

Writer's Rummaging Results in Finding a Treasure

ASHS Column for 07 31 08

Jerry Simmons

As a young man in the 1960s, my days were filled with work – 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. Monday through Friday (except Thursday) and 7-7 on Saturday. The custom at most businesses around Century and Flomaton was to close Thursday afternoons. Even so, the standard workweek was nearly 60 hours, because I seldom got finished with home service calls at 6 p.m. A fringe benefit was that I got a one-week vacation every year as long as I was back to work on Friday and Saturday.

One of the people I most enjoyed knowing back then was my cohort and coworker, Leon Lee. Leon is an expert in electronics and together we were the Stanton's team of radio and TV repair. I depended on his knowledge, because often I'd call on him to help me with difficult problems. He demonstrated his proficiency to me more than once.

The shop was in the front part of the old Century Grammar School building on Church Street. There were four of the large classrooms that had their interior walls removed and were used by Stanton's. As you went in the front door, to the left was the TV shop and to the right was a display of TVs, refrigerators and other appliances for sale. It was common to have 20 to 30 refrigerators, washing machines, and/or freezers with TVs and console stereos filling the rest of the space. It was quite an impressive display of merchandise, and a reason Stanton's was one of the largest volume retailers in the region.



A view from Front Street and the L&N railroad circa 1902. One might imagine this is similar to a view in the book mentioned here

One of the things I did while working for Stanton's was tear down and scrap old TVs taken in on trade. Behind the back walls of the shop and display areas was the rest of the old school building. The county health department used the east side, where the door to the old lunch room was, and the Sheriff's Department occupied a portion of the west side that faced Mayo Street. The hall going down the center was perhaps 40 or so feet long, six or seven feet wide, with a ten-foot ceiling. The trade-ins were stacked from the floor to the ceiling, from one end of the hall to the other and just about all across its width. That amounted to a LOT of old TVs.

In the mid-1960s the grocery store across Mayo Street from the old school building closed and the building was remodeled. The intent was to move the TV and appliance display and the TV shop there. It was decided something had to be done with the scrap TVs and I was elected (maybe I volunteered) to tear them down and take the pieces out to the dump.

Century's local landfill was located on Hilltop Road, right at the hill top. Jimmy Croley and I

loaded up the broken-down TVs in the back of one of the store's pickups and hauled them to the landfill. We simply tossed the pieces and parts into the gully dug out for trash. We threw old picture tubes into the gully and jumped back lest when they broke, the vacuum-induced implosion (a vacuum causes the opposite of an EXplosion) would send large chunks of glass back at us. If one of the large tubes failed to break apart, we'd often find large chunks of concrete or rocks and make a game of throwing that at it. It was cool to see the quite impressive implosion. We also used a .22 rifle to break it. We had to shoot the tubes in the face because the glass on the sides was so thick the .22 bullet just ricocheted off. When we shot the tube right in the face, it reminded me of the way a car's windshield looks when a pebble hits it and makes a star-shaped impression. The glass was thick there but not as thick as that on the sides and the bullet would destroy the tube readily.

Once, while making my way through the garbage to right a tube that was at a bad angle to burst, I spied an old green cloth-covered book. There was a great deal of debris in the fill obviously coming from the dismantling of the E.A. Hauss home. Hauss had been the man who ran the Alger-Sullivan Lumber Company for its entire existence and at his death, his wish was for the house to be torn down. Instead of going in and demolishing the house, a Bates family from Jay dismantled it piece by piece and reconstructed it east of Jay where it still stands (almost, but not quite, like it was when Hauss lived in it).

I picked the book up and looked at it a few minutes and realized it was a child's workbook, and the child was Hauss' daughter, Louise. It was written in pencil and dated from 1914-1915. Other relics from the home were there, but none that I remember making such an impression on me as this book. I stashed it in the truck and later took it home.

The book went with me as I moved time and again over the next few years until my daughter asked me if she could take it to look at. I forgot about it until a couple of years ago when I saw the book on a bookcase at my son's home. I tried to reclaim it, but he claimed possession was nine points of law and I didn't succeed. In 2007, I asked to "borrow" it, so that I might scan the pages and make an electronic copy. He relented and I did so. As with so many projects I start, I procrastinated several months and he had to ask for it back. I quickly did the scanning and gave it back to him, but at least now the Society and I have a copy. I also sent an electronic copy to Allen Phillips, Hauss' great-grandson, who lives in Destin.

I've said all that to share a portion of the book with you. The following is a simple perception of life by a little girl perhaps ten years old or so, raised rather privileged, yet isolated. The entire book reveals the efforts of her tutor, whether it was her mother or someone else, to expose her to art and culture and teach her math and literary skills. This particular page says,

My School Room.

My school room is on the third floor. It is about thirty-two feet long and twenty-two feet wide. There are four chairs and three tables in the room. From the large window that faces the mill and west, I can see the smoke from the mill, piles of lumber, roofs of the houses, and the crown of many trees. On the wall hangs the chart I made last year.

Ethel Louise Hauss

November 4, 1914.

Tomorrow, August 1, there will be a book-signing at the Escambia County Bank for the "Flomaton Centennial Scrapbook." The time is 10 a.m. until noon and 1 p.m. until 3. The author (me) and members of the book committee will be there to sign your copy if you want. Books will also be available for sale. Drop by and see us.

Y'all come.