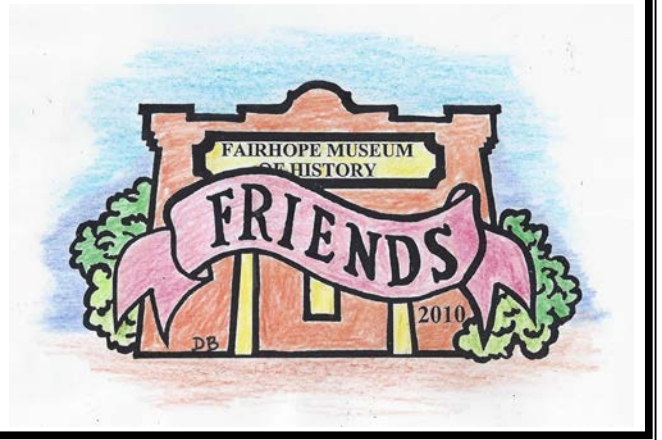


Friends

Of the Fairhope

Museum of History

Vol 9 Issue 4 August - September 2018



Fairhope Historical Bus Tours

Saturday, July 14, 2018

We've hired a Trolley to take you back a hundred years!



Director Donnie Barrett and twenty-four of his closest friends boarded the air-conditioned trolley and traveled back to old Fairhope. Three one-hour tours left the Courtyard of the Museum at 9 and 10:30 a.m. and 12 p.m. with every ticket sold for the popular tour as it perused through the Fruit & Nut District and north of Fairhope Avenue. The bus was filled with locals and visitors who came along to

learn more about our city. The trips covered 44 historical landmarks, plus numerous stories told as only Donnie can tell, having grown up picking up arrowheads and shards of pottery in the gullies as a youngster. In addition to talking about buildings and sites, Donnie quickly reminds guests that too many historic homes and landmarks are now gone, leaving only memories. **Bus Tours**, *continued on page 2, column 1*



Tour Trolley at the Beachside Rose Garden

The tours are an easy introduction to Fairhope history for newcomers, visitors and longtime Fairhope citizens alike. Priscilla Comer, a 32-year resident, says "I've gone on most all of Donnie's tours each year and I learn new nuggets each time. I was excited this year to learn more about the Old Fairhope Hotel on Fairhope Avenue. Donnie has so many fascinating facts about our town!" John and B. J. Christopher, new Fairhopeans from Houston, TX, were all smiles as they joined the 10:30 tour to get to know more about their new hometown.

Landmarks highlighted on each tour were Arthur Mershon's house, Whittier Hall, E.B. Gaston's home (founder), homes of Marie Howland (1st Library in AL), James, Cornelius & Spider Gaston, Berglins' Ice Cream plant (1st in State), Colonial Inn, Mayor Greeno's home (1903), Fairhope Sanitarium, Nicholville, (founded before Fairhope), Magnolia Beach Extension, French Turpentine Mill (1711), Bieser and Oswalt Plantations, Organic School, Nancy Lewis' home site (freed Slave, predating Fairhope), the many Fairhope piers (replaced due to fire and hurricanes) and many others. Mr. Barrett's narrative was further sprinkled with personal stories and interesting quirks of founders and families.

Each tour participant stepped off the trolley upon arriving back at the Museum, with a big smile, some with notes and others conspicuously touched by something along the way. The personality of historic Fairhope comes alive. Some guests have now, for the first time, seen their town as a Single Tax Colony.

The *Friends of the Fairhope Museum of History* sponsored the outing for the seventh consecutive year. ~

Donnie Barrett Announces Retirement

Museum Director Donnie Barrett, who has built the Fairhope Museum of History into one of the highest attendance museums in the state, has announced his retirement effective October 1, 2018.

Mr. Barrett was recruited by the City of Fairhope as director in 2007, when the decision was made to turn the Old City Hall into the Fairhope Museum of History. The Museum opened in 2008. Many citizens knew the Fairhope story, but only Mr. Barrett had demonstrated the potential to turn the building into a display of the city's past.

His father was employed at the Auburn Agricultural Experimental Station and the family lived there. Donnie gained a hands-on appreciation for the animals, fruits and vegetables natural to the area and their potential to sustain the town as it matured from a lively, creative economic experiment into the viable city that now attracts business, industry and retirees to this destination. Donnie spent years creating living history programs at historical sites, forts and battlefields. He served for eight years on the Baldwin Co. Archaeological Preservation Committee and has been on the University of South Alabama's archaeological team for 30 years. He took a personal interest in local pottery. When the original Fairhope Museum started in the Bell Building at the Organic School in 1995, Donnie contributed his talents to setting up and building all of the exhibits.

Mr. Barrett's decision leaves all of the volunteers and many citizens perplexed at how we will continue. He and wife Lottie are looking forward to retiring to their "other job" on their large tea plantation here in South Baldwin County. Donnie will move his passion to building, showing and talking tea.

Louie Blaze, president of the *Friends* says, "If I have ever considered anyone a mentor, it would have to be Donnie; not only to me, but to anyone who has worked with him at the Fairhope Museum of History. His knowledge of Fairhope is an encyclopedia of facts and stories told in an enthusiastic way that can be enjoyed by all, whether you are a resident or visitor to Fairhope. He makes volunteering at the Museum fun for all and he never is hesitant to answer a question or share a story about some incident or character that makes Fairhope the Mecca that that it is."

We wish Director Barrett a wonderful future and continued adventures, as he has shared with all of us!!



Director's Desk

Director's Desk, continued from left column -

When I started telling folks that I was going to retire, the news spread rapidly. Soon every bank teller, waitress or person on the street met me with "I hear you are going to retire?!?" I guess I needed to wait closer to the October 1 date to start my good-bye tour, as it has already made me a "has been" and a bit of a lame duck with the City.

When we started the Museum eleven years ago, few people had any idea what it was all about. People wondered what was going on in that building during the short six months I had to design the space, produce the exhibits and get the doors open. I was even skeptical of myself, if it was going to work or not. The first year we had 11,000 guests who were quite complimentary.

The first years of me trying to be a municipal bureaucrat were difficult, learning the nuances and city politics. It was hard to follow the rules when the rules kept changing. There were City officials who came down hard on me for little reason except they did not understand what I was doing, or they were suspicious of why what I was doing was working so well. I was even "written up" for going to a friend's mother's funeral. The first years in this Museum were hard. I guess it was a trade off with me learning how the City worked, and the City learning how museums worked.

Now, eleven years later, we have 24,000 guests coming through the doors each year and I have been bathed in compliments all along the way. I wanted to have lots of scheduled activities and now, we do a big event almost every month as well as the weekly teas. Our Round-Up Day, Satsuma Blossom Festival and our Tea for Two's have been very successful. But, my shining star will be the Elderberry Festival where I produced a major Fairhope event featuring a roadside weed.

Another accomplishment that I am proud of is the tremendous staff of docent volunteers that we have recruited and maintained; a consistent number of 60 to 70 since we started. Keeping such a large group functioning well is very difficult and comes with much planning and concerted effort. Our Museum has run like clockwork because of the work being done by the Museum docents. My style of being a docent is to actually become engaging with the guest, which is different from most other museums. Our staff has mastered that art. I even managed to get the docents to not have loud conversations while guests were close by, although that took some doing!

It feels good to have a deep sense of satisfaction that I have accomplished everything that I set out to do. Our exhibits are very nice and historically significant, and our archival spaces are neat and organized. We have amassed a large collection of artifacts, photographs and information files. I and we have worked on these constantly to keep them in this condition.

I am not sure which direction this Museum is going to take with a new director. But, a new direction it will... The programs we do now will leave with me and new programs will be implemented. I have even heard of one circling "helper" who expressed the bazaar notion that this building needs to become a rental facility, or dance hall. I hope this facility does not 'train wreck' like that, and that we will all continue to experience a smooth transition.

I now seem to be leaving when I am on the top of the heap. I have gotten to be a senior person on the City staff. Everyone in the City crews speaks, smiles and waves. I seldom ask permission for much of anything now (what are they going to do, fire me?). When I tried to get purchase orders in those first years, the purchasing agents would chew my ears off. Now they say, "you know what you need, go out and get it." The only problem with all this it has taken most of my adult life of dedicated museum work to get here. I will hate giving that up.

I have been through many chapters in my life and now I am coming to the end of a major era. It will be sad to leave a large group of good friends, not so hard leaving the City bureaucracy, but excited to face the next chapter on the horizon.

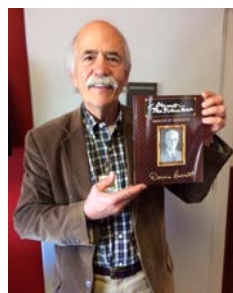
Donnie Barrett



Left: Donnie as the 'Mad Museum Director' posted in the November 2010 Newsletter.



Right: MC at the Ft. Mims reenactment, 2013



Left: Presenting the 2017 release of his book, *Stewart the Picture Man*



Right: Performing in a 1920s role

Annual Elderberry Festival Upcoming Saturday August 11, 2018

**One of the most popular annual events
at the Museum coming up soon!**

The Elderberry Festival slated for August 11 will be the *Friends of the Fairhope Museum of History* highlight event for August! For the tenth year since our Museum opened, the Elderberry Festival will be the premier program for music, fun and attendance. Each year, it encompasses the historical celebration of the Elderberry as a basic food for early pioneers, and gives us contemporary reason to have family fun in the summertime!

Pictured below is Director Donnie Barrett, presenting the trophy to last year's Pie Eating Contest winner, Mitchell Powers, a guest to Fairhope from Virginia, who won 'hands-down', over six other challengers. That is, with his hands in his lap, he consumed more Elderberry pie than his competitors, in one minute!



The Kracker Dan Minstrel Band will again play vintage music throughout the day and demonstrations of Elderberry uses will be on-going upstairs in the Old City Council Chamber. Local aficionados with Elderberry recipes will also participate in a food competition for creative uses of the berries. Plus, the Baklava Belly Dancers of Mobile will return to entertain this year, to show that the art form is fun as well as good exercise.

The activities will go on from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. ~

Friends Publish Second book **Fairhope A Decade of Stories**



The past ten years at the Museum have energized interest in the history of our City. Director Donnie Barrett inspired that interest and made it fun. So Bob Glennon, local author in behalf of the *Friends*, compiled forty-three feature stories researched and written by *Friends of the Museum* over the past decade.

The book is a tribute to Director Barrett and contains stories about the founding of the Single Tax Colony; personalities who built the town and landmarks that make Fairhope unique. Some are about surprise celebrities who contributed to the development and personality of our City.

Another compelling tale documents the trail of the jail cells in the Museum as being the original jail bars absconded on the night of October 10, 1901 when the County Courthouse in Daphne was "stolen" and taken to Bay Minette! And another first time documentary, tells about the old bunker under our Old City Hall - right out of the Cold War era.

The book will officially launch on August 11, 2018 at the Elderberry Festival. Copies will be available at the Museum Gift Shop and other Fairhope outlets for \$12. All proceeds go to the *Friends of the Museum* to fund projects and activities in the coming year.

This is the second book published recently by the *Friends of the Museum*. Donnie Barrett's *Stewart, the Picture Man* was first released in October 2017.

Did He Say, "Nine Piers"?

One of the most fascinating landmarks noted on the history tours of Fairhope is the Pier, located at the most western end of Fairhope Avenue. Director Donnie Barrett talks fast throughout each of the one-hour tours and if you were absorbed in the scenery of the Rose Garden, or youngsters casting nets over the railing for bait and lunch, you may have missed the story of the 1,483 foot structure protruding out into Mobile Bay. It seems sturdy enough, but in fact, the pier that you see had been destroyed nine times before construction of the concrete and steel structure that was last destroyed by Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005.



Soon after establishing the Single Tax Colony in November 1894, the new residents realized that there was money to be made by attracting visitors to the Eastern Shore. A dock for passenger boats was needed, but the water near the shoreline was too shallow for motorboats. Since the deeper water came closest to shore near the foot of Fairhope Avenue, a long pier was built there in 1895. The Hurricane of 1906 demolished it. It was rebuilt quickly as the founders now had their own bay boat *Fairhope*, which brought "tourists." In 1910, this second pier burned, along with the steamer, *General Lee*, which was tied-up at the time. While rebuilding for the 3rd time, a dance hall, bathhouses and a bowling lane were also erected. Another infamous hurricane hit in 1916, destroying the Fairhope pier, as well as the Grand Hotel at Point Clear. Another hurricane wiped out the pier in 1926 and another storm in 1936 wrought the demise of the last of the wooden piers. In 1968, the first concrete structure – the 7th Fairhope pier - was built. In 2004, Hurricane Ivan seriously damaged the dock and in a mere few weeks of reopening in 2005, Hurricane Katrina collapsed it again. It was re-engineered to address the dastardly water surges and has stood now providing enjoyment for residents and visitors for over ten years! ~

Who Knew?



Dot Bremer, a veteran, talented docent of our Museum for nine years, tells this light-hearted story about her first time to stop at the Old City Hall:

It was the spring of 1995 when Pete and I moved to Fairhope from New Orleans. That was when we first experienced the yellow pollen settling on everything, including our light blue Camry, which was in sore need of washing. In New Orleans, we were used to seeing "drive-in" car washing establishments in every neighborhood. If there was such a thing in Fairhope, we had not discovered it. Yet our car was in dire need of a shampoo and rinse.

While driving on Bancroft St. one day, across from the then pecan packing plant, I noticed some guys washing cars in the parking lot of what is now the Fairhope Museum of History. Worth a try, I thought, "Ah! A car wash," and pulled in. "Could you wash my car? I'll pay you \$5." Glancing inquiringly among themselves, they agreed, "Yes, m'am." My car received a good scrub and buffed to a shine. Happy day! (*You "old-timers" know where this is going.*)

It was but several days later, when I not only described my good fortune, but recommended my discovery to a neighbor, when I learned that those guys washing cars were Fairhope city jail in-mates who were washing the cars belonging to the policemen. They were not clad in white or orange suits identifying them as prisoners. At that time, I also did not know that the parking lot was behind the City Hall and that the city jail was right where the car washing was going on!

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Helping Fairhope Tell it's Story!

Tea for Two

Each Thursday 2 p.m. in the Museum Council Chamber

August 2 – **Suzanne Hudson** has proposed an “Alabama 200” Bicentennial event community wide reading of three literary works of fiction with ties to our area: *Waffle House Rules*, *V for Victor* and the *Poet of Tolstoy Park*. Come hear about her program!

August 9 – **Paul Brueske**, track coach at USA and dedicated Civil War researcher, has just released “The Last Siege: The Mobile Campaign, Alabama 1865.” Come hear him present this well-referenced new look at the battles of Spanish Fort and Blakeley.

August 16 – **Ben Raines** is a “Wizard of the Wilderness” with skills and talents as an author, senior newspaper reporter for the Press Register, explorer and researcher. A master of environmental studies and preservation, he is a wealth of knowledge and his presentations are masterfully entertaining!

August 23 – **Dr. Art Frankel**, Chief of Oncology at USA’s Mitchell Cancer Institute, is a physician scientist with a passion for finding better ways to fight cancer. He has rich stories to share about new cancer therapies.

August 30 – **Mike Bunn**, the new director of Blakeley State Park, will tell us of current events and plans for the future for this large historical park facility.



Tea for Two

Speakers - continued

September 6 – **Donnie Barrett** on “Fairhope’s Founding: Henry George or Populism?” Donnie has campaigned for years that it was Populist ideas that started Fairhope and never a true Henry George colony. Come hear the evidence and decide for yourself!

September 13 – **Donnie Barrett** - “Historic Potters of the Eastern Shore” Donnie gave this seminar at Auburn University as part of a Southern Pottery seminar in June. He looks forward to sharing the presentation at home!

September 20 – **Donnie Barrett** presents “The Chicken Program!” Did the egg come first? Why is chicken feces three colors? How many stomachs do chickens really have? Come get these answers and more fascinating facts you didn’t know you didn’t know about chickens!

September 27 – **Donnie Barrett** – “On Yoga and Retirement.” Donnie has practiced yoga for 46 years. He will do his morning yoga routine and talk about the benefits he has enjoyed from this practice including how it has helped him be the magnificent Director of the Fairhope Museum of History for 11 years.

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Newsletter

The Friends Newsletter is the official publication of the *Friends of the Fairhope Museum of History*, an Alabama Corporation organized exclusively for charitable, scientific and educational purposes within the meaning of Part 501 (c) 3 of the United States Internal Revenue Code. Contributing writers vary with each Issue. Inquiries and comments may be directed to Robert Glennon, Editor, at FairhopeMuseumNewsletter@gmail.com.

Fairhope Museum of History

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Hours: 9 – 5 Tuesday through Saturday Admission: Free!

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