

Early History of Pell City, Al.
Cogsweel - De Davis House 1888



To Pell City Library
Kate De Garis

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Pell City, Alabama
April 20, 2000

It is my dearest hope the reader
of this book will come to appreciate
the love, commitments, and sacrifices
of Pell City's founders and early citizens.
Kate De Garis

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SECOND TIME AROUND
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

In March, 1890 young Sumter Cogswell stepped down from the train in a small St. Clair County village, owned by the Pell City Land Company, only to find that he had missed his connection to Talladega and would be forced to spend the night. That single event, perhaps destined by fate, would start a chain of events that would create a town that would become a thriving, bustling city by 1990.

Mr. Cogswell, during the evening hours of that day in 1890, had the opportunity to talk to a number of the local inhabitants and learned that the town could possibly be purchased. With the eye of a speculator, the vision of a practical businessman and the confidence of a true salesman, he was greatly impressed with the area and the possibilities it presented. When he also learned that the President of the Pell City Land Company resided in Talladega, he made plans to call on him the following day.

After arriving in Talladega and discussing the opening of an insurance agency with Mr. A.J. Savery, the young Mr. Cogswell hurried down the street to the office of Mr. Don Plowman, and found that the Pell City property was, indeed, for sale.

Mr. Plowman, most certainly, was a little apprehensive about the youthfulness of the brash twenty-eight year old Mr. Cogswell, even with the credentials that he had presented. The asking price for the property was \$50,000.00, appreciably more than had been paid by the incorporators, and even though a handsome profit could be expected Mr. Plowman would not agree to an extended option.

After the necessary haggling had been completed, the young insurance executive could only secure a two week option, but left Talladega immediately for Chattanooga, Tennessee with his salesman's confidence and high expectations. Within that time limit he gathered together a group of investors in the Chattanooga and North Alabama areas, brought them to Pell City and sold the major portion of the 400 acres at auction. Mr. Plowman must have been pleasantly surprised when the young man walked back into his office, just a short time after his initial visit, and exercised his option with payment in full.

A resurvey was completed and streets reopened by the new owners and great expectations for rapid development was visualized by the investors. A number of new houses were built, and soon the Hercules Pipe Company, the very first soil pipe plant to be established in the South, was under construction. A second hotel was built, and stores, a

blacksmith shop, a saloon and a post office were doing business in the community within a short time.

In the early days of 1893 the future of Pell City, having been officially incorporated on May 6, 1891, appeared to be especially promising. Its nearness to Coosa River, three railroads whose junction composed the heart of the community, the surrounding fertile farmland and the lucrative markets of Birmingham and Anniston seemed to comprise the necessary ingredients to assure its success. But that certain success eluded Pell City for a second time. The panic of 1893-94 devastated the local economy, the pipe shop was relocated to Anniston and the town was forced into receivership.

The older towns of St. Clair County survived the terrible economic downturn that gripped the country, but the youthful Pell City could not weather the storm. Eventually the town would become virtually deserted, grass would grow in the streets, buildings would be destroyed by fire, and most of the houses and businesses would become empty. This was the picture that presented itself to young Mr. Cogswell in 1901, approximately ten years later, when he found himself gazing out a train window at the town of Pell City for the second time.

He immediately recognized that the potential still existed. The possibilities that he had visionalized earlier were still intact, and his businessman's instinct and salesman's confidence begged to be satisfied. He was by now a recent newlywed, forty years in age and very successful in the business world, and he certainly could recognize a truly great bargain when it was presented. In 1901 Sumter Cogswell purchased the principal acreage of Pell City, that he had sole to investors for over \$50,000.00 only ten years earlier, for \$3,000.00. The future of Pell City was, finally, assured.

Conclusion

IN THE BEGINNING
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

In the years before the Civil War, America's romance with railroads had begun and by 1860 more than 30,000 miles of rail had been put down. The massive fortunes of the railroad barons were beginning to accumulate, and the Civil War years were only temporary delays in the plans for much greater expansion.

The wheat fields, rich mineral deposits and forests of the interior of America were waiting to be tapped, and linking of the east and west coasts would be the key to the accumulation of even greater fortunes. By 1872 over 155,000,000 acres of land had been granted to railroad promoters. Along with vast concessions from the federal government and millions of dollars in loans, various states added additional outright grants of land, and stock subscriptions amounted to untold additional millions. It was estimated that approximately half of New Mexico, Arizona and California were, ultimately, given to railroad corporations.

The prospect of immense wealth in railroad construction did not escape the attention of H. I. Kimball of Maine who began large scale rail development in the State of Georgia immediately following the Civil War. One road, the Cartersville and Van Wert, was built to reach the vast deposits of slate in the Rockmart area with the idea of further extending the road into the State of Alabama to tap the coal reserves known to exist in Calhoun and St. Clair counties.

During the business panic of 1873 railroad construction declined due to the economic climate, and the roads changed hands a number of times. By 1883, the Cartersville and Van Wert, its name changed to the East and West Railroad of Alabama, had been extended to Broken Arrow, now Coal City, and George H. Pell was President of the corporation.

George Pell was a schemer, a dreamer, a fantastic promoter, and a man who possessed a mesmerizable personality. He was a power in the land who had access to the pocket books of Wall Street. He would, also ultimately spend two terms in New York penitentiaries for unlawful financial manipulation after having helped to found a town in rural Alabama that was named in his honor. Writing for the Age-Herald in 1904, Frank V. Evans noted that, "For this part of its early beginning the Pell City of today is not to blame and there is not a taint, nor a stain upon this goodly and progressive community."

Sensing the need for expansion to increase his railroad holdings and the utilization of agreements with other existing

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rail systems, the East and West line was extended southward from Broken Arrow to intersect with the Southern Railroad. Another road, the Birmingham and Atlantic Railroad, was also in operation from this juncture to Talladega.

Realizing the potential and economic possibilities of the area, a group of men purchased the acreage of the immediate area surrounding the rail junction with George Pell being the principle investor. Papers of incorporation were filed, and on October 28, 1887 the Pell City Land Company received its charter. The incorporators were John B. Knox, T.S. Blowman, D.L. Rogers, J.A. Savage, John Postell and Judge John W. Inzer.

The townsite was surveyed, streets were laid out, and plans were made to create a thriving city at this railroad junction in St. Clair County. Unfortunately, due to unexpected poor economic conditions and an apparent lack of promotional skills on the part of the original promoters, little was accomplished in the way of growth in the first years of its infancy. The fortunes of Pell City, and the real development of its potential would be left to the vision, dreams and ability of a young insurance salesman who missed his train connection and was required to spend the night in a backwoods community of Alabama in the Spring of 1890. He travelled on to Talledega the following day to establish an insurance agency. Little did he know that he would also create the beginning of a series of events that would bring him back to Pell City as a permanent resident many years later.

THE WAY IT WAS
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

The story of Pell City would not be complete without reference to Lydia McBain. Sumter Cogswell is the recognized "Father of Pell City," and she should, most certainly, be accorded the title of this city's "Mother." A gracious southern lady with a spirit of a true pioneer, Lydia shared Mr. Cogswell's dream of creating a thriving city from the ruins of a community that had failed during the panic of 1893.

With her husband, two small sons, household goods, a horse and buggy, a bird dog and a very large supply of food, Lydia McBain DeGaris Cogswell boarded the train on an early fall morning in Atlanta and arrived in Pell City in September, 1901 where she would live for the remainder of her life. Tom S. Coleman, father of Riverside's Bill Coleman and a pioneer citizen of this area, reported that the sight of the buggy was a source of much amusement to the town's small population. It, apparently, was the very first buggy with fringe on top that most of the inhabitants of Pell City had ever seen. Justifiably, it seemed out of place in this small community.

Lydia McBain was born in 1867 in Memphis, Tennessee. Her maternal grandparents, Capt. and Mrs. George Arnold, were one of the most distinguished and prominent families of western Tennessee, and her paternal grandparents were early pioneers that helped to settle the Memphis area.

Though born during the terrible years of early reconstruction after the Civil War, she grew up in the genteel atmosphere of the socially prominent of that era, and at the age of eighteen had become a lovely, talented and high spirited young lady to grace the social circles of Memphis. She attracted the attention of many suitors including that of Charles F. DeGaris, a thirty-four year old civil engineer and prominent contractor who had built many of the Mississippi River levees and railroads of the area.

DeGaris, a tall, handsome and successful businessman had already become one of the best known contractors in the South Central States and President of the DeGaris Printing Company of Memphis by 1885. Mrs. Belle McBain, Lydia's mother and a young widow at the time, was very much surprised when she found that her daughter, rather than herself, was the object of his ardent courtship. With gracious approval, and perhaps a somewhat wounded pride, the comely Mrs. McBain consented to allow Mr. DeGaris to come calling on her daughter, and soon his courthouse was very much in earnest. Characteristic of the drive and enthusiasm that had already been responsible for much of his personal success, Charles pursued Miss McBain with a singleness of purpose that soon disposed of any serious

competitors. The romance blossomed and the captivated Miss McBain accepted his proposal of marriage. The wedding, in 1886, was the social highlight of the year in Memphis, Tennessee.

In the following years two sons were born to the happy couple. John Annesley, father of present day City Councilman Johnnie A. DeGaris, was the first born, and soon after the couple were blessed with the birth of a second son, Julian. Unfortunately, the world crashed around the feet of Mrs. DeGaris in 1898 with the untimely death of her husband. Charles died of a heart attack at the age of 48 and Lydia was left a young widow with two very young sons to raise.

At a party during the summer of 1899 Mrs. DeGaris, while still in mourning, met a young, successful and engaging General Agent for the Insurance Company of North America and Globe Fire Insurance Company. Sumter Cogswell, son of the prominent Cogswell family of Charleston, South Carolina had established an office at Memphis in 1896 with five states under his jurisdiction. Even though his business activities required a great deal of travel, he soon found that affairs of the heart prompted him to cut short his trips and return to Memphis as soon as time permitted. Lydia McBain DeGaris had become most prominent in his thoughts, and she had soon found that he had become an object of great admiration in her own mind.

A second romance for the young Mrs. DeGaris began to blossom, and after accepting his proposal of marriage in the late winter of 1899 they were married on February 27, 1900. A local newspaper was prompted to report on the event as, "a marriage that proved a surprise to many people in Memphis was that of Sumter Cogswell and Mrs. Lydia DeGaris."

Having only recently opened an office in Atlanta as general agent for Manhattan Fire Insurance Company with jurisdiction over thirteen Southern states, he moved his bride to that city immediately upon their marriage and the new Mrs. Cogswell soon found herself active in the social circles of Georgia. But it was not destined that she would remain in that environment very long.

In 1901 Mr. Cogswell found himself gazing out a train window at the ruins of a small Alabama town. Ten years earlier he had been instrumental in persuading a group of businessmen to buy the property and establish the town of Pell City. During the interlude most of the buildings had burned and grass grew in the streets. The Pell City Land Company had been forced into receivership during the panic of 1893-1894 and the Hercules Pipe Company had been relocated to Calhoun County as the parent industry that would, ultimately, make Anniston, Alabama the soil pipe capital of the world.

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A vision, once again, formed in the mind of Sumter Cogswell and was eagerly shared by his new bride upon his return to Atlanta. The town still maintained the potential that he had envisioned on his earlier visit, and he and his new bride decided to buy the property and build their own city upon the ruins that existed. The principal acreage was purchased from the Pell City Land Company for \$3,000.00 and Mrs. Cogswell found herself as part owner of an entire Alabama townsite.

With her pioneering spirit, and faith in the judgment and vision of her husband, she prepared herself to move again for the second time in the short span of less than two years. Even though the family and friends of this young socialite expressed concern over her proposed move to a backwoods community in Alabama, she found herself caught up in the excitement of a new adventure.

On September 7, 1901 Lydia McBain DeGaris Cogswell, late of Memphis and Atlanta, stepped down from the train, surveyed a village of, perhaps, forty inhabitants and directed the unloading of her personal possessions. She, her husband and two small sons then walked the short distance to the Cornett Hotel No. 2 where she would set up housekeeping until her new home could be completed. The city that she and her husband had envisioned was waiting to be built and, together, they would write many pages into the history of St. Clair County in the intervening years.

HARDY CORNETT - PIONEER CITIZEN
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY

by George Williams

Hundreds of interesting stories could be written about the early beginnings of Pell City, but none could be more fascinating than were the actual characters who comprised this City's earliest population.

Hardy Cornett was the epitome of the adventurous entrepreneur of the late eighteen hundreds who helped to lead this nation into the nineteenth century. Solomon D. Kilgroe was a "man for all seasons" who combined his many talents to become a farmer, merchant, politician, school teacher, railroad agent, bank director, cotton broker, church and civic leader and, ultimately, an elder statesman of local history. Sumter Cogswell was very fortunate, indeed, to have had the able assistance, sheer determination and abundant resourcefulness of individuals such as those two in helping to assure the success of his new city.

Hardy's family moved from Harris County, Georgia in 1862 to settle on the Jim Coleman plantation at Riverside. He was only thirteen at the time, but in later life could vividly recall the difficult years of reconstruction after the Civil War. Almost seventy five years later he would recall the war years, Carpet Baggers, hard times, and especially would he remember the lack of food that was so prevalent. He stated that he was "raised" on buttermilk and cornbread and always knew when Sunday came because that was the only day of the

week when the family had biscuits for breakfast.

It was fortunate for many St. Clair County residents, in that day and time, that wild game was plentiful during those difficult years. The food supply of many families depended upon the marksmanship of the hunter. During the family's first winter in Riverside Hardy killed enough wild duck and geese to enable his mother to make and fill a large feather bed and two pillows. An abundant deer population also enabled him to kill two large bucks on one morning's hunt. His uncle was hired by Jim Coleman to protect his wheat crop from the geese. He not only paid him for his marksmanship, but also furnished a horse, gun and an ample supply of shotgun shells to accomplish the task. It can be assumed that everyone in Riverside ate wild geese during the winter of 1862.

Hardy's family moved to Seddon, after having lived at Riverside for a number of years, and his father operated a water powered cotton gin that had been constructed on Fishing Creek. The family ginned an estimated two hundred bales of cotton per season, and his father's financial prospects were vastly improved, but the unexpected happened. The authorities decided that the impounded water behind the dam was the cause of an outbreak of chills and fever and required that it be destroyed. Ironically, the old mill and dam site have long been covered by the backwaters of a much larger dam. Today, even though the dam and mill site cannot be located, the foundation of the old Seddon Baptist Church that way nearby can be seen on the bottom of Fishing Creek slough during the

low water level of winter pool.

Hardy's father then purchased the land now occupied by Avondale Mill and built a log home on the site that would eventually accommodate the old mill hospital. A large apple orchard covered the property now occupied by the mill itself. Not being particularly fond of farming, Hardy's father sold the farm in 1882 and built a hotel at Eden to take advantage of the lucrative business opportunities that were available during construction of the Southern Railroad. Eden, at that time, was a virtual metropolis when compared to the tiny Pell City community, and had been settled many years earlier under its first name, Manchester. Jesse Ginn, a Revolutionary War veteran, homesteaded the area in 1836. The town of Manchester was established with a post office being provided by the Federal government, and the name was changed to Eden in 1872. Needless to say, widespread speculation has persisted throughout the years as to the selection of that particular name.

In 1884 Hardy decided to move to Texas as did many other young men during the 1883-84 panic, and while working on a farm he met and married Lizzie Strickland whose family had also moved there from Eden in 1881.

In 1892 he and his bride returned to Pell City, and Hardy and Zack Hazlewood formed a partnership to operate a grocery, livery stable and hotel, but the infant town was to experience hard times again. The pipe shop was relocated to Anniston, the town went into receivership and most of the inhabitants

moved away. Eventually, the grocery, livery stable and hotel would all burn within a six months period.

Being an astute opportunist, Hardy promptly opened up a new hotel in the "old brick" building that had housed a herd of goats for a number of years. That "old brick" building was then known as the Maxwell building that in later years would be occupied by the Cameron Boarding House, Hill Grocery, A & P Grocery, U.S. Post Office and even temporary offices for County officials. Today, the first floor of the building is occupied by Discount Shoes, The Insurance Center and Pell City Pet Shop. In 1901, Tom Coleman paid a handsome \$10.00 per month for "good grub and a fine room" while living in the Cornett-Hazlewood Hotel.

Not one to waste golden opportunities that were presented, Hardy cultivated many acres of land and rented out vacant houses and other buildings while paying no rent himself. Since nobody claimed the property, Hardy became the self appointed caretaker for the bankrupt town and was doing quite well for himself until Cogswell decided to buy the property in 1901 and resurrect the city. It is not known what kind of a rental agreement was ultimately worked out between Cornett and Cogswell, but it must have been satisfactory to both parties.

Hardy would become a leading citizen of Pell City who would help to organize the First Baptist Church. He and his brother, George, would build a new hotel which would also burn in 1935, and in 1904 he formed a partnership with R. M. and

G. B. Alverson and J. W. Moore to establish the Pell City Hardware Company. The Company's policy was to treat every customer with "fairness and honesty," and the result was that a business was founded that still exists today under the present ownership of William "Bill" Gossett.

An account of Solomon D. Kilgroe's contribution to the growth and prosperity of the infant Pell City, and his association with the Willingham family of Cropwell will be left to another story. His life and times are as fascinating as were those of Hardy Cornett. Those two remarkable gentlemen of yesteryear occupied vital and key positions in the early history of Pell City, and it is certain that they were held in high esteem by Sumter Cogswell.

HELPING TO BUILD A CITY
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY

by George Williams

Solomon Davis Kilgroe was, indeed, a "man for all seasons," and an individual who possessed many talents. His influence was widely felt in the infant Pell City community. One who must have benefited greatly from that influence was Joe H. Willingham, another very early citizen of the town. Willingham was a young brother-in-law of Solomon Kilgroe who would, also, leave his own mark in the annals of Pell City's history.

Solomon was born in 1861 to spend a childhood amid the carnage of the Civil War. His earliest recollections would be of the terrible aftermath that followed. Possibly, that experience could have been responsible for the molding of his character, and the steady resolve acquired that would, eventually, make him very successful in many endeavors.

His first official responsibility after arriving in Pell City was that of Agent for the three railroads, but that activity was not sufficient to satisfy the ambition of young Mr. Kilgroe. In time he would own and operate seventeen small farms in the area, teach school, be elected to public office, become a local merchant, serve as a bank director and engage in the business of buying and selling cotton. His children and grandchildren would, ultimately, become business, political and civic leaders of Pell City, some of whom continue to serve the community during its centennial year.

Solomon's first marriage was to Carrie Willingham, a member of a prominent Cropwell family who were among the first settlers of this area. When Carrie died, at an early age, Solomon then married her younger sister, Lura, and from that union was born Joe W. and Willie Kate Kilgroe. Joe W. Kilgroe would become not only a highly respected business and civic leader, but would also serve as City Councilman and Mayor of Pell City in later years. His son, S. E. "Sonny" Kilgroe is presently serving as President of Kilgroe Funeral Home, one of the oldest local institutions, director of Union State Bank and just recently as a member of the City Council of Pell City.

Joe H. Willingham was born in 1879 at Cropwell, and by the age of twenty one was working in the capacity of Clerk for the three railroads under the supervision of his brother-in-law Solomon Kilgroe. His best friend, at the time, was Tom Coleman who also worked for the railroad as a telegraph operator. Tom was the father of Riverside's W. A. "Bill" Coleman.

Joe married Miss Cornelia Stone, and their firstborn, Joseph H. Willingham, would become an admiral in the United States Navy. His other children were William, Wasson "Snow," Martha and Kathryn. William died in an automobile accident at an early age, Wasson "Snow" would become a prominent citizen of Talladega during his adult life and Martha would marry Tom F. Griffin, Jr. of Lincoln. Tom and Martha were citizens of Lincoln for many years, but moved to their new home at Seddon

Point in 1967 where they still reside. Tom was the developer of the Seddon Point residential community of Pell City.

Joe Willingham was a young and energetic individual who also helped to provide the leadership for the early growth and direction of the new Pell City. Although he moved from Cropwell to Pell City to work as Clerk for the railroads, he would also become a leading businessman who would help to establish the funeral service that serves Pell City today.

Joe, his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. & Mrs. Tom Abbott, established a furniture store and grocery in the building that now houses Hagan Drug. At that time the building was partitioned with two doors fronting on Cogswell Avenue with the furniture store occupying the corner building.

Finding themselves with unused space at the rear of the grocery, they decided to utilize it for a funeral service that was very greatly needed in the growing community. In those days, the primary requirement for a funeral director was the willingness to serve, and the story is told that after conducting their first funeral service Mr. Abbott informed his wife and her brother that he was no longer interested in that profession.

Joe and Mrs. Abbott continued to operate the funeral service, and would later hire a nephew, Joe W. Kilgroe, as an assistant. In time, Joe Kilgroe would attend school, acquire professional credentials and eventually acquire ownership of the funeral service. That funeral service organization and Kilgroe Funeral Home, presently located in the beautiful old

home that was built by T. L. Rennie who succeeded George W. Pratt as Manager of Pell City Manufacturing Company in 1907, is a landmark in Pell City today.

The Kilgroe and Willingham influence has been a very positive one upon the continued success and growth of Pell City and they, along with other pioneer citizens, were very instrumental in helping Sumter Cogswell establish the city that all of its citizens can be proud of in its centennial year.

"THE BRANCH COURTHOUSE HAS COME"
 A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
 By George Williams

Immediately upon taking up residence in Pell City Sumter Cogswell, with his fertile imagination and sales ability, began to use his promotional skills to establish a branch courthouse in the community. A movement was initiated to locate a second courthouse south of Backbone Mountain because of the arduous journey that was required of the citizens of South St. Clair County to attend court and handle other legal business at Ashville.

Eden, Coal City, Riverside, Cropwell and Pell City were all competitors for the location of the branch for their respective communities. A lively and spirited political campaign evolved, and the tempers of the opponents and proponents became excessively heated at times. Many citizens of the Northern District charged that the branch courthouse would spell financial ruin for the county, and numerous people of the Southern District were highly critical of the fact that the Ashville courthouse was too far removed from a goodly portion of the county's population.

The election was held on November 6, 1901 and Pell City won by an overall majority of approximately 600 votes. Sumter Cogswell donated to St. Clair County block No. 26 of the original survey of Pell City for the location of the new courthouse and jail. The building was constructed and courts convened, but the controversy that had been created was far from being resolved.

A strong opposition to the branch courthouse was still very much in evidence in the Northern District and, with the charge of unconstitutionality, succeeded in having the courts abolished in 1905 by an act of the state legislature. The closing of the courts constituted a serious setback to the growth of the young Pell City community, but with determination and typical pioneering spirit the citizens of the Southern District set about the task of having the legislative act reversed.

The following lyrics, penned by an unknown author became the victory song of the Southern District:

The Wayworn Witness
 (Or Litigant or Juryman as the case may be)

I saw a way-worn witness,
 In tattered garments clad,
 Struggling up Backbone Mountain
 It seemed that he was sad.
 His mind was heavy laden,

"The Branch Courthouse Has Come" - Page 2

His strength was almost gone,
 Yet he shouted as he journeyed,
 "The Branch Courthouse will Come."

Chorus;

The Palms of Victory,
 Crowns of Glory
 Palms of Victory, I shall wear.

On arrival at the count seat,
 He found the case delayed
 No trial could be held then,
 So a second trip was made.
 So with garments worn and dusty,
 Twice yearly he would go,
 Wasting time and money,
 His purse was getting low.

Chorus;

But he kept pressing onward,
 His hopes were always high,
 for every fight is won by right,
 And deliverance is nigh
 So with ballot for Johnnie Moore,
 And he was wending home,
 He shouted as he journeyed,
 "The Branch Courthouse Has Come."

Chorus;

In 1906 John W. "Johnnie" Moore of Pell City, who was referred to in those lyrics, announced as a candidate for the state legislature, and Ed D. Hamner of Attalla announced his candidacy for state senator to represent St. Clair County. Their platforms supported the movement to reverse the earlier legislative act and have the courts at Pell City declared legal. Both were elected in the November, 1906 election and in January, 1907 the Constitution of the State of Alabama was amended making branch courts legal. In that same session, the legislature enacted the municipal code which was adopted by the Pell City council the following year.

With the re-establishment of the courts Pell City was again primed for progress, and many prominent lawyers chose to make their homes here. W.A. Starnes, Captain J. Gardner Green and M.M. Smith were some of the first attorneys to establish offices in Pell City, and ultimately these men would also carve out a niche for themselves in the political and economic life of this community. Their names would become as prominent in business and civic activities as they were in the legal profession, and they would leave their own imprint upon the pages of the history of Pell City.

"The Branch Courthouse Has Come" - Page 3

Time, alone, can sometimes diminish the importance of political controversy, but there are some incidents which can still evoke spirited conversation and debate a century later. Even after a hundred years, St. Clair County's two courthouses play a very prominent role in the political life of this area, and Backbone Mountain still seems to constitute the county's Mason-Dixon line. The controversy, that began in 1901, has added many colorful pages in the history of St. Clair County, Alabama. It will, most certainly, create additional spirited conversation into the distant future.

THE CHURCH
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

Bays D. Cather stood in the doorway of the old building surveying his new printing shop. He had rented the building on Monday morning after his arrival in Pell City the day before, and he was anxious to publish the first issue of his fledgling newspaper that he had already decided to name The Coosa Valleyan.

He was concerned about the old job press that he had hauled across Backbone Mountain from Ashville. The press had first been used in Talladega and then, much later, in Ashville. W.S. Griffith had relocated his newspaper, The Southern Alliance, to Ashville in 1892 and had taken the old press with him. The Southern Alliance was sold to Leroy Watson in 1900 and was then acquired by The Southern Aegis in 1901. Bays' father, Publisher of The Southern Aegis, had given the press to him for use in his new Venture at Pell City.

Bays set a few lines of type, inked up the press and cranked out a page or two. The printing was perfect and the old press operated smoothly. He was now ready to publish the initial issue of The Coosa Valleyan, but first it was necessary to acquaint himself with the small populace, sell advertising space, and gather a few bits of news that would be of interest to his readers. Happily, he set himself to the task, and very soon his newspaper was being read on the streets and in the homes of the local inhabitants.

In time, Cather would become acutely aware of another pressing need in this infant community. He was a sincere and devout young man who had grown up in a family that was dedicated to the church, and he sensed the need for a spiritual direction in Pell City.

Sumter Cogswell had also expressed such a need to Bays Cather, and had committed the gift of property to any churches that were organized. Mrs. Carolyn Alverson, with whom Bays had become acquainted, was also dedicated to the task of organizing a church. Together they decided that, at least, a Sunday school should be organized and, if successful, the services of a minister could be sought in the future. With the assistance of W.H. and Fred Miller a meeting was arranged, and Pell City's first Sunday school class was held in the print shop of The Coosa Valleyan.

Since no other building was available, Bays offered the use of his newspaper office until more suitable quarters could be acquired. And on that first Sunday afternoon in 1901 a number of people in attendance found themselves seated on

boxers and nail keys amid the ink, type, job press and other paraphernalia generally found in a newspaper office of the day.

The Sunday school proved to be very popular from the start, and soon people from more distant places were attending. All denominations were invited and the Sunday school adhered to a strictly independent policy. As the attendance grew, church services were begun and the old building, that stood across the street from present day City Hall, soon became the religious and social center of Pell City. From Monday morning until the paper was printed on Thursday afternoon the building served as headquarters for The Coosa Valleyan newspaper, but on the weekend it served the community as a house of worship.

Sumter Cogswell soon realized that two needs of his town could be jointly served. His offer to provide the property and most of the materials necessary for the construction of a suitable building was immediately accepted by the congregation that assembled on Sunday at The Coosa Valleyan. Bays Cather, members of that congregation and with the personal assistance of Sumter and Lydia Cogswell, set about the task. Soon a building was erected on property that is presently occupied by the residence of Mrs. Gloria V. Roberson. The interdenominational church, Sunday school and the Pell City School would all share the new building. Miss Dadie Griffith was hired as the new schoolmarm.

In 1902 the Pell City Methodist Episcopal Church was formed to serve members of both faiths. Lydia Cogswell was a communicant of the Episcopalian Church and Sumter Cogswell would, ultimately, convert to that faith. The Cogswells made a gift of the land to the Methodist Conference, and the building that housed the First Methodist Church was erected on its present site.

The Church was organized on December 12, 1902 with the following charter members: Bays Cather, A.T. LeFils, Misses Florence and Hortense Spears, Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Miller, Joe E. Connel, Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Ledyard and Miss Minnie Ledyard. Lee Tomley, Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Mitchell, Marion Fomby and R.E. Fomby joined the membership in January, 1903.

At the first quarterly meeting of the North Alabama Conference, after the organization of the church, Bays Cather was appointed to serve as Church Clerk, Steward and Secretary of the Sunday school. The Reverend E. E. Emerson was assigned as minister, and the first marriage to be performed in the new church was that of J.F. Miller and Miss Eddie Rowland. Bays Cather would later claim that he and Miss Daisy Kilgroe were the first romantic young couple to attend services there.

The Baptists soon established their own congregation, and

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in late 1903 and early 1904 the Baptist Church was organized. The Reverend A.E. Burns served as pastor, and M.M. Smith, J.H. Phillips and a Mr. Mitchell were appointed as Trustees. The building was constructed on the present site on property given by Sumter Cogswell, and the charter members of Pell City's First Baptist Church were: Mrs. John Cameron, Miss Martha Cameron, Mrs. B.A. Fite, Miss Nell Fite, Mr. & Mrs. H.A. Cornett, Mr. & Mrs. S.D. Kilgroe, Miss Dixie Kilgroe, Mr. & Mrs. M.M. Smith, Charles Nunnally, Sank Miller, Miss Jessie Miller, Mrs. T.J. Kilgore and Miss Daisy Kilgore.

Many descendants of members of both of those congregations reside in Pell City today, and are active in the affairs of the First Methodist and First Baptist churches.

Eventually, as the population grew, St. Mary the Virgin Episcopal Church was formed with services continuing to be held in the small school building. When a new school was built, on the site now occupied by City Hall, a beautiful Episcopal Church was erected on the property when the old school building was demolished. Bishop Beckwith of the Alabama Diocese held services there on many occasions, and Dr. Blacklock of Anniston was named as first Director.

Mr. & Mrs. Cogswell contributed generously to the construction of the building, and made a memorial gift to the church of a beautiful organ. During the following years, as members died and other moved away, the membership dwindled until the congregation became so small that it was no longer feasible to maintain a charter. The church was disbanded with many of its appointments, including the beautiful organ, being given to other Episcopal Churches in Alabama. The property was eventually sold to Mr. Pat Roberson, President of Union State Bank, and was later acquired by his son, J. Fall Roberson who succeeded his father at the bank. Many years later Mrs. J. Fall Roberson would build her home that stands on the site today.

As the years past by, Eden, Oak Ridge, Cropwell, much of old Easonville and the Mill Village would become parts of the municipality of Pell City, and their many fine churches would be added to the roster. The history of each of those churches is unique and would require many pages or print to report. They still maintain their own distinct personalities, and each has an illustrious and interesting history to claim as their own. Pell City, in its centennial year, has reason to be extremely proud of its many churches and the outstanding citizens of this area that comprise their congregations today.

THE BANK
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

With the assurance, in 1902, of an industry to provide numerous well paid jobs, steady employment and a tremendous increase in the town's population, Sumter Cogswell was now in a position to proceed with another step in his grand design for the growth of the city that he visualized. Pell City was now in need of his bank, and he set about the task of building it. His would not be just another local or state affiliated bank, but ultimately one of national scope. The new bank to be built would be named the Bank of St. Clair County, and would be the first successful one to be established in this county.

With the able assistance and direction of a number of the county's leading businessmen, the new bank would enjoy unprecedented growth and success. During the economic downturn of 1907 the bank would attain a remarkable record in the banking industry of the day. While most banks were issuing script or failing completely the relatively new bank in Pell City would remain on a cash basis, meeting local payrolls regularly, furnishing cash for cotton crops and paying checks as usual. Mr. Cogswell's careful planning and meticulous selections of his business partners had served him well during this particular crisis. By November, 1916 the bank would be proclaimed as St. Clair County's oldest, largest and strongest financial institution.

When the Bank of St. Clair County opened its doors for business in 1903 Sumter Cogswell found himself in the leadership role of yet another business venture. He was named as President of the bank, and would remain in that capacity for a number of years. McLane Tilton, E.J. Mautz, Arthur Draper, J. Fall Roberson, Sr., J.H. Moore of Coal City, Frank Holland Lathrop of Riverside and L. Cook would serve as the new bank's first Board of Directors.

In 1910 the bank received a charter necessary to establish itself as a national bank. The name was changed to the First National Bank of Pell City and McLane Tilton became President after Mr. Cogswell assumed the title of Chairman of the Board. In 1912 under Mr. Tilton's leadership, a new bank building was completed at a cost of \$20,000.00 and shortly thereafter it would be proclaimed, by Birmingham newspapers, as the "Finest Small Town Bank in the U.S." The bank building was located on the corner of Cogswell Avenue and 20th Street and would remain as a truly unique landmark until it was removed in 1969. The only evidence of its existence is the vacant lot where it once proudly stood.

In 1918, John Skelton Williams, U.S. Comptroller of

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Currency, issued a set of rules and instructions that were not very highly regarded by Mr. Tilton and other officials of the First National Bank of Pell City. Due to the disinclination of the bank's officials to obey Mr. Williams' highly resented instructions, it was decided to change the name once again. The name was changed to Union State Bank and it has continued to operate under that name up to the present day.

Not only did the bank weather the crisis that developed during 1907, but it has continued to survive all the other financial storms to develop since that time including the most disastrous financial collapse that occurred during the years 1929 to 1932.

Union State has continued to grow and prosper, and at the present time operates branch banks, not only in St. Clair County but in Jefferson And Cherokee Counties as well. Under its present leadership the continued success of the bank has been assured.

It has been said that history often repeats itself, and it certainly may be true concerning the banking industry in St. Clair County. Recently, after a lapse of twenty-seven years, a new bank was established in Pell City. Eighty-six years after Mr. Cogswell opened the county's first bank his grandson was instrumental, as one of the principals, in helping to establish Metro Bank that opened for business in mid-1989. The bank is located on property that was part of the original acreage purchased by Mr. Cogswell in 1901.

THE NEWSPAPER
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

In early January, 1902 a very young Bays D. Cather, Sr. made a momentous decision that would change his life forever. That decision would ultimately create an indelible mark upon the pages of Pell City's history, and carve a niche for Cather in the publishing business of the South.

He had been born into a newspaper family, grew up in the print shop of the family paper, and for nine months had been gaining additional experience while working for James P. Montgomery at Vicksburg, Mississippi. He was homesick for St. Clair County, but more importantly he felt a growing need to establish his own identity and create an outlet for his youthful ambitions.

The new town of Pell City was rapidly gaining acclaim and was receiving much attention in the printed media. His father's newspaper The Southern Aegis of Ashville was being mailed to him regularly and numerous articles were appearing in those pages regarding Sumter Cogswell and his efforts to build a thriving community in the southern part of the county. Bays Cather decided that it was time for Pell City to have a newspaper, and he wanted to be its Publishing Editor.

Mr. Cogswell was faintly amused when he received the first inquiry from this brash young man who wanted to establish his newspaper in a community that was little more than a railroad junction at the time. His amusement gradually turned to more serious considerations when he began to realize that Bays Cather also had a dream. Cather could possibly be a tremendous compliment to Cogswell's own ambition.

Cogswell had become acquainted with the young man's father, George R. Cather of Ashville, and had developed a great respect for him. Mr. Cather had established a printing business and a newspaper at Ashville in 1873, and immediately set about the task of teaching his young sons the printing trade and building a first rate publication, The Southern Aegis, for St. Clair County. Aware of the family's expertise and experience in the business, Mr. Cogswell decided that the Cather connection and Pell City's own newspaper could make an invaluable contribution to his new town's growth and success. He immediately extended an invitation, through the mail, to young Mr. Cather with a promise of his utmost assistance in helping with the establishment of the paper. Mr. Cather packed up his belongings, resigned from his Mississippi job, and headed back home to St. Clair County.

He borrowed equipment and material from his father's business, purchased other printing supplies, and in true

pioneer fashion loaded all of it onto two two-horse wagons and left Ashville on a call January afternoon in 1902.

Included in the equipment and supplies were cases, handset type, paper, ink and a Southern Alliance Nonpareil Job Press. The load was a tiresome burden for the mules, and the roads were in miserable condition. After double-teaming across Backbone Mountain, Bays spent the remainder of the night at Coal City. On a bright, sunlit but still cold, Sunday morning Cather arrived in Pell City, unhitched his mules at the local livery and walked the short distance to the Cogswell home where he received an official welcome from Sumter Cogswell and his wife, Lydia.

Cogswell had already made arrangements for its use, so Bays Cather set up shop in a vacant building behind the Pell City Drug Company on property where, ultimately, Pell City's Martin Clinic would be located. The young newspaperman busily engaged himself in the gathering of news, selling advertising, and getting acquainted with the community. He composed the articles, laid out the ads, set the type, inked up his press and on a Thursday afternoon in late January, 1902 the first issue of The Coosa Valleyan hit the streets of Pell City. It was an instant success, countywide, but was destined for hard times through the desperate years of 1903-04. The paper occupied that building for approximately nine months before moving to other quarters, but in that short time it gained historical prominence in numerous endeavors.

Bays Cather, like Sumter Cogswell, was a mover and shaker of sorts, and was also a very serious minded and religious young man. Sensing the need for a spiritual direction in the new community, he talked with Mrs. Carol Alverson and with the assistance of W.H. and Fred Miller a Sunday school was soon established. Since no other building was available, the first meeting was held on a Sunday afternoon at The Coosa Valleyan and, like the paper itself, was an instant hit. That Sunday school class would set the stage for the organization and erection of numerous churches in the area, and would, ultimately, make the town known as truly "a city of churches" when compared to other municipalities of comparable size.

Cather was also an incurable romantic which is very much in evidence from the words he wrote in detailing his romance with a young lady who would become his beloved wife. In a letter to The Pell City News in 1944 he stated that, "Mr. T.J. Kilgroe, of Riverside, moved to Pell City about the time I did. He had a beautiful daughter, Miss Daisy Kilgroe, and Pell City is where I first met her. Daisy and I were the first young Pell City couple who became sweethearts. These hills around town will always be sacred to our memory. For it was where I wooed and won the heart of the finest lady in all the world, where we, in 1904, became man and wife, and where we walked and roamed the fields and hills with four children

The Newspaper - Page 3

born to us during the twenty-one years of our residence there."

In those twenty-one years Bays Cather would become of historical significance to the continued development of Cogswell's city, and would print many personal pages into its history. The Coosa Valleyan contributed, greatly, to the rebirth of Pell City, and through its pages the image of the town would be enhanced to help stimulate interest in additional development. Cather would serve two terms as Postmaster, help to establish a mercantile business, be instrumental in the organization of the First Methodist Church and, in later years of his residency, own and operate Pell City's first theatre. He would also edit a paper in Leeds, Alabama and during the years of World War II was Publishing Editor of The Dania Press, a weekly paper at Dania, Florida. Cather's efforts, in Pell City, would help to create a very favorable atmosphere for other newspapers that were to follow.

The very first paper to be published in the Pell City area was the Pell City Echo edited by W.S. Griffith. Apparently it did not weather the panic of 1893, and very little is currently known concerning its existence.

In 1908 The Progress was established and the name was later changed to The Pell City Progress. In 1921 the name was changed again and the paper then became known as The Pell City News. The late, beloved Edmund Blair served as Publisher of The Pell City News for many years, and when he acquired the Ashville Southern Aegis in 1944 and merged the two papers he changed the name once again to the St. Clair News Aegis. Shortly after the death of Mr. Blair in 1972, the newspaper was sold to Mr. Robert Bryan of Bryan Publications who continues as Publisher to the present time.

A footnote to be added was the establishment of The Observer in 1970 by Mr. Bob Cornett, nephew of Edmund Blair. The Observer continued, with great success, until 1978 when it was also purchased by Bryan Publications and merged with the St. Clair News Aegis.

The excellent newspapers of Pell City have always played a very prominent role in the continuing progress of this area, and it is expected that such a role will continue to be played by the local news media as the City progresses toward the twenty-first century.

If he could write an article for our present day newspaper, Mr. Cather would be hard pressed to find the necessary and appropriate words to express his delight and amazement at the truly wonderful changes that have taken place in Pell City since that cold Sunday morning in January, 1902 when he first arrived.

THE MILL
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

Even though the 1901 courthouse controversy was intensifying and required a great deal of his attention, the fertile imagination of Sumter Cogswell was busy along other lines as well. The young community of Pell City needed a banking institution, but the success of a bank depended upon a sufficient working population with capital to save and invest, and borrowers that were in need of financial assistance. The new courthouse would certainly provide a significant prosperity to this railroad community, but a much larger increase in population would be necessary to create the city that Cogswell envisioned.

The South was in the midst of an economic boom, and Birmingham and surrounding areas were the focus of attention of many of the eastern money interest. Cogswell, realizing that Pell City's potential development required the availability of raw materials, land, natural resources and transportation concluded that this area was the perfect setting for the successful operation of a particular industrial revolution that was sweeping across all of Dixie. Thousands of bales of fine cotton were being harvested from Coosa Valley's fertile farmland every year, and rail transportation was available to haul it to distant cities to be converted to finished products. Coal and wood for fuel were in abundance, and he had hundreds of acres of land with a spring, that produced over 2,000,000 gallons of water per day. Everything was in place and the industry that he needed, for the city he envisioned, was within reach. All that was now required was salesmanship and promotion, and he had become a master of those two qualifications.

He was determined that Pell City must have a cotton mill, but not just an ordinary one. He would seek out developers to build a "state-of-the-art industry to produce the finest product available in 1901. His long time association in the business world had brought him many acquaintances, and the first of those to be contracted was his old friend, George W. Pratt. Pratt was a super salesman of the day, with a striking personality and great ability, and who just happened to be available to help promote this business venture. Together they made a terrific team, and Pratt was of no more inclination to waste time than was Cogswell.

Appointments were immediately arranged and they began calling on financial interests in Boston and other eastern cities. Ultimately, they arranged negotiation with the Howard-Bullock Manufacturing Company and the Draper Company of Hopwell, Massachusetts. Cogswell offered to donate 150 acres of land and the spring to the enterprise, and invest his own

The Mill - Page 2

capital in the venture. Howard-Bullock and the Draper organization readily recognized the golden financial opportunity that had been presented, and an agreement was soon finalized.

The first saw tooth cotton mill to be built in the South was under construction just shortly after the agreement had been reached and the cornerstone of Pell City Manufacturing Company was laid in August, 1902. Construction of new houses were also begun immediately, and in 1903 the mill was sufficiently completed so that operation could begin. Employment of the required work force was also completed, and in that same year Pell City became the home of approximately 1500 new residents. What had been a small, sleepy community only a short time earlier, became a bustling, thriving town overnight.

The first stockholders meeting of the company was held in Atlanta on June 19, 1902 and George U. Pratt was elected President. A.J. Draper was elected Treasurer, with A.E. Ledyard being selected to serve as Secretary. Pratt was also named as General Manager, and Sumter Cogswell was elected to the Board of Directors. A number of stockholders were listed at the initial meeting and among them were: The Draper Corporation, A.J. Draper, Sumter Cogswell, W.R. Jennison, Wade Langston, C.E. Riley, G.W. Pratt, W.R. Sears, J.T. Dickinson and Marion Jackson. The petition for incorporation was drawn at this meeting, and was granted very soon afterwards by W.S. Forman who was serving as Probate Judge of St. Clair County at that time.

With the assurance of an increased population, steady employment, a new and vital industry and the greatly increased potential for business development, Mr. Cogswell prepared himself to enter the banking world. The actual creation of the city, once only a figment of his powerful imagination, was well on its way to becoming a reality. His friend and partner, George W. Pratt, was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the construction and operation of the mill leaving Cogswell with time on his hands. Not one to waste precious moments on past accomplishments, Sumter Cogswell began to formulate his next plan of action. It was now time to build a bank for his town.

THE FIRST GREAT EXPLOSION
A CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF PELL CITY
By George Williams

Just when it seemed that all the bad luck, with which the infant Pell City community had been plagued, had run its course another major catastrophic even occurred. This occurrence, both physically and financially devastating, could have been the final death blow to many early towns struggling to establish themselves and survive, but Pell City had already learned to take such happenings in stride at a very early age.

Times were good in this new community in November, 1902 even though an extremely dry summer had been bad news for the farmers of the surrounding area. The mill was under construction, a branch courthouse was being built, a newspaper had been established, new homes and business buildings were being erected, and Sumter Cogswell was in the process of setting up the first bank to come to St. Clair County. A large construction company, hired by the East and West Railroad for a major project, was shipping thousands of dollars worth of material and equipment through Pell City on a daily basis. Business activity was humming, and to the casual visitor the future of the town was suspended, like a brightly shining star, in the optimism and exuberant expectations of its citizens. But this optimism was to change abruptly.

Tom S. Coleman, father of Riverside's Bill Coleman, was night operator at the Leeds railroad station and was finding it difficult to stay awake in the early morning hours of his late November shift. The hours had drifted by slowly and he found that night shift at Leeds was as quiet and possibly boring as it had been at Pell City. Only recently had he been transferred to Leeds and probably, for the remainder of his life, he could be thankful for that change in his job assignment and location.

At approximately 3:30 a.m. he was startled wide awake when he heard the operator at Pell City, a Mr. Roop, tell the dispatcher, "This depot is on fire." Coleman walked out onto the platform of the Leeds station and sat down on a bale of cotton. He looked toward the east thinking that he might be able to see the glow from the fire in the night sky, but his view was blocked by the mountain at Chula Vista. When he heard the wires go dead he knew that a serious situation had developed. He returned to his office, grounded out his line to the east and reported to the dispatcher. He was instructed to reopen his line, and about one half hour later he heard the Riverside operator report to the dispatcher that an explosion had occurred at Pell City.

The following morning the only remaining evidence of the Pell City railroad station was "a hole large enough to put the

The First Great Explosion - Page 2

new courthouse in." Jack Hall had been killed instantly while attempting to remove a new sewing machine from the station, and Tom Whitfield, a black brick mason who was employed in the construction of the mill, died when he was caught in the flames erupting from the conflagration. A railroad crewman, attempting to move the freight engine away from the depot had his chest pierced by a flying piece of lumber, the druggist, Doe Crowley, was badly injured and Col. N.B. Spears had an arm badly broken when he was hit by flying crockery. Col. Spears would later jokingly remark that he had quit drinking whiskey years earlier, but the spirits would still not let him be. It seems that the crockery, which had been responsible for his broken arm, had been a whiskey jug blown from the depot.

Windows were broken in numerous houses by flying debris, plaster walls in Joe Willingham's house were badly damaged, the Cornett Hotel was partially wrecked and windows were blown from the Maxwell building. A number of fires were started, and the area in and around the station resembled a war zone in the early morning hours as the townspeople struggled to handle the situation that had developed.

Even with the apparent devastation, the local citizens could still find reason to be thankful. Had the explosion occurred during the daylight hours, when the town's usual activities were at a peak, the deaths, injuries and destruction may have mounted to such great proportions that it would have been the final fatal blow to this promising community. Very few of the townspeople were aware that a large quantity of dynamite had been stored at the depot awaiting shipment. Even though lack of that knowledge had contributed to the deaths and injuries that had occurred the casualties could have been much greater during normal business hours.

The John Blair Macafee Company of Philadelphia had been retained by the owners of the East and West Railroad to blast a tunnel through Backbone Mountain so that a more direct line could be built from Coal City to the developing coal fields at Margaret and Acmar. Spur tracks from the Southern system had already pierced those areas, and the East and West owners were anxious to participate in the financial exploitation of those lucrative coal fields. The ultimate goal was to extend their railroad on into the booming city of Birmingham to capture a part of the expanding iron and steel industrial growth of that city.

Construction of the tunnel, just east of Odenville, was a very difficult task, at best, and material, supplies and equipment had to be shipped by rail from Atlanta through Pell City to Cook Springs. From there it was hauled across Bald Rock Mountains to the tunnel site by wagon. The two story building that served as the railroad station at Pell City was used to store some of this material and supplies for shipment

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at a later date when it was needed, and unfortunately, a large quantity of dynamite had been stored there, temporarily, when the fire occurred.

In 1887, the railroads operating through and out of Pell City agreed to build a joint depot near the terminus of the three rails. The site selected was in block forty three of the new town, and the building would be erected in the vicinity of where Hare's Service Station and the Pell City Curb Market now stand. The two story depot was a proud addition to the rapidly developing business district, and soon became a meeting place for local inhabitants as well as visitors and those only passing through to other destinations.

The building had only recently celebrated its fifty birthday in November, 1902 when the fire was discovered. The dynamite stored there proved to be too great a force to overcome when it started to explode before the fire could be extinguished. The great explosion that occurred completely and totally destroyed the building, but not the will and reserve of Pell City's population. The future still shone too brightly for this mishap to tarnish. Good times were still prevalent and expectations were high. This latest tragedy was certainly not the first to befall the community and with true pioneer spirit, that usually overcome most obstacles, the men and women rolled up their sleeves, went back to work with the will to survive and soon erased the damage that had been done. Very soon the explosion and the destruction that followed would only be a memory to be noted in the swiftly flowing history of this small South St. Clair County town. After all, a city needed to be built, and Pell City was not of the persuasion to waste valuable time. Ironically, according to "A History of St. Clair County," the tunnel was never completed.

Samuel and Lydia DeGaines Cogswell - Builders of Pitt City -
of Ala.



Quitclaim deed from Hercules Foundry Co.
Lydia De Garia Cogswell purchased
99% of Pell City May 21, 1901 from
Samuel D Brandeis and wife Alice of Mass.

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS
that the Hercules Foundry Company, a corporation duly organized
under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in consid-
eration of one (1) dollar and other valuable considerations, to
it paid by Lydia E. Cogswell, of Atlanta, in the County of Ful-
ton and State of Georgia, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowl-
edged, does hereby remise, release and forever QUITCLAIM unto
the said Lydia E. Cogswell the following described real estate
with the buildings thereon situated in Pell City, in the County
of St. Clair and State of Alabama, to wit: Lots numbered seven
and eight in block fifty one (51) in the town of Pell City, Ala-
bama, according to the plan and map of said town by S. H. Lea,
engineer, also the buildings and improvements on said land,
known as the "St. Charles Hotel"; also blocks forty eight (48)
forty nine (49) and fifty (50) (except lots 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6
in block 50); and blocks fifty nine (59) sixty (60) sixty one
(61) (except a piece of land in block number 61 running fifty
feet on Massachusetts Avenue, and 125 feet on State Street, be-
ing the easterly half of lots numbered 9 to 13 inclusive, in
said block number 61); also blocks sixty two (62) sixty three
(63) sixty four (64) sixty five (65) (except lots 17 and 18 in
block 65); and block sixty six (66) (except Roger's claim in
block 66); and blocks sixty seven (67) sixty eight (68) sixty
nine (69) as per plan made by S. H. Lea, civil engineer, now on
file at the Register's office at Ashville, County of St. Clair,
Alabama.

Also land described as follows, to wit: Commencing at a point
sixty (60) feet distant from and in continuation of the north
line of block forty eight (48), thence running westerly running
parallel with the G. P. R. R., three hundred (300) feet to a
stake one hundred feet (100) from center of location of said

railroad; thence southerly at right angles with said line sixteen hundred and sixty five (1665) feet to a point in the east line of the county road to Eden; thence easterly at right angles nine hundred and forty five (945) feet, more or less, to a point one hundred (100) feet southwesterly to the center of location of the T. & C. V. R. R.; thence northerly by said location one hundred (100) feet distant therefrom, six hundred and ninety (690) feet more or less, to a stake sixty (60) feet south of the south east corner of block sixty six (66); thence southwesterly sixty (60) feet from and parallel to blocks sixty six (66) and sixty five (65) six hundred and twenty (620) feet to a stake; thence at right angles nine hundred and seventy five (975) feet to the point of beginning; with the reservation of a lot owned by N. B. Spears, containing two and three fourths (2 3/4) acres:

Also tract of land containing one and one half (1 1/2) acres more or less, and described as follows, to wit: commencing at a point or stake sixty (60) feet south of the southwesterly corner of block sixty seven (67) and one hundred (100) feet east of the center of the location of the T. & C. V. R. R.; thence northeasterly parallel to the southerly line of block sixty seven (67) and sixty (60) feet therefrom, two hundred and twenty five (225) feet to a stake; thence southeasterly at right angles about two hundred and sixty five (265) feet to a stake; thence southeasterly at right angles about two hundred and forty (240) feet to a point one hundred (100) feet easterly from centre of location of the T. & C. V. R. R.; thence by said location and one hundred (100) feet from the centre of the same, two hundred and sixty seven (267) feet, more or less, to the point of beginning. Also all buildings and improvements upon said real estate.

Also the following lots, in said Pell City, St. Clair County, Alabama, to wit: Five (5) six (6) nine (9) ten (10) eleven (11) and twelve (12) in block two (2); two (2) four (4) six (6) seven (7) eight (8) eleven (11) and twelve (12) in block three (3); one (1) in block four (4); five (5) and six (6) in block five (5); four (4) in block six (6); twenty one (21) twenty two (22) and twenty three (23) in block fifteen (15); one (1) and two (2) in block seventeen (17); eleven (11) twelve (12) thirteen (13) fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) in block eighteen (18); twelve (12) thirteen (13) fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) in block nineteen (19); fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) in block twenty (20); fifteen (15) sixteen (16) twenty three (23) and twenty four (24) in block twenty one (21); one (1) two (2) six (6) seven (7) and fifteen (15) in block twenty five (25); one (1) two (2) fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) in block twenty seven (27); twenty and twenty one (20 & 21) in block twenty eight (28); one (1) two (2) six (6) and seven (7) in block twenty nine (29); ten (10) eleven (11) twelve (12) seventeen (17) and eighteen (18) in block thirty one (31); one and two (1 & 2) in block thirty nine (39); one (1) and two (2) in block forty (40); seven (7) and eight (8) in block forty one (41); twenty one (21) twenty two (22) twenty three (23) and twenty four (24) in block forty four (44); five (5) six (6) seven (7) eight (8) thirteen (13) fourteen (14) nineteen (19) and twenty (20) in block forty five (45); seventeen and eighteen (17 & 18) in block forty six (46); two (2) three (3) and four (4) in block fifty one (51); thirteen (13) fourteen (14) seventeen (17) eighteen (18) twenty one (21) and twenty two (22) in block fifty three (53); six (6) seven (7) twenty one (21) and twenty two (22) in block fifty four; one (1) two (2) three (3) and four (4) in block fifty eight; thirteen (13) fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) in block fifty two:

③

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

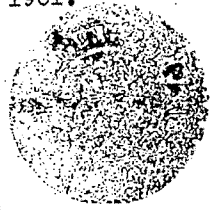
Also blocks one hundred and fifty eight (158) one hundred and fifty nine (159) one hundred and sixty (160) and one hundred and sixty one (161), together with all buildings and improvements on said real estate.

Being the same premises conveyed to said Lydia E. Cogswell by deed of Louis D. Brandeis, dated May 21st, 1901. This deed is given to confirm the title conveyed by said last named deed.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the granted premises, with all the privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging to the said Lydia E. Cogswell and her heirs and assigns, to their own use and behoof forever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the said Hercules Foundry Company has caused these presents to be signed in its name and behalf and its corporate seal to be hereto affixed by *Otto B. Cole* its treasurer this *thirty first* day of July, A. D. 1901.

Hercules Foundry Company
By Otto B. Cole Treasurer



Witness -

William H. Chubb

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

Suffolk, ss. I, *William H. Dunbar* a Notary Public, hereby certify that *Otto B. Cole* this day appeared before me and made oath that he is the treasurer of the Hercules Foundry Company, and that the seal affixed to the foregoing instrument is the seal of said corporation, and acknowledged before me that being informed of the contents of the foregoing conveyance he executed the same voluntarily as the free act and deed of the Hercules Foundry Company on the day the same bears date.

Given under my hand and official seal this *third* day of July, A. D. 1901.

William H. Dunbar
Notary Public.

COGSWELL & RICHARDSON.

FIRE INSURANCE.

6 & 8 W. COURT ST.

AGENTS.
DUN'S MERCANTILE AGENCY.
MEMPHIS NATIONAL BANK.

LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE 111.

MEMPHIS, TENN.

Love letter to
Lydia DeSaris
from Sumter Cogswell

36

Dec 8th 1899

My Darling Love,

Your delightful little letter came to me this morning laden with the delightful fragrance of orange & flowers - I would have been dreadfully disappointed had it not been upon my desk when I came in to the office this morning - I was affecting it -

I am delighted to know you are pleased with the Birthday remembrance - I did not have time to explain that the box in which they are does not fit the set & that Brodus has ordered a layer one which I will exchange for the one you have - will do this upon your return here - which do try and not defer much longer -

I am somewhat disappointed with your "My Mr. Cogswell"? - Why should you question it? Do whom do I belong if not to you? It is you who fire my waking & sleeping thoughts - It is the recollection of you that thrills my every fibre, that is rapidly transferring me into the coveted Happy Hypocrite - Please do not put any more question marks after my name -

Do you enjoy the Happy Hypocrite? To me it is beautiful & shows what love can and will do for its devotees - I met Miss Daisy at the Church and Mr. Phoin and it would be to see her - She asked

REFERENCES.

DUN'S MERCANTILE AGENCY.
MEMPHIS NATIONAL BANK.

FIRE INSURANCE.

6 & 8 W. COURT ST.

LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE 111.

2

MEMPHIS, TENN..

she
 & when she said, yes - I felt a little
 calms of her that you should write her by the
 same mail or myself -

Do you know you wrote a good letter - and you
 "just a wee bit humorous already" makes up
 for the supercilious for I take it all to myself
 that you are a wee bit humorous for me - So
 do, sweetheart?

I will go out to see you Mother Sunday night,
 sent her a bit of candy today, a book of
 peace offering, although I had no idea she
 expected me to see her to her carriage - I was too
 much engrossed into your departure to remember
 the little amenities of life - It is simply another
 case of too much sugar in the coffee - You know
 I would not be unkind or even discriminatory to
 her for anything -

I am sure you can love me a little
 more than your letter evinces, so try and make
 little more show in your next, would you?

I have felt bright & happy all day since your
 letter came so, please do it again. Yr's aff -

With much devoted affection

Love from yours

Anto Logically

SUMTER COGSWELL

Sumter Cogswell, the second son of Harvey and Mary Keller Cogswell, was born in Charleston, South Carolina on September 1, 1861 and died in Pell City on November 7, 1946. He was buried at Valley Hill Cemetery along side his second wife, Lydia McBain DeGaris Cogswell. Sumter attended school in his native hometown and graduated from Charleston College, the oldest municipality owned college in America. After college he went into the family firm of Walker, Evans & Cogswell, a lithographing and printing firm in Charleston. Years later, he left Charleston and went to Chattanooga and established a fire insurance agency. Later he became a fire insurance adjuster and representative of a large New York company headed by Rockefeller. It was on a trip to Talladega, Alabama as a representative of this company that Sumter first came to Pell City in March of 1890. Sumter stepped down from the train in the small St. Clair County Village, owned by the Pell City Land Company, only to find that he had missed his train connection to Talladega. He was forced to spend the night at the Cornett Hotel. This single event started a chain of events that would create the Town of Pell City, a thriving, bustling city in the 1990's. During the evening at the Cornett Hotel, Cogswell learned the town could be purchased. He also learned that the President of Pell City Land Company, Thomas S. Plowman, resided in Talladega. After arriving in Talladega and discussing the opening of an insurance agency with A.J. Savery, Cogswell went to see Mr. Plowman. Cogswell secured a two week option and purchased the 400 acres for \$50,000. He later sold most of the property. The property was sold to Pell City Iron and Land Company owned by Howard, Barr, Plowman, Henderson and General Wilder. The company resurveyed

the town, built several houses and brought the Hercules Pipe Company to Pell City, the first soil pipe company in the South. The pipe company later moved to the Anniston area, Pell City failed again.

In the meantime, Sumter married Minnie Righter of Chattanooga, Tennessee. There was only one child of the first marriage, Righter Aldage Cogswell (02-06-1891 - 05-17-1962), who would become an attorney in Chattanooga. When this marriage ended, Cogswell went to Memphis, Tennessee. In 1895 he opened a fire insurance agency with five states under his direction.

On February 27, 1900, Sumter married Lydia Elizabeth McBain DeGaris, a wealthy widow of Charles Francis DeGaris. She had two small sons, John Annesley and Julian DeGaris. Shortly after the marriage, the Cogswells moved to Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1901 on an insurance trip, Sumter returned to Pell City and found the town practically "dead". He learned that most of the property was controlled by a firm in Boston. He went to Boston, then back to Atlanta where he talked his wife into buying a large portion of the present town from the Honorable Louis D. Brandies, a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and the Hercules Iron Company. Again returning to Talladega, Cogswell went to see Mr. Plowman and again acquired the acreage owned by Pell City Land Company. The men who owned the Pell City Land Company, in addition to Mr. Plowman, were D.L. Roger, J.A. Savage, John Postell, Judge John W. Inzer and John B. Knox. Together Lydia and Sumter had acquired 99% of old Pell City. Losing no time, they began adding an addition on to one of the homes built in 1888 and located on Block #2. It has been lived in continuously since 1901 by the family for almost

4

100 years. Today Annesley and Ashley DeGaris, the fourth generation, live in the Victoria home and soon there will be the fifth generation (Oct. 1998).

When the Cogswell-DeGaris family arrived in Pell City on September 7, 1901, the house remodeling was not complete. They added to the 2-story house, 3 rooms, a pantry, 4 porches, a servant's house, a carriage house and a large barn. Thus, they stayed a short time at the #2 Cornett Hotel (the first Cornett Hotel burned) until the house was completed. Mr. Tom Coleman wrote the arrival down. "The day the Cogswells and DeGaris' arrived, they unloaded their ~~house hold~~ ^{household} goods it was a sight for me, they unloaded one Bey horse, one Surry (a buggy with fringe), a brown and white bird dog - they had more groceries than the entire little grocery store in Pell City. I remember 2 little boys, John Annesley ("Jack") and Julian. The Cogswell and DeGaris' made the population 40. Sumter Cogswell's children of his second marriage to Lydia DeGaris were three girls, Isabella Arnold Cogswell Davis (02-16-1901 - 06-03-1964), Lydia Elizabeth Cogswell Starnes ("Litz") (01-12-1903 - 05-06-1990) and Mary Keller Cogswell Balof (12-02-1905 - 01-16-1963).

Soon it was on to business for the Cogswells. Sumter and Lydia donated Block #26 to the county for the present day Pell City Courthouse. Originally on this block was a log house, the home of Judge Abner Lacey. In 1902 as the courthouse was being built, Sumter and Lydia donated 150 acres and a spring with a flow of over 2,000,000 gallons of fine water per day to the Pell City Manufacturing Company (cotton mill and village), today it is Avondale Mill. Mr. Cogswell put George W. Pratt over the construction of the cotton mill. Mr. Pratt succeeded in getting a McDraper and Howard Bullock together and there was begun the construction of the first saw tooth cotton mill in the South. The new mill brought many new residents and soon

many new problems. Thomas Henry Rennie of New England was hired and proved to be a good move. Soon stock went from less than \$50 to more than \$400 per share.

Next in 1903, the Cogswells interests were in founding a bank and it came to pass that the Bank of St. Clair County was organized, the first successful bank in the county. With Sumter Cogswell as President, the first directors were McLane Tilton, E.J. Moutz, Arthur Draper, J. Fall Roberson, J.H. Moore of Coal City, Frank Holland Lothrop of Riverside and L. Cook. Today the bank is known as Union State Bank.

Sumter and Lydia gave the land for the early schools, first school is where City Hall is today and the land where the present day Pell City High School sits. They gave the land for the early churches, First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, the first Episcopal Church (in fact, they built it themselves), the Wesley Methodist Church and colored Baptist Church. In addition, Sumter and Lydia gave land for St. Clair County Post of the American Legion, Ben M. Jacob Masonic Lodge (of which Mr. Cogswell was a lifetime member), 600 feet down 19th Street for Pell City Park and Recreation and also for the construction of streets and roads. In 1903 when liquor was legal, Pell City had a saloon. From those revenues came a \$35,000 grammar school, the City Hall and additional roads and streets were opened. Mr. Cogswell was the first elected Mayor of Pell City in 1903, an office he held for 14 years. While not serving as Mayor, Mr. Cogswell served on the council every year from 1903. He was a member of the St. Clair County Court of County Commissioners for two terms. During his terms in office, he was instrumental in getting the first roads in this section of the county constructed. Sumter Cogswell and Lydia DeGaris Cogswell are known as the "Father" and "Mother" of Pell City. Sumter was 81 years old when he died. *Submitted by: Sumter DeGaris, 2018 Third Avenue*

LYDIA ELIZABETH MCBAIN DEGARIS COGSWELL

Lydia Elizabeth McBain DeGaris Cogswell was born December 5, 1867 in Memphis, Tennessee and died December 28, 1951. She is buried at Valley Hill Cemetery. Her parents were Isabella Arnold McBain and John Gordan McBain of Memphis, Tennessee. Her maternal grandparents, Captain George Arnold (05-12-1812) and Eliza McKibbon Arnold, both born in Belfast, Ireland, came to Memphis, Tennessee from St. Louis in 1860. They owned Arnold Wholesale Grocery Store in Memphis and passed it down to their sons, George Arnold, Jr. and Annesley Arnold. A young man, Charles Francis DeGaris purchased a large share of stock in the Arnold Grocery. It was through Lydia's uncles and Charles DeGaris' business dealing and socializing that Lydia met Charles - Lydia was 18 years and Charles was 34 years old. When Charles DeGaris asked for Lydia's hand in marriage, it was something of a shock to her widowed mother who had thought that DeGaris was interested in her instead of her daughter. The Memphis, Tennessee wedding was a social event in 1885. Lydia was later voted best dressed in Memphis.

Charles Francis DeGaris (09-18-1850 - 01-03-1898), born in Hannibal, Missouri and buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis) attended one of the Ivy League schools and became a civil engineer building river levees and railroads. Lydia and Charles had three sons. The first, Charles, Jr., died in infancy and was buried by his father in Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis. Later came John Annesley ("Jack") in 1891 and Julian Sinclair in 1893.

When Charles died in 1898, plans were being completed for their new home by McGrath & Goodrich in Memphis. Lydia paid for the plans and saved them - this was their dream house. Today most of the family's old home and businesses have been torn down, but one still remains on 1116 Poplar Avenue. It is the George Arnold Mansion built in 1890, now Greenstone Apartments. The family were big entertainers and it was here at one of Lydia's Uncle George's parties that she met an insurance salesman, Sumter Cogswell. Sumter was the man who bought Pell City in 1890 and sold it later the same year. But, while Sumter was gone, his wife Minnie decided she had married the wrong man. She realized she should have wed Sumter's best friend. So, she did after first divorcing Sumter.

Sumter left Chattanooga after the turn of events for Memphis. Sumter Cogswell, son of the prominent Cogswell family of Charleston, South Carolina had established an office in Memphis in 1895 with five states under his jurisdiction.

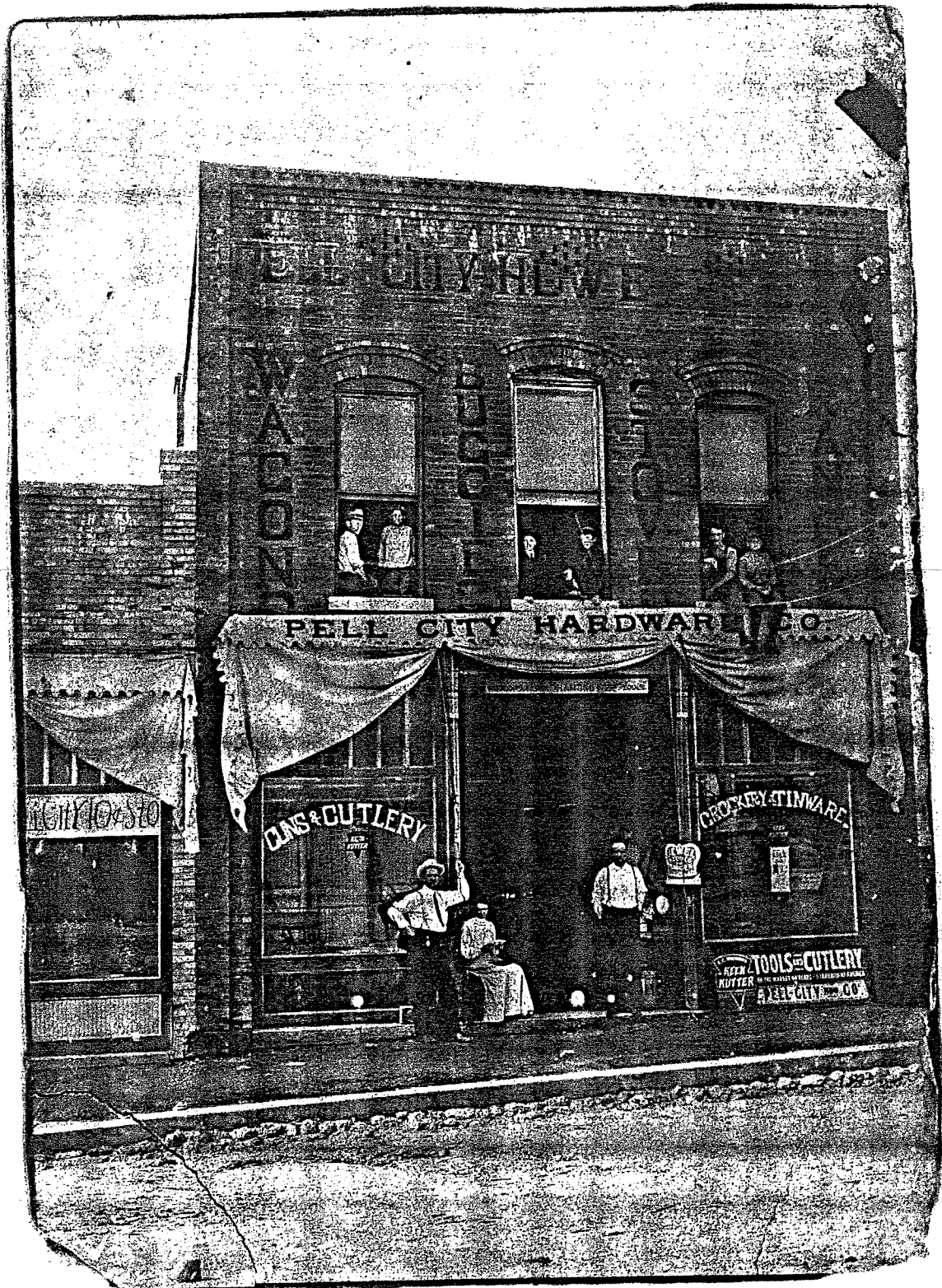
At the time Lydia met Sumter she was engaged to Robert Taylor of Memphis. She broke the engagement to Mr. Taylor and on February 27, 1900, Lydia DeGaris married Sumter Cogswell in Memphis and later moved to Atlanta where Sumter took over the handling of the Charles Francis DeGaris' estate. Lydia's mother wrote telling her not to let Sumter talk her into buying that backward town, Pell City. She said, "I fear for your life, it is very dangerous." The rest is history; Lydia and Sumter purchased it and moved there with Lydia's two sons, John Annesley "Jack" and Julian DeGaris, ^{had} -Sumter and Lydia ~~had~~ three daughters, Isabella Arnold Cogswell Davis (02-16-1901 - 06-03-1964), Lydia Elizabeth Cogswell Starnes ("Litz") (01-12-1903 - 05-06-1990) and Mary Keller Cogswell Balof (12-02-1905 - 01-16-1963). Sumter's son, Righter Aldage, by his first wife Minnie, often visited Pell City.

Lydia and Sumter are known as the builders of Pell City. They gave Block No. 26 for the Courthouse, 150 acres for the cotton mill, homes and a school, 600 front feet down on 19th Street for a recreational park, land for VFW and Masonic Lodge, land for the first Pell City School where the City Hall is today, 5 acres for Pell City High School where it is today, land for 6 early churches and helped established the first bank in St. Clair County (today it is the Union State Bank). *Submitted by: Lydia DeGaris, 713 Carr Avenue, Birmingham, Alabama 35209 Sources: Memphis, Tennessee Courthouse Records and Notes; Memphis Architectural Guild; Peabody Library - Memphis Archives; Private Collection of Lydia DeGaris Cogswell's Records; Pell City and Ashville Courthouse Records. (_____ words)*

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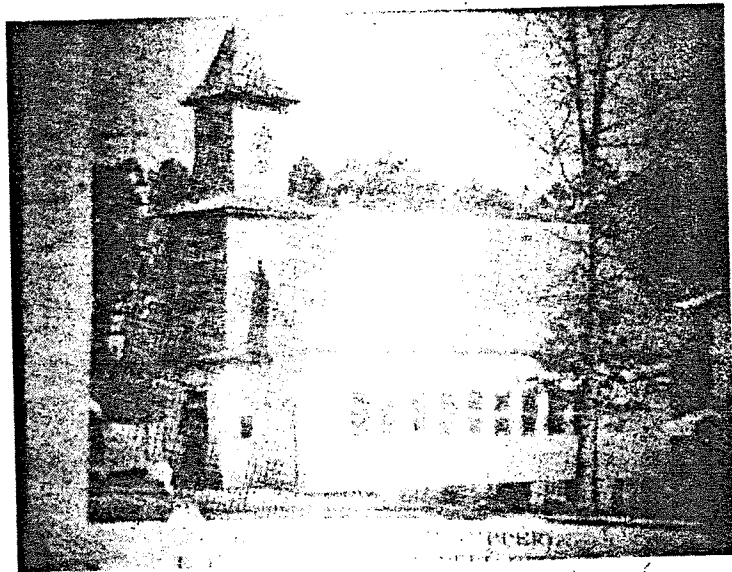
*Charles Francis De Garia / Memphis - 1885
 Lydia's first husband - his money built Old Fill City*



Olmerson Hardware
 His wife Annela sitting in chair -
 a first cousin to Lydia De lais Caswell -
 Bell City N. D.

For Kate

Joe



First United Methodist Church

Organized 1902 Building completed 1903
at present location

First Church organized + Built in
Pell City according to a

letter from Bays D. Cather Sr.

Charter member of church,

Publisher of the Cassa Valley Newspaper.

and later publisher of

The Davia Press

Davia Fla.

a skoot time. The Episcopal Church met in the school house
when the Methodist occupied their new building
The Episcopal Church was called Church of St Mary, The Virgin.
according to Mr Cather.