Notes and Documents

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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS:

by H. S. Marks

The Sunshine Belt, Madison County and Huntsville as extolled in 1907.¹

The accompanying article, although written in the early 1900's, seems remarkably up to date (except for the values and prices of goods and services offered here at that time.) What was, perhaps, imagined three quarters of a century ago has come to pass in the space age. Also, if we sometimes forget the many advantages offered to us today in our daily hustle and bustle, this article on Huntsville and Madison County will remind us of them. It is given verbatim.

Under a new commercial and industrial evolution, the well-known and familiar saying that "Westward the star of Empire takes its way," must be changed to read, "Southward the star of Empire takes its way." Beyond all controversy, in the future of this country, the star of empire will shine as brightly in the southland sky of this great republic, as it ever shone in the east or the west and the greatness and grandeur of the commercial factors of the common country will receive some of their brightest luster from the great South, as it swings more and more fully into the broad line of universal progress. In these respects, northern Alabama will stand in the front line, and in northern Alabama, Madison County, in the famous Tennessee Valley with the beautiful city of Huntsville as its central point will, to use an army phrase, "stand on the firing line."

The climate is all that can be desired, as the temperature is scarcely ever too high for comfort in summer and very seldom is it uncomfortable in winter. The winters are just cold enough for perfect health. Residents who have lived in every section of the Union declare the climate of North Alabama to be the best all
around climate they have found. Since the first settlement of the country, in the nineteenth century it has been locally celebrated. Sunstrokes are unknown. The annual rainfall averages forty-five inches, distributed nearly evenly throughout the year, making crop failures practicably an impossibility.

The location of the city of Huntsville, with its 20,000 population is unequaled in the picturesqueness of its beauty and the ever inviting charm possessed by its surrounding scenery, presenting views of mountain and vale that never grow old and on which the eye never tires to gaze—a delight and an inspiration. Nature secured for this city ample and admirable drainage. Its high elevation being 640 feet above sea level, and its distance from the river gives it absolute security from the night fogs and miasma of still water lakes. The air is pure, sweet and light. Its streets were macadamized sixty years ago and its free macadam and gravel pikes run out to the adjoining state and county boundaries and to the Tennessee River, giving the county about 180 miles of free pike roads. No city in the county is so amply supplied with pure cold water, or has a superior system of water works.

Huntsville is well supplied with schools. There are public and private schools enough to educate all the children of the city. Large public schools are controlled by the State Board of Education. The banking institutions of Huntsville are synonyms of strength wherever they are known and they are distinctively representative of the city in their personnel as well as their enterprise. Each of the four banks of the city has its own peculiar methods and we find here a commercial people of varying styles of business catered to in a manner enabling them to prosecute their operations to the point of success. The banks referred to are two national, one private, and a savings bank and trust company. Most of these banks are paying 4 per cent interest on time deposits of money. This
will appeal to business men, as evidence of a stable condition of our finances. The deposits have increased steadily in recent years and are now growing at a well-night phenomenal rate.

Huntsville enjoys a fine trade in retail and wholesale jobbing lines, and her merchants are among the best in this country, their commercial rating first-class. The tributary country to this city, which does much of its trading here, comprises some ten counties in Alabama and Tennessee. All commercial lines of trade are fully and well represented, and what Huntsville wants and has a place for is, not more merchants, but more factories.

The soil of Madison County is what is known as the famous red clay, running down in many cases to a depth of twenty feet. A recent soil survey by the Department of Agriculture of the United States Government elicited the fact that this red clay is the same as the famous Hagerstown, Maryland, clay loam, and has been demonstrated to be one of the most productive soils for wheat, corn, peas, fruits, vegetables and all general agricultural crops. The solidity of the subsoil causes this land to retain fertilizers without leeching.

In a word, the soil of Madison County is unsurpassed in fertility and durability. It needs only the same care and attention which is observed by the northern farmer in cultivating his lands to grow every crop raised in the north together with cotton, sweet potatoes, peanuts and every variety of fruit. The country is a paradise for vegetable or small fruit farming, for the reason that work in this class of farming extends throughout the year, the farmer being able to plow all through the winter months, and the violets blooming in the fields the year round. Land is rapidly advancing in price.
The average price of good well improved and desirably located farming lands in Madison County can be bought at from $12.00 to $30.00 per acre, all owing of course to character and extent of improvements and distance from Huntsville; and in some instances and localities, lands can be had as low as $10.00 per acre, but when a man pays from $15.00 to $30.00 per acre for land in this county, where lands are cheap, he is getting lands that will easily yield more clear dollars per acre than lands that are now selling in many portions of the North and West at from $75.00 to $150.00 per acre. We mean what we say, and can prove it.

If you are a manufacturer you will find here mountains of limestone ready for burning; quarries of sandstone ready to be chiseled into form; immense forests of hardwood of forty different varieties ready to be made into anything from a lead pencil to an antique oak or black walnut chamber set, all to be had at hand, or nearly at cordwood prices. For your factories you will find water without limit, of a quality that will make steam in your boilers without foaming; coal for your fuel at $2.00.

All in all, Northern Alabama, and especially the Madison County part of it, has a great future before it. Its present material wealth, and the widening out and the geometrical development of this wealth is pleasant to contemplate.

Let us go to the highest official authority for this information. From the reports of the census of 1890 we may learn the average value per acre of farm products in all the states. The figures compiled by the census statisticians were for 1889. The average for the whole country and for the different sections were as follows:

The United States-------------------$6.87
All States except the South------ 6.35
North Atlantic States----------$9.88
North Central States---------- 6.03
Western States------------------ 6.76
The South--------------------- 7.18

With the price of cotton this ratio becomes much greater in favor of the South. As it stands, the average annual value of farm products in the South is greater than the average of all the great agricultural states of the Central West, greater than the average of the expensively maintained irrigated farms, orchards, and gardens of the far West, and scarcely surpassed by the average of the enormously rich and populous Eastern and New England states, where agriculture has its highest development.

Huntsville maintains a businessmen's club, made up of 500 enterprising citizens, where the stranger may apply, either in person or by letter for the information he may desire. The Secretary of this club will promptly attend to all these matters. No matter what you want, apply to him. He is himself a bureau of information.

Footnote:

¹From "Counties of Alabama. Their Resources, Their Riches and Their Characteristics." In Alabama, Serial No. 27, Bulletin of the State Department of Agriculture and Industries, J. A. Wilkinson, Commissioner, 1907.