commented that "on the streets nothing but the most ardent wishes for his acquittal are heard." Friday, April 25, at 1:30 p. m., Judge Harry Bruce instructed the jury, in what both the prosecution and the defense admitted was a fair and impartial manner, and the jury retired to consider the case. The court assembled at 3:00, but the jury was still out

and it remained out, deliberating the case for four hours. At 6:30 p.m. the jury returned to the courtroom and delivered its verdict: "Not Guilty."²⁶

One historian has described the scene in this manner: "the twelve old Confederates filled solemnly from the room. Almost immediately they returned, their faces all smiles. Their verdict was a unanimous 'NOT GUILTY'--for Frank's able attorneys, Confederate hero General Leroy Walker, Richard Walker and R. B. Sloan, had done an excellent job on convincing the jury that Frank James was a misguided ex-Confederate private."²⁷ Indeed, there was much sympathy for James because of his military service, but the facts of the case do not substantiate the implied slur on the Circuit Court of the Northern District of Alabama. Both sides admitted the judge was impartial. The jury was out for four hours; it did not return immediately. The verdict had to be a unanimous "Not Guilty;" otherwise, there would have been no verdict. A juror later stated that on the first ballot the vote had been nine to three for acquittal, and that it was not until the last ballot that the minority had come around.²⁸

It is evident that the prosecution did not prove its case. None of the witnesses for the government, not even paymaster Smith, were able to swear on oath that Frank James was, without doubt, one of the men who committed the crime. And the testimony of Dick Liddil was questionable, if not worthless, to the government's case. The defense, on the other hand, had several reputable witnesses who swore on oath that Frank James was in Nashville on the day of the robbery. In short, the verdict of the jury really hinged on whose testimony they would accept--that of witnesses who thought they had seen James with the two other robbers, or of witnesses who were positive they had seen James in Nashville on March 11, 1881.

It is evident that the jurymen considered this question at some length before rendering their verdict.²⁹

It is quite possible that, in spite of the reputation of Frank James, the jury was correct. Another member of the James Gang, perhaps even Dick Liddil, may have been the third robber. Certainly, there was "reasonable doubt" that Frank James was the man. Frank James did not deny that the James Gang committed the crime. But, he said that "whatever Jesse might have done, he had no connection with the many crimes charged to the James Gang."³⁰

The cheers were deafening when the jury brought in its verdict. Frank James showed no emotion; he shook hands with his attorneys, then a sheriff arrested him to return him to Missouri for another trial. Crowds from the courtroom and some members of the jury followed James to a hotel to shake hands, and the demonstration of the pleasure of Huntsville with the verdict lasted far into the evening. There was even a band which serenaded James and his attorneys from outside the hotel. There was some hope that Frank James would favor the town with a speech, but that night he was whisked out of town by the sheriff from Missouri who had purposely created the impression that he was leaving on a later train.³¹

Frank James was never convicted on any charge of substance. When finally released by Missouri authorities, he returned to farming in Oklahoma and Missouri. He also worked at jobs in Dallas and St. Louis, appeared at fairs as a race starter, and even joined Cole Younger in a Wild West Show. He died peacefully in 1915.³²

Major William R. King, whose efforts had contributed to the destruction of the James Gang, was transferred from the Muscle Shoals project in 1886, and served as Commandant of the Engineer School, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army, until shortly before

his death in 1898. Muscle Shoals Canal was completed under the direction of Colonel John W. Barlow and Captain George W. Goethals. It opened to traffic in 1890 and closed when the construction of Wilson Dam began in 1819. Except for money taken from "Whiskey Head" Ryan, none of the funds stolen from the paymaster in 1881 were ever recovered, "Whiskey Head" Ryan was sentenced to twenty-five years for train robbery in Missouri, but was released in 1889 because of his poor health. However, his old habits caught up with him--he hit a tree limb while riding full gallop and fatally injured himself.³³

¹Details of the 1871-1890 reconstruction of the canal are provided in Leland R. Johnson, "19th Century Engineering: The Muscle Shoals Canal," Military Engineer, LXIII (July-August, 1971), 260-65.

²Ibid., p. 264; Chattanooga Daily Times, March 15, 1881.

³Chattanooga Daily Times, March 15, 1881.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.. United States Army, Corps of Engineers, Office of the Chief of Engineers, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, United States Army, to the Secretary of War, for the year 1881 (3 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), II, 1847-48 (cited hereinafter as Chief of Engineers, Annual Report, 1881).

⁶Chief of Engineers, Annual Report, 1881, II, 1847-1848; Charles N. Branham, ed., Register of Graduates and Former Cadets of the United States Military Academy (West Point, New York; West Point Alumni Foundation, Inc., 1860), p. 210, provides biographical sketch of Major King; see Leland R. Johnson, "19th Century Engineering: The Muscle Shoals Canal," Military Engineer, LXIII (July-August, 1871), pp. 262-63, for additional information and a portrait of the officer.

⁷Chief of Engineers, Annual Report, 1881, II, 1847-1848; William A. Settle, Jr., Jesse James Was His Name or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966), p. 133 (cited hereinafter as Settle, Jesse James); Carl W. Breihan, The Day Jesse James Was Killed (New York: Bonanza Books, 1962), pp. 98-99 (cited hereinafter as Breihan, Jesse James). Breihan provides a thorough and vivid account of the life of James, while Settle is scholarly and authoritative. There is extensive literature about the James Gang, but the accounts by Breihan and Settle are the most useful.

⁸Chief of Engineers, Annual Report, 1881, II, 1847048.

⁹Ibid.; an extensive correspondence ensued between Major King, the Chief of Engineers, the Secretary of War, the Attorney General, and various United States Marshals and District Attorneys. It is on file in Records of the Office of Chief of Engineers and Records of the War Department, Old Military Records Branch, National Archives. Copies are in possession of the author. On July 15, 1881, a train on the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad was robbed near Winston, Daviess County, Missouri, about sixty five miles from Kansas City and the conductor was murdered. As a result, the governor of Missouri offered \$5,000 reward for the James brothers. A portion of this reward eventually went to those who apprehended William Ryan. Settle, Jesse James, pp. 107-10, 119.

¹⁰Settle, Jesse James, pp. 129-30; articles about their stay in Nashville are found in: Nashville Banner, April 19, 22, May 1, October 10, 13, 1992; Nashville Daily American, April 19-20, October 6, 9-14, 1882. See also Jesse James, Jr., Jesse James, My Father (Cleveland: Arthur Westbrook Co., 1899), pp. 5-6, 74.

¹¹Joseph H. Ross to Wayne McVeagh, July 15, 1881, Record Group No. 60, Records of the Office of Attorney General, Legislative, Judicial, and Diplomatic Records Branch, National Archives; William H. Smith to Wayne McVeagh, July 15, 1881, ibid.; Lionel W. Day to Attorney General, July 18, 1881, ibid.; United States, Circuit Court for the Northern District of Alabama, "Criminal Case No. 3063 (U. S. vs. Frank James and others)," on file in Regional Archives Branch, Federal Records Center,

East Point, Georgia, includes the indictment along with other papers and evidence in the James case.

¹²United States, Circuit Court for Northern District of Alabama, "Criminal Case No. 2710 (U. S. vs. Dick Liddil, alias Dick Little), " ibid., includes the official records of the Liddil case; Settle, Jesse James, pp. 137-38.

¹³Breihan, Jesse James, 155-56; Settle, Jesse James, pp. 152-53; for a running account of the trial as it progressed see Chattanooga Evening News, April 16-26, 1884, and Nashville Daily American, April 15-27, 1884. The James trial made the front page in these two newspapers; evidently the same reporter telegraphed the story nightly to both papers (he is not identified). The story as it appeared in the Daily American will be cited hereinafter.

¹⁴Settle, Jesse James, pp. 140-41, 152-53; Breihan, Jesse James, p. 164; Nashville Daily American, April 18, 1884.

¹⁵Nashville Daily American, April 17-18, 1884; see official papers and evidence in the case in United States, Circuit Court for the Northern District of Alabama, "Criminal Case No. 3063 (U. S. vs. Frank James and others), " Regional Archives Branch, Federal Records Center, East Point, Georgia.

¹⁶Nashville Daily American, April 18-19, 1884.

¹⁷Ibid., April 18-20, 1884.

¹⁸Ibid., April 20-22, 1884.

¹⁹Ibid., April 18-19, 1884.

²⁰Ibid., April 18-20, 1884.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., April 21, 1884.

²³Ibid., April 20, 1884.

²⁴Ibid., April 20-21, 1884.

²⁵Ibid., April 22-24, 1884.

²⁶Ibid., April 24-26, 1884.

²⁷Breihan, Jesse James, p. 164.

²⁸Nashville Daily American, April 24-26, 1884.

²⁹Ibid., April 15-27, 1884; Settle, Jesse James, pp. 152-53.

³⁰Nashville Daily American, April 23, 1884.

³¹Ibid., April 26-27, 1884.

³²Breihan, Jesse James, pp. 167-70.

³³Ibid., p. 99; Leland R. Johnson, "19th Century Engineering; The Muscle Shoals Canal," Military Engineer. LXIII (July-August, 1871), 260-65. Colonel John W. Barlow served as Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army, in 1901; Captain George W. Goethals later directed the construction of the Panama Canal.

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS OF MADISON COUNTY

by Mia Taylor

I was born in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, in the year 1801, two miles from Lexington. My father was a native of Virginia, and a soldier in the War of Independence. He entered the army the second year and was first at the battle of Monmouth. This battle was fought on one of the hottest days on record, and my father said that after the battle many of the British were found dead on the field without any wound.

He came to South Carolina in Lighthorse Harry Lee's command and participated in the many battles and skirmishes ending in the occupation, and at the close of the war had risen to the rank of Lieutenant of a Cavalry Company. He was in the disastrous charge at Quinby Bridge where, owing to misdirection of orders, the advance was not supported, and out of twenty, only five made good their retreat, all the others being killed or captured. As the survivors fought their way back across the bridge, a sturdy Briton, endeavoring to bar their passage, was cut down by a saber stroke across the face.

Twenty years afterward he and my father met at a horse race in Lexington, Georgia, and renewed their acquaintance under more favorable auspices. Coming southward at the close of the Revolution, my father settled at Lexington, then near the (Chickasaw) frontier.

As there was continual ill feeling between the Cherokees and whites, a Scouting Company was organized, which my father commanded for over ten years. (On June 24, 1779, at Martinsville, Henry County, Virginia, he had married Hannah, daughter of Miles Jennings of that County. Marriage is on record at Martinsville, Virginia.

The Georgians had suffered severely from Indian hostilities, and for many years, though this tribe bore ostensibly peaceful relations toward the Federal Government, there was a constant predatory warfare waged between them and the white pioneers, the Indian stealing and occasionally massacreing and the whites retaliating with tenfold severity. Occasionally horses would be stolen, a house burned and its occupants murdered or taken captive, then would follow a sudden raid into the Indian country, captives frequently being recovered, towns burned and Indians indiscriminately slaughtered. My first recollections are of a double log house near pine forest, a large cleared field adjoining, cultivated by negro slaves. In summer a table of pine slabs was set in the yard between the dwelling house and cabin. Around this near sunset were gathered my six older brothers and my older sister, tall, lithe and graceful as a fawn, while my mother with her kind loving face sat at the head of the table with my three year old sister at her knee, and my baby brother in her arms. My father, who then was approaching middle age was frequently absent or was detained by business until we small children had retired. The Indians by this time had been gradually forced back towards the mountains, and Lexington was no longer on the frontier. Yet there were scores of old soldiers of the Revolution and veterans of the Indian wars in the country. And on long winter evenings, they gathered around each other's hearths and fought their battles over again, and many were the marvelous

tales of peril and adventure and of hardship that we listened to with greedy ears and glowing faces.

Our country was a veritable land of plenty, the woods were full of game and the rivers of fish, and cattle and sheep and swine fairly swarmed in the woods. We very seldom had wheaten bread, but we had Indian corn in greatest abundance, from which food of endless variety was prepared. I don't think any cotton was raised, but we had linsey and jeans and every family had its flax wheel and a little patch of flax. And then we had plenty of buckskin, the never failing resource of the back woods.

But this country was growing too thickly settled by typical pioneers and my father belonged to that class. So in the year 1806, with his wife and nine children and about a dozen negroes, he loaded up his wagons and pack horses and set his face westward. My father and his two oldest sons rode in front, followed by our two wagons with their negro drivers, then came my mother and the two youngest children on pack horses, followed by negro women and children on foot, and some on horseback, while two of my brothers, sixteen and eighteen years of age, with a trusty negro servant brought up the rear. It seemed to me that we were traveling for a month or months. We traveled about fifteen miles per day over roads not well opened and frequently we had to cut timber out of the road, fill up excavations, and camping by the side of swollen streams to wait patiently for them to subside. We occasionally passed by Indian villages, and my father being well up in the Cherokee tongue was hospitably welcomed and entertained. After we got out of Oglethorpe County we saw no more white people, until we came to what is now Murfreesboro on Duck River, where we found a few white settlers and a grist mill in course of erection.

We had left Georgia about the first of March and

it was now near the first of April. My father had for many years desired to go to the great bend of the Tennessee, so tarrying on Duck River, just long enough to lay in a month's supply of bread and salt, he turned southward and traveled steadily for about a week and one fine spring evening we came to Elk River. The stream was clear and the adjoining lands fertile and near at hand was a bold, clear stream pouring its swift waters into the main stream. We skirted along this stream for near two miles northward, when we came to a low limestone ridge from which the stream rose in the form of a fine bold spring, gushing from the face of the rock. Here we rested for the night, our tents were erected near the spring and when I rose the next morning a little after sunrise, the negroes were dressing a fine venison my father had shot, and a large rattlesnake was suspended from the limb of a spreading beech tree near the camp. The day was devoted to an exploration of the country and everyone pronounced it a goodly land. On the third morning the sound of the maul and ax and the crash of falling timber awoke the echoes, soon the walls of a log cabin began to arise, the ridge pole and pieces were put on, boards riven from the heart of white oak covered it, puncheons hewn out from small logs split in the middle floored it. A chimney was built of split sticks, and the white family moved in. The negroes at first slept under the trees. The weather was warm and pleasant, night was hideous with the wail of whippoorwill, hooting of owls and screaming of wildcats and howling of wolves. In the morning, day was heralded by the song of the mockingbird and thrush, the cawing crows and the gobble of wild turkeys in the tall tree tops. All nature was animated and the forest and streams seemed densely populated with beast and bird, flesh and fowl, everything except man.

Our family for months had no visitors. This region did not appear to have been intruded on even by the savage. The Indians had left no traces of settlement in the neighborhood. We had dropped into the midst of an immense hunting ground, with no one to molest or make afraid. We lived from the forest and with an occasional pilgrimage to Murfreesboro, the year was passed by our family in a state of complete isolation from the world. A large corn patch had been cleared up and corn was planted in holes dug with a hoe among the stumps and roots, and bread was raised in more than sufficient quantity for the coming season. The Indian corn on these fresh original lands grew to a height of twelve or thirteen feet and produced two or three large ears to the stalk. We were a mile from the Elk River and the little creek, (Taylor's Creek) on whose banks we settled still bears the name bestowed on it by my father. We had been located here for a year, and were living in the midst of plenty. We had no sickness during the year. We made enough corn for bread, and had made two hominy mortars, by burning holes in the ends of two large hickory blocks, and we worked the pestles with sweeps and in this way we obtained very good bread. The woods furnished an endless variety of meats, and when winter came, we started a sugar camp in the hills where the sugar maples stood thickest and made a considerable quantity of sugar and molasses. We had salt from Nashville. At the close of the year a road was blazed out all the way and as there was no other wide blazed road, no frontiersmen could mistake the way.

When the next spring opened many newcomers came to the beautiful and fertile region, where we had located and quite a settlement sprang up. This was a very agreeable experience after the solitude of the preceding year, and among the number were some of our relatives, who had followed our footsteps from Georgia,

and who received a warm welcome. But in a year or two hunters began to tell of a country still further south, down towards the Great Tennessee River. They reported this country to be of unexampled (sic) fertility, well watered by many streams flowing south, clear and sparkling as the Elk itself. And one or two adventurous hunters reported that they had found, after following these streams southward, that they all merged into one strong and clear rapid little river, that they called Flint, and when they came to the junction of the two larger streams, they found a well defined path leading from it through thickets and canebrakes toward the mountain that could be seen in the distance. As night approached they had reached the foot of the mountain and encamped near a spring. Next morning they ascended the mountain which was covered with heavy timber, and from a cliff looked down on a vast swampy region with water gleaming in the distance. They treaded southward, ascending as they went, until just before reaching the mountain summit, they came to a spring in a dark mountain gorge, with waters of ice coldness. Skirting the mountaintop, they followed a sinuous mountain ridge, covered with heavy growth of cedar that shut from their view the surrounding country. As they descended they found traces of a beaten path that grew plainer as they gradually descended. Presently the cedar gave place to magnificent oak and poplar growth and they knew that they were at the mountain base, yet they found swamps and marshes on either side. On the north side was a long, dark ravine at the foot of an almost perpendicular cliff of limestone, from the foot of which issued a large stream of water that spread over the swampy country below.

Soon there was considerable inquiry concerning the new region, to which our hunters had penetrated, and my father began to talk of moving further south.

We had been living on Elk River now for three or four years, and the settlements were gradually extending southward, over into new land just purchased from the Indians in Mississippi Territory. My father and his boys and negroes had cleared and cultivated some twenty acres, mostly in corn and pumpkins, though we had a little flax patch and my mother had a flax wheel or two, which was generally kept in motion. By this time a mill had been built on Elk near the mouth of the little creek on which my father settled. I have not visited the spot in fifty years, and they told me that there is now a cotton factory near where the mill stood. At the time of which I speak, the water was carried in a race to the high bank of the creek and its waters projected against an overshot wheel. The building was a mere shed to protect the works, which were crude in character as the stones had been quarried from the adjacent mountains or highlands, but still, crude though it was in character, yet it supplied the most of the neighborhood.

Occasionally were seen the pack horses of settlers beyond the line in Mississippi Territory, they attracted as much attention from our little community as a traveler from the Anitpodes would not command. These tall stately men in buckskin clothing were enthusiastic in the praise of the new country beyond the state line, and while a large number of settlers pouring into Elk River country, a considerable number of the old pioneers were going further south. One reason for emigration was that Tennessee was a state and was extending its laws over its new settlements. In 1806-7 the Indians relinquished the vast triangle to the United States, the base of which extended from the highlands and headwaters of Elk to the mouth of Elk River, and whose apex was one hundred miles southward in Chickasaw Island. On (the) Tennessee River there was a heavy emigration southward and a little

town began to spring up at Winchester. Many of the pioneers had spent the larger portion of their lives on the frontiers of civilization and laws and regulations of settled communities were somewhat irksome. While they were naturally peaceful and orderly, yet habit had them fond of old pioneer laws, that usually had been potent for the preservation of order in their communities, and when law was extended over them they generally declined appointments involving administration of the laws, and held themselves aloof from the courts. When, by traveling a dozen miles, they could pass beyond the jurisdiction of state authority, it didn't take long for many of them to cross over the state line. By this time a road had been blazed out from the old town of Winchester, through the heavy forests to the state line, near New Market, and this formed a part of the Great Highway westward through Alabama and Mississippi to Natchez, then the Capital of Mississippi Territory.

The circumstance that somewhat retarded emigration induced my father to emigrate further south, the Chicksaws had generally been very friendly to the settlers, but the settlers hated the Cherokees and their hatred was fully reciprocated. About this time the air was full of rumors of a general Indian war, and my father who had fought the Cherokees for some twelve or fifteen years felt the old war fire reviving and came to Alabama, in order to be in the van of the battle, should hostilities actually commence. So in the spring of the year 1810 he sold his improvement on Elk River, and came southward down the newly cut road until he struck Flint River at old Brownsboro, where there was a considerable colony of old friends, who had preceded him and who, at that time, formed the extreme southern settlement in the county, east of the mountains.

At that time a considerable little village was

forming at Hunt's big spring, known as the town of Twickenham, and my father settled on a high hill, north of Brownsboro. A horse path, leading from Brownsboro to Huntsville, had been made on the south boundary of the section line from Flint River to Huntsville mountain. The lands had been surveyed the year before and the settlers could follow the newly blazed section lines to the mountain, from which to Huntsville a road was blazed out nearly on the line of the present Belle Fonte road, but many years passed before a wagon road was opened. All the people living on Flint, who drove wagons to town, went up the river to the old Winchester road, crossing the river near the factory, then known as Wood's Mill. On the west side of the river they skirted around the mountain through the open woods, through the Mastin Farm, and around by the Green Bottom Inn, just opened by John Connally, a famous sportsman and prominent man in his day. Horton's mill above the Three Forks and Brown's mill half a mile west of old Brownsboro had not been built and our grinding was done at Huntsville, at a mill put up west of town by John and William Badlum. I being one of the younger boys officiated as a mill boy, at first being accompanied by an older brother or a negro man or boy. But as I grew older I frequently made the trip alone.

Men now living in this country can have but little conception of the richness and beauty of the region between Brownsboro and Huntsville. With the exception of the mountain spur now known as Cedar Ridge and then covered with a thick grove of stately cedars, it was one continued grove of magnificent Poplar interspersed in the lowlands with Oaks, Walnut, and Hickory. It was a case of the survival of the fittest for there was little or no undergrowth, and the forest titans had reserved so much space for light and ventilation that, where trees were not prostrated by storms,

wagons could easily be driven anywhere over the woods, and in riding through the beautiful open forest a deer on the run could be seen for a quarter of a mile through the forests. The mountain was rather difficult especially on the eastern side. The path wound among low jagged cliffs of Limestone, and it took experienced steering at some points to prevent our meal bags from coming in rude contact with the sharp rocks leaning up on each side of the trail. At this time but little impression had been made on the unbroken forest east of the mountain. There was a house at Nuchol's spring near Cedar Ridge, and some two or three along the base of Monte Sano near the cool sparkling spring on south side of the Moore plantation. From Huntsville to the mountain-top was one unbroken forest with small clearings made south of the road, one by Moses Vincent at Underwood, and another near the old Calhoun quarters. There were a few straggling log cabins on the path from Steel's corner out as far as the Fleming place, and several new houses among the trees from Holmes Street down Green Street. Toward the pike from Steel's corner, the road wound around a large pond, where the water stayed all summer and which was full of green briars and old stumps and logs, to where the ground began to rise into a considerable knoll, where the Court House stands. Here stood at that time a little frame building used as a Court House and another north of it for a jail, which in a year or two were replaced by brick buildings, a source of wonder to the young natives.

A trip to Huntsville Mill was a great holiday for the boys, as sometimes a dozen or more would come along together. In the crowd was generally some older person, who could put up sacks for unfortunate boys, who were dragged off by the sacks or the saplings, and needles and thread also, were forthcoming

repairs in case of damage. We generally started at sunrise or before and reached our destination in two or three hours, and as we tarried until all had obtained their grist, we reached home near nightfall. Thus we managed to spend the greater part of the day in town and no exposition of the present civilized period ever delighted our souls, as did the wonders of the new and growing little city, Huntsville. We wandered around the spring cliffs and waded in the wide and sluggish waters in the swamp below. Somebody had started a tan yard, just below the spring at the foot of the hill, and making of leather was a new revelation to us. Then came the brick yard and bricklaying and the carpenters and masons at work and there was also a cotton gin run by Dr. David Moore and a distillery above the mill owned by James Clemons. As evening approached we set out in time to reach home before night fall, and turning around the Cedar Ridge and circling around the point we would frequently hear the scream of the catamount, that infested the rough and honey combed rocks covering the upper ridge and listened to many blood curdling stories of adventurous hunters, who had encountered wild beasts in their wild and difficult lairs up in the black cedar groves.

In the year 1810 and 1811 there was but little increase in the population of the Flint River Colony. There were rumors of Indian wars and the little triangle which had projected itself beyond the state line about twenty-four miles along its northern limit, and tapering to a point at Chickasaw Island on Tennessee River would have been in serious danger, surrounded on all sides by two such powerful and warlike tribes as the Cherokees and Chickasaws. But fortunately both of these tribes remained friendly and when hostilities began the seat of war was south of the mountains on the waters of the Coosa and Tallapoosa. Huntsville had grown to a town of seven or eight

hundred inhabitants and was driving a profitable trade with the Indians, among whom even at that time civilization was advancing. But many who had sought land at the land sales in 1809, delayed bringing their families to the new territory at a time when the temper of the Indian tribes was unsettled, and war appeared probable. But the settlers were not easily intimidated by fear of Indian hostilities. A large number of them had come from Georgia and Tennessee, where there had been continual hostilities between the races until the beginning of the present century and the rising generation, who had heard their fathers fight their battles over again, longed for an opportunity to emulate their deeds. But with the year 1811 hostilities seem to have passed away, and settlers began pouring into the country east of Flint River.

Out toward Hurricane Creek, a large colony of German settlers were locating, among whom was Jacob Derrick, a wealthy man who bought large bodies of land near the Indian boundary in 1809. Ben Lawler, John Lamberson, Henry Harless, Richard Pockrus, and John Paueur, whose descendants scattered over North Alabama and many of whom now comprise some of the best citizens of Madison County. John Brown purchased a large tract of land near Brown's village. The old town was laid off into divisions and in the year 1812 it was second to Huntsville in population and importance. Its population rapidly increased and it was the headquarters of the Flint River Navigation Company, that at an early day shipped cotton and produce down the Flint River.

A large settlement soon gathered around the village, among whom were the Hewletts, Lambersons, Taylors, Peeveys, Massingales, Browns, Lawlers, Cottons, Scotts, Jordans, and Derricks, who rapidly cleared and opened for cultivation the fine, fertile lands on both sides of Flint River. The settlement extended

up Flint River to Three Forks, where Haughton's mill was erected and where the second voting place in the county was established. Everybody lived in log houses of various grades, from humble cabin daubed with clay to the hewed log house with plank floors, shingle roof, and cracks chinked and finished off or pointed with lime. Lumber was all sawn at Saw Pits by hand; it was a serious task to saw out the plank for a first class dwelling.

For the accomodation of my father's large family, he built a square log house about twenty feet square with a side room. The floor was made of White Ash plank sawn at Saw Pit, the house was covered with chestnut shingles and stood with but little change, and without being recovered for nearly fifty years. The kitchen and smokehouse and negro cabins were crude long cabins daubed with clay and several of them had dirt floors. East of the house was a slough or lagoon with many springs running into it and some boiling up from its bottom. The water in this lagoon was clear and cold with tuckahoe trees growing in the stream and along its borders. It was always swarming with fish and a haul or two of a seine, generally supplied both white and black with ample supply of fine fish. From this slough to the river was a body of rich bottom land covered with tall green trees over topping the heavy cane brake that covered the entire surface. The road from Huntsville skirted the hills and crossed the river half a mile above old Brownsboro and a thick grove of Beech extended down the river on its eastern side. Small game was abundant and occasionally bears and wolves were slain in the river bottoms, and cat-amounts and panthers in the mountains.

I and my brothers during these years did not eat much idle bread! My father at this time, careless in his business matters, had left his farm to the care of my older brothers and the negroes. These slaves

were part of my mother's inheritance from my grandfather's estate, who had died and for that day had left a considerable estate. My mother's consisted of two or three men with their wives and young families and the labor of three or four men, and about the same number of boys had to support some thirty in family, black and white, and to do this, more land had to be cleared. So every spring there was a new ground of several acres to be grubbed and the brush and logs piled, and on the canebrake, part was planted and cultivated with the hoe alone. The older laborers had to cut the timber and split the rails, the boys drove the oxen, hauled rails, put up fences and cut cane roots and grubs with the hoe and mattock. There was but little money in circulation now and agricultural implements were scarce and dear and many common tools and implements were made of wood. The soil was wonderfully fertile, the season regular and a failure in crops was unknown. Our hogs and cattle kept fat all the year round in the care used, and a little corn fed to the hogs in the fall made plenty of fine port for the whole year. During the winter months there was wild game, either fish, flesh or fowl served at our daily meals with corn bread in abundance, and nobody was ever in lack of an abundance of the actual necessities of life. Sugar and coffee or tea was seldom seen. I do not think there was ever a pound of tea in my father's house, and I have frequently heard him say, that he never to his recollection ever tasted the beverage. There was a large quantity of good whiskey made in the country and nearly all the heads of families drank it habitually, yet there were but few drunkards in the community. Nearly everybody wore homespun clothing, jeans, linsey, and buckskins in winter, and cotton and flax homespun in summer. In an assembly of forty or fifty boys in summer at church or elsewhere you would not find half a

dozen wearing shoes or coats, until they were seventeen or eighteen. Whether at a corn shucking or quilting, at church or a wedding, the crowd appeared barefoot and in shirt sleeves, their shirts washed white as snow and ornamented with copper or dyed suspenders fastened before and behind with a large bone or pewter button. We wore hats of plaited grass or straw in summer and of wool or fur in winter. The hatter's trade was a flourishing one and anybody could get a good fur hat that would last five or six years, who could furnish a hatter with raccoon or beaver or otter skins enough to make two hats.

In the year 1812 our peaceful community was disturbed by rumors of war with the Indians. It was known that there had been some bloody battles fought in the northwest and traders who traveled south of the river among the Cherokees reported that their friendly spirit towards our people had cooled and that missionaries from the northwest had stirred up a feeling of enmity towards the whites much to the chargin of Edward Gunter and other Indian chiefs in the tribe south of the Tennessee. Some of these chiefs were half breeds, of great wisdom and foresight, who owned large property in land and slaves, and were earnestly desirous that their subjects should become civilized, and who saw nothing but destruction to their people in a war with the white settlers. While no one doubted the fidelity of the Indian chiefs, yet it was very questionable, whether their influence could restrain the young men of their tribe from joining a Confederacy that Tecumseh and his brother were organizing to unite the tribes from the Ohio to the Gulf in a general Indian War, and many settlers who had bought their lands in the new country had delayed removal of their families until the trouble had passed. But General William Henry Harrison's successful campaign in the Northwest culminating in the hard won victory at

Tippecanoe allayed the apprehensions of the whites and confirmed our neighboring tribes in their friendship. But the fact that we were at war with Great Britain aroused the military ardor of our people and military companies were organized and drilled thoroughly in the settlements, forming the nucleus of the companies that afterwards took part in the campaign.

ROWENA WEBSTER'S RECOLLECTIONS OF HUNTSVILLE DURING THE 1862 OCCUPATION

By Bessie Russell

On April 13, 1862, Federal forces under the command of Brigadier General Ormsby McKnight Mitchel captured Huntsville and cut the important railway line of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. For the visionary Mitchel, who had distinguished himself as an astronomer before the war, this accomplishment hopefully meant the quick capture of Chattanooga and East Tennessee. With that vast territory under Federal control Mitchel felt that Union armies could move in any direction they wished, threatening the Confederate rear in Virginia or marching southward into Georgia.

The Federal command did not accept this plan and left Mitchel in Huntsville as commander of the occupying army. This, of course, was not what he wanted and he chaffed bitterly over the assignment. Various accounts tell of the harsh manner with which he dealt with the populace. Probably he was venting his frustration with his superiors on the defenseless citizenry, who saw in him the epitomy of Federal power and dominance, reaping dissolution in the wake of its control.

One such individual who witnessed General Mitchel's plight during this period was Miss Rowena Webster, who came to Huntsville from Beechwood, Tennessee, to escape from approaching Federal armies

who had captured Fort Donelson in February, 1862. Her respite from the turmoil of war was short-lived, however, with the arrival of Mitchel's troops. In her later years Miss Webster recorded some of the highlights of the occupation. They offer an interesting insight into conditions in Huntsville at that time. The account, printed here in part, opens with the fall of Fort Donelson.

What is all the commotion? Church bells ringing! Soldiers moving rapidly to and fro! Women and children leaving the various churches on the Sabbath morning! Darkies smiling at the scene! People running here and there, seeking a place of safety - a place to flee! DONALDSON HAS FALLEN - DONALDSON HAS FALLEN! Who brings the news? Says one, and another, and another! No mistake, Oh, where is my Father? cries one, and where is my brother? and where is my husband? No tidings of any, as yet. Oh, this dreadful suspense! All may be either wounded or dead. Soldiers rushing to the Chattanooga Depot to join their command. Women and children fleeing to some place of refuge, crowding all of the trains that are leaving the City. Some going to one place and some to another. Many reaching the home of Mrs. Andrew Erwin of Beechwood, Tennessee, - they find her doors wide open always to the Confederate soldiers, their sick and wounded, and her servants and provisions placed lavishly at their command-like Florence Nightingale who never wearied in her attentions - applying medicines and remedies for their relief.¹

What Tennessee soldier does not remember her kindness? Many, very many, under the sod, if able to speak would rise up and call her "Blessed". She

was a noted monument among the living and will always be a precious memory to her many friends. While she was a rare exception, there were thousands of noble women who gave all they had to our Confederate soldiers for their comfort and relief. Grandly, nobly and beautifully did our women perform their part in this great sacrifice for their Sunny South. Many of the wounded arrived at Mrs. Erwin's home and were kindly nursed and cared for until they were ready to again join their command. Every attention was given them by the army physicians, some died and others soon restored. In the meantime the Federals began to move in. The house was soon searched for soldiers and all of the provisions on hand used - nothing was ever left in their wake that they could possibly consume or destroy. Some officers of the Federal Army would protect our property, while the majority would encourage their soldiers to commit every depredation in their reach. Mrs. Erwin had many an altercation with them, but in a most ladylike way stood firmly to her principles.

It soon became necessary for the young ladies of the household to refugee to places south of the army; two going to Greensboro, Georgia to their uncle's, Colonel Willis, while two went to Huntsville, Alabama.² After having been in Huntsville a few days, the Federals came like a cyclone into the City. While I and my youngest niece (Miss Rosa Turner) were staying with friends (Mr. and Mrs. Matthews), Miss Turner was placed in school.³ I never received such a shock as when a servant girl at daylight proclaimed, "Miss Rowe, the turnpike is black with the Yankees - I can hear them a mile off." While I never was the least afraid of them, I was startled beyond measure. I looked out of the window and discovered that they had come to stay. Men, women and children were panic stricken, altho none ever showed the least fear of

them. Every woman in the City was aiding Confederate soldiers to escape, even disguising some of them in female attire. Soon they had all escaped. One of the first who was captured was a brother of General John T. Morgan. I said to the officer who held him captive, "I hope you will be kind to him." He replied, "I will." Soon Gen'l M., of Astronomy fame, Federal Commander, had possession of the City. A greater tyrant never lived in revolutionary times! An Ohio Regiment was encamped on Popes Hill, near us, - they would pass every day to water their horses at the famous Big Spring of Huntsville. One of them chanced to see Miss Sallie Matthews and Miss Rosa Turner, playing with grace hoops wrapped with red, white and blue. The soldiers were quite amused until they saw a tiny Confederate Flag attached to my arm. Altho it was simply hanging on my arm, one ordinary soldier, without any authority, rushed in the yard, saying, "Miss, I want that flag." I replied, "You haven't the bravery to capture one on a battle field, but ask for a baby flag from a woman?" He replied, "If you don't give me that flag, I will put a case of smallpox in this house and one in the house opposite." I said, "Bring your smallpox case, I am not afraid of you, nor your smallpox," and I immediately tore up the flag, placing it in my pocket, and threw the hoop into a reservoir at the foot of the hill, saying, "If you are a good diver, you can get that hoop." In the meantime the Captain came up with his Company and saw me destroy the flag and put it into my pocket, saying, "You shall not have this flag." He informed the Officer, and the next day Mr. Matthews, his daughter Sallie, Rosa Turner and I were arrested. Mr. Sam Matthews ordered his carriage, saying we had to go into Camp by order of Gen'l M. I rebelled and said I would not go if they brought a regiment for me. Seeing that Mr. Matthews was in earnest, I was



MAJOR GENERAL ORMSBY McKNIGHT MITCHEL
Federal commander during the 1862 occupation.

compelled to yield and remarked to him, "I am very indignant and vexed but if I have to go, I will try to be a lady, even among my enemies." On arriving at Camp several officers offered to assist us out of the carriage and escort us to the tent, but we all refused to accept their offer. Under the trees, in Gen'l Lowe's grove, the tents were arranged and the General's son received us with far more politeness than his father, saying the General would receive us in a few minutes.⁴ Not in the least excited, I waited my summons. Soon we sallied to the tent where the General was seated behind a table with a pile of "green backs" placed before him. The young school girls were a great deal frightened and kept on their veils. Mr. Matthews, being a stammering man, was very slow in his introductions, first introducing the girls. I awaited my presentation and my wrath began to stir at the thought of being held to account for such a trifle. I sneered, looked to the right and to the left, and was a long time taking my seat, trying to keep as calm as possible. When Gen'l M. began his questions, asking Miss Matthews if she had not insulted his soldiers, she replied, "I did not; one of them asked me for the little flag and I gave it to him." Then I said, "It was not larger than my hand." He said, "I don't care if it was a mite, it was a flag." Then turning to me, he said, "Don't you know that you are in open rebellion." I said, "I am a Rebel open and above board." Growling like a lion, he said, "No man, or woman, or child shall say that they are Rebels in my tent." I replied, still more firmly, "I am a Rebel." He then said, "Don't you know that I could send you to Fort La Fayette in five minutes." I replied, "that is very rapid traveling." I could see a lurking smile pass over his face, and he said, "Are you a lady?" I replied in a most indignant manner, "Who doubts it?" He then said, "You women, get to your homes." He was

surely no gentleman but an arrant coward and a tyrant. He seemed particularly bent on insulting the women and children and went into the Army for gain. No worse order was ever given in the days of the French Revolution than that he issued to old Gen'l Turchin (a Dutchman) when he told him to march into the town of Athens, Alabama and to give the soldiers the liberty of the town for two hours.⁵ And they surely obeyed the order, in every sort of mischief and crime of which soldiers are guilty, without restraint. The people of Athens will never forget this outrage, as long as any inhabitant is left to tell the story. At the home of Judge C. they completely demolished the place, to punish the family - they pitched their tents as close to the house as they could get them and never removed them until they had orders to leave. All of the vehicles, carriages, buggies and everything of the kind were rolled miles away, unless they destroyed them by chopping them up with axes or hatchets. One of their chief delights was to strew molasses and lard all over the carpets, break up the furniture and smash the mirrors, and to leave nothing that they could possibly destroy. Had not the Rebels, in their shrewdness, hid much of their provisions, they would have perished. This Ohio Regiment did the fighting of that command for they went out 1400 strong and only fifty survived, but this old General never went out with them - he was too busy buying and selling cotton and enriching himself.

One day, in Huntsville, Alabama, a rumor came that a Confederate General, with 10,000 Indian soldiers, was crossing the river a few miles off, which created a great panic among the Federal troops. Artillery, infantry and every available piece of armor was ordered out. Such clashing and clattering of arms through the streets we had not heard before. This gave the ladies a chance to exult and clap their hands for joy,

hoping that the Yankees might have to retreat. It was soon found to be a false alarm and the citizens had to quiet down. Arrests were daily made of quiet unoffending citizens, and never did they have any peace while this branch of the army remained. We often kept the Yankees in hot water, reporting that Forrest, Morgan or some famous General was in the neighborhood, when we had no tidings from them. It was a mere ruse to defend ourselves from insult.

On one occasion Gen'l M. gave an order that the Rebel ladies might attend the burial of a nephew of Gen'l C. Whether it was a kind streak he took or whether it was to ascertain the feeling of the ladies we did not know, but believed it was the latter, and altho they were using all of the horses and carriages in the City, every lady in town robbed all of the gardens of flowers and each carried an immense bouquet and walked behind the hearse for a mile and a half to decorate, not only his grave, but all of the Rebel Soldiers' graves in the cemetery. Gen'l M. might have known that it was a good time to show their principles and they never lost an opportunity to exhibit them.

The first Yankee soldiers that I encountered, I was walking with my lovely friend, Mrs. William Mastin, Sr., and I shut my eyes as I passed. She remarked, "Miss Rowe, it is all lost on them for they will think that you are a blind woman."

Some of us went to an old Baptist Church, out of use, and found many soldiers there waiting to be exchanged. They were always a jolly, wholesome set and one of them remarked, "People cannot say that we don't stand by our church."

Shortly after the Battle of Shiloh Major C. arrived, limping on crutches. We had told him, when he left, not to come back wounded in the foot and limping on crutches. Miss Fannie Donegan had told him, if he

was wounded to come to their house and we would nurse him. The Yankee Surgeon attended him and the surgeon remarked that "Huntsville was a lovely place, so full of flowers early in the Spring that it was like a fairy-land." Maj. C. said, "Doctor, the flowers are nothing, the society is charming, so refined, so cultured." A short time after, many of our soldiers returned, wounded from this battle. One Sabbath about a dozen Yankee soldiers came to arrest Major C. We endeavored to conceal his crutches and disguise him, but they rushed into his room saying that by the authority of Gen'l M. they must arrest him. Maj. C. seemed calm, but the ladies, Miss Mary H. (to whom he was engaged at the time), Mrs. B., her mother, Miss Donegan and I, were very indignant and asked them if it took twelve of their men to arrest one of ours. We thought Maj. C. was getting along very well with his wound but from imprudence he was threatened with lockjaw and his features were rigid and extremities cold. He threw a book at the head of a servant to awaken him, and sent him to wake Miss Fannie Donegan and myself. We went to him, kindled a fire, gave him a strong toddy, put a cloth of laudnum on his foot and heated it with our hands. He declared that we had saved his life. A short time after this, when he joined his command, he was married to Miss Mary H. at Brentwood, Tennessee, and returned to his command without his bride.

We had two soldiers concealed on the flat roof of Mr. Donegan's house - Mr. W. and Mr. R - we used to pass their food to them every day until they could steal a chance to escape from the Yankee soldiers.⁶ They finally made their escape and joined their command. One day a woman, in deep mourning and heavily veiled, was seen getting over the cemetery fence to decorate some Yankee graves, when a man's boots were seen and some of the Rebel ladies discovered

that he was a Rebel spy who brought letters to them through the lines.

Miss Fannie Donegan and I had never seen the burial of an officer so, as one of the noted Yankee officers had died, we concluded to conceal ourselves in the dense shurbbery and watch the procession as it was passing the cemetery, The body was in an ambulance, draped with crape; his war horse was draped also; the officers were riding with reversed arms; many soldiers; a band was playing the dead march with muffled drums. It was a solemn sight to us. The cemetery was just a short distance from Mr. D's residence, near enough to hear the guns and cannons fire quite frequently, for he was Col. of Artillery and was a great loss to them. On their return, after the procession was out of sight, three grave diggers came along; Miss Donegan asked the first one if they had buried an officer. He said, "No, it was one of their men." I said, "that is not so, I know it was one of your officers." He passed on; a second one came by, she asked again if that was not one of their officers. This one said the same thing and denied it. I said, "I will ask the next one." The third one passed; I halted him and said, "What officer was that you have just buried?" He said he was not an officer. I said, "I know better, he was one, for I have noticed you have buried five or six of your men and did not make any parade over them - did not even fire a gun - now this man had all of the honors and flourishing of trumpets accorded to him, there is no use in denying the fact." He at last acknowledged that it was an important man they had lost.

Another day I was sitting on the front porch with Harvey Donegan and one or two more friends, when a number of Yankee officers passed along, escorting a daughter of Gen'l M. She was also dressed in a blue riding habit with a sword at her side, which seemed coarse to us Southern women. Harvey Donegan re-

marked in their hearing, "Miss Rowe, there are some beaux for you." I replied, loud enough for them to hear, "I hope never to be reduced to such as that - I keep better company."

Daily depredations were committed as long as the Federal soldiers were in our midst. Many say that this is the result of war, but I am sure they must have had many an officer who was merely vested with a little authority who took advantage of it and abused it by all the arbitrary acts they could show. Many had never commanded soldiers before, and showed even their own soldiers the greatest tyranny, but when their regular officers commanded they were born gentlemen, they were always polite and controlled their men and were willing to have wrongs redressed and grant favors, when not unreasonable. You may say that about one-third of the latter class controlled their army, while two-thirds were turned loose to do what they pleased. Most of the population of Huntsville were Confederates and would have died before they would have denied their principles. In the beginning, I admit, that we often tantalised the Yankees by walking along the streets and giving ourselves the titles of our noted Generals - but take it to yourselves, if you were about to be robbed of all your possessions and accumulation of wealth which was honestly gotten by your parents and your rightful inheritance, would you not have felt the same way, especially when the parents and grandparents of these Yankees had bought and sold slaves? They were once as much their property as ours!

¹The typewritten copy of Miss Webster's account is in the Manuscript Section at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. The original is titled "Memoirs of a Southern Girl."

²Miss Webster was probably in her late thirties when she came to Huntsville with her niece, Rosa Turner.

³According to the 1859-60 edition of the Huntsville City Directory, Samuel Matthews lived on the north side of McClung between Adams and California. It appears from the manuscript that the Matthews yard was just above the city resevoir.

⁴Lowe's Grove where Matthews and the girls were taken was located on Gallatin Street on the site where the Royal Funeral Home once stood.

⁵Miss Webster's reference here is to Colonel John Turchin.

⁶The James J. Donegan home was a large brick house on the site of the present Huntsville Jr. High School on Randolph Avenue. The stone wall in front of the school was built by Mr. Donegan.

