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And a Good Time Was Had by All: Celebration and Barbecues in the Early Days of Madison County, Alabama

By
Nancy Rohr

Entertainment in the first days of Alabama statehood had both distinct unsettled roughness and a deep respect for past shared experiences. Rural pioneers were entrenched in isolation until they could find a common purpose to share with others. Young men and boys everywhere gathered to show off and compete with one
another; men were required to turn out for muster at militia practice. Quilting bees, cabin or barn raising, corn husking, weddings, funerals (most often performed quickly in the humid South), church, brush arbor, and revival meetings encouraged the entire family to attend neighborhood gatherings. In town, ceremonial gatherings united the people as a community. Dinners honored visiting celebrities such as hoped-for future president, Andrew Jackson, or current President (James Monroe). Barbecues everywhere allowed as many people who could fit into the space to enjoy food and drink, the news of the day, a bit of gossip and neighborliness.

Three Cheers and Hurrahs: Celebrate loud huzzas

Across the nation, wherever one might go, one singular celebration united everyone in the summer each year, as it does today: the Fourth of July. A co-mingling of civilians and the militia encouraged a display of common values and a show of strength that aroused praise for past patriotism and present readiness.

The grand Fourth of July events worked their way south as the pioneers migrated. For instance, the 1808 celebration at Occoney Station, South Carolina began with a militia parade, followed by an address by a minister, and then everyone “marched to an agreeable and natural arbor, where, in the company with a number of others, they partook of an elegant barbecue.” (Moss 25) The spirit moved into the “Old Southwest”, or the Old South.

Naturalist John James Audubon apparently enjoyed his Fourth of July barbecue in one Kentucky settlement, where donations to the festive meal included “ox, ham, venison, turkeys, and other fowls.” But before eating, “A great wooden cannon, bound with iron hoops, was now crammed with home-made powder; fire was
conveyed to it... and as the explosion burst forth, thousands of hearty huzzas mingled with its echoes.” After the cannon salute and patriotic speeches, all joined at the tables; toasts and dancing followed. Audubon continued glowingly, “The fair led the van, and were first placed around the tables, which groaned under the profusion....Many a national toast was offered and accepted....The ladies then retired to booths that had been erected at a little distance.” The men who returned to the table, “…recommenced a series of hearty rounds. How-ever as Kentuckians are neither slow nor long at their meals, all were in a few minutes replenished, and after a few more draughts from the bowl, they rejoined the ladies....” (cited in Moss 25-29)

At the same time, in Madison County, Alabama, the festivities for the Fourth of July in 1824, lasting from dawn until almost certainly well after dusk, were recounted in the newspaper. The celebration “was ushered in by firing from the Volunteer Company commanded by Captain Dunn. After the usual evolutions, a procession was formed by the military and citizens, who marched to the Presbyterian Church where after an appropriate prayer by Rev. Mr. Allan, the Declaration of Independence was read, succeeded by pertinent remarks by Mr. Acklen, who was followed by an impressive and eloquent oration by Mr. Woodward. Two sumptuous entertainments were provided – one at Capt. Jones’ Hotel, [The Huntsville Inn] the other in the Grove. At the former, the Hon. H[enry] Minor, assisted by Col. Osborne, presided; and at the latter, Maj. Roberts, assisted by Col. Aiken.” They would recount vivid memories of the cost of their struggles, sacrifices, and the loss of loved ones from the final victory of 50 years earlier. (Demo, July 13, 1824)

As the meal finished, the arranged 13 “regular” toasts were offered, ending always with one for the “ladies fair.” Depending on
the events and news of the times, this was followed by any number of “volunteer” toasts usually given by prominent leaders, merchants, doctors, and lawyers, honoring the heroes of the past and with admiration of contemporary champions as General Mad Anthony Wayne and Simon Bolivar. The description of a celebration for the Fourth of July in 1825 in the Huntsville Democrat implied a great deal of cheer:

The Anniversary of the American Independence was celebrated in this place on the 4th instant with the usual demonstrations of joy & hilarity. A splendid barbecue was prepared for the occasion in the Grove by Messrs. Cross and Clark. Thomas Humes Esq. was appointed President, Robt. W. Roberts and James J. Pleasants, Esq.’s Vice Presidents and Logan D. Brandon, Esq. Secretary. The following toasts were drank (sic) and the day was closed in harmony.

him to the shores of his native land. The day – Consecrated by the voice of Patriots – may its blessings depend unimpaired to the latest posterity.

The union of the States – May it stand firm like Mount Atlas, and glory, happiness and independence must be the result.

The people of the United States – Great in resources, courage and patriotism.

The memory of Washington.


The Ex-Presidents of the United States – Their virtues are engraved on the hearts of a free people.

The State Governments – Their own rights and the general welfare promoted without party animosities.
The Army of the United States – A Lamb in peace, in war a Lion: its past achievements serving as the best commentary. 

The Navy of the United States – The motto “don’t give up the ship, don’t strike the flag.”

General Andrew Jackson – The hero, the patriot, the friend of mankind – Long may he live to enjoy the esteem and affections of a free people.

The memory of the Patriots and Heroes of the Revolution.

The State of Alabama.

The fair daughters of America – Their smiles for the friends of their country, their frowns for its foes.

VOLUNTEERS

By the President – The Nation’s Guest may propitious gales waft

By Vice President Roberts – May we never lack a Kremer as a watchman on the walls of our Republic.

By Vice President Pleasants – The Judiciary of Alabama – Free and untrammelled, the safe depository of the people’s rights.

By the Secretary – The Hon. Wm. Kelly – our friend though absent still present.

By Samuel Peete, Esq. – John Quincy Adams constitutionally elected President – Though we do not approve, it is our duty to acquiesce.

By Col. J. I. Thornton – The memory of Byron – the fame of Emperor’s and Kings may be effaced; their deeds may fade; but his will remains as long as bright as the sun.
By Vice President Roberts – General Andrew Jackson – The conqueror of the invincibles; the inflexible statesman – may a grateful Republic, yet place him in the Presidential chair.

By Wm. Acklen, Esq. – The American Fair – A brilliant type of seraphic purity – no fairer boon to mortals known – no richer blessing by Heaven given.

By John Phelan – America as she is – Europe ought to be.

By George Fearn – The memory of Benjamin Franklin.

By Wm. McNeil – The memory of Wm. W. Bibb our late Governor.

By Matthias Munn – The memory of John W. Walker, Esquire.

By Anderson Hutchinson – Unholy Alliance whether to pervert the minds, enslave the persons, or pick the pockets of the people – Let truth expose, indignation crush and infamy cover them.

By Byrd Brandon – Israel Pickens, Governor of Alabama – May his successor shed as much luster of the state as he has.

By Roger Stevens – Murphy our next Governor – May he be the DeWitt Clinton of Alabama.

By R. C. Rathbone – Freedom and Independence to all the nations of the earth – ours by the pole star.

By John Murphy – The Next President if not Jackson, let him have the principles of a Jackson

By James Long – Our next Legislature – May it be composed of Wisdom, Integrity and independence.
By Alex. Wasson – When we forget General Anthony Wayne, may we be forgotten.

By Maj. Fleming – General Andrew Jackson, the Hero of New Orleans.

By a Spectator – The coulder on the land and the keel of the sea – May all who hold the handle and helm find honor and reward.

By another Spectator – The Mechanics of Huntsville, the most respectable part of the community.

By Maj. Fleming – The whole World a Republic – No King but the King of Heaven.

By the whole Assembly – Simon Bolivar – May he persevere so that this inscription shall be made upon every temple of liberty “Washington and Bolivar.” (Demo, July 5, 1825)

General LaFayette, the Nation’s Guest, had completed his triumphal tour of the United States and recently passed through south Alabama, at a cost of $17,000 to the taxpayers of the state, and was soon to sail from New Orleans. Others names recalled heartily in 1825 are perhaps not as quickly called to mind today but should be:

John Williams Walker, son-in-law of LeRoy Pope, served as president of the Alabama Constitutional Convention and was appointed to become the new state’s first Senator. He had been in poor health and had died just some two months earlier at the age of 46.

The 6th governor of New York, DeWitt Clinton, was greatly admired for his efforts to build the Erie Canal. Of locally, the
Muscle Shoals Canal, Fearn’s Indian River Canal, and Flint River Navigation Companies were current topics of progress.

Even in seemingly backwoods Alabama, Lord Bryon was famous among the literate ladies and gentlemen for his poetry, and possibly even more so for joining the Greek War of Independence, where he met his death. The attendees also praised fearless Bolivar and Washington.

The event described in the newspaper, “in the Grove,” suggests an outdoor event for this grand celebration of leaders and hopeful leaders of the future city. As reported by the Democrat, this was a more sophisticated version of the traditional celebration. The article did not report on the food served, how long the evening of spirits continued, or who carried the men home. Certainly many of these men had accomplishments to celebrate and many more to look forward to.
The attendees of these occasions were well known in the community and appeared to be significant leaders. **Andrew Cross**, according to the census of 1830, maintained a household with one male under the age of five, two males between five to nine; two males from 10-14; one male over 30; one female under five; and, one female 20-29 for a total of eight people. They are not noted in any other census. An early settler, he died on June 7, 1836. To have made arrangements for the celebration to be at The Grove suggests he was a man with useful connections. (Gandrud 314)

**Clark** was probably Dr. **Elisha B. Clark** who with his partner, Dr. Jonathon F. Wych, maintained an office early in 1818 at the market house. Fees were reasonable: $1 for a town visit or depending on the miles and the circumstances 50¢ to $1 a mile in the countryside. All visits at night were double in price. Later, Clark had an office in a backroom of the Bank Hotel which was located across Fountain Row from the newly built Planters’ and Merchants’ Bank. (Fisk 21, 55, 122, 123)

**Thomas Humes, Esq,** came south from Knoxville to practice law in 1815 and applied for a land grant in 1819. He served as mayor of Huntsville from 1826-1828. The 1830 census showed no slaves or children living in the household. Shortly afterwards in 1831, his widow, Elizabeth, called upon her son-in-law, Joseph Caruthers, to administer his estate. Among the estate inventory items was a map of the United States valued at $1.50. (Oh, to locate that map today!) Their grown children included Eliza Lewis, Martha Speck, William, and Miss Mary who died in Huntsville at the age of 82 in 1887. (1830 Federal Census; Madison County Probate #420; Family Files, Huntsville Public Library)

Similar to others in this group, **Maj. Robert W. Roberts,** followed opportunities. Originally from Delaware, he practiced
law in Tennessee, moved to Limestone County in 1822, and eventually Scott County, Mississippi where he served as a judge and member of the U.S. House of Representatives. For four years he served in the 28th and 29th U.S. Congresses.

A Virginian, (Hanover County) by birth, now a merchant and a lawyer with offices on the Square, James Jay Pleasants, Esq. (1797-1849) successfully involved himself in local and state politics. That he married Emily Bibb, a daughter of the second governor of Alabama and a niece of the first, did not appear to be a disadvantage as he mixed readily with state leaders. He served as Secretary of State for Alabama from 1821-1824. His was a prominent family with connections to the firm of Pleasants Bros. of New York, Cotton Factors & Commission Merchants, handy for dealing with his acres of southern cotton. Probate records show extensive holdings in Sunflower County, Mississippi and 1000 acres in Crittenden County, Arkansas. (Hobbs 144; Probate #1612)

Logan D. Brandon, Esq. (1803-1855) was the twelfth of Rachel and Josiah Brandon’s 15 children. The Brandons migrated from North Carolina, with stops in Georgia and Tennessee before settling in north Alabama around 1810. (Logan’s middle name, Davidson, was in memory of the neighbors massacred by the Indians while Brandons were in Tennessee.) Two of the brothers, Thomas and William, noted contractors and brick masons, built many of the early brick homes of Madison County.

Just a few years after this 1825 barbeque dinner, Logan Brandon was acquitted of murder. It seems that in 1830, Brandon testified against Col. Gideon Northcut at that man’s court-martial, possibly in retaliation for an altercation of some sort. Northcut spoke to his company about the events. Rumors had flown for some time on both sides, and worse still was the talk in the community. At the muster field Logan shot and killed the colonel when he believed
Northcut to be reaching for his gun. However Brandon was able to use as his justification the defense of the reputation of his sister, Mrs. Smith. The jury acquitted Brandon because this was clearly a case of self defense and honor. Northcut had been very popular and the community remained divided in their feelings. That served little good to Mrs. Northcut when her possessions were sold at the steps of the Court House as required by law. A new widow, she now had three sons and seven daughters to raise. *(Demo. Dec. 16, 1830)*

In 1843 Logan Brandon married Sarah Haughton and they moved to Monroe County, Mississippi where so many others had migrated and where he died in 1855. *(Madison County Marriage Record Book 4A, 1; Gandrud 519, 552)*

The Honorable **William Kelly, Esq.** (1786-1834) born in South Carolina, came from Tennessee in 1817, where he had served as a judge in the circuit court. He was elected to Congress in 1821, and was called to fill the vacancy left when John Williams Walker retired from the State Assembly in December 1822. *(Kelly surprisingly won by one vote over the favored John McKinley, who would go on to bigger things.)* After losing the next election for that seat, Kelly returned to the state House of Representatives.

For a time Kelly, a strong Jacksonian Democrat, and William Long, the publisher of the Huntsville *Democrat*, were both influential and popular among the more middling settlers. They may have been the first to use the title “Royal Party” against LeRoy Pope and his Broad River cohorts. Kelly then entered into a battle that challenged the Royal Party and may have been a blessing to many of the more deprived settlers.

With his partner at that time, Anderson Hutchinson, Kelly sought a repeal of the statute of limitations for a group of clients in order to recoup excessive interest they had already paid out from the
usury law of 1818 of Mississippi Territory times. When it became known that Kelly would receive 50 percent of the amount refunded if the cases were successful, his constituents abandoned him. Further, the Alabama Supreme Court ruled in 1827 that the usury law had been legal, and no interest would be refunded. Kelly’s downhill slide continued into 1828 when he instigated a bizarre “Trial of Judges” to depose three Supreme Court judges, but unfortunately for Kelly, they were vindicated. This was his final defeat. Ruined to obscurity, he moved to New Orleans where his burial site is unknown. (Encyclopedia of Alabama, Dec. 7, 2014)

Colonel Samuel Peete, Esq. (1794-1877) raised near Petersburg, Sussex County, Virginia was a veteran of the War of 1812, graduated from William and Mary, and settled in Huntsville around 1820. His sister Eliza Jane Lane and brother Benjamin Peete, also very accomplished, settled nearby in Limestone County. He practiced law and served as mayor of Huntsville twice in the 1830s. In 1833 he married Susan Pope and they had two daughters before she died in 1838. Peete owned the house at 600 Franklin Street until it was purchased by Dr. John Y. Bassett. The two girls were raised by their maternal grandmother, Eliza (Mrs. Benjamin Pope) in a household of “refined and intellectual atmosphere” at 621 Franklin Street. Mrs. Pope apparently did a good job with the girls; they married well, if that is any indication. Julia, after attending Mrs. Lamb’s select school in Philadelphia married William B. Bate, later major general, Governor of Tennessee, and later U. S. Senator. The second Peete daughter, Mary Irby, also attended a northern school, but once home her father continued her education with Latin and college studies, music, and even chess. After the Civil War she went to Europe to continue her French studies before returning. In 1868 she married Dr. Cornelius Dupre of North Carolina. Samuel Peete died in
Nashville, in 1877 at nearly 83 years of age. (Family Files; Robey et al 9; Gilchrist 7-11, 123-125)

The toast offered up by Col. James Innes Thornton, Esq. may just well as been given by his brother, Harry I. Thornton. Lawyers both, they arrived in Madison County from northern Virginia with impeccable credentials. Their family connections by marriage and blood relationships included George Washington, James Madison, and Zachery Taylor. Their family enterprises included mills, shipping and of course, plantations and politics.

The younger of the two brothers, James Innes Thornton (1800-1877), graduated from Washington and Lee University in 1820 and joined his brother’s law practice in Huntsville. He moved on to Cahaba, the state capitol, to practice law. In 1824, James became Secretary of State of Alabama a position he held for ten years through five governors, a delicate task in politics anywhere. Reflecting his reputation, he was appointed to be the official state escort for General LaFayette on his tour through the United States. James Thornton’s house, Thornhill, near Forkland is considered to be one of the most significant antebellum houses in Alabama.
Colonel Harry I. Thornton, his brother, was the U. S. Attorney for the Northern District of Alabama (1826-1829) and became a prominent leader of the Alabama Whig party. Active on many scenes he was one of the two founding members of the local temperance society and a trustee of the Huntsville Female Academy. He relocated to Tuscaloosa, then to Eutaw, Alabama for two years. President Pierce appointed him to be the first Federal Land Commissioner for California, a noteworthy and profitable position, and he and his family moved to San Francisco. (Dupree 170; ADAH)

William Acklen, Esq. (1802-1872) was born in Tazewell, Tennessee and came with his family to Huntsville by 1808. His was a second generation family, grandchildren of founder John Hunt. William’s parents were Samuel B. Acklen and Elizabeth
(Hunt) Acklen. William read law in Huntsville and began to practice in 1823. In 1826 he represented Madison County in the House, and was four times returned. Beginning in 1823 he was elected state solicitor, a position he filled for twelve years. In 1853 he defeated the Hon. William Fleming for State senator, and served for four years. Politics can take a high toll; Acklen became weary of his early accomplishments. By 1858 the R. G. Dun Insurance Co. report noted him solvent, and with “no equal as a criminal prosecutor,” “but inefficient from indolence and political operations. Acklen had married Louisa King of Montevallo in 1832 and both are buried at Maple Hill Cemetery. (Lawyers), R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School; Gandrud, 475; Maple Hill, 51; (http://alabamapioneers.com/biography-william-acklen-born-1802/#sthash.lqTJG1oA.dpuf/ 9/14/14; Dupree 227)

Among William’s eight siblings were several high achievers, typical of the early successful Madison County settlers. John R. H. Acklen was sheriff for a time in Madison County; Sarah McGee relocated to Texas with her husband; Palmyra Coleman and Cristopher also went to Texas. Most notable among the family was their brother, Joseph Alexander Smith Acklen (1816-1863) who served as a federal district attorney for Alabama for a period of time and in the militia during the War of 1812. Later Capt. Joseph Acklen, after signing prenuptial agreements, married who was by most accounts the wealthiest woman in Tennessee, the widow Adelicia Franklin. At that time she owned seven plantations and 659 slaves in Louisiana and various Tennessee properties. They lived together at Belmont Plantation near Nashville where he continued to enlarge their holdings. (Family Files)
“America as she is...” so toasted John Phelan. If any one family characterized opportunity in America, Phelan’s did. It was written that his father, Jonathan, was “An Irishman, of good reading and intelligence,” a Queen’s county man of Marysbourough. He fought in the Irish Army as a captain at the Battle of “Vinegar Hill” in which the Irish were defeated in 1798. Finding it an appropriate time to move on, he married Mary Sluigan and came to New York (around 1800) when he was 24. He married his second wife, Priscilla Oakes (Ford) Morris from Boston, in 1807. After working in New York, he moved to New Brunswick, New Jersey where he was a cashier in a bank and unfortunately fell into “pecuniary difficulties” because of speculation in real estate. He moved to Baltimore, then to Richmond, and found a business partner in a
Mr. Dillon. Together they began a soap and candle manufactory which did not succeed; accordingly they set out together about 1817 with their candle-moulds for the Alabama Territory, then “one of the remotest settlements of the West.” As grocers and chandlers they appeared successful for a time, and Mrs. Phelan brought the children to join her husband in 1818. The Boston lady must have given pause to this adventure so far from all she knew.

Once in Alabama, their children helped in the family business, which, according to their newspaper ad, offered “New Candles, Old Whiskey, and Draught Porter which is neither old nor new, but just in its Prime.” It could not have helped their situation that in 1820 the good Captain was “dreadfully stabbed” by a journeyman carpenter and his case at the time was a “doubtful one,” although he survived. Nevertheless, “Old Capt. Phelan,” as he was called, apparently was “too convivial in his nature,” and this time “the end was pecuniary ruin.” The sheriff, to pay off his debts, seized and sold all their goods. Priscilla and a daughter worked to support the family “by the needle” and the oldest son was taken on by Cox & Lewis as a “store boy” circa1824. The genial father, John, had served his southern home as a City Alderman in the 1830s and in the militia as adjutant. The 1830 census showed a household of five and no slaves. Captain John Phelan died in Tuscaloosa in 1850. (Distinguished American Lawyers, 50-5 in Family Files; Rohr, “The News,” 8; Gandrud, 502)

Among John Phelan’s children, two sons did particularly well. John Dennis Phelan (1809-1879) born in
New Jersey, rose from the family poverty with financial help first from a friend, Dr. Miles Watkins, and graduated from the University of Tennessee. Phelan became a lawyer but returned to Huntsville in weakened health, still poor. For a time, he tutored and divided that meager income with his family. Opportunities in Memphis and New Orleans faded, and he considered becoming a vagabond in France. In order to return home from New Orleans, he had to borrow money from an acquaintance. Once back in Madison County, Phelan wrote editorials for the Democrat and, as a result, found public notice. Friends urged him to enter politics, and his first gathering was at Cloudtown (New Hope) where, to get attention, he staged a contest to dance a “jig.” (Politics seemed simple, perhaps even simple-minded, then.) His stunt attracted the crowd’s attention, and thus began a political career in Alabama. In 1835, he married Mary Ann Harris and relocated to Tuscaloosa, where he became a prominent jurist and legislator. He was an Alabama Supreme Court Justice, Attorney General and performed many other prominent legal duties. In 1852 John Phelan was remembered as being usually grave but with “a strong relish for wit and humor,” who still enjoyed the dance and took pleasure in a good song. (Distinguished American Lawyers in Family Files 50-54)

Phelan’s wife, Mary Ann, volunteered with other women and helped establish The Ladies Memorial Association in Alabama after the War. She helped found Alabama’s first Memorial Day celebration in Montgomery and gathered supporters to restore cemeteries of the War dead, which were already in disrepair and in some cases, ruin. John D. Phelan later served as a professor of law at Sewanee. He died in 1879 in Marion, Alabama. (ADAH)
A second son, James Phelan (1821-1873), was born to John Phelan in Huntsville and served as an apprentice printer for the Huntsville *Democrat*. In Tuscaloosa, he edited the *Flag of the Union* and became the state printer in 1843. With his wife, Eliza Jane Morris, he moved to Mississippi in 1849 where he practiced law in Aberdeen and developed a large practice. He served in the state senate in 1860 and as a Senator from that state in the First Confederate Congress of 1862. His bill to confiscate all the cotton in the South in order to obtain foreign loans created such a furor among planters that he was burned in effigy and defeated in the next election. James Phelan later settled in Memphis and practiced law there until his death. (ADAH; *Distinguished American Lawyers*, 50-5 in Family Files; Rohr, “The News,” 8; Gandrud 502)

The Fearn surname in Huntsville speaks of early settlers and success in many fields. Although they practiced medicine and law, the Fearn brothers were involved in plantations, politics and progress, as they proposed it, on a vast scale. Among other developments, George Fearn, Esq. (1798-1864) and his brother Dr. Thomas owned the Huntsville Public Waterworks, the first within the state. George also stayed actively involved in the Indian Creek Navigation Co. through its completion in 1827. Perhaps less
prominent than his brothers Richard, Col. Robert, and Dr. Thomas Fearn, George and his wife Elizabeth (Burress) Fearn continued from Madison County to Mississippi. He relocated in Hinds County, and by 1850, was worth $8000. By 1860, the census set his value as a merchant with assets of $39,000 in real estate and $43,000 in personal estate. Leaving his brothers behind served him well. (Gandrud 135, 278; 1850; 1860 Federal Census)

As early as statehood in 1819 Robert and William McNeil were merchants on the Square. It is possible business was poor or they looked for opportunities further west, for there are no available records of the McNeils in Madison County for that time period. (Fisk 30, 40)

Among the early settlers who moved on was Matthias Munn born in 1797 in New Jersey. Like other young men, he saw the possibilities in the South and decided to relocate here. At one time, he leased the Bass Mills to grind wheat and corn at Three Forks of the Flint River. While in Madison County, he married Rosannah Feeney, a good Irish name, in 1821, and they had at least two children, Joseph and Mary, before moving on to Tuscumbia, Lauderdale County. There, according to the 1860 census he was noted as age 63, a machinist, with no slaves. His income was modest with $300 in real estate and $690 in personal estate. (Record 67; Marriage Record book 3: 125; 1860 Census)

Little is known for certain about James Long, except that at the death of his father, Daniel in 1833, James inherited property west of Meridianville, and in 1837 he married Ann Monsell. One might consider a possible relationship between this Long and William B. Long, the lawyer who founded the Huntsville Democrat in 1823. It could be that James Long was disheartened or simply decided to find his future elsewhere. (Deed Book U, 46; Gandrud 137)
Anderson Hutchinson, Esq. (1798-1853), born in Greenbrier County, Virginia, studied law at his father’s county clerk office. He went on to Knoxville and then to Huntsville. In Huntsville he was for a time partnered in a law practice with William Kelly, noted above. They represented debtors before the Supreme Court of Alabama, appealing for their clients’ compensation for debts extracted by usurious interest rates. Obviously he was popular at the statewide Masonic meeting held in 1824 Hutchinson was elected Grand Knight. (Dupree 90, 91; Record 68)

In a possible attempt to disassociate himself from the erratic behavior of his one-time partner Kelly, Hutchinson moved on to Raymond, Mississippi, then settled in Texas in 1840. In Austin he
was appointed judge of the Fourth (Western) District and therefore a member of the Supreme Court.

He arrived just in time to become involved in the Texas “Pig War,” which threatened diplomatic relations between France and the new Republic of Texas in 1841. Picture, if you will, an innkeeper’s marauding pigs invading the stables and then the rooms of the French charge d’affaires – even his very bedroom, to devour linens and chew papers. When the Frenchman ordered his servant to kill the pigs, the innkeeper thrashed the servant and moreover threatened to thrash the French diplomat! Dubois de Sailigny promptly claimed diplomatic immunity and demanded punishment for the innkeeper, Richard Bullock. Hutchinson presided as judge at the trial when the French government found a way to keep peace and offered a compromise as did the Texans, ending “the war.” Peace was not so easily found for all issues on the frontier. (<http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/justices/profile/view> 12/11/14.)

While holding court in San Antonio one year later, Hutchinson was captured and taken with others to Perote Prison in Vera Cruz, Mexico. Freed six months later, he boarded the U.S.S. Vincennes and landed at Pensacola. He died in 1854 and his widow received 640 acres bounty land due him as a Perote prisoner. Hutchinson County, Texas was named for him. (<http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/mgp01> 12/11/14)

**Byrd Brandon** (1800-1838), an attorney, was the ninth Brandon offspring. He practiced on the Square with various partners, all distinguished in the community. In 1830 his household of seven whites had four slaves tending to their needs. Well regarded, Governor Pickens commissioned him as a Lt. Colonel in the Militia. Although he was already in poor health, President Van
Buren appointed him Consul to Campeachy where he died in 1838. Brandon’s will clearly showed his apprehension. “This pail (sic) and afflicted body of mine must soon sink beneath the cold clod of the valley....” His was not a shabby household as it included among other items for the use of his wife of 13 years, Mary Jane (Caldwell), their 12 hair-bottom mahogany chairs, the table, one Brussels carpet, their portraits, and his gold watch and chain. He owned ten slaves and a carriage for which, like the watch, he paid extra taxes. The widow might choose to live in town or at the farm on their 200 acres in Lincoln County, Tennessee (near his father’s land). If she sold the property, she was to reserve the best cabins for the old Negro man, Billy, and the Negro woman, Nancy and see to it that they had 10 or 15 acres of the best grass land to cultivate for the estate. His two sons were to have the best education anywhere in the United States which was to include English and classical education. They might choose their own professions. The girls’ education was to include all the usual uplifting classes in French, Spanish and Italian, the piano and guitar. Byrd Brandon bequeathed to his brother, Samuel, his white Russian rabbit hat. (That must have been a sight to behold in downtown Huntsville, Alabama in 1838.) (Taylor 104; 1830 federal census; Gandrud 287; Probate #201)

Robert Stevens was likely the partner in Selby & Stevens, Watch Makers, Jewelers & Silversmiths, on the Square in 1821. Besides selling watches and clocks, the partnership repaired and cleaned musical snuff boxes. One might wonder how many musical snuff boxes there were in Madison County at the time, but with eight other silversmith and watch shops in Huntsville, competition was apparently strong and profitable. (Fisk 75, 77)

Mr. Rufus C. Rathbone (1775-1842) presents an interesting jumble of information, most of it recorded accurately in the legal
records. The rest of the story remains out of sight, and his descendents may have cause to wonder. What is known of his life in Madison County, Alabama is as follows: according to the 1810 Census, Rufus Cogswell Rathbone and his wife lived in Kershaw, North Carolina, with a household of 17 that included nine slaves. By January 1819, they had moved south, and there were letters waiting under his name at the Post Office in Huntsville. The census of 1830 showed that he and his wife were well established, now in their 50s and 60s. There were 14 slaves on his property and no other families with that surname nearby. His wife, Martha, died in Madison County in June of 1832, and in March of 1835 Rathbone married again, to Elizabeth L. Mason, 31 years younger than he. She was likely a member of the William Mason family, established here since 1809. They had connections to other family members nearby and the Flournoy cousins had been here long enough for their name to be established as a gathering place at Flournoy Crossroads. (Marriage Records 4: 238; Gandrud 476; Family Files)

One month earlier, Rathbone had emancipated his slave Betsey Liggins and her daughter Sarah Ann Margaret for good conduct and services rendered. Furthermore, he recommended Betsey, he said, “with pleasure, as a first rate house woman, a good seamstress, honest and not surpassed by any servant within his knowledge.” Betsey was described as “yellow, about 32” and Sarah, “age seven,” and “almost white.” (Madison County Deed Book P, 371)

By July 1839, (four years and three babies later), apparently all was not well at the Rathbone home place. Marital discord existed, according to the statements made, “interrupting the harmony which should characterize such a union,” and the couple legally agreed to live separately. Rathbone would provide support and maintenance of $750 for four years to Mrs. Rathbone. She would keep and
maintain the youngest child until the age of five and then "it" would be surrendered to Mr. Rathbone. In the meanwhile, Rathbone would have control, custody and management of the two other children immediately. According to the settlement, the youngest babe was not to be taken more than 20 miles from Huntsville. Furthermore Mrs. Rathbone also relinquished all rights to dower and other distributions at the time of her husband's death. (Deed Book R, 275, 276)

Whatever their differences, the couple had subsequent children. Sarah was born in 1840, but died within two years. A fourth son was born as noted in Rathbone's will. When Rufus Rathbone died in January 1842, Elizabeth and his sons Rufus C., Jr., Daniel M., George W., and Andrew Jackson were the beneficiaries of his estate that included 17 slaves, perishable property, and land valued at more than $28,000. Messers. Patton and Donegan were to serve as guardians of the children and establish a fund for the education of his sons. The two boys should be sent to a good manual-labor school, a current educational trend of the times, but one selected with a view to economy and health of the situation. Adding to the losses young Andrew Jackson Rathbone, born Oct. 21, 1841 died on June 3, 1842 and was buried beside his father in the family cemetery at "Slabtown" near Jordan Lane. (Probate #498; Johnson 176)

A suitable year later, in early May of 1843, the widow Rathbone married Eli Littleton Dean and they, along with the three remaining children, moved to Monroe County, Mississippi. A new guardian was appointed for the children. Regrettably, Rufus, Jr. died there even before his guardianship was established in 1846. (Of this family federal census records were not useful and only G. W. Rathbone of Monroe County was enumerated in 1860 as a "gentleman" worth $8000. ) Elizabeth (Mason) Rathbone Dean
died in Del Rio, Texas in 1896, age 90. This was certainly a woman with stories to tell. (Marriage 4: 689; Probate #498; Family Files)

John Murphy (1786-1841) newly elected Governor of Alabama would serve two terms. Although he was born in North Carolina he quickly found his place in 1818 in Alabama where he was elected to the House of Representatives, then the Senate and as Governor for two terms. He went to the U. S. House of Representatives from 1833-35. While in Washington City, South Carolina Representative James Blair read a letter from his wife to Murphy apparently displaying too much affection toward Murphy. In despair, Blair shot and killed himself in their lodging rooms. One can only speculate at the actual events or words exchanged that evening. Murphy, of course, never wrote of it. (ADAH)

The grandfather of Maj. William Fleming (-1867), Col. William F. Fleming (1729-1795), was a Scotsman who emigrated and settled in then-western Virginia and practiced medicine. Due to injuries during the Battle of Point Pleasant in Dunsmore’s War, he was unable to serve later in the Revolutionary army. For a brief eight days in June 1781, during the confusion of that war, he served as Governor of Virginia. Later he became a commissioner to settle claims on unpatented land in Kentucky. Not surprisingly, his family came to own extensive land in that state.

Madison County’s William Fleming, the colonel’s son, arrived early and left his own mark on the people and politics of the county. Reflecting the ready violence of the times, Fleming appeared in the wrong place at the wrong time at the 1820 land sale. The crowded site was not well organized and “an affray” developed between Elisha Rice, local wealthy merchant, and Matthew Clay of Lawrence County. Fleming attempted to separate the two men, and was wounded himself. According to reports, the
cause was trifling and no arrests were made. However, in his efforts to stop further mayhem, Fleming knocked Rice’s gun hand and was shot in the chin. Undeterred, Rice continued to attack Clay with his dirk, stabbing him several times before Clay could pull his pistol and fire “a heavy load of buck-shot against Rice’s side.” Clay was severely wounded, Rice only bruised, but Fleming was “horribly disfigured” with a broken jaw.” (Fisk 111; Dupree 143)

Fleming recovered well enough to be elected to State senate in 1821. Judge Taylor, in his history of Madison County, spoke admiringly of Fleming. The major was, “chivalric by nature and generous and sincere to his friends and courteous and forbearing to his enemies.” His “harsh and discordant voice,” probably a result of this earlier “affray,” left him with imperfect enunciation, “yet the fun of humor characterizing his oratory and anecdotes pervading his public speeches gave them a keen relish, while his rigid honesty and sound common sense made him an exceedingly formidable competitor before the people.” For over a quarter of a century, according to the Judge, Fleming was the most popular and influential man in that region. Later noted as a Colonel, he ran for the House of Representatives in 1834 and the State Senate in 1839. (Taylor 58, 97)

Fleming’s home site called “Tall Timbers,” located on the Flint River in the southeast part of the county, required a workforce of 37 slaves according to the 1830 census. (Among the men at this dinner, he probably owned the most acreage.) Eventually he would have over 700 acres in the county. Among gentlemanly activities, Fleming enjoyed a position as officer in the North Alabama Jockey Club. William Frye painted portraits of William and his wife, Sally. Fleming died in 1867. (1830 Federal Census; Gandrud 317, 328; Probate #2651)
Alexander Wasson apparently came to Huntsville with ready cash in his pockets. In 1816, he purchased an empty lot for $60 which he sold two years later for $700. Although this was a fine profit for anytime, the new owner, Jesse Searcy, sold the property within eight months for $1400. It was the site of the future Weeden House. Wasson may have expected a better profit in 1824 when he advertised ten building-lots of $\frac{1}{2}$ acre each adjoining Huntsville on the west, lying in the village of Mechanicsville, on the left side of the street leading to Athens and Browns Ferry.” Little else was recorded about this early entrepreneur. (Dupree 44; Record 65)

William and Sarah Fleming

One might notice that these are not the first tier names of Madison County such as Pope, Walker and their friend Tom Percy. Nor is
Clement Clay mentioned in a time when social structure was so layered. LeRoy and his wife, Judith, may have ridden down from their mansion to observe the procession from their carriage. Senator Clay and Susannah might not feel the need to mingle with the crowds. (Surely they did not peer, gaping from the windows of Clay Castle, but did they allow their servants to watch the parade?) Those men had played major roles in earlier years, but now, in 1825, were quite secure in their positions. There would be no need to make an appearance.

Only one man in the group, William Fleming, could truly be called a “planter” with extensive acreage in the county. Among the men who spoke at that impressive celebration there were at least fifteen lawyers – J. J. Pleasants, Logan and Byrd Brandon, Samuel Peete, William Acklen, Anderson Hutchinson, the Phelan brothers, one of the two Thornton men, Thomas Humes, Robert W. Roberts, William Kelly, George Fearn, John Murphy, and William Fleming. One might give pause to the number of lawyers noted here at the dinner. (Even if there were no others in town, and some were just visiting for the event, this amounts to roughly one lawyer per 93 persons inside the less than one square mile town limit, which had a population of 1512 people. [Album, 5] How many other lawyers, not particularly in favor at that moment, were in town?) In these rough and still unformed years, land fraud was prevalent, and violence, as we have seen, was often just around the corner. Land had to be registered at the county court house and protected from the poacher, the runaway slave caught, the slave-stealer punished, and always the innocent protected. The role of the military and local militia added distinction and a title for Captain Jones; Majors Fleming, Roberts, Thornton, and Colonels Acklen, Osborne and Peete. Doctors Clark and Wythe were there. The others were
businessmen. One connection not to be overlooked is that of politics – winners and losers. They were all in the running: Humes, Roberts, Pleasants, the two Brandon brothers, Kelly, Peete, Thornton, Acklen, two Phelans, Fearn, and Hutchinson. Who else within the group (speakers and others at the tables) aspired to hold public office, but never managed to acquire enough votes in this highly competitive setting? More men may have had aspirations, but only the winners are recorded.

A woman’s recollection of these celebrations might have been even more enlightening. Lest there be any doubt, women were in attendance at this commemoration. Lest there be any doubt, women were in attendance at this commemoration. According to an account in the *Democrat* of September 9th, certain Eastern papers dared question the *etiquette* of their presence! This published “unmanly” scold was aimed at “some of the most amiable and accomplished ladies of this place.” Would the easterners “exclude them entirely from the benefits of civil liberty...” because, it was printed, “they never had borne arms in defense of their country, consequently, they should not celebrate its liberty.” The *Democrat* reminded its readers that ladies were “not entirely useless in time of war” and introduced several examples of their zeal and love for country. Ah, those “cold blooded Yankees.”

**Fireworks of All Kinds**

Formality required status and money, leaving many young men to their own activities. As always they found ways to entertain themselves. Young bucks often played at pastimes recalled by their fathers from their youth, and alcoholic drinks made events more noteworthy until surpassed by the next encounter. At the same
time, official Huntsville city fathers constantly enacted regulations to maintain order and safety. The ordinances of 1832 reflect a busy year for local lawmakers.

Private billiard tables, a taxable revenue source, were not outlawed, but gaming and betting were illegal. Gaming tables were against the regulations, as were lotteries, thimbles, dice, Faro Banks, A.B.C. Tables, Black and Red Tables, E. O. Tables, Chucks-a-Luck, a three ticket lottery, rouge and noir, Rowley Powley or any other table game with the exception of chess. Cards or dice at any tavern or inn or public place were illegal, including side bets. Did that cover all occasions of public gambling? Never. How better to top off an evening of fun for young men lured to excitement than with throwing turpentine balls, playing at long bullets, rockets, raising a balloon or any other thing calculated to endanger the property or persons of said town to the peril of inhabitants? All were made illegal; drat it. (April 9, 1832, H City Min., II)

In an outdoor crowd, other entertainments might include cock-fighting, bear-baiting or gander-pulling. Horses were swapped and raced with bets among the owners and viewers alike. Challenges of physical superiority were popular. Young men enjoyed knife throwing, foot races, shooting matches. Wrestling and fisticuffs allowed nose pinching, eye gouging and ear biting – no holds were barred. These activities lent themselves to the once a year celebration of the grand and glorious Fourth of July. Fireworks sparked, in every sense of the word.

**Barbecue Served Up in High Style**

Formal dinners also limited the number of attendees by the dimension of the rooms and the availability of acceptable guests.
The barbecue, however, as it developed in the countryside, became an occasion for “the more and the merrier. What is there not to know and love about the southern barbecue? Although there are definite ties to the word Caribarbecueean, of slave origins, surely it is almost as old as fire. Colonial America adopted the Jamaican practice, and it is no surprise that rum became an early addition.

The Rev. Charles Woodson, traveling his circuit of western South Carolina in the late 1760s, shared in his journal the intense sensory appeal of barbecue, “I had last Week the Experience of the Velocity and force of the Air – By smelling a Barbicu dressing in the Woods upwards of six miles.” Continuing south, it was understood that, “Get ten people together, and where the Irish would start a fight, Georgians will start a barbecue.” No fighting, just shared good eats. (Moss 20; Dabney 197, 198)

Not all barbecue gatherings were of mixed company. Gentlemen who enjoyed the companionship of one another found select clubs a setting for relaxation and pleasure. An 1804 poem described the loss of one local venue: “On the Fall of the Barbacue-House, Beaufort, S.C. During the Late Tremendous Storm” where the “sacred temple ... in mirthful glee, the jovial sons of Pleasure oft convene.” (Moss 18,19)

Grog’s mellow radiance set their souls on fire,
Till Kindling into generous rage, the group
Caught inspiration from each other’s eye;
Then, bright witticisms flash – the merry- tale-
Satirical description – jeu de wel-
Song – and conundrum – in their turn succeed

Clearly “Sons” was the operative word for this all-male stronghold. A toast was matched, one for another, as the men were
hard-drinking, hard-swearing, card-playing, and inclined to practical jokes. Their clubhouse was not rebuilt, but one may reasonably suppose that another stronghold was found for this mainstay of manliness.

As the back country became more stable and the over-the-hill settlers filtered, then poured, into the “Old Southwest” of Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia, social connections were increasingly important. Although pioneers brought with them ties of kinship, marriage, religion, politics, and foodways, distance reinforced loneliness which might be eased by community activities. Men, women, children, white or black, in bondage or free, often attended and reaffirmed shared civic values and friendships on some level.

Settlers brought many established traditions to Madison County. Lively events and an animated atmosphere often accompanied patriotic days, campaigning, and elections. Treating and offering free liquor and food was expensive, but upper class gentlemen candidates could usually afford the costs. For instance, in the 1758 election for The House of Burgesses, in a district of only 391 voters, a good time was had by all. George Washington spent £39.6s for “28 gallons of rum, 50 gallons and one hogshead (at least 60 gallons) of rum punch, 34 gallons of wine, 46 gallons of ‘strong beer,’ and 2 gallons of cider royal.” (Not that this was an attempt to buy votes, because that was against the law.) Nay, this was merely a show of the “candidates’ generosity and hospitality…defining traits of a gentleman.” Note, however, that at this time, the only voter was a male land-holder who pronounced his vote aloud inside the courthouse before the nominees, who then thanked voters for an affirmative vote. (Moss 16, 17)

Generosity seemed boundless. Anyone could attend these barbecues, and voting credentials were not investigated. At the
time of the first Federal election of 1789 in one Virginia county, “ther Could not a ben less than 2 or 3 Thousand persons men women Children and negrows” who crowded around for a taste of the roasted oxen.” (Morgan, 197)

It should come as no surprise that many pioneers, by the very nature of being in transit and unsettled, displayed a hearty nature and little regard for rules. A new political structure would soon be established, and the 1819 Alabama constitution had allowed all white men over 21, not just landholders, to vote. The aristocratic traditions of Virginia, no matter how prideful, were left behind. The Fourth of July may be ceremonial, but electioneering on the frontier was taking a different turn.

On the stump in the early 1820s, a novice campaigner was among the first presenters that day: David Crockett. In the backwoods of Tennessee, he ended his speech: I was “as dry as a powder horn, and that I thought it was time for us to wet our whistles a little; so I put off to the liquor stand, and I was followed by the greater part of the crowd.” Few voters stayed behind to hear the opposition speakers; and needless to say, Crockett won the election. (Moss, 37-38.)

In the summer of 1825, advertisements in the Huntsville newspaper noted that barbecues were given at E. Johnston’s at Flourney Cross Roads; Geron’s Spring at Miles H. Powers four miles south of Hazel Green; John Bellew’s at Ditto’s Landing; James Scarborough’s blacksmith shop two and a half miles from Ditto’s Landing. Festivities and good eating could be found at George P. Harrell’s Spring eight miles northwest of Huntsville; Levi Hind’s Spring near Major John Griffins; the French Tavern at Hazel Green; A. S. Wright’s house, six miles northeast of Huntsville near John Seay’s Tan yard; Francis Bell’s Spring two miles from Ditto’s Landing; Section school house two miles from
Samuel Moulhrum’s, Triana; and Big Prairie in Madison. Other sections of the county where good company might be found were at Mullins Flat, eight miles southwest of Huntsville and approximately the same distance from Triana; Woodruff’s Spring near Blevins Gap in the Little Cove; and William Derrick’s Muster Ground, seven miles northeast of Huntsville. If one wasn’t quite sure of the host’s home place, directions were given in the advertisement. Regrettably most of these notable locations have dimmed from our view and disappeared. As we have also seen, city folks in the village of Huntsville enjoyed the feast sponsored by Andrew Cross at one of Huntsville’s two most prominent locations. The Huntsville Inn was in the center of town and the Grove, as the name suggested, offered a lovely accessible and sheltered location for townspeople. (Record, 70)

Map of Madison County, 1893

Madison County was canvassed for potential barbeque locations. A local spring, a crossroads, and tan yard were prominent features. The militia grounds, already a mainstay of male territory where all eligible men were required to turn out, also served as a site for the tax collector, the voting place for the militia, and the polling place for elections. It was a site with fewer restrictions imposed by polite
society or town officialdom. Most of the advertised barbecues were held in rural areas, out of the sight of the city, county seat, pillory, stocks, and the authority of the sheriff’s office. Blatant visual reminders for propriety such as church steeples and spires were also significantly out of sight.

Once the campaign season had started and there was a break in farm work, people might have time to respond to an invitation where the feast would be “as good as some, and inferior to none.” Moreover, people could “expect from the various office hunters a complete history of the past, present and future laws and politics of the State of Alabama.”

A further look at some of the barbecue events from the newspapers of 1825 offers a study of hospitality and their sponsors.

This event took place at the neighborhood militia grounds where citizens were accustomed to go for drills, to elect officers, pay state and county taxes. Often the whole family and the entire neighborhood attended the practice. Muster day, with its militia practice and parade, was required by law for all men between the ages of 18 and 45. This was a necessity for home security, at first from the Indians and then from the fear of slave uprisings. Of course, it reinforced male bonding along with hearty eating and often-times serious drinking. It was the custom for military groups to elect their own officers. Previously candidates entertained voters at their own expense, now the candidate also became a guest to the host – men
who had well-known names in the neighborhood. With everyone gathered already, food and drink were offered and local candidates came to seek votes. What a perfect combination for politicking. (Huntsville Democrat, July 19, 1825; Rohr, “Fife, 1-15”)

Captain Robert Burbage Armistead settled in the northern part of the county near Winchester Road along the Flint River and married Mary Bass, a daughter of Uriah Bass, himself an active farmer and entrepreneur. The barbecue host, Samuel Vest, was of comfortable means. He, his wife and their eight children farmed 150 acres and had five slaves. Vest died in 1830. (Gandrud 295)

As announced, Francis Bell’s barbecue was at his spring two miles from Ditto’s Landing and the price was right for all. Originally Bell settled in 1812 on Indian Creek, but moved to join relatives south of Elon off Hobbs Island Road, west of Whitesburg Pike.

At some point, Francis Bell bought over 600 acres of land in south...
Madison County. It was located just above the Tennessee River, with one plantation of 400 acres along the macadamized roadway. (The roadway would not remain wide enough in the future. Some of the “mountain” to the west of South Memorial Parkway, called Bell Mountain, was removed when the Parkway was developed into four lanes.) In 1830 he owned seven slaves, but maintained 17 slaves by 1840. He wed Nancy Richards in 1841 (his second or third marriage) and, when widowed, married Charlotte Claupa in 1847. She died in her 27th year in 1855, leaving her husband with three small children. Francis Bell, who was considered to be an aged and worthy citizen by his peers, died at his residence near Whitesburg in September 1857. His estate was given to his children and their descendants, five of his grown children having predeceased him. Bell had done quite well by the standards of that day or any other. His estate included among other items a gold lady’s watch and chain, $36,000 in perishable property that included 39 slaves and 42,748 pounds of cotton sold at 9½¢, less his debts still came to over $11,000. (July 19, 1825 Democrat; Family Files; Marriage Book 4: 588, 4A, 173; Gandrud 554, 356, 584; Probate #2128) William Graves Bouldin (1792-1857) was a son of Capt. Green Bouldin originally of Henry County, Virginia. He, his wife, Mary Graves, and several children migrated to north Alabama about 1819. Graves Bouldin, as he was called, married a neighbor, Elizabeth Hammonds, in 1821. (Eli Hammonds, her father was noted in the community as a fine soldier and a friend of Andrew Jackson.) Bouldin’s assets grew to ownership of seven slaves in 1830, and by 1840 he had seventeen. Driven by political aspirations, he ran for tax collector in 1834, and in 1840 he was at a Democratic Meeting that included John C. Thompson, Esq., Capt. G. Steele, Col. Robert Hancock, Maj. W. Fleming, C. C. Clay, Jr., and Col. Wm. C McBroom – all political figures in the
county. The Hammond-Bouldin cemetery is just east of Harvest. (Gandrud 301, 342; Marriage Book 3; 116)

The location for the feast was at the place of David Clutts. A young man at the time, his name is one of the few remaining on the landscape of Madison County. The area was close to the Indian Boundary and some settlers, who were not originally allowed to settle there, removed themselves just inside the county line just south of Harvest. For many years Cluttsville, served as a much used crossroads that supported merchants, a post office and a Masonic Lodge. The censuses show that David Clutts and his wife, Margaret, were both born in Tennessee; he held no slaves. In 1840 the household included 12 white people and 12 free people of color. His family had thinned out by 1850, when he was listed as a carpenter, property valued at $100. Seven children still resided at home, next door to the Thomas Graves family. In 1860 there were three daughters at home; after the War, David, Peggy and 12 others with that surname lived there, according to the 1870 census. Neither David nor Peggy Clutts were shown in the 1880 census in Madison County. (Democrat. June 7, 1825)

Barbecue was good eating, but one can only guess as to whether the drink was in a typical brown jug, passed from person to person, as was sometimes known to happen. William Earnest hosted this barbecue at his house which also may have served as a Public House, or inn, located near William Stamps’ place on the busy Triana Road. In 1822, Earnest married in 1822 Rachael Jones. He married again in 1827, Agnes, daughter of Reverend John Nelson. A solid farmer at his death in 1827, with no children, his widow inherited five slaves among his other property. William W. Stamps, his neighbor on Triana Road, died in 1828. Having no children or wife, his land, 29 hogs, 15 slaves, and miscellaneous
Barbecue Free

There will be a Barbecue served up in high style

on Sat. 23rd at Captain Woodruff's Spring,

Barbecue.

A Barbecue will be furnished on

Thursday the 30th inst. (June)

at the house of the subscriber, four miles East of Hazlegreen,

and near Geron's Springs. Good eating and drinking.

A large collection of citizens and candidates are expected.

Items passed to his three brothers. His two sisters received $10 each.

(Gandrud 302, Marriage

Solomon Geron purchased land at $2 an acre in 1814 along the Briar Fork, west of Hazel Green. During the battle at Horseshoe Bend, he served as Sergeant in the 7th Regiment of Mississippi Militia under Captain Acklen. This announcement was timely because he had recently re-opened his resort, Sulfur Springs, "in a fine healthy neighborhood with neat and comfortable cottages for the use of families." (Aug. 9, 1824)

According to family records, George B. Woodruff left Brunswick County, Virginia in the very early 1820s. Woodruff siblings who also settled here included Robert W. and Allen. Other families from that area settled in Madison County.

https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review/vol41/iss2/6
County including Allen, Wilkins, Wyche, Eldridge, Manning, Vann – all to become prominent names in this county. Woodruff himself entered land in Section 26, at the south edge of Green Mountain known locally as “Potato Hill” about 3½ miles from Owen’s Cross Roads, between the Flint and Tennessee Rivers. Many of the family members were buried at the Inman Cemetery near Possum Hollow. In 1836, George married (as his second wife) Jane Inman. Judge Taylor mentioned the Inmans as poor boys living on Flint River, who moved north, and became “merchant princes in New York and Philadelphia, proprietors of the famous Inman line of ocean steamers.... The last of the family who went northward to join his brothers about the year 1838 left Vienna on a sorry pony, and he is now one of the richest merchants in the city of Philadelphia.” [Woodruff Family Files; Taylor 96, 97]

The advertisement below exhibits a host, or hosts, not to be outdone. Who would consider not accepting this invitation?
A FREE BARBECUE!!

Many of the good citizens of the Western part of this county

have thought proper to join and give a most

SPLENDID BARBECUE

On the 25th of this instant at George P. Harrell’s Spring, eight miles North West of Huntsville for the special benefit of all the candidates and people in general. As it is presumed there will be a greater collection of people than ever has been seen at a barbecue in any of the southern states there will not be less than ONE THOUSAND weight of meat put upon the pitt, (sic) besides other necessaries to give zest to the entertainment.

All this will be like God’s blessing, “without money and without price.”
With the exception of George Harrell, one may only guess about the other sponsors of this remarkable event. Harrell purchased 320 acres south of today's Hale Road and north of Martin Road. His death notice reported, "George P. Harrell, Esq., age 52, an old and respectable citizen of Madison County" has died. (Gandrud 455) Although their names are not mentioned, this instance was clearly the effort of a group of like-minded men. They formed a nascent political cluster, interested in a candidate with the same goals in mind, or at least the promise of the same goals. Whether it be road improvement, the state bank, or the Muscle Shoals Canal, sponsors intended to influence politicians on the stump with the assurance of a large number of voters.

**Sobriety Is Exchanged for Intemperance**

For all the communing and excitement they offered, however, this free food and drink appeared more than unseemly to many old-timers. The behavior of the attendees was, in the eyes of many less, than worthy. Wasn't it enough to attempt to sway the voter with merit? They looked down upon these barbeques as blatant attempts to manipulate voters.

Citizens of Madison County were not out of step with much of the South. As one observer wrote of an earlier celebration in New Bern, North Carolina, the barrel of rum was opened after enjoying the barbecue, "leading officials and citizens... promiscuously ate and drank with the meanest and lowest kind of people, holding hands and drinking from the same cup." This was a truly democratic gathering; by nightfall the empty barrels were burned and the party retired. (cited in Moss 33).
Hints of frontier changes made their way back north, as one editor complained that New Yorkers had adopted “the modest custom of their Southern neighbors” when they advertised in the newspaper, and worse, Yankees next might expect “…orations, barbecue and prime bang up knock me down whiskee frollicks.” (cited in Moss, 30)

Attitudes were changing in northern Alabama regarding barbeques, made apparent when this poem was published by the editor in a Huntsville newspaper:

Did you ever see a Barbecue? For fear
You should not, I’ll describe it to you exactly:-
A gander-pulling mob that’s common here,
of candidates and sovereigns stowed compactly, -
Of harlequins and clowns, with feats gymnastical
In hunting-shirts and shirt-sleeves- things fantastical;-
with fiddling, feast, dancing, drinking, masquing
And other things which may be had for asking.

The catchy rhyme appeared in the Huntsville Southern Advocate on July 13, 1827 as a letter to the editor by an anonymous citizen who signed his name simply as “Barbecuensis.”

In actuality, Madison County’s standards were no different than those of other states. As candidates in Virginia made speeches extolling their own virtues along with kegs of drink on Election Day, the day descended to one of debauchery and brawling. In South Carolina one such event turned into a scene of “noise, blab, and confusion….much drinking, swearing, cursing, and threatening….clamor and confusion and disgrace.” (Morgan 184)

Sadly, for the candidate and voter alike, campaigns had become “a paroxysm of condescension and conviviality. A gentleman had
to go about shaking hands and soliciting the approval of people who normally had to solicit his approval.” Would one, lower himself before voters, should one “take off his hat to people whom he would not recognize when the election was over. He had to dine with them, chat with them, and above all get them drunk and get drunk with them.” (Morgan 198) Could that have been the case at one Madison County barbecue, where seemingly innocuous bottles arranged on the table actually had the name of the candidate written on the back of each? (Huntsville Southern Advocate 1825, Aug. 5, 1827)

In Huntsville this growing popular sentiment was seconded by the opposition newspaper. Both papers seemed to agree, for a change, on a stand against the negative influence of such barbecues not to mention the demeaning behavior, the commonness, and even coarseness. That was not the worst, as other letter writers noted. The question became, how would these newly elected representatives consider his decisions? Would he “enact wholesome laws and promote and preserve the peace, happiness, and prosperity of the State, but if he will drink raw whiskey, eat rawer shote, dance bare foot on a puncheon floor…. and pull at a gander’s neck.” Would elections now be determined by how much the voter could eat or worse, how much he could drink! Not what he might read or write or even worse yet – think? (Advocate, July 13, 1827)

Here was a chance to blend with the wanna-bes, mix with the well-known, and even hobnob with the soon-to-be-famous. Was this newfound, temporary equality enjoyed by the many simply a vehicle to stroke and boost the egos of the wealthy few? “Ordinary men found themselves the center of attention. The frantic solicitation of their votes elevated them to a position of importance they could not dream of at other times.” This often presented a
make-believe impression, momentarily, of course, “pretending that people were equal when everybody knew they were not.” One would like to think this was Southern hospitably at its best, but perhaps voters were “bullied or bought or simply talked into” voting for the candidates; was not this some “form of bribery?”

“And to whom are we indebted for these barbecues? …to the candidates; to the legislators in expectancy, who are presently to wield the Democracy of Alabama.” Strong words indeed. America’s new vision of the individual and his role in a democracy obviously altered the order of society and, worse, could lead to social disorder. (Morgan 175, 176, 197; Demo. July 13, 1827)

Political campaigns were no longer merely the upper class affairs of landholders as once seen in aristocratic Virginia, but a comingling of frontier communities eager to unite and share, even for one day, their commonality. But how common might it become? How low might citizens sink? The apparent lowering of standards and ideals, once so highly cherished, became the issue.

The recent Panic of 1819 remained painfully clear to all. After so many had recently lost money with the Bank default, now, in February of 1825, who could be trusted, and who should be trusted, with their precious vote? Had the aristocratic “Royal Party” politicians not led the countryside, with offers of whiskey, eats and promises, into the terrible times of a depression? Or, was it the “populist” manner of thinking, with their whiskey, eats, and promises? Either way a clear head was needed, one unsullied by bad whiskey, excessive food, and blatantly false promises.

The Temperance Society membership found this an ideal time to appeal to citizens about the ruin of drink, and worse, free drink. After early settlement, the farmer and the city folks alike, had time to make cider, make use of surplus corn for whiskey, and purchase cheap rum. The commission merchant, stationery shop, merchants,
pharmacies, taverns and grog shops provided seemingly endless varieties of spirits. One merchant offered a consignment, newly arrived, of 20 barrels of Ohio rye whiskey, but alas, only five barrels of Tennessee Corn whiskey were available. Mr. Foote offered all this at reduced prices and with the added incentive of 35,000 Spanish Cigars now in stock. Not to be outdone, Warren & Collins recommended their New Orleans goods including fine spices, brown sugars, coffees, Cog’s Brandy, Holland & N. York Gin, Jamaica and New England Rum, and assorted cordials from West India. Wines included Madeira, Tenerife, Dry and Sweet Malaga, Port, Muscatel and Claret. Homemade spirits on the frontier were plentifully available “for a cost,” of course. (March 30, 1827 Advocate) The American Temperance Society, newly founded in 1826, had far to go in the coming days.

Moreover, the Second Great Awakening was upon the land. A renewal of camp meetings flourished at Blue Springs and Jordan’s Camp Ground, for example, and pointed people into wholesome directions. These religious meetings, with all their drama, were often led by an untrained preacher. He maintained nonstop preaching in daylong meetings that lasted far into the night, accompanied by singing, prayers, sermons and a fervent religious spirit. Preaching reaffirmed the straight and narrow way of southern religion; drink, and certainly too much drink, was harmful to a decent life. Reinforcing the local spirit, evangelical preacher Lorenzo Dow made his second appearance in Madison County early in 1827 with
at least five assembles. (Demo. Jul 17, 1824; Sept 2, 1824; Demo May 11, 1827)

The anti-barbecue message began gathering local strength, becoming a firestorm of popular opinion, as it seemed the whiskey keg was “ever flowing, ever full” as “sobriety is exchanged for intemperance...and liberty chastened to licentiousness.” In 1829, over one thousand citizens signed a petition against electioneering and barbecues. *source [cited in Moss,

Sensing the turning tide, candidate for clerk of the County Court, Lemuel Mead directed a letter two weeks later to the Advocate regarding his candidacy: “…believe that you will approve rather than censure, when you are told, that instead of being found at a barbecue or muster ground, I am in my office endeavoring to do the duties thereof....twice elected by your suffrages, it would be expected that I am at least qualified... I put myself upon the people, trusting, that if, in any thing, I may have erred, I shall find in them a forgiving spirit.” Mr. Mead correctly sensed the spirit of the times, and continued to serve through 1835. (July 31, 1824)

Fortunately for the lovers of barbecue, however the brouhaha was not a final blow in Huntsville, nor the United States. Southern hospitality and barbecue would again thrive at political campaigns throughout the nation. As modern political parties developed, local candidates, even Presidential candidates, (notably Andrew Jackson – Democrat – in 1828 and William Henry – Whig – in 1840, succeeded on the stump-lined campaign trail.

An 1840 promotion for William Henry Harrison and his log cabin campaign alluded to liquor and local militia. As political contests became more polished, barbecue was not forgotten. One high note of classic verse was thrown in as a common chant in the campaign of 1846 proclaimed:
Democrats – They eat rat!
But Whigs
Eat Pigs.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

Van Buren Is Roasted

After one election, George Steele sponsored what was most likely the ultimate indulgence. Combining winning politics and a barbecue in Madison County, Steele opened his estate, Oak Place, to the public on an evening in March 1845. The Clay sisters, editors of the Huntsville Democrat, described the splendid event in their Nov. 24, 1909 issue. One must keep in mind that the ladies were writing about an event more than 60 years earlier when wealth, good breeding, political boasting and fine food met on the very same evening:

During the Presidential campaign of 1840, Captain Steele picked out among a fine stock, a splendid ox that had never worn a yoke, named him Van Buren, and said he intended to celebrate the elections of the next Democrat President with a grand free barbecue and serve Van Buren (the) ox roasted whole. He was
doomed to disappointment – Van Buren was defeated! Nothing daunted, Captain Steele kept the ox on the fattening diet, and in four years celebrated the inauguration of a Democratic President, when James K. Polk was received by a triumphant and happy party in the White House.

The ox had grown in grace and luscious physical proportions, and he was slaughtered for the feast given at Oak Place in March 1845. Four thousand citizens from Madison and adjoining counties and states with pleasure accepted the generous and courteous invitations, scattered broadcast to Whig and Democrat alike….On the center table was a magnificent cake pyramid, four feet high, surmounted by a figure of President-elect, James K. Polk.

All kinds of vehicles, from the lowly ox cart to the elegant carriages drawn by dashing teams were brought into requisition to bring the poor, the rich, the high and low, welcomed alike.

The barbecuing… required 24 hours. With his handsome horns, highly polished, he presented a very luscious spectacle, stuffed with turkeys. There were pigs and lambs, barbecued, hams boiled and their accompaniments in jellies, sauces and bread without stint, ice cream and cake and immense cut-glass bowls of syllabub.

Crowds Sat on Cushions, Stumps or Rocks

Another barbecue described on that very beloved mountain above Oak Place was sponsored by the Huntsville Gun Club in 1891. No politicking here by all accounts. This barbecue accompanied a “special shot” event in August. The Monte Sano Railway ran special trains from the depot and private carriages were filled as hundreds took advantage of the outing. Instead of the usual target clay pigeons, the hunters matched their skill against 500 live pigeons and 1000 swallows. According to the account,
there were those few who hoped an occasional bird might be quicker than the shooter as most watched in awed silence and others cheered. There was more to come:

“Barbecue was served at twelve o’clock. Long trenches of red hot coals glowed beneath whole sheep, pigs and claves that were stretched on gridirons over them. Colored cooks turned and basted them with butter, bacon juice, red pepper, salt and garlic. At other points great flames licked the black sides of iron washpots which were now filled with boiling stew or soup. Five-gallon coffee pots sent out a steam of enticing aroma. Tubs of pickles, Irish potato salad, slaw, and relish tempted the hungry. Watermelons and ice cream freezers, and cakes and candies stood ready to be served.”

After eating, many enjoyed walking to Cold Springs, to O’Shaughnessy’s lily pond or to Lover’s Leap. At the Natural Well some dropped rocks into the pit knowing full well that things plunged into the deep waters would always come out at the Tennessee River. That might be questioned, because others felt sure that such items really came out at the Big Spring, perhaps at Byrd Spring and eventually to the River.

As evening arrived gas lights from Huntsville streets could be seen, the evening star appeared in the western sky, and the exodus of “wagonettes, tallyhos, surreys, and buggies” began. The wildlife could have their mountain once more in stillness. (Elizabeth Humes Chapman, *Changing Huntsville*, 189-1899. (Huntsville, AL: Historic Huntsville Foundation, r. 1989), 122-124.

As one may surmise, these barbeques were so much more than an excuse for free food and booze. They brought people together who would otherwise never have met. They served at social magnets, allowing people from different classes and backgrounds to mix in a common setting.
The quickly changing countryside (from landscape to urban), along with the upstart democratic politics of the day, was reflected through these social events. They revealed the apparent need to modify campaign methods, and, one might argue, instigated a better organized party system. Should one’s favorite candidate suffer defeat, there would be next year’s barbeque to look forward to.

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