

Writer Back From Rest with Good News

Alger-Sullivan Historical Society column

January 17, 2000

By Jerry Simmons

As many of you know, about the middle of last year I took a reprieve – a sabbatical, if you will, from this column. The last few months have still been hectic, even without newspaper deadlines to meet. A lot of things have happened, some not so good and others not so bad. Just life.

But now I'm back trying to help Margaret Collier with the column again, for better or for worse. Thanks to all you folks who made nice comments and said you missed my writing. For the ones who didn't miss it, thanks for not telling me!

There's a lot of history that I've learned with a half year away from this work, and I'll share some of it as time goes along. Much came from my lot to be honored to be the author (the "compiler," really) of a commemorative book for the Flomaton Centennial Celebration. We, the centennial committee and I, hope it will be ready in time for the celebrations coming up in the spring. Flomaton's one-hundred year anniversary is in May and the time will pass rapidly between now and then.

The book will not be a history book as such. It's more of a scrapbook – a compilation of many stories and photographs, much of which I believe will be new to many of the readers. There's a bit of history in the beginning, but you may be glad to know that you'll not have a test at the end of your journey through the book.

"Now, why is a guy from Century doing a book about the history of Flomaton?" You ask. Believe me, I asked the same question. It started at the first part of 2007 when I was asked, along with a couple of others from Century, to be part of a committee to help collect information concerning Flomaton's past. Jerry Fischer and I were going to be the main ones to do the actual work on the book, but when Jerry couldn't devote full time to the task, I was the one to do it.

Even though I hail from the other side of the state line, Flomaton was a big part of my growing up years: Saturday afternoons at the Jackson theater; cruising the Milky Way; the skating rink; the Ten-Cent store where I remember the first sidewalk Santa Claus I ever saw in person (who scared me); haircuts (and Mr. Guymon bragging about how badly Flomaton's gonna beat century); all those things influenced me just as they did many, many other children.

Above I said "the one to do it," but that's not true at all. There've been a great many people, especially Jerry Fischer, who've been directly involved gathering stories, pictures and gobs of past information about the town. Besides that, many others wrote contemporary stories, and looking through over a hundred years' worth of Escambia County newspapers, I found lots more. Then there are the other archives of the Escambia County Historical Society at the museum at Jeff Davis Community College; there was a wealth of free information there.

We found a veritable treasure of clippings, pictures and stories in the persons of Dot and Lurette Ptomey. Jerry Fischer had a tremendous storehouse of photographs he's collected over the years and we used just about all he had of Flomaton. Some of these photos you may've already seen in the calendar distributed by the Escambia County Bank each year, but there are lots more that haven't been seen before.

I think you'll be pleased with the book once we get it printed and ready for sale. Plus, I think there'll be a couple of surprises in it you might not be expecting. We uncovered some long-forgotten details; but we also found some details that you may have never known about. Then there are some things that might have been better left covered up with the dust of the years covering them.

I went through many of the Flomaton high school annuals in the high school library and I left Post-Its on pages that had pictures I thought would fit the book. Afterward, students from FHS scanned those pages and made digital copies of the photos for me. I was very pleased with the result; the kids did great!

The problem was, however, that a lot of yearbooks are missing from the school library's collection, and some of the ones there had a lot of pictures cut out, which is a shame. We made do with what we had. By the way, if you have any FHS yearbooks that you'd like to donate to the school, please do! Call Wanda Ledford, the librarian at the high school.

A good project for the students eventually may be to digitize the annuals, that is, scan them like they did for this book. That way, the annuals they do have will be preserved for the future.

It's not likely you'll find anything published any time recently about Flomaton's past with as much all together in one place as we have done. But there is still so much we didn't get that's still out there. I hope there'll be a second volume.

You need to know there's a play in the works, too. Stephanie Salter from Monroe County is writing it. An educator in her first career, she's had a great deal of experience working with Monroeville's "To Kill a Mockingbird" play. Her husband Butch Salter has played the sheriff for years.

Stephanie's expertise is dramatics, and the committee heard her read the play a couple weeks back. If we can find actors for the play that put half as much into it as she did reading it, there's no telling where it'll go. Mrs. Teresa Hultz, an English teacher at Flomaton high school, will direct it, and there'll be a need for folks like you to step up and try out for the parts. She is tentatively calling the play "Crossties: Stories from the Junction."

Stephanie commented, "The most challenging part has been sifting through the information and selecting stories, then weaving them together in a way that will capture the heart and the spirit of the community - the simplicity and nostalgia of days gone by."

She continued to describe her thoughts: "On a stage with little scenery, no sets, and only a few props, characters play out a series of scenes that depict people and events that shaped Flomaton's history over the years. Sometimes the action is interrupted by unexpected guests like the newly-weds who have been traumatized by Rube Burrows, the notorious train robber. Sometimes characters like Korrie Brown step in and out of the action to speak directly to the audience and set the record straight. Music and lighting help to set the mood and move the play along as each tale is played out upon a practically bare stage."

Salter said, "This is a great opportunity for the community to get involved by playing roles of friends and family members or working behind the scenes to help bring the production to life. I am really looking forward to Flomaton's centennial celebration and seeing the play come to life in May."

Personally, I'm anxious to see the play, scheduled for the first part of May; and I can't wait to have the book published - and I hope you'll be glad both were done. Be ready for more news to come as it develops.

Y'all come.