

**2012 Pilgrimage
Camden & Canton Bend
Wilcox County, Alabama**

The Wilcox Historical Society is sponsoring a tour featuring “Early Wilcox County Citizens and Their Homes” on **Saturday, February 25, 2012**. 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 on the attached map. In addition to the featured homes and buildings, 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.

Tickets, Maps, and Information are available at the Female Institute and at Black Belt Treasures, 209 Claiborne Street in Camden. For advance tickets, contact Black Belt Treasures at 334-682-9878 or info@blackbelttreasures.com.

*Brochures & Tickets
Compliments of
Camden National Bank,
Town- Country National
Bank, & Wilcox County
Farmers Federation*

Visit our website @ www.wilcoxwebworks.com/history

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

**EARLY WILCOX
COUNTY CITIZENS AND
THEIR HOMES**

**Saturday, February 25, 2012
9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**1. Wilcox Female Institute
Tour Headquarters**



**Tickets, Maps, and Information
Available Here and at Black Belt
Treasures**

Adults: \$20.00

Students: \$10.00

Children 6 & Under Free

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

1. Wilcox Female Institute (1849) - Cover Picture

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.



2. Thompson-Spurlin-Matthews-Curry (c. 1840)

During the early years of the 1830’s and 40’s, the county seat underwent a name change from Barboursville to Camden. During this time, local dentist Benjamin Thompson purchased his corner lot on Union and Calhoun (Clifton) Streets and built a simple “T” house with a one story porch. In 1867, the house was bought by W.F. Spurlin, a local jeweler, who retained it until 1911 when it was sold to B.H. Matthews, owner of Matthews Hardware Company. Mr. Matthews enlarged and remodeled the house, adding a large columned pedimented porch and a suspended balcony. B.H. Matthews served as Mayor of Camden and President of the Alabama State Hardware Association. When he built his two-story brick hardware store on Broad and Claiborne Streets (today’s Coast to Coast), it had the only elevator within 50 miles. The house has remained in the Matthews family for four generations and is the home of Will and Sommer Curry. Additions were made in 1987 and 2009.



3. Dunn-Fairley-Bonner-Field (c. 1825)

This is the oldest documented structure in Camden. It was built for Thomas Dunn and his wife, Martha Hobbs, early settlers who donated land to build a new Wilcox County seat at the present site of Camden. Dunn died in 1936 while the town was called Barbourville. This house was originally a two-story log house constructed c. 1825, and modified about 1840 with a two-story frame addition built by Mrs. Dunn’s second husband, Major Fairley. In the 1890’s, W.J. Bonner altered the house to its current form with the addition of the full double tiered gallery and extended eaves. It was at one time listed as one of Alabama’s “Places in Peril,” and was donated to the Wilcox Historical Society by the Bonner family in 2001. Initial preservation efforts were begun by the Society, and then it was sold to Blake and Bettie Field, who oversaw its restoration in 2006. The present occupants are Strother and Patti Gibbs.



4. Bagby-Liddell-Burford (c.1847)

Arthur Pendleton Bagby, who served two terms as Governor of Alabama (1837 and 1839) and later as a U.S. Senator, moved to Camden in 1853. He contracted with Henry F. Cook to build a home “befitting a man of his position.” They agreed on a price of \$3,750 to be paid in three installments. Unfortunately, Bagby could not make the payments and the property was sold at public auction to Thomas King Beck to satisfy Mr. Cook’s lien. Beck and his brother Franklin King Beck were nephews of Vice President William Rufus King. The house was purchased by John T. Liddell, Sr. in 1896, and was for many years the home of Will and Viola Liddell. This two-story antebellum design features square box columns, a hallmark of Cook, and has supporting timbers which are secured by morticed joints and wooden pegs. The floors are 6-inch heart pine. In 1998 the house was purchased by Danny and Missy Burford. A Christmas tree fire in 2007 necessitated extensive restoration.



5. Jones-McIntosh-Hicks (1860)

The one story Gothic Revival dwelling, erected in 1860, was the home of General and Mrs. Richard Channing Jones and their ten children. Jones was a prominent lawyer, President of the University of Alabama (1890-97), a state senator, President of the Alabama Bar Association, and Brigadier General in the state militia (1876-90). A small schoolhouse behind the main structure was possibly used to educate the Jones children. Most Wilcox Countians remember this as the home of Dr. and Mrs. E.L. McIntosh, and more recently their son Roy. Dr. McIntosh was the county health officer for 30 years and considered himself “the Family Physician of Wilcox County” so far as preventive medicine was concerned. Since purchasing the home in 2008, Lucy Hicks has taken much care to preserve the original integrity of the house and also Roy’s beloved gardens.



6. Beck-Bryant-Talbot (c. 1847)

Few Wilcox County settlers claim the social and political connection of William King Beck, the original owner of the house recently named River Bluff House. The nephew of U.S. Vice President William Rufus King, Beck was born in North Carolina and migrated to this area about 1820. Like many men of the Old South, Beck combined his law practice with cotton planting and achieved considerable local prominence. River Bluff House is a large Greek Revival Cottage with a recessed porch supported by octagonal columns. These columns and the Greek Revival “eared” architraves framing the interior window and door openings strongly link this structure to builder Alexander Bragg. According to local tradition, J.D. Bryant, who owned the house in the late 1800s, altered the hipped roofline from the original form. The home was restored by Don Bell in the early 1990’s, then altered by Mr. and Mrs. Jim Bridges. Doug and Judy Talbot of New Orleans are the current owners.



7. 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.



8. Gee's Bend Ferry and Ferry Terminal

The original ferry which provided transportation for Gee's Bend residents to the town of Camden was moved downriver 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 new ferry terminal building shown above was dedicated in the Fall of 2011. This building also houses the Chamber of Commerce and brochures describing the region are available here. The ferry runs every 2 hours from 8 AM to 4 PM. If you choose to drive from Camden through Canton Bend, Prairie Bluff, Gastonburg, Gee's Bend, and then back to Camden via the ferry, this will provide you with a unique glimpse of the history of this region, and also the ever continuing development of the Alabama River frontage.



9. Black Belt Treasures

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. Gee's 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.

The public is invited to join Black Belt Treasures Guild for an *After Hours* event on Friday, February 24, from 6-8 p.m., at the Black Belt Treasures Gallery located in historic downtown Camden. The evening will feature music, a special showing of paintings by Black Belt artists, a Silent Auction with a variety of art and treasures from throughout the region, and delicious food prepared by Black Belt culinary artists. Tickets for this event are available for purchase - \$20 single and \$30 couple - by contacting Black Belt Treasures at 334-682-9878 or info@blackbelttreasures.com by February 20, 2012.



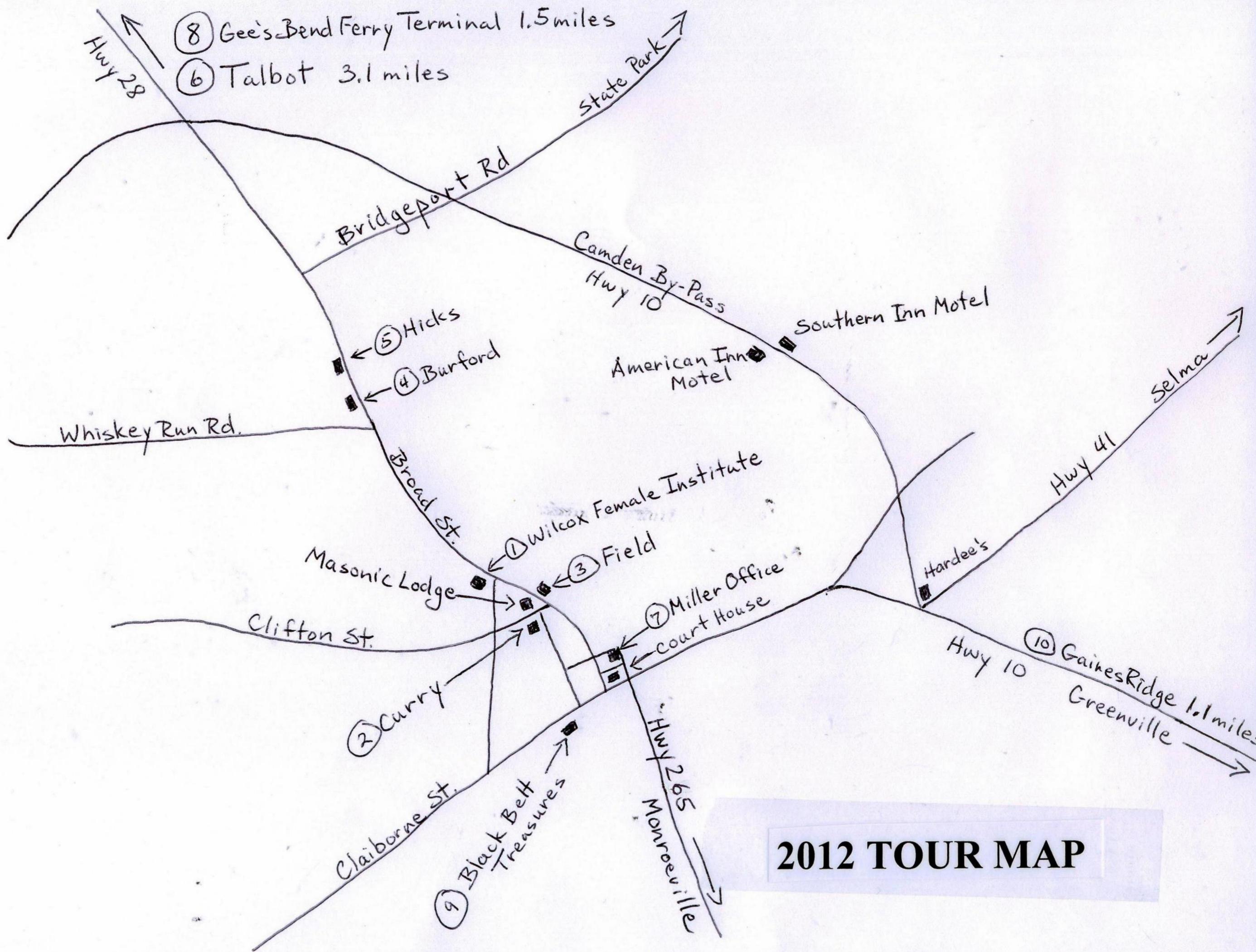
10. GainesRidge (c. 1835)

This historic antebellum home was constructed in the 1830's by Ebenezer Hearn, a renowned Methodist Circuit Rider. The "T" house, with its hall and parlor plan, retains the original Federal style woodwork. The home was acquired by the family of the current owner and was a family residence until 1985 when GainesRidge Dinner Club opened. If you would like to enjoy a great dining experience here, please call **Betty Kennedy** at **334-682-9707** for reservations.

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS



- ⑧ Gee's Bend Ferry Terminal 1.5 miles
- ⑥ Talbot 3.1 miles



2012 TOUR MAP