

Part II

BELL CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
BELL CITY, ALABAMA

Chapter 6

Pell City

There are eleven incorporated towns in St. Clair County: Pell City, Ashville, Ragland, Riverside, Margaret, White's Chapel, Moody, Branchville, Odenville, Springville, and Steele. Of this number, only Pell City can be classified as a small metropolis. Although it is the youngest of the eleven, it is the one which, through the enterprise and resourcefulness of its citizens, has kept pace with the growth of Alabama. In the year 1901 Pell City had a population of 40; today the count stands at 5,602. It may rightly be called "the town that refused to die," for in its early years it suffered a number of setbacks that would have proved disastrous to people of lesser stamina. Laura Kate Eatman Gray, a native of Pell City, has prepared the story of the town for this publication.

Pell City is situated in the southeastern portion of St. Clair County. To the north are the beautiful mountains which divide the county into two geographical sections. To the south, the placid Coosa winds its way to join its sister rivers on their voyage to the gulf. The town is here because of three early railroads that met in the very center of what is today its business section, and because of the foresight of one man, Sumter Cogswell, who upon seeing the location for the first time, was so impressed with its beauty and natural advantages that he immediately began using his talents and energy toward the promotion of a modern city.

The May 4, 1844, issue of The Southern Aegis, a newspaper published in Ashville by George R. Cather, stated: "Pell City is the name of the new town east of Eden." The June 4th issue of the same paper reported that "on June 1st, Articles of Incorporation for the Pell City Land Company were filed in the office of the probate judge." The first town charter was granted on the 28th of October, 1887. Green Evans was the first mayor. The incorporators were John B. Knox, T. S. Plowman, D. M. Rogers, J. A. Savery, John Postell, and John W. Inzer. With the exception of Mr. Postell and Judge Inzer, all of these men lived in Talladega. John W. Inzer was the attorney for the East and West Railroad, and he and John Postell are credited with having named the young town for George H. Pell.

John Postell had been a captain in the Confederate Army, and he was a close friend of Judge Inzer. He was a builder of railroads and served as

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chief engineer when the Flagler Railroad system was built in Florida. He was general manager of the East and West Railroad when it was built through Pell City in 1887. His wife was the talented and distinguished Lucinda Katherine Hudson who traveled extensively in this country and in Europe, and had been presented at the court of King James.<sup>28</sup>

In 1887, the three railroads, the East and West, the Talladega and Coosa Valley, and the Georgia Pacific, built a joint depot on block forty-three of the town of Pell City. The East and West was later sold to the famous New York family of Pells for whom the town was named. This railroad later became the Seaboard Airline Railroad. The Talladega and Coosa Valley Railroad extended from Renfroe, a distance of almost twenty-seven miles, in 1887. The first eight miles of the road were built by Rogers and Franks, lumber dealers, and for years D. M. Rogers managed it. On October 1, 1890, it was merged with the Birmingham and Atlanta Railroad, and between 1886 and 1899 many short branches were built to ore beds. The road was primarily built for the hauling of lumber, but, when Talladega Furnace was erected, it became the means for hauling iron ore.

The late Mr. John Fant of Cropwell enjoyed telling about the time the train fell into the Coosa River. The railroad crossed the river at Stemley on a wooden bridge which collapsed one day under a heavy load. This would have proved to be a horrible tragedy if a colored porter, Jordan Cranford, and the conductor, Henry Fleetwood, had not saved the lives of the passengers. Jordan Cranford dived in and rescued every passenger, handing each of them to Mr. Fleetwood who stood on top of the car.

The little road was the most convenient mode of travel from Talladega to Birmingham and Atlanta, since it made connection with the Southern at Pell City. But after the lumber mills at Renfroe closed, and the furnaces in Talladega ceased operation, the road was no longer needed, and the right of way was sold to individuals. The only railroad which is operated through Pell City today is the Southern, which began as the Georgia Pacific with plans to extend from Atlanta to Texarkana, Arkansas. It managed to reach Greenville, Mississippi, but was thrown into bankruptcy in 1884 and was taken over by the Southern Railroad Company.

These were the three railroads which met at Pell City, and which caused W. S. Griffith, editor of the town's first newspaper, to speak of this town as the "hub of the South." At the time the railroad station was built, the only other building in town was the Cornett Hotel, located where the old home of R. C. Gravett stands today. The hotel was operated by J. C. Cornett, father of Hardy, Pat, Dill, and G. P. Cornett. It ceased operation when the building was destroyed by fire.

The little village was a mere infant when, on a March day in 1890,

young Sumter Cogswell, on his way to Talladega, was forced to make connection in Pell City. Of necessity he spent the night there. Mr. Cogswell was in the employment of the Home Life Insurance Company as a general agent, and he was on his way to call on A. J. Savery in an effort to establish an agency for his company in Talladega.

Sumter Cogswell was greatly impressed with the natural beauty of Pell City's location, and his active imagination at once saw the possibility of a future city here. It was near the river. It had three railroads. It was near enough to the markets of Birmingham and Anniston. It was surrounded by fertile farm land. When Mr. Cogswell learned that Mr. Tom Plowman of Talladega was president of the Pell City Land Company, which owned the town, he paid that gentleman a visit and learned that the town was for sale. He managed to secure a two-week option, and within that time limit the land — four hundred acres — was sold to the Pell City Iron and Land Company for \$50,000. Minutes of Probate Court at the Ashville courthouse indicate that "the town of Pell City was officially incorporated on May 6, 1891."

The new owners had the town site resurveyed, streets opened up, and several houses built. The Hercules Pipe Company, the first soil pipe plant in the South, was located at Pell City.<sup>29</sup> Soon there was a second hotel, a store belonging to Mr. Lindsey, Jesse Williams' blacksmith shop, a saloon with Mr. Flanders as proprietor, a post office, and a few new houses. But the panic of 1893-94 forced the Pell City Iron and Land Company, along with the Hercules Pipe Company, into receivership. The pipe shops were moved to Anniston, which city today has the reputation of being the largest center of soil pipe manufacturing in the world.

Although the older towns in St. Clair County were able to survive the depression of the nineties, for a place as young as Pell City it virtually meant extinction. In 1901, Sumter Cogswell, who had not kept in touch with the little town, again passed through Pell City. Upon looking from the train window, he was surprised to see a deserted village. The streets were grown up with weeds. The houses were empty, and the place had the appearance of a ghost town. When he reached his destination in Atlanta, Mr. Cogswell telephoned Mr. Plowman and learned the sad story of failure. He also learned that the town was again for sale. This time Mr. Cogswell purchased the principal acreage, which is today Pell City, for the sum of \$3,000. The deeds were sent to the Atlanta National Bank for examination as to title, with attorneys M. M. Smith and James L. Herring of Ashville also examining them. All pronounced the deeds to be legally correct. Mr. Cogswell then became owner of the town site, with the exception of the fifty acres which belonged to the Hercules Pipe Company, for which a young lawyer by the name of Louis J. Brandeis of Boston, Massachusetts, was a trustee.<sup>30</sup> Later Mr. Cogswell purchased



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In 1901 Sumter Cogswell brought his wife and her two sons to live in this house in Pell City. At that time the town's population was only forty.

these fifty acres.

Sumter Cogswell was married to Mrs. DeGaris, formerly Lydia Elizabeth McBain, in 1900. On September 7, 1901, ten years after the time he had first visited Pell City, he brought his wife and her two sons, Jack and Julian DeGaris, there to live. When this family came there were

only forty people living in the town. Tom S. Coleman, a native of Riverside, came to Pell City when he was about twenty years old to work as a night operator of the depot. In 1950 he dictated to Elizabeth Cogswell Starnes his memory of her family's coming there to live:

The day Mr. Cogswell unloaded his household goods it was a sight to see. They unloaded one bay horse, one surrey which amused me very much, as it was the first buggy I had ever seen with fringe around the top, and the first to come to this country town, one bird dog, white and brown, named Jack or Dan, and several loads of household goods. They brought with them a greater stock of groceries than the entire stock of the town's one small store. Jack and Julian were small boys, and there was Righter Cogswell who didn't stay in Pell City much.

The Cogswells moved into the house where Mrs. Starnes now lives, which occupies block number two of the original survey of Pell City. Here were born the three Cogswell daughters: Elizabeth (Mrs. Orr Starnes), Isabelle (Mrs. Dean Davis), and Mary (Mrs. Charles Balof). Mr. Cogswell had great plans for Pell City. He was an enthusiastic promoter and had the ability to instill into the hearts and minds of his fellow citizens the desire to see their town prosper.

Bays D. Cather, Sr., gives a vivid description of the coming of the mills and the courthouse. Mr. Cather came from Ashville in 1902. He was editor of *The Pell City News*, was postmaster for two terms, and was in the mercantile business. He also owned and operated the local theater. He was married to Daisy Kilgroe of Seddon. Mr. Cather wrote:

The year 1902 was an unusually dry year. Farmers were greatly worried. Some of them sold out and moved to Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Two good things happened to the town: Pell City became a branch county seat and the courthouse was built, and the cotton mill came to town. The spending of a million dollars for labor and materials during such a bad crop year was like receiving manna from heaven.

An ordinance passed by the constitutional convention in Montgomery in 1901 provided for a branch county seat in St. Clair County. Travel was difficult since the county is cut in half by Backbone Mountain, and people living south of the mountain and attending court at Ashville had to travel the treacherous mountain road — next to impossible in bad weather — or go by way of train to Birmingham, from there to Whitney, the Southern station three miles from the courthouse at Ashville.

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An election was held on January 6, 1902, to determine the site of the branch courthouse. Four towns were asking for it: Pell City, Eden, Coal City, and Riverside. After a heated campaign, Pell City won by a majority of 600. Block twenty-six was purchased from the Pell City Realty Company as a site for the building. This was known as Lacy Hill, as it had been the site of the two-story log house of Abner Lacy. Probate Judge W. S. Forman was authorized to borrow \$9,000. The money was borrowed from Mrs. Bert McLaughlin Forney, Miss Bertie Lee McClendon (Mrs. Pat Roberson), James L. Herring, and J. P. Philips. The building was accepted by the county in March of 1903, and a spring term of court was held in the Southern Judicial Division.

In 1902, Mr. Cogswell gave 150 acres of land, which included a very fine spring, to Pell City Manufacturing Company. Soon the construction of the first saw-tooth cotton mill in the South was begun. George W. Pratt, who was in touch with the Draper autoloom interests, and Howard Bullock of New England were instrumental in having the mill located at Pell City. The cornerstone of the building was laid in August of 1902, and by the close of 1903 there were about 1500 new inhabitants in the town. Pratt was president of the company.

Just as things were looking up for Pell City, two events of catastrophic nature occurred, and again the citizens were called upon to weather a storm. Late in the summer of 1902, the owners of the Seaboard Airline Railroad, having purchased the East and West, tied it to Atlanta. The Coal City and Ragland line was extended to Birmingham. It pierced the Black Creek Coal fields near Margaret and Acmar. The owners decided it would be profitable to drill a tunnel through Backbone Mountain.<sup>31</sup> The John Blair Macafee Company, of Philadelphia, had the contract for the tunnel. The material necessary for blasting the tunnel was shipped to Cook Springs and hauled in wagons across Bald Rock Mountain to the site of the tunnel. The heavy rolling machinery had to be tracked across the mountain. That is, small sections of the track with steel rails were laid, and when the machinery reached the end of the laid track, men were taking up the back end of the track and re-laying it in front of the moving machines. The method was slow but sure.

Some of the high explosives used in blasting were shipped to the Southern depot at Pell City and transferred from there in wagons to the tunnel site. Those were busy days — building a cotton mill, a new courthouse, and a new railroad all the same year.

One night in November, when there was a large shipment of dynamite and several kegs of powder at the station, the depot caught fire. It was some time after midnight, and few of the volunteer fire fighters knew of the explosives until the railroad men began to yell a warning. Jack Hall did not hear the warning. He was attempting to move a new sewing

machine from the station. He was instantly killed. Tom Whitfield, a Negro man who was doing the masonry work for the new mill, went too near the fire and was killed. One of the crew, who was moving a freight engine away from the fire was struck by a piece of lumber which pierced his chest. Colonel N. B. Spears was struck by pieces of flying crockery and almost lost his life.<sup>32</sup> Doc Crowley, who had the drugstore, was badly injured. Joe Willingham's house had the plaster knocked from the walls, and the Cornett Hotel was partly wrecked. Windows were blown from the old Maxwell building. A number of homes caught fire from flying timbers. The next morning there was a hole where the depot had been that was big enough to put the courthouse in. One of the engines backed up to Seddon, and the crew tried to get Dr. Crump to come down and treat the wounded. But the doctor was on a case and could not be reached. However, Dr. J. T. Brown of Riverside, Dr. Turner of Cropwell, and Dr. Laney of Eden were soon on the scene. Later the railroad doctors came up from Birmingham to help with the injured.<sup>33</sup>

Although the disaster dealt a forceful blow to the little town, the people went back to work with a will to repair the damage. Soon, however, they were to face yet another disaster. Two years after the courthouse at Pell City was finished and sessions of court were in full swing, certain citizens in the northern section of the county charged that it was unconstitutional to have two sets of court in one county. These people requested the legislature to have the sessions of county and circuit court in Pell City abolished. The legislature did this, and the Alabama Supreme Court upheld the decision. The Southern Judicial Division was abolished in 1905 when John Pelham was circuit judge and James L. North was sheriff. W. S. Forman was probate judge. Although the pride of the citizens was hurt, they went to work at once to have the courts re-established. They contended that the court dockets were so crowded that lawyers, witnesses, judges, peace officers, and anyone else who had to attend court were forced to make the tiresome trip to Ashville for several terms of court before their cases finally came before the judge and jurors.

John W. Moore of Pell City ran for the state legislature and pledged himself to have the constitution amended to allow a county to have a branch court. Ed Hamner of Attalla announced himself as a candidate for the state senate on the same platform. These two men were elected, and when the legislature met in 1907, the constitution was amended.

After the re-establishment of the courts, Pell City began its real development. The cotton mill brought Thomas Henry Rennie, a man skilled in the manufacturing business, to take charge of that enterprise. Mr. Pratt, who was president of the company, was in many respects a genius, but his greatest ability was that of a salesman. Mr. Rennie came

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in 1907 and remained until 1936, making an outstanding success of the mill. During this period E. A. Thompson was superintendent.

The Pell City Manufacturing Company was sold to Avondale Mills in 1919.<sup>34</sup> The company spent a million dollars in 1938 and 1939 to make it a thoroughly modern denim mill. On October 31, 1954, Pell City observed "Denim Day." The event was a great success, and the next year they had "Denim Week." The last yard of denim was run at the Pell City plant of Avondale Mills on January 12, 1962. The plant now makes a material called greige.

Pell City's first school was taught in a little schoolhouse built by Sumter Cogswell, W. H. Miller, and many others. Miss Dadie Griffith was the teacher. By 1905 the town had a school system with nine months of free schooling. A brick schoolhouse was erected where the City Hall stands today. Professor P. M. Matthews, who was also a lawyer, served as principal. Handy Ellis — later Judge Ellis — was principal from 1907-1908. In addition to the public schools, the cotton mill company maintained a splendid school on the hill near the mill. Many years later Miss Iola Roberts came to teach in that school. After a number of years, she became principal. When the school was taken over by the County Board of Education, and a new brick building was erected, it was named the Iola Roberts Elementary School. Miss Roberts has contributed much to the civic, social, and religious life of the town. Today Pell City has four schools which are fully accredited.

In 1903, The Bank of St. Clair County was organized with Sumter Cogswell as president, Frank H. Lathrop as vice-president, and McLane Tilton and J. Mantz as cashiers. In 1910 a new charter was obtained, and the bank became First National of Pell City. The name was changed in 1918 to Union State Bank. It was the first bank to be established in St. Clair County and has served the public continually ever since. There was another bank of short duration called Pell City Bank and Trust Company, which was in operation from 1910-1911. Today there are two strong banking houses in Pell City, Union State and the People's Bank. Also located there is St. Clair Federal Savings and Loan Association.

The first Sunday School was a Union school and was organized by Mrs. Carol Alverson, Bays D. Cather, Sr., and W. H. and Fred Miller, with the help of many others. It was held in the building which stood behind Pell City Drug Company. The building also served as Mr. Cather's printing shop, as he was at that time the editor of *The Pell City News*. Small kegs and wooden boxes from the grocery were used for seats. Soon church services were held in this building on Sunday night. From this humble beginning, the Pell City Methodist Episcopal Church came into being. The Presiding Elder came down from Gadsden to help with the organization. A church building was erected on the site of the present

building. At quarterly conference, Bays D. Cather was appointed church clerk, steward, and secretary of the Sunday School. E. E. Emerson was sent by the North Alabama Conference to be the first pastor. He was also pastor at Eden. The membership consisted of fourteen men, women, and children. The first marriage to be performed in the church was that of J. F. Miller to Miss Eddie Rowland.

About 1904, the Baptists organized a congregation in Pell City. Their first building occupied the site of the present First Baptist. There were eighteen charter members. The trustees were M. J. Smith, Mr. Mitchell, and J. H. Phillips. The Reverend Mr. Burns was the first pastor.

The first little schoolhouse was later occupied by the congregation of St. Mary the Virgin Episcopal Church. Bishop Beckwith of the Alabama Diocese held services there many times. For a brief period their director was Dr. Blacklock of Anniston. Today there are many fine churches in and around Pell City, the newest being Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church.

In 1903, Dr. R. A. Martin came to make his home and to practice medicine in Pell City. He became one of the town's most public-spirited citizens, contributing much to the welfare of his fellow townsmen. He established Pell City Drug Company and Pell City Infirmary. His younger brother, Dr. Claude Martin, was the town's first dentist.

The town's first hospital was the Gertrude Comer Hospital, which was sustained by Avondale Mills. It began operation soon after the mill was purchased by the Comers. Dr. Martin was head of the medical staff, and Miss Elsie Dunn was head of nursing services. It was under these two people that Miss Ruby Zackie, St. Clair County Health Nurse, received her training. The St. Clair Memorial Hospital, which is supported by county taxes, is located in Pell City, and it is said to be one of the best equipped small hospitals in the state.

When Pell City became a branch county seat for St. Clair County, prominent lawyers came to make their homes here. W. A. Starnes, whose wife was Selma Eaton, was one of the first and one of the best. His oldest son, Thurston, returned to practice here after receiving his law degree. M. M. Smith, who came from Ashville in 1903, was an able attorney, and his son, Victor, also practiced law in Pell City. Frank B. Embry came as a young lawyer and has given his time and energy in many civic and religious activities. Charlie P. Pratt, McLane Tilton, and Gardner Greene were all practicing attorneys.

One of the oldest business establishments in the town is Pell City Hardware Company, organized in 1904 with John W. Moore as president, and R. M. Alverson, Claude Alverson, and Hardie Cornett as the associate members of the firm. C. O. Lacy has owned the store since 1961.

Kilgroe Funeral Home was begun in 1908 by Thomas J.

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Abbott. The only requirements for directing funerals at this date in history were a stock of caskets, a horse-drawn hearse, a bier, and a pair of hand strips with which to lower the casket into the grave. Mr. Abbott, known locally as Uncle Tom, was most enthusiastic about his new venture. He directed his first funeral at Eden and found it to be a devastating experience. He at once came to the conclusion that this was not for him. When he reached home, he paced the floor for an hour, pausing occasionally to scrub his hands. His wife and her brother, J. H. Willingham, were partners in his business. Finally he said to them, "If you want this undertaking business, you can have it. I'm through!" Mrs. Abbott and Mr. Willingham operated the funeral home as a partnership until the death of Willingham in 1937, when Mrs. Abbott sold her half-interest in the business to Joe W. Kilgroe. It was then a partnership of Mr. Kilgroe and Cornelia Johnson Willingham until 1941. Joe Kilgroe's son, S. E. (Sonny), supervises the funeral home today. Mr. Kilgroe and his wife, Josephine Bukacke, now own and operate a very unique antique business in Pell City. They are both considered authorities on antiques, and their place, which is an authentic reproduction of an old Williamsburg shop, has patrons from throughout the United States.

During World War I, only one other town in the United States furnished more soldiers and subscribed more for liberty bonds in proportion to population, than Pell City. It was from St. Clair County that Captain Gardner Greene and fifty men went with Company C of Alabama's famous 167th Infantry Regiment as a unit of the Rainbow Division. Of the 263 men in Company C, only 51 returned. Captain Greene was one of those who were killed. On July 4, 1937, at "Good Neighbor Day," a granite monument honoring St. Clair County's soldiers who fought in World War I and the Spanish-American War, was unveiled. Miss Mary Ashley Greene, only child of Gardner Greene, unveiled the memorial.

It is not possible to write of all the memorable people who make the Pell City story one of universal interest. Some distinguished, good solid citizens must of necessity be left out. The story would indeed be incomplete, however, without mention of Colonel Napoleon Bonaparte Spears, for he was one of Pell City's most colorful citizens. He was born in Tennessee in 1848 and was educated at Emory and Henry College, in Emory, Virginia. When he was twenty-one, he was admitted to the Tennessee bar and elected to the Tennessee legislature. He came to St. Clair County around 1889 and practiced law here until his death in 1928. He was a member of the Alabama legislature, representing this county from 1898-1901. It was he who, as a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1901, had the ordinance approved — which was later

declared unconstitutional — for the establishment of a branch county seat in Pell City. He was also at one time mayor of the town. Colonel Spears was married to Florence Eugenia Mitchell, and they were the parents of three daughters: Hortense, Eugenia, and Pratt Spears.

Another unforgettable pioneer was James L. Garrett. He came with his wife, Sally Hindsman Garrett, to Pell City in 1905. He was a great politician. He was a Populist, and when that party ceased to exist, he did not return to the Democratic Party, but became a Republican. He served eighteen years (three terms) as circuit clerk of St. Clair County. Mr. Garrett was a Baptist lay leader. He loved all-day singings and singing conventions — especially the sacred harp singers. In years gone by, Mr. Garrett, James Ragland, Leroy Truitt, Austin Hazelwood, and Lester Smith sang together. Mr. Garrett's daughter, Mrs. Eula Garrett Vinson, was their accompanist.

Another of Pell City's best remembered citizens was Solomon Davis Kilgroe, who was born in 1861. He loved the land and thought every individual should own a bit of it in order to be a good citizen. At the time of his death he owned and operated nineteen small farms. His life did not lack variety, as he was an active member of the First Baptist Church, a politician, farmer, school teacher, railroad agent, bank director, cotton buyer, and merchant. Joe W. Kilgroe is his son, and his two grandsons are S. E. Kilgroe and Sol Mongold.

In the early 1950's it became evident that the old courthouse at Pell City was inadequate, and it was necessary to replace it. Martin J. Lide of Birmingham was the architect, and the contractor was R. P. Henderson and Sons of Pell City. The building was financed with county funds; no federal or state aid was used, and existing taxes were not increased. M. W. Forman was judge of probate at that time, and the commissioners were E. N. Peace, W. H. Hess, W. A. Coleman, and W. D. Wilkins. Virginia Luker was clerk of commissioners court. The building was dedicated on March 3, 1956. Master of ceremonies at the dedication was Pat Roberson, and the main speaker was Governor James E. Folsom, who was introduced by Circuit Judge Frank B. Embry.

On April 23, 1956, two neighboring towns, Eden and Oak Ridge, merged with Pell City. Eden was an old municipality which flourished in the 1880's when it was the "railhead" for the track workers along the Southern Railroad. Oak Ridge was a new town, incorporated in 1947 through the efforts of E. J. Doby. This merger brought the population count to 3,644. A third area, Avondale Mills Village, also became part of the municipality in September of 1956. Until that time, the mill village had never been within the city limits of Pell City, although the mill was. The 1970 census gave the population as 5,602.

The little village of Eden was once called Manchester. The name was

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changed in 1872 when a post office was established there. The earliest settler was Jesse Ginn, a Revolutionary War veteran. In 1836 he brought his family to St. Clair County and settled on Wolf Creek two miles below Eden. On November 14, 1971, the Broken Arrow Chapter of the DAR marked Jesse Ginn's grave with a bronze plaque. Other early families were the Pattersons, Sweats, Laneys, Cowans, Cates, Truitts, Lewises, Robertsons, Stevens, and Hindsmans.

A section of the town of Seddon, known as Seddon Shores, is now a part of Pell City also. This includes the old West residence, land where the Fishing Creek Methodist Church stood, the old cemetery, and the home of Dr. John Roberson. Seddon was settled in 1880 when the Georgia Pacific Railroad was built. It was incorporated that year with a population of five hundred. The people came there to live from Truss's Ferry (Ferryville), one mile away on the Coosa River. It was a lumber community for Empire Lumber Company. The town was named for Thomas Seddon, who was the first Secretary of War for the Confederate States under Jefferson Davis. The first merchant was J. K. P. Lacy. Dr. Henry Green Crump was the first doctor. Other pioneer settlers were Jake Maddox, W. H. and W. N. Roberson, and Harvey Bell. When the timber supply was exhausted the mills moved away. Today part of the tiny village stands dismally amid dreams of the past.

The town of Cropwell now is also part of Pell City. Soon after the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, a group of friends and relatives from the Laurens and Abbeville districts of South Carolina came seeking a new home in the wilderness. They were the John Roberson, Williamson, Truss, Coleman, and Collins families. They homesteaded near the Coosa River on land where today Cropwell and Pine Harbor stand. Soon other families joined them: Buchanans, Bryants, Joneses, Fennels, Kilgroes, Castleberrys, Bowdens, Allens, Brewsters, Alexanders, Walkers, Turners, Laneys, Rolands, Heasletts, Coleys, Mays, Moncriefs, and Murchinsons. These people secured the finest farm and timber land in the valley for a dollar an acre and prospered on it. Jeremiah Collins, who could not afford a wagon and had brought all his worldly goods on a crude "slide," soon owned hundreds of acres of fine land, a good home, and more slaves than he could call by name. These pioneers cleared land, established roads and mail routes, and built churches and schools. They operated stores, grist mills, distilleries, and tanneries. Their entertainment consisted of fox hunting and horse racing.

In 1833 a post office was established about a mile from Truss's Ferry. It was first called Coosa, but was changed to Diana, and, in 1837, to Cropwell. James Roberson was the first postmaster. There was another early post office nearby in the Harmon settlement which was called Fountainrun. J. O. N. Hardwick served as postmaster there.



This house belonged to the Mays family who came to Cropwell in the 1820's.

People of the Baptist faith attended church at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, which had been established in 1828, or at Coosa Valley Baptist Church which was founded in 1840. The few Methodists, including the McRaes and the Laney's, went to Easonville Methodist Church. In 1888 the Cropwell Baptist Church was organized, and today it is one of St. Clair County's most active churches.

The proximity of Cropwell to Easonville enabled the Cropwell families to send their children to Easonville to school. Coosa Valley High School was opened in 1880 with I. W. Hill as principal. By 1889 Cropwell had its own school, with excellent teachers from the beginning. Roy Gibson (later county superintendent of education) was principal there; it was the first place he taught in the county. Cropwell was the first community in

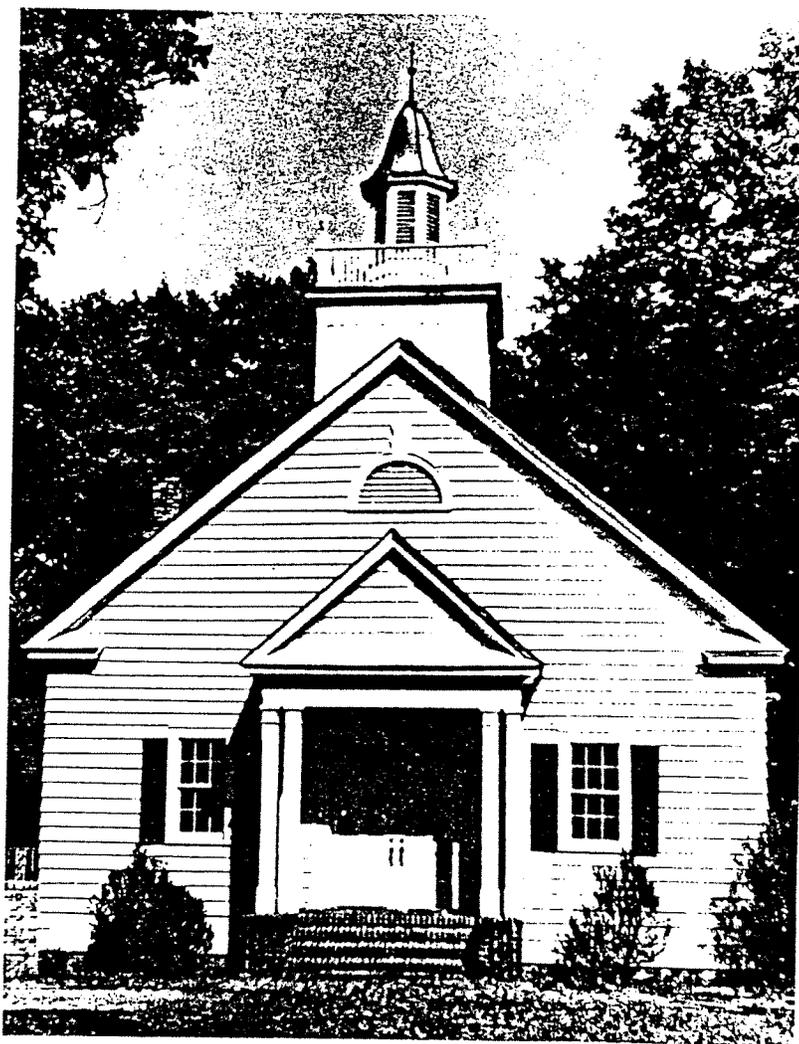
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the county to vote for the three mill tax for the support of the schools.

The farm land in the Cropwell area was very productive cotton land. Cotton gins did a thriving business. The first ones were owned by the Colemans, the Laceys, and the Robersons.

In 1840, John W. Jones came from Petersburg, Virginia, and built a mercantile business at Cropwell. Mr. Jones' daughter, Sarah Adeline, was married to James Roberson, and the business eventually became James Roberson Sons. The sons, J. Fall and Pat, have been active in merchandising, farming, politics, banking, and church circles in the county.



Cropwell Baptist Church, organized in 1888. It is still in use today.



This building housed the mercantile business originally owned by John W. Jones, which was passed on to his son-in-law, James Roberson.

Another successful business, which was begun before the Civil War, was owned by William T. Smith. This store was closed, however, when Mr. Smith went to fight with the Confederate Army. In 1861, Company C of the 10th Alabama Infantry Regiment was organized at Cropwell with J. D. Truss as captain. William T. Smith was a member of this company, and he rose to the rank of colonel.

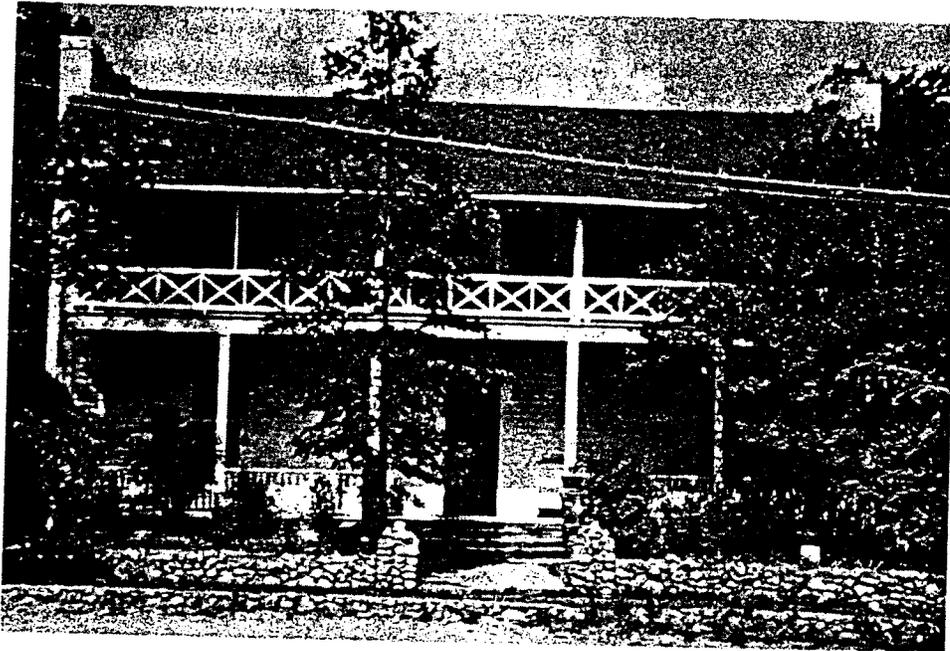
The first Masonic lodge in St. Clair County was organized at Cropwell. The first United Daughters of the Confederacy chapter was organized there on July 20, 1914, and it was called the John W. Jones chapter.

For a town that has suffered so many setbacks in its early days, Pell City has made phenomenal progress toward becoming a city. Recent developments, such as the country club, the airport, the lakeside developments, and new industry, give a preview of the development that can be expected in the future.<sup>35</sup>

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Supplement to Chapter 6

A Plantation Home in Pell City



This plantation home was once the residence of Green Evans, the first mayor of Pell City. It now belongs to the Riser family.

Mrs. A. F. Riser is the proud owner of Pell City's oldest home, a rambling two-story white house reminiscent of deep South plantation life. It actually was a plantation home when Green Evans and his wife, Sarah, built it in about 1891. According to old deeds recorded in the courthouse at Ashville, Mr. Evans owned considerable acreage here.

The stately old house has a gambrel roof with a severely plain entablature supported by slender square pillars. There are no pilasters. The three windows opening on the upstairs veranda and the two on the first floor veranda lack ornamentation; their pink louvered blinds are their only decoration. The small window panes are of blown glass. Their simplicity is relieved by the beautiful sunburst transom over the front door. The chimneys at either end of the house are of handpressed brick.

When you step across the threshold, you at once see that Ann Riser has done a superb job of restoration, for you feel that you have stepped back in time to a bygone era in Southern history. The house has had many different mistresses down through the years, and each has given it loving care. Some of the families who have called this place home are the

Evanses, Rowes, Alversons, Raglands, Hazelwoods, Fowlers, and the Eatmans from whom Dr. Riser purchased the house in 1956. Mrs. Riser's love for the place reflects her faith in American traditions.

Every piece of furniture in the house is authentic — either an original, or a true reproduction — and represents a style current in Southern farm homes during the late nineteenth century. One especially fine piece, and likely the oldest one, is a walnut secretary of early eighteenth century vintage. It was made for an ancestor of Mrs. Riser who lived in Virginia, and it had a very long hazardous journey before it finally reached Pell City.

This beautiful old home is invitingly livable, and Mrs. Riser, with her mother, Mrs. Nell Godfrey, and her sixteen-year-old daughter, Ann Jr., are very hospitable people.

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