

Five Points, Our Streets and Avenues

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In 1892 when the East Huntsville Addition was replatted by the Northwestern Land Association the new east and west roads became Avenues named for the company's directors and other prominent Huntsvillians, except for Eustis, Randolph and Clinton, which were continuations of existing roads. The north and south roads became numbered Streets, and remained that way until a city ordinance in 1958 renamed roads throughout the city.

Who were these prominent men that shaped the city of Huntsville and our neighborhood? Let us begin with...

Wells Avenue

So named for William S. Wells, originally from Elmira, New York, moved to Pierre, South Dakota before calling Huntsville home in 1892. He was president of the Northwestern Land Association, founded and managed the Union Investment Co. that developed city property, was active in the chamber of commerce, a director of the Farmers and Merchants Bank and was head of the W. J. Bennett & Company, a livery firm.

Mr. Wells, his wife Emma and son Glenn invested heavily in the East Huntsville Addition owning a great many lots and constructing desirable rental homes. Born in 1839 and passing in 1900 his contributions to Huntsville only encompassed 8 years, but they were remarkable years. The March 7, 1900 edition of the *Mercury* proclaimed in his obituary "Huntsville loses a loyal citizen," and judged his death "a public calamity."

Wellman Avenue

Willard I. Wellman came to Huntsville from South Dakota like William S. Wells. Mr. Wellman served as the 1st president of the Farmers and Merchants Bank in 1892 and was chairman of the state Republican Party in the early 20th century.

He owned nearly all the stock in the Spring City Furniture Co. and almost half of the International Copperage Sales Agency, a corporation that bought and sold real estate throughout the country. Locally the real estate firm Boyd and Wellman vigorously subdivided lots and built middle class housing, for rent and for sale. His parents, L. R. and Mary Wellman were likewise involved with

Huntsville and the Northwest Land Association, purchasing over \$63,000 worth of lots in the East Huntsville Addition. In 1915 Willard and his wife Helen gave the city a piece of land at the intersection that forms our Five Points, and in a restricted deed called for the land to always be used as a park or revert back to the original owners. The preservation of this local landmark became official June 29, 2002, when the Wellman Family Park was dedicated.

Pratt Avenue

Tracy Wilder Pratt was born in 1861 in Minnesota. Very little is documented of his ventures prior to his move to Huntsville in 1892, although a Pierre South Dakota City Directory for 1890-1891 shows Pratt & Wellman as proprietors of the Dakota Central Bank and sole owners of four additions to the City of Pierre. The list of his accomplishments in Huntsville is long and exemplary, but to name just a few, shortly after arriving in Huntsville Tracy Pratt announced the formation of Huntsville's 3rd cotton mill, known as the West Huntsville Cotton Mill. He also was an incorporator of the Northwestern Land Association and served as Vice-president, and like Willard Wellman and William Wells also owned a great many lots in the East Huntsville Addition.

A February 1899 *Mercury* article gives praise and credit to Tracy W. Pratt as assisting in bringing the Merrimack Mill to Huntsville. Once this new mill was built a great need arose for a streetcar system to link the Dallas and West Huntsville villages with downtown. In July 1899 the Huntsville Railway, Light & Power Co. was organized-the capitol stock was set at \$100,000-of this amount Pratt invested \$99,700. The opening of the streetcar line followed. Essentially the creation of the streetcar system made the East Huntsville Addition property incredibly desirable and created the suburb and neighborhood now known as Five Points.

In 1900 Pratt was successful in securing Huntsville's 5th cotton mill, Lowe. He traveled extensively nationwide on behalf of Huntsville; He secured an army camp here during the Spanish American War & in 1907 a National Guard Camp, named Camp Tracy W. Pratt was established in West Huntsville. The July 1907 *Banner* lauded "No town ever had a more enterprising citizen than Mr. Pratt and no town has ever received more at the hands of one citizen...practically all of the substantial growth of the town since his residence here has been due to his efforts."

October 29, 1928 Tracy Wilder Pratt passed away. His obituary in the *Times* pronounced "It is generally agreed that he was responsible for more of the major industries locating in Huntsville than any man who ever resided here, and was

Huntsville's First Citizen." He was a member of and identified with practically every civic, social, fraternal, patriotic & business organization in Huntsville.

Out of respect for Pratt, all businesses in Huntsville ceased operations for five minutes at the onset of his funeral.

Many northern men contributed to attracting industry here, but no one matched the achievements of Tracy W. Pratt, he embodied Yankee ingenuity in his adopted Southern home.

Ward Avenue

James A. Ward was one of a group from South Dakota who formed the Northwestern Land Association and served as their treasurer. Of the four South Dakotans he is the only one who never lived in Huntsville. Little is known of Mr. Ward and his accomplishments other than he was an attorney and a railroad speculator.

Beirne Avenue

Andrew O'Beirne came to Virginia from Ireland in 1793, shortly after the O was dropped from the surname. It is said he had 7 children, one of them named George, and it is believed this is who the avenue is named for.

George Plunket Beirne was elected an alderman in Huntsville in 1842, and was elected mayor the following year, and was re-elected in 1849, and 1850.

Mr. Beirne was director of the Northern Bank of Alabama later known as the First National Bank of Huntsville, and served on the Board of Directors of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad.

According to family lore he was married to Eliza and had 9 children, all girls. He passed away in 1881 at the age of 72. He owned a wonderful home on Williams Street and much land which was left to his spinster daughter Jane who passed away in 1918.

Through the years Beirne Avenue has also been spelled Bierne, but this appears to be misspellings.

McCullough Avenue

Augustus W. McCullough was one of a group of local businessmen who formed the North Alabama Improvement Company, which was later sold and became the Northwestern Land Association.

Local historians have written of him as a Court Clerk, a member of the executive committee of the local labor union and as “a school teaching carpetbagger with staying power who made the transition from bagger to community builder.”

From 1870-1871 he was listed as a trustee for Alabama A & M University. The City Directory for 1897-1897 lists Mr. McCullough as a U. S. Commissioner and special master, Memphis and Charleston Railroad, with his home being on Meridian Pike.

O’Shaughnessy Avenue

Michael O’Shaughnessy and his brother James opened a commission house and cottonseed oil factory in Nashville during the mid 1860’s. Michael expanded his business to Huntsville in 1881; however it was James who most clearly recognized the potential of this city.

The brothers were eager supporters of Huntsville with capital, experience and connections. In 1886 they organized the North Alabama Improvement Company. They eventually controlled oil mills throughout Alabama, had a refinery in Brooklyn and shipped oil to Europe.

Michael built the home known as Kildare (also known as the McCormick house at 2005 Kildare Street, where it still stands) and resided there until the turn of the century. James purchased several hundred acres on Monte Sano in 1885 for his home, which sadly was destroyed by fire in 1890 and never rebuilt.

Andrew Jackson Way

(Originally 5th Street)

Andrew Jackson may have been our seventh president, but he was first in many ways. He was the first populist president who did not come from the aristocracy, he was the first to have his vice-president resign (John C. Calhoun), he was the first to marry a divorcee, he was the first to be nominated at a national convention (his second term), the first to use an informal "Kitchen Cabinet" of advisers, and the first president to use the "pocket veto" to kill a congressional bill (legislation fails to become law if Congress adjourns and the president has not signed the bill in question).

He was orphaned by the time he was 13 years old, losing his mother and two brothers during the Revolutionary War. Jackson himself bore scars from a British officer’s sword on his skull and hand, and bullets from duels in his

shoulder. Jackson had the nickname of "Old Hickory" because his troops viewed him as very tough.

His tie to Huntsville is recognized by an encampment he made here in 1813, after marching from Fayetteville, Tennessee – “without halting.” enroute to the battle of Horsehoe Bend. This site encompasses the triangular median at Holmes Avenue and Lincoln Street, and is honored with a Historical Marker.

It is also said he acquired a great deal of land in Madison County and frequently visited the area. The Green Bottom Inn, one of Huntsville's earliest hostelrys served as host to Andrew Jackson. The inn and tavern were built in 1815 by John Connely, a Revolutionary War soldier. The Inn was located on Meridian Street where Alabama A&M University now stands. It is said to have been a favorite haunt of General Andrew Jackson where he "raced his horses and fought his cocks." The Inn burned in 1931.

Russell Street

(Originally 6th Street)

Col. Albert Russel, a native of Pennsylvania, born on the 25th day of May 1755, a soldier of the American Revolution, moved to Huntsville, Alabama in 1816 where he purchased the place known as Russel's Hill and lived there until his death in 1818. Russel Hill still stands, although a home is no longer there. It has a water tower on top, and is the rise between Holmes Avenue and University Drive slightly east of Jordan Lane.

Albert Russel Erskine was a descendant of the Russel and Erskine families. Erskine joined the Studebaker Corporation in South Bend in 1911 as Treasurer and member of the Executive Board. Four years later at the age of 44 he had climbed to the top spot as President of the company. Much of Erskine's fortune was lost when Studebaker went under. The rest of the estate was sold and little left for his family. Albert Russel Erskine, for many years President of the Studebaker Corporation and an outstanding industrialist of the country, died from a self-inflicted bullet wound in 1933. The Russel Erskine Hotel was named in honor of him; he had invested \$10,000 in the venture.

It is unknown where the “extra” L came from in the street sign and is a mystery why it has remained that way. City Council minutes of August 1, 1958 and the ordinance adopting the Street names show the name spelled Russel, with one L. The City Directory of 1959 shows 6th Street being changed to Russell (note 2 L's) Street. Patently it has always been in error.

Coleman Street

(Originally 7th Street)

Daniel Coleman, born 1838 in Athens, served in the Confederate Army, was elected state senator from Limestone and Lauderdale counties for three sessions, resigned to practice law in Huntsville. He was elected Solicitor of the Eighth Judicial Circuit by the general assembly for six years and was President of the Alabama Bar Association in 1884. Mr. Coleman was appointed by President Cleveland to the Consulship of St. Etienne, France in 1886.

Daniel married Claude Le Vert and inherited the house at 517 Adams Street. Daniel died in 1906. His younger brother Frank Coleman born in 1849, was Registrar of the U. S. Land Office from 1885-1896, and also resided at the Adams Street address.

England Street

(Originally 8th Street)

Dr. Walter Booker England, Sr. Born in Lincoln County Tennessee November 9, 1882. After receiving his Doctor of Medicine degree in 1904 He practiced medicine in Kentucky, moving to Toney, Alabama in 1906, and moved to Huntsville in 1913. His office was located on the southeast corner of Randolph Street and the East Side Square; they resided at 709 East Holmes. Married to Pearl Mae Baites in 1905 they had two sons Charles and Dr. Walter Booker England, Jr. D. D. S. practiced dentistry in Huntsville, both sons are now deceased.

Dr. England must have been an excellent diagnostician for it was he who diagnosed the first case of Spanish Flu in Hazel Green, Alabama in the fall of 1918. The flu epidemic spread rapidly and sadly Dr. England gave his life at the young age of 36 fighting the now infamous 1918 epidemic. There were no miracle drugs to help, patients were advised to rest in bed and stay warm. Dr. England worked day and night during this time trying to help others. It was noted in a tribute published in *The Huntsville Times* "...he sacrificed his own life so that others might live. Dr. England was not only a fine physician but was a good man, kind neighbor, and friend. One who enjoyed the love and respect not only of his profession but of the whole community".

There is also this interesting recollection of a dearly departed neighbor, Alta Mae Bailey - "When we purchased our home in 1947 our address was 103 South 8th Street. Sometime around 1958 it was changed to Percy Street.

Mr. Gilbert England was Asst. Postmaster and his home was on Beirne Avenue, but Percy Street was on the west side of his property. Shortly thereafter our address was changed to 106 England Street. We always felt that he had a lot to do with changing the name to England Street.”

Percy was not included on the list adopted by the City Council in 1958 and the City Directory for 1957 shows Gilbert H. England residing on Beirne Avenue, occupation listed as “Supt. of Mails.”

Lacy Strøet

(Originally 9thth Strøet)

Theophilus Lacy was Cashier of the Northern Bank of Alabama in 1859 and resided on the second floor as required by state law. The bank closed during the occupation of Huntsville by Union forces. In 1865 the building was reopened as the National Bank of Huntsville, Lacy served as its Cashier until 1874. This is the George Steele bank on West Side Square.

Minor Strøet

(Originally 10thth Strøet)

Henry Minor was Attorney General of the Mississippi Territory (1817), served as Clerk of the Madison County Court (this position was replaced by the Probate Judge and Circuit Court Clerk in 1850) during 1818 and 1819, was a Madison County delegate to the Alabama Constitutional Convention, became a reporter to the State Supreme Court in 1819, succeeded Justice Clay on the Alabama Supreme Court in 1823. Minor lost his seat on the Supreme Court of Alabama but was appointed as Clerk of the Alabama Supreme Court, being the first man to hold that office and concluded his career by serving as the Clerk of the Alabama Supreme Court from 1825 until his death in 1838. At this time the state government was moved from Cahawba (now Cahaba) to Tuscaloosa (spelling at that time.)

In 1817 he purchased 2 acres of the south side of Williams Avenue for \$346 from LeRoy and Judith Pope and two years later bought another ¼ acre from them. He sold his property, including a newly constructed house, in 1824 to George Malone for \$4000. Henry Minor had moved to Greene County (which is adjacent to Tuscaloosa County) in 1823 to be closer to the State Supreme Court. Minor’s Huntsville residence was demolished in 1901 to erect the Lowe/UAH president’s house at 210 Williams.

Grayson Street

(Originally 11thth Street)

John Grayson 1770-1826, was an early settler of Madison County arriving here in 1807. Originally from Virginia, he married Sally Carter 1776-1838 from Cocke County Tennessee. It is said he trained as a surveyor under Thomas Jefferson and was sent here by the same along with Thomas Freeman to initially survey this new area. John was one of the original trustees of the Green Academy, appointed in 1812, and owned the Flint River Navigation Co. He and his family lived in what is now known as the Big Cove area, and although the home is no longer standing the family cemetery is still located off Old Big Cove Road. His descendants still live in the Huntsville area.

Around the neighborhood Grayson Street is also known as “where the sidewalks end” most likely from the fact that in 1925 when this area was annexed in to the City Grayson Street was the Eastern Boundary.

The Journey's End

Any journey takes you down a path. Along the way you meet new friends, encounter old friends and acquaintances, and hopefully you learn new things. The journey to document the names associated with the Streets and Avenues within our Five Points Historic District was all of the above.

Linda Allen, City Planner

Patricia Ryan, City Planner

Lisa Leddo, City Planner

Nancy Grayson Van Valkenburg, Descendent of John Grayson

Margaret Anne Goldsmith, Descendent of Oscar Goldsmith and Solomon Schiffman

Rhonda Larkin, Archivist, Madison County Records Center

Historic Markers of Madison County, Alabama by The Huntsville- Madison County Historical Society (formerly the Huntsville Historical Society-1951-1974)

Medicine Bags and Bumpy Roads by Jewell S. Goldsmith and Helen D. Fulton

Why Is It Named That by Dex Nilsson

Northern Dollars for Huntsville Spindles by Patricia H. Ryan, Huntsville Planning Department

Minutes of the Planning Commission

Huntsville City Council Minutes