

Branchville, Rags to Riches

By KIM CRAFT
News-Aegis Reporter

BRANCHVILLE—A rags to riches council, the Branchville Town Council has come a long way from the 10-by-12 metal building used for meetings when the council was formed.

During the winter of 1989, the council moved its chambers from a rental house on Blair Farm Road to a new building next door.

Town Clerk Gail Alford recalled those first days in the hull building bought from a mover. "We had to build the foundation and everything. There wasn't anything in here but the carpet and it was black," she explained, adding that black was not the intended color.

After about 10 hours of professional cleaning, the carpet was once again its original color. "I threatened anyone who walked in with dirty feet," Alford said.

With clean carpet underfoot, the renovations began. Police Chief Don Lowe played an active part in the renovations during his spare time. Alford recalled days of heading for town hall when it was closed just to paint the walls.

"You should have seen this office," she said, sitting at her desk. "It looked like anything but what you would want to step into. The studs, rafters and everything were showing."

Though renovations to the mayor's office aren't yet complete, the majority of the renovation was completed in 1991. Mayor Robert Hezlep said the work was done during people's spare time. "It was just a matter of getting things done," he said. "There's wasn't any big drive or anything."

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In departmental matters, Hezlep noted that the fire department had received its first ever rating in November 1991. The department was given a Class 9 rating and was told it could possibly obtain an 8 rating after purchasing a drop tank and a two and a half inch nozzle. The equipment was ordered and the nozzle was delivered the first week in March.

"We're gradually growing," Alford noted. "When I started the job four years ago, my hours were four hours a week. Now I'm working 32 hours a week." The council has really grown from the days of meeting in a metal building, Alford noted. "They're really a great bunch," she said. "In the four years I've been here there's never been a cross word said."

Brauchville. Interior village and postoffice
in the W part of St. Clair county, in the NE 1/4
of the NE 1/4 of Sec. 9, T. 16, R. 2 E., 16 miles S
W of Ashville. Populations: 1870 - whites, 1306
colored, 113, total 1419; 1880 - Brauchville Precinct 3 -
1,935; 1888 - village proper - 150; 1890 - Brauch-
ville Precinct 3 - 1,047; 1900 - ditto - 1,278;
1910 - ditto - 2,652; 1912 - village proper - 90.
It is located on the Pike from Montevallo to Ash-
ville. It is named for the small "branch" or
stream, whose cold spring furnishes the water-
works of the village. The first settler, William Waters,
came in 1812; then John and William Vaudegrift, Geo.
and James Ash. The first merchant was Mack Taylor,
who occupied a log cabin store, 1855. S. Springer
Hurst was the first P.M.; he was killed in the Civil
war; this has been a post office nearly 100 years.
Dr. Sanders was the first physician; John Dickey, the
first school teacher, 1830. The first church was Lamb
Laud Presbyterian, Rev. Cal. Hardin pastor. A sawmill,
a planing mill, a wagon buggy factory, and a furniture factory
are in operation. Cattle and hog raising and farming occupy
the people. Mineral springs abound.

Inzer - letter: Vaudegrift's letter, P.M. 1870

Lost art reborn

It had been a dream of hers since childhood. And one day while eating lunch, Nancy Stone realized the friends she was having lunch with could help build that dream.

The friends owned several old barns. What does that have to do with dreams? Well, Miss Stone had always wanted to build her own log cabin. The logs and boards from those barns are still in perfect condition although they're about 100 years old.

"Have you ever thought of selling those logs?"

"Yea, when do you want them."

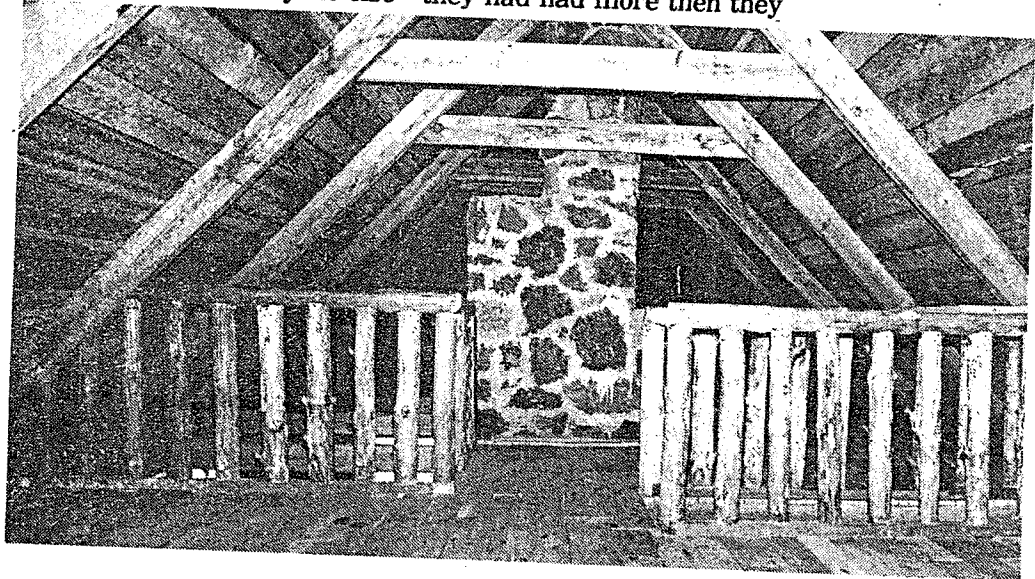
What? All these years, they've never let anyone else

have those logs, and all of a sudden they're mine if I want them?

It was the beginning of a difficult relationship. Her and her family and some friends had to haul the massive logs and all the boards back to her Branchville property.

That wasn't easy, but the backbreaker was carrying 40 tons of rock to the cabin site. They were for the chimney. Only 3 to 4 people helped with that hard labor.

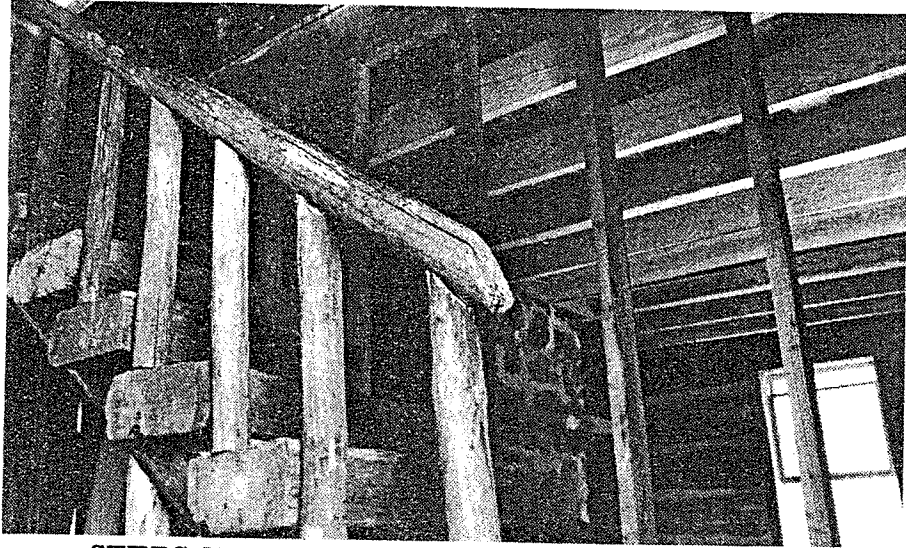
They had planned on having a fireplace on the ground floor and another upstairs. But by the time they had gotten to the upstairs, they had had more then they



UPSTAIRS

YOU CAN'T SEE IT

in Branchville



STEPS OF MASSIVE, OLD LOGS



could stand of chimneys and rocks and fireplaces, so the upstairs fireplace died before it was ever born.

A heater, built into one side of the chimney at ground level, is the only source of heat in the cabin. The cabin, however, will have electricity and hot and cold running water.

Building log cabins is a lost art, Miss Stone said. She didn't know how to do it, neither did anyone in her family. There was one old friend who did know.

His name is Bert Layman, and he is 81 years old. Of course, he's still a kid compared to the ancient logs

themselves. He has the energy of a kid, too.

He and Miss Stone's brother, Trey, have done most of the construction of the cabin. Before they began building, he took an inventory of every log and plank from both of the old barns.

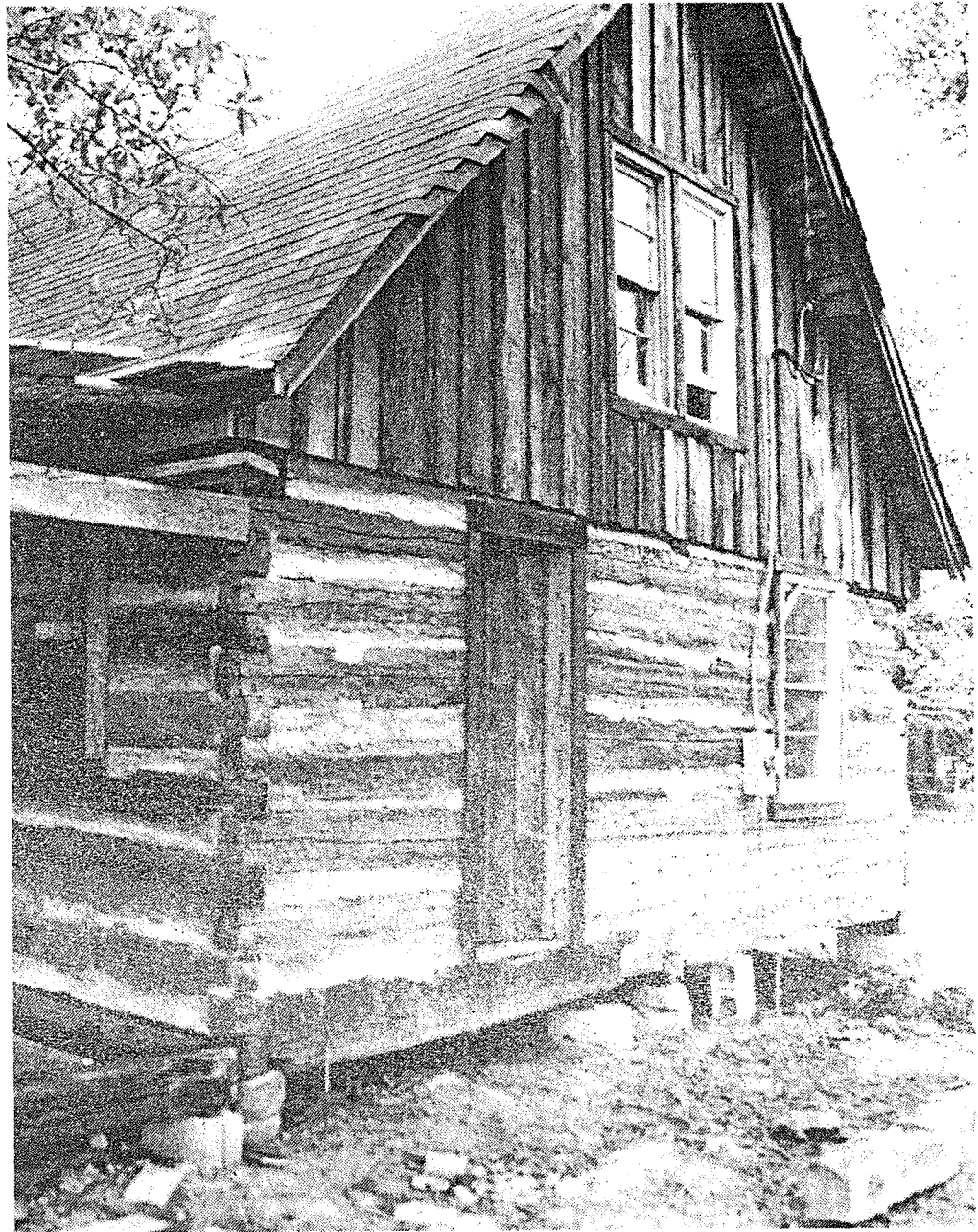
For Miss Stone, those barns not only built her dream but answered her prayers. While she was youth director of a church in Hawaii, she "gave it to the Lord, and it happened."

Perhaps it took a rare faith such as that to produce a rare form of art such as cabin building.





The cabin a



Almost finished

ERSKINE MEDICINE COMPANY DRUGGISTS

FAMOUS ELIZA JANE MEDICINAL
SPRINGS

OFFICE OF
DR. W. F. VANDEGRIFT
PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON

BRANCHVILLE, ALA., August 14, 1917.

Mr. Thos. M. Owen, L.L.D. Director,
Montgomery, Alabama.

Dear Sir:-

Branchville Alabama, taken its name from Napel Branch, a small stream from a spring which is the head waters of Kelleys Creek. Branchville is located on the public road 10 1/2 miles from Ashville and 49 1/2 miles from Montevallo, hence this road is called the Branchville and Montevallo Public Road, is situated in the N.E. 1/4 of the N.E. 1/4, section 9, township 16, range two east.

The first settler of this place was William Watson, about 1810, then came John and William Vandegrift, James Ash, and Gen. A. Ash, the latter was our Representative of the Legislature during and after the War of 1860-1865.

The first Merchant was Meek Byres who occupied a log cabin for his store house, this was about 1805.

Spencer Hurst was the first Postmaster, who served as Postmaster until he went to War in 1860. Was killed there, his son took over as Postmaster until the war ended.

Dr Sanders was the first Physician, 1820-1865

John Bickey was the first School Teacher, 1830.

Rev. Peater Harden was the first Preacher who came from South Carolina in the early days of Branchville settlement, was a Cumberland Presbyterian.

We have various industries such as raising fine Hogs, Cattle, Sawmill, Planing Mill, Manufacturers of barrels, caskets and Caskets.

We have water works from spring's own gravity which supplies our town.

We have discovered mineral springs and have named them The Famous Eliza Jane Springs. The Springs have been discovered, the water analyzed, tested, and proved to be highly medicinal for the cure of all kinds of bladder and stomach troubles.

Yours Very Truly,

W. F. Vandegrift