

CHILTONIAN

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Clanton's Hotel on the Hill: Elliot/Palmer/Wilson/Thomason/Willingham/Dewitt/Clanton The Second Part of a Two-Part Series by Derric Scott

In our last issue we discussed the early days of the "Hotel on the Hill" at 2nd Avenue North and 8th Street when it was known as the Hotel Elliot and the Palmer House. Then...

Calamity Strikes!

Tragically, the Palmer House/Hotel burned on Saturday January 31, 1914, at 3 A.M. The fire also destroyed the old Episcopal Church building and the Davis Boarding House/Hotel. In the book, A History of the Episcopal Church in Clanton and Chilton County, Alabama, by William M King, Trinity Episcopal Church, 2013, the author states, "In 1883, an Episcopal mission was established at Second Avenue and Ninth Street in Clanton on a lot adjacent to the two-story, wood-framed Wilson Hotel ... A small wooden church was built on the property in 1888 or 1889." It seems the church congregation was dormant at the time of the fire, in 1914. The Davis Boarding House was on the northwest corner of Second Avenue North and Eighth Street, across from the grocery.

QUARTERLY MEETING

The Chilton County Historical Society will hold its sprint meeting on **Sunday, July 14th**, at **2:00 PM** at the **Senior Connection**.

Our speaker will be Thomas Blalock and he will present a slideshow and discuss his research and his activity posting photos and history on the "U know u lived in CLANTON as a kid" Facebook group.

The meeting is free and open to the public.

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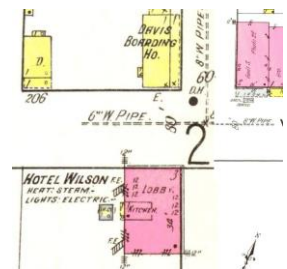
Clanton, Alabama 35046-0644

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Left: Looking north down 8th St. from 2nd Ave N, Davis Boarding House on left, grocery on right. Right: 1917 Sanborn Map



Back From the Ashes

The burned hotel was rebuilt by Peyton D. Wilson and William S. Wilson, Jr. (using contractor Walter Longcier) as a three story brick building with 50 rooms. It reopened June 16, 1914 as "The New Hotel Wilson." (Photo in last issue). The location was moved slightly west, probably so that Eighth Street could later be continued southward. It seems the Palmer family may have kept management responsibilities despite the name change. Tax records show Wilson paying property taxes at least through 1922.

Changing Hands

March 7, 1917 the hotel furnishings and equipment of the New Wilson Hotel were purchased from Mrs. J. F. Palmer by Mr. J. Q. Wade. It seems from other documents that Mr. Wade ran another hotel prior to this, named The Wade Hotel, at least from 1911 through 1918. Mr. Jim Wade remembered

stories that his grandmother ran a boarding house out of her home until the Hotel was purchased.

At least through 1928 it was called The Wilson Hotel. The Sanborn Fire Maps of 1917 and 1928 both show the same layout for the hotel, and both maps call it Wilson. It was later called The Thomason Hotel through the early 1940s.

A Union-Banner article, March 7, 1946, says that Jimmie Bell (Bell Hardware) bought the hotel from Dr. Guy Shields. At the time it was used by Faith Bible Institute and hadn't been a hotel for at least 3 years. Mr. Bell was going to use the first floor to display his large hardware and the upper floors as apartments. Mr. Bell's plans must have changed, because on Sunday, November 24, 1946, from 3:00 P.M. until 8:00 P.M., The Willingham Hotel had its formal opening under the new management of Mr. G. O. "Buddy" Willingham of Montgomery. It was remodeled with new fixtures and all woodwork and floors redone. The Coffee Shop was to open later.

The year 1955 opened with the property under new ownership. Mr. John M. Higgins purchased it from Mr. Jimmie Bell. The article in the January 27, 1955 Union-Banner says "the fixtures of the hotel had already been bought from Buddie Willingham by Mr. and Mrs. L. M. Stewart who recently moved here from Montgomery. Mr. Stewart works with the Ballard Clanton Fertilizer Company" The article discusses other buildings in the area and says that "these developments present the need for streets to be opened up over the area between the railroad and Enterprise Road. Eventually Eighth Street will be extended on south to the Poley Bridge swamp, opening up a large area for light industries."

Sometime later, around 1960, it seems to have been known as Hotel Dewitt, operated by Dewitt Easterling. Notice in the photo that the window trim is the same as it is today.

Hotel Clanton

An article in the Chilton County News on 11/21/1963 about Jack Mims' Grocery store says it is across from the "Hotel Clanton." Tax records for 1964-1966 also list Hotel Clanton.

Recent Years

Mr. Higgins used part of the building for his office space. Other ground floor offices were rented in later years. In November 2006 arson severely damaged the interior. A fire was set on the ground floor and much of the remodeled interior was destroyed, but the structure remained intact.

On May 22, 2008, the Willingham Hotel was listed on the Alabama Historical Commission's Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED