

2007 Spring Pilgrimage

Wilcox County, Alabama

The Wilcox Historical Society is sponsoring a tour of homes, churches, schools, and other historic sites located in Wilcox County on Saturday, May 12, 2007. The places on tour this year represent just a few of those historic buildings and sites that are part of our heritage and rich history of this area of the Black Belt. The homes and buildings on tour are marked by signs denoting name and number as noted in this brochure. In addition to the featured homes and buildings open for the tour, there are many others that can be observed during a walking tour of the downtown area of Camden which is designated as a National Historic District.

We hope that your day is enjoyable, and that you will visit again on our next tour. Please note that barbeque lunches will be available at the **Masonic Building located on Broad Street in Camden on a first come basis.**

Tickets are on sale at **Blackbelt Treasures, Tour Headquarters**, which is located at **209 Claiborne Street in Camden**, or you can pick up tickets at the Weir Home in Gastonburg if you want to start the tour at this location. Additional maps of the tour route and other information are available at each of these locations. Advance tickets are available upon request for \$18 each by calling **334-682-9878**, e-mailing grsouth@frontiernet.net, or by writing the Wilcox Historical Society at the address noted.

*Brochures Compliments of
Camden National Bank,
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Bank of Pine Hill*

Visit our website @ www.wilcoxwebworks.com/history

Wilcox Historical Society
P.O. Box 464
Camden, Alabama 36726

SPRING PILGRIMAGE

Wilcox County, Alabama

Saturday, May 12, 2007
9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

1. Blackbelt Treasures

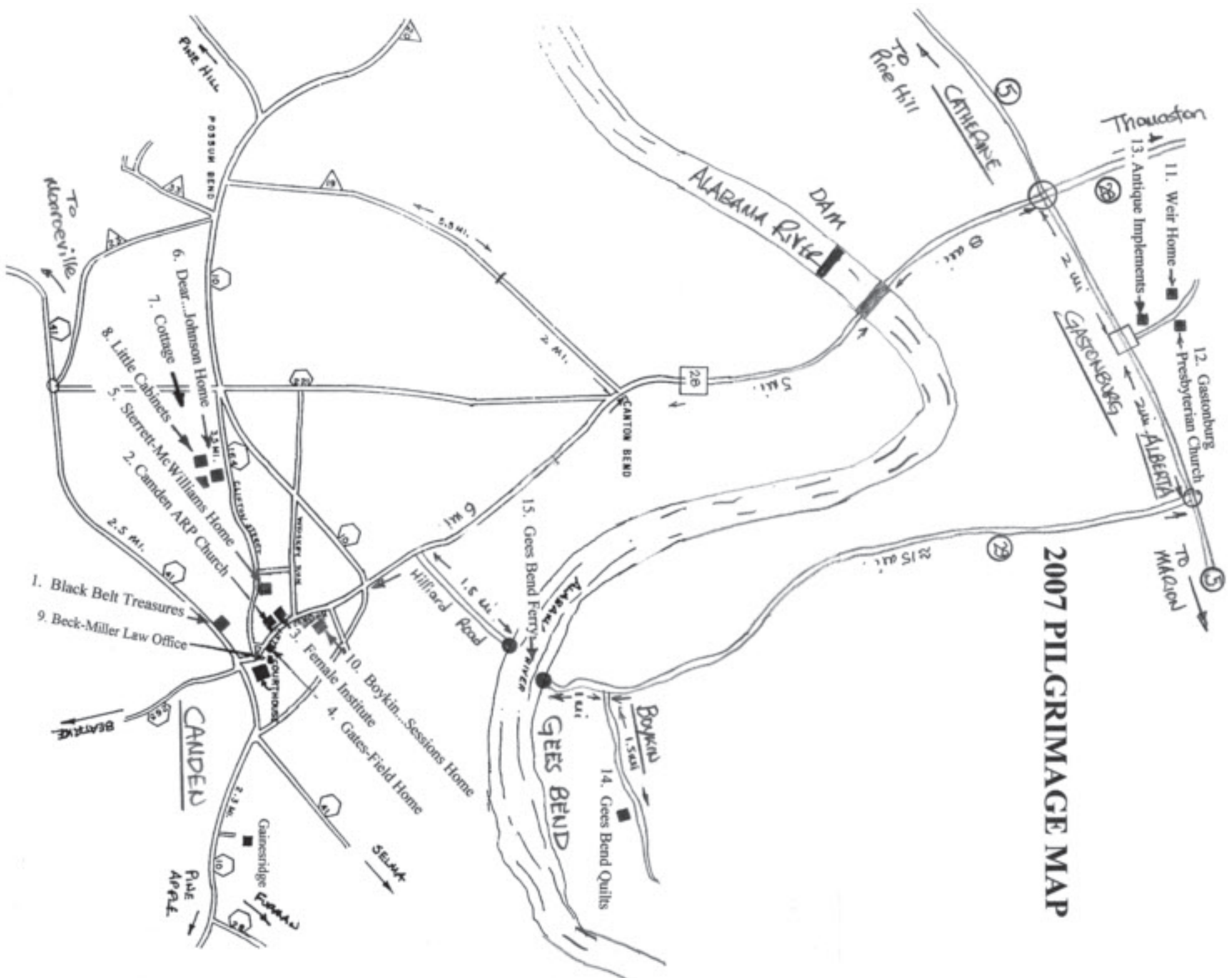


Tickets, Maps, & Information are Available Here

Adults: \$20.00
Students: \$10.00

Children Under 6 Free

Sponsored by:
Wilcox Historical Society
P.O. Box 464
Camden, Alabama 36726





2. Camden ARP Church (c. 1849)

This building was constructed in 1849 to house the congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. It is the oldest of all the Camden church buildings. In 1890 the elders of the Camden Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church purchased the building and lot for \$400. The building underwent a major renovation in the early 1900's which changed the antebellum style to a style of the late Victorian period. In 1990, the ARP Church's Centennial year, leaded stained glass windows were added. It is one of only four active ARP churches located in Alabama.



3. Wilcox Female Institute (1849)

Long considered the "Pride of Wilcox County", this building was erected in 1849 and chartered as an academy for women in 1850. During the antebellum and postbellum periods, this school was one of the most successful academies in Alabama. In 1908, the building was deeded to the State and used as a public school into the late 1960's. The brick structure features twin Doric columns, a second floor balcony, and a two-tiered cupola and pilastered belfry. The threat of demolition led to the formation of the Wilcox Historical Society in the 1970's. It was deeded to the Society in 1974, and restoration/preservation has continued since that time. Proceeds from this Pilgrimage will be used in the preservation of this historic landmark, and the Beck-Miller Law Office.



9. Beck-Miller Law Office (1840)

This historic building located in the downtown national historic district served as the law office for Colonel Franklin King Beck. Colonel Beck, who commanded the 23rd Alabama Infantry, held General U.S. Grant's Union troops at bay for 12 hours with a single regiment at the Battle of Big Black Ridge (Mississippi). A year later, Colonel Beck was mortally wounded at the Battle of Resaca, Georgia on October 12, 1864. After the turn of the century, the building became the law office of Joseph Neely Miller and his younger brother, Benjamin Meek Miller, Governor of Alabama from 1931-1935, and in later years, William Joel Bonner. This Greek Revival building was acquired by the Wilcox Historical Society in 1995, and with the assistance of a grant from the Alabama Historical Commission, was restored to completion in 1999.



10. Boykin-Jones-Liddell-Sessions Home (circa 1840)

This home located at 316 Broad Street in Camden was built by Dr. Wolfe in the late 1830's. The original portion of the home now includes the nucleus of the family living quarters. The home was purchased by John Gordon McArthur in 1853, who in turn sold the property to Samuel B. Mathews in 1856. A year later Mr. McArthur sold the home to Major Francis Boykin, II of Tilden. The piazza, central hall, and large drawing rooms were added by him. These additions show Greek Revival influences in the woodwork and other features. Later additions included the windowed porches along each side of the original construction. Major Boykin, born in Conecuh County in 1818, and who owned large plantations in Dallas and Wilcox Counties, reportedly moved to Camden so that his daughters could be educated here. Major Boykin's daughter Camilla and her husband J. Paul Jones became the owners in the late 1870's. Their son, Dr. J. Heustis Jones and wife Minnie Miller lived there after their marriage in 1907. Mr. and Mrs. Howell Lee bought the home in 1979, prior to which it had remained in the Boykin family for 122 years. Mr. and Mrs. Dick Shattuck purchased the home in 1986, and then sold it to Jane and David Liddell in 1990. Darryl and Lori Sessions have been the owners of this beautiful home since 2002.

4. Gates-Field Home (early 1900's) (Picture on Bottom of Previous Panel)

This is one of several "Sears-Roebuck" homes that were shipped by railroad to Wilcox County in the early 1900's. The original Dr. Zeno home in Pine Apple is another example of these homes. They came as modular sections and local carpenters constructed them from the "kit". This home had been in the Gates family for many years until Bettie and Blake Field purchased it in late 2006 and began the restoration that you see today. In fact, the Fields have revitalized this entire block including the historic Dunn-Bonner-Field home that has been on previous tours.



5. Sterrett-McWilliams Home (1851)

Inspired by the works of architect Samuel Sloan, this outstanding example of antebellum eclecticism was built in 1851 for Judge David W. Sterrett, lawyer, planter, and trustee of the Wilcox Female Institute. The veranda features four tall trellis-type supports, scroll-cut balustrades, and an unusual parapet. Red glass sidelights surround the front door. Other outstanding features include the spiral cantilevered stairways in the foyer, heavy decorative plasterwork in the symmetrical parlors, original gasoliers, and jib doors. In 1870, the home was sold to Richard Ervin McWilliams and wife Amelia Lindsay Coate, great grandparents of Lindsay Cook and Garland Cook Smith. Lindsay, Garland, and husband Lathrop Smith are the current owners and stewards of the home which has been in the McWilliams family for seven generations.



1. Blackbelt Treasures—Tour Headquarters

The Black Belt takes its name from the band of rich black soil that stretches across south central Alabama. The region first prospered because it was ideally suited for growing cotton, and thus was the genesis of the many large plantations and antebellum homes in the region. This region has also been fertile ground for an amazingly diverse and talented group of artists, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs. The featured Gees Bend quilters are one of these talented groups.

Black Belt Treasures, located at 209 Claiborne Street in Camden, is a non-profit economic development program which markets high quality products from the Black Belt region. The retail gallery showcases artwork, sculpture, pottery, woodwork, baskets, jewelry, books, and much more which can be viewed on their web site, www.blackbelttreasures.com. Tickets, maps, and other tour information are available here.



11. Weir House—Gastonia

Located in the historic hamlet of Gastonia in northwest Wilcox County, this Queen Anne style farmhouse, circa 1880's, was built by the ancestors of the current owners, Jim and Karen Weir. The roof is now sheet metal and a new addition is blended onto the back but otherwise the exterior is original. The interior has been freshened but still retains most of the original design elements. The "new" garage was designed after carriage house plans were found in a book in the attic, and incorporates some original windows and shutters. This house was on the HGTV show "If Walls Could Talk" as a result of various things that were found in the attic. Tickets are available at this location for those wanting to start the tour on this side of the river.



6. Dear-Jones-Cannon-Johnson Home (c.1840) (Picture on Bottom of Previous Panel)

Charles Dear, a prominent Camden attorney, built this beautiful home in the late 1840's. He came to Alabama with his parents in 1819, and in 1842 was elected to the State Legislature. He and his wife, Eliza Mason, were the parents of eight children. Dear, a frail and sickly man, willed his home to his son Addison, who sold the home and 39 acres to William Clarence Jones in 1883 for the sum of \$800. The house remained in the Jones family for many years and several changes were made to the structure. In 1982 the home was purchased by the late Edmund Cannon, a native of Vredenburgh and a Mobile attorney. Billy and Mandy Johnson purchased the home on February 19, 1999. The Johnsons named their home "Harthaven" because of the many deer that roam the pecan orchard, fields, and woods that surround the home. (Reference Psalms 42:1: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God".)



7. Amanda's and Forrest's Cottage

This cottage was constructed in the early to mid-1900's after the original wood home, which was one of approximately 12 tenant houses, burned. The four-room concrete block house with cement floors, no running water, three electrical plugs, and many cobwebs was made into a home by Billy Johnson and his daughter Amanda in 2000. The home has been added on to four times by Billy and other local builders over the past seven years. Situated on a beautiful lake, the home is located behind the main Johnson Home (No. 5), and is the home of Amanda Johnson Bell and her daughter, Mary Forrest (2 1/2), who is named after Billy and Mandy's late son William Forrest Johnson.



8. Little Cabinets

The cabinet was built by Billy Johnson in 2006 for the Johnson's daughter-in-law Jodi Johnson Hansell, her husband Paul, and the Johnson grandchildren Taylor (8), Lange (4), and Reese (2). Lange called the cabin "Little Cabinets" while it was being built by "Tut", her grandfather. The name has stuck.

12. Presbyterian Church—Gastonia (c. 1890) (Picture on Bottom of Previous Panel)

The Presbyterians originally built in the area a hewn-log house for a church and in 1830 a frame building was built. The present Greek Revival style Presbyterian Church was built around 1890 by the Gaston family. A Gaston descendant, Jim Watson, with his wife Vicky, have been good stewards for its conservation for the future. Services are still held during the warm months, April through October.



13. Antique Agricultural Implement Park— Gastonia

This park located on the west side of Highway 5 features mule powered and/or steel-wheeled farm equipment dating to the early part of the 20th Century. This equipment collected from the local area is on loan from the collection of Claude Strother and designed as Master Gardener Project by Karen Weir.

14. Gees Bend Quilters and Quilters Collective

Generations of women in the isolated African-American settlement of Gee's Bend, a virtual island surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped bend in the Alabama River, have created quilts from whatever materials are available, using patterns of their own design. These quilters stitch quilts at home and at the **Quilters Collective** which will be open on tour day with quilters demonstrating their unique talents. Visionary collector heard about these remarkable women and their talents, and spearheaded exhibitions at many popular museums throughout the United States. Much more history will be provided at the **Quilters Collective** housed in the Boykin Nutrition Center.

15. Gees Bend Ferry

The original ferry which provided transportation for Gee's Bend residents to the town of Camden was moved down-river in 1967. The culmination of an approximately 10-year project was completed in late 2006 with the christening of a new ferry, and daily transportation is now provided. The ferry will run each hour on tour day, and your ticket covers the cost of a one-way trip. The trip from Camden through Canton Bend, Prairie Bluff, Gastonia, Gees Bend, and back to Camden via the ferry will provide you with a unique glimpse of the history of this region, and also the ever expanding development of the Alabama River front.