

Wilcox Historical Society

Fall 2009 Newsletter

Edition No. 25

September 14, 2009

Upcoming Events

Cart Blackwell Presentation

The next Wilcox Historical Society meeting will be held on Friday, September 25, 2009 starting at 2:00 P.M. at historic Cook Hill located at 2373 Highway 10 West, Camden, and will feature a presentation by Cart Blackwell, III. Cart is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Cart Blackwell, Jr. of Selma and the grandson of Heustis and Virginia Crum Cook, whose family has owned Cook Hill for generations.

A brief history of the Cook ancestral home follows:

This home was built in 1839 by Daniel and Martha Norwood Cook. The cradle that has held 5 generations of their descendants stands at the foot of a massive mahogany bed brought by covered wagon from North Carolina to Wilcox County in the 1820's. The two-story home with its long single-story veranda and the uncluttered lines suggests Carolina architecture. Simplicity, spaciousness, and sturdy workmanship are reflected throughout the home. The inside of the home features wide heart-pine flooring, imported English hardware on double-cross doors, and plaster walls.

Cart, a young historian, will present a program on Alexander Jackson Bragg: Master Antebellum Builder. Following is a summary of his talk as described in his own words.

Buildings are the stages upon which we enact our lives. Strangely enough, the built environment often goes ignored. Think about painting and sculpture, the other fine arts. One cannot help but enter into, with mind and eye, a William Harris painting. The Confederate monument in the cemetery looms over all else in its immediate vicinity. One looks up to the officer figure atop the granite shaft. It invites circumnavigation. Both a William Harris painting and a local marker bespeak regional culture and identity. Buildings are equally indicative of people, place, and thought. Then why is architecture taken for granted?

Buildings are ignored for the simple reason they are part of our everyday lives. They are often seen as places in which

one works, sleeps, eats, or drinks, not institutions or habitations deserving contemplation on a serious level. Yet buildings were and remain indicators of a people's progress and posture. Wilcox County is blessed with a rich cultural heritage. Her houses, churches, and public buildings are the most visible signs of that heritage. That is something to think about for the built environment. Be it courthouse or outhouse, both are testaments to our shared past, realities of our actual present, and vehicles to a prosperous future.

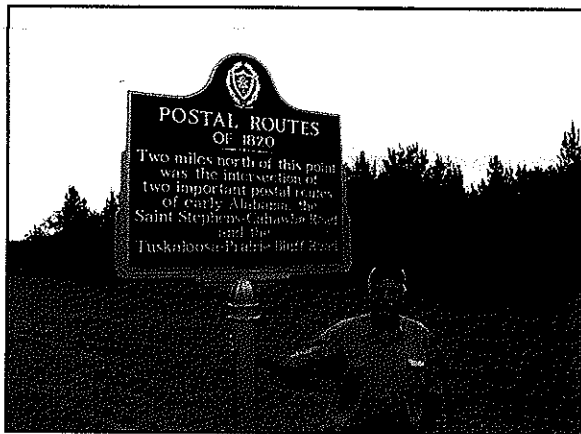
The people who built, commissioned, and used our built environment deserve attention. In my lecture and presentation, "Alexander Jackson Bragg: The Life and Work of Antebellum Master Builder," I address how all these individual contingents came together to create some of Wilcox County's most historic buildings. The Tait-Erwin-Phillippi House, County Courthouse, the old Episcopal Church, the Tait-Starr House, are among those to be discussed. Matters of style, whether a building is Greek Revival or Italianate, will factor into my interpretation, but the focus will be on the economic, technological, social, and political realities that determined the building arts. I want to show why these buildings matter, why we should not take them for granted. They have stories to tell. Come learn about them for you will learn about yourself.

Historical Signs Restoration

The Town of Camden, Wilcox Female Institute, and Postal Routes of 1820 signs were recently restored by Sewah Studios of Marietta, Ohio, and have been reinstalled. This project was funded by the Wilcox Historical Society. A special thanks is extended to Joe Nettles, Bill McEvoy, Strother Holt, and Don & Mary Charles Donald for taking the signs down and re-erecting them, and to Dan Brooks for donating funds for the Camden sign restoration. Photographs of these signs are included herein.

Walking and Driving Tours

The towns of Camden, Furman, and Pine Apple are developing driving and/or walking tours of their National Historic Districts. The Furman tour brochure, which will also serve as the official document for the Furman History Celebration event on April 17, 2010, has been completed and an application made for cost sharing with the Alabama Department of tourism. The Pine Apple tour brochure is nearly complete also. The Camden Walking Tour is being spear-headed by the Chamber of Commerce and Blackbelt Treasures, along with Society members Ed Shirley, Kristin Cook, and Linda Etheridge. A Walking Tour of Camden Cemetery is also being done.



Joe Nettles and Postal Route Sign

Other News

The Miller Law Office is currently being painted, and repair and painting of the cupola of the Wilcox Female Institute is also needed. This item will be discussed at the upcoming meeting. A recent series of Ghost Trail "You-Tube" videos done by Linda Vice and the Blackbelt Tourism Initiative is available for viewing. Just go to "Google", type in "Alabama Ghost Trail" in the search box, and you will have over 20 selections to view. Some are narrated by local residents and Society members.

The Wilcox Historical Society was founded in the late 1960's with the initial goal to save and restore the Wilcox Female Institute. The primary goal of the Society continues to be to preserve the history of this region and to act as a clearing house and reference source to people searching for genealogical information. Our local Wilcox County Public Library is the best source of genealogical information and features one of the best genealogical rooms to be found anywhere. The library staff can be reached at 334-682-4355, 100 Broad Street, Camden, AL 36726, e-mail wilcoxgen@frontiernet.net. If research is needed, they can refer you

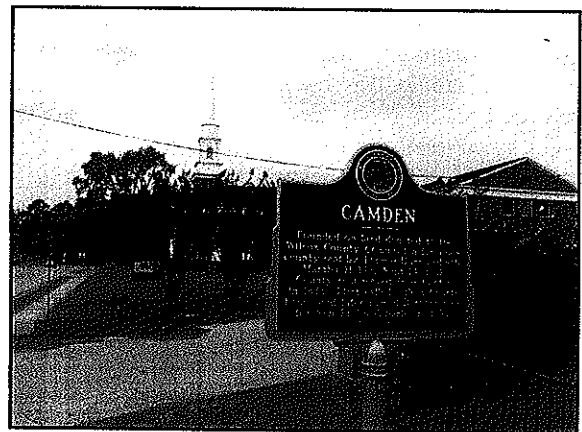
to a local historian who can perform the research for a nominal fee.

The Wilcox Historical Society may be contacted at P.O. Box 464, Camden, AL 36726. Our web site link may be accessed through www.wilcoxwebworks.com. The cost to join the society is \$10 per person, or \$15 per couple annually. **Payment is due by January 1 of each year.** However, if you have not paid your 2009 dues, you can pay at this time.

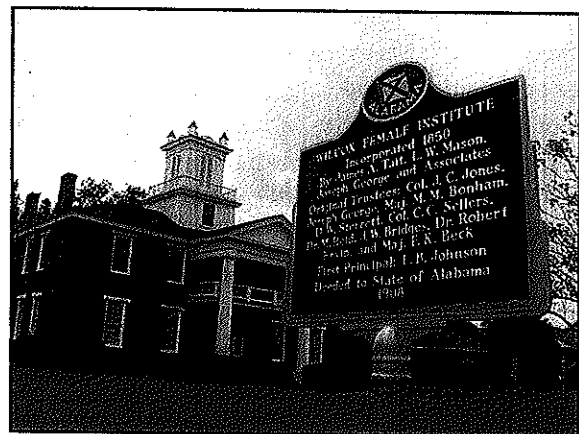
Membership Application/Payment Card

Name(s): _____

Address: _____



Camden Historical Sign



Wilcox Female Institute Sign