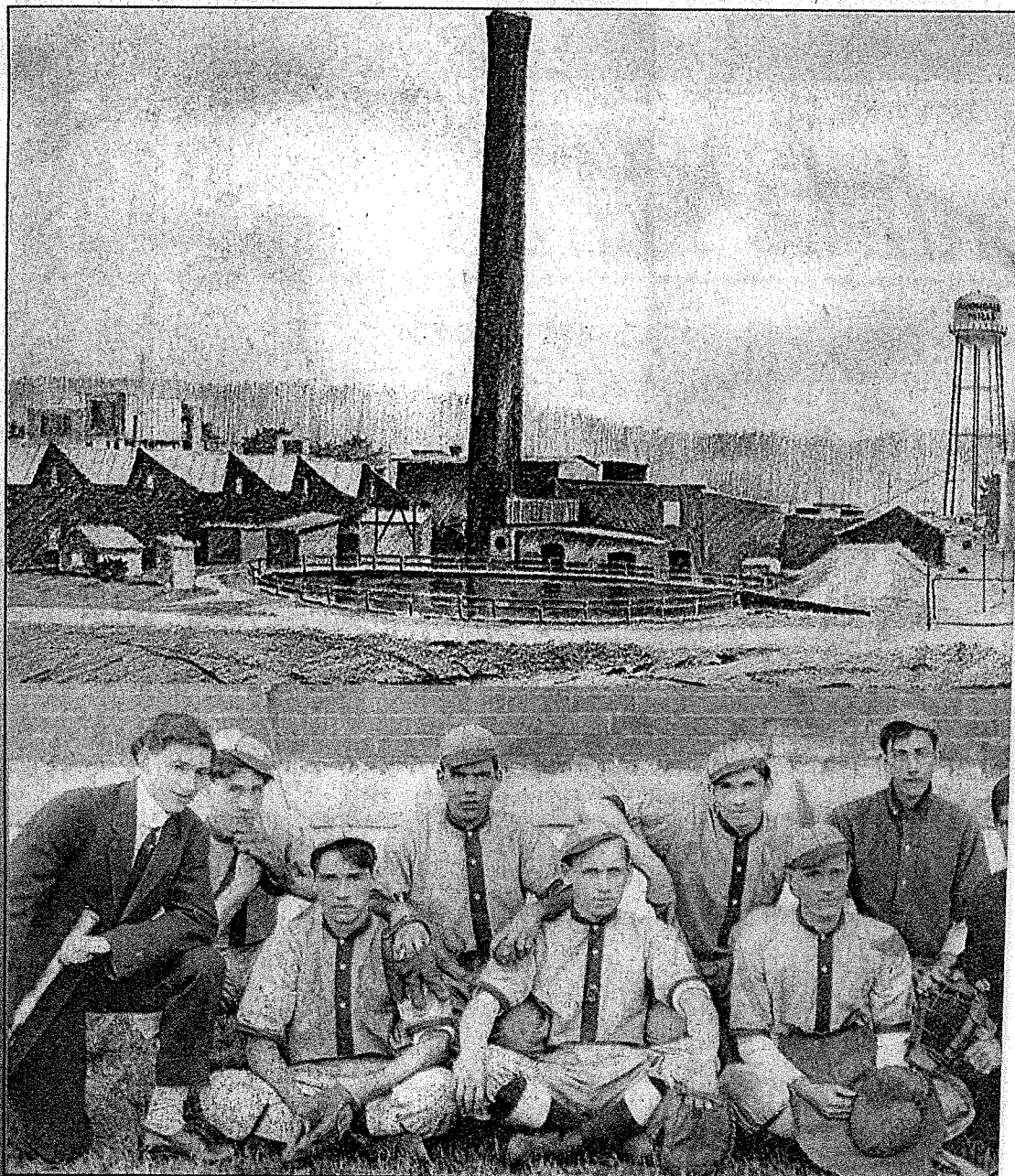


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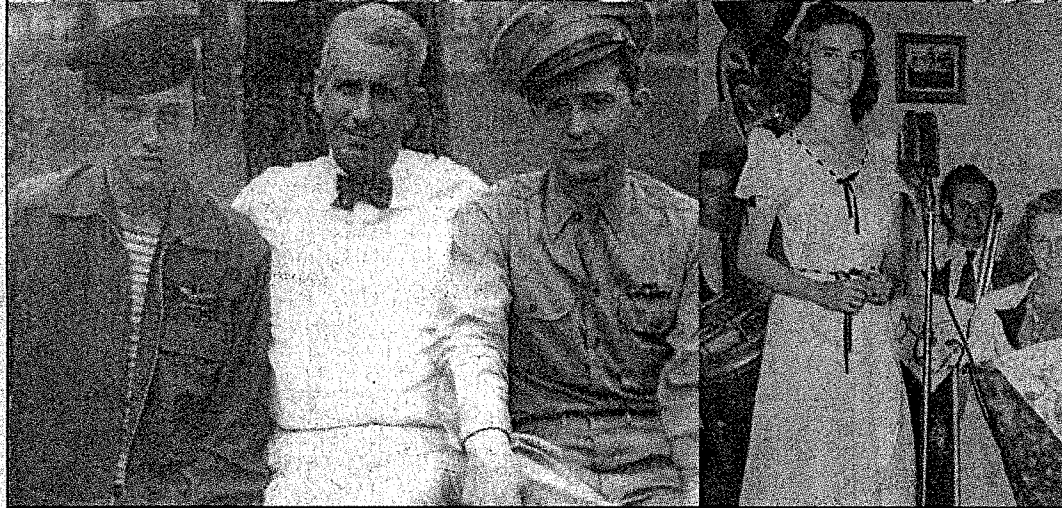
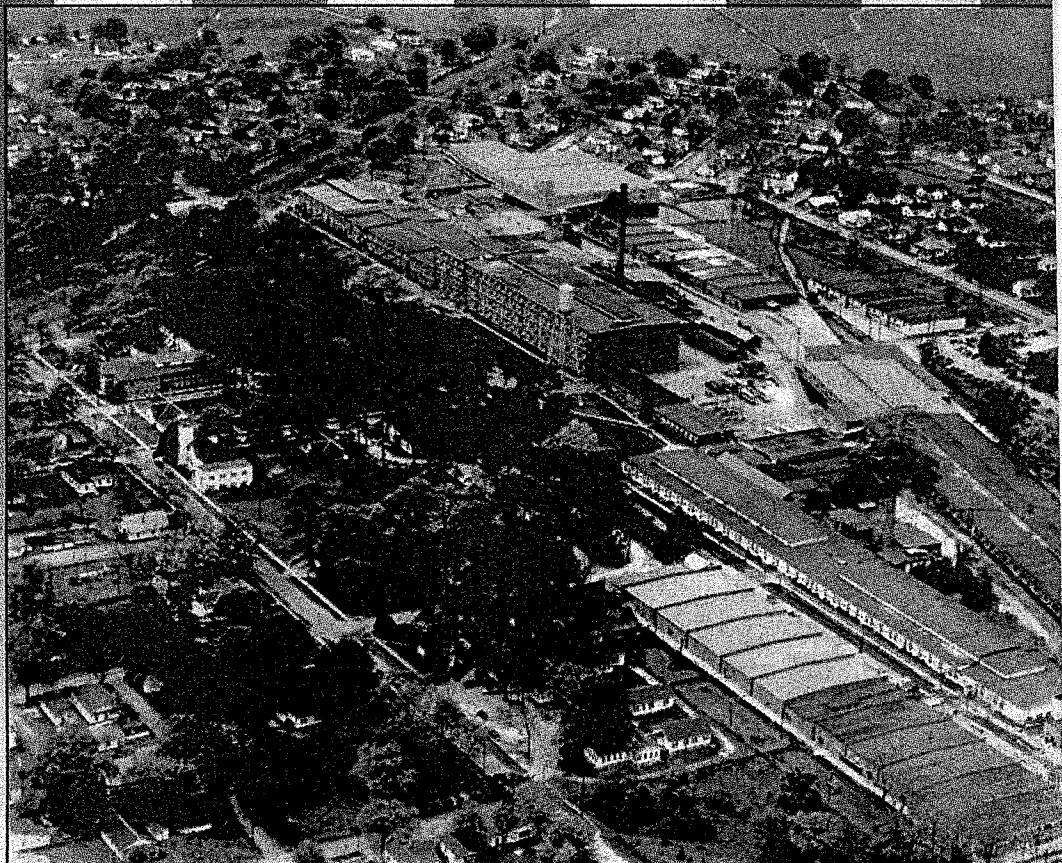
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August 13, 2006

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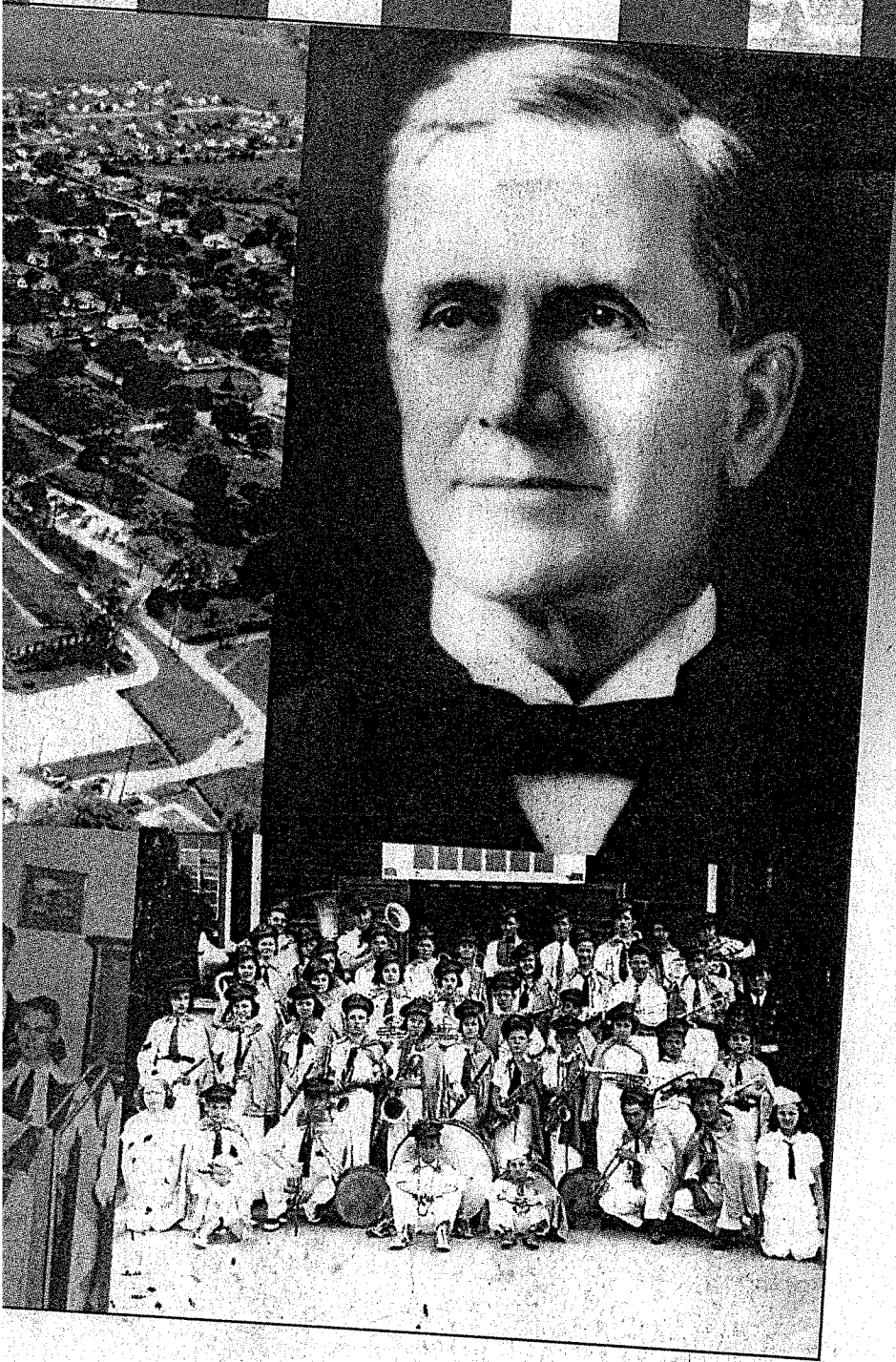


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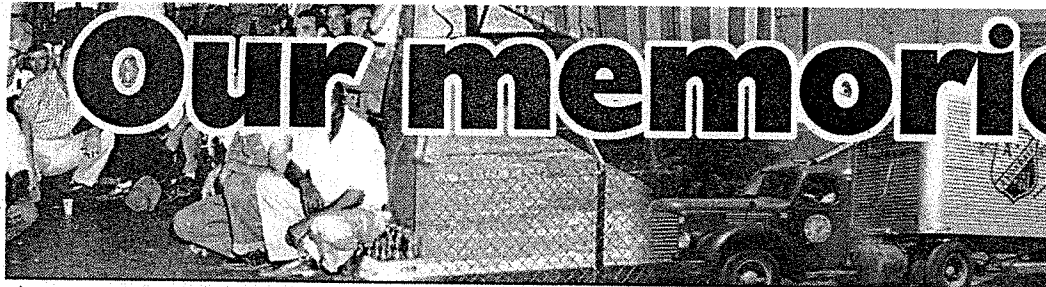


QUALITY TEXTILE





SINCE 1845



2 — THE DAILY HOME, Talladega-Sylacauga-Pell City, Ala., Sunday, August 13, 2006

# The legacy of Avondale

By Kelley Sawyer Wasserman  
Sylacauga

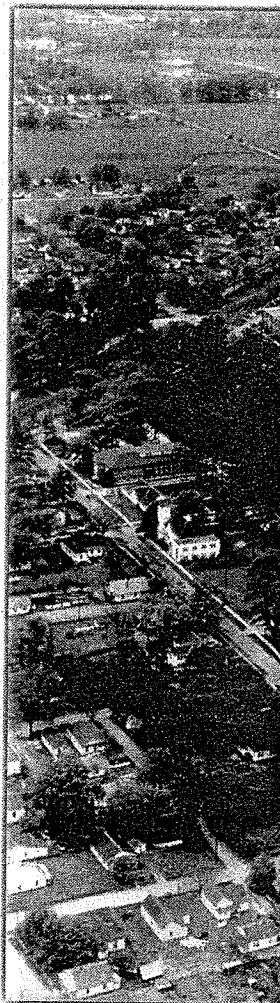
For many years it has been said that the associates of Avondale Mills were the foundation of the company, a statement that is as true now in the closing chapter of Avondale's history as it has been for generations. Throughout the years it has been the people of Avondale who made such a wonderful difference in the operations of the mills and in the communities in which they live. Most significant of all are the friendships shared by so many people to form a wonderful family of associates.

Similar to many, many people, Avondale Mills has fed and clothed me my entire life. My father retired from the company after 40 years of devoted service and I met my husband at Avondale. I began my own career there during my senior year at Sylacauga High School and worked part time at Central and Catherine plants. Throughout my college years, I came home to work weekends and school breaks. Though the work certainly wasn't easy, it paid almost twice what my friends were making and went a long way toward helping pay for college expenses. After graduation I did not plan to stay at Avondale, but God had other plans in mind. Eventually I was appointed

editor of *The Avondale Sun* and had the privilege of spending the next 18 years covering the stories and events of Avondale associates.

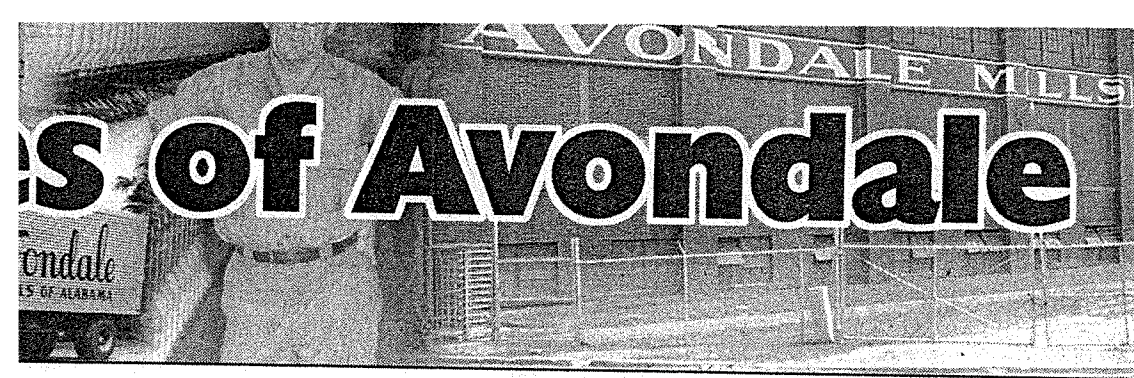
During my time as editor I visited all of the mills on a regular basis, and it was always heartwarming to witness the friendships and camaraderie of associates. The mill people were family in every sense of the word. Twin brothers working side by side; a mother and her two grown sons working the same shift; husbands and wives working opposite shifts so that someone could be home with the young children; three generations employed at the same plant; and all associates eagerly welcoming a new person into the fold — regardless if it was a relative or not.

Avondale associates are loving people filled with pride for their children and grandchildren, as evidenced by the hundreds of baby pictures and graduation pictures shared with *The Avondale Sun*. Every achievement was important, from a young boy shooting his first deer to a sales representative hooking a big fish. All of these simple pleasures in life have been even more meaningful because of the opportunity of sharing them with friends. The family of Avondale could always be counted on in time of need as well. When an associate at Bon Air Plant lost her house to a fire, her fellow

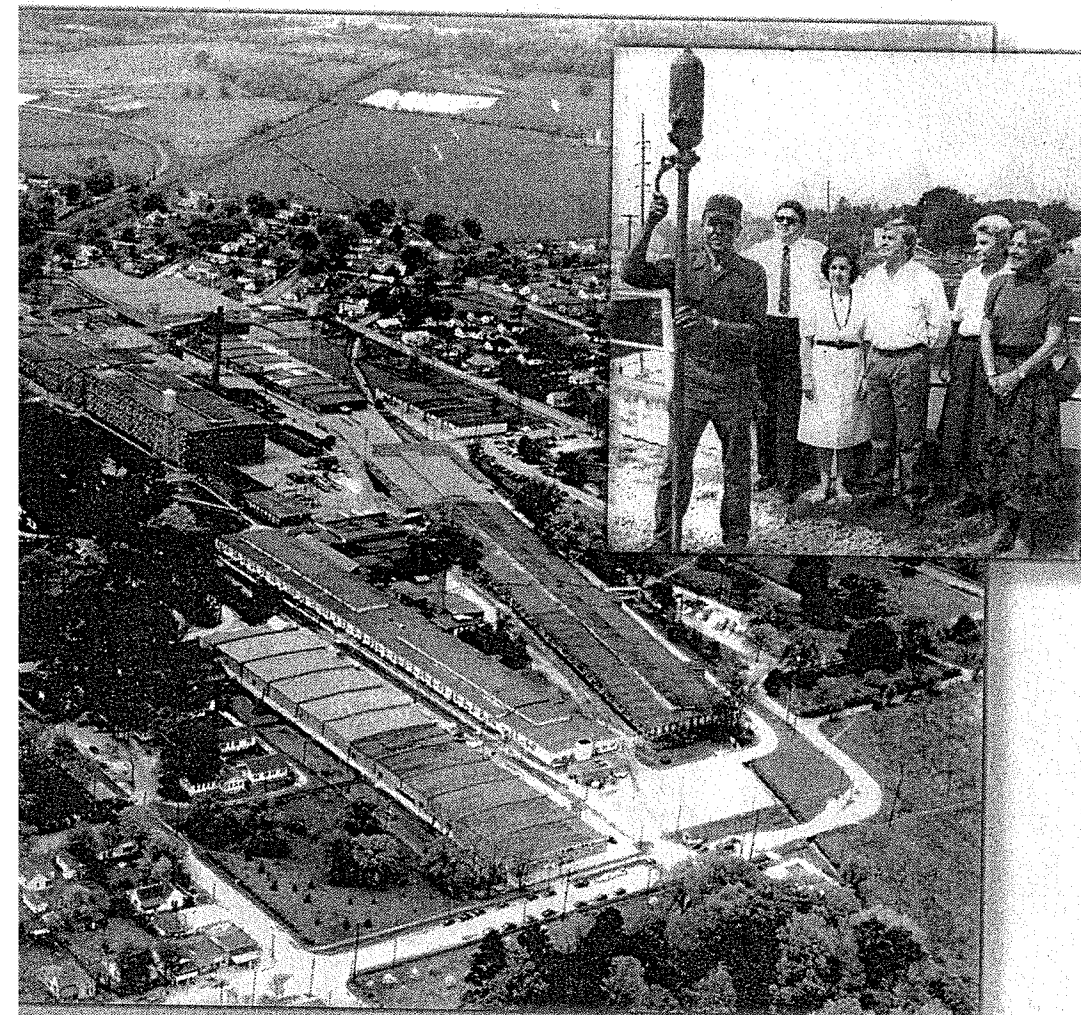


This aerial view of Service. Shown is the more. INSET TOP: The

associates rallied around her with assistance. When associates at both Pell City and Catherine plants were struggling with leukemia, blood drives were held in their honor. Many people who had never given blood before participated knowing that their simple donation would make a difference for someone



# Avondale Mills



Avondale Mills complex in Sylacauga was taken in April 1953 by McLaughlin Air village behind the complex, Mignon area, Mignon United Methodist Church andistle in Pell City signalled shift changes.

else who was suffering as much as their friend.

In times of sadness and loss, the Avondale family never failed to show their love and support. When my father passed away earlier this year I was deeply touched by how many associates comforted us with their love and warm

had been 12 years since his retirement. This type of support and friendship is what has distinguished Avondale associates and makes them truly special.

The circle of fellowship among Avondale associates has held them together for generations through good times and

seeking new career opportunities, may they take with them the comforting memories of old friendships and make a home for themselves with their new co-workers. May you all eagerly look ahead and welcome the new challenges and friendships that await. I wish the very

# Avondale in you

## People and community service made Avondale special

By Guin Robinson  
Birmingham

I have so many great memories of Avondale, and I suppose like with most pleasant memories, they involve the people.

The closing of the company has brought a flood of memories rushing back. I am reminded of fruit basket distribution and the joy on the retirees' faces as they gathered for that special tradition.

I remember my interview with Avondale in Pell City in the March of 1989 as I drove over the viaduct on Highway 231 and saw the city of Pell City. I thought this was where I want to be and thanks to Avondale, I was given that opportunity.

I am reminded of a Sept. 10, 1999, meeting with Bob Hatcher, Cisco King and Mark Tapley as I informed them I would most likely be appointed mayor of Pell City in the next few days and I needed to know the company's feelings.

Mark said "this community" has been good to Avondale and this is an opportunity for one of our own to give back. I have never been prouder of the company than that day. They supported me completely.

I also remember many nights passing the Avondale ball fields that we filled with young athletes and knowing that the company was not only providing the fields,



Frank J. Green, now deceased for five years, is shown receiving a Zero Defects Award for outstanding achievement from Donald Comer Jr.

but the power to light them. Their support of the community was unmatched.

I formed my management style with my training at Avondale, and I am forever grateful.

It is hard to believe that Avondale is no more, but I will cherish the many memories of wonderful people and a great company.

Thank you, Avondale.

## 'Those were the days'

By Peggy H. Green  
Sylacauga

My husband, Frank J. Green, worked in the Catherine Plant for many years and enjoyed his job and had many friends. He liked working with his co-workers. Our son, Frankie Green, had his first job also there in the Catherine Plant where he worked for several years.

My father, James H. Smith, spent many years in the Eva Jane Plant, as did my husband's father, Robert L. Green, before his passing

many years ago.

I can remember as a child running down the road to meet my daddy as he walked home from his job at Eva Jane. He always had his little brown sack in his hand where he had carried the lunch Mama had made for him.

I remember the little movies we went to, close to where the gate is going in to the Eva Jane plant. They had a small screen like a small drive-in theater. We all went. Anyone who wanted to come was welcome. I remember we, children and some adults, sat on the grass. Some brought lawn chairs.

Those were the days.

There has been many family fed, clothed, housed and taken care of by jobs that our fathers, mothers and family members had at Avondale Mills, and Beverly Hall held many events for many members and their families.

My daughter was walking down the aisle by her father, Frank Green, on her wedding day at Beverly Hall. I miss very much seeing

# words ...

parking lots filled with cars, the people changing shifts as they are chatting with their friends and co-workers.

I have many memories, even though I never worked there myself. I knew so many who did because of my husband, son, father and other relatives. I feel like, and I know everyone else does also, that the world has come to an end. It feels so unreal that a plant that has been here forever is now gone. God bless all the people who filled those plants and spent many hours of sweat earning a living there.

What do they, we do now?

## Growing up as 'Avondale kid'

By Julia Skelton  
Pell City

My grandfather — Cordell Wright — was the chief master mechanic for all of the Avondale plants during the 1930s through the 1950s.

He was the one Mr. Comer would send to all the plants to solve problems, including plants in Georgia that the Comers had stock in.

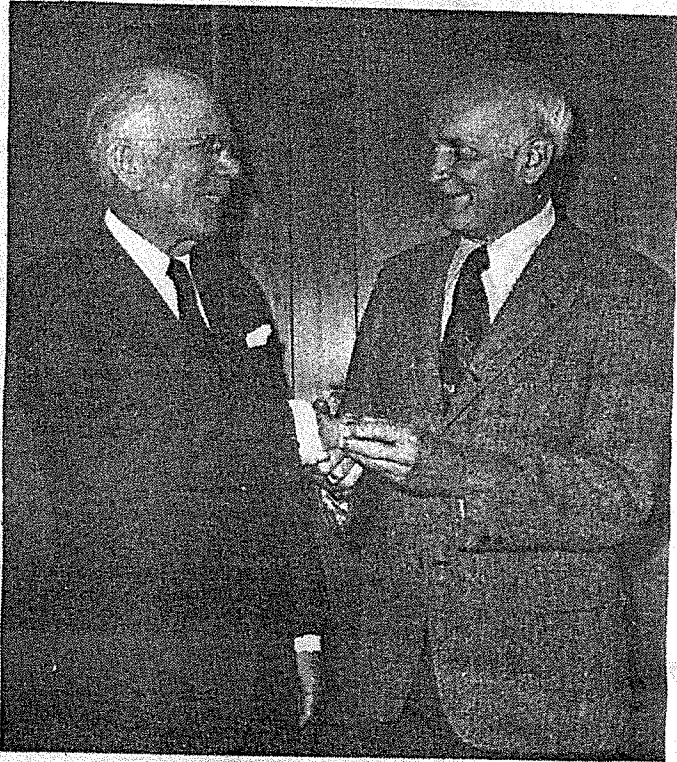
Pawpaw Wright was very good at inventing things and finding simpler ways to do a job. In 1938, he built a house behind the present Nichols/Lawson School.

He asked the electricians at the Sylacauga plant what they would charge him to wire the house one weekend.

They had a meeting and said if he would get Mrs.

Continued on Page 3

## From the Avondale Sun



### 50 years for J. Craig Smith

J. Craig Smith, Chairman of the Executive Committee and Director, received his 50-year pin recently from Chairman Donald Comer, Jr.

He served 19 years as President and Chief executive officer of Avondale.

His business affiliations are many. A few of which are: Director, Southern Bancorporation; Director, Birmingham Trust National Bank; Director, Protective Life Insurance Co.; Director, South Central Bell Telephone Company and Director, Illinois Central Gulf Railroad.

His trade associates are: Past President, Alabama Textile Manufacturers Association; Director and past President, American Textile Manufacturers Institute, Inc.; Past President and Honorary Life Member, International Federation of Cotton and Allied Textile Industries, Zurich, Switzerland; Director and past President, National Cotton Council of America; Chairman of the Board and past President, Alabama Chamber of Commerce; Honorary Member, The Liverpool Cotton Association, Limited, Liverpool, England.

Smith is universally recognized, not only in Alabama but throughout the nation and the world, as one of the truly outstanding giants of the textile industry.

... nearly ever philanthropic and civic organization which appeals to him for assistance. He is married to the former Page Thompson of Selma. They have one daughter, Mignon Comer Smith, of Washington, D. C.





# Drummond-Fraser

By June Winters  
Sylacauga

Drummond-Fraser Hospital played a vital role in the lives of those who worked for Avondale Mills in early years. The company hospital was Sylacauga's first hospital, but even before Drummond-Fraser, there was a small company hospital, Eva Jane Hospital, which according to a clipping from the Sylacauga News, opened on March 5, 1918.

Before that facility opened, Avondale operated a first aid station at the mill.

Eva Jane Hospital became Drummond-Fraser Hospital in 1920, and no one seems to know where the name came from. It was a 40-bed hospital, with a staff of well-trained nurses.

Dr. John D. Pitchford Sr. came to the hospital in 1932. He graduated from Emory University and was a doctor at TCI in Birmingham for seven years.

Later Dr. Pitchford went into private practice in Walker County, before coming to Sylacauga. He practiced at Drummond-Fraser until his death in 1960.

His son, Dr. John Pitchford Jr., graduated from the University of Alabama School of Medicine in 1948 and

at Drummond-Fraser Hospital for a short period.

The late Dr. A.K. Whetstone was the obstetrical physician at Drummond-Fraser. He graduated from Birmingham Medical College in 1914 and built his first medical office with his own hands. The office was located between Titus and Rockford.

Dr. Whetstone came to Sylacauga in 1928 to practice at Drummond-Fraser and at Sylacauga Infirmary, another small hospital that had been built by the Craddock family.

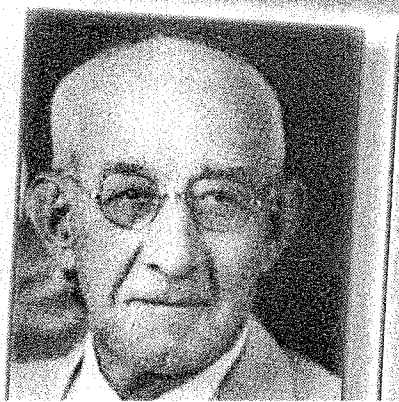
In 1953, Dr. Whetstone was honored by the City of Sylacauga, and at that time, he had delivered "about 4,600 babies."

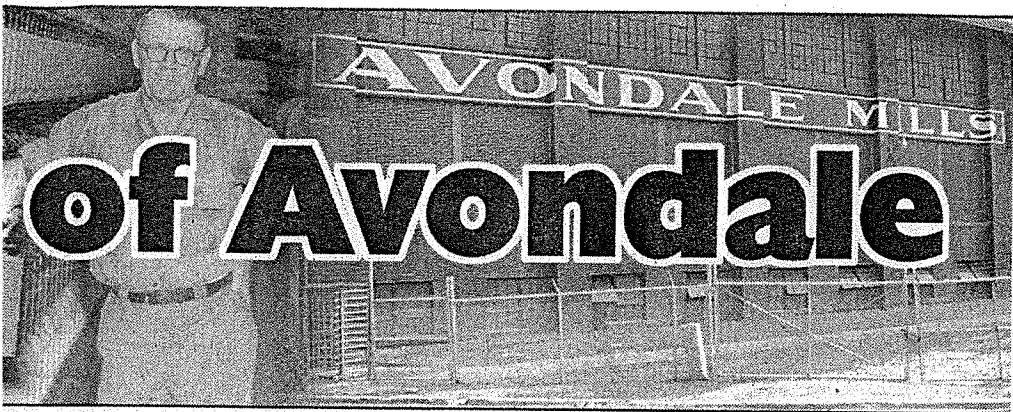
The nursing staff at Drummond-Fraser lived in what is now Beverly Hall, located across from the hospital. In those days a married woman could not serve as a registered nurse.

In 1959, Drummond Fraser began making plans to merge with Sylacauga Infirmary, and in 1960, the merger was completed. Beryl Pitchford, wife of Dr. Pitchford Jr., says Drummond-Fraser Hospital was torn down in no time after the merger was completed.

"It was a good hospital with a good staff

## The doctors and



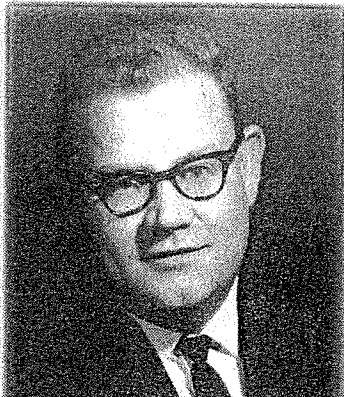


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THE DAILY HOME, Talladega-Sylacauga-Pell City, Ala., Sunday, August 13, 2006 — 3

# Hospital

## nurses for Avondale associates



Drummond-Fraser Hospital nurses 1950-62 are, seated from left, Mrs. Burton Kelly, Luline Hickman, Pat Patterson, Lena Payne Leverette and Zip McNeil; back row, from left, Nina Hester, Carrie Lou Wood, Willie Mae Person, Martha Carmichael, Mrs. Hosey and Mrs. Christman. The late Penny Grimes was

# Avondale in your

From Page 2

Wright to cook them a fried chicken dinner they would do it for free. Imagine getting your house wired today for a meal!

To me — this is a wonderful example of how Avondale employees looked out for each other.

I'm a Mill Village kid — growing up in the shadow of the smoke stack of the plant in Pell City and listening for the shift change whistle — 10 p.m. meant I'd better be in bed! I attended the little octagon kindergarten with Mrs. Mary Collins and Mrs. Pauline Rich as the teachers — chocolate milk and crackers on Friday, what a treat!

My most vivid memory of that time was Santa Claus (aka Mr. "Chick" Moore) coming to the kindergarten with a gift for each one of us. We went in alphabetical order, and I was next to the last child.

Someone broke in front

of me with a baby sister, and when my turn came, there wasn't a gift. You can imagine the disappointment of a 5 year old at that. Mr. Moore came to my house that afternoon with a beautiful baby doll and said Santa had left it in the sleigh by mistake.

Santa ran into Mr. Moore and asked him to bring it to me. That's the kind of people who worked for Avondale Mills!

## Lifetime of Avondale memories

By Henry Smith

Goodbye to a lifetime of memories.

Henry Smith went to work in Avondale Mills in 1934. He retired in 1979.

He worked as a doffer in the shop and as a guard. He took care of his wife and four children while working at Avondale Mills. He also made many friends.

The people at Avondale Mills were like one big family, especially in the older days. He worked in Eva Jane for 20 years. He wanted to share this picture of the Eva Jane crew with everyone. If any of the Eva Jane crew is still with us, Mr. Smith can be contacted at 256-245-6973.

## A love for Avondale and its associates

By Isaac Barber  
Pell City

I went to work at the Pell City Avondale Mills plant in 1949, after serving in the U.S. Army, Sixth Army, 33rd Combat Battalion, 136 Infantry in the Southwest Pacific under Gen. Douglas McArthur.

I worked as a beamer operator in the warp preparation department for 12 years. They changed from making denim to gray goods. They moved all denim to the Eva Jane Plant in Sylacauga.

I went from the Pell City plant to the Eva Jane Plant in 1961. I worked there in the cloth room for five years as a roll cloth grader. I then went back to a beamer operator in the warp preparation department at the Eva Jane Plant. I worked there for 23 years before retiring in 1991, with 40 years of continuous service.

I went back as a temporary worker for two more years. I couldn't ask for a better company to work for, as they were good to me. I raised my family and put my daughter, Christy, through college on wages



Henry Smith is pictured third from left on the bottom row:

# words ...

in Avondale. I prided myself of doing good job, zero defects. I was by the Avondale slogan, "Right the First Time", and I do.

They gave me a nice pension at my retirement. I went to work in 1993 with the Daily Home as a caregiver, and I'm still with them. They have also treated me well.

I've enjoyed working for both companies.

I'm sorry to see Avondale close down. It meant so much to so many people.

I love my associates and Avondale, and the people I worked with will always be a warm spot in my heart.

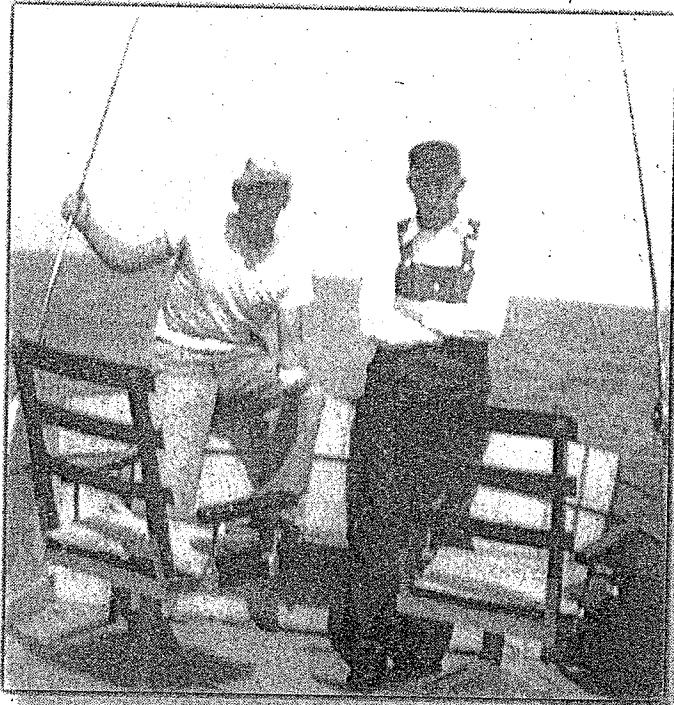
I trust that all who were working with Avondale will soon find a new job that will be as good, if not better than what they had.

## much more than a story

### Jim Wright

With the exception of about 17 years, I have lived in sight of Avondale Mills in the same house. This time period covers from 1944, when I was 1 year old to present.

When I think of Avondale Mills, I think of my early years. Avondale Mills was much more than just a mill factory with a bunch of mill hands living in a mill village. It was a community where everyone knew just about everyone. We had our own school system (K-8), fire department and hospital plan, police department, constable, community center, credit union, a recreational lake,



Former Avondale Mills employee Frank Lee Jr., left, poses with another employee on the Avondale Mills yacht at Camp Helen in 1958.

and a Florida retreat.

It was a community that was crime free, a place where children could roam about safely and be welcome into any house if they needed help.

It was not all a bed of roses, there were bad times as well.

But if you compare the good against the bad, the good parts far outweigh the bad. Sadly, this way of American life will never happen again.

## Employee has fond recollections of company

By Frank Lee Jr.  
Pell City

I worked for Avondale Mills from 1946 to 1958.

My dad, brother, uncles, aunts and cousins worked there. The owners, the Comers, were good people who cared for their employees. They paid the going wage in the textile industry.

They had a profit sharing plan, retirement plan, and a credit union that paid 6 percent interest on savings. A doctor office visit was \$2.

Employees living in the village paid \$1 per room rent for a month, including utilities. They finally sold the house for \$100 a room.

My fondest memories were the many vacation trips to Camp Helen. The cabins rented for \$15-\$20 a week. Available was a club house for games. The company also had a yacht used

Continued on Page 5



— THE DAILY HOME, Talladega-Sylacauga-Pell City, Ala., Sunday, August 13, 2006

# Camp Helen

## Mill workers live the good life, vacation

By **June Winters**  
Sylacauga

When Avondale Mills was in its “hey day” and running full speed, not only did the company provide jobs, houses and medical facilities for its workers, it also provided recreation.

The perfect place for Avondale employees to take vacation was Camp Helen.

In a brief history of Camp Helen, it states it was Donald Comer Sr.’s idea to establish a summer recreational place in Florida for his Avondale associates. It is said that during the spring of 1932, he, Fletcher Comer and Hugh Comer went to the Panama City area looking for a place.

About 20 miles out of Panama City on the Port St. Joe Highway, they saw a sign which said “Davis Beach.” They stopped, took a swim in the gulf then sat down with Mrs. Davis and talked at length about turning it into the recreation area they were considering.

In June of that year, the Mignon Basketball Team was taken to Davis Beach, where they pitched army tents and camped for three days. After the trip

was opened, it was named Camp Helen in honor of Mrs. Fletcher Comer. It would soon become known as Avondale Mills’s summer playground.

Boats, two large dormitories and a meal hall were built, and company buses carried the vacationers back and forth.

From 1933 until 1941, the camp echoed with sounds of laughter and activity. Then came World War II.

A group from Pell City’s Avondale Mills was the last to visit this Camp Helen before Avondale turned the area over to the United States government to build a military facility. Today it is the site of Tyndall Air Force Base.

According to an issue of the Avondale Sun, Avondale announced in November of 1945, that a new campsite had been purchased about 25 miles west of Panama City. It was known locally as the “Hicks Place at Phillips Inlet.” There were plenty of shade trees on the property, as well as individual cabins and a large building which could be used as a dormitory and recreation hall.

Over the years Camp Helen was the vacation



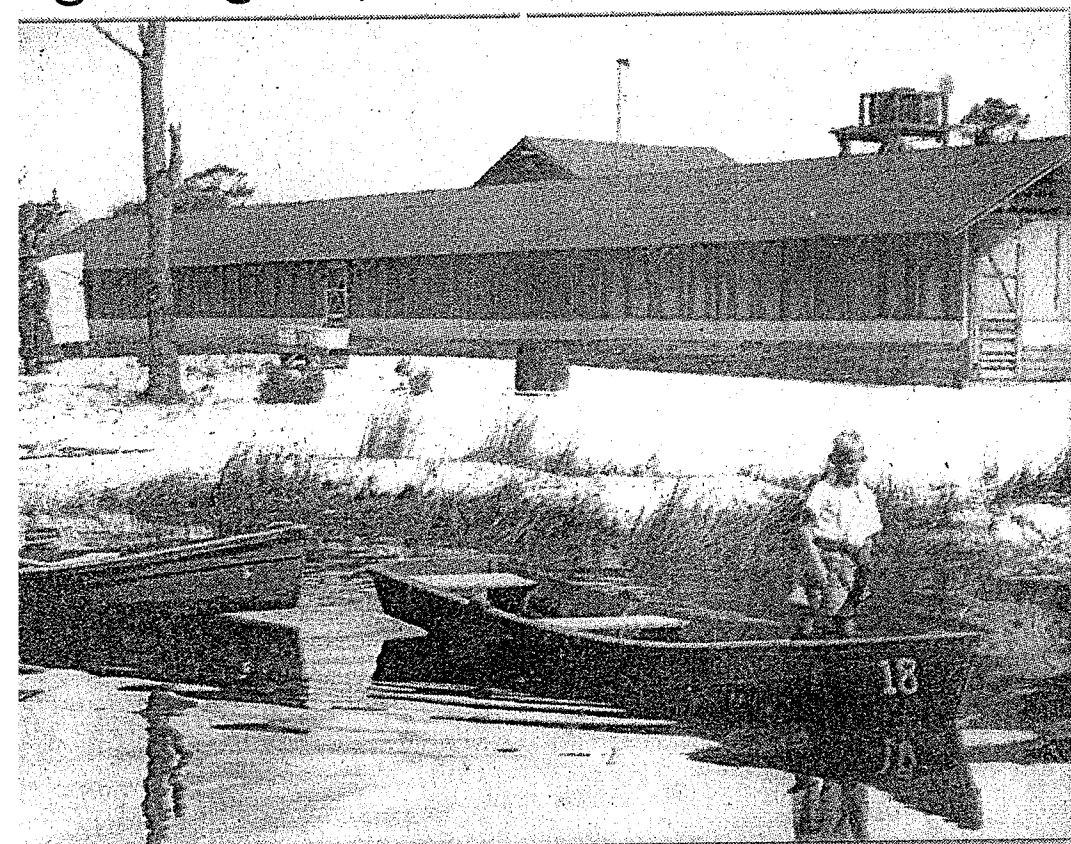
Avondale employees



AVONDALE MILLS

# s of Avondale

## ng along the Gulf Coast



ered year after year along the Gulf Coast at Camp Helen.



LEFT: Camp Helen staff in 1959 included Tommy Bivin of Sylacauga; Mary Braden of Pell City; Howard Padgett of Niceville, Fla.; Dale Layton of Sylacauga; and

...stopped, took a swim in the gulf then sat down with Mrs. Davis and talked at length about turning it into the recreation area they were considering.

In June of that year, the Mignon Basketball Team was taken to Davis Beach, where they pitched army tents and camped for three days. After the trip someone was quoted as saying, "Despite the hogs and sand flies which were very plentiful, this group had a great time."

This was the beginning of Avondale's camping program on the gulf.

Around August, a regular camp was set up, and that summer some 1,300 people visited the area. The camp had a full staff and a program, with Howard Padgett Sr. in charge.

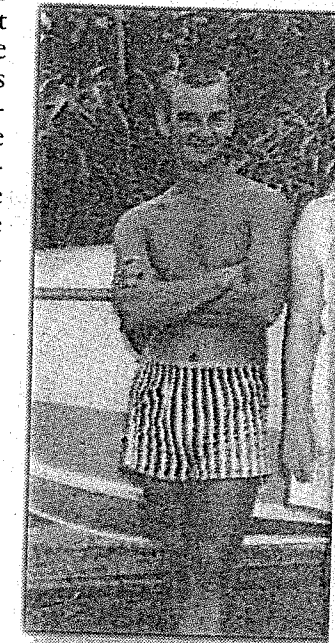
Avondale officials were still looking for a more suitable place for a permanent camp, and that September, they found a stretch of beach known as Hog Island, not far from Davis Beach. The area contained some 60 acres.

In March of 1933, building began and by the first of June, it was finished. Before the camp

purchased about 25 miles west of Panama City. It was known locally as the "Hicks Place at Phillips Inlet." There were plenty of shade trees on the property, as well as individual cabins and a large building which could be used as a dormitory and recreation hall.

Over the years Camp Helen was the vacation spot for thousands of people from Avondale and their families. There were six cabins, eight duplexes, a "big house," which sleeps 16 people, a recreation hall and meal hall. Vacationers usually stayed for a week, and most of their stay was financed by the company. Howard Padgett Sr. managed the park for Avondale Mills from 1940 through 1960, when his sons Howard "Howie" and Eric Padgett took over. Tugs of war, watermelon cuttings, fishing, deep-sea fishing, sunbathing, shuffleboard, horseshoes, ping pong tournaments and bingo were some of the activities offered.

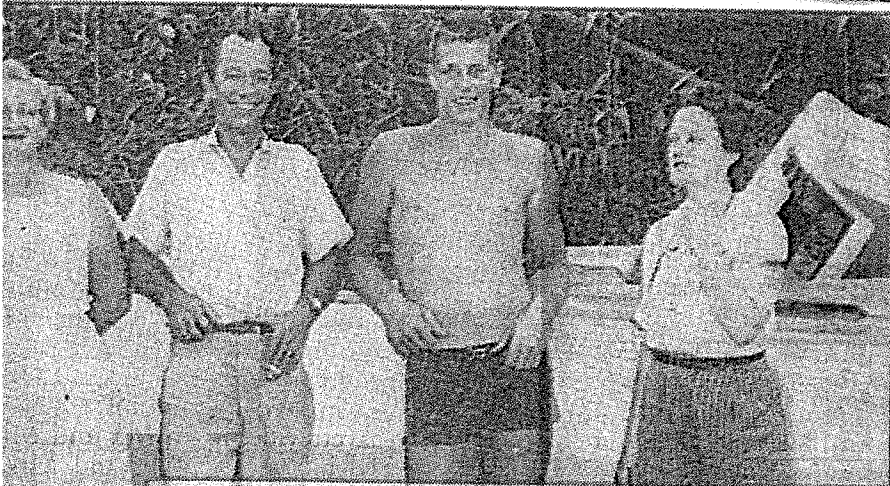
Employees' children worked at Camp Helen during the summer as lifeguards. They stayed in Army-type barracks furnished with a cotton mat-



**RIGHT: Cruising a from Avondale's y also an option for Camp Helen.**

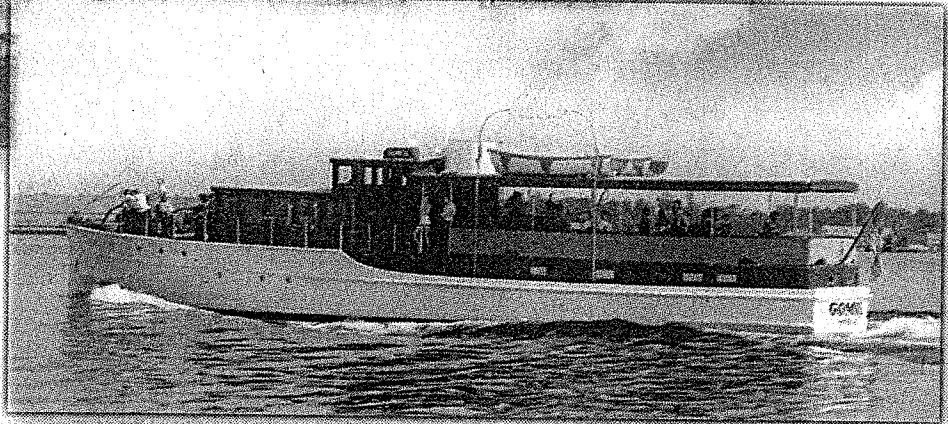
ress and were paid \$75 a week. They were provided with food and clothing as well a place to stay, along with the salary.

Not only was Camp Helen a place for family vacations, but it also served as a retreat for football, baseball and basket-



LEFT: Camp Helen staff in 1959 included Tommy Bivin of Sylacauga; Mary Braden of Pell City; Howard Padgett of Niceville, Fla.; Dale Layton of Sylacauga; and Alice Moore of Pell City.

I fishing  
ht were  
sitors to



ball teams. Members of the Avondale Band would go, as well as civic groups and social groups.

For 40 or more years, Avondale provided the beach activities to employees and guests. Tens of thousands vacationed there, including actor/

comedian Jim Nabors. Other distinguished guests included illustrators Norman Rockwell and Douglas Crockwell. Crockwell provided illustrations of Camp Helen that were published in the Saturday Evening Post.

In 1996, Camp Helen

was purchased by the State of Florida and now belongs to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Recreation and Parks. Last year, more than a hundred people who worked there in the summers returned for a reunion.



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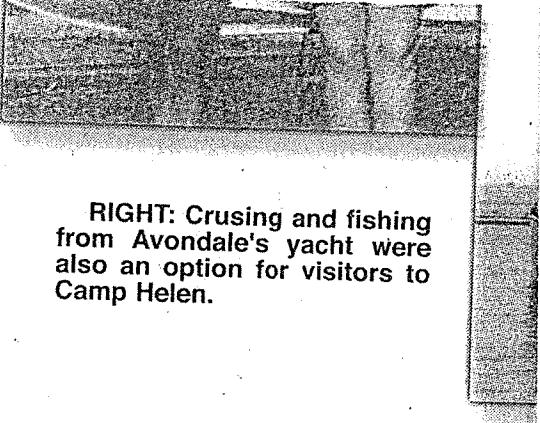
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ball teams. Me the Avondale Ba go, as well as civ and social groups

For 40 or m Avondale provi beach activities to ees and guests. thousands va there, including



**RIGHT: Cruising and fishing from Avondale's yacht were also an option for visitors to Camp Helen.**

# Avondale's favorite hot spot

**By Howard Padgett Jr.**  
Friends of Camp Helen president

I am Howard Padgett Jr. known to all that vacationed at Avondale Mills Camp Helen, as "Howie".

My dad was camp director for 37 years, after my grandfather, William Henry Call Padgett, began Camp Helen in 1945 and passed away that same year.

Both my brothers, Herschel and Eric, as well as myself, worked there as Lifeguards. Eric took on the camp director position after dad retired.

Eric remained there until 1997, one year after the state of Florida purchased it to become Camp Helen State Park.

On May 20 of this year, the non-profit C.S.O. (Citizens Support Organization), Friends of Camp Helen, (which I head as the president of this 501(c) 3 group), held a reunion for former Avondale Mills Camp Helen Staff. Cooks, grounds keepers, camp hosts, dieticians, kitchen staff and lifeguards from 1945 to 1986 were in attendance.

*From Prospective Issue No. 2, 2006 of The Inlet Tower Published by the Friends of Camp Helen*

## Former Avondale Mills workers at Camp Helen have first reunion

The First Reunion for past Camp Helen Staff workers was held Saturday May 20, 2006, at the Lodge of Camp Helen State Park.

Camp Crew workers from the 1945 to 1986 Avondale Mills period reunited for the first time since Avondale closed Camp Helen in 1986.

Over 30 families turned out to spend the day together and unite to once again become "Camp Helen Family".

Traveling from eight states and as far away as Houston, Texas, these families returned to "paradise" and to revisit what most called "the best days of their life". The majority had not seen each other in 25 to 35 years, which

made for a combination of joyous smiles, hugs, tears, and laughter.

Reunion day activities started with a welcoming with coffee and snacks, followed by a cake cutting and gathering inside the Lodge. During the day, oral histories and stories from the Avondale Camp Crew days were video taped.

At mid-day, a luncheon was served, taken straight from the Camp Helen menu, which consisted of sliced ham, purple hull peas, tomato, vidalia onion, roll, and cake, pudding, or ice cream for desert.

Ice cream selections included Nutty Buddies, Eskimo Pies, and Ice Cream Sandwiches.

Some made the trek to the old pier in the Gulf at the Inlet and ventured back by way of the nature trails.

Others walked the grounds of the rest of the Camp touring and reminiscing about what it was like when they worked there. The Big House (the Lodge) provided the focal gathering place for reunion speeches in the afternoon. At 3:00 the watermelon cutting took place

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actor/  
In 1996, Camp Helen

guests included illustra-  
tors Norman Rockwell  
and Douglas Crockwell.  
Crockwell provided illus-  
trations of Camp Helen  
that were published in the  
Saturday Evening Post.

of Florida and now belongs  
to the Florida Department  
of Environmental  
Protection, Division of  
Recreation and Parks. Last  
year, more than a hundred  
people who worked there  
in the summers returned  
for a reunion.

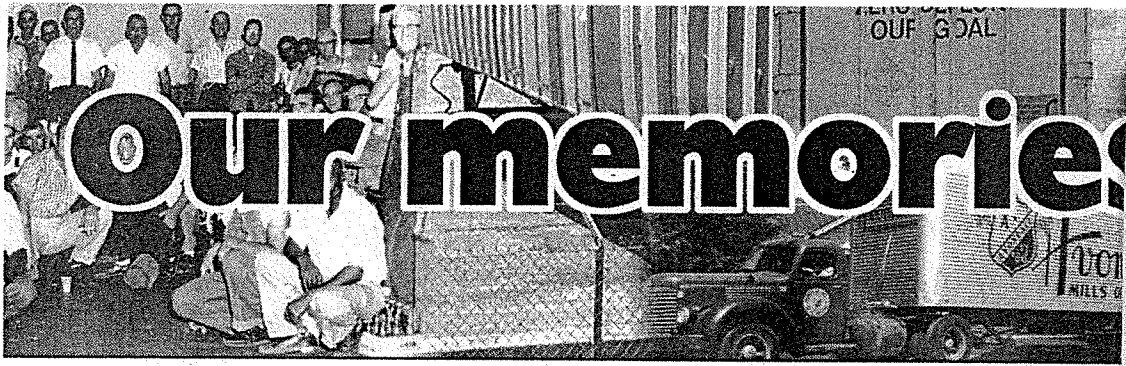
# It lives on today



Camp Helen staff from over the years recently gathered at the resort for a reunion. From left are Maury Ragsdale, Eric Padgett, Matt Remson, David Bivin and Tom Bivin.

next to the breezeway. Camp Crew photos were taken on the front steps of the lodge. The breezeway was also the site

for the drawings for the paintings donated by a local artist of scenes from various locations at Camp Helen State Park.



# *A wedding to remember*

## One Avondale couple tied

**By Cissy and David Wyatt**  
Sylacauga

The following are some special memories of Avondale that my husband, David, and I had while working there. I worked in the corporate office for Mr. J. Emmett Warren, Vice-President of Purchasing.

Mr. Warren came to work one morning and when he opened the door to the reception room, then went to his office, he said very loudly, "What in the heck (he would spell it differently) is going on in here! I could hear you outside before I came in the building. I have never heard such commotion!"

One of the girls (there were six of us) said, "Cissy and David are going to be married on 'Bride and Groom,' the national radio and television program in Hollywood, California!" T.V. was in its infancy, but everybody had a radio. There was one T.V. in Sylacauga at the time.

Moma and daddy listened to the program and made some interesting comments about it.

After David and I became engaged, my parents asked us to write for an application. "Oh", I said, "They wouldn't accept a farm girl who picked cotton and milked two cows twice a day, as well as other farm chores until I entered Alabama College for Women."

Finally, moma wrote for the application.

Bill Irby, editor of the *Avondale Sun*, the company paper, wrote an article titled

and relatives at the airport to see us off.

Mayor Ed J. Howard sent a telegram on our wedding day, Nov. 10, 1949, and said, "We will all be listening and best wishes." Other friends and relatives sent telegrams.

The program originated in the El Morroco Room in the Chapman Park Hotel. This was prior to the wedding ceremony in the secluded sanctuary of the Pueblo Oratorio adjacent to the hotel.

There was a huge audience. John Nelson, the emcee, asked many questions. The first was, "What is Avondale Mills and what do they make?" I said, "They make the best chambray in the world!" He asked, "What is chambray?" I replied, "It is cloth." His next question was, "What is it used for?" I said, "It's used for dresses, curtains, bedspreads, table cloths and other things. They also make denim and ticking. Denim is used for blue jeans and some other clothing for ladies. Ticking is used in making mattresses. They flew us out here!" David said interrupting, "What? You mean Avondale paid for your flight? That was very nice of them." "Yes," said David. "We certainly did appreciate Avondale's generosity."

When we returned to Sylacauga, the first day I went back to work, I wore a denim outfit.

When Mr. Hugh Comer, president of the company, came in the reception room, he said, "Miss Cissy, I like that outfit you are wearing!"





THE DAILY HOME, Talladega-Sylacauga-Pell City, Ala., Sunday, August 13, 2006 — 9

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58

er

# e knot Hollywood style



**Cissy and David Wyatt were married on 'Bride and Groom' a national radio and television show.**

**The couple were selected for the program after Cissy's mother sent in for an application.**

# Avondale in your

From Page 5

## 'Avondale kid' tells story of growing up

By Jane Massey  
Childersburg

The thing I remember most about being an "Avondale kid" was growing up in the Mill Village in Sycamore.

My parents, Roy and Runelle Luker, worked until their retirement in the Sycamore plant. Dad worked in the Carding Department, and Mom worked in the Spinning Department.

I remember the mill whistle blowing at every shift change, and my brother Rodney and I would be happy because that meant Mom and Dad would be coming home.

At that time, Sycamore had everything that you would need. A clinic if you needed medical attention, a drugstore for your medicine, the company store where mom would send us to get things she needed.

There was a theatre, bowling alley, skating rink, beauty shop, hardware store — all the conveniences, always something to do.

On Saturday, Rodney and I would get a softball game started with some of the other "Avondale kids." There was also a pool there where we had good times.

We had a great childhood, summers at Camp Helen, weekends at Camp Brownie. But the best times of all were spent just riding



our bikes around with our friends in the "Village".

Mom and Dad are gone now, they were the greatest, as were all good Avondale folks.

I know when they passed away, the "whistle" blew in Heaven and the angels said, "Listen, Mom and Dad are coming home."

## Recollections of Avondale people abound

By Mrs. Avressel M. Cannon

I was happy to see your offer to realize some of what we remember about loved ones working at Avondale Mills. I'm 75 years old, but I remember my father, John McAfee, and my brother, James L. McAfee, working for Avondale.

My father worked there for years. He would walk from Truss Lease to Avondale. Every shift night, my dad would leave home about 10-11 a.m. every day for his 2 p.m. shift, leave at

5 p.m. for his 10 p.m. shift. He caught a ride sometimes but he loved to work.

I knew when Avondale Mills would give the picnic and everyone would be there. I remember all or at least a lot of people that worked there, Ms. Constance Nobles cleaned, Mr. Milton Turner Sr., Milton Jr., Bes Coleman, John L. McAfee. Some of these people have gone on to Jesus.

I knew Mr. and Mrs. Alverson of Eden. They were great people always good to me and my children. I went to Avondale Camp in Florida whenever they would go. Uncle Charlie Cannon and Charlie Cannon worked there. They lived in the old houses on 78. I knew a lot of people, the Whittens, Loves especially.

Just a few words about what I know. I wish I had a bowl of Avondale Gumbo. It was very good. Mr. Embry did a lot of good things. I remember Mrs. Lipscomb who worked at the mill.

Oh yes I tried to go there.

# words ...

## From boyhood to manhood, Avondale plays a role

by David Murphy  
All City

In just a few days, a long chapter in my life will come to an end as Avondale Mills closes its doors for the last time. I, along with thousands of citizens across America and the world, have in some way been touched by Avondale for well over a

hundred years.

My Avondale story began in November 1954 when Avondale moved its corporate offices from New York City to Sylacauga. I was the first child born to Frank and Charline Murphy and was 15 months old, living in Birmingham, when my father landed a job as a credit analyst in the credit department in the corporate office in Sylacauga. Our family made the move from Birmingham to Sylacauga at about the time my brother,

Frank Jr., was born in late November 1954.

My father worked 30 years for Avondale, retiring in December 1984. I went to work at Avondale in June 1973 following my sophomore year in college, working a summer job in the Central Plant in Sylacauga.

Before the summer was over, Avondale offered me a two-year textile scholarship to Auburn University, which I accepted, and I trans-

Continued on Page 10



Pictured is a group of Avondale Mills employees from the different plants who were awarded the company's Zero Defects Corporate Award trip to Williamsburg, Va., in 1977. They are, from left, front row — Myrtle Tabor, Eva Jane plant; Onzelle Childress, Eva Jane plant; Lottie Grier, Indian Springs plant; Tommie Nobles, Pell City plant; Claree Hawes, Alexander City plant; Joyce Steele, High Jackson plant; standing — Mrs. Donald Comer Jr.; Robert Latham Jr., zero defects administrator; Julius Shell, Catherine plant; Lonnie Wyatt, Eva Jane plant; Jack Dick, Central plant; John Quenelle, personnel director; Charles Ward, Coosa plant; Finus Collins, Pell City plant; Gary Reames, Grace plant; Reed Rudder, Mary Ann plant; Mike Haynes, Sycamore plant; William Blackmon Jr., LaFayette plant; Pearson McKinney, Eva Jane plant; Boots Hyde, general office; Donald Comer Jr., chairman of the Board; and Helen Hanna, Catherine plant. The picture was provided by Mrs. Mattie Collins of Pell City.

# A place for families

*Editor's note: Dorris Hickman Jones has many memories of Avondale Mills in Sylacauga because so many of her family members, including herself, worked for the company.*

*She attended Walco kindergarten and later taught and did music there.*

*Her late husband, Paul N. Jones, was in the company personnel department with Ann Carothers. Her son Rickey Jones had various jobs with the company.*

*Her late father, Forney W. Hickman, worked in the plumbing department, while her late mother, Wilma S. Hickman, worked in Mignon Drug Store. Her late sister, Laura Hickman, worked in the laboratory, while her late brother, Joe Hickman, and sister, Mildred Ham, attended Mignon and Comer schools.*

*Mrs. Jones, her husband, her sister Laura Hickman and Mildred Ham all graduated from Comer School.*

## By Dorris Hickman Jones

Sylacauga

Many trips were sponsored by Avondale. A school trip for school children in May 13, 1937, to perform for American Manufacturers Association in Washington, D.C., was one of those.

Mrs. Essie P. Creel was the choral instructor and chaperone. I was on this trip. On this trip we met Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and were invited to the White House to have tea and cookies with her. What a treat for these Avondale kids.

My family and many friends were long-time members of Mignon United Methodist Church. The Hugh Comer family were members of this church and held numerous leadership roles. The pipe organ, which is still in use, was donated by the Comer family in 1924 in memory of Eva Harris Comer.

I played the organ for many years following Mrs. Ida V. Jarvis and Mrs. J.P. Creel.

Many fun activi-

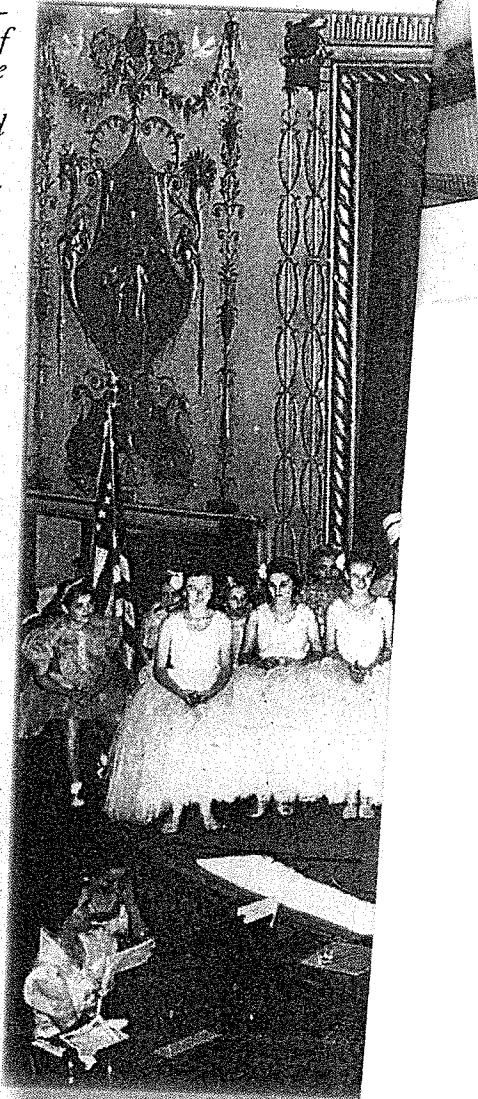
ties were furnished to Avondale children, such as a swimming pool and playground at Lake Louise — refreshments were served at all gatherings.

After my play days, I was employed in the kindergarten at Walco, working with Mrs. Lurline Campbell and Mrs. Louise Moseley. At the Sycamore kindergarten, I assisted Mrs. Stella Dodd and Sally Player for many years and had a playground there.

All of the Avondale family health problems were tended to by Avondale Drummond Frazier Hospital, clinic and dentist. My two sons, Rick and Wareen, were both born at Drummond Frazier, just two blocks from where we lived at 8 Main Street.

### Recreation

Beverly Hall was the center for many, many activities in addition to social events such as wedding receptions, showers, family reunions, birthday parties, school reunions, the early years provided dance classes and tumbling classes by



Avondale sponsored a Association meeting and ch

Mr. Kirbey. It also provided places for school teachers to live. Another perk was a beauty shop operated by Mrs. Ruthie Haynes upstairs.

Just past Avondale Circle was a golf course extending over Comer Hill to Oak Street in Walco — fun, fun. I guess the most exciting thing we looked forward to was the Camp Helen trips in Panama City, Fla.

Were it not for these trips, most of us would not have had a chance to see the

Dorris Hickman Jones has many memories of Avondale Mills in Sylacauga because so many of her family members, including herself, worked for the

Walco kindergarten and later taught and

led a band. Paul N. Jones, was in the carpenter department with Ann Carothers. Her son worked on various jobs with the company.

Forney W. Hickman, worked in the maintenance department, while her late mother, Wilma, worked in Mignon Drug Store. Her late father, Forney Hickman, worked in the laboratory, while her brother, Joe Hickman, and sister, Mildred Ham, worked in Comer schools.

Her husband, her sister Laura Hickman and her brother-in-law all graduated from Comer School.

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Avondale sponsored a school trip to Washington for children to perform at American Manufacturers Association meeting and children got to meet First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

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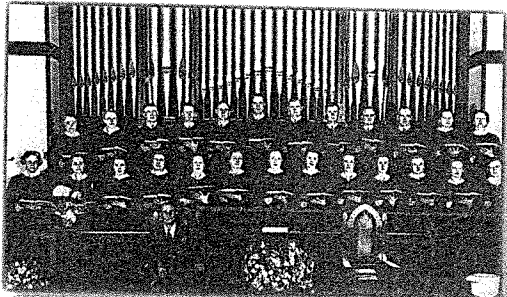
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Were it not for these trips, most of us would not have had a chance to see the

Gulf of Mexico. Five dollars covered all expenses for a 5-day trip — transportation, meals and board!!!

Honorable deceased Avondale men of the Mignon United Methodist Church are Huel Cleghorn, Luther Mizzell, Jim Persons, Otha Nivens, Bill Haslam, Paul Jones, Arnold Tankersley, Forney Hickman and choir director Jim Kelvey.

I taught public school music at Comer and Sycamore schools for more than 40 years.



Hugh Comer of Avondale Mills gave the pipe organ shown behind Mignon United Methodist Choir to church in 1924.



# Avondale in your

From Page 9

ferred to Auburn, graduating with a Bachelor's Degree in Textile Management in 1975. I had the fortune to work in six plants in my 33 years with Avondale, most of those years at the Pell City plant. I had the pleasure to be associated with so many great people, and I cherish my time with Avondale Mills.

There are countless Avondale memories I could share, but I would like to mention a few memories from the perspective of my youth, growing up in Sylacauga.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, most families

had one car. Our family was no exception.

I remember very fondly around 4:30 p.m. on many afternoons my mother would load up my brothers and me into the car, and we would go to the old schoolhouse corporate office building to pick up my father from work for the day.

This office was located across from Mignon Baptist Church on 10th Street in what is now the Eva Jane Plant parking lot. I remember the area around the old office building having a few large trees, making it a very shady parking area.

My father's parking spot was right next to a large tree

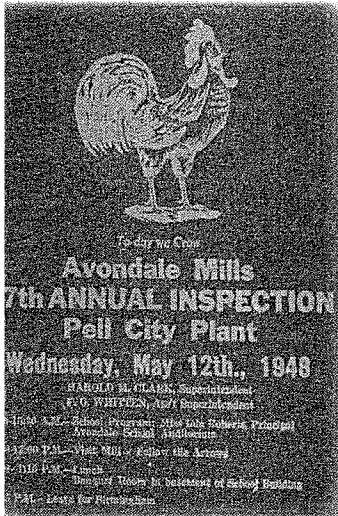
on the left side of the one-way circle drive around the old office building. I remember meeting many Avondale associates that worked with my father outside the old office building on those trips to pick him up from work. Most of those associates, like my father, were World War II veterans and wound up working many years together for Avondale, most retiring with many years of service with the company.

One day in late summer 1963 when I was 10 years old, my father came home early one afternoon and told my brothers, Frank, Paul, and me to put on our coats and ties because we



Every year, youths would work to put together fruit baskets for associates at Avondale Mills.

# words ...



This program was printed on denim.

This photo of a worker in an old Avondale truck was taken in the early '30's. I was told it was about 1930. This photo was loaned to me by Don Smith for posting on the internet. It looks as if this photo was taken near a ball park. There's an old movie camera on a tripod sitting in the bed of the truck. As of yet, the man in the truck has not been identified. The truck seems to be a mid to late '20's model A Ford.

— Jerry Hardy

were going to the Open House for the new corporate office building on what is now Avondale Avenue in Sylacauga. Our entire family, which by this time included my 5-month-old sister, Martha, loaded up into the family car and went to the new Avondale corporate office building.

Hundreds of families attended the Open House. During the tour, my father introduced us to Mr. J. Craig Smith, Avondale's president at the time. I remember shaking his hand. After walking out of the room where we met Mr. Smith, my father told me I had just shook hands with one of the greatest men on the face of the earth. Eleven years later, in 1974, I shook hands with him again at an Avondale Scholarship

Luncheon, remembering my father's words from that day in 1963.

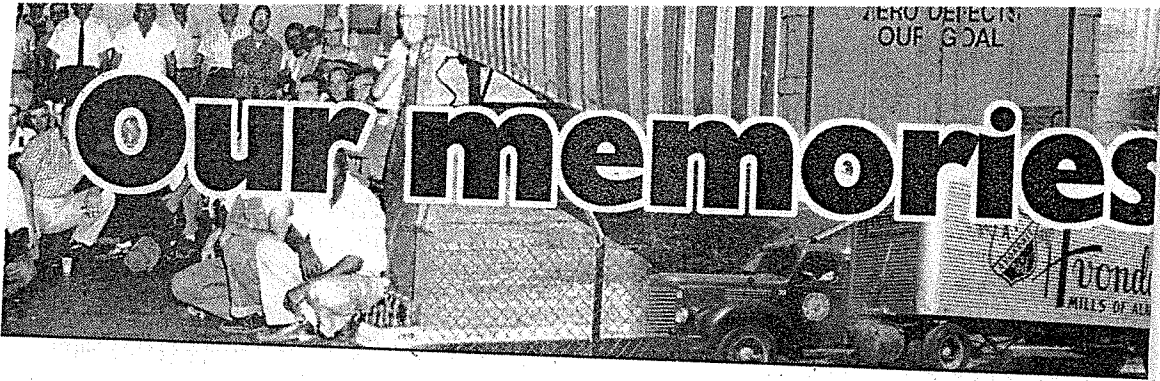
Growing up in Sylacauga in the 1950s and 1960s was great, especially the summers. Avondale Mills put much emphasis on youth recreation — the opportunities for recreation we had were in large part supported by Avondale.

Many afternoons my mother would tell my siblings and me to put on our swimming suits because we were going to Lake Louise Swimming Pool. There were two separate pools at

Lake Louise, one for younger children and a larger one for those older. Both pools seemed bigger than life. My first swimming lessons were at Lake Louise.

There were other afternoons that my mother would go to the Cotton Boll out on old Highway 280, which was across from what is now the mental health building. The Cotton Boll sold hundreds of styles of fabrics made at Avondale. My mother sewed clothes for us, so the Cotton Boll

Continued on Page 11



# Our memories

## Generations touched by

By Denise Sinclair  
Alpine

The most vivid memory I have left of my grandfather, Mack Sell Sinclair, is his coming home from the mill with his overalls covered in lint.

He worked at the Avondale Mills plant in Sycamore for 38 years, retiring in the early 1960s.

With the closing of Avondale, I started questioning my father, Northern (Bunk) Sinclair, and mother, Bobbie, about their memories of Sycamore prior to the closing of the plant.

I had relatives from both sides of my family working in the Sycamore plant.

My father's family, which included three sisters, Dinah, Liz and Shirley, and his brother, Lewis, lived in the mill village until my grandfather bought a farm in a community known as Papertown. He purchased the 36-acre farm for \$2,500.

A veteran of World War I, my grandfather married Emma Blankenship when he was 25. He was one of nine children born to Mr. and Mrs. Cole Sinclair.

My father's grandfather, Cole, started to work at Sycamore at the young age of 50 and worked until he was 70.

Of his nine children,

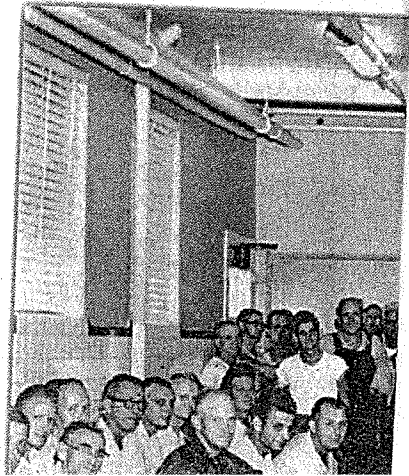
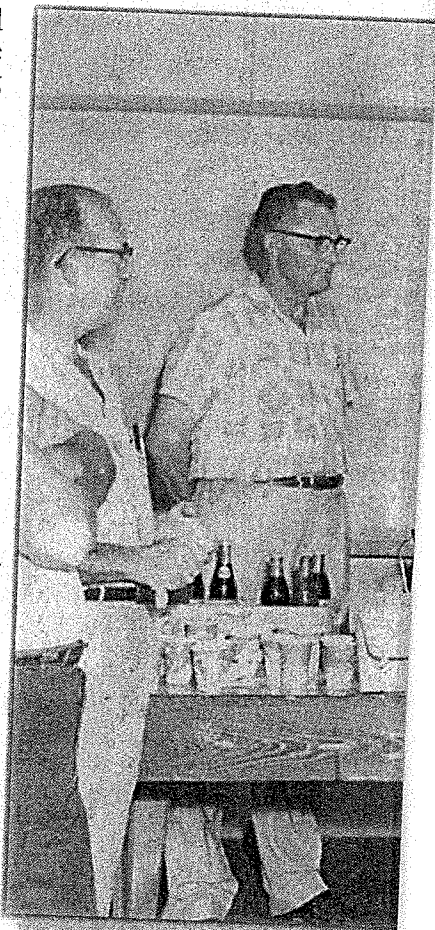
My father even worked a short time with my late uncle Jasper Heath doing plumbing at Avondale's plants across the state from 1955 to 1956 when he went to work for Beaunit Mills.

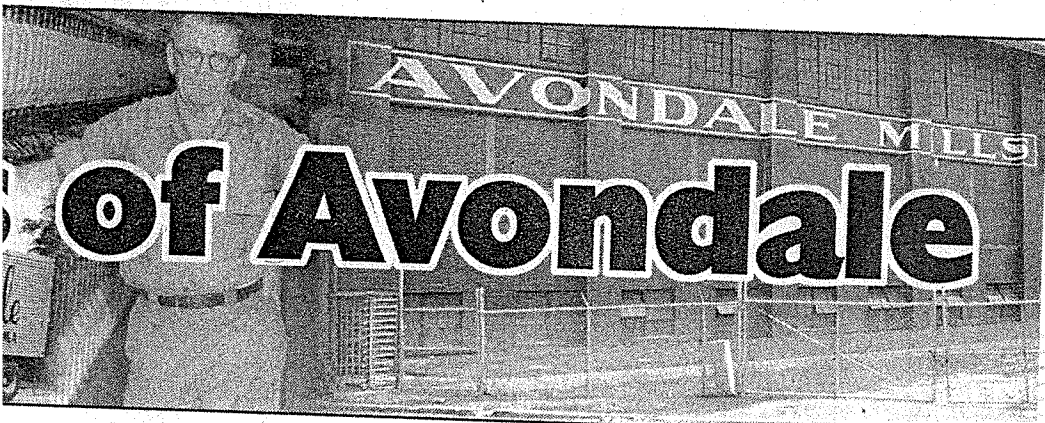
My grandfather was known as Sell, and he worked in the card room. The family lived near the swimming pool in the mill village that had a hotel where the school teachers stayed, a doctor, a company store run by C.L. Mizzell, a train depot, a movie theater, a baseball field and more. It was a self-contained little town.

In addition to my paternal grandfather working for Avondale, my maternal grandparents did, too. Barney and Willie Fields worked at the plant for awhile, before moving to Tucson, Ariz., in the early 1950s.

It is amazing how many lives Avondale has affected in these small communities across the area from Sycamore to Bon Air to Mignon to Pell City.

I would love to have a conversation from those early generations about life in those villages and as Avondale employees. What would they say about the textile industry today that is slowly fading away in America, one that kept food on the table, put children through school and per-

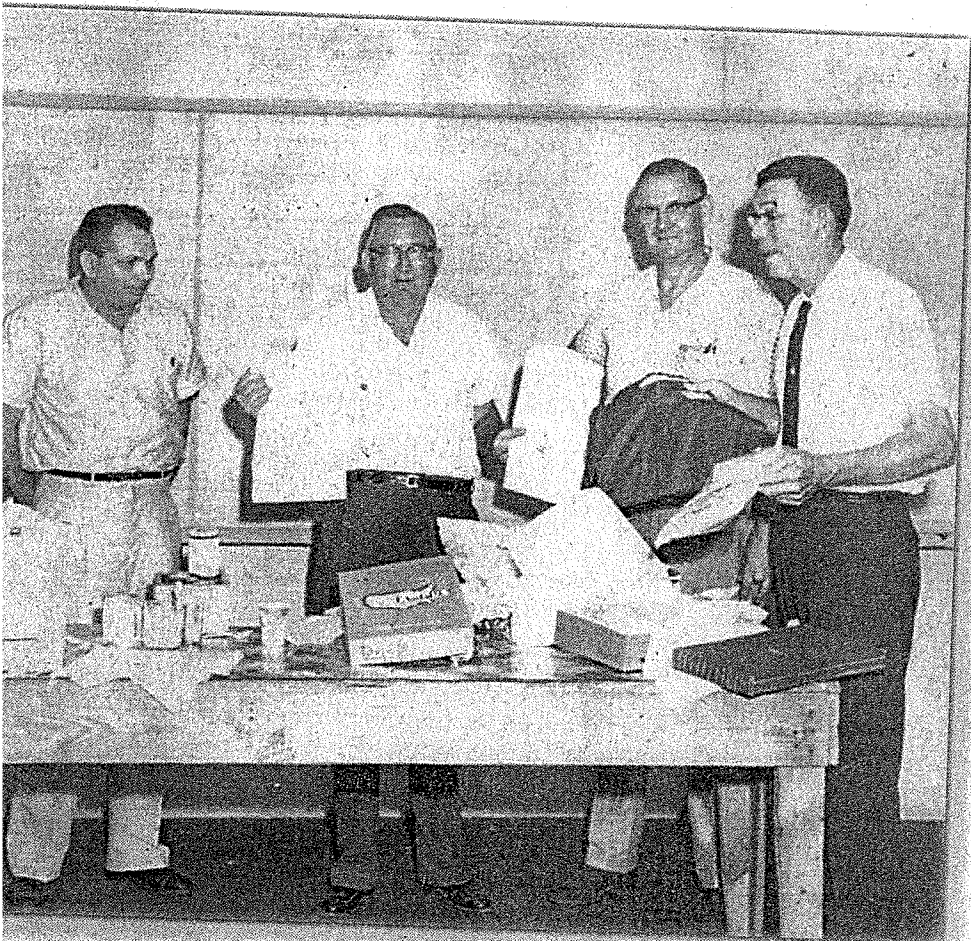




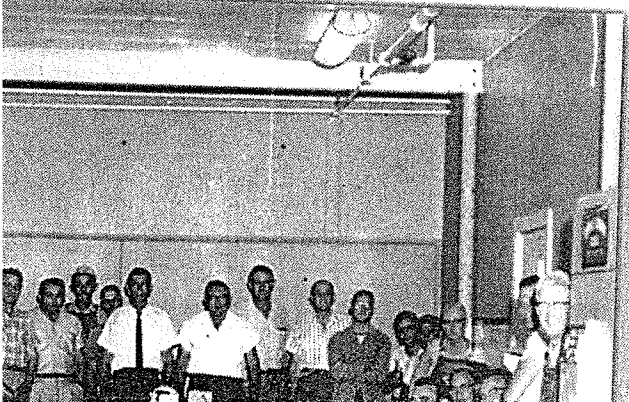
# of Avondale

THE DAILY HOME, Talladega-Sylacauga-Pell City, Ala., Sunday, August 13, 2006 — 11

*mills*



**ABOVE:** Mack Sell Sinclair with the white shirt and tie is recognized for 38 years of employment when he retired from Sycamore's Avondale plant in the early 1960s.



**LEFT:** Here, Mack Sell Sinclair is shown

# Avondale in your

From Page 10

was one of her favorite places to go to buy cloth for sewing.

Beside the Cotton Boll was a small wading pool. Often while my mother was shopping at the Cotton Boll, we were outside wading and splashing in that wading pool.

Avondale also supported organized baseball through the Sylacauga Little League and the Sylacauga Babe Ruth League, beginning in the 1950s and on through to the present. Many of those whom I played baseball with from 1962 through 1972 were sons of Avondale associates, while most of those adults leading the program were Avondale associates, including my father, who

served as president and as treasurer of the Sylacauga Babe Ruth League for a number of years.

It was often that on opening night for the new baseball season, Mr. Donald Comer Jr. would speak to all the youngsters playing ball and to the crowd, and we all listened to every word he said because what he said was important. Several of those who I played baseball with wound up working with Avondale, some of whom I was fortunate to work with years later.

Avondale touched my life in many ways from 1954 to 2006, and the life lessons I learned and experienced in my youth were all impacted in some way by Avondale Mills, laying the foundation for my career several years

later at Avondale.

Working for Avondale was great, and I am grateful for all Avondale has meant in my life.

## Avondale, Miss Iola Roberts hold special memories

By Margaret Mongold  
Pell City

After I married Sol Mongold, named for Solomon Kilgroe, his grandfather, we moved to Pell City.

Joe Kilgroe talked to Miss Iola Roberts, and I went to teach school at the Avondale Mills School.

Miss Roberts taught me more about teaching than either the University of Alabama or Auburn. She also visited every home of our students and told us what good families came to Pell City to work. I know it to be true by the students. They were so polite, respectful, clean and well behaved.

I always remember Christmas. The Boy Scouts packed the fruit in vegetable baskets to the brim with oranges, apples, candies and nuts. You could smell them when you entered the building. Everyone carried one home that night. The



Mrs. Velma Joiner, Mrs. F.O. Whitten, Mrs. Thelma Gallops in the "Manless Wedding"

# words ...



Finus "Pop" Collins of Pell City is presented a Zero Defects letter and award from Craig Smith for his performance at the Pell City Avondale plant in the 1970's.

ne's I bought were not as good.

Avondale sponsored and promoted the Scouts. Today we have a very heavy iron cout seal ... to be kept here in Pell City.

The school had someone painting all the time, walls, rooms halls, everything.

Avondale gave us anything we asked for, if worthy. One year before an Avondale inspection, I told Miss Roberts in my study all period I could make a jack-drop curtain for the

huge stage. She asked, and a huge roll of beautiful, sky-blue material arrived. I wonder now if I should have asked. I cut 13 and half feet and pleated it at the top and began stitching all our curtains together. It was what we needed and finished on time.

Our class talked about making some money for our class with Miss Roberts, and I called Mr. Baker from Talladega. He sold us paper, pencils and notebooks to sell. We discussed how to

keep our younger buyers happy, fairness, polite, calling by name.

Our first purchase (with money raised) was a television for the school auditorium. It was a hit.

Miss Minnie Gunter, a wonderful first-grade teacher, told me when the smoke stack for Avondale was finished, she was put in a swing, pulled to the top and she placed the last brick.

Years ago Avondale Mills

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Continued on Page 12

# A class all their own

By **Laura Nation-Atchison**

Home features editor

Brownie Drummonds has a treasure.

It's not the type treasure some would think of, it won't bring her a fortune or anything.

But it brings back memories that money can't buy.

The mural painted to tell the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears came from the wall of the old Avondale Mills kindergarten building, and it was almost thrown away.

After the building was moved to the site where Lola Roberts School is now, it was being renovated to use as a school library.

Mrs. Drummonds' husband, Foster, worked for the Pell City School System and was involved in the renovations.

He saw something stuffed inside a trash can, reached in and pulled it out, and when he saw it was the Goldilocks mural, knew he wanted to save it.

Mrs. Drummonds said her husband came home with the piece, which is about 3 feet by 4 feet in size and told her he had something he thought she'd like to see.

"It took me a second to realize what it was, I hadn't seen it for so long," Mrs. Drummonds said.

Now, the mural hangs in Mrs. Drummonds' sewing room, still bringing back memories from her kindergarten days.

Mrs. Drummonds used to "slip off" and go to the Avondale kindergarten before she was old enough to attend, probably when she was about 4 years old,

she said.

"But as long as they had room, they'd let you come," she said.

Mrs. Drummonds remembers during nap time every day, "when we were supposed to be sleeping, looking up at those murals."

She recalls that the "Jack and Jill" mural was the longest one in the room.

Kathy Patterson remembers the murals well, too, and the little round building that held them.

She and Mrs. Drummonds were in the Avondale kindergarten at the same time, the late 40s, probably, Patterson said.

The windows in the one big room were above the murals, and there was a ledge on the outside the boys would play on, Patterson said.

The children were in kindergarten for half a day, and could walk home for lunch, Mrs. Drummonds said.

The children had a playground with swings and slides, a sand box, even a little wading pool to use in hot weather.

"All you could really do was sit in 'it," Patterson said. "But it sure came in handy in hot weather."

Patterson's family lived just across from the mill on 29th Street.

She remembers her brother Doug Turner's dog, Lady, even splashing through the little pool on her way to John Henry Martin's grocery where she'd be given a bone nearly every morning.

The pool, made with big wide bricks, was probably about a foot and a half deep and maybe 30

wide, Patterson said.

There were probably about 30 or 40 children in the kindergarten class when Drummonds and Patterson attended, and there was one teacher, Betty Lou Terry, at the time.

Avondale Mills built the kindergarten and school buildings, but the schools were part of the St. Clair County System, Mrs. Drummonds said.

The building that became the kindergarten was once a pavilion, she said, and Mrs. Drummonds remembers her grandmother, Roxie Patterson Spruiell, talking about "courting with my grandfather there."

There was a bandstand in the pavilion at one time, too, she said.

Mrs. Drummonds' father, Ed Spruiell, was personnel director for Avondale.

The Drummonds' daughter, Leann Smith, went to the Avondale kindergarten in the late 60s when the number of children had grown to the point there needed to be two classes.

That's when the names "bluebirds" and "redbirds" were assigned to the two different groups, and they met in different buildings.

Sarah Beth Blair, who went to the kindergarten at Avondale in 1955, remembers a "Tom Thumb" wedding her class had, with all the children dressed up for it.

"Freddy Hazlewood was the groom, and Patsy Ingram was the bride," she said.

Blair remembers other things that made the little kindergarten

# OT AVONDALE



Laura Nation-Atchison/The Daily Home

**Brownie Drummonds' husband, Foster, pulled this Goldilocks mural out of a trash can when the Avondale kindergarten building was being renovated for a library. Murals of nursery rhymes lined the walls of the round building.**

"We used all the old nursery rhymes there, like 'a Little Teapot,' things like that," she said. "We loved it and remembered all so well that most of us wanted our children to have the same ones when they went to kindergarten at First Baptist. And they loved it." Blair remembers, too, the hand-made vanilla butter and peanut butter "sandwiches" the lady made "Pinky" made for them for snacks.

"She was very interested in the cultural aspect of our education and provided opportunities in performing arts and other areas that we hadn't had before. She even brought in a voice instructor and the whole school performed 'The Messiah.' Can you imagine that at a little rural school like we had?" Mrs. Drummonds grew up hearing the whistles blow — at 6 a.m., 2 p.m. and 10 p.m. — for

She's one of many who are very saddened by the mill's closing. "It was a nice way of life and the mill supported a lot of families here," she said. "It also brought a lot of money into Pell City." Mrs. Drummonds is a retired city clerk for the City of Pell City. But the mill meant more than just the money to most. "When I heard it was closing, well, it's just something that hurts your



# Avondale in you

From Page 11

had a baseball team.

I was very proud of our students and I loved them all.

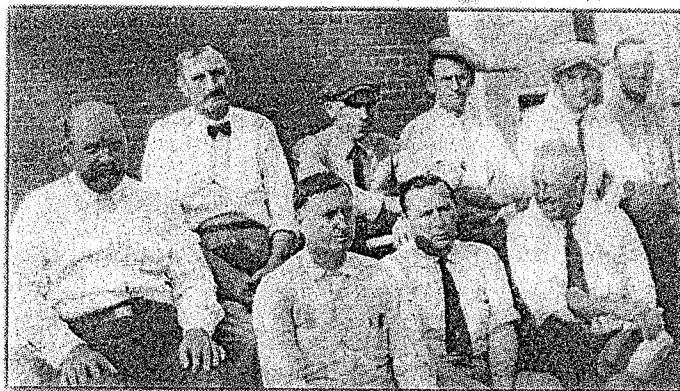
## Sorrow over Avondale closing

By Ruth Rich  
Pell City

I wish to take this means to express my sorrow for Avondale closing its factories and especially the one here in Pell City.

It has been a part of my life since the early '20s when my father began working for Avondale.

I attended Avondale School. We had a good school and good teachers. On my 16th birthday, I went to work as a spinner



A group of Avondale Mills employees sit outside the Pell City plant during a break. The picture was submitted by Ruth Rich, 89, who was an Avondale Mills employee for 62 years. She believes the picture was taken during the 1920's.

at the Pell City plant and retired in 1979 at 62 years of age.

I have heard it said that Avondale ran its plants a few days a week during the Depression so its people would have some income

coming in.

They stored the cloth in warehouses and after the Depression, people had a little money to buy with. They finally sold all the cloth.

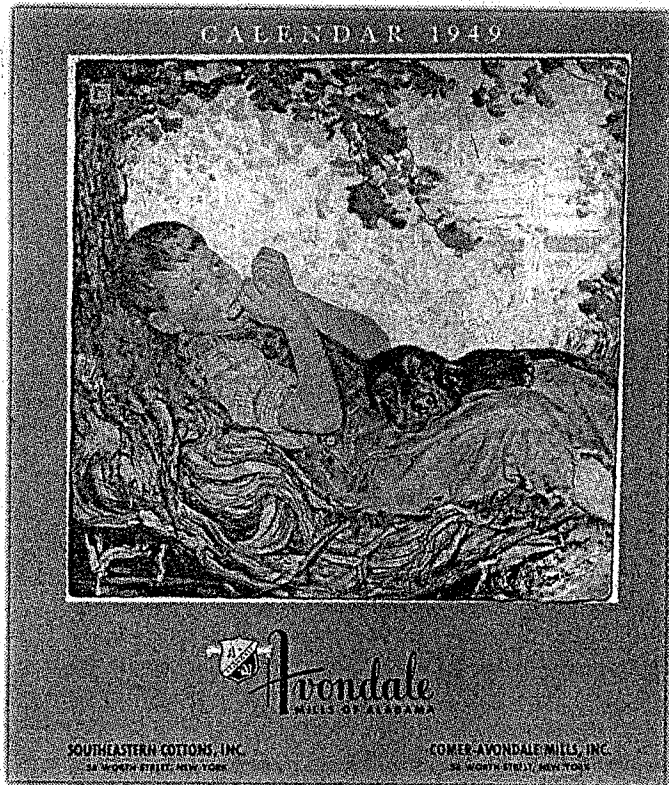
The Comer family was

# words ...

A good group to work for. They cared about their people, and Avondale was a good place to work. I spent about 40 years with them.

I don't remember working for the people that bought Avondale from the Comer's, but I am sure they were nice too. These are just a few thoughts and memories of Avondale.

This calendar was an "attic find" in Sycamore from Byron and Helen White. The year was 1949, and each month depicted some aspect of life at Avondale. The illustrations were from paintings by Douglass Crockwell and were originally done as an advertising campaign for Avondale in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Each month's illustration was a "amable piece of art."



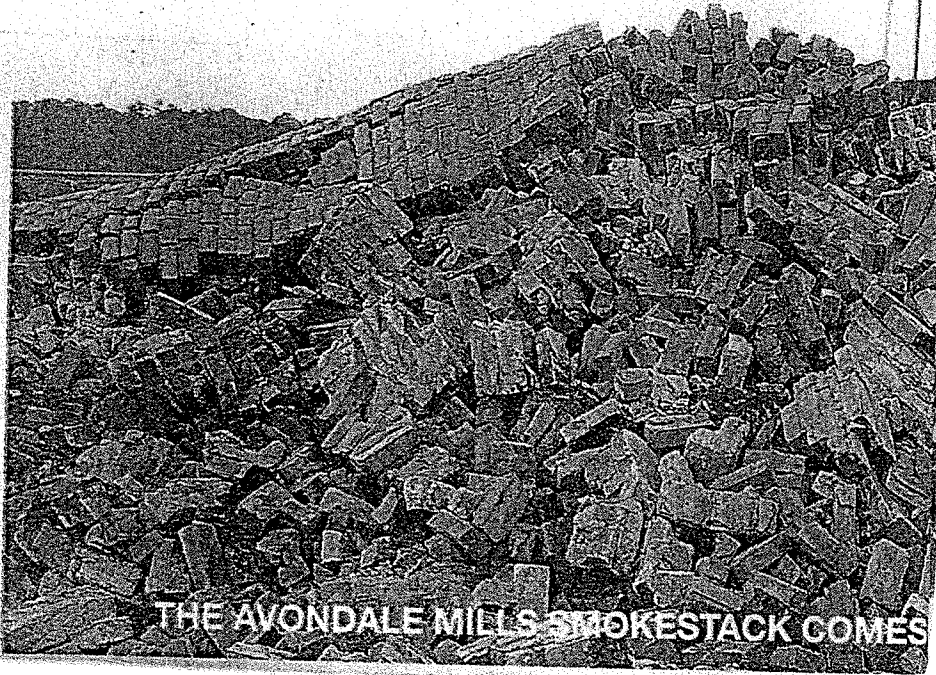
# ST. CLAIR

*Your hometown newspaper*

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Thursday, M

## Historic



THE AVONDALE MILLS SMOKESTACK COMES

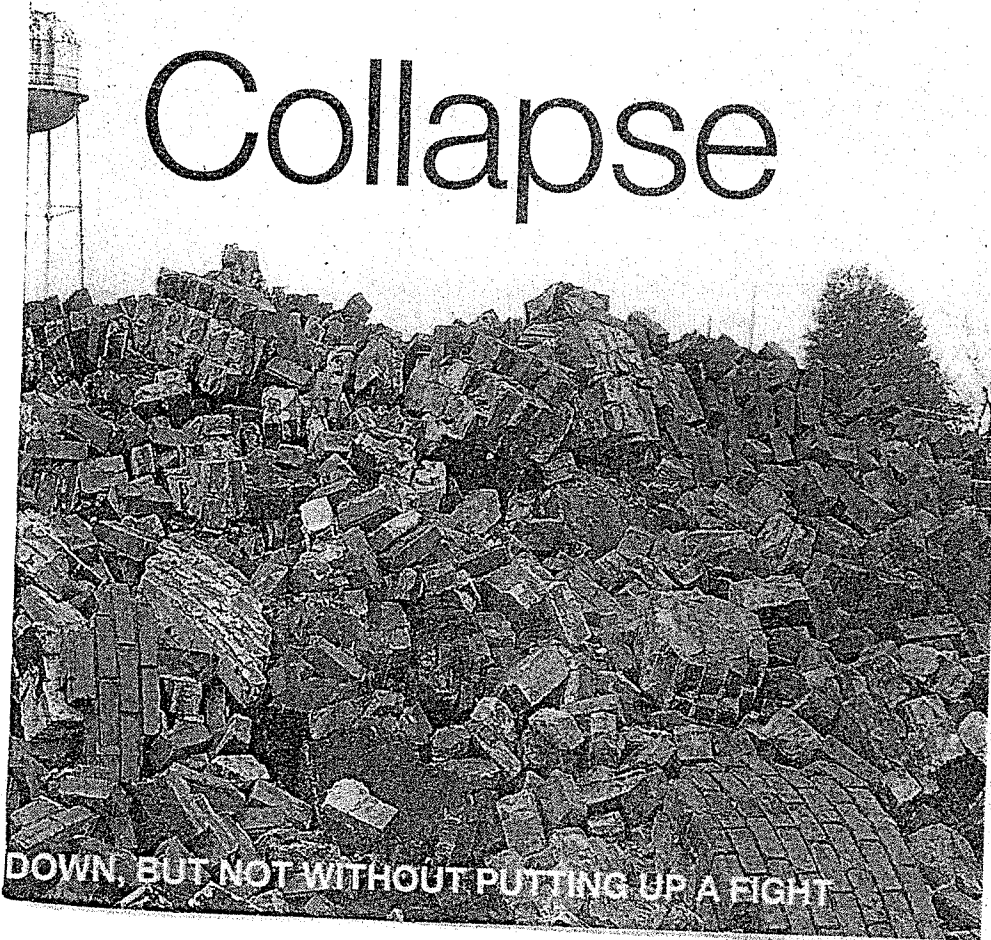
# NEWS-AEGIS

*for St. Clair County since 1873*

November 26, 2015

50 CENTS

## Collapse



DOWN, BUT NOT WITHOUT PUTTING UP A FIGHT



## THIS WEEK

Events on Page A2

**Nov. 28-29: Landis Antiques Mall's Annual Open House.** Saturday 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sunday 1-5 p.m.

**Nov. 30: Leeds Area Open Circle Poets.** 7 p.m. Leeds Theatre and Arts Center.

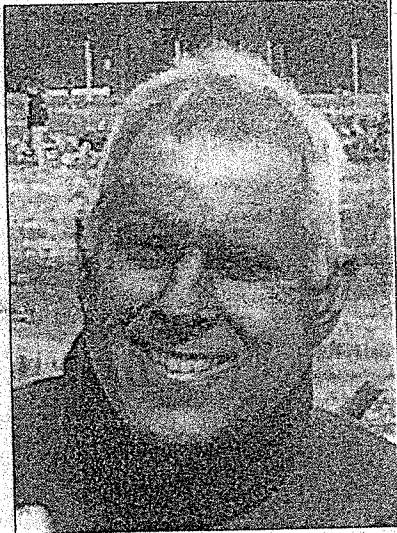
By **JEFF THOMPSON**  
*editor@newsaeigis.com*

On Nov. 24 at 9 a.m., The first explosion cracked the silence, but the structure didn't move. As bricks slowly crumbled at the base of the Avondale Mills smokestack, a chorus of "They don't make 'em like they used to" swept through the crowd that gathered around former mill property in Pell City.

It was almost an hour before

the demo  
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Pell City



On Nov. 24, Pell City's Tim Phifer, left, walked away from what could have been a deadly accident with only his skin stained by soot and minor scrapes to report. The City of Pell City contracted with Phifer of Alabama Phoenix Services to demolish the Avondale Mills smokestack, and after two unsuccessful dynamite detonations at the tower's base, Phifer used a backhoe to chip away at the base of the structure. Following more than an hour of effort the stack collapsed, burying Phifer in the cab of the machine. **Photos by Jeff Thompson.**

lition company placed its second charge, and at 11 a.m. they hit the dynamite. Nothing came out across the channel that instead of another charge, demolition contractor Tim Phifer of Alabama Phoenix Services was using a track hoe to clear the area of debris at the base of the smokestack. The audience reacted as Phifer, a resident, approached

the structure and began chipping away at its base with a piece of heavy equipment.

"That is so stupid," a woman said in the background. "He's going to get himself killed."

Phifer removed a large portion of the tower's brick exterior to reveal an inner support. Made of woven layers of brick mortared by concrete, the core refused to give way — even as the outer layer dwindled to nothing.

Then, with Phifer feet away,

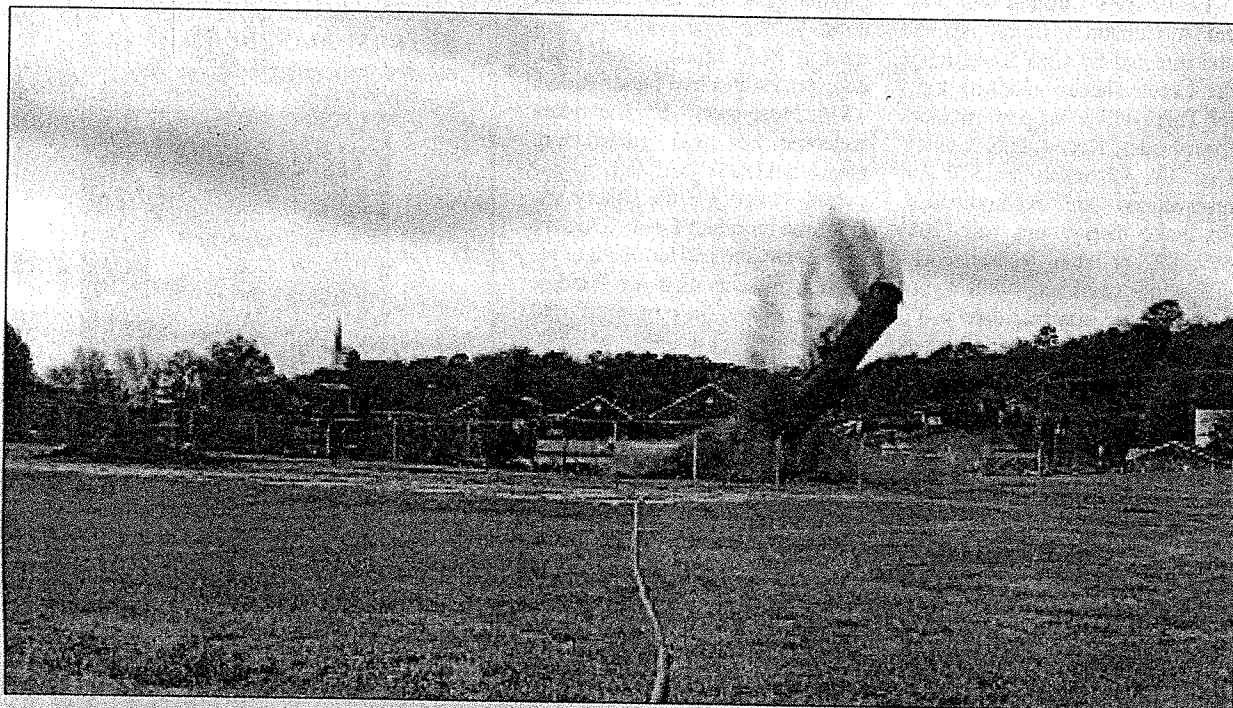
the tower fell the opposite direction of the plan and right onto the top of the track hoe. Right where Phifer was sitting.

"I just stayed inside the cab and rode it out," he said, his clothes and skin coated in black soot except in some places where the scrapes could be seen. Phifer was removed and assisted by medical personnel and released.

City Manager Brian Muenger

Thursday, November 26, 2015

## AVONDALE | From Page A1





**ABOVE: THE INNER CORE OF THE SMOKESTACK WAS COMPOSED OF INTERLACED BRICKS THAT WERE MORTARED WITH CONCRETE. THE EXPLOSIONS CAUSED IT TO FALL INTO THE CENTRAL CHAMBER, REINFORCING THE STRUCTURE.**

said it was Phifer's decision to move the backhoe into harm's way and that he was thankful no one sustained serious injury in the accident, but he acknowledged the morning's result was less than ideal.

"Things definitely didn't go as planned," Muenger said afterward.

Phifer said he elected to set charges at the base of the tower after testing the upper regions.

"We didn't know how the thing was made, but every time we drilled a hole up high it would go into chamber full of ash," he said. "It would be waste put an explosive there, so we tried to blow the bottom out."

But each charge caused rubble to collect in the base and reinforce the core.

"It just kept filling in," Phifer said.

When the dust settled, City officials walked the scene, the centerpiece of which was a buried piece of equipment. Chief of police Greg Turley located a section of the core to find out what had put up so much resistance.

"That's what did it," Turley said, holding a chunk of bricks that remained perfectly mortared even after the 150-foot tower collapsed on top of them.

As Muenger surveyed the site, he pointed to numerous bricks — the majority, really — that had no mortar attached at all. The smooth surfaces proved what previous studies had suggested. Years of erosion had removed the structure's adhesive at the top. Even though it was slow to fall, it wasn't safe, he said.

"This area is supposed to be a park someday, and in this condition the smokestack was certainly a hazard," he said.

In the coming days, City crews will clean the site, and salvageable bricks — of which there are many — will be put on pallets and saved as officials decide a use for them. During the Council meeting on Nov. 23, Council President James McGowan suggested they be sold to raise money for future development on the site.

Council members appeared to like the idea, but no official decision has been made.



## OPINION

# A community as strong as its tower

By JEFF THOMPSON  
Editor

I can see the Avondale Mills smokestack through my office window in downtown. When I came to Pell City in January, it's one of the reasons I put my desk there.

The day it fell, Nov. 24, I set up a camera on the corner of 4th and 29th in the Mill Village and stood with a crowd of about 50 through the first charge at 9 a.m. and the second at 10 a.m. Then, around 11 a.m., after 45 minutes of watching the demolition team use a piece of heavy equipment to hammer away at the metal flume in the center, I returned to my desk and looked out the window.

From there, blocks away from the tower itself, I could still hear the machine strike the structure. I stopped being excited about the explosion, and I started feeling sad.

This tower has had a difficult day. More so, it's had a hard life. It's survived more than 100 years of erosion, including the 2011 tornadoes. It survived a fire that consumed the buildings around it.

Today, it stood through two detonations and an extensive attack on its foundation. The bricks at its base scattered around it revealing nothing but a central support, and it just stood there defying reason and physics.

It literally refused to die.

As I wrote this, it was still there. And when I looked at it, I was proud of it. It's watched over generations of residents — families that built their futures here thanks to what it was and what it stood for. It's an aged patriarch that endured for the sake of those who needed it. And it reminded us today, on its deathbed, its strength is our strength.

It had to come down, and it did. The property will never have been allowed to move forward with it looming like it is. But in its final moments, it gave us more of a gift than we ever could have hoped to receive from its destruction.

At 11 a.m., the smokestack had resisted death for two hours. Remember that when you look toward the future of your city. It was built just like the tower; its people raised to endure all forms of hell.

You're as strong as your tower, Pell City. Remember that when you tell the story of the morning it wouldn't fall. Remember it, because it's the story of your community.

---

# QUOTABLE

"I'm sad to see it go. It's been a company and business that's put Pell City on the map. It's a part of history that we are putting behind us." - **J.R. Oden**

"It's really sad to me, but things don't stay the same way forever. It is a part of our history coming down, but things change over time." - **Lavonne Brown (father and sister worked at Avondale)**

"If it's a hazard, yeah, take it down. I would love to see it stay, but not if it isn't safe." - **Alex Odem (great grandmother and great grandfather worked at Avondale)**

"The stack brings back a lot of memories. I just hope the city does something with the property, so it doesn't go to waste. There's a lot of memories out here in this field." - **Kent Beavers (He and family members worked at Avondale)**

"It's heartbreaking. The smokestack was something I had hoped my children growing up now would have something to see and be reminded of their grandparents. We have photos, but that's all we have now." - **Tammy Floyd (Parents Junior and Elba Shirley both worked at Avondale Mills)**



## Letters from the desk

*A Letter Written to Harmon Mims  
from Hugh Comer on May 26, 1933*

Dear Harmon,  
I just want to write you and say what a fine chap I think you are. I have watched your work here closely during the last year and I think you not only deserve but will attain success in your life.

I don't know what your plans are for the Fall - whether you want to continue on as Band Instructor for another year before you go off to school, but I want you to know that I am ready to talk with you any time.

At graduation time, I know it is customary to make some little presentation to your friends and here is my check for \$10.00 and I would like for you just to kindly throw it away - get something that you like to have but that you feel would be a little to expensive for you.

Yours very truly,  
Hugh Comer

This photo was made in the late 1940s in the old Avondale general office with the late Hugh Comer, seated.

*For the Avondale Sun:*

It is certainly fine to be getting friends, Sally and Harmon, and orchestra, from points in Florida just received a card from the marked Key West. This is away we are happy to know that this their own initiative and expense a trip for themselves that has cost the brand new over-seas highway. This orchestra is furnishing a fine only to the social life at Sycamore and other mill points but they are inspiration to the religious program places, as well.

I am giving you the name of this because I want everybody to know I am mighty glad to have you with me.

AVONDALE MILLS

# es of Avondale

THE DAILY HOME, Talladega-Sylacauga-Pell City, Ala., Sunday, August 13, 2006 — 5

## of Hugh Comer



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Also pictured are Henry Blocker, Louie Machen, Jim Ward, Walter Roark, Walker Hunter, Homer Reed, Howard Hill, Bobby DeLoach, Merle Mizzell, Carol Watson, Margaret Henderson, Helen Harmon and Coleen King.

# Water recreation for

By June Winters  
Sylacauga

Researching Avondale's involvement in the community has been a great challenge for everyone at The Daily Home. Every corner we've turned we have discovered more!

You've heard the old saying "sometimes you can't see the forest for looking at the trees, and that's about the way I felt when Shirley Bain asked me the other day if I had written anything about Camp Brownie. The one thing that probably meant more to me than anything — was the thing I forgot.

I know a lot about Camp Brownie myself, because my uncle and aunt, Bill and Ollie Mae Edwards, were caretakers there for

many years.

My brothers know even more than I do because they spent more time there than I did, especially my older brother, Gerald Foster.

Camp Brownie was located on the Coosa River in Fayetteville. It was a "mini Camp Helen," on the river rather than the bay.

There was a "big house" on the hill, with several bedrooms furnished with cots, a huge kitchen with commercial-type stove and long tables. There was also a recreation room.

Several small cabins were scattered about the area, and on the bank of the river, there was a pavilion with a long picnic table, where groups came for picnics and "watermelon cuttings."

My uncle wasn't the first caretaker at Camp Brownie, but he

was the last. Hel Power Company water up and Avondale sold C

Helen Hute recalls a Mr. at a Mr. and Mrs. Mr. and Mrs. (also caretakers.

She recalls Brownie when girl and riding Avondale had p there was a very on the boat, and up and down the "as far down as t

Shirley Bain n pool on the groi so cold you cot My brother says by a spring and there in the woo

## Avondale in your

From Page 3

to entertain employees.

Avondale was the best company I ever worked for. It was a privilege to work for such wonderful people.

### Avondale memories precious ones

By Lunease Shell  
Sylacauga

I would like to share some of my precious memories of Avondale Mills having retired in 2002 with 35 years of service.

I worked in Eva Jane plant and Sylacauga. Finishing all those years.

I remember the days when the Comer family cared about the employees, supplied fruit baskets, and gifts at Christmas. Once a year we would look forward to our bonus (profit sharing) checks each fall that helped us get our children ready for school. On inspection days, Mr. Comer (Hugh & Donald), also Mr. Craig Smith, would come



Cindy, received a full nursing scholarship upon graduation in 1972. My daughter April, was awarded the J. Craig Smith Scholarship in 1992.

Some of my fondest memories are of Camp Helen in Panama City, Fla. We stayed in cottages and had three meals a day served in the dining hall. We could go out on the "Sunrise", The Comers' yacht to go

went on each day that were planned by the director. I'll never forget the dinner bell that rang three times a day.

Someone once told me "my kids didn't think Camp Helen was Heaven, but they believed Heaven would have a Camp Helen." I agree.

Avondale helped us to be able to raise our kids in the Mill Village, send them to Comer School, and I am so proud to be a part of such an elite group of people.

# everyone

ft when Alabama backed the river at Lay Lake. Camp Brownie.

son Roberson Mrs. Roberts, Culbertson and a rizzle who were

ing to Camp ne was a little

a house boat ided. She said colorfull canopy

hey would ride ver, sometimes Coosa Ferry."

lls a swimming ls, "with water it stay in it." pool was fed probably still omewhere.

Camp Brownie was a modest place. There were no frills, but it was peaceful, quiet and comfortable. A perfect place for families to get away for a weekend, and it was not too far.

Avondale was generous with the camp and was always willing to let church groups and other civic groups use it any time.

### Other lakes

I am told there was a similar camp near Springville for Pell City Avondale employees, but time ran out before I could explore this. I intend to try to find out one of these days, and welcome a note from anyone who knows about the camp.

There was another recreation area Sylacauga Avondale employees enjoyed tremendously. Lake

Louise located in Mignon was one of the most popular places in the area. This lake too, had the most wonderful cool water and was a favorite swimming place for the young and old alike.

Lake Louise is still there, but there's no swimming now, and picnic areas are a thing of the past.

Beautiful, private homes dot the shore now, and the serenity is the same today as it was yesterday.

So long Camp Helen, Camp Brownie, Lake Louise, Avondale Lake and the great people who created you for our pleasure.

Those days are gone forever. But the good memories will last forever for each one of us who had the pleasure of enjoying these special places.

# words ...

me to want to publish se memories that we rish so dearly. And thank Avondale from all our ily.

### Avondale's good old days remembered

Vivonne C. Helton Sylacauga

My father, J.D. Clifton, his two brothers, were partners for Avondale in the late 1930's and early 40's. I was the only child in a family of six children. I was born in the hospital. My mother was born at Drummond-hospital.

One of the two stories I remember best is during the late 1930's, a new man was to work at Avondale. There was no housing here, so my father hired a carpenter crew and built a house on the corner of Eighth and Norton streets where the Sylacauga swimming Pool now stands, for my parents.

It was one of the better houses in Sylacauga.

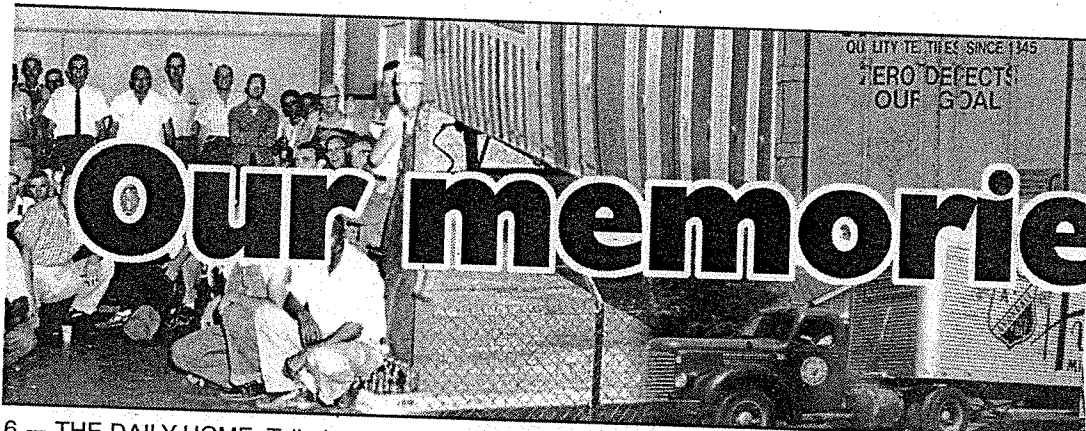


**DAPPER DUKE HORNSBY** gets a big birthday surprise. His grandchildren from Goodwater have been putting on civic club appearances, radio shows and the like for some time but Duke had never heard them but, as a birthday present, they prepared a special program to surprise him at the Avondale Exchange Club. Our Royalty from Tuscaloosa Avenue is shown with his favorite entertainers: Freda, 14; Susan, 13; Howard, 11 and Ray 7—and, you have our word for it, this whole Hornsby group is GOOD, GOOD, GOOD.

money from Avondale Credit Union to build a house. My uncle built the house for \$125 and a mule. He got the mule, but never the money.

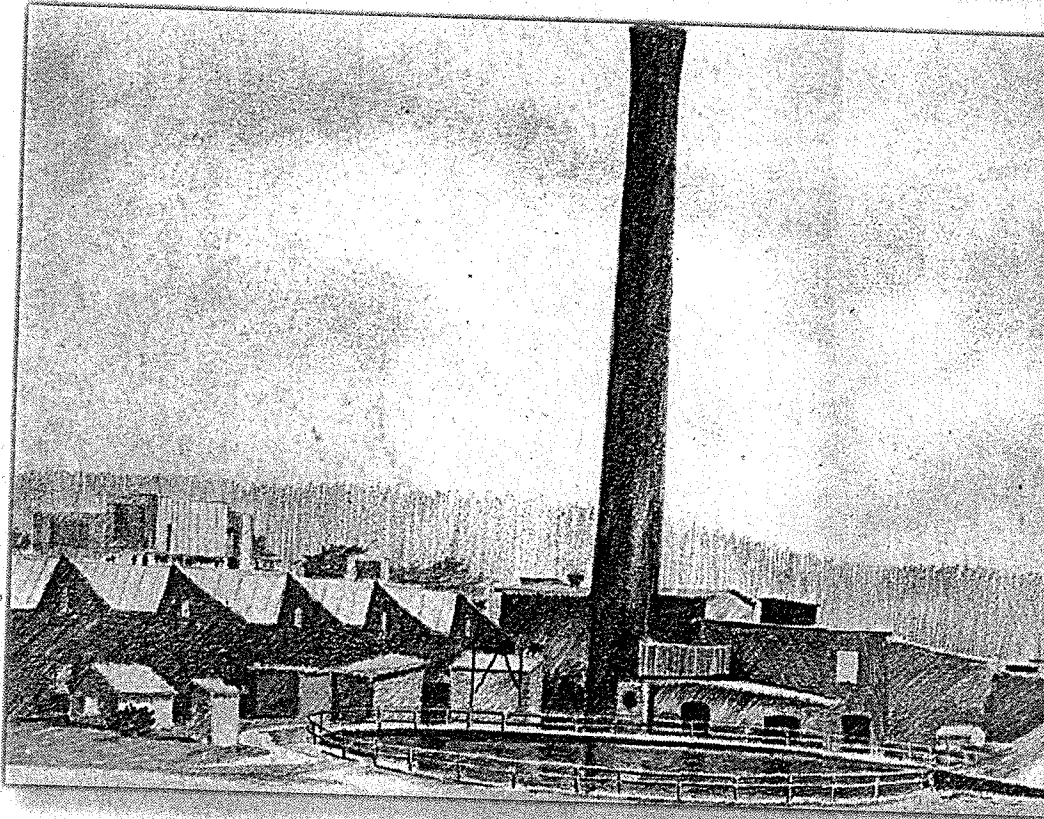
I was a student at R R

We wore a cotton white shirt and a white v-neck sweater with a gold "C" on the front. All of our uniforms were furnished by Mr. Comer.

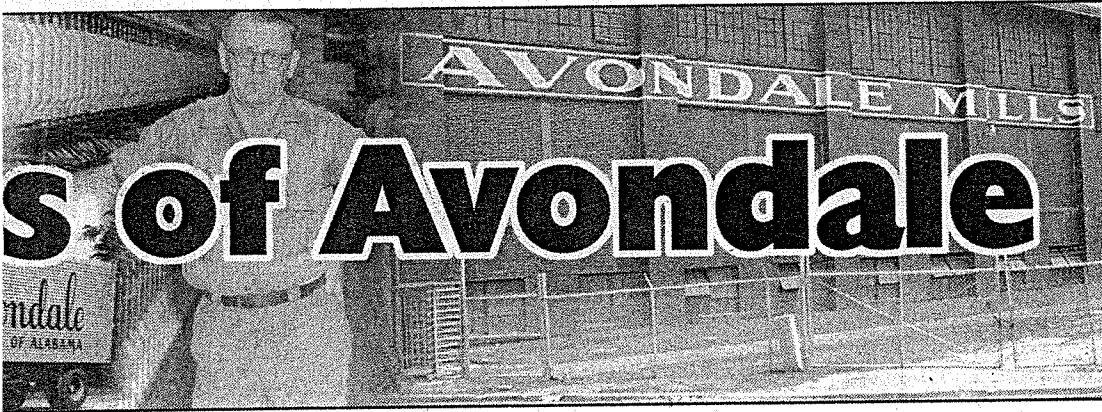


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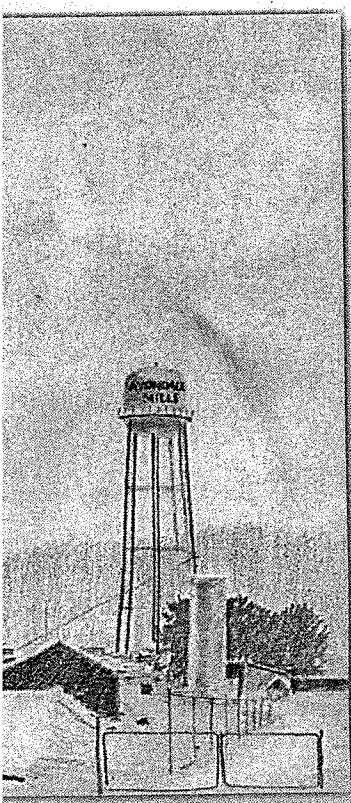
# From the



This is a drawing of the Avondale Mills plant in Pell City, which was done by Pell 1982. The drawing was provided by Mrs. Hattie Collins of Pell City.



# e archives

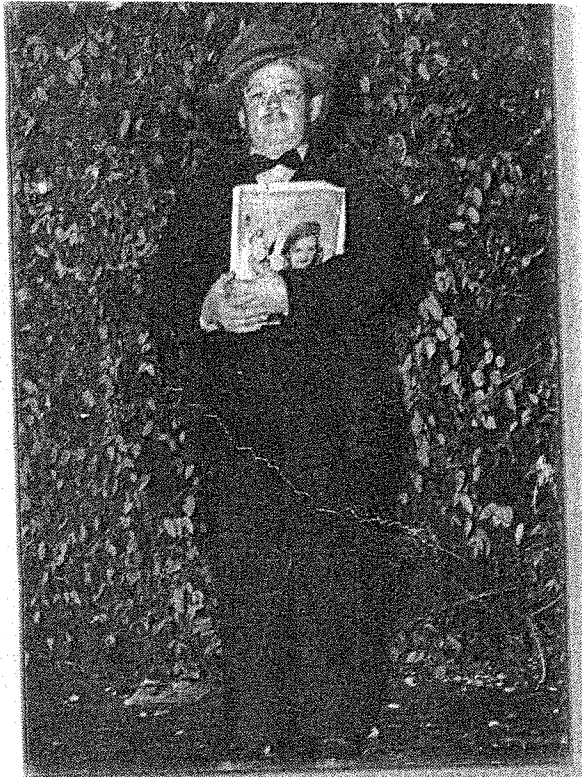


ty artist Wayne Spradley in

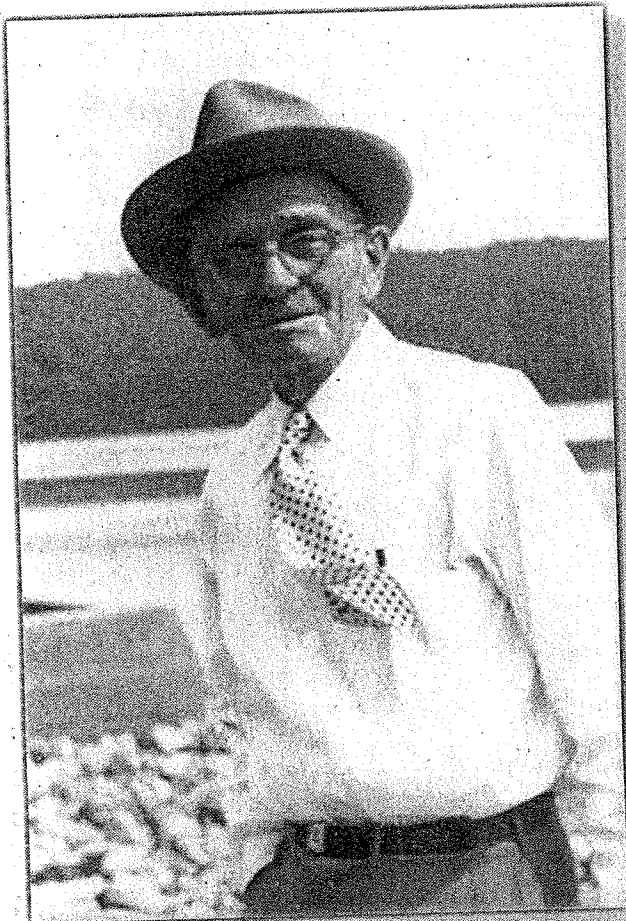
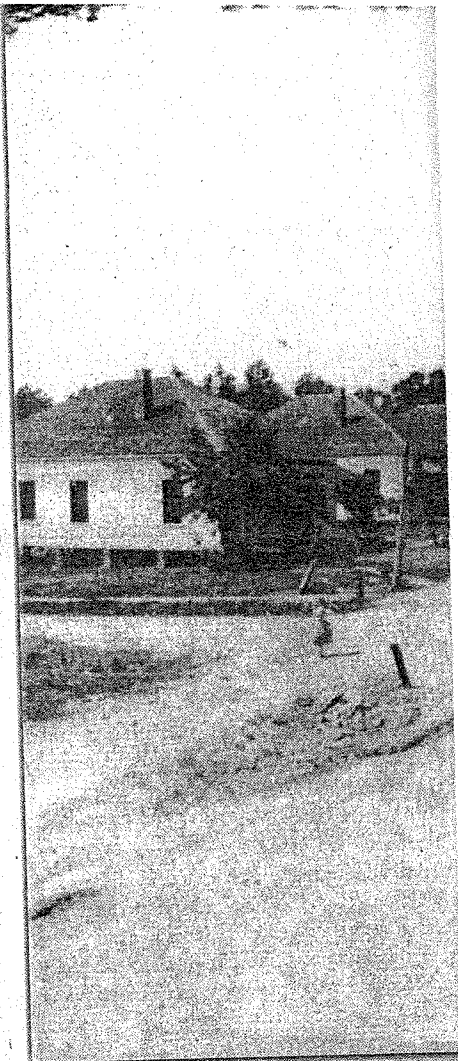


Harmon Mims, long time band director for Avondale Mills in Sycamore and Sylacauga.

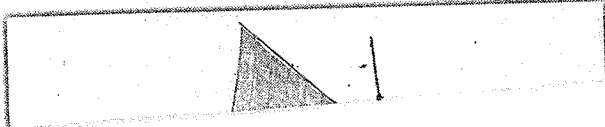




Mrs. Viola Hollis, the preacher in the "Manless Wedding," M.I. Club, Pell City.



Cordell Wright, grandfather of "Avondale kid," Julia Skelton of Pell City.





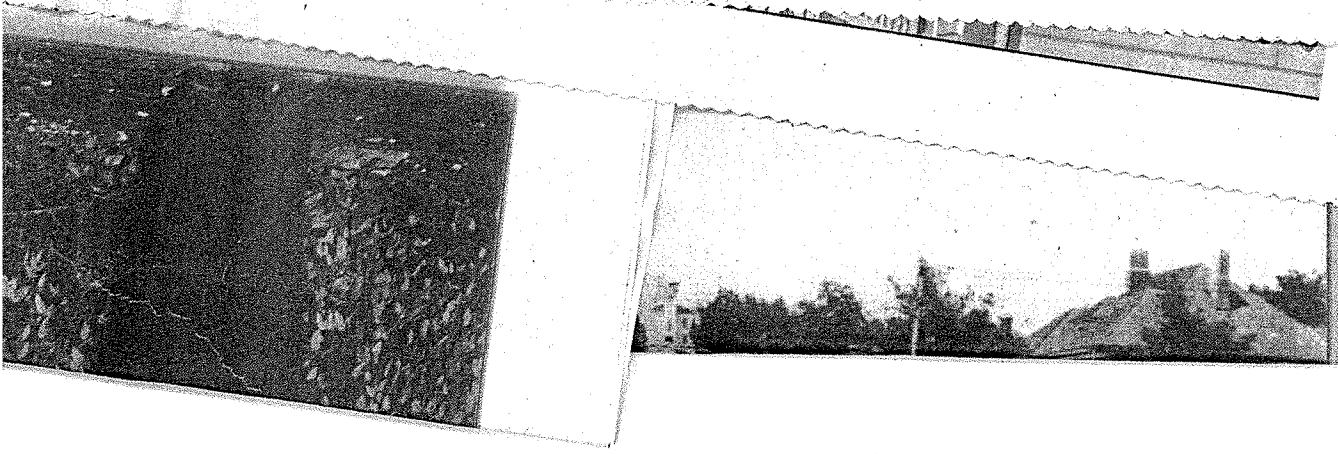
This is the pay stub of former Avondale Mills worker Frank Lee Jr., who worked for the company from 1946-1958. He was making about \$1.02 an hour at the plant in 1949.

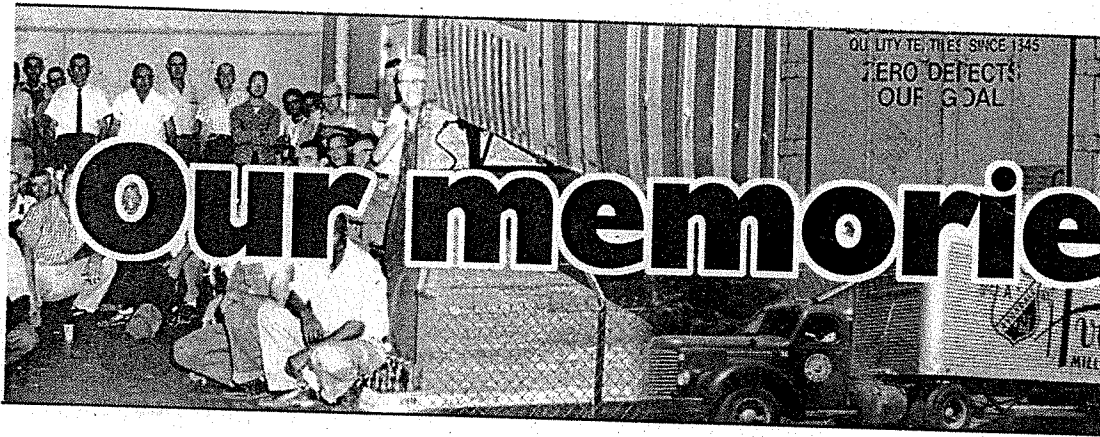
**STATEMENT**  
**PAY AND DEDUCTIONS**  
**AVONDALE MILLS**

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 2528 FRANK LEE, JR. SEP. 11, 1949

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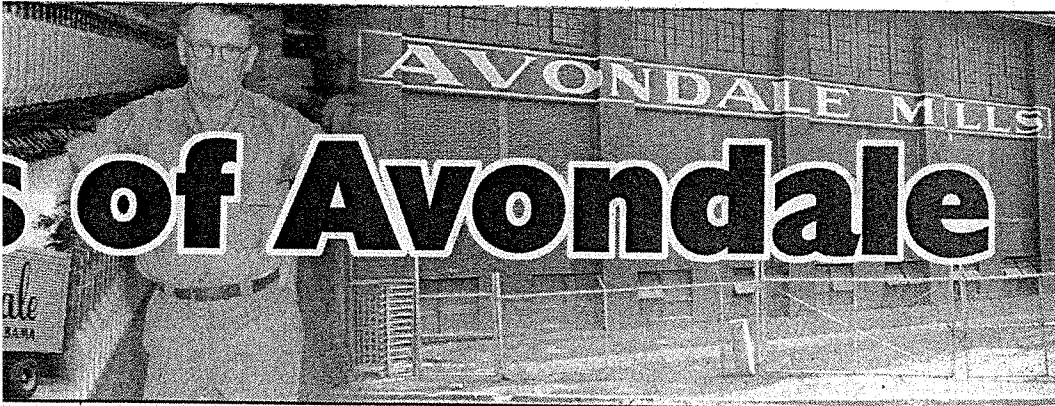


# From the



Avondale Band makes its way through downtown Sylacauga parade, 1942.





THE DAILY HOME, Talladega-Sylacauga-Pell City, Ala., Sunday, August 13, 2006 — 7

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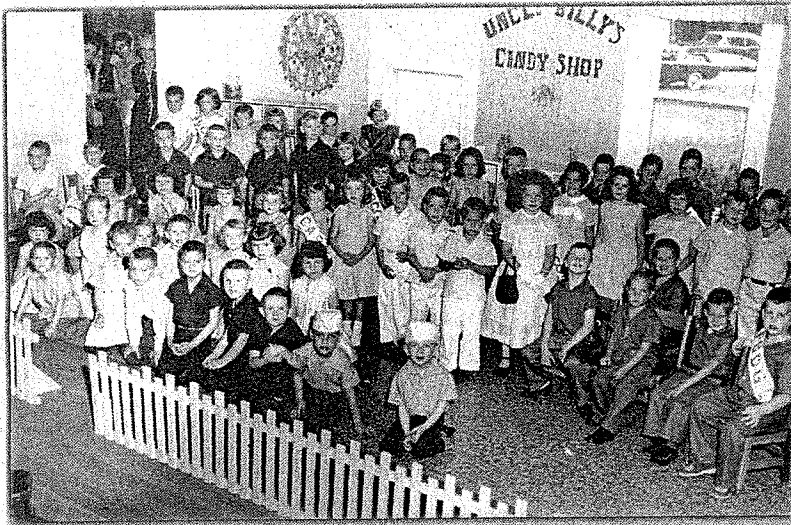
Founder B.B. Comer



J.M. Henley at age 18, Avondale's first band director



Pell City's early mill



Kindergarteners in Sylacauga, 1958

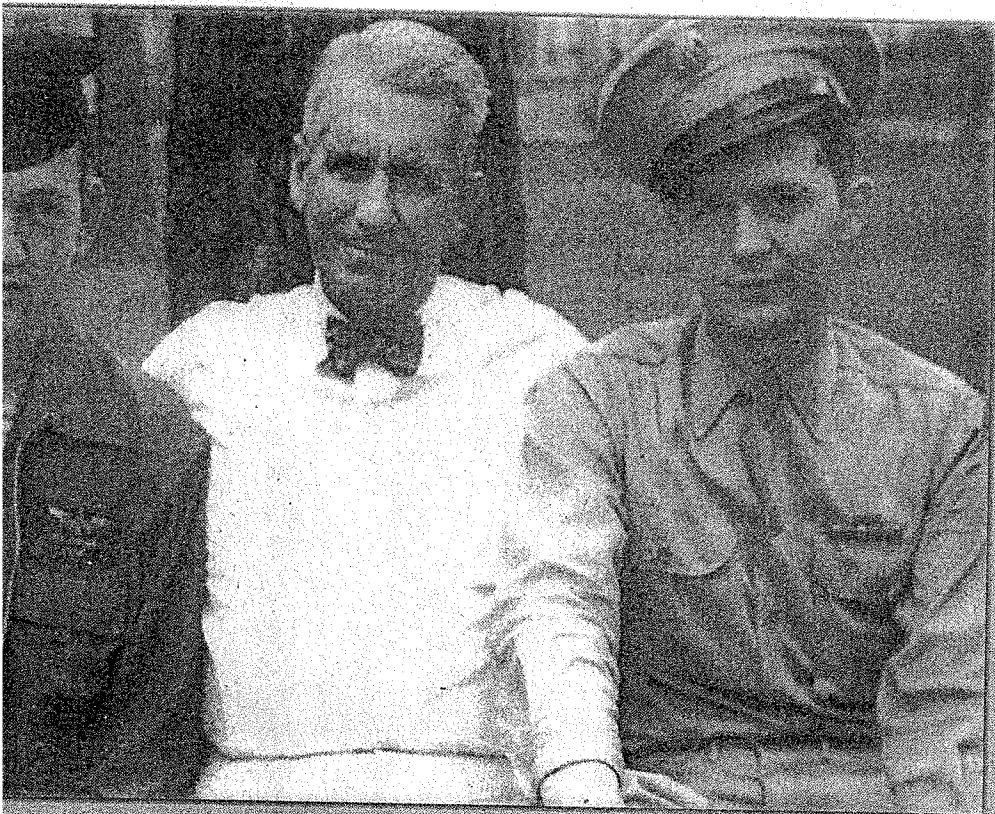


From left, David Wy on weekend pass, an the sons and daughte When Mr. Comer hea He asked him to mee Overlord, the invasion Medallion. Milton was

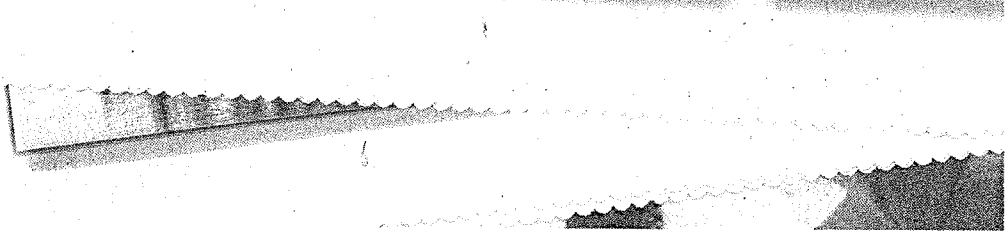




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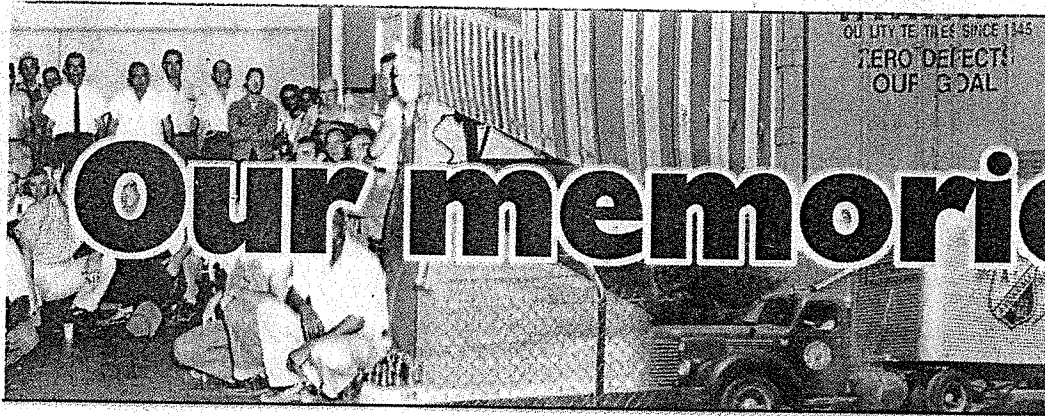


r., Hugh Comer and Milton Bulger. According to Cissy Wyatt: "David was home ton came home, not knowing David was home. Mr. Comer was very proud of his Avondale employees who were helping the U.S.A. to retain her sovereignty. they were here, he called Bill Irby, editor and photographer of the company. n in Avondale Park and make a picture of the three. David was in Operation rance called D-Day. He received two purple hearts and the Greatest Generation ve Navy."









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## *And the bands play*

### Music a central part of life for many in mill community

By **Sara Ann Mims Price**  
Sylacauga

My father, Harmon Mims, was the director of Avondale Mills band for about 20 years and also head of the Mignon band activities.

The bands sponsored by Avondale Mills were big business in those days. At one time, they had more than 150 persons of all ages enrolled in three band groups, the girls' saxophone band, Drum and Bugle Corps and the Big Band.

This was way back when former Gov. B.B. Comer was in charge at Avondale. The Comer family gave great support to the band programs of their cotton mills, and they went everywhere.

My dad and mother played in the band when J.M. Henley was the director. My mother, Sallie Mims, played the trumpet, and Dad played the bass drum.

My mother worked in the mill as a spinner in the Old Central mills, the only plant in Sylacauga at that time. She was so small she had to have help to get her

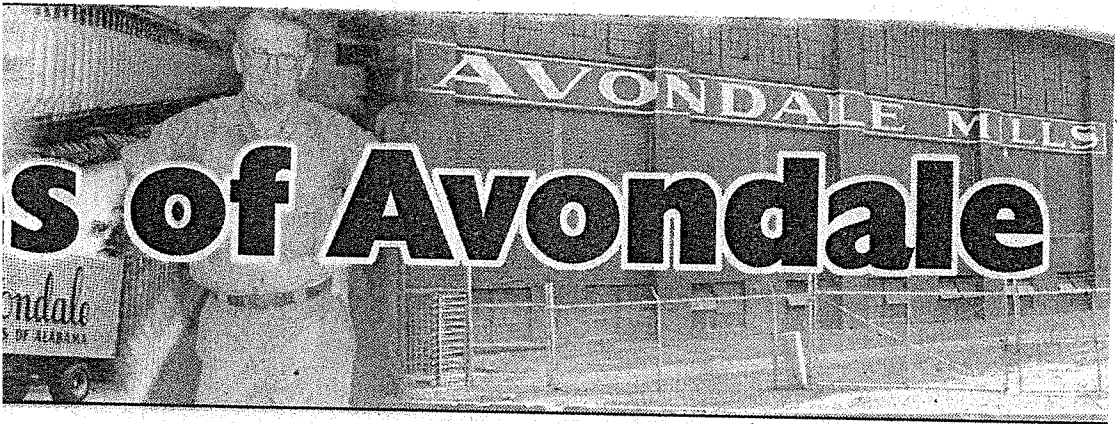
who lived in Sycamore but almost everyone attended the Second Variety Program that was given in front of the Band Hall Tuesday night, beginning at 7:30 and ending at 9:30. My dad was Toast Master, Band Master, announcer and, in general, just the all-around man of the whole program.

The band pleased the people with some very beautiful numbers — first, “The Star Spangled Banner,” after which my dad read the “American Prayer” while everyone stood with bowed heads. They would end this program by playing “Boogie Woogie Band”.

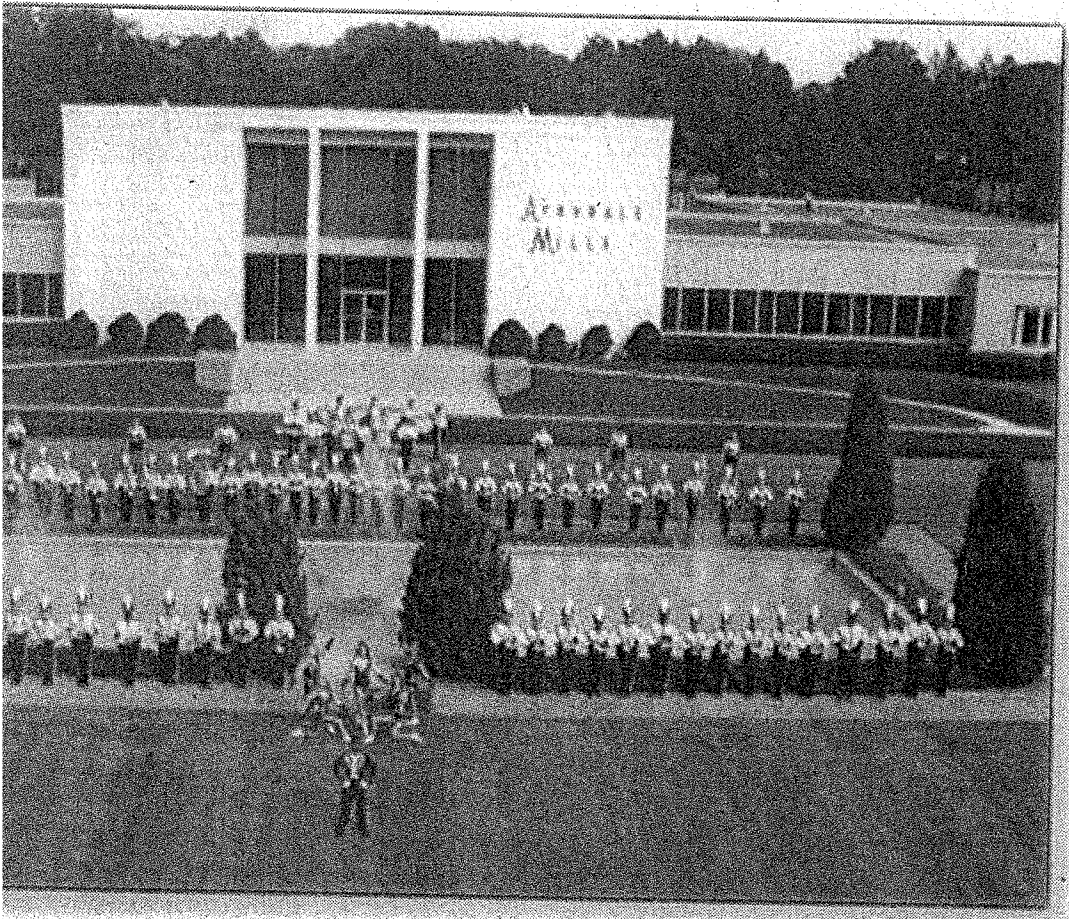
In 1942, they moved to Sylacauga. They were famous for their band work. They organized an orchestra. My mother played the piano, and my dad played in it and also directed the group. The band practiced at the Beverly Hall in Sylacauga. I had a lady tell me just the other day that she joined the band in Sylacauga and my dad told her right quick that she couldn't play!!

I remember all the major-ettes with the Sylacauga band. They were good. The Drum Major was Billy Joe Hickman at the time, and I





*ed on*



was the band director at Sycamore, and he invited the Mignon group to come to Sycamore to play.

A job was offered to my dad, and he went to work in Avondale's company store operated by the late Cecil Mizzell, and my mother got a job in the mill kindergarten.

It was not long after that when Mr. Hugh Comer asked my dad to take over the Sycamore band. The band room was located next to the company store in Sycamore, and Mr. Hugh Comer would come to band practice and baby-sit me.

Not just the people

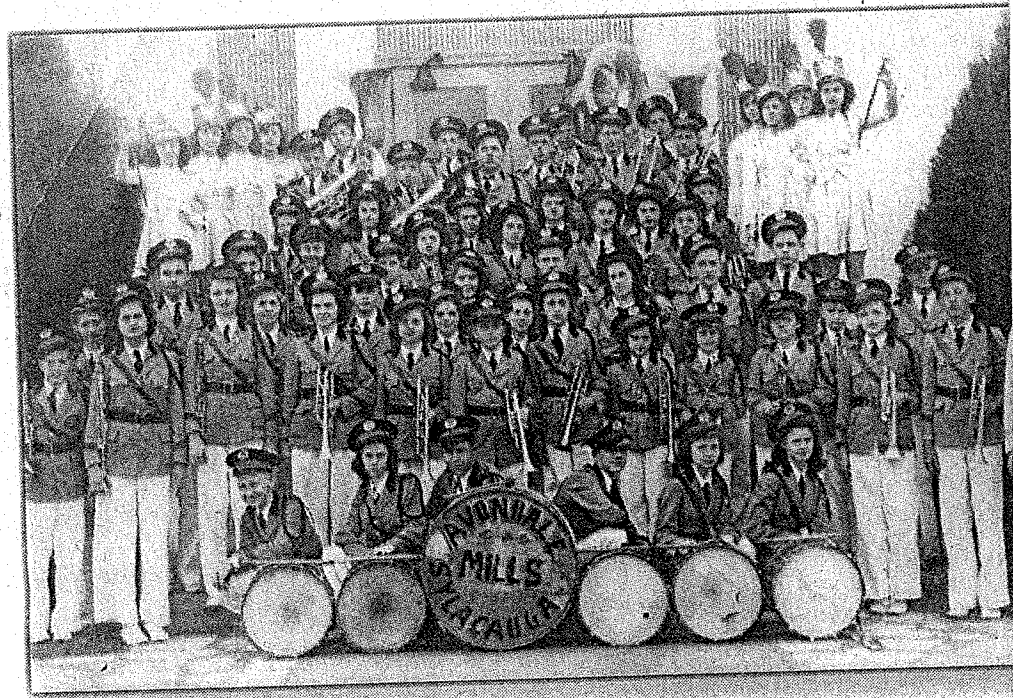
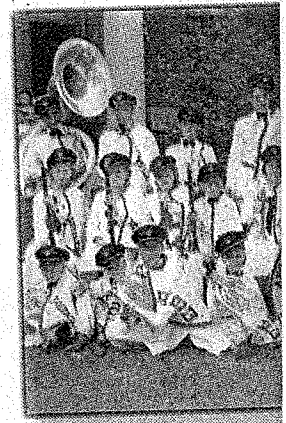
until she went to 5113 and couldn't play anymore.

I can remember marching in Pell City for parades. The band always played for the inspections. Lewis Simpkins at that time was the band director in Pell City, and he and my dad were great friends.

Dad also played in a dance band, which was much in demand for dances in the area. He played with the late Lewis Simpkins and Gene Landreth, a blind musician from Alabama Institute for the Blind in Talladega. Gene Landreth could play a piano like no one else!



Majorettes pose in school.



Avondale Band plays in Alexander City parade, 1935.

front of Pell City's Avondale



1940s Avondale Mills Dance Band

INSPECTION PROGRAM

AVONDALE MILLS MARCHING BAND CONCERT AND SYCAMORE CHORAL CLUB

B. B. COMER MEMORIAL SCHOOL AUDITORIUM

Tuesday, May 7, 1940, 5 P. M.

Bands and directors participating: Birmingham, Eugene C. Jordan; Pell City, Lewis Simpkins; Alexander City, Tommie Russell; Wagon and Sycamore, Harmon Nims.

1. Stars and Stripes Forever      John Philip Sousa  
Directed by Harmon Nims
2. Scenes From Operaland      Arr. by Al Hayes  
Directed by Lewis Simpkins
3. Over The Rainbow      Xylophone Acc., Eugene C. Jordan, Jr.  
Directed by Lewis Simpkins
4. The Bells of St. Mary's      Trumpet Quartette, Sycamore  
Piano Acc., Dorris Hickman
5. Figgly Wiggly      Xylophone Solo, Eugene C. Jordan, Jr.  
Directed by Eugene C. Jordan

6. Sycamore Choral Club      Directed by Mrs. W. F. Christian

1. Invitations
2. Songs My Mother Taught Me, Medley
3. Desert Lullaby

7. Sweet and Low      Saxophone Quintette, Sycamore  
Directed by Harmon Nims

8. Black Eyes, Waltz      Arr. by Briegel  
Directed by Tommie Russell

9. South of the Border      Vocal Trio, Alexander City  
Directed by Tommie Russell

10. The Singing Hills      Vocal Solo, Shirley Peak  
Directed by Harmon Nims

11. Sharpshooters March      Ascortian Solo, Eugene C. Jordan, Jr.  
Directed by Eugene C. Jordan

12. The Trumpeters Three      Trumpet Trio, Birmingham  
Directed by Eugene C. Jordan

# Avondale Announces Modernization Plans

The Pell City plant of Avondale Mills will get a big bite of the \$8.5 million which the company announced this week they would spend in 1961 for modernization and improvement of their plants in Alabama.

The exact amount of money to be spent at Pell City in the modernization plans was not stated in the first news released.

The Pell City Mill will be changed from weaving blue denim, its principal product for many years, to a grey goods operation. The local plant is operating on 2 shifts at present, but when the move to the new type of goods is completed, they will operate three shifts, according to Avondale Mills officials.

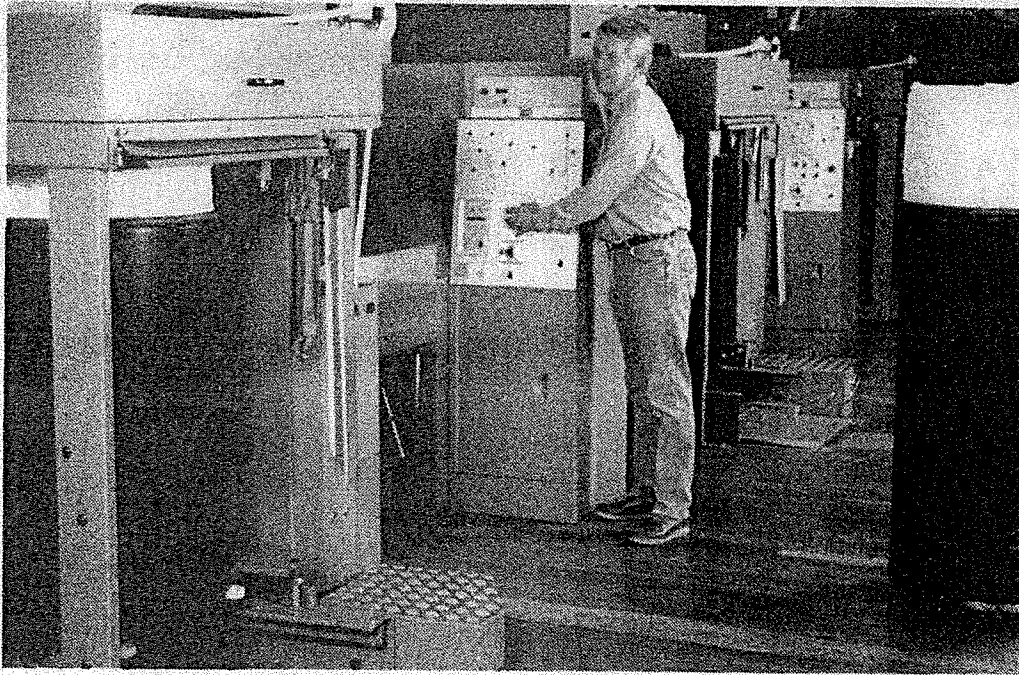
J. Craig Smith, Avondale president, had this to say re-

garding the mill: "During the past five years, our hourly rate of pay has increased 27%, and our average total labor cost per pound has decreased 14%."

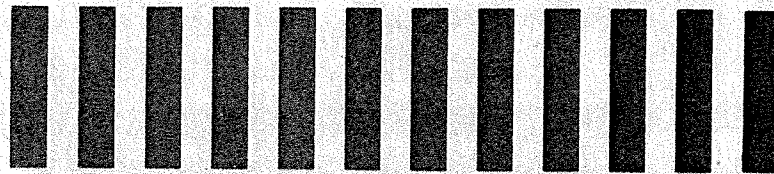
The company recently distributed \$1,389,137 of profit-sharing money to their employees

Mr. Smith said, "We begin our new year with unfilled orders for 20,227,000 pounds."

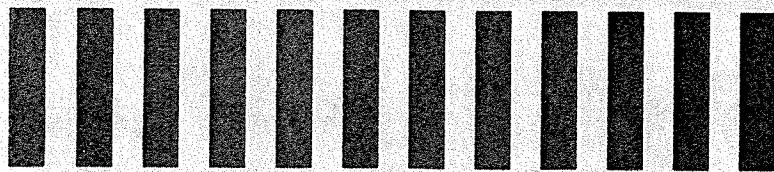
Avondale's plans, unfolding a short time after Valk Mfg. Co. announced plans for enlargement of their Pell City plant, is good news from the Pell City industrial front.



Avondale's Yarn Division is the nation's largest supplier of sales yarn to the knitting industry. The company has achieved state-of-the-art technology throughout its plants. Pictured is Mike Evans.



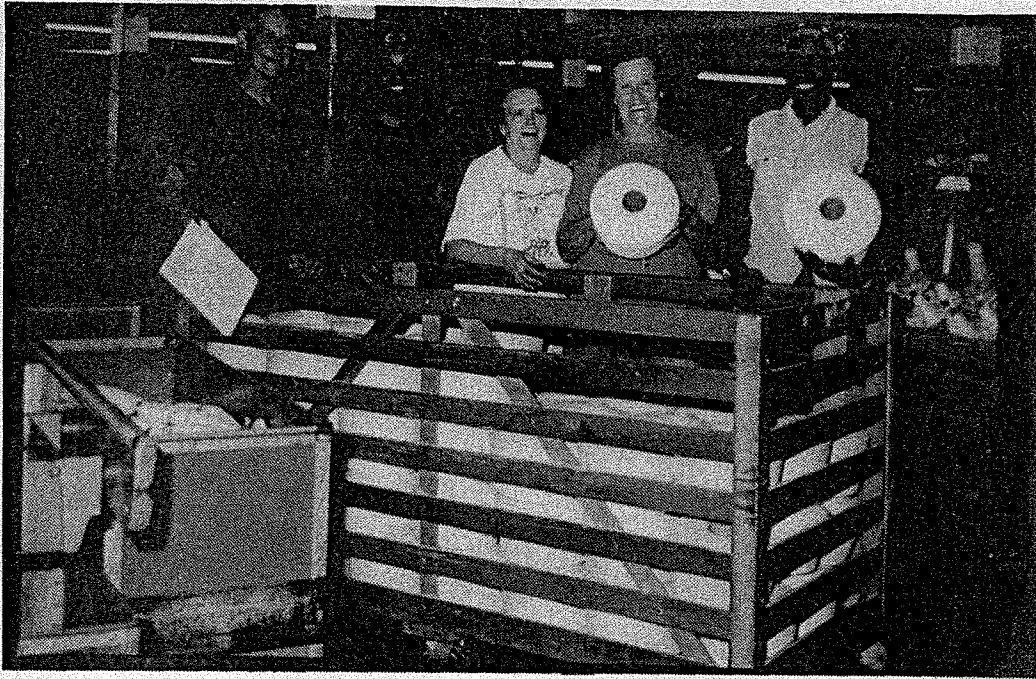
**AVONDALE**



**ZERO DEFECTS OUR GOAL**

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and safety  
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of the St.  
years.

**Richard Swear  
Plant Manag**



**Avondale is proud to have completed two years without any loss-time injuries.**

**Pictured L-R: Fred Gossett, Ronnie Garrett, Dean Dye, Vertis Carlisle, Bessie King.**

and run's throughout avondale's history: commitment to quality and integrity and a concern for the well being of it's associates. Quality and safety are of paramount importance at Avondale. Avondale is proud to have been a vital part of the Clair County area for more than 80

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**Guin Robinson**  
**Human Resources Manager**



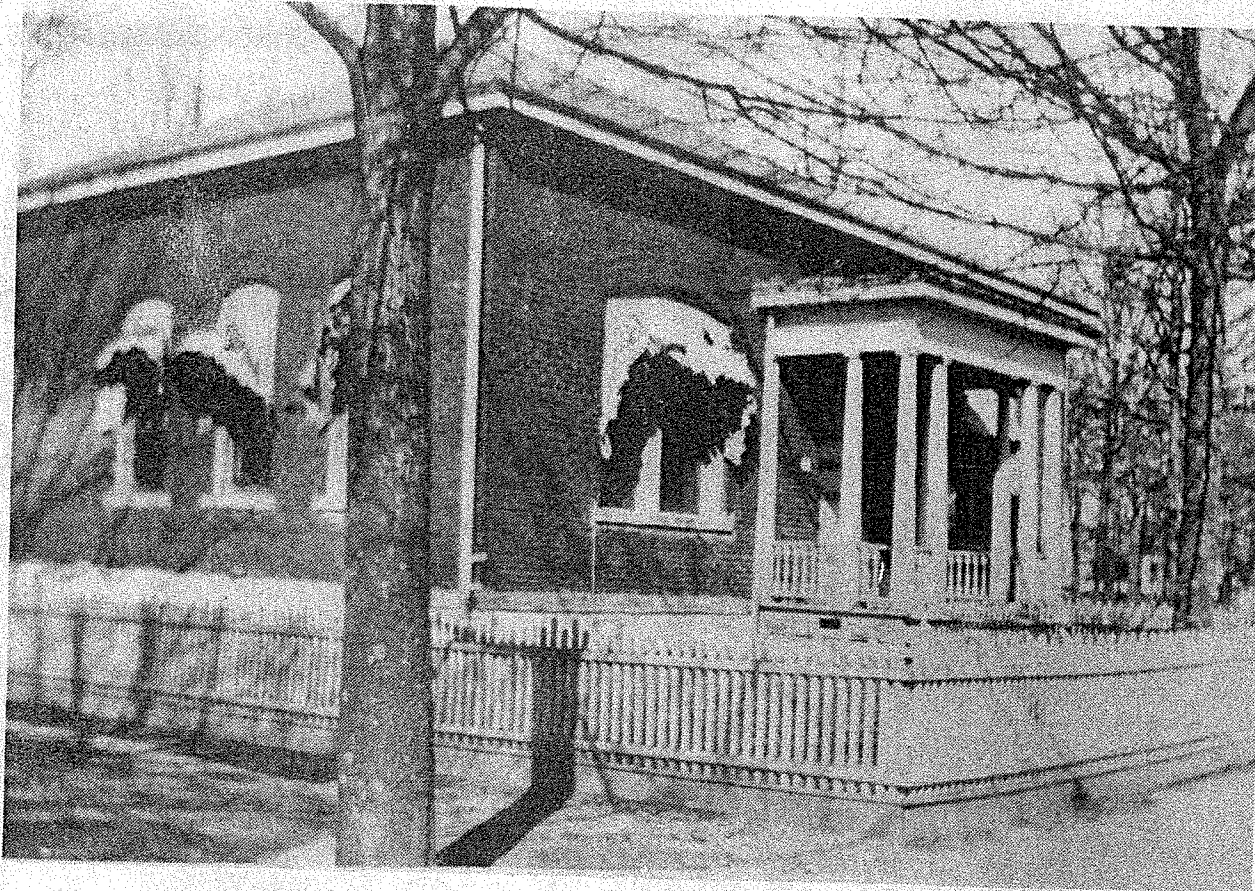


**BLACKSMITH SHOP**—This picture shows the Theo Scott Blacksmith Shop that was located on Main Street in Ringville. The blacksmith shop was run from water from Spring Creek and was the only shop with a rubber tire machine for buggies. Wagons and buggies were built and repaired there. The picture was taken in the early 1900s.

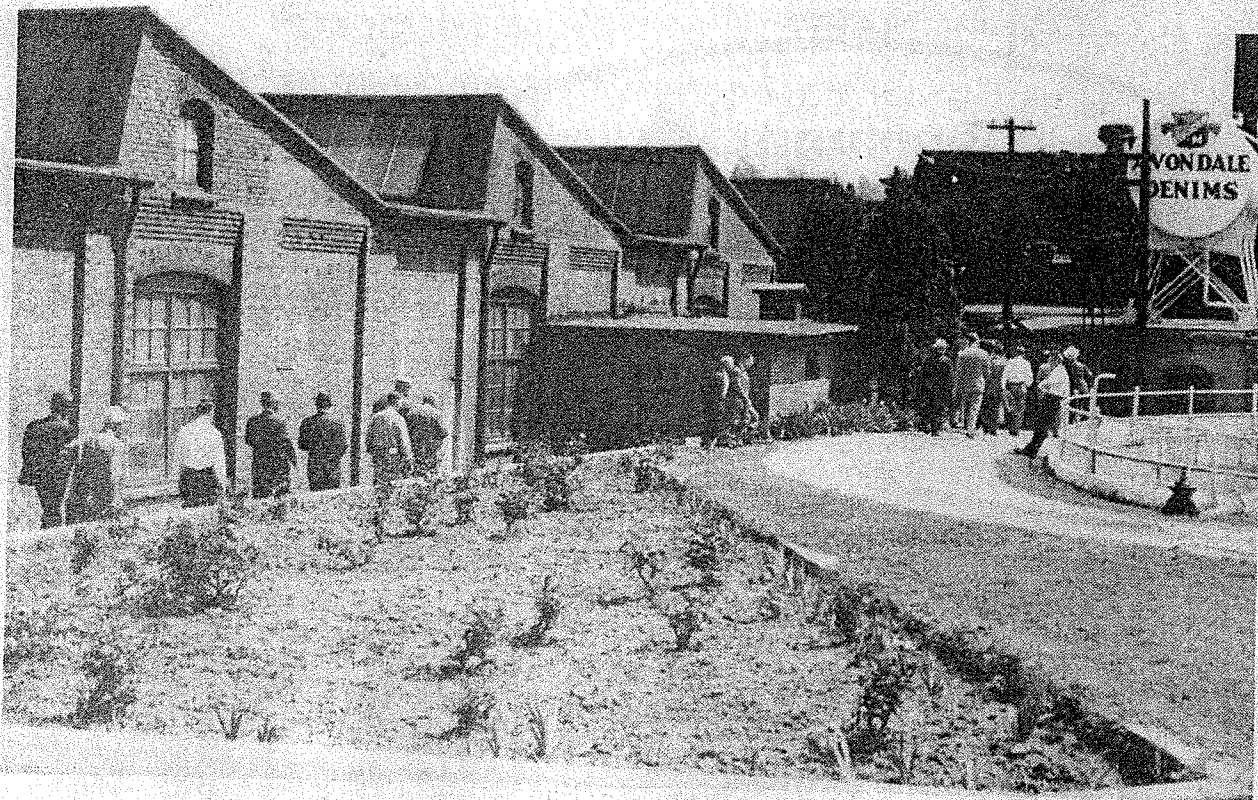


**Proud To Be  
A Part of  
St. Clair County  
Since 1990**





**AVONDALE OFFICE**—The administrative office at Avondale Mills once looked much different from the way it looks today. It used to be red brick and had awnings over the windows. Today the building has been painted white and the awnings have been taken down.



**INSPECTION DAY**—This picture, taken in the early to mid-1940s, is of an Avondale Mills Inspection Day. The corporate managers would make visits to inspect the plants and this day they were captured on film.