

The CCGS Newsletter is glad to publish stories and other information about Chilton County and her families. In this issue we have an article about the APC's Lay Dam Village:

## APC's Lay Dam Village Life

as related to Scarlett Teel by Wallace Roy Wood

### Upcoming Dates

Clanton Library, 2:00 PM:

- April 28, 2013 – BRING PICTURES AND RECIPES ANYTIME 1:00 TO 5:00!
- May 26, 2013 – MEETING



Mr. Wallace Roy Wood

**Wallace Roy Wood** was born on October 1, 1928 to **Wallace Wood** and **Grace Williams Wood** at the self-contained village built by Alabama Power Company. He enjoyed the idyllic village life growing up on the banks of the Coosa River before he enrolled and graduated from Thorsby Institute in 1947 and Piedmont College in Demorest, Georgia in 1953. He worked for many years as a banker and was a long time member of the First Baptist Church in Clanton.

**Wallace Roy Wood** enjoyed beautiful music, beautiful flowers and appreciated and produced beautiful art. His home garden was appreciated for years by passers-by for its beauty in the spring and summer. To share this beauty, he donated a daylily garden on Ollie Avenue to the city of Clanton. He also held many art shows for the community to enjoy in his garden. He shared by serving on the Clanton Beautification Board; he was a Clanton City Councilman from 1968-1980, as well as serving as Mayor Pro-Tempe for a time

The father of Mr. **Wallace Roy Wood**, Mr. **Wallace Wood**, began working for a newly formed corporation, Alabama Power Company, in 1920. He worked at Lay Dam in Chilton County. It was originally called **Lock 12** when Alabama Power Company was first formed. Land was bought along the Coosa River in north Chilton County, Alabama to build the first unit to generate electricity by the infant company. Much of the land was purchased from the **Rolfree Bates** family. Due to the fact that the nearest town of Clanton was ten to twelve miles away, Alabama Power Company built a self-contained village at Lay Dam to provide the necessary services for the workers, employees, and their families to live at the site. Since Lay Dam was the first dam established on the system, Lay Dam Village must have been the first village built. Mr. **Wallace Roy Wood** was born in 1928 in this Alabama Power Company village on the bank of the Coosa River. Mr. **Wallace Roy Wood** related this information of his experiences there as he lived and enjoyed village life until the 1940s when he began college. One could tell from the look on his face as he related his memories that Mr. **Wallace Roy Wood** had a warm spot in his heart for Alabama Power Company and thoroughly enjoyed his childhood growing up in the various activities and atmosphere of the village life. Since this interview Mr. **Wood** has died. This is his story of village life at Lay Dam.....  
To enter the village one traveled beneath a

distinctive stone archway across the roadway with a cattle guard underneath. The village was actually two villages—one for the black employees and one for the white employees. Each village was provided with its own school—a one room school with one teacher for the black children and a two room school for the white children with a teacher paid by Alabama Power Company and a teacher also provided by Chilton County. Teachers who taught there over the years were Mrs. **Jessie Dorminey Grant**, Mrs. **Bernice Williams Thomason Gaither**, Mrs. **Ruth Primm**, Mrs. **Evelyn Cooper Martin**, Mrs. **Frances O'Neal Greene**, and Mrs. **Lois Primm Taff** from Thorsby, Alabama. Alabama Power Company provided a character named "Daddy Shores" to visit the schools for the company to stress electrical safety programs.

Entertainment was provided also. A baseball team was formed and probably some of the players were hired to work for the company simply because they were good ball players. A ballpark was provided and the team went around to other towns to play and hosted games at their own park. The "dam kids" were the envy of Clanton kids because the Clanton kids did not even have a swimming pool or tennis court as provided by Alabama Power Company at the village. Soon visitors from Clanton came to play tennis! Another gate led from the village to Yellowleaf Creek to provide access to fishing, and a hill

was equipped with pine straw for the children to slide to the bottom!

A large club house was provided for the Alabama Power Company's employees and their families. It was used to hold dances, cooking schools, ice cream suppers, and hot dog suppers. The ice cream was sold for about a nickel a cup. The money went for the benefit of the Sunday school. Mrs. **Grace Williams Wood** was credited with beginning the Sunday school classes. **Granny Lakeman** taught the Sunday school classes, and pastors of churches in Clanton would come to preach services or revivals

There was much merriment in the village at Christmas time. Alabama Power Company provided all the children a gift such as a toy car or truck for the boys and a makeup bag with some make up for the girls. Each child got a bag of fruits and delicious sugar candy as well.

The village had a community barn with stalls provided for individual cows of the residents. It was amazing to see that the cows knew exactly the stall in which they belonged and headed for the proper stall each day at milking time. Mrs. **Sarah Cox Jones**, daughter of Mr. **Charlie B. Cox** and wife of Mr. **Crit Jones**, would have fun aiming a stream of milk from the cow's teat into curious watching children's mouths during milking time.

Rows of metal garages were provided for the employees' cars. The garages kept the cars out

## Alabama Power Company Lay Dam Village Life (cont)

of the sun and rain but provided little protection from the elements for the owners of the cars, because they were built away from the houses. A small ice plant was provided with a special wagon that went around to the homes delivering chunks of ice for ice boxes. A special water system and a village wide only telephone system with coded rings for each home were provided. A family would be alerted to pick up their telephone by hearing perhaps two long rings followed by one short ring for example. One un-named person always picked up no matter whose code rang simply for the sheer pleasure of talking on the telephone!

At lunch time each day an employee went around to the homes in the village to gather up lunch pails to deliver to the workers on the job. The person picking up the lunches had a special carrier with double hooks so that he could carry four lunches at a time rather than only two at a time. A bunk house for the unmarried men was in the village as well. Mrs. **Grace Williams Wood**, Mr. **Wallace Roy Wood**'s mother, became known for her cooking skills by cooking for the men in the bunk house; often she was called upon to cook for visiting "big wheels" from the company.

In spite of all the care needed by the children who were produced in the village, their mothers seemed to have spare time. They would meet together regularly for sewing and a favorite card game, *Flinch*, which was enjoyed by the women. The children had a favorite tree, a sycamore, in which almost everyone's initials became carved while they were growing up in Lay Dam village. The tree stood for many years as a memorial and evidence of their living there.

Remembered family names of those once living in the village are two sets of **Millers, Marcus, Wood, Lakeman, Farley, Greene, Deal, Woodson, Jones**, and **Thomason**. Mr. **Thomason**, the assistant superintendent of Lay Dam, was killed when a turbine blew. His widow, Mrs. **Bernice Williams Thomason Gaither**, after her remarriage, returned to teach at the village school.

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