

# The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

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Volume 19 | Number 1

Article 6

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3-20-1993

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### Recommended Citation

Gamble, Elizabeth Hill (1993) "Huntsville - Then and Now," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 19: No. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol19/iss1/6>

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## HUNTSVILLE — THEN AND NOW

Elizabeth Hill Gamble (1991)

My father, Monroe Hill, left the farm in 1928 and moved to Huntsville to send his only child, Elizabeth, to school. He wouldn't buy a home here as he was going back home to the farm when she graduated, which he did. He managed the county wholesale grocery sales for W. L. Halsey. He rented a house (the Terry homeplace) from Mr. T. L. Terry on East Clinton Street. I walked 3 blocks to East Clinton Grammar School. East Clinton Street at that time was a dead end at the mountain.

The school had a large round fire escape from the top floor — The kids were allowed to slide down on special occasions, but I never would go down.

On May Day we would have a May Pole Dance and weave in and out the May Pole.

I remember once my class did a Scottish Dance. My mother made me a plaid kilts, tam and velvet vest to wear.

Once the Chitauqua came to town and was on the school grounds. There was a large tent, and we would go to see the shows.

When I attended Jr. High School it was in the old Wills-Taylor School on the hill, just left of what is now the Annie Merts Building. Miss Annie Merts was my geometry teacher at Huntsville High School.

I took 4 years of Latin from Miss Mildred Hutton, who had attended the old Saunty Webb School at Bell Buckle, Tennessee. There were only 7 students in my 3rd & 4th year Latin classes. Milton Frank was coach, and also was my European History teacher at Huntsville High.

While I was at Huntsville High, we had the 1st Red & Blue Newspaper and also the 1st Pierian Annual. I graduated in the class of 1938 and went to college in Tennessee. My husband and I taught in Lebanon, Tennessee for 15 years.

I married Barnett Gamble, whom I met in college. My father moved back to the farm in Tennessee after I went to college.

My father passed away. We didn't want to sell the farm, so we moved to Huntsville in 1966 and taught in the Huntsville City Schools for 15 years. I taught at Mt. Gap Middle School, and he has been a principal in the Huntsville City School System.

We now live in the Jones Valley area — and I can remember when there were no houses in the area, and there was a gravel road from Drake Avenue to the river, and there was no bridge across the river, only a ferry.

My parents would take my 2 cousins and me to town on Saturday night and we would go to the Lyric theater. There was always a serial, to be continued, as Tarzan. We would have to go back the next Saturday night to see what happened.

My parents would wait for us, sitting in the car and watching the people pass by or visit in the back of Dunavants' grocery store. My father knew the operator of the grocery store, which was at the back of the main Dunavant's store. My father and Mr. Pierre Dunavant grew up together as neighbors in Tennessee.

It's been interesting to see Huntsville grow and change from a cotton mill town to a space age city.

Excerpts from *My Moving Tent*, by Mrs. Sue F. Dromgoole Mooney.  
Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South. 1903



Dedicated "To My Husband, in the door of whose tent I have so long sat, and to the preachers and the people among whom our moving tent has been pitched for more than forty-six years — July 1856 - November 1902."

"The annual session of the Tennessee Conference was drawing near. It was to be held that year at Huntsville, Alabama, North Alabama being at that time included in the Tennessee Conference. The scenery 'en route' was rich in coloring, the landscape gleaming in every tint and tone of color. We were a merry party. By we I mean 'us' and the Tennessee Conference, for most of the remembers were aboard, beside a 'goodbye companies' from other Conferences. We stayed all night at Stevenson, then a new place, where hotel accommodations were not the best. It still seems to me that we were a long time reaching H., where I was to have my first experience of 'being sent somewhere to stay,' which, being interpreted, means in Methodist phraseology, to be entertained for a week or thereabouts." (p. 72)

"We were the guest of Mrs. Rice, a wealthy widow and a member of the Episcopal Church .... A teacher who was a member of the household and the first religious monopolist I ever met. He read all the prayers and said all the graces. It never dawned on him that this was a breach of clerical courtesy. But so it seemed to me. An illustration of dogmatic High Church imperialism! I exercised the grace of silence." (p. 74)

"... our tent was moved to that most beautiful inland town, Huntsville, Alabama. My life in Huntsville even to this distant day seems more than a dream of beauty. It was more. It was a dream realized in all the charming colors that dreams are supposed to have. The people received us so cordially and treated us so courteously during the whole two years, the then limit of the pastoral terms, that they have never held a second place in my affections..." (p. 107)

"The city itself is beautiful for situation, and this beauty was enhanced by lavish expenditure of money in the erection of public and private buildings. Sanitary regulations were well-nigh perfect. The social and literary life filled my utmost desire. In the several Protestant Churches there were godly, devout men, and of elect women not a few. Many men of wealth gave [p108] freely to God of their time and substance. Rev. Harry P. Turner was a local preacher of influence,

having his home near the city. Rev. P. B. Robertson was in the city — a man of usefulness and piety.

"Spotswood and Rison were Methodists and druggist. ... We could not have received a warmer welcome in a father's house than we had into that of Dr. John C. Spotswood, where for more than a year we had our home. ... Dr. Erwin's two years' pastorate had just closed, probably the most popular of any in the history of the Conference. The people, all the people, loved him, especially the people called Methodists, and would not give him up. So he had been elected President of the H. Female College, at that time one of the most prosperous institutions in the South. He was to succeed Prof. Geo. M. Everhart." [Dr. Erwin died within their 2 year stay.] (p. 107)

"One of the most worthy of these in our Church at Huntsville was Mrs. Martha Jordan. She was deeply religious, devoted to her own church, but broad and catholic. She was the fast friend of her preacher and his family. Her sense of humor was keen, her own humor irresistible. She was witty, ready at repartee, and rich in resources, odd in her dress and manners, affectionate in disposition. She was universally popular and won her way where others failed."

This was illustrated during the occupation of the city by the Federals, when it was sometimes difficult, and oft times impossible, "to get a pass." She went in person to Gen. Mitchell — was so pleased to see the man whose geography she had studied when she was a little girl! had never expected that pleasure! After this gracious introduction, she got a pass, and would go in person on the cotton wagon as it passed through the pickets. The South had no more ardent friend. She was an enthusiast in its best sense. Leaving her home, to which she was fondly attached, she went to Virginia and was both nurse and mother to our boys in hospital. Her fate was most melancholy and tragic. Returning from Nashville, the car caught fire and she perished in the flames. Seeing the inevitable death that was so near, she threw from the window her well-worn and constant traveling companion — her Bible. Many passages were marked, such as: "Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee." Her death was a shock, and all sorrowed that her home-going was after this sort.

"A thousand ways has Providence  
To bring believers home."

Among the elect Methodists of Huntsville were "Grandma Watkins," Mrs. Pope, and her daughter Mrs. Mastin, Mrs. Bibb, Mrs. Scruggs and daughters, Brothers Turner and McDowell. Among our members Mrs. John Nance had a

large share of my love, and among Presbyterians Mrs. Fackler and her daughters, Sallie and Elvira, were favorites. I have often wondered how life fared with them. We were much together in books, in the home, and in social life. Once a week Mrs. Fackler had her pastor, Rev. Frederick Ross, to dine with her, and to this dinner the Methodist preacher and his wife had a standing invitation.

During this year Rev. Alexander Campbell, his wife, and son-in-law visited Huntsville, the guests of ex-Gov. Chapman and his wife. Mr. Campbell preached for a week morning and evening in the Methodist Church. He recognized the courtesy, and said nothing in any sermon that could offend the denominational pride of the most sensitive. He was a fine-looking man, "brainy," and the strongest speaker I have ever heard on the errors of Romanism. The Old Man on the Tiber was hit hard, as was the tendency to high-churchism in the Protestant Episcopal Church. (p. 112 - 113)