

Friends

Of the Fairhope Museum of History

NEWSLETTER



Vol 6 Issue 3 June - July 2015

Satsuma Blossom Festival April 18, 2015

A full day of activities filled the Museum of History on Saturday, April 18 for the second annual Satsuma Blossom Festival celebration.



In the 1920's the satsuma, a species of the orange, became popular among farmers and citrus growers in South Alabama. The fruit was tasty, easy to peel and refreshing. Those virtues caused the industry to rapidly expand in Baldwin County until cold winters devastated many of the trees. By 1930, commercially growing satsumas had waned, but the fruit was still a favorite when it could be found. A big part of the appeal was the beautiful blossoms in the springtime. Consequently, the flowering trees remain a part of our history.



Saturday, April 18 was a cloudy, overcast day, so the agenda was flexible as the hours of fun passed. Some outdoor activities were moved inside to be sure no one got wet. In the morning, guests were entertained with fun tunes by the Eastern Shore Ukulele Club and the introduction of the Dogwood Trail Court. The ladies in traditional colorful antebellum dresses and hats of the Old South, greeted visitors, co-mingled with adults and played with children. Everyone wanted their picture taken with the girls!

At noon, a Maypole dance was performed outside, by students of the Creative Outlet Dance Center. Because of the threat of rain, the decorated bicycle contest was cancelled.



"Blossom Festival," continued on page 2, column 2



Director's Desk

It never ceases to amaze me how enthusiastic our docents are when they speak to visitors about Fairhope and our Museum. We have such a good cross-section of talents and skills among our docents. Each of our fifty-plus volunteers bring experience and know-how to every event. The big exhibits like *Baldwin County During the Civil War* are designed by me, but built by the docents and volunteers. That one was done well and we all had fun doing it. Again, the volunteer staff have taken the pictures that we are putting around the walls for the *Bayboat Era* Exhibit and are building some of the props and helping with the layout and construction. This saves the Museum and City a lot of money.

One of our best examples of teamwork came last November when we did the re-enactment of Founder's Day at the Colony Cemetery. We had over 20 volunteers play roles of Fairhope Founders. The costumes were very creative and realistic to the time period. Even the acting was fun and authentic.

Each of the major events we do each year are hosted by docents who take charge of the program. Jim Bates and I participate, but the volunteers take much of the burden off of us so we can do the business of the Museum. Even this Newsletter is done by experienced volunteers.

Thanks to all of the *Friends* for your work!!

Donnie Barrett

Blossom Festival, continued from page 1

At 12:30 p.m., John Reno played and sang Gulf Coast music for the crowd gathered in the Museum glassed entry foyer.



Then, to the great pleasure of the audience, Director Donnie Barrett announced the crowning of *Miss Satsuma Blossom Festival*— Mrs. Emogene DeMaagd, a long-time docent and twice chairperson and hostess for the Satsuma Blossom Festival.

During the top of the day, some games and a Bean-Bag Toss were played when not inhibited by rain. Celebrated military veteran Mawk Arnold had as much fun as anyone, leading the Cupcake Walk for the second year in a row.



At 1:30 p.m., "Mad Mike," (Mike Hammons) the magician, mesmerized the audience with a fun Magic Show!

Again, the Satsuma Blossom Festival was deemed a great success. Smiling guests came and went all day, braving the unpredictable weather to enjoy a Saturday of fun for the family.

Bay Boat Era

New Museum Exhibit

Bay-boats will once again be arriving in Fairhope! The Museum of History is currently constructing a new year-long exhibit highlighting the bay-boats that served the town of Fairhope from 1901 until 1929. The opening of the Cochran Bridge Causeway for automobile traffic between Mobile and the Eastern Shore in 1928 preempted the need for boat transit of people and freight. Until then, the golden age of paddlewheel steamboats prevailed on Mobile Bay.

When completed within a few weeks, the exhibit will feature specific bay-boats that served Fairhope during the era, providing a life-line to the local economy via export of pottery made from nearby clays and the import of curiosity seekers, Mobilians coming to summer cottages and tourists to stare at Single-Taxers, who settled into their view of "Utopia."



Models on display are built to scale, based on original specifications. The *Fairhope I* and *Fairhope II* represent the entrepreneurship of the Single Tax Colony to bring passengers and money to the businesses on Fairhope Avenue. The *Pleasure Bay*, *Heroine*, *Baldwin*, *Apollo* and the *General Lee* will also be on display with placards of their stories in the development of Fairhope.

The new exhibit will launch about June 1, 2015, subject to the Mayor's calendar for the ribbon cutting!

History Tours of Fairhope

Four bus tours on July 18

On Saturday, July 18, 2015, Director Donnie Barrett will again host four bus tours of Fairhope, taking guests back with landmarks and stories about the personalities, lives and quirks of significant contributors to the Single Tax Colony. Unlike tours in the past that continuously moved through time and streets, each of these tours will focus on celebrities and get into greater detail about the men and women of old Fairhope.

The tours will leave the Museum's Bancroft Street entrance at 9 a.m., 11 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Tickets - donations to the *Friends of the Museum of History* - will be \$20 each and can be bought beginning June 15 at the Museum. The donations are used to cover Museum expenses for immediate-need materials, costs of this Newsletter and incidentals not covered in the Museum budget.

- Docent News -

Peco Forsman and Bob Glennon, two local historians and active supporters of our Museum, have recently been appointed to serve on the Baldwin County Historic Development Commission. The appointments were made by the County Commissioners in recognition for their interest in historical preservation in Baldwin County.

Docent Rebecca Brunson released her new non-fiction book, *Hardee's Dairy Dream*, on May 5, 2015. She was (*nee*) a Hardee. The book is a memoir of sorts - a series of personal experiences and stories about growing up in Mobile and Monroeville. It's a fun read and real insight into childhood in South Alabama.

A conversation with Former Mayor James Nix.

by Curt Cochran



Former Mayor Nix and his daughter Vicky Nix Cook gave a delightful Tea for Two program at the Fairhope Museum of History on April 21st. Vicky led the program with her book of watercolor sketches of Fairhope scenes which are the Mayor's favorite places. Ms. Suzanne Hudson wrote the book text and read excerpts during the presentation. The book contained sketches of many of the beautiful scenes in Fairhope and is intended to document the Fairhope beautification which was started by Mayor Nix and led by him for 28 years. The Mayor's favorite place in Fairhope is the center of town at Fairhope Ave. and Section St. where the Fairhope clock and flowers on all four corners of the intersection are accented by hanging baskets and other planters.

Although the flowers and the beautification program are what most people think of when they recall the Nix reign as mayor, he says he ran for mayor for a different reason. He explained that he was on the city council from 1968 to 1972 and became increasingly concerned about the city electric utilities and sewage treatment facility. There were occasional power outages causing the

sewage to empty untreated directly into Mobile Bay. He decided to run for mayor to fix that as a first priority. He was able to lead the city in quickly making those changes and the city now has prime water treatment facilities.

Fairhope's flowers have always been attributed to an epiphany of Mayor Nix, but he says that it wasn't one particular event. He says that when he took office as Mayor, Fairhope had mostly weeds, so planting flowers was the obvious thing to do. The plan for flowers evolved and grew over time. Mayor Nix was an avid traveler and went many places. On these trips, he would see attractive landscaping in a city and bring the idea back to Fairhope. He appreciated the beautiful flowers in Southern Germany and England and tried to copy those in Fairhope. The idea to build trash cans with flowers planted in the top came from Disneyworld. As the flowers program grew larger, he realized that the city could not continue to buy them all, so the decision was made to build city greenhouses. The number of greenhouses eventually grew from one to eleven. He visited Holland during the tulip season and decided Fairhope had to have tulips. To make that work, the city had to build a cold house to hold the bulbs. The tulips have been an impressive addition.

Mayor Nix also had the idea to build the rose garden and the fountain at the pier. This has become a symbol of Fairhope. The beach area north of the pier was undeveloped when he took office and he decided to improve it. In the 1970s, it was primarily a lover's lane, confirmed by the Mayor's daughter Vicky, with dirt roads and no amenities. Mayor Nix decided that the beach could be used by all the community and set to work building paved roads, the duck pond and other facilities that make it the most popular beach on the Eastern Shore. (The kids had to find another place for a lover's lane).

Mayor Nix was also instrumental in building the new city hall, the library, Founders Park, and many other improvements. Some twenty of them are pictured in Vicky's sketch book. The book is both a tribute to Mayor Nix and a fundraising project for the Fairhope Educational Enrichment Foundation (FEFF).

Mayor Nix has been retired from office for 15 years but maintains an active interest in the city and ongoing events. He answered questions from the audience with a lively sense of humor. He claimed that all he did for Fairhope was to make it a pleasant and enjoyable city for all of us. Residents *do* enjoy living here and we owe much to Mayor Nix's imagination and vision. —

The Cemetery Tour with Director Donnie Barrett

by Curt Cochran

Museum Director Donnie Barrett's tours through the Fairhope Single Tax Colony Cemetery over the last 18 years have become legendary. For the last several years, he has hosted the tour on the last Saturday in April as part of the city walking tours.



This year on Saturday, April 25th, a crowd approaching 100 people gathered at 10 AM to follow Donnie around the tombstones and listen to his animated commentary on those who lie beneath and their role in the rich history and events of Fairhope. Although Donnie plans a path through the cemetery, he doesn't rehearse what he will say. Because his commentary is mostly spontaneous, many come year after year. This year, Donnie greeted people at the gate and ushered them down to the central street where he gave an overview of the tour and instructions on how to follow him, with special attention to *not* step on graves.

The first stop is always at the marker for E. B. Gaston and a discussion of Populism in the 1890s and the many efforts to build a commune such as Fairhope. Gaston was a slow convert to the Single Tax theory but was totally committed to the Fairhope Colony and hoped to build a better way of life for himself and all who would join him.

Soon there was a stop at the marker for Craig Shelton and Donnie told the story on why his tomb-



stone looks like a large grindstone. The photo (left) shows Donnie at the Shelton grave marker.

Donnie always discusses the women of early Fairhope, especially Marietta Johnson and Marie

Howland. Marietta Johnson was an educational innovator in Minnesota. When she read about Fairhope in the *Fairhope Courier*. (The Fairhope Cou-

rier in the early 1900s was a national Single Tax newspaper with a circulation of 65,000). After learning about Fairhope, she decided that it would be a perfect place to open her innovative new school of Organic Education, and here she came.

Marie Howland was a very modern woman who came to Fairhope from the Commune, Topolobampo, in Mexico. She found a home in Fairhope among its open-minded people although they didn't practice free love as she was purported to endorse. She liked walking to the beach with her bathrobe open displaying her full figure of about 300 lbs and liked to bath and canoe in the nude. She was an intellectual who owned some 1200 books and established Fairhope's first library in her house with her books. She wrote newspaper columns on women's suffrage for national newspapers and the *Fairhope Courier*.

Donnie needed only a short walk between tombstones to start his next description, as the audience jostled for position so that they could hear. He covered all the major and some less-familiar families in Fairhope with the things they did that were important, interesting, or just quirky. As his voice tired, Donnie found his way back to the Southwest corner of the cemetery where other members of the Gaston family are buried and also where his red truck was parked. He pronounced the tour at an end, although he stayed a while to answer questions. Then he headed back to the museum to once again become immersed in Fairhope lore and history.

It was a great experience and one that everyone should join at least once, or annually, if you can.

—

Tea for Two

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

Upcoming Programs

June 2 – Debra & Rob Tarr – Debra and Rob operate the *Rita's of Alabama* that serves Alabama Water Ice and custard. They will tell about their business and maybe give out samples! Mmmmm!

June 9 – Becky Brasington – Becky is Fairhope's Animal Control officer and she will tell us about this city department and also stories of different animals and situations she has encountered.

June 16 – Becky Brunson – Becky, a docent on staff here at the Museum, grew up in Monroeville, AL knowing Harper Lee and Truman Capote. Her new book "Hardee's Dairy Dream" will be presented.

June 23 – Craig Sawyer – Craig has been on the Fairhope Police force for many years. He will tell us his Fairhope story and about recent activities at the Fairhope Police Department.

June 30 – Billy Garner – Billy will talk about his life on Fairhope's Agricultural Experimental Substation in the 1930-40's. He will tell of the farm products that were developed there.

July 7 – Donnie Barrett – Donnie has been helping develop the new museum in Stockton, AL. He will show a power point presentation on Battle Creek Indian mounds, the Ellicott line and Charles Bartrum.

July 14 – Chef Jule Roach – Jule will show a power point presentation on chocolate and tell her Fairhope story and about her business, "The Frenchman's Corner of Fairhope." Chocolate fudge and caramel samples will be served with our tea.

Tea for Two

Upcoming Programs, continued

July 21 – Teresa Thorne – Teresa will unveil her new book "Angels at the Gate." Her research behind the book tells tales of the ancient cities of Sodom & Gomorrah and if they ever existed.

July 28 – Hank Burch – Hank is the director of Five Rivers Delta Center. He will tell us about his life here in Fairhope and also what is happening at the nature center.

Upcoming Friends Meetings

The next planning meetings of the *Friends of the Museum* will be **June 16 and July 14, 2015, 3:15 p.m. in the Council Chamber Room upstairs at the Museum. Show Up and Chip In!**

Mary Ann Maradik, President
Friends of the Fairhope Museum of History
and Museum Coordinator of Docents

Seventh Annual
Elderberry Festival
Saturday, August 8, 2015

The Newsletter

The Friends Newsletter is the official publication of *Friends of the Fairhope Museum of History, Inc.*, 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. Contact: Fairhopemuseum-newsletter@gmail.com. Editor: Bob Glennon.

Fairhope Museum of History

24 North Section Street (251) 929-1471

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

Like us on: [facebook.com/FairhopeMuseumofHistoryFriends](https://www.facebook.com/FairhopeMuseumofHistoryFriends)