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George J. McCanless Jr.

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THE MONTE SANO RAILROAD

by
George F. McCanless, Jr.
November, 1992

Work began on the railroad from the still existing Huntsville Depot to the top of Monte Sano over one hundred years ago in July of 1888. Formally named The Huntsville Belt Line and Monte Sano Railroad Co., the workers essentially completed it one year later in August of 1889. The railroad was built to transport passengers and baggage to the Monte Sano Hotel, which had opened on June 1, 1887.

The railroad wound along an interesting route, most of which is today paved and serves as roads. It began at a small station located near the Huntsville Depot of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, the main east-west railroad that still connects Huntsville with Memphis and Chattanooga. It went south on Jefferson Street, then turned east on Clinton Street, and up Bankhead Parkway to the present-day Toll Gate Apartments. The line crossed Toll Gate Road and took a roundabout route through the woods over some creeks. Some of the stone structure used in the bridges still stands. One spectacular turn in this region was called the Buttonhook. The roadbed emerged from the woods near the parking lot at the hiking entrance of the Huntsville Land Trust property just east of the Heritage of Monte Sano subdivision. From this point it traveled up Bankhead Parkway to Monte Sano State Park. When it reached the



present-day Von Braun Observatory, the railroad traveled west along what is now a line of telephone poles until it crossed Nolen Avenue just east of Chickasaw Drive. One can still see a railroad fill there. The line continued west and traveled along what is now Railway Avenue and Denison Avenue. It crossed Monte Sano Boulevard and stopped near the Monte Sano Hotel on Old Chimney Road. The tracks did not form a "Y", so there was no way to turn the train around. The train backed all the way down Monte Sano to the old Depot.

The Huntsville newspapers of the day heralded the building of the railroad with great enthusiasm. On June 8, 1888, the *Huntsville Daily Mercury* announced that the standard gauge "dummy line" was now a certainty. Work would begin immediately and it would be pushed to completion by September 1. On July 5th, the same paper reported a wider objective of this railroad was to lay tracks encircling the city. The July 10 edition announced, "A squad of 25 men with mule teams arrived in the city yesterday afternoon to work on the construction .." of the railroad. A week later, the newspaper regretfully announced Huntsville's first labor strike. The company paid the workers one dollar per day for a ten hour day, but the company management decided to increase the work day to twelve hours while holding to the dollar wage. The tone of the article indicated the company was getting its way. The July 25th edition published a letter signed by CIVIS. He stated that he had signed the petition to have the city give the dummy line the right of way on Clinton Street. However, he had since learned that the railroad would run from the "end to end" of Clinton Street and he regarded this as a mistake. The newspaper announced on December 28 that the "dummy line" was now half complete and would be running to the mountain this summer.

The *Weekly Mercury* (Huntsville) on May 22, 1889 reported "Cuts through solid flint rock to the depths of 20 and 30 feet and hundreds of feet in length, and trestles towering above the tree tops in the gorges below." The track will be laid to the, "second crossing of the turn pike (the Land Trust entrance on Bankhead Parkway) tomorrow night and as the rest of the road is graded on the crest of the mountain, and beyond Cold Springs on the side (intersection with Fearn Street), the track will be laid and the road in full operation by the first week in June." This issue further stated that the company paid over 300 hands each week. On June 19, two state railroad commissioners were invited to "make a trip" over the railroad. They were taken as far as Cold Springs on June 13. The June 26 issue carried the following announcement by the H.B.L. & M.S.R.R. CO.: "Passenger Trains will commence to run regularly from Huntsville

Tuesday, June 25th, on which the Monte Sano Hotel opens. Hacks will meet the train at the end of the track to carry passengers to the Hotel..." The price was, "25 cents each way and additional 25 cents will be collected for hack fair." It further stated that, "tickets purchased on the train going up will be five cents extra." The July 10 issue announced that there were to be three round trips per day. The July 17 issue indicated, "The railway and equipment have cost the management a sum of \$100,000. This (the railroad) is now running within a quarter (mile) from the hotel." On August 14, the paper announced completion. The article pointed out such scenery as "Fagans Canyon" and "O'Brian's Buttonhole." The September 25 edition carried the headline Monte Sano Railway followed by a subtitle, A card from the Manager to the people of Huntsville. "Our trains will run as per new schedule until Oct. 1st, longer if you wish it." The announcement added that the railroad was, "equipped with a train costing \$15,000." The manager continued, "Some say the road is dangerous. We do not find a single passenger on the railway has been hurt, though a good deal has been made when an odd truck (set of wheels) left the rails a time or two." This "card" from the manager indicated that at least one minor accident had occurred and business seemed to be suffering. At any rate, the first year of operation was the high point in the life of the railroad that once ran up Monte Sano.



THE ROARING TWENTIES

"Early in the 1900's, Charles Hutchens and his wife Molly built a "summer place" of stone facing A Street in the town of Viduta on Monte Sano Mountain. There was a large garden. There were wooden porch columns. The ceilings inside were probably like the current ceilings under the porch, that is, oak planks. The porch was not concrete. There were a lot of doors and windows for cross-ventilation. The windows and sills were wood. There were screens on the windows. The exterior shutters were used to seal up the house in the winter. If there was a summer rain the windows could be left up and the shutters closed. The rain was kept out and the breeze allowed inside. There were nice thick walls and deep windows. There was a rock walk going from the front porch to A Street (Lookout). As a child visiting my grandparents, I would walk through the woods to Aunt Molly's. We children would seldom use the front door. We'd head for the back door which led to the kitchen. The cook would always give us food. My grandfather (William Thomas Hutchens) had a

two-story frame house with porches. It was where you now turn off Monte Sano Boulevard on to Nolen Avenue. There was a barn, a well, and a privy. C. E. Monroe, the artist, was a childhood friend of mine. He lived next door. The only road up the mountain was the toll road, (an extension of Randolph Avenue). It was a dirt and rock mountain road maintained by the mountain residents. We children would scramble to be near the car windows so when we arrived at the toll keeper's we could call out "Hutchens car." We felt very important. I also visited my other grandparents, the Newman's, across from Viduta Lane. Across from our house there were woods up to the Wellman's house (currently Mr. Hall's, 3627 Nolen Avenue). Mrs. Wellman and my mother were good friends. They each had four children. One day they decided to get away from the children so they left Mr. Wellman in charge. He was a big, strong man. He let the children climb up on the shiny tin roof and slide down. He would catch us. Our mothers came home and Mr. Wellman was in deep trouble. I never saw an Indian on Monte Sano or in Huntsville. Arrowheads were like pebbles on the mountain. They were so common you didn't even pick them up. We'd wake up in the morning to the sound of cow bells. I think they came from the Schrimsher farm." (Dr. E. Hutchens, 1992)



CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS AND MONTE SANO STATE PARK

The 1930's, or the Great Depression Years (1931-1940), was a time of crisis when people were experiencing lack of money, poverty and hardships, as never seen before. The Civilian Conservation Corps, referred to as the CCC, was the 1930's version of an economic rescuer. Implemented under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a million and a half young men and war veterans enrolled in the CCC. The 3486th Company, SP-16 (1935-1940) and SP-12 (1935-1938) were located on Monte Sano Mountain. The purpose of having camps on Monte Sano was to build a 2,000 acre state park. The men of the CCC built roads, stone cabins, furniture for the cabins, hiking trails, a 75,000 gallon water tank, a public lodge and laid 33,000 feet of sewer line and 9,000 feet of three-inch water pipe (CCC yearbook and file). Robert K. Bell, a young Huntsville attorney, was general chairman of the city's biggest and most elaborate occasion in many decades. "The show place of the Tennessee Valley" — Monte Sano State Park — was formally opened on August 25, 1938. A

giant celebration was staged by Huntsville and Madison County. Parades, motorcades, barbecue, speeches, and a Queen's Ball climaxed a three-year dream of local businessmen. **Thanks to the efforts of the CCC men of Company 3486.** When World War II started the men (lacking transportation) walked off the mountain and joined the regular Army.



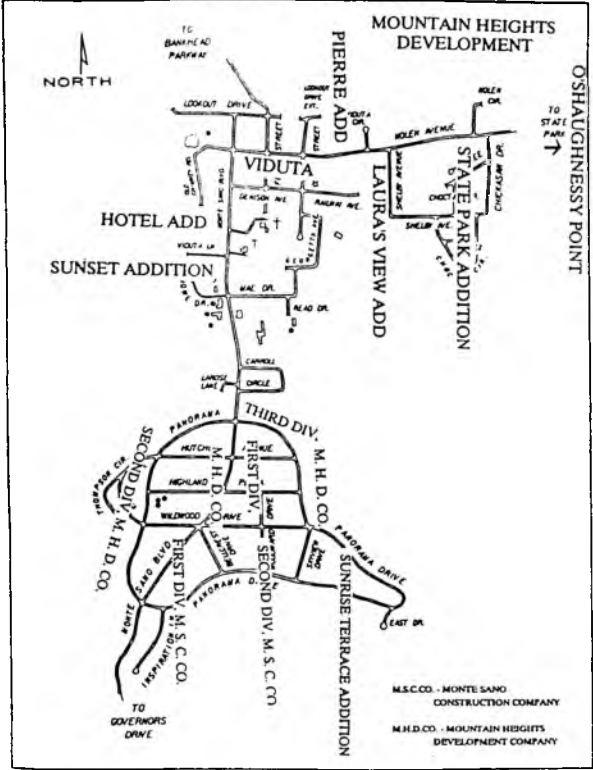
MOUNTAIN SETTLERS OF THE '50'S (1950'S THAT IS)

Spearheading the move of German families from Fort Bliss, Texas were Hans Lindenmayr and Leopold Osthoff. They contacted Sam Thompson, who was a stock holder in the Mountain Heights Development Company and the resident sales representative. He lived near 5510 Panorama Drive (house torn down). Herren Lindenmayr and Osthoff were also interested in a 36 acre farm on the southeast side of Monte Sano Boulevard owned by Mr. Lowe Williamson.

In May of 1950, Mr. Osthoff purchased the 36 acre farm, representing the following families: W. Angele, K. Debus, K. Hager, K. Heimburg. G.

Mandel, H. Millinger, E. Neubert, E. Rees, A. Schuler, H. Horn, H. Bergeler, H. Lindenmayr, W. Voss, A. Rudolph, and L. Osthoff. The price: \$7,000. Now came the work of developing the farm into residential lots. While the families lived downtown the consortium contracted with Ashburn & Gray for a survey. Noojin Hardware and Supply Co., London's, and The Hutchens Company bid on the galvanized pipe and installation for the water supply. By October of the same year, Karl Waltersdorf of the Huntsville Electric System was contacted and installation of 60 Amp. service requested. There were six houses under construction and two others starting in November. Mr. Roy Stone, Chairman - Board of County Commissioners, was contacted for culverts and gravel-covered roads. In a letter to Mr. Stone from L. Osthoff: "I know your Department is tight up with work, however the fact that FHA requirements have to be fulfilled in order to obtain the badly needed mortgage and that in next winter at least 8 people will use the road to get to work may entitle you to consider our request." And so Sunrise Terrace Subdivision evolved. (Neubert file)

Ref. G W Jones and Sons Map, Sept. 8, 1954



PRESERVATION IN ACTION

I. The Call

Dorothy Scott Johnson
2409 Dairy Lane
Huntsville, Alabama 35811

May 30, 1994

Dear Gladstone Place Resident:

As an amateur historian and a 23-year resident of the old Chapman home, I would like to point out some items of historical significance in the neighborhood, especially as they concern the stone spring-house and cooling barn. I understand these buildings are in imminent danger of being destroyed. It is chilling to think that over 170 years of history can be wiped out in a few minutes with a bulldozer.

When a subdivision is built, in the name of progress, it is often necessary to destroy certain minor geological, archaeological, or historical features. If any of these features are of major significance then other measures must be taken.

It is difficult to imagine that where you now live was once under a sea, but just west of the spring-house is a sedimentary rock outcrop embedded with millions of fossilized prehistoric sea creatures.

Before the Indian cession of 1807, the area around the spring was a campground for Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes (mostly Cherokee). Many artifacts such as grindstones and arrowheads have been found to attest to the fact. Some members of the local Archaeology Club have even suggested that the Alabama Historical Commission might like to sponsor an archaeological dig in the area around the spring.



An extremely rare and endangered species of albino, sightless crayfish live in a huge cavern on Cave Hill in northwest Huntsville. During heavy rains these crayfish (some call them shrimp) can be found in the Chapman Spring. According to the late Dr. Walter Jones, Alabama State

Geologist, this is the only place in the world these creatures exist. Any radical changes could easily destroy this animal's natural habitat.

The first white settler in the immediate area was Allen Christian who squatted on the land about the time of the Indian cession. He applied to the U.S. Government for a patent believing he was on the land on which rested the spring. When the survey was made in 1809, he found that his land was a few yards south, much to his chagrin.

George Kaiser got the land containing the spring but did not stay long. Christian and Lemuel Mead (the first Circuit Court Clerk and member of the legislature) co-purchased Kaiser's equity in the land in 1810, and finally obtained the patent October 3, 1820.

In 1835 Christian and Mead divided the land, Mead taking the north part and Christian taking the south part with the dividing line being the spring. Christian actually got the spring while Mead was allowed access. The spring was then called Christian Spring and is the headwaters of Spring Branch.

After obtaining the patent in 1820, Christian began to cut trees and made lumber for his home-to-be (now called the Chapman home) and let the lumber cure for about ten years. During that waiting period, the stones for the house's foundation and those for the dairy barns were cut (probably by slave labor) from the stone found on the side of the mountain. The stonework in all of these buildings is identical as was the foundation to Gov. Chapman's mansion that stood on the west side of Maysville Road.

Allen Christian died in 1836, and his widow continued to run the farm until she died in 1842. The property was in various hands between the time of her death and October 13, 1849, when it was bought by Philip Woodson for \$7,200. Woodson's daughter and her husband, Augustine Withers, had possession until it was sold to Governor Reuben Chapman on January 21, 1873.

Governor Chapman had owned part of the land for many years (west of Maysville Road where the mansion stood) and four generations of his descendants have called it home. It was during the Chapman era that the dairy with its stone barns became a commercial enterprise that helped sustain Huntsville citizens through three wars and the Great Depression. It is also during this time that more detailed history is known about the place.

In 1889, the dairy was operated by William E. Matthews. During his management an attempt was made to make it a showplace. Roofs of the dairy barns and spring-house were shake shingle with typical Victorian fishscale trim. The trim was still in evidence in 1971 when we bought the home.

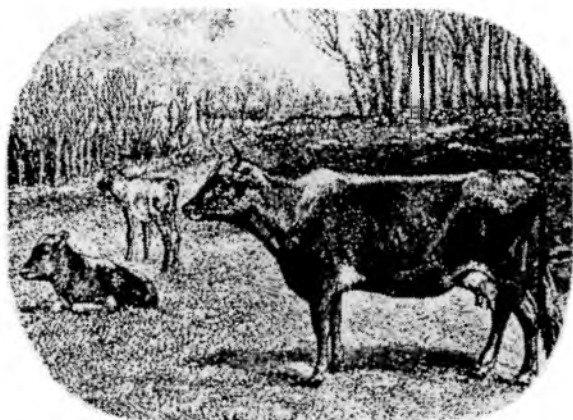
The spring-house had built-in shelving of stone on which eggs and dairy products for the home were kept cool. Water from the spring was piped to the house, to the tennis courts west of the house, and to the cattle pasture in front of the house. It is known that in the last 72 years, the spring has continually run despite some droughts of major proportions.

The dairy herd was composed of registered Jerseys, some imported directly from the Jersey Islands. The dairy house, the southernmost of the



three buildings, had two rooms downstairs plus upstairs sleeping quarters for Mr. Meadows, the Swiss dairyman. Water was piped from the spring into cooling vats which were located on the north and west sides of the cooling barn and were deep enough to submerge five-gallon milk cans.

The cows were milked in a barn across the lane. After milking, there were carriers to take it immediately to the front room of the dairy where it was strained and canned to be submerged in the vats to cool. It was then bottled and capped and delivered to customers twice daily.



Among the cows were two of exceptional productivity: Signal's Lily Flag and Little Goldie. Unofficial tests showed that Lily Flag's output and the butterfat content of her milk far exceeded that of the current world champion; little Goldie was a close runnerup.

Lily Flag soon became the talk of the town and on June 2, 1892, a reception was given her. Mr. Meadows sleeked her up, decorated her horns with iris and ribbons, then took her below the barn to receive callers. One hundred five persons registered, greeted her, and were served a glass of her milk. In October, 1891 she was valued at \$10,000 which was the price of many farms in the South at that time.

A "Lily Flag Supper" was given by Mrs. Matthews (a noted cook) on June 22, 1891 to benefit the Presbyterian Church. Sweet milk, cream, buttermilk, cottage cheese, ice cream of any flavor, sherbert, boiled custard, Delmonico pudding, blanc mange, and Charlotte russe were made exclusively from her milk and served to the guests. Cakes and other byproducts were also served. Few people could believe that one cow could supply the needs of the town.

General Samuel H. Moore, co-owner of Lily Flag, resided in the present Harry Rhett home on Adams Street. He gave a party and invited 1,500 guests with Lily Flag as guest of honor. The party has become legendary in Huntsville. There is a subdivision and some businesses named for her today. Few realize she was part of the Chapman Dairy.

In 1894, the Chapman family resumed control and management of the dairy. During the Spanish-American War in 1898, four regiments encamped on Chapman land. On Trinity Sunday, 1898, they arrived at the Chapman place hungry and weary from a delayed trip from Tampa, Florida on short rations. They asked for food, water and permission to lie on the grass and rest. Mrs. Rosalie Chapman (widow of Gov. Chapman's son, Reuben III) stopped her milk wagons and served the soldiers milk from the dairy. The spring furnished water for the thirsty men.

Next to succeed in management of the dairy was Reuben Chapman, IV, and his wife, Josephine Gaboury (the daughter of Joseph Gaboury who introduced the first electric trolley car to the United States in Montgomery, Alabama). Reuben and Josephine managed the dairy through two world wars and the Great Depression. During the depression, Josephine said many times, "The little children must have milk," and they were given milk regardless of their parents' ability to pay. No one was ever turned away and it has been said that the dairy sustained the life of Huntsville during that terrible period.

The dairy continued to serve Huntsville's milk needs until after the second world war. At that time homogenization became necessary but Reuben and Josephine felt they were too old to go to the expense and effort of changing over. Too, White Way Milk had been introduced in Huntsville and the community would no longer have to rely on this dairy. They sold their herd and gradually sold off the land to developers but retained 34 acres which included the dairy barns.

The dairy barns are believed to have been built between 1820-1830 and the spring-house earlier, probably 1810-1820. This makes them some of the oldest stone buildings in the state and certainly in north Alabama. The destruction of these buildings and landscape would mean an irreparable loss to the heritage and history of the area.

Restored buildings nestled in their beautiful setting will greatly enhance the resale value of your property. It would be a delightful, unique place for picnics and parties.

II. The Response

Notes on Springhouse and Other Dairy Buildings on Woodcroft in the Gladstone Place Development

During the week of May 30 - June 4, 1994, several people with an interest in and a knowledge of the history of the site of Gladstone Place toured the remains of the stone buildings on Woodcroft and discussed with some homeowners the historic value of the area and possible ways to preserve it.

Buddy Chapman, who grew up on the property; Dorothy Scott Johnson, a professional genealogist who has researched the history of the neighborhood since moving into the Chapman farmhouse on Dairy Lane in 1971; Suzanne O'Connor, President of the Historic Huntsville Foundation; Elise Stephens, a history professor at Alabama A&M University and the editor of *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly of Local Architecture and Preservation*; and Dee Gilbert and Diane Ellis, Gladstone Place homeowners, met informally twice near the springhouse to discuss the historic value of the springhouse area and what might be done to preserve it while meeting the needs of the neighborhood.

On Saturday, June 4, preservation architect Harvie Jones of Jones & Herrin Architects came to the site to evaluate it and meet with Jim Hayes, President of Gladstone Place Homeowners Association, and several other homeowners gathered there to clean out debris and underbrush.

Harvie Jones noted that the cooling house, with its ashlar stone, appears older than the restored barn behind the McDonald house. He believes it is likely the oldest agricultural structure in Madison County. Jones suggested restoring the springhouse with the remaining original stones, and stabilizing the cooling house by 1) clearing the vegetation growing from the mortar, 2) repointing the stonework with a lime-based mortar, and 3) constructing a random cement cap to stop further weather deterioration. He will give us the phone number of Robert Irving, a mason familiar with this type of pointing who has done work for the Burritt Museum. Jones gave a top-of-the-head estimate of what it would cost to rehab the two structures as between \$5,000 and \$10,000. Since, at this point, no one knows for sure what the original buildings looked like, to do any work beyond this plan of restoration and stabilization would be conjectural and costly.



Landscaping the area and enhancing the spring and stream were also discussed. Jones complimented the association on the appearance of the barn and picnic area behind the McDonald house and offered the suggestion that landscaping be kept simple and rustic in keeping with the style and age of the buildings and in order to keep maintenance costs low. (Pea gravel rather than crushed limestone is a more appropriate ground cover, for example.)

Harvie noted that once the area is cleaned and restored, vandalism and similar mischief is likely to decrease.

Jim Hayes mentioned the problem of run-off from the storm drain in the street affecting the stream, and Jones said that was something that should definitely be corrected.

The site and the larger neighborhood is rich in geological, archaeological, and historic interest. The entire Spring 1989 issue of *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly* was devoted to the area. With this in mind, the group discussed where we might get help to support our restoration and preservation efforts. Harvie noted that brick-and-mortar grants are hard to get but not planning grants. The following ideas emerged:

- Seek a historical marker for the area. You do this through application to the City Council. The markers are expensive, about \$2,000, but if the city accepts the application it pays for the marker. Harvie Jones said our council representative, Jimmy Wall, strongly supports these efforts. He suggested that we might not want to broadcast widely information about the site in the interest of keeping it protected for the neighborhood.
- Seek recognition and help from the Alabama Historical Commission.
- Seek inclusion on the National Registry of Historic Sites if it will include ruins. We would then be eligible for planning grants.
- Seek help from local groups such as the Huntsville Land Trust, the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the Botanical Garden, garden clubs, Eagle Scouts, etc. for landscaping or maintenance.
- See if a local archaeological group is interested in doing a dig on the site.
- Reproduce the 1884 plat for inclusion with the historic marker.

Elise Stephens said residents of Monte Sano realized what a historical area they inhabited and formed a group to research and preserve their treasures. We already have a group in place. Diane Ellis will call Jane Barr of Monte Sano to find out how they proceeded in their preservation efforts. Suzanne O'Connor offered a list of historical and preservation agencies that may help us.

The group agreed that we need to develop a master plan before proceeding, but that there is some urgency to prevent further deterioration, vandalism, and theft of the stones. Perhaps we can put up a chain to protect the area while we make our plans for restoration.

6/4/94

Diane Ellis

2004 Brandy Circle