

Montevallo *Historical* Times

Vol. 9 No. 2

Newsletter of the Montevallo Historical Society

Spring 2025

Cemetery Plot Restoration Completed



The ambitious cemetery plot restoration project taken on by the Kroell & Jennett families and the Montevallo Historical Society in 2023 came to a conclusion on January 15, 2025 when Ensley Iron, LLC completed the installation of the custom sign that identifies the historic burial ground.



The sign provides a listing of members of each family buried in the plot along with their birth and death dates. Order of listing is based on the earliest to latest birth date of each individual. The sign is cast aluminum and should last 100 years or more.

Historical Society Named Contest Winner

While the replacement of the Kroell/Jennett wrought iron fence was the most ambitious and expensive part of the restoration, successfully cleaning the gravestones was also a major requirement for the project.

Early on, the MHS cemetery committee discovered D2, an effective cleaning solution used by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemeteries to maintain the pristine white that makes the arrangement and presentation of veterans markers so dramatic when viewed by visitors to these shrines.

The markers in the Kroell/Jennett plot were uniformly black at the beginning of the project. We learned that the stain comes from algae, a living organism, that takes up residence on the stone and feeds off its minerals. An initial application of D2 begins to kill the algae and successive appli-

cations finish it off. The beauty of this material is that it is not toxic and can be left on the stone to do its work. The D2 and dead algae should soon be rinsed clean by normal rainfall.

The Kroell/Jennett plot benefitted greatly from our use of D2, with multi-

ple examples of success. Our most economical source for purchasing gallon jugs of D2 was an online source known as **Atlas Preservation** in Connecticut. In 2023 we found out about a contest that Atlas conducts each year to recognize outstanding D2 stone cleaning projects nationwide, so we decided to submit an entry from our 2024 project.

To our surprise and delight, Atlas announced in early 2025 that the Montevallo Historical Society had been selected as one of the winners in the latest contest.

Contest winners receive a \$100 gift card that can be applied to future Atlas purchases, but the recognition has been the true reward from our entry.

The photo you see here was copied from **atlaspreservation.com** where our selection along with all other winners in our category was announced.



President's Letter

Dear Friends:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of our active members who decided to renew their membership in the Montevallo Historical Society at the beginning of the year. You can see the current line-up of active members on page 3 of this newsletter. While we have lost some members in the last year as a result of the inevitable passage of time, it is still gratifying to see that we remain a strong organization with a total of 168 individual members.

There is a silver lining, however, to the reduction in our numbers. We are happy to report that the number of Kroell Business level memberships has remained consistent at four, and the Jesse Wilson Society (\$250 level) has had a substantial increase from 10 to 16 members in this category since our report at the beginning of 2024. Also, in the same time-frame, we have added 18 new individual members.

The dues you pay to MHS when you renew your membership each year go a long way toward helping us fulfill our mission to support and promote local history. Funds from dues payments also help us serve you with quarterly newsletters, a vibrant website, and interesting and entertaining general membership meetings. Thanks again for your support of all that we do in the interest of our members and the community of Montevallo.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the fourteen Montevallo Historical Society members who currently serve as directors and officers. As stated in our bylaws, the board of directors is the governing body for the organization and I want to congratulate and thank each director for the time and effort they put into attending regular board meetings, their wise counsel as we make decisions, and the many behind-the-scenes tasks and duties that they cheerfully take on and perform so willingly.

As a corollary to the remarks above, I would like to encourage any interested active member to let us know if you would like to serve the Montevallo Historical Society as an officer or director. There are no vacancies on the board at the moment but if a position should come open, we would

be quite happy to have the name of someone waiting in the wings to present to the board for approval.

As you have already seen on page 1, the energy and effort that our cemetery committee has devoted to the Montevallo City Cemetery has paid off again.

Marilynn Donoho, Judy Duda, and Clay Nordan have become our experts on the history and lore of the cemetery and they provided considerable expertise and sweat equity for the Kroell/Jennett burial plot restoration and rejuvenation. I'm sure you will agree with me that placing the handsome identification marker (thanks to the Kroell family's generosity) with the new iron fence at the entrance of the plot was the perfect punctuation to what has become one of our proudest contributions to the preservation of local Montevallo history.

But who knew that these enthusiastic local history and marble tombstone buffs would bring even more attention and acclaim to the project by being selected as a winner of a nationwide gravestone cleaning contest. Nice accomplishment!

I would like to conclude by singling out and thanking Marty Everse, one of our Founding Directors, for his most recent contribution to this issue of the *Montevallo Historical Times*. Once again, we are the grateful recipient, thanks to Marty, of a document left to posterity by Mike "Doc" Mahan.

Our newsletter editor, Clay Nordan, has transformed an informal report and interview conducted by Mike into a most readable and entertaining account of the story of Eddie Watson and his family and the life and times of the Strand Theatre, their movie palace on Montevallo's Main Street. Family photos courtesy of Eddie's daughter, Jane Bullock, provide icing for the cake. Enjoy!



Officers

John E. McCulley
President

Bill Nathews
Vice-President

Judy Duda
Secretary

Clay Nordan
Treasurer



Directors

Jim Brown
Tara Brantley
Marilynn Donoho
Martha Eisenberg
Billy Mack Lee
Melinda Nix
James Salter
Anne Thomas
Sherry L. Vallides
Anita Williams

FOUNDING DIRECTORS:

Dr. James S. Day • Kenneth Dukes • Marty Everse • Mae Glosson • William Glosson • Susan Godwin • Dr. S.M. Mahan, Jr. (1934 – 2018)
John McCulley • Norman McMillan • Melinda Nix • Clay Nordan • Debbie Pendleton • Janice Seaman • Anne Thomas • Sherry Vallides

Montevallo Historical Society

Roster of Active Members – April 2025

KROELL BUSINESS MEMBERSHIPS (\$250)

C&V Painting, Inc.
Sherry Vallides
Central State Bank
Mitt Schroeder
JP Building Company
Jason Picklesimer
Smitherman's Pharmacy
Sammy Shunnarah

JESSE WILSON SOCIETY (\$250)

Tommy Baker
Ed Czeskleba
Karen Czeskleba
Bill Denson
Lois Doyle
Robert Doyle
Judy Lien Duda
Helon Everse
Marty Everse
Catherine Griffin
Philip Hubbard
Clay Nordan
Sally Sears
Adelle Simpson
Danny Wyatt
Rose Mary Wyatt

PATRON LEVEL (\$100)

Richard Anderson
Sharon Anderson
David Bennett
Patricia Bennett
Charlie Binion
Randy Bodine
Jim Brown
Linda Cicero
John Cox
James Day
Renè Day
Patty DeBardeleben
Marilynn Donoho
Paul Doran
Yvonne Kroell Graham

Kathy Hedgepeth

Cecily Orr Hullett
Margie Scott Jones
Bill Keller
Jeanetta Keller
Missy Ketchum
Charles Kaiden Kroell
Marijean Kroell
Bob Lightfoot
Gene Lightfoot
Michael E. Malone
Guy Milford
Jack Moran
Lynn Rotenberry Moran
Barbara Morris Nabors
Melinda Nix
Rusty Nix
Laurie Gene Orr
Debbie Pendleton
Douglas Rodgers
Libby Rodgers
Randie Sears Rosenberg
Molly Sears Rosenberg
Andrew J. Rosenberg
Sandra Scott Small
Anne Thomas
David Thomas
Daniel Thornton
Jonne C. Thornton
Becky B. Thornton
Barry Woodham
Dee Woodham

SINGLE & FAMILY LEVEL (\$25 OR \$40)

Ron Albright
Ellen Andrews
Mary Arledge
Steve Arledge
B J Barclay
Brenda Bates
Rebecca Beaty
Jade Beavers
Gary Bell
Courtney Bennett
Lee Binion

Cheryl McClure Blackmon
Becky Holcombe Bolton
Tara Brantley
Becky Brown
Jane Watson Bullock
Janet Rotenberry Burnett
Tad Cairns
Glenda Terrell-Cairns
Pam Campbell
Martha Eisenberg
Judy Robinson Feagin
Barclay Fisher
Priscilla Fisher
Bryan Fowler
Nancy Fowler
Randy Fowler
Bruce Fraser
Sharon W. Garrett
Mae Glosson
William Glosson
Margie Hardin
Carey Heatherly
Jim Hermecz
Barry Hocutt
Clark Hultquist
Cathy W. Hyer
Karen Kelly
Peggy Hurt Kent
Kathy King
John Kirby
Carolyn Kirby
Jimmy Lawley
Linda Lawley
Billy Lee
Brenda Lewis
Krist Lien
Carol Lightfoot
Kirk Lightfoot
Luci Lovelady
Elizabeth Chism Ludwig
Scott Martin
Bruce McClanahan
Jane McClanahan
John McCulley
Mary McCulley

Jerry McGaughy
Larry McGaughy
Nancy McGaughy
Susie McGaughy
Jan McKinnon
John McKinnon
Joan McMillan
Norman McMillan
Laurie Middaugh
Barb Milstead
Bill Muehlbauer
Courtney Parker Murphy
Bill Nathews
Casie Nathews
Dean Nathews
Cheryl Patton
Michael Patton
Joan Pickett
Mike Pickett
Bill Plott
Atticus Plott
Sandra Albright Rogers
James A. Salter
Steve Sears
Alma Sears
Madeleine Sears
Bobby Joe Seales
Diane B. Seales
Luke Smith
Eddie Spears
Maureen Spears
Plesia Spears
John Starks
Jackie Starks
Carolyn Frost Turnbull
Scott Turnbull
Marilee Turnbull
Hubert Van Tuyll
Anita Williams
Bradford Williams
Nancy Wilstach
Carol Winslett
Eddie Winslett
Julia Youngblood
Gary Youngblood

Laurie Orr Binion • 1932 - 2025

Laurie Orr Binion, age 92, of Montevallo, Alabama passed away on Thursday, January 16, 2025. Affectionately called “B-Mama” by family and close friends, Laurie was surrounded by her loved ones in CICU at Shelby Baptist at her death. She was preceded in death by her mother, Annie Laurie Orr, and her father, Milton Lee Orr of Montevallo. She was also preceded by her brother Milton Lee Orr Jr., brother John William Orr, and sister Marie Orr McManus. Her survivors include her husband of 69 years, Charles Edward Binion Jr, and their four daughters – Lee Rollins Binion, Patricia Binion Preston (Charles), Amy Binion Brown (Danny), and Laurie Binion Harris (Brian).

Laurie is also survived by grandchildren - Kelli Preston Eden (Sean), Paige Preston Boyer (Terry), Charles Albert Preston IV, Coleman Lee Preston (Sally), Paul Bradford Singleton Jr, Jackson Rollins Singleton, Julia Grace Harris, and Emma Elizabeth Harris. Her surviving great-grandchildren include Preston and Owen Boyer, Parks and Eli Eden, and Grayson Harris.

Laurie was born on December 16, 1932 in Montevallo, Alabama. She attended the University of Alabama, where she was a member of Delta Delta Delta sorority, and received her BA in Fine Arts. Following graduation, she was employed as an artist by Harvey's Department Store in Nashville, Pizitz

Department Store, and Lucky and Forney Advertising Agency in Birmingham.

She married Charles Edward Binion (Charlie, “Buddy”) in 1955. While raising children, Laurie served as a Girl Scout leader, and was also involved in the Service Guild, The Montevallo Garden Club, Meals on Wheels, and Silhouettes Dance Club. She was a proud member of the Sarah Towery Art Colony of Alexander City, of which she traveled with numerous times to paint in San Miguel. She was a lifelong member of the First United Methodist Church of Montevallo.

Laurie was a talented seamstress who enjoyed designing and sewing for her daughters. She was also an avid vegetable gardener, to the education and delight of her family, but she was best known for her delicious homemade brown bread. Laurie was a lover of all cats and horses, and never resisted the chance to give one a good home. She had the gift of making everyone feel comfortable and welcome, which is why she loved to host so many family functions. Her family gave her her greatest joy.

A celebration of Laurie's Life was held on Monday, January 20, 2025 at First United Methodist Church of Montevallo.

Memorial donations should be directed to First United Methodist Church of Montevallo or the Greater Birmingham Humane Society.



This photo from the early 1990's shows members of Montevallo's New Horizons Seniors Club decorating the tree for their Christmas party held annually at the John W. Stewart Student Retreat on the University of Montevallo campus. (L-R) Augusta Lovelady, Mary Nell Frost, Billy Dunham, Theda Nordan Dunham, Charlie Binion, Montevallo Mayor Ralph Sears, Laurie Binion, Mildred Bolton Orr, and former Montevallo Mayor, Dr. M.L. Orr, Jr.

Laurie Binion Makes “Orr Sauce”

by Catherine Legg
Shelby County Reporter/Montevallo Community Columnist
PUBLISHED TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2013



Laurie Orr Binion is a Montevallo girl and even if she knows that she is a wonderful artist, that she loves animals, especially horses, and that she is an avid gardener, that is not what she is known for. She is a great cook, from a long line of great cooks.

Laurie spent a happy childhood in Montevallo where her father, Dr. M.L. Orr, Sr., was Dean of Alabama College (University of Montevallo). Her mother was Angie Laurie and siblings were Marie, Milton, and John. Laurie and her husband, Charlie, have four daughters: Lee, Patricia, Amy, and Laurie, who have grown since eight grandchildren. Laurie graduated from Montevallo High School, and gained her Bachelor's of Arts degree from the University of Alabama.

For the next several years she worked in the advertising field before becoming a full-time writer. As proof of the “great cook” reputation of her forebears, Laurie makes a batch of her “Orr Sauce,” and tells its interesting story.

“The recipe came from my father's mother, and my mother, during the depression, thought she would make it to sell. She used half-balls made, but never really got her recipe off the ground, so it just became a family recipe. We used to eat everything green, beans, or are added to it? Charlie even says it's no hamburger.”

Laurie always makes enough of the sauce for her extended family, and she loves to share this recipe with friends.

Orr Sauce
1 Green Pepper (tomatoes, beans, or meat optional)
2 Bell Peppers - Same can be hot peppers
4 Large Onions
1-2 White Onions
2 Cans Beans
2 Tbs. Salt
1 tsp. Red Pepper
2 tsp. Ground Onions
4 tsp. Ground Onions

Sauté, peel, and chop the tomatoes, and chop the peppers & onions. Put in a big pot - Add all other ingredients and cook down all day until it seems done - Keep stirring. Do not let this burn - Stir occasionally and enjoy. Using your house smell this good! Put in jars and seal in a water bath canner.

Catherine Legg, Montevallo correspondent for the Shelby County Reporter, wrote this story in 2003 about Laurie making “Orr Sauce”, an old family recipe. To see the story and recipe, go to www.historicmontevallo.org.

Editor's Note: Laurie and Charlie Binion joined the Montevallo Historical Society in our first year as an organization, 2017. They have remained as active members ever since. One of Laurie's accomplishments during her life was her contribution of thirteen original line drawings to *Time Has Made a Change in Me* (edited by Robert David Ward), a collection of memories written by individuals who grew up and spent their childhoods in Montevallo. To order a copy go to www.historicmontevallo.org and click on “Montevallo Books”.



Montevallo Main Street hosted its inaugural "Monte Gras Ball" on February 1, 2025 in the elegant ballroom of the University of Montevallo's Anna Irvin Hall. A number of Montevallo Historical Society members were in attendance for a memorable evening of good food and fun.



Dee and Barry Woodham were joined by her brother and his colorful family. (Standing, L-R) Shane Kelly, Leigh Allison, Barry Woodham, Dee Woodham. (Seated, L-R) Russ Allison (brother), Jana Smallwood, Kelsey Allison, Lindsey Allison, Shaun Styer.

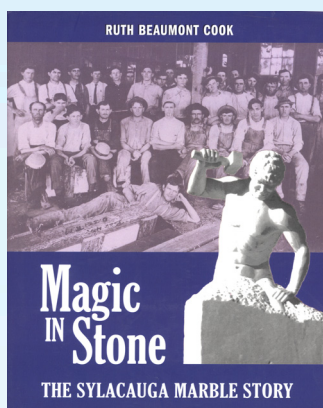


Chuck King (left) jokes around with Montevallo Main Street president, Kirk Lightfoot. Chuck's orchestra provided authentic New Orleans-style Dixieland music for dancing and an indoor "second-line" parade. Souvenir "Monte Gras" handkerchiefs for waving in the parade were a nice touch.

Next MHS General Membership Meeting

Sunday April 27, 2025 • Parnell Library • 2:00 pm

Our Invited Speaker will be Ruth Beaumont Cook
Author of *Magic in Stone* • The Sylacauga Marble Story



There is growing evidence that a number of markers in Montevallo City Cemetery were carved from white marble slabs extracted from the famous quarries in the Sylacauga, Alabama area. So a program on this topic should be quite timely as well as interesting and informative. Ms Cook will have copies of her book on hand for sale that she will be happy to sign for interested readers.



Brief History of the Strand Theatre

By Dr. S.M. "Mike" Mahan, Jr.

Before this narrative was written, the owner, Mr. Carl Love, began demolition on the Strand Theater with a goal to turn the theater into apartments. In an effort to document the historic significance of the Strand Theater, a lengthy interview with the owner and builder, Mr. Eddie Watson occurred producing this report. After discussion with Montevallo mayor, Ralph Sears, the change of occupancy of the theater was questionable due to city codes and ordinances. The paper was presented to the City Council to see if the demolition could be slowed down or stopped and a more conservative adaptive reuse plan could be found.

The narrative was also to be used to place the Strand Theater on the National Registry of Historic

Places. Documentation for the National Registry was submitted to the Alabama Historical Commission and to the Montevallo City Council, but National Registry was never obtained due to a lack of interest from the owner, Mr. Love, the City Council, and citizens of Montevallo. Following demolition work on the Strand Theater and an adaptive reuse to apartments, only the outside shell of the Strand Theater remains. The remaining original structure is basically intact and I hope this report might help a new owner consider restoration and reuse so that Montevallo area citizens could once again enjoy Montevallo's historic Strand Theater.

Dr. S. M. "Mike" Mahan, Jr.
September 7, 2010



Thomas Edwin "Eddie" Watson
1901 - 1998

with an option to buy in six months. Mr. Wade did not anticipate the Watsons exercising their option to buy, but before the six months were over, with some financial help from Merchants and Planters Bank, the Watsons exercised their option and purchased the theater for \$5500. The Wade Theater was renamed the Strand and the Watsons began a very successful business.

In the early 1930s Eddie got word through the local "grapevine" that Pat Kroell, an older, very successful merchant and business en-

Mr. Eddie Watson's father was employed as a general superintendent of the Aldrich Coal Mine during the ownership of Mr. Darius Thomas. In 1920, Eddie's mother, Mrs. Ruth Watson, rented the Methodist Church building which was located on the corner of Island and Middle Streets facing Middle. The Methodists, in 1906, built a new church which now serves as the First United Methodist Church. Mrs. Watson opened the Strand Theater #1 in the church and operated the theater at that location until about 1933. Eddie and his brother, Morris, helped their mother with the theater. However, on September 5, 1920 Eddie enrolled in the University of Alabama to major in commerce. He attended the University for three years.

Mrs. Watson incurred competition in the Montevallo theater market in April 1929 when Mr. Wade opened a theater in an existing brick structure which stood on the lot where the Strand is now located. Red Mahan's Bob-Her Shop was located on the left of the Wade Theater and Rogan's Store on the right.

Eddie remembers showing silent films and "talkies" at the Strand Theater #1. They employed a piano player for musical accompaniment to the silent films and to fill time as reels were changed or film was repaired.

In the late 1920s (exact date unknown), Mr. Wade contacted Mrs. Watson offering to sell, lease, or rent his theater. Mrs. Watson and Eddie agreed to lease for rental

Editor's Note: We are grateful to MHS founding member, Marty Everse, who discovered in the personal archives of his good friend, Dr. Mike Mahan, a printed report concerning Montevallo's Strand Theatre, much of which is based on an interview conducted by Mike with Strand owner, T. W. "Eddie" Watson before he died. This article borrows extensively from the report. The text has been lightly edited to enhance readability and to improve the organization of the original.

trepreneur in Montevallo, was planning to build another theater at the corner of Main and Middle, at the present site of Smitherman's Pharmacy. The theater was to be very large with a seating capacity of 500. Before long, Mr. Kroell had gone ahead and poured the foundation and footings for the building.

By now, Eddie had become president of the Southeastern Theater Association, so anticipation of local competition led Eddie to make a quick trip to Atlanta to consult Association members, developers, and studio representatives about what he might do to discourage the competition from Pat Kroell's theater.

Because of his personal acquaintances with key members, he was given word by the Association that if he would construct a state of the art theater, studios would not honor contracts for films with Mr. Kroell.

Eddie Watson then began plans to build a new theater. He purchased an additional lot and hired an architect from Birmingham. The architect, Mr. Whilden, had built a number of theaters, most of which had been for African-American audiences (at this time blacks and whites were kept separate by different theaters or black patrons were seated in the balconies or in the rear of the theater).

Eddie instructed his architect that seating would be in excess of 500 and the balcony should accommodate approximately 100 people. The theater was to be equipped with two projectors, quality seat-

ing and its decor in keeping with the latest Hollywood trends. Eddie sought financial help from several lending institutions, and the necessary funds were acquired from Liberty National Life Insurance Company and Montevallo's Merchants and Planters Bank. His plans were to demolish the existing Strand in the spring of 1935 and be back in business in September in time for the fall term of Alabama College.

Mr. Honeycutt began work on the building, but due to building complications: shortages of mate-

(An article in the Montevallo Times announcing the reopening of the Strand said that the opening-night feature would be a movie entitled "Red Salute", starring Barbara Stanwyck and Robert Young).

Eddie confessed that after the opening, for the first time in several months, he worried that he might have made a mistake in opening such a grand theater, due to the fact that movie lovers did not attend the Strand in the numbers he had anticipated.

He said he was told by some of

his colleagues that the beauty of the Strand intimidated some of the local folks, and they were not used to such an edifice and it would take them a while to become acclimated to the Strand. After several months, attendance increased and the Strand began to show a significant profit.

Eddie recalls the Strand #1 had only single projectors which meant the films had to be stopped as reels were changed. His first projectors were Motioncraft carbon-arc projectors, one of which

was transferred from the previous Strand Theater #1. After several years, a pair of state-of-the-art simple projectors was purchased along with a direct current (DC) generator for converting alternating current (AC) to DC. This welcome improvement made for movies being shown without jerky motions. The new Strand was also equipped with a small organ, which Eddie thinks was a Wurlitzer, used to entertain the audience before and after the motion pictures. It was also played



rials, cost increases, delays on seating delivery (which were purchased from the American Seating Company), the Strand was not completed and didn't open until November of 1935. When Eddie was asked if he had a grand opening, he stated, "I only wanted a quick opening". He needed income to begin to defray his investment costs. Eddie could not remember his opening night picture, but the 500 seat Strand did come to life and became an integral part of life in Montevallo.

during lantern slide presentations or to fill dead space as repairs were made to film or projectors. The organ was removed when the Strand was equipped with a sound system for playing records. The old Wurlitzer was loaned to the owner of the Columbiana Theater and was never heard from again.

Eddie Watson related that after construction had started on the new theatre, Mr. Harry Epting from Atlanta visited Montevallo and informed him that his balcony had not been laid out properly so as to offer balcony occupants a good view of the screen. Consequently, the balcony arrangement was redesigned. Eddie said the balcony seats were always better than the downstairs seats, but he never told the downstairs audience that the African-American audience had the best seat for cheaper admission. His initial admission charge was white children 10 cents, black children 5 cents, white adults 25 cents and black adults 20 cents. At one time, white adult admission was 29 cents.

Eddie had agreements with all the major movie studios, Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, 20th Century Fox and so forth. He prided himself on showing new pictures in Montevallo as they were issued and in most cases before or soon after they opened in Birmingham or Montgomery.

People came from near and far to the Strand Theater. The mining communities of Marvel, Boothton, Aldrich, and Maylene all ran special buses two to three times a week to the Strand. The Siluria cotton mill village also gave the Strand a great deal of patronage. West Blocton, Centreville, Calera and Columbiana all had their own theaters, but, with Eddie's creative advertising schemes and the attraction of the Strand itself, ten, twenty and twenty-five mile theater trips were common.

The students from Alabama College, of course, were a mainstay for



A photo from the 1941 Alabama College yearbook, "The Montage", shows students on a break from their studies to take in the latest Hollywood feature film at the Strand.

him and provided a good, dependable baseline audience. This variety of audiences kept Eddie constantly looking and searching for films which would attract a broad spectrum of audiences with disposable income. Stage productions and Vaudeville shows were common at the Strand.

The stage was designed to accommodate a variety of productions due to its size and flexibility. The Strand was graced with a dark red, heavy velour main curtain, and the screen could be raised for stage shows. There was also a curtain

that could be lowered and raised to accommodate projection of local merchant advertising.

Stage shows were not scheduled but if a group wanted to perform on Eddie's terms, that of a percentage of ticket sales, they could. Thus the Strand became Montevallo's Alabama Theatre, Fox Theatre, or Radio City Music Hall. The only stage shows Eddie recalled was when young Minnie Pearl performed and when a group of young African-American men convinced him that their minstrel show would be a money maker. Laughingly he recalled it cost him money to get them out of town.

He had six billboards located in Bibb and Shelby Counties on which he kept up-to-date advertising of coming events. He said he used to personally change the billboards every week, sometimes early in the morning or late at night depending on which film he had booked. When financial times got better, Eddie started hiring out his billboard installation work.

He was asked how many months in advance he made his bookings, and he said most of the time it was only weeks or days. This constant attention to providing current films

STRAND--Montevallo

--OPENING--

MONDAY and TUESDAY

With the Year's Outstanding Romantic Comedy

RED SALUTE

With

Barbara Stanwyck, Robert Young

and Cliff Edwards

=====

Shows Begin at

6:40 and 8:35

=====

No Increase in Admission

and advertising schemes was the secret to the success of Montevallo's Strand theater enterprise.

Another of Eddie's advertising schemes was the use of handbills. Small colorful handbills were printed with images of coming attractions. The handbills were passed out in the downtown shopping district and placed on automobile seats or under windshield wipers. He also employed paper boys to place the handbills in their folded newspapers such as the *Birmingham News*, *Montevallo Times*, and *Shelby County Reporter*. He related that the *Birmingham News* and *Post Herald* caught him using their papers in his advertising schemes and forced him to stop doing so. Handbills were also placed in post office boxes by friendly post office employees. This might mean free admission to the Strand for helping. Eddie would go to the post office and retrieve thrown away handbills the day they were placed in the boxes to use them again. He was printing an average of 5000 handbills a week.

Another innovative, audience attracting scheme was his lottery scheme or raffle. Each ticket purchased to the Strand would entitle the buyer to a lottery/raffle ticket number. These numbers were placed in a large, round wooden tumbler, built by Mr. Jim Splawn of Wilton. At the Saturday night movie, someone from the audience drew a number. If the number was not claimed, the lottery continued to the next week. Each week the prize money got larger and often reached \$300-\$400. Up until this point, only those attending the Strand could have a number in the round barrel. Eddie soon found he could sell raffle tickets for the prize money to some people even if they did not go to the movie. However, this was a form of gambling, forbidden by law and, after a considerable time of making good profit on his game, the minister of the First Baptist Church and Mr. Gardner, the

REBEL DRIVE-IN—Hiway No. 31
1/2 Way Between Alabaster - Calera
SUN. and MON., JULY 22 and 23



IT RIPS THE HEART!
EXODUS
Note! One Show at 7:30

TUES. and WED., JULY 24 and 25



PRODIGE... MOST POWERFUL WARRIORS THAT EVER LIVED!
MGM. **ORSON WELLES' MATURE**
THE TARTARS
TECHNICOLOR

REBEL DRIVE-IN—Hiway No. 31
1/2 Way Between Alabaster - Calera
THURS. and FRI., JULY 26 and 27



A great picture!
WILLIAM HOLDEN - CLIFTON HOLDEN - WEBB
SATAN NEVER SLEEPS
FRANCE NOVEN

SATURDAY, JULY 28
THREE BIG FEATURES!
ABBOTT and COSTELLO in
"WISTFUL WIDOW OF WAGON GAP"
Also Teenage Hot Shots!
"HOT ANGEL"
Plus Charlton Heston, Anne Baxter
"3 VIOLENT PEOPLE" Color

STRAND
THEATRE — MONTEVALLO, ALABAMA
2 Shows Sunday at 2:30 and 7:30
Saturday Shows Begin at 2:30
Other Days, 2 Shows at 6:40 and 8:30
SUN. and MON., JULY 22 and 23



The hilarious saga of the bravest soldier who ever fought a war... flat on his back!
HORIZONTAL LIEUTENANT
JIM HUTTON - PAULA PRENTISS - JACK CARTER
DICK BUCKLEY - CHARLES MABRY
MAYNARD DEXTER - MINOSH UMEKI

STRAND THEATRE
TUES. and WED., JULY 24 and 25



THE TARTARS vs THE VIKINGS!
METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER
ORSON WELLES' MATURE
THE TARTARS
TECHNICOLOR

STRAND THEATRE
THURS. and FRI., JULY 26 and 27



For those who work all day... and the wild ones who...
Twist All Night
LOUIS PRIMA
JUNE WILKINSON
SAM BUTERA
and THE WITNESSES
Plus The Newest Sensation
"TWIST CRAZE"

STRAND THEATRE
SATURDAY, JULY 28
— Double Feature Program —



THE ONLY MOTION PICTURE WITH A "FIGHT BREAK"
HOMICIDAL
WILLIAM CASTLE
A GUNN - PICTURES RELEASE

— And —



THEY'LL Bust the Buttons Off Your Waist!
THE WISTFUL WIDOW OF WAGON GAP
ABBOTT COSTELLO MAIN
LORI MARTIN - MARTIN BALSAM - JACK KRUSCHEN
TULLY SAVARAS - BARBARIE CHASE

REBEL DRIVE-IN—Hiway No. 31
1/2 Way Between Alabaster - Calera
SUN. and MON., JULY 15 and 16



From Fanny Hunt's Best Selling Novel!
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LANA TURNER
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SANDRA DEE - DAN O'HEIRLY
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TUES. and WED., JULY 17 and 18



BILLY WILDER'S EXPLOSIVE NEW COMEDY
THE FRENCH CONNECTION
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REBEL DRIVE-IN—Hiway No. 31
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THURS. and FRI., JULY 19 and 20



SHOWDOWN IN THE HIGH SIERRA!
M-G-M presents
RANDOLPH SCOTT - JOEL McCREA
RIDE THE HIGH COUNTRY
In Cinemascope and METROCOLOR

SATURDAY, JULY 21
THREE BIG PICTURES!
ELIZABETH TAYLOR in
"LOVE IS BETTER THAN EVER"
Also CLARK GABLE in
"RED HOT WHEELS"
Plus Michael Craig, George Sanders
"TROUBLE IN THE SKY"

STRAND
THEATRE — MONTEVALLO, ALABAMA
2 Shows Sunday at 2:30 and 7:30
Saturday Shows Begin at 2:30
Other Days, 2 Shows at 6:40 and 8:30
SUN. and MON., JULY 15 and 16



TRIGGERS THE SCREEN'S MOST SAVAGE WAR OF NERVES!
CAPE FEAR
GREGORY PECK - ROBERT MITCHUM - POLLY BERGEN
LORI MARTIN - MARTIN BALSAM - JACK KRUSCHEN
TULLY SAVARAS - BARBARIE CHASE

STRAND THEATRE
TUES. and WED., JULY 17 and 18



THEIR OATH WAS...
THEIR CRY...
THEIR GOD...
NIGHT CREATURES
COLOR
PETER CUSHING

STRAND THEATRE
THURS. and FRI., JULY 19 and 20



He used love like most men use money!
Sweet Bird of Youth
PAUL NEWMAN - GERALDINE PAGE
In Cinemascope and METROCOLOR

STRAND THEATRE
SATURDAY, JULY 21



SHOWDOWN IN THE HIGH SIERRA!
FACE TO FACE OR BACK TO BACK!
RIDE THE HIGH COUNTRY
RANDOLPH SCOTT - JOEL McCREA
BARBARIE HORTLEY
In Cinemascope and METROCOLOR

Eddie Watson blanketed the town with Handbills promoting the week's features.

police chief, cited him for his illegal activities.

Eddie was then called before the Grand Jury in Montgomery and was indicted. Upon returning to Shelby County and consulting with Judge Wallace in Columbiana, the judge instructed Eddie that he would be fined a small and reasonable amount if he agreed to discontinue his practices. Eddie agreed, got in his car and started to Montevallo; in route to Montevallo he decided that what he agreed to was not what he wanted to do. He returned to Columbiana and asked Judge Wallace if he could withdraw his commitment to discontinue his game. Judge Wallace told him he'd better stop the game, but Eddie continued for several more months. Of course, he did pay his fine of \$50.

The Strand Theater did host one opening-night preview, but he couldn't remember the name of the movie. It was sent to him by mistake from the distributor, and he said the film was of poor quality and every time it was shown it was stretched. After several times, the film was no longer able to be shown. Eddie notified the studio of the poor quality of the film and possibly saved the studio a great amount of embarrassment had the film been released to other theaters.



Watson family photos courtesy of Jane Watson Bullock.

Eddie and Georgene Watson in their Highland Street home with Eddie's mother Ruth holding her new granddaughter, Jane, who was born in September of 1955.

At Alabama College in 1952 or '53, Sir Dr. Robert Payne of the English department produced and directed a 90 minute color movie. Barbara Baker, Alabama College student from Calera, starred in the leading role. Locals Alvin McGaughy, Ruth Ratliff, and Barbara McGaughy played supporting roles. Ralph Sears and Putnam Porter served as technical and musical directors of the film. The movie, entitled, "A Letter to Jenny", was previewed in Birmingham at the Avon Theater and in Montevallo at the Strand. Plans were made for "A Letter to Jenny" to be shown in Atlanta and eventually in New York.

However with little or no success and many poor reviews, Sir Robert's dream never came to fruition. However, upon its first night showing at the Strand, people came in droves and lined up all the way to the Baptist Church. Standing ovations were given to the stars and dreams of new careers and wealth were common. Dr. Payne told Eddie whatever his portion of the showing, just send it to him. Eddie showed the film, sent the commission to the producer, and Sir Robert Payne's film was never shown again.

Another chapter in the history of the Strand is the men's Sunday school class. During the 1930's, prior to WWII, Dr. Oliver Cromwell Carmichael, President of Alabama College, and his brother Dr. Carmichael, an ordained minister, began a non-denominational men's Sunday school class.

This innovative men's community religious endeavor became extremely popular; the class reached a membership of over two hundred men. As the class grew in size and needed a permanent meeting place, Eddie Watson was asked if the Strand Theater could be used.

Of course, he agreed and the Strand became the home of the Montevallo Men's Sunday School Class. Several Alabama College



Ruth Watson's 1890s-era Victorian-style home that still stands on the corner of Middle and Alabama Streets in Montevallo. Both Eddie Watson and his brother Morris grew up here.

students served as violinists and pianists for the singing. The brothers Dr. Carmichael served as class leaders and delivered most morning lessons. The class also became a large fraternal and social organization and surely had a significant political influence. It became so popular and so large that it began to hurt the church attendance in all denominations. The ministers of the local churches organized and protested the Sunday school class as it was hurting not only attendance, but impacting collection plates. The class posed for annual group pictures, one of which was done in front of Jeter Mercantile. The class had such notorious members as Mr. Thomas, Aldrich mine owner, F.W. Rogan of General Mercantile, Mr. Jeter of Jeter Mercantile, Red Mahan, Cassey Fancher and others. Eddie couldn't remember how the class got started and wasn't sure why it disbanded, except that Dr. Carmichael resigned in 1935 to become Dean of the Graduate School at Vanderbilt in Nashville, TN.

In 1948, the Strand underwent a complete facelift featuring new colors and decor. A new marquee was designed by a theater design company from Atlanta. New seats were installed, along with a new popcorn machine, new projectors, and sound system. A curved screen completed the Strand's update.

A noted theater decorator/painter was hired to paint and modernize the Strand. The effort took some three months. Eddie said this noted artist was known to take a drink and he remembers going many mornings to Mrs. Mulkey's boarding house to get him up and started on the Strand.

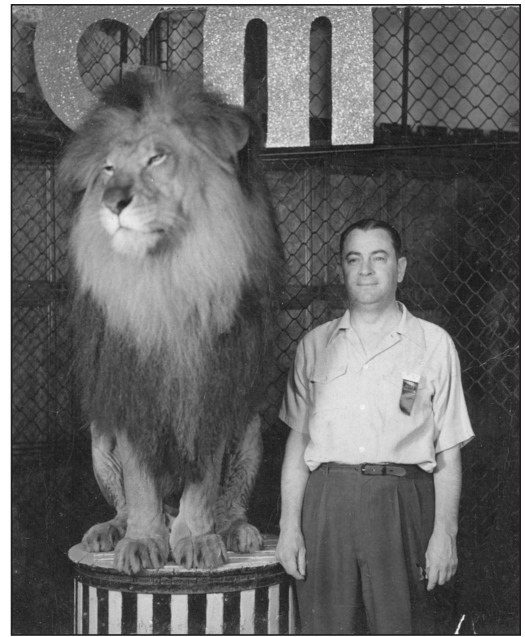
The multi-colors, new carpet, neon-lit marquee with changeable letters for feature notices; its blues, pinks, purples, reds, and golds helped to continue the Strand's unprecedented audience attraction.

Mrs. Ruth Watson, Eddie's mother, was the single familiar

face at the ticket booth. She worked and sold tickets at the Strand until she reached the age of 95. She cleaned the Strand Theaters I, II, and III, helped paint the screens and advised Eddie. But mainly she sold the tickets and monitored the income, stacking her nickels, dimes, quarters, and pennies neatly in two-to-three inch stacks on her counter inside the ticket booth. The half-dollars and paper money were securely placed out of reach and out of sight, and the stacks of change never got above a minimum of 50 cents to a dollar in height. She would never ride home in the car with Eddie. She walked to and from the Strand, rain or shine, three blocks to her beautiful 1890s Victorian home on Middle Street.

The Strand and Eddie and Mrs. Watson served the city as the best baby sitting service available. Can you imagine? From Saturday at 2 p.m. till Saturday at 6 p.m. 25 cents would give you admission to two Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, or Tom Mix Saturday westerns and a Batman, Superman, or Tarzan serial. A cartoon, a preview of coming attractions and lantern slides advertising the specials at Klotzmans' Ready to Wear, Hoffman's Dry Goods, Kroll's General Mercantile, Montevallo Motor Company, Mahan's Barber and Beauty Shop, and Lovelady Motor Company were also shown.

Between the two o'clock and four o'clock showing, if you hurried after the serial and between the comedy you could rush to Rogan's store, and for fifteen cents acquire a bag of peanuts, and an RC cola, and come back for a nickel bag of popcorn. All of this was done under the watchful eye, caring and disciplining words, actions, and sometimes treats (always justified) of Eddie and Mrs. Watson.



Eddie with the MGM Lion mascot at the Southeast Exhibitors Convention in Jacksonville, FL in 1941.

Eddie Watson, Montevallo's most eligible bachelor, entered into holy matrimony in 1948 after the arrival in town of Georgene McCauley, then professor of Physical Education at Alabama College. Georgene and Eddie's daughter, Jane, was born and the Strand Theater became associated with the third generation of Watsons. Eddie gave back to his community by serving on the City Council as Finance Chairman for 30 years. His contributions to his community were unprecedented.

The Strand Theater served Montevallo from 1920 until 1971 under the leadership of Mr. T.E. Watson. All Montevallians, thousands of Alabama College and University students can relate and remember moments in the Strand. Laughter was bounteous. Many tears were shed with the likes of Scarlet O'Hara. Eyes were closed as fear raced through our minds when Dracula, Frankenstein, and Cagney appeared on the screen. A large number of first-time hand-holding episodes happened at the Strand. Kisses were often talked about and a few were seen. Romances began, romances ended, but memories of the Strand continue to linger in the minds of many.

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