



## THE BIRMINGHAM GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

Founded April 15, 1959

[www.birminghamgenealogy.org](http://www.birminghamgenealogy.org)

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## THE PIONEER TRAILS NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2015

**General Meeting for June:** The Birmingham Genealogical Society will meet at 2:00 p.m. on **Saturday, June 27th** on the fourth floor of the Birmingham Public Library (in the Arrington Auditorium). The Board of Directors will meet at 1:00 p.m. in the same room.

**Please join us as BGS member Carl W. Dykes presents “World War II: Women in the Navy.”** In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the U. S. Navy realized they needed to recruit women to fill positions previously occupied by men; thus freeing up men for combat roles. Three different programs came into being: Nurse Corps, TAR Program and WAVES. This presentation will describe events leading up to the institution of these programs and the aftermath.

**Please join us for this informative program!**

### Research & Genealogical Tips

© Michael John Neill, “Genealogy Tip of the Day,”

<http://genealogytipoftheday.com/>, TIPDATE

**Female’s Name at that Time:** Records on female relatives in most areas of the United States will use the name they had at the time the record was created. If you can’t find a female relative in a place and time where you expect to, is it possible they had a marriage you are not aware of?

**Who bought it?** When reading through estate records and inventories, pay close attention to those individuals who are buying property from the estate. There is a good chance that they are relatives and neighbors. In more recent times the names may not be a dramatic revelation, but in an earlier era it may help you to establish geographic proximity of two individuals.

**What kind of Courthouse copy is it?** When obtaining a copy of a deed record from a courthouse, don’t forget that the deed in the courthouse is a record copy. In the early days of record keeping, those deed copies were handwritten or typed transcriptions. Later courthouse copies of deeds were made by some sort of photographic process. It’s not the original deed in the courthouse—it’s a transcription or a reproduction. The original was retained by the person obtaining the property, just like today.

**Is the Will in the Paper?** There was a time when many American newspapers published summaries of what happened at the local term of the probate court. Details of your ancestor’s will, property owned at death, final bills, and more may have been published in the local newspaper. If probate records at the local courthouse are not extant or the case you want cannot be found, local newspapers may be able to provide some clues. Generally speaking these notices became less frequent in the early 20th century. Newspapers can also be a good source in burned counties. The courthouse may have burned, the some newspapers may have survived.

**The past is not dead. It isn't even past. --William Faulkner**

*Scott A. Martin, BGS Newsletter Editor*



### “McCalla's Sadler House and Cemetery listed as "Places In Peril" for 2015”

*Birmingham Business Journal*, 3 June 2015

The Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation in May released its list of Alabama's Most Endangered Sites for 2015, which includes two historic locations in Jefferson County. The Sadler House and Sadler Cemetery in McCalla were nominated by the West Jefferson County Historical Society, which owns the properties. The Sadler House is one of only a few two-story frame “I” houses in the plantation plain style that is open to the public in Alabama. The historical society said in a release they host about 2,000 school children annually at the house. The house’s cedar shake roof has deteriorated and inevitably will need to be replaced, which has an estimated cost of \$30,000. A grant from the Alabama Historical Commission to repair the roof requires matching donations from private citizens and organizations, the release said. The abandoned Sadler Cemetery is located in a remote part of the county and is often vandalized. A public awareness campaign will also be needed to improve understanding about the Alabama pioneers buried there. Ultimately, fundraising will be required to finance cleaning and policing of the cemetery property.

### “Volunteers and Bessemer Police spruced up Sadler Cemetery”

<http://www.abc3340.com/>, 13 May 2012

Chainsaws cut through the silence of Sadler cemetery over the weekend. Slicing through years of history, volunteers like 64 year old Ronnie Wildman began cleaning it all up. Ronnie Wildman says, "People just forgot all about this cemetery." Wildman has family buried in the cemetery. He says the grass got so high, it was above his grandfather's tombstone, which he didn't feel was right. "I saw how much it had grown, it was heartbreaking, and it really was. This is my heritage, this is my roots." Throughout the years, the grave site has become a major eyesore, as volunteers load limbs and branches onto flatbed trucks, destined for the burn pile. Sgt. Hank Edwards with the Bessemer Police Department says, "It was just overgrown with bushes, weeds, you couldn't even read some of the stones because they were so much grass and weeds in front of it." So Edwards decided to post the problem and a date to clean the cemetery on Facebook, little did he know the community backed the Bessemer police department 100% "I just expected such a low turnout from past experience's and we pulled up there was already somebody here unloading the truck, a few more cars started coming and before long we had 16 to 20 people out here," says Edwards. But as the more than 200 year old cemetery was unkept and broken for so many years, what's not broken is the spirit of the volunteers like Wildman, who vows to restore the cemetery's beauty once again. "I know if my granddad was still here, he would be so proud, he really would," says Wildman.

**Hosea Lott Holcombe** (SOURCE [http://www.bhamwiki.com/w/Hosea\\_Holcombe](http://www.bhamwiki.com/w/Hosea_Holcombe)) (born Lott Holcombe July 20, 1780 near Cross Keys, Union District, South Carolina - died July 31, 1841 at Fort Jonesboro) was the founder and first pastor of several early Baptist churches and an influential religious leader and historian in the early years of the Birmingham District. Holcombe was the son of Hosea and Phoebe Smith Holcombe of South Carolina. He assumed his father's name at his death in 1789. On June 7, 1801 he married his cousin, Cassandra "Cassey" Jackson and on August 17, 1805 was ordained as a minister by his home church in Padgett's Creek. In 1812 he was pastor of Hebron Baptist Church in Lincoln County, North Carolina. While there he was influenced by Reverend Luther Rice to dedicate his life toward evangelism and church leadership. Holcombe became known as a forceful opponent to those who opposed the church's mission activities afield. In 1818 Holcombe travelled to the Alabama territory and joined the Canaan Baptist Church in Jonesboro, which had been founded earlier that year. In fulfillment of his mission to plant new churches, he soon organized the Ruhama Baptist Church in the Ruhama settlement along the Huntsville Road, now part of East Lake in Birmingham. While continuing to lead Ruhama he helped established other churches in the area, including Enon Baptist Church (1819), and Hebron Baptist Church near Leeds (1819). He also helped to found the Rock Creek Baptist Church west of Bessemer in 1822, Roupes Valley Baptist Church (1827), and Union Baptist Church in Shelby County in 1833. Holcombe also helped organized the first Alabama Baptist State Convention in Greensboro in 1823 and served as its president from 1833 to 1838. In 1835 the convention tapped him to write a history of the Baptist church in Alabama, for which he travelled all over the state. Holcombe and his wife had 11 children, of whom 3 became ministers. Hosea died at the age of 61 in his home near Jonesboro. He is buried at the Sadler Cemetery near Bessemer. A historical marker on Alabama Highway 150 between Bessemer and I-65 at Muscoda was erected by the Alabama Historical Association to recognize his contributions as a church historian.

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## *The Southern Claims Commission: A little known source of genealogical information*

by Elizabeth Nitschke Hicks, November 1996  
*The CLF Newsletter X* (November 1996): 11-12.

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The Southern Claims Commission was created by Congress in 1870 as a result of pleas from citizens who had sustained losses during the Civil War (1861-1865). This commission addressed claims (for personal property only) from residents of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Southern Claims Commission appointed local commissioners to hear these claims, determine the authenticity of the claim, and decide if indeed the claimant had been loyal to the Union during the war. Yes, you read correctly: The claimant had to answer that he/she had been loyal to the Union and had not provided aid of any kind in support of the Confederacy. Before you say, "Not MY southern ancestor!" you should consider that people did what they had to do to receive compensation for losses suffered during the war. Many southerners did not consider it "lying" to "lie" to a Yankee (especially a bureaucrat).

A case in point is that of the Reverend Isaac Madison Hicks, claim #11,760, of Bibb County, Alabama. Rev. Hicks was a Baptist preacher, had been a county tax collector, and had an eldest son, Joseph Newton Hicks, who fought as a member of the 8th Alabama Cavalry for the Confederate cause. This is not the type of person one would expect to file a claim, but the National Archives has 44 pages of sworn testimony of Rev. Hicks and two witnesses. This particular claim gives an account of General James H. Wilson's troop movements in the march to Selma and tells of Union soldiers taking horses, feed, and cooked food from the slave quarters and burning crops but sparing Rev. Hicks's house because he was a Mason. Supporting testimony was given by a witness who says he is Rev. Hicks's son-in-law. Another witness, a former slave, gives an account of seeing one of the stolen horses and saddle "under a Union soldier near Selma." Both whites and blacks filed claims and gave testimony in support of claims made by others.

There are three types of claims:

- **Allowed.** The U.S. paid the claim, and the only records that survive are the name of the claimant, place of residence, and amount paid.
- **Barred.** Claim was either filed too late or the commissioners ruled the claimant a Confederate supporter. In this case, only the name, place, and description of loss are given.
- **Disallowed.** Claim was not paid, but for reasons other than late filing or the fact that the claimant was a Confederate supporter.

A disallowed claim is the type you hope to find, as it gives the most information for the genealogist and/or historical researcher. Rev. Hicks's claim was this type. You will get the claimant's answers to 80 questions asked by the commissioners as well as the answers given by the claimant's witnesses. Both claimant and witnesses were asked, "What is your name, your age, your residence and how long has it been such, and what is your occupation? If you are not the claimant, in what manner, if any, are you related to the claimant or interested in the success of the claim?" A few other examples of questions asked were "Where were you born? If not born in the United States, when and where were you naturalized? Produce your naturalization papers, if you can.

Did you have any near relatives in the Confederate army or in any military or naval service hostile to the U.S.? If so, give names, ages on entering service, present residence, if living, what influence you exerted, if any, against their entering the service, and in what way you contributed to their outfit and support." For female claimants, "Are you married or single? If married, when were you married? Where does your husband reside, and why is he not joined with you in this petition? How many children have you? Give their names and ages...." Witnesses were

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asked, “In whose favor are you here to testify? How long have you known that person altogether, and what part of that time have you intimately known him? Did you live near him during the war, and how far away? What was the public reputation of the claimant for loyalty or disloyalty to the U.S. during the war? If you profess to know his public reputation, explain fully how you know it, whom you heard speak of it, and give the names of other persons who were neighbors during the war that could testify to his public reputation.” I think you get the idea of how these claims can provide very helpful and interesting information.

How do you determine if your ancestor had a claim and how do you get it? There are three finding aides to these claims at Clayton. The first is an index (on microfilm) from the National Archives titled *Consolidated Index of Claims Reported by the Commissioner of Claims Southern Claims Commission 1871-1880* (cabinet 48, drawer 8). The second and third are books by Dr. Gary B. Mills: *Civil War Claims in the South, An Index of Civil War Damage Claims Filed Before the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880* (GEN 973.7 M657 USA) and *Southern Loyalists in the Civil War* (GEN 973.7 M657 USA). All these indexes give the name of the claimant, the claim number, and state. The first book also gives the claimant’s county of residence. Once you find your ancestor’s name and claim number, write to the General Reference Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. 20408. Be sure to specify that this is a Southern Claims Commission claim, give the name of the claimant, the state, and the claim number. Send no money. The National Archives will reply with the number of pages and the cost for obtaining the claim file. You have 30 days to send for the claim before it is re-filed.

If you do not find your ancestor listed, try this technique: Go to the 1860, 1870, or 1880 federal censuses, write down the names of your ancestor’s neighbors (head of households) 5 to 10 households before your ancestor on the census and the same number of households following. Then see if any of these neighbors had claims and send for them. There is a very good chance your ancestor was one of the witnesses for the neighbor.

These claims are a good source of genealogical and historical information for ancestors in the “burned counties,” and if a claimant died during the claim process, often the heir(s) took up the claim. The heir(s) would then have to prove their relationship to the deceased claimant using Bible records, depositions, etc., all of which may hold valuable genealogical information.

In some cases, the claim was sent to the U.S. Court of Claims. If this happened with your ancestor’s claim, the National Archives will notify you of this and will send you a new case number to use to pursue the claim from the U.S. Court of Claims (Index Section, 717 Madison Place NW, Washington, D.C. 20005). All this may sound complicated, but all you have to do is send in the initial request and follow the instructions. The last claim I requested took about three months, including the time taken for the National Archives to locate the claim, the time taken to notify me of the cost—they accept credit cards—and the time taken to respond to my order for the claim. But believe me: It is worth the effort!

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### Using Funeral Home Records for Genealogy

Provided by Christine Woodcock @ [www.geneosity.com](http://www.geneosity.com), 15 June 2015

Once you have found the obituary for your ancestor’s death, take note of the name of the funeral home that handled the arrangements. Then, contact them to see what information they have in their records regarding your ancestor. Funeral homes keep detailed records about the individuals that they provide service to and care for. Funeral home records can be a valuable resource. The funeral home will have a copy of the “funeral card” or the card given to those who attend the service, a copy of the death record they issued for the family and information on the next of kin. They will also have a list of all of the newspapers that the obituary for your ancestor was published in. If an autopsy was performed on your ancestor, the funeral home can supply you with the information for the name and address of the coroner as well, which will allow you to contact that resource for detailed information and details surrounding the cause of death. The funeral home can provide you with the name of the deceased’s family physician, the name of the insurance company, (if the insurance company paid for any part of the funeral), the name of the clergy that performed the service, and often they can provide you with information about where to find a will for the deceased.

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During the interview conducted by the funeral home at the time that the funeral arrangements were made, a number of details are provided. These may include: education, church affiliation, military service, membership in organizations. Plans for the service might include: the place, time and location; the names of any pallbearers (and perhaps their relationship to the deceased), music played, readings, prayers, speeches or eulogies.

You will learn whether there was a burial or a cremation, the date of the burial or cremation and if cremated, the disposition of the cremains (whether they were buried or perhaps given to a family member for safekeeping etc). Don't be shy. Start writing letters requesting the information you are looking for regarding your ancestor. This information will provide you with the details you need to help "flesh out" who your ancestor really was. Always include the offer of paying for photocopying and mailing of the information (most of these resources will not charge for this information, but will be pleased that you acknowledged their time). Include an e-mail address so that if possible, the records can be scanned and sent to you electronically. Also by providing this contact information, the funeral home can contact you with any outstanding questions that they would like clarified before they send out the final reports to you.

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### *NEWS FROM BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA*

#### *The Christian Index, 11 July 1872*

When a good man dies it seems proper that some suitable mention should be made of his life and works. In obedience to this thought, I will notice, briefly, the record of the Rev. Allen McDonald, who was born in South Carolina, in November, 1791, and died at his residence, in Jefferson County, Ala., May 15th, 1872--aged 81 years. While he was a young man he went to Tennessee, where he lived a few years; and while there the Indian war broke out. He was a young man and joined the army, and served his country under Jackson--was in that campaign all through what is now known as Talladega County, Ala. In 1814 he was married to a Miss Phoebe Ray, and indeed, she was a "helpmeet for him." They soon came to Alabama, and settled in Jefferson County; and soon afterward, he attached himself to the Hebron church of said county. It was soon seen that the Lord had a work for him to do, and so he was licensed to exercise his gifts. The country was new, many persons coming in all eager for money, and hence in this new field of labor, there was a vast amount of work for him to do. God had given him a sound and healthful body, great zeal, strong lungs, and well did he use all his powers for God's glory. He was never regarded as a very strong man in doctrine, (yet, "sound to the core,") but he was what was for better, a "good man," "known and read of all men. "In the days of "Camp" and "Protracted" meetings, Bro. McDonald was considered almost an indispensable. When such meetings were appointed, he was always invited, and when he could, always attended. His work was so well understood by all that it was hardly necessary for the committee on devotion to say, "Bro. McDonald will close the exercises." The writer of this sketch has often been with him on those occasions of which he now speaks. After the congregation had been dismissed, and all had retired to rest, some poor, wounded sinner would desire that someone should pray for them, when Bro. McDonald was almost certain to be sent for. How often we have listened to his well-known voice, with all the energy of his soul ascending to God. It may be said of him: He was truly a man of "prayer" and "faith," and for hours would he thus spend his time--sometimes almost all the night would be devoted to praying, singing, instructing and exhorting. Many stars will be in his "crown of rejoicing." Bro. McDonald was ordained to the full work of the ministry in 1843, by Byars, Scott and Holcombe. He sustains an irreproachable character. He was one of the few men whom the tongue of slander could not reach--he was "above suspicion." His end was almost like the sainted "Enoch," he was not for God took him. On the day of his death he ate dinner as usual, was cheerful, talking to his family, went and lay down on the bed, and, in five minutes, passed away almost without a struggle. He leaves his aged companion and many relatives to mourn after him. May his mantle fall upon his son. A. J. Walcrop.

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## ***The Birmingham Age-Herald, 3 July 1905***

Fire, which started at 2 o'clock in the four-story building occupied by the Birmingham Paper Company at 2105 and 2107 Morris Avenue, destroyed that building and at the hour of going to press the Collins & Company's wholesale grocery adjoining at the corner of Twenty-first street and Morris Avenue was virtually destroyed. Fireman Gip B. Spruell was killed by a falling wall at 3 O'clock and Fireman Hoffman and Fireman Hodges were seriously injured.

The origin of the fire is not known, but by the time the department had reached the scene the entire Paper Company building was wrapped in flames and the fire was spreading to the buildings on either side, the Tyler Grocery Company on the east side and the Collins Building on the corner. The fire loss will probably reach \$175,000.00.

Before 2:30 o'clock the floors of the Birmingham Paper Company had commenced falling in . Fireman Stanfield was caught under one of the walls and his left foot was badly bruised. His injuries are not serious. He was taken to fire department headquarters where medical attention was given him. Chief Mullin received a severe cut in the shoulder from falling glass, but paid no attention to the wound. Other firemen received lesser injuries.

At 2:40 o'clock the fourth floor of the front wall fell, About a dozen fireman were standing under the wall, but all escaped except Huffman, who is the department electrician and Spruell, who has only been in the department a short while. The held a line of hose from one of the steamers. They were buried under the falling brick and it was some minutes before they were discovered as they were so completely covered by the debris. As soon as they were found willing hands revoked the debris and dragged them to one side. Physicians were summoned, but by the time they arrived Spruell was dead. His head and chest were badly bruised by the brick. He died as he was being taken to an ambulance at First Avenue and Twenty-First Street. Former City Physician Whelan attended him. He leaves a wife and two or three children. He was about 45 years old.

Hoffman was carried to Hillman Hospital. He had a severe wound in the head and several deep gashes about his face. As usual the fire department was entirely too small to cope with the fire. Chief Mullin stated at one time, when there was a chance to save the Collins Building, with proper equipment: "See. I have not enough men to do this work. We are hampered by lack of men."

The fire had gained such a head way at 2:15 o'clock that the aerial truck was useless, as it could not be raised on account of the heat. Later it was used on the Collins Building. AT 4:15 Collins and Company's Store was still burning and there seems no chance of saving any part of it. It was a four-story structure. The fire started at the top and worked its way downward.

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