

# CHILTONIAN

Volume 21, Number 1

January 2001

## QUARTERLY MEETING

The regularly scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society will be held Sunday, January 14, 2001, at 2:00 p.m. in the Clanton/Chilton Public Library. All members are encouraged to attend this important meeting.

At the time of publication and due to the recent holidays, no guest speaker has been identified.

At our January meeting, nominations will be accepted for all Society positions, and new officers will be elected.

## YET ANOTHER CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We again solicit *your* inputs for future Newsletters. We need feature articles on churches, schools, businesses, military units, individuals, etc. In addition, we will publish family Bible data, old newspaper articles, and a limited number of historical and genealogical inquiries each quarter.

But before we can publish such things, we need *your* inputs. Please send us a copy of any historical information you would like to see in the Society Newsletter, and--as long as it doesn't libel someone or violate a copyright--we'll do our best to publish it for you and for all other members of the Society.

## CREDITS:

*Chiltonian* is a quarterly publication of the Chilton County Historical Society and Archives, Inc., P. O. Box 644, Clanton, Alabama 35046-0644. (A Non-Profit Organization)

## OFFICERS:

President	-	Colyn Moatts
Vice Pres.	-	John Glasscock
Secretary	-	Cathy Popwell
Treasurer	-	Colyn Moatts (acting)
Historian	-	Marian Mims
Reporter	-	Betty Collins
Program Chair	-	Glynis Thomas

## MEMBERSHIP RATES:

Annual: Individual \$9, Couple \$12, Student \$5  
(Dues payable in January)  
Lifetime: \$100

## Where Was Baker/Chilton's First Courthouse Located?

By  
Colyn C. Moatts

For many decades, we've known that Baker County's original "County Capital" consisted of a one-room log courthouse located to the northeast of present-day Clanton, at a site known as "Grantville."

Because the structure had not yet been built in the spring of 1869, the first session of Circuit Court was held in Walnut Creek Methodist Church. However, the new courthouse was available for the fall term of court. We also know that the new log structure mysteriously burned to the ground in early 1870, resulting in the seat of County government's temporary relocation to Dake's Old Mill on Walnut Creek.

Our primary public source for most of the above information is T. E. Wyatt's classic history, *Chilton County and Her People*, which was first

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(continued from page 1)

published in 1940. "The old courthouse at Grantville was...located 300 yards north of the old home of Ely Moatts, one mile northwest of Walnut Creek." Included in the Carlos Wyatt update of the volume (done in 1975) is a photo taken from the Pinedale Road bridge over I-65, looking south toward Walnut Creek. In this photo, an arrow points toward the old Grantville location on the right or *west* side of I-65. Because the photo is a shallow oblique view, it's impossible to determine the exact location beneath the arrow; however, it's important to note here that old Adams Ferry Road crossed the current location of I-65 as depicted in the photo, between Pinedale Road bridge (location of the camera) and the Walnut Creek valley in the photo.

Most folks remember that Mr. Wyatt was editor and publisher of *The Union Banner*, and many folks assume that he only researched old newspaper files to come up with the information in his history. However, he also interviewed many of the "old-timers" in the County, and one of those he relied heavily on was Alfred Baker, Jr., a son of the man for whom Baker County was named when it was established in 1868.

Alfred Baker, Jr., was born 25 Nov 1858 and lived until 24 Oct 1946. He was 11 years old when the Grantville courthouse was built, and, according to my father (one of his grandsons), he had a vivid memory of the events that took place during Union Reconstruction.

According to Grandpa Baker, the County's first courthouse was located on the north side of Adams Ferry Road (referenced above), directly across the road from the old Moatts homeplace. Today, the western remnant of Adams Ferry Road is known as Laverne Street. Before it was cut by Interstate 65, the road continued eastward, winding its way to the Coosa River. (See map, next page.)

The Grandpa Baker location of Grantville is supported by my personal memories of visits to my Great-Uncle Eli Moatts who lived at the Moatts homeplace with his widowed sister, Viola Headley. The homeplace remained intact until shortly after Aunt Viola's death in 1966.

Uncle Eli, son of Tom Moatts and step-grandson of Alfred Baker, Sr., was born 2 Oct 1882 and died 31 May 1958. Uncle Eli was close to his "Uncle" Alfred, Jr., and Eli was an important caregiver to his grandmother (Mary Ann "Polly" Johnson

Moatts Baker) after she was divorced by Alfred, Sr., sometime after 1890.

On my frequent childhood visits to Uncle Eli at the Moatts homeplace, there was always a cultivated field on the north side of the road in front of the homeplace—where Scottsdale Subdivision houses now stand. The field was cultivated by my Uncle Cabe (Eli's brother), with a portion used as a garden by my Aunt Viola.

Several times, after the harvest was complete, Uncle Eli walked with me into the field to a point about 50 meters north of Laverne Street and about 50 meters east of present-day Moatts Drive. There, in a circular pattern about two meters in diameter, was a patch of uneven, rough ground where only weeds and thorns grew. My Uncle Cabe always plowed around the spot when he put in a crop of corn or cotton.

According to my Uncle Eli, the circular area was the site of the Grantville courthouse well. Also according to him, the well was filled with chimney stones and other rubble after the 1870 fire. Uncle Eli further told me that, "Lots of local people still think there's gold buried at the bottom of that old well, but there ain't nothin' to it. They got the money out before they burned it."

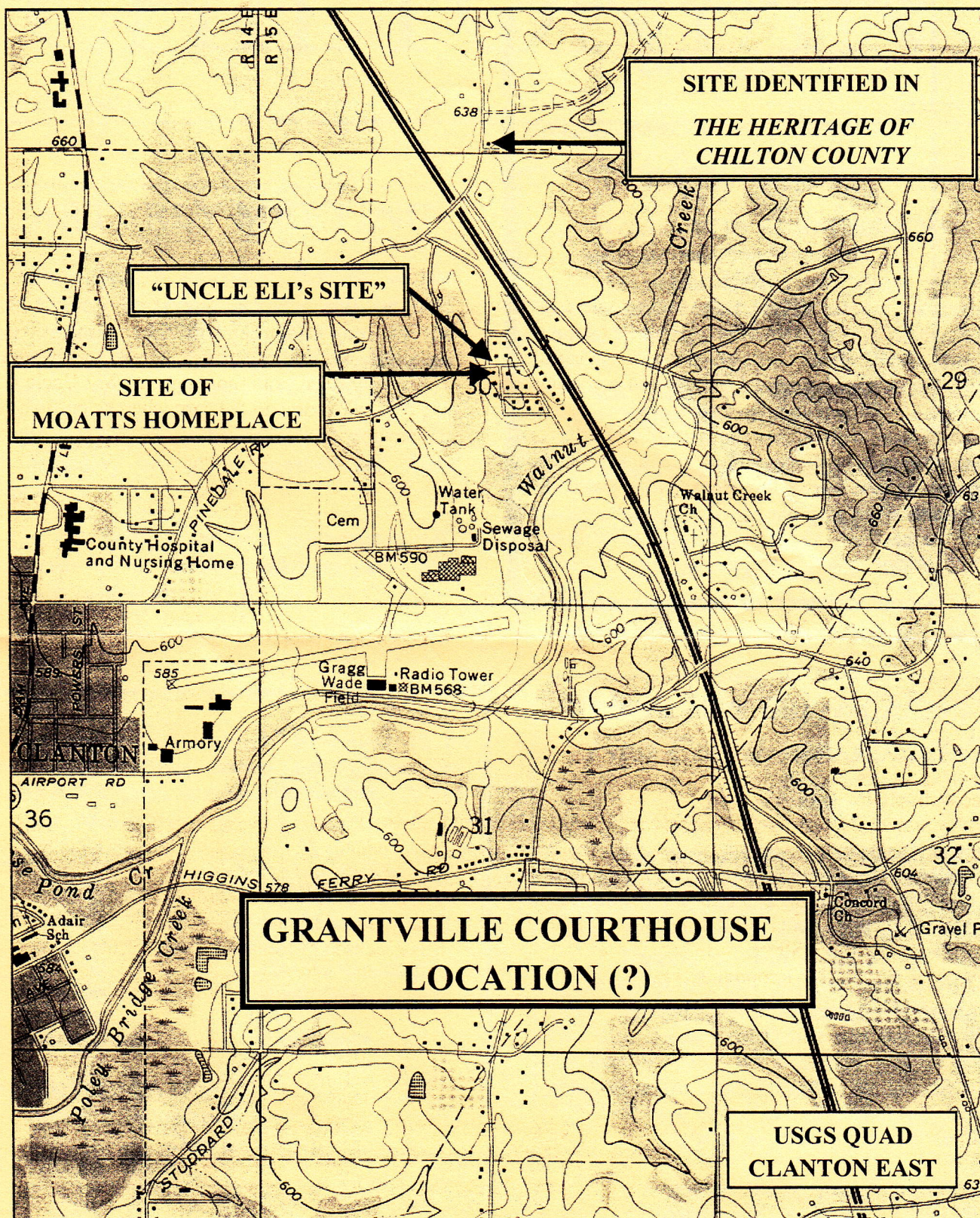
Because of my personal experience with Uncle Eli, I was somewhat surprised to see an article in the new book, *The Heritage of Chilton County*, which depicted a different location—east of I-65—for the old courthouse. (See map.)

Although I was on the Heritage Book Committee, the editorial process was completed independently by various committee members, so I had not seen the article titled, "Placenames and Trivia Tidbits About Chilton County and a Few Places Just Beyond Its Borders," written by Mr. Mike Jackson of Houston, Texas.

In subsequent correspondence with Mr. Jackson, I learned that the source of his information is a program known as *Street Atlas USA* (version 8.0) and that it has a pretty good record for accuracy on old, historical sites. Mr. Jackson has no other information about the Grantville site.

At the time of this writing, I have been unable to do any research on *Street Atlas* to identify its source for the Grantville location data. In the meantime, if anyone has additional relevant information on the Grantville location, please contact the Historical Society.







## Value Plus

*Old Schools of Chilton County Alabama*

By Lorene LeCroy

\$15.00 + \$2.50 S&H

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*Baker/Chilton County Marriages,*

1870-1893

\$22.50 + \$2.50 S&H

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*The Heritage of Chilton County*

\$59.40 + \$5 S&H

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Chilton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 644

Clanton, AL 35046-0644

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# CHILTONIAN

Volume 21, Number 2

April 2001

## QUARTERLY MEETING

Due to a number of factors, there will be no scheduled meeting of the Chilton County Historical Society in April.

Those annual members who wish to continue receiving the Newsletter are reminded that renewals were due in January 2001. This will be the last Newsletter mailed to those whose 2001 renewals are not received by May 1, 2001.

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## *What Happened To The 1890 Population Census?*

How many of you have ever run up against the "brick wall" of the 1890 Federal Census? I know I certainly have. I'd give almost anything to know whether one of my great-great-grandfathers was still living with his second wife or had divorced her by the time of the Census enumeration.

The following article is reprinted from Volume 16, Number 1, of the *Alabama State Data Center (ASDC) News*. It gives some insight into a major failure of records keeping and historic preservation.

Reference sources routinely dismiss the 1890 Census records as "destroyed by fire" in 1921. Yet the tale is far more complex. This is a genuine tragedy of records—played out before Congress established a National Archives—and eternally anguishing to researchers.

As there was not a permanent Census Bureau until 1902, the Department of the Interior administered the Eleventh Census. Political patronage was the most common order for appointment of the nearly 47,000 enumerators; no examination was required. This was the first US Census to use Herman Hollerith's electrical tabulation system, a method by which data were punched into cards and tabulated. Also, for the first time, enumerators prepared a separate schedule for each family. The schedule contained inquiries relating to race (white, black, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, or Indian), home ownership, ability to speak English, immigration, and naturalization. Enumerators asked married women for the number of children born and the number living at the time of the Census to determine fecundity. The 1890 schedules also included a question relating to Civil War service.

*(continued, next page)*



When enumerators completed their counting, the US population was returned at nearly 63 million (62,979,766). Complaints about accuracy and undercounting poured into the Census office, as did demands for recounts. The 1890 Census seemed mired in fraud and political intrigue. New York State officials were accused of bolstering Census numbers, and the intense business competition between Minneapolis and St. Paul resulted in no fewer than 19 indictments against Minneapolis businessmen for allegedly adding more than 1,100 phony names to the Census. Perhaps not surprisingly, St. Paul businessmen brought the Federal court complaints against the Minneapolis businessmen.

In march 1896, the original 1890 special schedules for mortality, crime, pauperism and benevolence, special classes (e.g., deaf, dumb, blind, insane), and portions of the transportation and insurance schedules were badly damaged by fire and destroyed by Department of the Interior order. No damage to the general population schedules was reported at that time. In fact, a 1903 Census clerk found them to be in "fairly good condition." In 1921, the remaining schedules could be found piled in an orderly manner on closely placed pine shelves in an unlocked file room in the basement of the Commerce Building.

At about five o'clock on January 10, 1921, an employee noticed smoke coming through openings around pipes that ran from the boiler room into the file room. He saw no fire but immediately reported the smoke to the desk watchman, who called the fire department. Minutes later, on the fifth floor, a watchman noticed smoke in the men's bathroom, took the elevator to the basement, was forced back by the dense smoke, and went to the watchman's desk. By then, the fire department had arrived, the house alarm was pulled (reportedly at 5:30), and a dozen employees still working on upper floors evacuated. A total of three alarms and a general local call were turned in.

After some setbacks from the intense smoke, firemen gained access to the basement. While a crowd of 10,000 watched, they poured 20 streams of water into the building and flooded the cellar through holes cut into the concrete floor. The fire did not go above the basement, seemingly thanks to a fireproofed floor. By 9:45 p.m. the fire was extinguished, but firemen poured water into the burned area past 10:30 p.m. Disaster planning and recovery were almost unknown in 1921. With the blaze extinguished, despite the obvious damage and need for immediate salvage

efforts, the chief clerk opened windows to let out the smoke, and, except for the watchmen on patrol, everyone went home.

Newspaper photographs captured the scene after the devastating fire and pointed out the need for safe storage of national records. The morning after was an archivist's nightmare, with ankle-deep water covering records in many areas. The 1890 Census had been stacked outside the fireproof basement vault and was, according to one source, "first in the path of the firemen." That morning, Census Director Sam Rogers estimated 25 percent of the 1890 Census was destroyed, with 50 percent of the remainder damaged by water, smoke, and fire. The preliminary assessment of Census Bureau Clerk T. J. Fitzgerald was far more sobering. Fitzgerald told reporters that the priceless 1890 records were "certain to be absolutely ruined. There is no method of restoring the legibility of a water-soaked volume."

Speculation and rumors about the cause of the blaze ran rampant. Some newspapers claimed, and many suspected, it was caused by a cigarette or a lighted match. Employees were keenly questioned about their smoking habits. Others believed the fire started among shavings in the carpenter shop or was the result of spontaneous combustion. At least one woman from Ohio felt certain the fire was part of a conspiracy to defraud her family of their rightful estate by destroying every vestige of evidence proving heirship.

Most agreed the fire could not have been burning long. After all, a watchman and engineers had been in the basement as late as 4:35 and not detected any smoke. Others, however, believed the fire had been burning for hours, considering its stubbornness. Despite every investigative effort, no conclusion as to the cause was reached. There were strict rules against smoking, electrical wires were intact, and no rats had been found in the building for two months. Spontaneous combustion in bales of waste paper was unlikely, as they were burned on the outside and not totally consumed. In the end, even experts from the Bureau of Standards brought in to investigate the blaze could not determine the cause.

The disaster spurred renewed cries and support for a National Archives and also gave rise to proposals for better records protection in current storage spaces. Utah's Senator Reed Smoot, convinced a cigarette caused the fire, prepared a bill disallowing smoking in some government buildings. The *Washington Post*



expressed outrage that the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were in danger even at the moment, being stored at the Department of State in wooden cabinets.

Meanwhile, the still soggy original and only copies of the 1890 schedules remained in ruins. Over the next few months, rumors spread that salvage attempts would not be made and that Census Director Sam Rogers had recommended that Congress authorize destruction of the 1890 Census. Prominent historians, attorneys, and genealogical organizations wrote to new Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, the Librarian of Congress, and other government officials in protest. The government invariably denied any planned destruction. By May of 1921 the records were still piled in a large warehouse where, complained new Census Director William Steuart, they could not be consulted and would probably gradually deteriorate. Steuart arranged for their transfer back to the Census building, to be bound where possible, but at least put in some order for reference.

The record is scanty about what happened between 1922 and 1932 and seemingly silent on what precipitated the following chain of events. In December 1932, in accordance with Federal records procedures at the time, the Chief Clerk of the Bureau of Census sent the Librarian of Congress a list of papers no longer necessary for current business and scheduled for destruction. He asked the Librarian to report back to him any documents that should be retained for their historical interest. Item 22 on the list for Bureau of the Census read "Schedules, Population... 1890, Original." The Librarian identified no records as permanent, the list was sent forward, and Congress authorized destruction on February 21, 1933. A small scribbled note found in a Census Bureau file states "remaining schedules destroyed by Department of Commerce in 1934 (not approved by the Geographer)."

What happened to the fervent and vigilant voices that championed these schedules in 1921? How were these records overlooked by Library of Congress staff? Who in the Census Bureau determined the schedules were useless, why, and when?

Some of these documents remain. In 1942 the National Archives accessioned a damaged bundle of surviving Illinois schedules as part of a shipment of records found during a Census Bureau move. At the time, they were believed to be the only surviving fragments. In 1953, however, the Archives

accessioned additional fragments from Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas, and the District of Columbia. These have been committed to microfilm and the microfilm series can be viewed at the National Archives, the regional archives, and several other repositories. Before disregarding the 1890 Census, Alabama genealogical and other researchers should check whether the schedules they seek did happen to survive.

*[In our immediate area, for example, the 1890 schedules for beats 8 and 11 of adjacent Perry County still survive.]*

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\$15.00 + \$3 S&H

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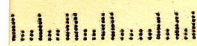
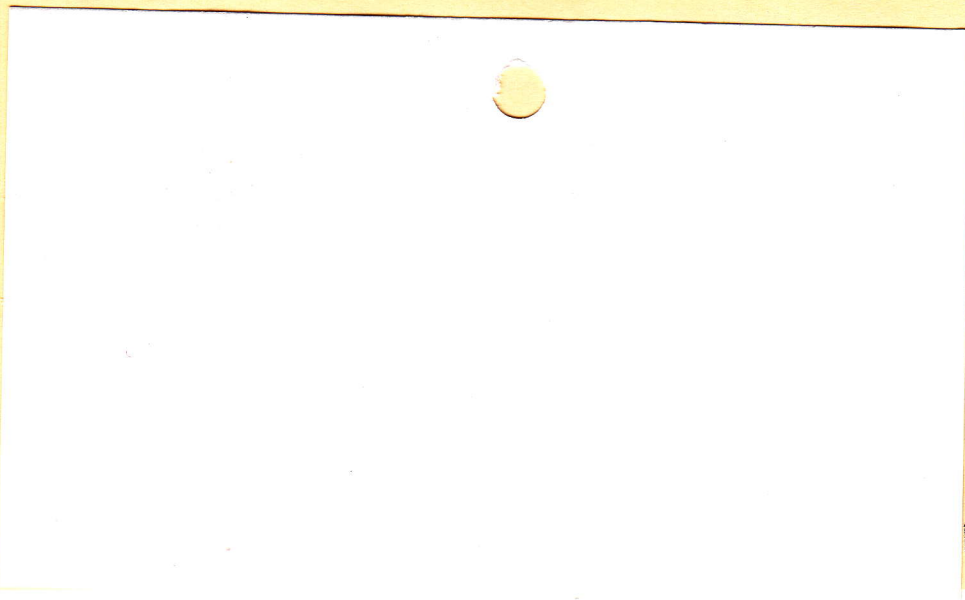
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# CHILTONIAN

Volume 21, Number 3

July 2001

## QUARTERLY MEETING

The Chilton County Historical Society will hold its quarterly meeting at 2:00 PM on 8 July at the Chilton/Clanton Public Library. Although no formal program is scheduled, the time will be used to develop an action plan to chart the future course of the Society. All members and other citizens who are interested in our County's history and its preservation are urged to attend.

As a result of non-payment of dues, several names have been dropped from the Society's membership roll. Those who wish to be reinstated may attend the July meeting and pay dues for the coming year (2002).

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## Encouraging Words

On 23 April 2001, the Society received the following note of encouragement:

Mill Valley, CA  
April 19, 2001

Dear Friends,

*Enclosed is a check for [amount] to help defray the cost of postage, since I am a "Lifetime" member.*

*The Chiltonian is always received with much interest and appreciation of the effort of those who give of their time in publishing it.*

*In a recent issue, the recalling of the 1932 tornado brought back memories to me, since we lived across the street from the hospital at that time. If you would be interested, I could write you about it.*

*Thank you again for the good work you do.*

Sincerely,  
Jan (Janette) Williams

Of course the Society welcomes the practical assistance in the form of a donation for postage; however, we are most encouraged by the offer of a written, different-perspective, eyewitness account of an important historical event in Chilton County.

The Society gladly accepted Mrs. Williams's gracious gift as well as her kind offer to write about the 1932 tornado. We look forward to receiving her article, which we hope to publish very soon.

## Chilton County Bibliography

The Society is often queried about available "books on Chilton County." As a partial response to those queries, the following list of books, articles, and compilations is offered. You will note that some of the titles do not indicate relevance to Chilton County;

(continued on Page 2)



however, each listed entry includes important historical-context information or direct reference to the County—either by its current name, its former name (Baker), or by name of one of the original counties from which Baker was formed in 1868.

The list is not intended to be comprehensive, and additions—or corrections—are most welcome. The entries are alphabetical by author or publisher.

1. Abrams, Ulysses H., *A History of Mulberry Baptist Church, 1818-1968*. Montevallo: Montevallo Printing, Inc., Second Printing, 1995.
2. American Historical Society, Inc., *History of Alabama and Her People*. Chicago & New York, 1927.
3. Autauga Genealogical Society, Edited by Larry W. Nobles, *Federal Census, Autauga County 1860*. Prattville: Autauga Genealogical Society, 1992.
4. Ayers, Edward L., *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
5. Bergeron, Arthur W., *Confederate Mobile*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991.
6. Brewer, Willis, *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men, From 1540 to 1872*. Baltimore: Reprinted for Clearfield Company, Inc., by Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1995. Originally published in Montgomery in 1872.
7. Carter, Hodding, *The Angry Scar*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959.
8. Chilton Heritage Book Committee, *The Heritage of Chilton County Alabama*. Clanton: Heritage Publishing Consultants, Inc., 2000.
9. Chilton County Historical Society & Archives, Inc., Edited by Benjamin D. Roberts, *Cemeteries of Chilton*. Clanton: Mail Specialist, 1990.
10. Clanton Study Club, Edited by Benjamin D. Roberts, *A History of Chilton County*. Clanton: Early Enterprises and Hayman Associates, Inc., 1983.
11. DuBose, John Witherspoon, Edited by James K. Greer, *Alabama's Tragic Decade: Ten Years of Alabama, 1865-1874*. Birmingham: Webb Book Company, 1940.
12. Evans, Curt J., "He 'Dared Maintain' His Views: Daniel Pratt's 1855 Senate Race," in *Alabama Review* #50 (January 1997): 3-17.
13. Fleming, Walter L., *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1905.
14. Foshee, J. C., *I Remember... I Remember: My Heritage, History, and My Life*. Montevallo: Times Printing Company, 1974.
15. Gray, Daniel S., *Autauga County: The First Hundred Years, 1818-1918*. Prattville: Prattville Public Library, 1972.
16. Hamilton, Virginia Van der Veer, *Alabama: A History*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977.
17. Jackson, Harvey H., *Putting "Loafing Streams" to Work*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997.
18. Kelsey, Michael; Nancy Graff Kelsey; Ginny Guinn Parsons, Compilers, *Miscellaneous Alabama Newspaper Abstracts, Vol. I*. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1995.
19. Kelsey, Michael; et al, Compilers, *Miscellaneous Alabama Newspaper Abstracts, Vol. II*. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1996.
20. LeCroy, Lorene, *Old Schools of Chilton County Alabama*. Clanton: Private printing, 1997.
21. LeCroy, Lorene, and Blanche Dennis, Maplesville, *The Town and The People*. Montevallo: Times Printing Company, 1990.

(continued, Page 3)



22. McMillan, Malcolm Cook, *The Alabama Confederate Reader*. University: University of Alabama Press, 1963.
23. Mims, Shadrack, *A History of Autauga County*. Prattville: Reprinted by Autauga County Board of Commissioners, 1976.
24. Roberts, Ben, with Nell Thomas, Betty Collins, and John Glasscock, *Yours, Mine and Theirs*. Clanton: Mail Specialist, 1995.
25. Rogers, William Warren, *Confederate Home Front: Montgomery During the Civil War*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999.
26. Rogers, William Warren; Robert David Ward; Leah Rawls Atkins; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994.
27. Schunk, Dr. John F., Editor, *1850 U.S. Census, Autauga County Alabama*. Wichita: S-K Publications, 1987.
28. Thomas, Nell; Sue Thomas; John Glasscock; Cathy Popwell, Compilers, *Baker/Chilton County Alabama Marriages, 1870-1893*. Clanton: Chilton County Historical Society, 1999.
29. Thomas, Sue Hardy, and Elizabeth Jones Collins, Compilers, *1870 Federal Census of Baker County (Now Chilton County) Alabama*. Birmingham: Private printing, 1985.
30. Vinson, Charlene, *Genealogical Abstracts From The Autauga Citizen, 1853*. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 2000.
31. Vinson, Charlene, *Genealogical Abstracts From The Banner, 1893*. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1999.
32. Wyatt, Thomas Eugene, *Chilton County and Her People: A Brief History*. Clanton: The Union Banner, 1940 & 1950.
33. Wyatt, Thomas Eugene, edited by Carlos Wyatt, *Chilton County and Her People: A Brief History*. Montevallo: Times Printing Company, 1975. [An update]
34. Wyeth, John A., *Life of Nathan Bedford Forrest*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1899.

We believe we have provided sufficient information to allow you to access most of the above books/articles/compilations through your local library or inter-library loan. Some, however, are available only through the Society and the Chilton/Clanton Public Library, e.g., Ms. LeCroy's *Old Schools of Chilton County Alabama* and the Society's *Baker/Chilton County Marriages, 1870-1893*. Of course, the recently published book, *The Heritage of Chilton County Alabama*, is also available for purchase through the Society or the Chilton/Clanton Public Library.

We hope you find this short bibliography a useful addition to your historical or genealogical resource file.

#### *The Chiltonian*

### **Value Plus**

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Volume 21, Number 4

October 2001

## QUARTERLY MEETING

The Chilton County Historical Society will hold its quarterly meeting at 2:00 PM on Sunday, 14 October, at the Chilton County Mini-Museum in Peach Park. Mr. Wayne Sewell of Alexander City will speak on "Who Are You?—A Guide to Genealogy Methods and Practices."

All members and other Chilton citizens who are interested in our County's history and its preservation are encouraged to attend.

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Programs	-	Morris Moatts

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## Alfred Baker

### *The Quest For Documentation*

There is little doubt that our County's original namesake, Alfred Baker, Sr., was the moving force behind the establishment of Baker/Chilton County in 1868; however, there is a relative dearth of documentation currently available regarding either his private or his public life.

Perhaps the absence of private documentation can be partially explained by a frequently told family story that all Alfred's personal papers were burned shortly after his death. (He died on 9 February 1896, a Sunday, at Clanton.) This attempt to "prevent embarrassment to the family" might also explain why there is no record of a will ever being processed through Probate Court. As a man of considerable means who had served as US Postmaster, Justice of the Peace, and State Legislator, Alfred Baker certainly knew the importance of a will and the final settlement of his estate.

That there was some potential for "embarrassment to the family" can not be denied. Again, numerous family stories recount Alfred's fondness for members of the opposite sex and his many indiscretions as a married man and public figure. One issue from an extramarital affair can be documented, and a charge of bigamy that was made moot by a timely divorce can be substantiated by inference from relevant newspaper articles and census reporting. Some wags have commented that such indiscretions would make Alfred Baker singularly qualified for political office in the modern era.

Although some public records exist in County files and in the State Archives, many of these are tabular in nature and give little insight into the dynamics behind a particular event. For example, we can document Alfred's election as a Justice of the

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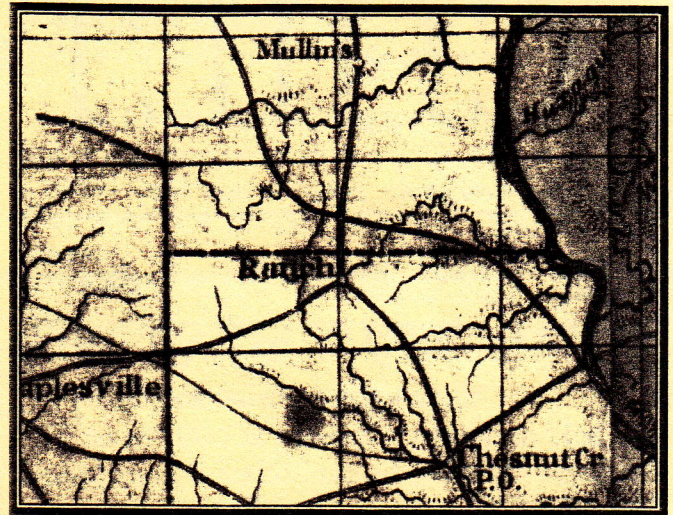
Peace of Autauga County on 3 March 1862; we have records of his enlistment and service in a "90-day company" of the militia or Home Guard (known as the Autauga Rangers), also in March of 1862; and, we have records of his service in the Legislature, after being elected as a Radical Republican in the "5-day follies" election of February 1868.

According to the Secretary of State's records in the State Archives, Alfred Baker was something less than a "mover and shaker" while in the Legislature. In the handwritten log of legislative activity, the name of "Mr. Baker" appears only occasionally, usually in reference to acquiring tax-free liquor licenses for some of his business associates. His major accomplishment as a Legislator from Autauga County was the establishment of Baker County—a political and geographic power base for himself, his relatives, and his friends. Once the new county was a fact of life, his record of legislative activity is notable only for Alfred Baker's absence from the sessions.

Recently, two documents were discovered in the State Archives that expand our knowledge of Alfred Baker and give additional depth and color to his life and character. Both documents are related to the War for Southern Independence, and the first comes from an Archives file called *Governor's Correspondence, Applications for Exemption from Military Service*. The handwritten document ensemble is transcribed below, with spelling, grammar, and punctuation as in the originals:

[Transmittal note]

"Ranch, Ala. [see map] April the 15<sup>th</sup> 1864  
To your Excelency Mr Thomas H. Watts  
Governor of the State of Ala. I drop you  
[these?] few lines with the enclosed pertition  
asking your Excelency to Exempt me from conscrip-  
tion as it is the request of the citizens in  
the Beat in which I live – as your Excelency  
will see my servises is necessary in the Beat  
in which I live. Please write to me soon  
and let me know what to depend upon.  
I will further state to your Excelency that most all of  
the citizens of Chestnut Creek Beat have told me that  
they are willing & desirous of signing a pertition to  
your Excelency for my exemption But I have not had  
the oppertunity of seeing all of them. Please anser this  
soon [and?] nothin more But I remain yours as ever  
Alfred Baker, Esqr"



Detail from Colton's 1868 Map of Alabama  
[Courtesy of University of Alabama]

[NOTE: Published only a few months before Baker County was created, Colton's 1868 Map of Alabama depicts the location of "Ranch" immediately south of the (then) Shelby County line, approximately halfway between the Chestnut Creek (Autauga County) and Mullins (Shelby County) Post Offices. Some have asserted that Ranch was located at the site of the old Tink's Restaurant near Peach Park; however, the Colton Map—accuracy unknown—appears to locate it farther north, near the headwaters of Walnut Creek, perhaps in or just north or northeast of the present-day City of Clanton.]

[Enclosed petition]

"The State of Alabama  
Autauga County

To his Excellency Thos H. Watts, Governor of said  
State \_\_\_\_\_

The undersigned your petitioners and Citizens  
of Chestnut Precinct in said County \_\_\_\_\_ Showeth  
unto your Excellency that Alfred Baker is a Justice of  
the Peace in and for said Precinct and County, that he  
is a good Officer and as such we believe his services  
are necessary for the proper administration of the laws,  
that in the section of Country where he resides it is at  
this time indispensably necessary to have a Justice of  
the Peace. \_\_\_\_\_ We would therefore respectfully ask  
Your Excellency to Certify that said Baker as such  
Justice of the Peace is necessary for the proper

(continued on Page 3)



administration of the State Government, in order that he may not be liable to Conscription under the late Bill of Congress\_\_\_he being within the Conscription age\_\_\_And is in duty bound & your petitioners will ever pray.

April 4<sup>th</sup> 1864

Robert (his + mark) Wilson  
J M Wyatt  
John R. Price  
James M. Parrish  
Moses Armstrong  
James R. Mims  
Bartley Oden  
Joel Dennis  
James Wilson  
J. W. N. Wilson  
Henry A[us?]bonn  
Henry A. Maddox  
Wm Driver  
Dennis Askins  
I. M. Connell  
Edward Mims  
George G. Mims  
Anderson Baker  
Abraham Mims"

[Annotation on back of petition]

"Autauga  
Alfred Baker  
J.P.

Certificate  
Given"

As an aside, one of the most interesting signatures on Alfred's petition is that of his younger brother, Anderson Baker, who later served as one of the new Baker County "Election Commissioners." The documentation of Anderson's Civil War participation is confusing at best, and his presence at home to sign a petition—in April 1864—only adds to that confusion.

The record of the Autauga County Volunteers Aid Fund (page 65) indicates that Anderson was a conscript who entered service on 1 September 1862. The Compiled Service Records of the National Archives indicate that Anderson was a Private in Company "F" of the 9<sup>th</sup> Alabama Cavalry, who was paroled at Montgomery on 26 April 1865. The 1907 Census of Confederate Soldiers Residing in

Alabama—which includes Anderson's correct birth date—indicates he entered service at Selma in June 1863 and that he was "Sent home sick and never recovering, did not return to service—sent home in June 1864."

Granted, the 1907 Census enumerator only recorded information provided by Anderson, but, unless his signature was forged on Alfred's petition, he was already home on 4 April 1864. Another factor we have to consider is the impact of the chaos that ensued when the South lost the war and began the agony of Union Reconstruction.

Southern government and military paperwork and record-keeping were a shambles. Given the existing confusion, it was relatively easy for the "common folk" to remember history any way they might choose. And they could almost be certain that no paperwork would contradict their version of events. In his case, perhaps Anderson felt uncomfortable being labeled a "conscript"—he told the Census enumerator his first name was "Andrew" and he was in Company "A" vice Company "F"—and perhaps he was even a deserter who had gone home to be with his ailing first wife (Elizabeth Mims Baker) who died on 31 May 1864. Unless some Baker descendant shares with us a cache of personal letters that have been moldering in an attic trunk for the past century, we'll likely never know the answers.

The same phenomenon of selective memory is also evident in the case of Alfred Baker. We now have documented evidence that his Civil War military service was limited to 90 days of duty (in Mobile from March – June of 1862). We know that the Autauga Rangers home-guard unit participated in the "defense of Selma" in the spring of 1865, and we can infer that Alfred—as an officer of that unit—participated in the fighting before Selma, perhaps even at Ebenezer Church; however, this is inference based on logic, and no supporting documentation has been found. Because of the "Certificate Given" to him by Governor Watts in 1864, we now have documented proof that Alfred was exempt from the Conscription Law and regular service.

With the above documentation as background, we can read a more recent version of Alfred Baker's history that was published more than 30 years after his death as part of a biography on Elijah Cary Baker. Cary's bio was submitted for the American Historical Society's *History of Alabama and Her People, Volume II* and is found on page 553.

(Continued on Page 4)



(Continued from Page 3)

Elijah Cary Baker was born on 8 March 1878, the second son of Alfred and Mary Ann Johnson Moatts Baker (Alfred's second wife), and he included in his 1927 bio the following paragraph on his parents:

"[Cary was] a son of Alfred and Mary (Johnson) Baker, the former a farmer and merchant and the first man to be elected to the Alabama State Legislature from Baker County [sic], which was later made Chilton County. **He enlisted in the Confederate army, and served as an officer during the war between the states. After the surrender he returned to his home, and conducted a large plantation near Clanton.** A man of public spirit and pride in his neighborhood, he donated the ground on which the courthouse stands in Clanton, and also the site for the Methodist Church, and he was the original owner of the townsite of Clanton. For some years he was the leading merchant of Clanton, and he died a rich man. His father, Charles Baker [sic], was one of the pioneers of Chilton County. The mother of Elijah C. Baker was born and reared near Columbiana, and she was the daughter of Isam Johnson [sic], a farmer and stockraiser of the Columbiana district."

Based on the documentation that's available, the two sentences in bold (above paragraph) *technically* are not untrue; yet, a casual reading certainly leaves one with the impression that Alfred enlisted in the *regular* army, fought for four long years, and returned home after the official surrender.

Was Cary a deliberate prevaricator? I don't think so. He was born several years after the war and Union Reconstruction, and it is much more likely that he only repeated the family history as it was taught to him as a child.

As Cary correctly pointed out in the latter portion of the quoted paragraph, his father *was* a man of great public spirit who almost single-handedly created the county now known as Chilton (formerly Baker County) and the city now known as Clanton (formerly Goose Pond).

Alfred Baker was a very colorful character and a product of his times. He was the elected representative of a large group of predominantly yeoman farmers, who owned few if any slaves and who generally displayed a lack of enthusiasm for fighting in a "rich man's war." Because of their independent attitudes, many were socially and

economically ostracized after the war—even to the point of physical attack—and it took a long time for memories to fade and hurt feelings to mend.

The citizens of Chilton County today—both natives and transplants—owe a great debt of gratitude to Alfred Baker and the other strong men and women of his time. As for me, I consider Alfred my most interesting and colorful Great-great-grandfather. I don't condone some of his behavior, but I'm proud of what he accomplished for the generations that followed him—including my own. Anyone out there have an old trunk in the attic?

Colyn C. Moatts  
The Chiltonian

\*\*\*\*\*

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