

PINTLALA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Next Meeting:
January 21, 2018 - 2:30 p.m.



*c/o Pintlala Public Library
 255 Federal Road
 Hope Hull, Alabama 36043*

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January 2018

“Dr. Thomas Duncan Home, Fleta, Alabama”



Top, L to R: Zeverah, Buena Mae, Lucile, and Alalu Duncan, Litishia Boyd Poole, grandmother of Zeverah; Water tank at rear of house. Home including Pettus Road; windmill on southside of house, hard to see; house in the distance at rear left is thought to be home of William Caffey Norman. Dates unknown. Photographs courtesy of Tryon McLaney.

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VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The PHA Newsletter normally opens with an inspirational message from our President. However, this issue brings a simple greeting and wishes for a healthy and blessed New Year from the Vice-President. Additionally, I encourage all of our members to take the time to read this issue's main article in its expanded format written by PHA president, Gary P. Burton. This paper is of importance to our members and all Montgomery County residents as Gary has assembled an overview of the nearly one hundred-year progression (1846-47 through 1945) of county management of the poor among us and their care.

Gary has worked diligently for months reading minutes of Montgomery County's various governing bodies as reforms for indigent care developed. The men who led the way to reform are to be admired and appreciated.

We should be thankful to Gary for his caring interest, paired with skilled research, as he brought to light a phase of our history that for the most part had been left in the shadows.

Alice Carter

Vice-President

January 2018 Program

PHA will meet on Sunday, January 21 at 2:30 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall of Pintlala Baptist Church. The program will be presented by Haley Aaron, Collection's Archivist at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Her presentation will be based on her article, *Alabama Nightingales: WWI Nurses at Home and Abroad*, published in the Winter 2017, *Alabama Heritage* magazine. This article provides a look into the early years of the nursing profession in America and Alabama. The U. S. entered WWI in 1917 and the war environment provided opportunities for young nursing students to test their skills. This led to post-war occasions for nurses to improve public health in general.

Please join us for this inspiring program. See you on the 21st – bring dues!



Haley Aaron

New Members

PHA was pleased to receive five new memberships in October 2017. We appreciate these new members and their interest and support of our efforts to preserve and collect the history of our area of Montgomery County.

Mr. and Mrs. Laslie Hall, Hope Hull, AL
 Dr. and Mrs. Tony Hopper, Hope Hull, AL
 Mrs. Kate Houston, Coosada, AL
 Mr. Gil Jennings, Hope Hull, AL
 Mrs. Marianne McLeod, Hope Hull, AL

In Memoriam

Jane Windham Chesnutt
 1929-1917

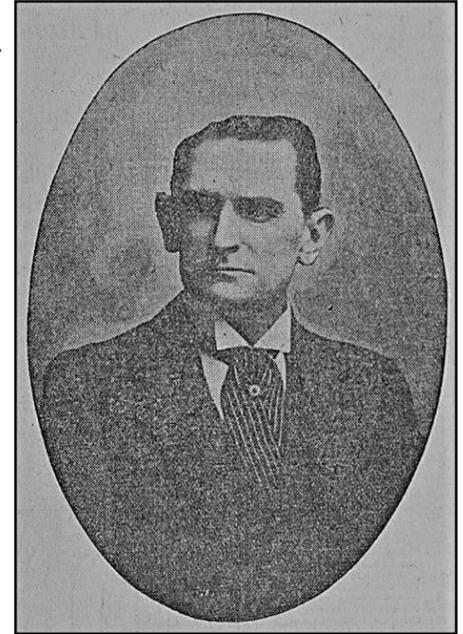
YOU'RE DRIVING ME TO THE POOR HOUSE

An Overview of The Almshouses In Montgomery County, Alabama

Gary Burton

The 28-caliber revolver dropped from the lifeless hand of Dr. Shirley Bragg as he fell back on his own bed. Downstairs at his 314 South Perry Street residence was his wife preparing the breakfast he had requested while his carriage was being brought to the front of the house. He would be driven to his office in the State Capitol complex where he worked as the State Inspector of Jails, Almshouses, and Cotton Mills.

Dr. Bragg's absence from the breakfast table sent his wife upstairs where she found her husband, his head wrapped in bedcovers in order to muffle the sound of the gunshot. The fateful day was October 29, 1908. The next day's *Montgomery Advertiser* gave the story front-page coverage. The event of Shirley Bragg's suicidal death was written in sensational language. The headline: *Pistol in His Own Hand Ends Life of Dr. Shirley Bragg*. Immediately following were sub-headlines: *Fired Bullet Through His Brain; Driven Despondent By Continual Ill Health; Was Apparently Cheerful Few Minutes Before Death; Distinguished Montgomery Man Was Champion of Prison Sanitation Reforms And Was Fearless In A Long Crusade*.



Dr. Shirley Bragg
Courtesy of the Alabama Department of
Archives and History

A watershed statement in the news account spoke highly of Dr. Bragg's work. Since the previous year, 1907, the physician had served in the position of State Inspector of Jails, Almshouses, and Cotton Mills "in which capacity he has rendered efficient service and has effected a radical change in the treatment of prison and poorhouse unfortunates and has brought about improvements in their health condition. He was fearless in his denunciation of existing conditions, without exception, where they were proven inefficient and unsanitary."¹

The death of Dr. Bragg was tragic. His ill health was certainly a motivating factor. Unmentioned was his tenacious crusade to bring reforms to the care of convicts and paupers housed in jails and almshouses. Interestingly, those incarcerated in jails and poorhouses were alike called *inmates*. Personal exposure to the squalor and sordid conditions which often prevailed in jails and poorhouses may have clouded the otherwise rational thinking of this public health crusader.

The story of caring for Montgomery County's poor by means of an almshouse is a checkered story at best. Only six years after the death of Dr. Bragg, Montgomery County purchased land (1914), ten miles west from the capital city off Cantelou Road, on which would be built the final structures where an almshouse would be used.

Note: The primary source for this overview has been the minutes of the governing body for Montgomery County, Alabama, variantly called the Board of Roads and Revenue, Board of Revenue, County Commission, etc. Citations from such minutes will be referenced only by a specific date. Verbatim extracts will appear in italics. Synopses otherwise. Page numbers and

item locations were inconsistently supplied.

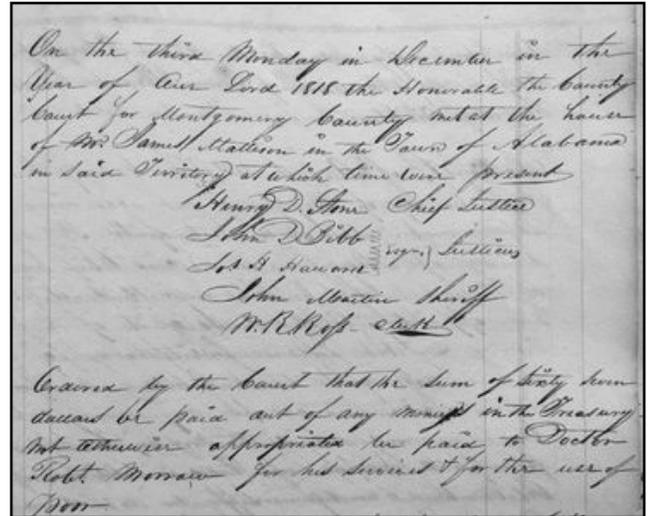
Caring for the poor through the work of almshouses in Montgomery County was influenced often by racism, the availability of money, the evolution in medical and public healthcare, and politics.

Definition: Almshouse

1. A building where poor people are allowed to live for free.
2. Poorhouse

Early Efforts To Take Care Of The Poor

Montgomery County was legislated into existence by an act of the General Assembly of the Mississippi Territory, December 6, 1816. From its earliest days rendering care for the poor was included in the governance of county affairs. Montgomery County records indicate that the activities of the governing board had moved from Fort Toulouse, the original county seat, to Alabama Town (soon to become part of the early village of Montgomery) while still a territory. The first action taken was to pay Dr. Robert Morrow \$67.00 who was serving as physician of the poor. (The Third Monday, December 1818, p. 3)



First doctor to work with the poor

Serving almost as a frontispiece for the earliest minute book, one can see that encumbrances on the county treasury are listed. Expenses for the poor are cited for 1826, 1827, and 1828.

Appropriation for Poor 1826, 1827, 1828		
To James Harrison 1826	102	A
Hotel Henry	106	B
Appropriation for Poor 1827	107	C
John Stewart 1827	111	D
to School Book	111 - 115 - 120	E
to Andrew Hatley	111	F
for Andrew's Hair	113	G
to G. Pond 1827	114	H
to Peter Williams	115	I
to Samuel Goodson	115	J
to David Good	115	K
to G. B. Finckleton	117	L
to Hugh W. Henry	117	M
to Amy Henry	120	N
for the Poor 1828	120	
to James Harrison	121	
Autumn 1828		
Armstrong/Made 31		

1826, 1827, 1828 allocations for the poor

One of the county's nascent attempts to assume responsibility for the poor was the dividing of the county into geographical districts, sometime called precincts or beats. Often an early, well known Captain in the local militia would be charged with the upkeep of roads, bridges, and paupers and later the "overseer" for a district would ask the county for reimbursement. Only occasionally would expense money be requested of the Board of Revenue in advance.

Illustrative of this, it can be noted throughout early county history that leaders of the local militias would be in charge of districts. When the Board of Revenue met on March 26, 1821, the record states, "Court proceeded to appoint overseers of the poor in each captain's district." Then what followed was a list of assignments: "Doctor Hugh W. Henry in Capt. Smith's," as an example.

December 11, 1822, p. 21-22.

*Court met agreeable to adjournment
Present his honor N.E. Benson, Judge
W. Graham, H.B. Davis, Commissioners*

Ordered that the sum of forty dollars be allowed H.W. Henry, commissioner of the poor of Captain Smiths District for the medicine, care, and attention and supporting a Mr. Turner during twenty days to be paid out of money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated...

Reading the names of the other overseers in the 1821 list is like a review of the early settlers of Montgomery County: Joseph Fitzpatrick, Doctor Anderson, Edward Moseley, John Ashley, William Bonnell, William Miller. The Montgomery County Board of Revenue was often comprised of a Chief Justice, Associate Justices, County Sheriff, and Clerk. One of the ongoing tasks of the board was to keep current the list of overseers.

The following example typifies most:

- *Ordered by the court that the clerk issue his warrant on the treasurer in favor of Christiana Wheeler for the sum of twenty five dollars to be paid out of the money in the poor fund. (May 15, 1837, p.51)*

County minutes are replete with this kind of court action. Other examples:

- *Mr. Lassiter appeared before the Board in behalf of Mrs. Lizzie Whatley who is blind and destitute and stated that she desired to have her eyes operated upon and that if the Board would make an application for her for three months the amount it would cost to keep her in the poorhouse he would take her to his house have her cared for, and after consideration his request was granted. (July 3, 1893)*
- *A Petition was received from Dr. Thomas Duncan and 18 others asking assistance for Miss Frances A. Sealy an afflicted lady who lives in beat 16 and is unable to earn a living but now resides with an aging father who is himself unable to provide for her, and after consideration it was agreed that she be allowed the sum of five dollars per month to be paid to her father. (m. January 24, 1898) 5707*
- *Mr. W.J. Reynolds presented a bill of \$38.45 for expenses in carrying a J.F. Wilcox an insane pauper to the insane asylum at Tuskaloosa. The bill also includes the expense of an extra guard and after consideration it was ordered paid. (October 30, 1893) 5499, p. 424.*

Montgomery County Establishes the First Poor House, 1846 and 1847

There may have been earlier entrepreneurial attempts at starting a poorhouse as a means of taking care of the poor. The record is silent at this point. One cannot help but observe the high volume of expenditures from the paupers fund during the decade of the 1830s, but a mention of any effort to establish a poor house is elusive until March 2, 1846 (p. 300):

A committee was appointed to report back to the Board on purchasing land for a poor house. This appointment was repeated later in the year.

Two months later, May 4, 1846, revenue from taxes was set aside for the poor house. The Board ordered the tax collector of the county to levy and collect 5 percent of the State tax for 1846 "for the paupers of establishing a poor house." (p. 306)

However, as 1846 was winding down, the idea took on substance with the formal action of the Board of Revenue; there seems to be some urgency attached to the matter, for the charge has an intensely expectant tone:

- *State of Alabama*

- *Montgomery County*

- *At a special commissioner's court held on the 9th day in November 1846 for the purpose of establishing and making arrangements for a poor house in said county. (November 9, 1846)*

Following is the appointment of G.B. Marshall, J.B. Meriweather, and J.W. Mitchell. These three are charged with making a selection of the land for the poorhouse and later in the same meeting charged with making the actual purchase. A report was to be given to the Board.

Shortly after the turn of the year, January 15, 1847, commissioners of the Board took quick action. The minutes get very specific. It must be remembered that the proposed location of the poor house was in today's Elmore County. Until 1866, it was included in Montgomery County:

- *In the matter for establishing a poorhouse for said county, the commissioners having rented the Atkins place found at the fork of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers for the ensuing year for one hundred dollars, This day employed _____ Bishop (The first name was not supplied) to take charge of houses, lots, and forty acres of land and also take charge of all the paupers sent to him by order of the Court by his first giving bond in the sum of five hundred dollars with good security for his faithful performance of his duties as said keeper of the said poorhouse. And it is ordered and decreed that said Bishop is to receive the sum of fifty dollars for every pauper that is over ten years old and thirty-six dollars for every pauper over six years old and under ten years years old, and twenty-five dollars for every pauper under six years old per annum pay (?) quarterly...*

And it is understood and decreed that said Bishop shall furnish said paupers with holsom provisions and comfortable clothing. Said Bishop shall execute his said bond and be ready to commence said duties of said (?) of said poorhouse and be provided with all the necessaries to take charge of said paupers on or before the 15th day of January 1847.

The 1850s and Paying Keepers Of The Poor House

The work of the poor house continued through the decade. Assuming the location was still in today's Elmore County, the focus of work changed to paying and supplying keepers of the Poor House.

A special Court was presided over by a Justice of the Peace for Montgomery County, H.W. Watson, who seemed to be the only one in attendance, May 17, 1853. The court ordered that one hundred dollars be advanced Robert Wood who was a keeper of the Poor House. Money was also expended to furnish articles for the house. At the August term of the court, He would

assume the charge out of his account.

The next month, June 9, 1853, witnessed the reimbursement of eight dollars to an individual for carrying a pauper to the poor house. The following year, February 1, 1854, the County paid \$200.00 which "caught up" his pay through April.

Reconstruction, Freedmen's Hospital, and Almshouse Apartment

Not long after the Civil War, the Freedmen's Bureau established a strong presence in Montgomery and in other cities throughout the state. Establishing venues for education, alleviating hunger, and taking care of the sick were priorities. Focusing primarily on meeting the needs of former slaves and their families, Wayne Flynt states that more whites were served than blacks.² The Freedmen's Hospital, which included several cabins, and inmates (patients) were given to Montgomery County for management on November 16, 1867. The year following 201 persons were served. Thirty-five died. Many were brought to the hospital in dying condition; often homeless vagrants picked up off the streets, filthy and starving. Statistics and a summary of the 1867-68 year were filed by the County Physician, Dr. S.D. Seelye. He was held in high esteem by elected officials. His tasks were overwhelming. Dr. Seelye also gave oversight to the conditions prevailing in the poor house and the jail. Missionaries were allowed to conduct services in the hospital. Morale improved.

November 6, 1868, p.18
Order 47

Royal H. Daniels was approved as Steward of the County poor house. He would follow the general directions of the Judge of Probate and would receive rations for himself and nine year-old boy. When a housekeeper is obligated, she is to receive rations for her work and superintendence as a nurse.

January 4, 1869, p. 33
Order 73

The Judge of Probate was authorized to purchase 20 cords of wood to be distributed among the city's poor.

November 1, 1869, pp. 111-112
No. 190:

Dr. S.D. Seelye reports to the Court of Commissioners after his first year of employment as Surgeon of the Almshouse, Freedmen's Hospital and Jail. Dr. Seelye received effusive praise from the Commissioners before filing his report. Poor house summary:

Beginning his work in November 1868, Dr. Seelye found 25 inmates in the poor house, many of whom were strong, healthy women except for chills and fever. They had migrated from all parts of the state as a result of war. The women had owned and farmed small tracts of land, but without any means to continue and unable to sustain themselves, Montgomery, being distant from hostilities, and with its poor house, had been their place of settlement. Dr. Seelye advised them to make plans to leave the poor house in the spring, seek residence on small farms where they could live, rehabilitate themselves, and not be a burden on the county. The Judge of Probate agreed with the approach.

“The County premises on which the Poor House is located, being the chief camping ground for the farmers of Coosa and Tallapoosa counties, in their visits to our city, I urged upon them the necessity of seeking homes with them, where their labor would insure them a comfortable support. With few exceptions, however, this advice, frequently urged, went unheeded, they preferring the idleness of the poor house to the independence of their former life.”

By November 2, 1869, Dr. Seelye limited rations to occupants of the poor house, forcing an exodus of the more healthy inmates. The numbers dropped to only a few, but gained in number by September. The doctor’s advice became somber and more urgent.

The location of the poor house was unhealthy. Located near Cypress Pond, those in the poor house struggled with various illnesses.

Being in close proximity to Cypress Pond, the most pestilent source of malarial poison in the neighborhood of the city, it could not be otherwise than a hotbed for various sicknesses arising from such cause. During the spring and autumn months, remittent and intermittent fevers and dysentery are rife, the patients are cured with difficulty and subject to frequent relapses. During the month of October nearly everyone of the inmates were sick with the last named disease, there being not enough well ones to care for the sick. The children have nearly enlarged spleens and the pale cadaveric hue of malarial cachexia.

Note: The Cypress Pond is located in today’s Cypress Nature Park on the edge of the city.

What followed was the swift action on the recommendation from Dr. Seelye that inmates (white paupers) be relocated to healthier accommodations. The seventy acres involved had been purchased from Emmaline S. Wilson. The deed was recorded on February 18, 1867 for \$3500.00

The property was quickly condemned on November 2, 1869, but not before a search was underway for a Superintendent to give oversight to the Freedman’s Hospital and the poor house apartment on hospital grounds where the white paupers now lived.

A Window into The 1870s

The Montgomery County Board Of Revenue was becoming more organized in its approach to governing the operation of caring for the poor. Individuals were still appearing before the Board, or being represented by an advocate requesting financial help. Often a written petition sufficed. At the same time work with paupers, especially through an almshouse, was contracted, usually to the lowest bidder.

April 26, 1875, p. 9 (Item 18)

The newly sworn Board was presided over by Thomas Joseph with Samuel Hubbard serving as its clerk. John C. Nicholson, William R. Westcott, and James G. Gilchrist served also.

On this date, an early matter on the agenda was the insistent request that Robert Barker, who had contracted with the Board to work with paupers, take swift measures in providing the Board with pertinent information about each pauper:

- *Name*
- *Time and duration as a pauper*
- *How long each had been supported at the expense of the County*

- *A list of all articles and property in Barker's possession belonging to the County, but used in support of the poor.*

May 24, 1875, p. 20-21, (Item 36)

Upon the recommendation of the Judge of Probate, Fannie Slater was recommended for the Board's consideration for a stipend as opposed to being admitted to the poorhouse. She had two small children and received no assistance from her husband. It was agreed for the county to give Fannie Slater ten dollars per month for three months.

May 25, 1875, (Item 24)

It was ordered that a claim on the County Treasury be filed on behalf of Rev. D.W. Gwin, pastor of First Baptist Church.³ Gwin was to be reimbursed \$39.95 expenses while traveling to and from the State Insane Asylum, removing Julia Dougherty, *non compos*.

(The Rev. Gwin began his service with FBC in December 1868 when he was thirty years old. In September and October 1873 Montgomery experienced a widespread epidemic of yellow fever. The entire city was quarantined. The 300-membership church lost 55 members to the epidemic, including the pastor's twenty-two month old daughter.)



David W. Gwin

By the end of 1875, Eliza Hood was seeking a stipend from the Board of Revenue in order to care for her 22-year old son who was helpless and subject to fits. She also had to support three other children, owned no property, and had applied to the poorhouse. The medical attendant had deemed the poorhouse unsuitable for the 22-year old. A stipend of five dollars per month, less costly to the county than living at the poorhouse, was awarded Eliza Hood.

It wasn't long before Robert Barker's contract was assumed by Patrick Robinson (p.41 & 42). For the month of July, Robinson was paid, after a deduction, \$1,097.50. By January 1876 (p. 89, Item 70), the minutes reflect the expectations of the Board of Revenue. Any contractor working with the poor was expected to provide:

- comfortable and healthy quarters
- necessary medicines
- fuel
- clothing
- bed and bedding
- every necessary expense
- burying the dead

As the end of 1876 approached, the Montgomery Board of Revenue was preoccupied with selecting a physician for the poor house, hospital, and jail. Among many applicants Dr. F.M. Hereford was chosen to begin January 1, 1877. His salary, \$35.00 per month for ten months.

Board Involvement with An On-site Visit

Monday, January 23, 1882
(Item 1434)

An increase in inmates at the jail and patients in the poor house was motivation for the board of Commissioners to institute a pay raise for the County Physician to \$25.00; obviously economics and circumstances had changed since 1877. Dr. M.L. Wood was the physician.

July 3, 1882 (Item 1628)

Montgomery County's governing board made the decision to visit the poor house the very next Saturday. Word was sent that every inmate should be present or expect to make other arrangements for accommodations elsewhere.

July 8, 1882, pp.86-87 (Item 1631)

On the day of the visit each occupant was called before the board; the poor house was found in good and comfortable order. The following paupers were allowed an extension of ten days in order to find employment, then each would be discharged: John Boatfield and wife, Sallie Boatfield, Ed Macon, Nathan Williams.

In The Montgomery Advertiser (Friday, January 14, 1887, p.5). A reporter accompanied Dr. L.L. Hill, Jr., the county physician, to the poor house. *This public institution is located on the southern suburbs of the city and kept by Mr. Sam Robinson. There are at present seventy-five or eighty inmates, and they are all well cared for...About four-fifths of the paupers are negroes...On the grounds there are a number of neat cabins and cottages, and these are occupied by the paupers.*

April 25, 1887 (Item 3411)

The keeper of the poorhouse was instructed that he must not allow inmates to leave the poor house grounds. If caught, a discharge would be in order.

Increased Regulations and Oversight

The decade of the 1890s witnessed an uptick in monitoring the work of the almshouses. Superintendents (Keepers of the Poorhouse) were regularly appointed by the governing body. Diligent, and often courageous, County Physicians were appointed too, often honoring the recommendation of the local medical society. S. J. Robertson served for many years as Superintendent or Keeper of the poor house. The names of effective County Physicians who inspected the jails and the almshouses: Drs. R.S. Hill, Shirley Bragg, George P. Waller, Glenn Andrews, and J.H. Naftel.

As to locations of all the poor houses, it is difficult to know. The minutes speak to those who often contracted with the county, on the basis of being the lowest bidder, to operate a poor house on property which had sufficient structures and which the contractor already owned. The would-be keeper of the poor house would supply all the necessities, including food, and work with the County Physician to secure the right medicines. The contract would state the monthly salary/stipend and the duration. Of course, under these arrangements, the poorhouse would be in a different location from time to time. Any narrative about the poor house based solely on the

minutes of Montgomery County government would find it impossible to determine all the sequential locations.

The last year of the nineteenth century provides a glimpse into public health measures used in combatting illness and disease. Primarily County health officials tried to enforce sanitation measures and prevent the spread of contagious illnesses.

The Pest House

May 15, 1899, p.160
Item 6165

Dr. Glenn Andrews, City Physician, presented a bill for to the County for locating prisoners from the jail to the pest (pestilence) house. The pest house was a means of quarantine for healthy inmates in the jail or poor house. The sick and infectious inmates were sent to the pest house. In this case Dr. Andrews was leading the public health fight against a county-wide small pox epidemic while inspecting both facilities

Committee Report On Poorhouse

May 15, 1899
Item 6161

Dr. McCrummen of Ramer reported to the Board that the committee had performed the examination and found things in very bad shape. Everything was dirty and filthy and the inmates who were sick were not being cared for. There was no one to look after them or nurse them. After consultation with the Board, Dr. Waller, the County Physician, and Mr. Robertson, keeper of the poorhouse, were ordered to be summoned to appear before the Board at the next meeting to offer an explanation of such a state of affairs.

Dr. Shirley Bragg, Public Health Hero

Dr. Shirley Bragg cut his life short, but his influence in the cause of public health continued as a force with which to reckon. Dr. Bragg was born near Lowndesboro, Alabama on November 3, 1853. He was the son of Mr. John Bragg, who was for many years prominent in Alabama public life and was the nephew of General Braxton Bragg. He was educated at Spring Hill College, Mobile and at St. Louis University. Later he received a diploma from the Alabama Medical College, Mobile. He came to his profession extremely talented and well equipped. Prior to his position at the time of his death, he served as County physician for Lowndes and Montgomery counties. Since 1901 he served in the capacity of Inspector of the Convict Board of the State of Alabama, being elected president of the board in 1905. Prior to 1901 Dr. Bragg practiced medicine in Montgomery and Lowndes County. At the time of his death, Dr. Bragg was the State Inspector of Jails, Almshouses, and Cotton Mills.



Perhaps known for speaking truth to power, Dr. Bragg's rhetoric in writing against the filthy, unhealthy conditions of jails across the state could very well have been used in reference to poorhouses. In his report for 1906, he speaks like an Old Testament prophet:

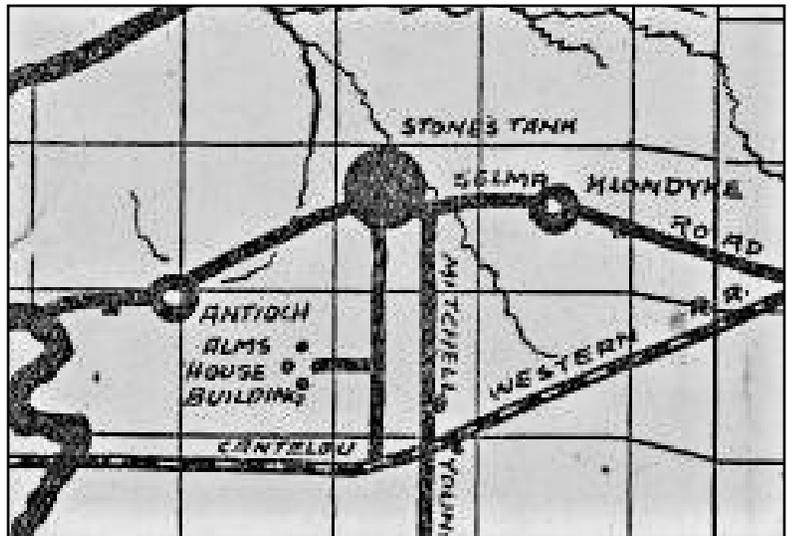
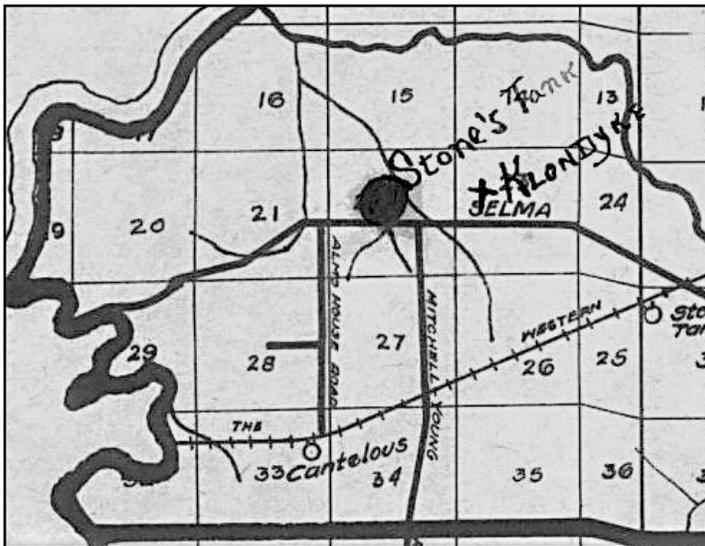
"I have not changed my opinion in reference to the jails of the state. I am more convinced than ever that the ideas of humanity and civilization would be better carried out if the torch were

applied to every jail in the Alabama. *It would be more human and far better to stake the prisoner out with a ring around his neck like a wild animal than to confine him in places called jails that are reeking with filth and disease, and alive with vermin of all kinds. They are not only harbingers of disease but nurseries of death.*"⁴

Can one imagine that Dr. Shirley Bragg would speak with less force in reference to the abuses in the poorhouse? A mere two years later Dr. Bragg was dead. It was 1908. Others were emerging like him, such as Dr. Glenn Andrews who thundered forth with similar moral indictments.

The Last Almshouse in Montgomery County

Six years after the death of Dr. Shirley Bragg, Montgomery County acquired land in the western sector of the County. The 1914 acquisition of property was deemed appropriate for the county almshouse. Located north of Highway 80 and to the west of today's Cantelou Road, the site was ten miles from the city center of Montgomery. By 1919 and 1920 Montgomery County maps located the structures serving the purposes of the poorhouse. Today's Cantelou Road was called Almshouse Road. To locate the site today, one must drive to the end of Janet Warner Drive which intersects with the west side of Cantelou Road. The Montgomery County Sheriff's Firing Range Office is nearby.



T16N, R16E, Section 28 Historical Maps: alabama.maps@ua.edu

An early description of the almshouse is described in the 1919-20 Report of the State Prison Inspector, Dr. Glenn Andrews, to Governor Thomas E. Kilby:

Montgomery County Almshouse

*Located ten miles from the county seat. The superintendent is employed on a salary basis, and necessary help is provided by the county for the proper conduct of the institution. The county provides food, clothing, a physician and medicine for the inmates, and furnishings and equipment generally for the institution. There are four six-room frame buildings, for the inmates, together with mess halls and a kitchen, and a nice frame dwelling for the keeper. A water works system is the only convenience. The farm, of about two hundred fifty acres, supplies a large quantity of vegetables, meat, and provides milk for use at the institution.*⁵

Dr. Glenn Andrews, served under five governors, as the State Prison Inspector. Included in his duties was the oversight and reporting on the work of almshouses. Attributed to his leadership were many medical and social reforms. He spoke forthrightly in his examination of almshouses as he did for prisons. Andrews was an effective public health official. All almshouse reports are subsumed in State Prison Inspector reports to the Governor. Dr. Andrews signed off on those made by Deputy Inspectors. They make for interesting reading. The following two selections represent polar opposites in substance and tone.

November 22, 1928

To: Governor Bibb Graves

The inspection was made on November 21st, and the following report is respectfully submitted:

Eight white women, seven white men, four negro women, and twenty-four negro men were inmates at the time of inspection.

One white woman and two negro men are to be removed immediately to the respective hospitals for the insane. The necessary papers have been inspected and the patients have been accepted.

Conditions throughout were found to be very satisfactory.

New beds where needed have been supplied, and additional straight chairs, and also rocking chairs, and abundance of blankets, new winter clothing, including a warm sweater for each inmate, with shoes, etc., just bought and distributed.

An adequate supply of fuel, both wood and coal, was on hand.

The food was found to be ample, very well prepared, with an abundance of milk and butter, green vegetables and potatoes.

There was no complaint from the inmates of the food or treatment.

Some additional cooking equipment, and a suitable kitchen table, were advised, which should be purchased immediately, so it was stated.

The necessary repairs and improvements are under consideration, which will be acted on later by the board of revenue. Until this is determined upon, painting, especially on the interior of the building, will be in abeyance.

The most urgent repairs are necessary on the hearths and fireplaces in the residence of the keeper. As they now are the fire hazard is appreciably increased.⁶

June 26, 1931

To: Governor B.M. Miller

Ten white men, seven white women fourteen negro men and five negro women were inmates at the time of inspection.

The rooms of the white women, and a few of those of the white men were found in fair condition, no bed bugs and only a few flies. However, unless strict rules of cleanliness are enforced about the premises, flies will become very troublesome.

Several beds in the building occupied by white men were infested with bed bugs, and flies were in evidence.

Bed bugs were found on all negro cots that had not been painted, the bedding was soiled throughout this section, and the greater number of mattresses were worn and unfit for use, and some of the cots were without mattresses.

The rooms were littered with refuse, the mantels were piled up with old bottles, etc., and the surplus bedding and clothing lying around in a careless manner.

Some of the mattresses in the rooms of the white women were...and difficult to clean.

An invalid woman, confined to her bed at the time, should be provided with a hospital bed properly equipped with raising and lowering same, and protecting sheets in order that she may be kept comfortable and clean.

New mattresses were needed on both beds in this room. Additional sheets should be supplied for her use, and a frequent change of thin gowns.

The rolling chair of a man patient needs repairs.

An arrangement should be made to supply iced water for drinking purposes at the various buildings.

The banisters to some of the houses need repairs.

A number of blankets, surplus clothing, and junk were found in the rooms.

The kitchen was in fair condition, but needed some attention to details.

The garbage disposal is bad, and the drain from the kitchen sink makes a disagreeable condition across the yard. Both conditions should be corrected.

The same criticism applies to the places where the washing is done. Water stands about these places, and will inevitably produce mosquitoes and flies.

The dining room of the negro inmates was in very good condition. The cups for drinking were in need of scrubbing, which was directed to be done.

The one for the white inmates was not so well kept.

Some changes should be made, better tables provided, and utensils of better type used. Tin baking powder cans are now used for milk and coffee, and only a limited number of knives, forks, etc., were found.

Oil cloth is used on the tables. This was worn and discolored.

The cook and the wife of the keeper state that the inmates took the eating utensils away from the table, misplaced them and broke the crockery and glass ware so badly that it

was impossible to have a supply, hence they were using these makeshifts.

Obviously, if close and proper supervision is kept by those in charge over the dining room especially during meals, and when meals are sent to those unable to come to the dining room, check up on the utensils returned to the kitchen, the loss and breakage would be reduced to the minimum.

Dinner of green snap beans, okra, green butter beans, Irish potatoes, meat, corn bread, biscuit, milk and butter, was well cooked and adequate.

The fence between the negro quarters and the white department has not been replaced. This should be done.

Water connections and toilets should be made. A tank of sufficient size to supply hot water for all departments should be installed.

The type of toilet now in use is not satisfactory. The odors from same were in evidence in the cottages at the time of the inspection.

All clothing and bedding not in actual use should be removed from the rooms, cleaned and properly stored. Unless this is done the loss from moths and deterioration will be expensive. Provision for this will be more than offset by the savings made.

The rooms should be inspected daily by those in charge, and a close supervision kept on the entire institution and the inmates. Many of them wander about the neighborhood, running the risk of the traffic on the roads.

Only one man was found to be working, Mr. Moschell, who assists the keeper in the fields and about the place, and receives a dollar a day when he works. He and his invalid wife buy extra food with this money and keep it in their room. They prepare coffee and other light articles of diet, so they said. Some other rooms were found with extra food therein.

Generally speaking, inmates were seemingly fairly contented, and only a few had complaints to make.

In the absence of the keeper, the inspection of the kitchen was made with his wife. The rest of the work was done unassisted, by anyone connected with the institution.

Respectfully yours,
Glenn Andrews⁷

The Rapid Demise of Almshouses

By 1923 public attitude across the nation had changed. There seemed to be a fast-growing consensus that the overwhelming number of almshouses were poorly managed and reeked with unsanitary conditions. In *Almshouses in Alabama*, a thesis written by Knox Gilmore Jennings, in pursuit of the degree of Master of Social Work at Florida State University, an abundance of skillfully written information describes the advent of almshouses, the checkered service rendered by most, and their disappearance from the institutional landscape in Alabama. In the 1964 thesis Jennings carefully dissects the cultural dynamics which brought

about the end of the almshouse as a means of addressing the needs of the poor. Extremely well documented, Jennings, who now resides in Montgomery County, notes the following forces at work in the movement to close down the almshouses:⁸

- A study was initiated in 1923 by the Department of Labor surveying the conditions existing in almshouses. The study was a collaborative effort with the Loyal Order of Moose, the American Legion, the American Federation of Labor, the National Fraternal Congress, and the American Fraternal Congress. Public Opinion proved supportive stating that almshouse facilities housed:
“...paupers, insane, idiots, feeble-minded, blind, deaf-mutes, drunkards, drug addicts, sufferers from chronic diseases, criminals, epileptics, children, prostitutes, mothers of illegitimate children.”
- Superintendents were appointed through a system of political spoils and were basically neglectful in providing care.
- Popular publications decrying the profound neglect found in almshouses were influential. In 1929, *Banishing the Poorhouse*, was published in The Literary Digest and serves as one example.
- Governmental enactment of the social Security Act in 1935. Under the provisions of this act, the Alabama Department of Public Welfare was organized in August, 1935. This made the care of the poor a state, federal, and county responsibility. States and counties could now take advantage of grant-in-aid programs as a result of the act.⁹

There were other factors which led to the demise of the almshouse:

- Lyn Frazer, Archivist for First United Methodist Church, Montgomery, observes that settlement houses, like the North Montgomery Settlement House which preceded The Nellie Burge Community Center founded in 1904, were meeting specialized needs along the social landscape in Montgomery County.
- The delivery system of public healthcare was becoming more necessarily specialized. The almshouse was never designed to meet the vast needs of the chronically ill. Common to poor whites were diseases like pellagra, hookworm, typhoid fever, malaria, tuberculosis.¹⁰ There were illnesses related to occupations such as cotton textiles and coal mining. Emerging medical specialties are noted when Dr. J.L. Bowman, County Physician, reports on the venereal clinic in Ada (April 3, 1943) and the work of the Anti-Tuberculosis League (January 22, 1945).

Note: We know very little about the unfolding dynamics in the final few years of the last Montgomery County almshouse. It is this writer's suspicion that the reports made by Dr. J.L. Bowman, County Physician, are subsumed in a larger, differently named file. The minutes of the Board of Commissioners merely mention that the report was filed. The reports have not been located to date.

Jennings notes that by September 30, 1945, four more counties had closed their almshouses. These counties were Colbert, Coosa, Etowah, and Montgomery. Also noted was that most almshouses in Alabama around 1945 began to function as nursing homes for the chronically ill.¹¹

Montgomery County's Last Superintendent: Charles H. Warner, Sr.

(February 5, 1944)

Mr. C.H. Warner, Superintendent of the county Alms House, made known to the Board that the Superintendent's home and some other buildings, including the water tank, were in need of repairs. On motion of Mr. Bell, seconded by Mr. Gardner, the three members of the Board for the Northern District were constituted as a committee to have the necessary and needful repairs done to the County's property at the Alms House.



Charles H. Warner Sr. and wife Adele

This writer is indebted to Edmund Warner and Kay Spivey, grandchildren of C.H. Warner, Sr., for enriching conversation and the provision of the photographs of the last structures serving as the last almshouse for Montgomery County. The photos were made for insurance purposes after they were relocated to Mr. Warner's farm sometime in the 1950s.



752 square feet

Edmund remembers visiting residents who occupied the almshouse structure when he was a young boy in the 1950s. His memory is very accurate given the fact that, according to Jennings, most almshouses in Alabama around 1945 began to function as nursing homes for the chronically ill.¹²

This was before states embraced the movement to build nursing homes as we know them today. Some residents had special arrangements with the former superintendent to continue their occupancy. The fact that Mr. Warner the previous year had asked the County to make improvements to the County facilities may be evidence of his foresight for the facilities to assume this responsibility. Charles H. Warner doubtless had a strong bond with those who wished to remain. It is good to know of his desire to render care in a changing time.



720 square feet



887 square feet

*Over the hill to the poor-house---my child'rn dear, good-bye!
 Many a night I've watched you when only God was nigh.
 And God'll judge between us; but I will al'ays pray
 That you shall never suffer the half that I do to-day!*

From *Over The Hill To The Poor-House*
 Will Carleton, 1897

END NOTES

1. Montgomery Advertiser, October 30, 1908.
2. Wayne Flynt, *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, (Tuscaloosa: The University Of Alabama Press, 1989), p.53.
3. Lee N. Allen, *The First 150 Years: Montgomery's First Baptist Church, 1829-1979* (Birmingham: Oxmoor Press, 1979), pp. 98-99.
4. Clarissa Olds Keeler, *The Crime Of Crimes, Or, The Convict System Unmasked*, (Washington, D.C., 1907), p. 20
5. Alabama State Board of Administration administrative files of the State Prison Inspector, 1904-1937, Government Records Collections, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Ala.,
6. *Ibid.* 1928
7. *Ibid.* 1931
8. Knox Gilmore Jennings, *Almshouses In Alabama*, (master's thesis, Florida State University, March 1964), pp.20-27.
9. *Ibid.*, p.26
10. Flynt, pp. 176-181
11. Jennings, p.37
12. *Ibid.*

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Dr. Dallas Hanbury, Montgomery County Archivist. No one could have been more professional than he. He is a champion for both the history and heritage of Montgomery County. Whatever I needed was waiting on me when I arrived.

The research staff with the Alabama Department Of Archives And History. A great place with great people.

Gil Jennings. Knox Gilmore Jennings. We have known each other for many years. Only recently did I learn that his 1964 Master's Thesis on the almshouses of Alabama was so pathbreaking. We only live a short distance from each other. Conversations are enriching.

Edmund Warner and Kay Spivey. I am grateful for the conversations which were essential to my understanding. Their generosity with photographs likewise was essential. Their grandfather would be proud of them.

Lamar Hall. One protracted phone conversation was motivational. He knew more about the last almshouse than I could ever hope to know. A retired Assistant County Engineer with Montgomery County, Lamar Hall is a wonderful guardian of county heritage.

Lyn Frazer. A remarkable friend with whom conversation relating to county history is always stimulating. Her work as a church archivist is unexcelled.

Bill Sansom. Conversation with Bill, a friend of longstanding, was the inspiration for this work. When he told me that his parents, devout members of the Church of Christ, would use their Sunday afternoons to visit the almshouse and trim the toenails of the residents, then my resolve about this project became firm.



**PINTLALA HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION**

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Hope Hull, AL 36043*

████████████████████
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JANUARY 21, 2018

2:30 P.M.

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