BIRMINGHAM REMEMBERED:
The Shades Valley Sun for June 1, 1961 carried an article the opening paragraph of which read as follows:

No one is indispensible, but it is hard to imagine what Birmingham and Alabama would be like if they had been deprived of the dynamism of Mervyn Hayden Sterne. For 40 years his unique combination of resolution, vision and energy has been at the command of the community. He is much more than a businessman with civic interests. He is, above all, a citizen who has been the creative guide and mainstay of a hundred good causes and at the same time an investment banker of national distinction. "Dedicated" is a much-abused term, but it belongs to Mr. Sterne, if it ever belonged to anyone. He is conspicuously an indefatigable servant of the public good.

To Mervyn Hayden Sterne, that "indefatigable servant of the public good"—five years after his death—this issue of The Journal of the Birmingham Historical Society is dedicated.

THE YEARS OF TRANSITION

Photograph by Nettie Edwards Spain
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FOREWORD

"Years of Transition" is one of the euphemisms often employed by historians in an attempt to characterize periods of substantive social, political, or economic change. Its use is, however, more than frequently subject to challenge, since few periods of recorded history have been devoid of substantive change; thus, it is virtually the whole of history and not just one period for which the phrase may be termed characteristic.

For the history of Birmingham, at least for those segments of that history upon which this issue of The JOURNAL of the Birmingham Historical Society focuses, the phrase is perhaps less misleading. The decade of the 1880's and the first two years of the decade which followed — prior to the severe economic recession of 1893 and the labor protests of 1893 and 1894 — were, indeed, a period of dramatic change, if one considers the economic boom of 1886 - 1887, the consequent growth of the city's population (from 3,086 in 1880 to 26,178 in 1890), the advent of architect-designed commercial and residential structures, the introduction of the electric light and the telephone, the development of new water resources, first, from Five Mile Creek in the north and, then, from the Cahaba River in the south, and the construction of what would become a major street railway system, linking not only the various sections of the city but the city and its growing number of suburbs as well.

These years were indeed years of substantive change, but not simply in terms of economics and aesthetics. The roughness which one visitor had observed in Birmingham's earliest citizenry had, by the 1880's, with the advent of a thriving coal and iron industry and a consequent growth in population, evolved into a rawness which at times approached the uncontrollable. As one local historian has noted, "Saturday night was a night of wild abandon. A saloon on every corner gave invitation to turn payroll dollars into celebration. The weekend toll of dead and injured was appalling, when drunken brawlers 'shot it out' in bar or street, innocent by-standers not infrequently falling victim to the stray bullets. Some lurid writers began to refer to Birmingham as the 'Murder Capital of the World.'"

Perhaps the one affair which illustrated most clearly the rawness that could typify life in Birmingham during these first years of dramatic change was the Hawes murders and the riot which followed the arrest and indictment of Richard Hawes for the murders of his wife and two of his children. In the July, 1978 issue of The

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JOURNAL of the Birmingham Historical Society, Jeff Northrup recounted the events associated with the murders and offered a pointed critique of the role of one of Birmingham's major newspapers, The Age-Herald, in the creation of an atmosphere in which rawness was given expression as uncontrolled mob violence. In this issue of The JOURNAL, Northrup offers a conclusion to the Hawes affair, concentrating again upon the role of The Age-Herald and also upon what the whole affair had to say about Birmingham and its people during the first "years of transition."

The second period of marked change followed the economic depression of 1893 and the years of its immediate aftermath. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, not only was there a resurgence of labor unrest but, perhaps of greater economic significance, the invasion of the Birmingham District by United States Steel and the consequent transfer of a major industrial property, the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, from local and regional control to that of an emerging national corporation.

Coincidental with these developments came major changes both in the city's skyline, with the construction of three major "skyscrapers" at the corners of First Avenue, North, and Twentieth Street and a host of other large commercial buildings, and in her boundaries, with the creation in 1910 of Greater Birmingham, through the merger of ten outlying suburbs with the city proper.

Changes in the economy and in the face and shape of the city were not, however, the only evidences of transition. There were striking alterations in terms of social structures as well. During the first and second decades of the twentieth century, a plethora of social service organizations emerged, including the Boys' Club, the Children's Aid Society, the Salvation Army, and the Anti-Tuberculosis Society. In the same period, the development of existing institutions with similar or different orientations continued. Among the latter was the city's fledgling library. In Chapters III and IV of their history of the Birmingham Public Library, Virginia Pounds Brown and Mabel Thuston Turner continue the account of the transition of this institution from a facility designed to serve the needs of high school students and their teachers to one whose patronage was the general public. The torturous course of this transition, in the years between 1900 and 1909, and particularly the valiant but often frustrated efforts of those who struggled to create a public library and to staff the facility and house its collections adequately provide ample testimony of the unpredictable character of change. In the midst of a period of marked transition, the changes that occurred came not only with the speed of the hare but also with the slowness of the tortoise.

In one facet of life in the Greater Birmingham area, in that of race relations, change in the prevailing tradi-
A pair of iron ore miners take a lunch break atop a pile of lumber outside the Wenonah mines in 1936, three years after Mine Mill became the official union representatives for these men. Black miners such as these made up a large proportion of Mine Mill’s membership. Copy of Farm Security Administration photograph; negative on deposit at the Library of Congress; photographic print, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.
THE RISE AND FALL OF MINE MILL IN ALABAMA

The Status Quo against Interracial Unionism, 1933-1949

HORACE HUNTLEY

Editor's Note: This article is a revised version of a paper—by the same title—presented at the Sixty-third Anniversary Meeting of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, Inc., held in Los Angeles, California, October 12-15, 1978. Dr. Huntley is currently serving as Assistant Professor of History at the University of Alabama in Birmingham.

In 1933, the nation embarked upon a new era in labor history. Even the divide-and-conquer tactics of employers and the precariousness of race relations could not stop the new wave of worker organization. The new organizational thrust was sparked by the enactment of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 which guaranteed labor's right to organize without management interference. The act was also designed to cut employment, shorten the work week, insure a decent wage and prevent unfair competition and overproduction. Shortly after the act's passage, the United Mine Workers organized 400,000 coal miners within three months, and several other unions increased their numbers substantially.

This organizational thrust was national in scope and involved many occupations; however, the focus here is upon the Birmingham, Alabama iron ore mines and the miners who worked them. While white miners did participate in this unionizing drive, black workers were the vast majority. There were five intervening years between the initial organization of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers and the Union's first major victory. This victory was realized as a result of the outcome of the 1936 strike when 160 miners lost their jobs because of their strike activities. The Union was finally granted a National Labor Relations Board hearing in 1937 and not only won reinstatement and back pay amounting to $102,050 for the discharged workers, but also obtained an agreement to negotiate their first contract with Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, a subsidiary of United States Steel.

This was an important victory for Mine Mill. For two long years, the discharged miners and their families had suffered agony and hunger. The disappointments of those two years, coupled with that of the previous three, had been almost unbearable. The white miners who had remained loyal to Mine Mill had been ostracized both on and off the job for having the audacity to participate in the so-called "nigger union." Black workers had always been relegated to an inferior status and ostracized, so they undoubtedly thought it better to be organized and ostracized rather than simply ostracized.

The Union was in dire need of this major victory, which greatly bolstered its prestige. Jubilation abounded throughout the mining camps. Just as the National Industrial Recovery Act and the Wagner Act had rejuvenated workers' efforts to organize, this triumph served a similar purpose, and white and black miners now flocked into the Mine Mill fold.

Although it would seem that this victory was a blessing, it ironically signaled the beginning of the end for Mine Mill on Red Mountain. This account relates the progression from victory to defeat for an experiment in interracial unionism. The influx of white workers into Mine Mill made it necessary for TCI to devise new tactics of divisiveness. With the Brotherhood of Captive Miners (the company union) having lost popularity among white workers, the possibility of playing it against Mine Mill became quite remote. If the two unions could not be pitted against each other, then TCI's alternative was to pit Mine Mill against itself by dividing it along racial lines.

Some white miners had been concerned about the prominent roles black miners played in Mine Mill, and they became even more concerned when they failed to wrest control from the blacks and thus reverse the union's racial policy of 50-50 official representation. TCI was aware of the white miners' uneasiness and set out to nurture it. Racial fears were highlighted by some whites who reportedly were "company stooges." For its part, TCI assisted by reversing its hiring policy. While the company previously had hired predominantly blacks, they began hiring whites almost exclusively during the decade of the 1940's.

TCI's new hiring policy aroused great concern among black unionists who viewed it as an effort to...
return the Mine Mill Union to the control of white miners. By the late 1940's this concern had spread to the rank and file black miners. For example, in testimony before a congressional committee considering a Fair Employment Practices Act, Eugene Calhoun, a black miner from Bessemer, declared:

*I work for the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. One reason why I want to support the fair employment practices is because these people down there are being denied the rights and privileges to have a job and to earn a decent living, because of their color. This particular company, in the last 2 years almost quit hiring Negroes. They hire white about 100 to 1. Of course this is not because of their [blacks'] inefficiency, but because they [TCI] can use them [whites] to bust the labor unions.*

Although the “100-1” statement seems an exaggeration, the charge that the company hired whites more frequently than blacks does stand up under investigation. In retrospect, several black miners spoke strongly of the company’s efforts to reduce the preponderance of blacks in the mines. One miner stated bluntly: “The only way for them [TCI] to break the union was to get more whites in the mines and pit race against race. So they stopped hiring Negroes.”

The issue of Communism was also never far from the heart of most intra-union conflicts of Mine Mill after the early 1940's. During this period, the iron ore locals on Red Mountain were developing a sensitivity to the alleged “Communist ideology”

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*A view looking down on the Wenonah ore processing plant and associated structures. In Jones Valley below may be seen the small mining community and the miners’ houses at Wenonah. Copy of Farm Security Administration photograph; negative on deposit at the Library of Congress; photographic print, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.*
The charge of Communism anywhere else usually meant
the leadership was seemingly following the dictates
of the Communist Party in carrying out undemocratic
principles. In Alabama, the same charge meant the
Union was too liberal in its stance on racial equality,
and in fact adhered to the wishes of the majority,
which was black. In the South, anything interpreted
as an effort to achieve racial equality was termed
"Red." The alleged "Communism" within Mine Mill
was the excuse some whites in Alabama needed to bolt
the union.

White discontent, as has been noted, was evident
throughout the 1940's, but it was not until 1948 that
white forces gained enough strength to challenge black
control of Mine Mill. The impossibility of takeover
from within became evident to the discontented whites,
so their strategy was changed: secede and affiliate
with another union.

As early as April, 1948, the Mine Mill International
representatives on Red Mountain reported uncooperativeness of various local officials. On April 9, 1948,
M. C. Anderson, a white Mine Mill representative, discovered that local white officials had made improper
to the rank and file on important issues relayed
to the locals from the International office. He suggested that duplicate copies of all correspondence
sent to the financial secretaries—who were white—
for Muscoda Local #123, Wenonah Local #157 and
Ishkooda Local #153, also be sent to the recording
secretaries—who were black.7 This was the first official
Mine Mill indication of a possible split along racial
lines between secessionists and non-secessionists.

Under normal circumstances, two International rep­
resentatives worked the Alabama locals of Mine Mill
with one usually concentrating on the iron ore mines.
In January, 1949, four representatives referred to the
secessionist-troubled locals in their semi-monthly
reports. They were Frank Allen, Asbury Howard, J. P.
Mooney and M. C. Anderson. Allen and Howard were
black. Howard reported that some officers of Ishkooda
Local #153 and Wenonah Local #157 were holding
meetings in the rival Steelworkers' Hall. The report
went further to say that those attempting to secede
from Mine Mill were to elect officers and receive a
charter from Steel."8 J. P. Mooney reported a meeting
between "top officers" in the United Steelworkers
Union and 'company stooges" in Mine Mill who were
preparing for the subsequent raid.9 Allen reported
meeting with 200-300 men of Wenonah Local #157
with the only indication of secession coming from Leo
Kendrick, president of the local.10

On February 2, Charles Wilson, a white Executive
Board member of Mine Mill was appointed adminis­
trator of the affairs of Local #153 by John Clark,
Mine Mill International President.11 This was the
International's attempt to get loyal men to replace
the white secessionist leaders.12

Between February 3 and February 10, ten persons
were suspended from Local #153, "for advocating and
attempting secession."13 On February 5, Charles
Wilson requested that the offices of president, vice
president and financial secretary of Local #639, Ore
Conditioning Plant, be declared vacant and that P. W.
Tindle be designated administrator.14 Local #639
was all-white because whites only were hired at the plant.
That facility would play an important role in the

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7Vernon H. Jensen, Nonferrous Metal Industry Unionism, 1932-
8Letter to M. E. Travis, April 9, 1948, in Official Papers (OP)
of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers,
located at the University of Colorado's Western Historical Col­
lection. Also see Jensen, Unionism. p. 42.

9Letter to Travis, January 31, 1949, OP, Box 95.
11Personal Interview, Asbury Howard, former Mine Mill Official.
12Letter to John Clark, February 5, 1949, OP, Box 46-10.
Officials of the Mine Mill Union are shown here gathered for their Fifty-seventh Convention in 1961. In the center behind the podium is John Clark, the International President of the union, and immediately to Clark’s left stands Asbury Howard of Bessemer. Even after its defeat on Red Mountain, Mine Mill obviously retained its bi-racial character. Photograph courtesy of Horace Huntley.

representation election to be held in April, for TCI employed nearly 400 men there. Nevertheless, it was the Ishkooda and Muscoda locals, and not the Ore Conditioning Plant, which led the secessionist movement.15

George B. Elliott, suspended president of the Ishkooda Local #153, told the local press that his local had withdrawn from Mine Mill, and that the members were applying for affiliation with the United Steelworkers of America.16 In a few days, it became evident that the Steelworker strategy was to entice the workers to leave Mine Mill by granting charters to the secessionists.

Wilson continually denied the withdrawal of any Mine Mill locals, and he charged that Elliott’s statements did irreparable damage to Mine Mill’s ability to carry on collective bargaining with TCI and were misleading to the rank and file.17 In February, 1949, J. P. Mooney reported daily “rump meetings” and wrote:

The secessionist wants a lilly white union, company union, the Negroes and some whites are definitely opposed to their tactics. The city and county law enforcement officers are largely on their side, which of course is expected, for the Steelworkers have supported many of the Cut-Throat Politicians, and we have opposed some of them.18

On February 15, Asbury Howard reported secessionist activities in the Muscoda Local #123: “Whites trying to go to Steel, said to be installing a Steel charter today at Steelworkers Hall.”19

Sometime in late January or early February, Nicolas Zonarich was dispatched to Birmingham by Jim Thimmes, acting in the absence of Philip Murray, President of the CIO and the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). His mission was to investigate the situation and make recommendations to the Pittsburgh national office. Two weeks later, Zonarich recommended that the Steelworkers grant charters to the secessionists.20

On February 18, John Clark, International President of Mine Mill, wrote Philip Murray requesting a statement denying his organization’s support of the secessionists.21 The question raised in Clark’s letter of February 18 was seemingly answered two days later. On February 20, pictures were taken at Muscoda of men with raised hands, taking the Steelworkers oath.
of obligation. Only five of approximately 200 men pictured could possibly be recognized as black. Another picture was taken of three men, two white and one black, displaying a charter issued by the Steelworkers. The men in the picture were L. R. Lowe, president, Ben Spears, vice president of the newly-established Muscoda Local #3803 of the USWA, and John Playfair, a representative of the Steelworkers from Pittsburgh. Six of the pictures were published displaying officers of the six locals; Ben Spears was the only black.22

In a personal interview, Ben Spears, later explained his reasons for accepting the vice presidency with the Steelworkers. He was approached by Nick Zonarich and John Playfair who wished to talk about the Steelworkers. He refused to allow them to visit his home because he feared retaliation by other black workers, so they met elsewhere and asked him to join the Steelworkers Union and to accept the vice presidency. Spears made a special effort to point out that he had only a third grade education, and he suggested to Zonarich and Playfair his lack of preparation for such a position. They assured him that that made little difference. And besides, the two men told Spears, Mine Mill was Communist; and as they further observed, they were certain that he did not want to be one. Mr. Spears said, "I didn't know what that was, but whatever it was I didn't want to be it." At that point he agreed to accept the vice presidency of the Steelworkers' Local #3803.23

Apparently, a mixup occurred, because the day before the pictures of the oath ceremony were published, Mine Mill president Clark received a telegram from Dave McDonald of the Steelworkers stating:

International Office did not issue nor authorize issuance of United Steelworkers of America Charter for Muscoda iron mine. Am advised that some sort of charter has been installed and am attempting to uncover the facts as to what it is and how it came about.24

This information was widely distributed throughout the troubled locals by Mine Mill. On February 28, J. P. Mooney, a Mine Mill representative, reported to his superiors that the Steelworkers had erred in allowing pictures to be published of the men accepting the USWA charter in Muscoda, and that the incident was adversely affecting the secessionist cause. He thought this blunder was evidence enough to show that the men issuing the charters were lying about the Steelworkers' involvement.25

Mooney further reported that the secessionists offered six black leaders $300.00 each to have their pictures taken holding the "phoney CIO charter."26

23Personal Interview, Ben Spears, retired T.C.I. workman, June, 1976.
24Telegram, February 24, 1949, OP.
26Ibid.
The crude simplicity of the miners’ existence was typified by their houses, which for the most part were built by the company and then rented by the miners. This photograph was taken during the height of the Great Depression in the late 1930’s, and it was living conditions like this which inspired much of the union activity. Copy of Farm Security Administration photograph; negative on deposit at the Library of Congress; photographic print, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.

Meantime, Asbury Howard reported that whites attending the Muscoda Local #123 meeting had voted to move the meeting to the Steelworkers’ Hall after Charles Wilson informed them that he had been appointed administrator. Most whites voted to move while all blacks voted against the move. The whites then left. 27

Mine Mill continually attempted to get the USWA and the CIO to either admit giving support to the secessionists or to make a statement rebuffing them. After McDonald had denied issuing a charter at Muscoda, no further statements were made by the national officers of the Steelworkers or the CIO until mid-March. Nevertheless, the secessionist movement continued with the assistance of Steelworkers’ organizers. On March 16, the national silence was broken and McDonald formally replied to specific questions raised by Clark. The reply was brief and to the point:

1. The United Steelworkers of America did not issue a charter for Muscoda Iron Mines, nor any other Alabama Mines.
2. The United Steelworkers of America is not raiding the Mine Mill and Smelter Workers. Your union has disintegrated in Alabama.
3. The United Steelworkers of America is not stirring up racial conflict. Mine Mill is doing all in its power to do so in Alabama. If trouble ensues, it will be because of Mine Mill’s activities. 28

At this point, Mine Mill’s opponents changed their strategy. Rather than issuing USWA charters, the CIO decided to grant local Industrial Union charters. On March 17, Clark wired Murray indicating his outrage at this “violation of the Constitution of the CIO.” 29

This was the first official act of the CIO in the controversy, but it would not be the last.

On March 22, nine leaders of the embattled Mine Mill locals sent a joint statement to Allan Haywood, CIO Director of Organization in Washington, D.C., condemning the CIO for encouraging and assisting the raiding of their union. The statement accused the recipients of the Industrial Union charters of being “company minded and union wreckers.” Why, the letter inquired, had black workers totally rejected overtures from the secessionists? The statement answered:

The leaders of this outfit were scabbing on Mine Mill strikes and/or leading the T.C.I. company union while the [blacks] were standing firm in Mine Mill during the years it was tough to be a union member on Red Mountain. 30

Despite the fact that blacks constituted nearly fifty percent of approximately five-thousand miners employed by TCI, less than a dozen had joined the secessionist cause. The letter also stated that only fifteen percent of the white workers were actively supporting secessionists. Haywood was also informed that these

28Letter to John Clark, March 16, 1949, OP.
29Telegram, March 16, 1949, OP.
30Letter, March 22, 1949, OP.
ANOTHER
$10,000 REWARD!
to anyone, including
DAVID J. MCDONALD,
Who can produce an agreement signed by T. C. I. that it will bargain with Steel
after this election
The Popsicles Are Desperate
They Could Not Claim Our First Reward.
They Cannot Claim This One!
If they had an agreement they would print IT instead of a telegram!
TO THEM WE SAY......
Put up or Shut up
VOTE FOR
MINE - MILL!

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF MINE, MILL & SMELTER WORKERS - C. I. O.

A campaign poster for the Mine Mill Union during the representation dispute in 1949, charging that the Steelworkers Union was lying about a prior agreement with TCI to bargain for the contract of the ore miners. The term “Popsicles” was a derogatory reference to any union which was viewed as a company union. The term derived from the early days of union activity when TCI would furnish popsicles as refreshments at company union meetings. Copy of poster courtesy of Horace Huntley.
were the same men who had for years attempted and failed to destroy Mine Mill from within. Lately, they had resorted to labeling the union "Communist" and calling all whites who remained "nigger lovers." The letter of condemnation concluded by stating that if the CIO continued to support these men in their "raiding, hoodlum-violence, promotion of race hatred, discrimination and company unionism," they were no better than the company which had continually used similar tactics against all independent unions.\footnote{Ibid.} 

The intensity of the struggle now grew. On April 4, an agreement was signed by J. H. Williamson, Manager of Industrial Relations for the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, Charles Wilson for Mine Mill and R. E. Farr, director of District #36 of the United Steelworkers of America calling for a consent election for the "CIO Industrial Unions." The election was scheduled for April 21, at the TCI properties.\footnote{Agreement for Consent Election, April 4, 1949, OP.} In addition to the fact that the winner of the election would be the sole bargaining agent for nearly 5,000 TCI employees, the prospect of workers from smaller companies following this lead must have loomed large in the minds of both union leaders.

One of the main points of contention in the last three weeks of the campaign was who, in fact, were the opponents of Mine Mill in the upcoming election. The consent agreement was between TCI, Mine Mill and the Industrial Unions, as Mine Mill continually repeated.

Then on April 14, exactly one week prior to the election, David McDonald sent a telegram to Nick Zonarich, International Representative of the Steelworkers in Birmingham who had been working with the opponents of Mine Mill for approximately four months. The message read:

Please inform T.C.I. Iron Ore Workers they will be chartered by United Steelworkers of America, C.I.O., after election on April 12. Inform them T.C.I. has agreed to recognize United Steelworkers of America, C.I.O. as their bargaining agent after election is won on behalf of C.I.O. Industrial Union.\footnote{Telegram, April 14, 1949, Box 46-15, OP.}

This message indicated two things. First, an agreement between TCI and the Steelworkers had been worked out in apparent violation of the agreement between the company, the Industrial Union and Mine Mill. The company thought it was to their advantage for the Steelworkers to win, since the leaders of the Industrial Unions were proven loyal company men. Second, the national representatives of the Steelworkers and the CIO were not willing to risk losing the election by attempting to remain anonymous. Evidently, that anonymity had been desirable previously because it was considered cannibalistic within labor circles to raid other \textit{bona fide} labor organizations.

A lengthy editorial in the \textit{Iron Ore Miner} accused Mine Mill's opponents of inserting the race issue into the campaign. The editorial pointed to the inevitability of the "popsicle gang" resorting to this tactic. The close relationship between TCI and the Industrial Union officials, and the fact that race-baiting was an effective company tactic in defeating independent unionism in the past was also part of Mine Mill's argument. What was most shocking to the writer of this editorial was the support of such tactics by the Steelworkers and the CIO. Dividing the workers by race was one of the oldest anti-union tactics used by companies, and he thought that it was inconceivable that these two groups could now support such efforts.\footnote{Ibid.}

Sometime during the last week of the campaign, the importance of the race issue became even more apparent. Mine Mill had been continually referred to as the "nigger union" and white members labeled "nigger lovers," but it was not until the Ku Klux Klan rode that the issue was elevated to its peak. Riding past the Mine Mill District office in Bessemer, approximately 100 Klansmen dressed in their familiar white robes and hoods waved torches, sounded their horns, and officially entered the controversy.\footnote{Report from Dolan to Clark, OP; Howard interview.}

On the day before the election, each union was to present two separate radio messages from radio station WJLD in Bessemer. The station normally directed much of its programming to a black audience; therefore, it appeared that the final appeals by both unions were to black workers. The first broadcasts took place without incident.\footnote{Jensen, \textit{Nonferrous Metals Industry Unionism}, p. 237-38.} The second broadcasts, however, were scheduled very close together, and the outcome was violence. The reports of the incident vary, but court records suggest the following. Upon George Elliott's completion of the Steelworkers' broadcast, he and Maurice Travis, Mine Mill's national secretary-treasurer, exchanged remarks. Present in the room where this encounter took place were three Mine Mill representatives and as many as eight Steelworkers. Travis referred either to Elliott's lack of experience in broadcasting or to his previous connections with the company unions. The Steelworkers' account states that Elliott then hit Travis with one punch and knocked him over a table. The Steelworkers prevented the other two Mine Mill representatives from getting involved, while Nick Zonarich prevented the Steelworkers from attacking the two representatives.\footnote{Ibid.} Mine Mill's account differs. It claims that several men attacked Travis and beat him into submission. The other two Mine Mill representatives did not go to the rescue of Travis and could not be provoked to fight, though they received many insults and threats. The police were summoned, but no arrests were made.\footnote{Ibid. Also see Dolan's report to Clark.} On April
22. Travis was diagnosed as having had a ruptured sclera, torn superior temporal vortex vein and a circular rupture in the globe of the eye,³⁹ and he remained in the hospital in Bessemer and Birmingham until May 11.⁴⁰ On May 23, Travis' eye was removed as a result of injuries sustained on April 20.⁴¹

It is ironic that the CIO described this incident as a minor altercation between two men which was blown out of proportion by Mine Mill. Obviously, this incident was publicized to the fullest extent by Mine Mill and it is unlikely that this was simply a fist fight between two men. In November, 1949, George Elliott was found guilty of assault in the Travis case and fined $200.00 and court costs, in the Municipal Court of Bessemer.⁴²

The election went off as scheduled on April 21. Rufus Paret, Director of the voluntary labor arbitration tribunal of the American Arbitration Association said he had never witnessed such a bitter union election.⁴³

Although, Mine Mill termed the campaign as relatively quiet until 48 hours prior to the election, it was far from being all flowers and banner pageantry. Graham Dolan, Mine Mill Education Director, described election day this way:

_Thursday, April 21, was election day. We would have been mistaken if we had thought that the incident in the radio station would halt the terror. Repeated reports of intimidation were phoned into our office during the day. Every automobile carrying white workers was stopped and its occupants told by roving gangs of Steel hoodlums that if they did not vote for Steel they would be killed or beaten up. The Steel hoodlums told the workers that they would know how they voted, that they had an arrangement with the Company for so knowing. The Negro workers were not to be intimidated and were not frightened from the polls, which were located at five different places on company property._

_Twice during the day, Brother Robinson and I made tours of the polling areas and saw these roving gangs of Steel hoodlums. We had to arm ourselves with baseball bats and knives. Twice the Steel gangs tried to stop us, shouting profane threats to Robinson and myself. Had it not been for some astute driving by Brother Robinson, there is no question in my mind that we would have suffered a fate similar to Travis. Once we were accompanied by Mrs. Alton Lawrence, but this did not deter the Steel hoodlums from screeching their vile threats._⁴⁴

The Industrial Union won the election 2,696 to 2,233.⁴⁵ The four International Representatives of Mine Mill reported the outcome of the election and also that those who had voted for Mine Mill pledged to continue to struggle in its stead.⁴⁶ Mine Mill protested to the American Arbitration Association about tactics used by their opponents during the campaign, but reportedly decided against contesting the result before the Association because of a fear of more intimidation of the workers.⁴⁷

Whether the workers gained or lost as a result of the Steelworkers' victory is a valid question. An analysis of the 1949 Mine Mill and Steelworkers' contracts shows little difference. Even the seniority clause which was so blatantly absent from Steelworkers propaganda prior to the consent election was evident in their new contract. Obviously, the importance was not in the differences in contracts, because even the wage rates were the same. The company resisted additional demands, as well as a cost of living increment; moreover, it received a more tractable union. In this sense, the effort was worthwhile from the Company's perspective. But this was accomplished at the cost of a deterioration in relations between the company and its black employees.

The contract and other "bread and butter" issues were obviously of great importance. But in answering the question of losses, one must be able to delve further. To black workers, Mine Mill was much more than just another labor organization. Many miners related to this writer that prior to Mine Mill on Red Mountain, blacks lived in the "shadow of slavery." For them the Union meant a coming of freedom, justice and equality. That labor organization became a way of life, and one that those workers cherished. With the loss of the election, that way of life was dealt a near fatal blow.

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⁴⁰_Ibid., May 12, 1949.
⁴¹OP, Letter from Derrick Vail, M.D., May 24, 1949.
⁴²Record of Transcript of Criminal Cases From Municipal Court of Bessemer, Case No. 45822, November 9, 1949.
⁴⁴Dolan to Clark, April 26, 1949, OP.
⁴⁵Howard, Semi-Monthly Report, April 30, 1949, OP.
⁴⁶_Ibid., Howard, Allen, Mooney and Anderson. Also see the Union, May 9, 1949.
⁴⁷Reynolds Interview.
An engraving of the gallows on which Richard Hawes met his death on February 28, 1890. The picture was based on an actual photograph by J. Horgan and appeared on the front pages of both the daily and weekly Age-Herald. In a final irony of the case, the gallows was constructed by a juror in the case, J. A. Griffin, who of course had voted for the death sentence. From The Age-Herald, May 5, 1890.
THE HAWES AFFAIR: PART II

JEFF NORTHRUP

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.

William Shakespeare, Macbeth, V, iii, 22 - 23.

In December of 1888, murder was committed in Birmingham. Not that this crime was of and by itself worthy of much notice in the early history of the city. Brawls, beatings, shootings, minor riots and civil disorder in general were almost weekly and certainly monthly occurrences in what bore all the earmarks of a restless frontier boom town. But the victim of this crime seemed in her death to touch even the more calloused hearts of the local citizenry. The body of a little girl, judged to be about twelve years of age and later identified as May Hawes, was found floating on East Lake on December 4, 1888. When, in the ensuing days and weeks, the bodies of her sister Irene and her mother Emma P. Hawes were also found at the bottom of the lake at Lakeview Park, the Birmingham populace, in righteous indignation, cried out for retribution. Circumstantial evidence pointed to the husband and father of the deceased, one Richard R. Hawes.

Birmingham was a frontier town in 1888, but it was at least a thousand miles east of any point that any schoolboy might identify as the edge of American civilization. Why had so many rows of corn in north-central Alabama, seemingly passed by time and space, suddenly become a real estate agent's dream? The answer, as all know, lay in the mineral wealth beneath those cornfields. In the twenty years from its founding in 1871, Birmingham matched its birthday with a twenty-fold increase in population. Unencumbered with the gentile nostalgia for antebellum folkways that enveloped so many other Southern cities with longer histories, the Magic City looked forward to an industrial future, not backwards to an agrarian-dominated past. If the Old South was typified by a sort of aristocratic languor, Birmingham typified the New South—sweaty blue-collar industriousness. In the language of the Chamber of Commerce, the city was "wide awake." There was great wealth to be had if one were shrewd at business, and as a result men worked hard, played hard, and lived hard. "Birmingham, in short, was an ambitious, grimy, gangling young giant, an unrefined but robust new metropolis of the New South." It has been written that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it. Whether or not Birmingham businessmen knew this maxim, they were aware that boom towns had shown a marked proclivity for going bust. The city fathers, were, therefore, anxious to keep Birmingham's image favorable, or at least as favorable as those melodramatic early years of the town's history would permit. Needless to say, the rather bizarre and grisly nature of the Hawes murders had to be expiated quickly. Too much bad publicity meant bad public relations, and bad public relations meant slower growth, bad business, and lower profits.

The Age-Herald, the city's major daily newspaper, took its cue and immediately became chief prosecutor, judge, and jury in the Hawes matter. Months before Dick Hawes was brought to trial, he was convicted in newsprint, and through that medium, recognized as guilty in the minds and hearts of many of the newspaper's readers. The Age-Herald must bear some responsibility for the unfortunate series of events following the arrest and incarceration of the accused.


Richard Hawes, who was convicted of the murders of his wife and two daughters, and was hanged for the crime. This engraving was made from a photographic portrait taken by Daniel C. Redington, an early Birmingham photographer. From Goldsmith B. West, The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham (Birmingham: The Caldwell Printing Co., 1888).
Richard R. Hawes was born in Russell County, Alabama, in 1856. His childhood was spent in Columbus, Georgia. He enjoyed little formal education, and his first job, that of a wood-passer on the Selma, Rome, and Dalton railroad, reflected that fact. But Hawes worked hard and faithfully, and was promoted to fireman and then to engineer. He served on several railroads, and at the time of the crime was working for Georgia Pacific, running his engines from Birmingham to Columbus, Mississippi, and back again. In 1880 he married Emma Pettis of Atlanta, a young belle of eighteen years. For undiscernible reasons, Emma soon turned to other suitors and to drink, and the resulting marital difficulties prompted the couple to leave Atlanta for Montgomery, and finally to Birmingham. Dick Hawes thought of divorce, and while still in Georgia began legal proceedings toward that end. Events were later to show that these proceedings were never consummated. Four children were conceived in this ill-starred relationship: one had died in infancy, the others were named May, Willie, and Irene.

The identification of the body of May Hawes on Wednesday afternoon, December 5, 1888, was almost simultaneous with the arrival of a telegram at the Age-Herald offices announcing social news of what normally would have been of a secondary interest: the culmination of a wedding that day in Columbus, Mississippi. The groom: R. R. Hawes of Birmingham. The bride: one Mayes Story, of Columbus. This amazing turn of events almost caught the local constabulary off their guard, for they barely had time to rush to the depot and arrest the bridegroom, who by coincidence was passing through Birmingham with his new wife, on their way to a Georgia honeymoon. The local populace, informed of every twist and turn of the tawdry plot by the Age-Herald, was filled with anger and confusion. Where was his first wife, Emma? Where were their other children, Willie and Irene? How could Richard Hawes marry again?

The discovery of Emma's beaten and bruised body in the lake at Lakeview on the morning of the eighth of December seemed to answer these questions for the newspaper and its rapidly increasing readership. As the eighth fell on a Saturday, the ranks of the local citizenry were swollen as denizens of the surrounding suburbs came downtown to spend their paychecks, hear the latest gossip, and speculate concerning what was popularly becoming known as the Hawes Horror. Fueled by alcohol and what can modestly be termed intemperate rumor-mongering by the local press, the mood of the townspeople became ugly. No one could afterwards say with any degree of certainty where the mob formed. Every street corner and public house served as a magnet for overly emotional, self-righteous men bent on revenge. By ten o'clock in the evening, a mass of humanity had formed in front of the new jail on Twenty-first Street, between Third and Fourth Avenues, North. Their purpose was the lynching of the prisoner Hawes.

Between the mob and its objective stood the Sheriff of Jefferson County, Joseph S. Smith. Smith had taken the precaution of swearing in extra deputies, and that night was surrounded by forty rifles. As the horde of several thousand began wedging itself into the narrow alley leading to the jailhouse door, Smith drew an imaginary line and ordered the crowd to halt. The mob pressed inexorably forward. A second order also went unheeded. The command to "Fire!" was given, and when the shooting was done, eleven citizens lay dead. Units of the Alabama Militia were called out to clear the streets, which they did successfully, and a macabre quiet settled on Birmingham the next Sunday morning. In less than a week, the unabashed boosterism of the city by its inhabitants was replaced by the stark realization that the future might not be as faultlessly grand as once imagined. A pall fell over Birmingham, fully as dark as the soot spewed into the atmosphere by its blast furnaces. The rabid emotionalism of the preceding days was replaced by a quiet resolve: "justice" must make Richard Hawes pay for the shame and sorrow he had caused the city.

The months following the riot and leading up to the trial were devoid, for the most part, of any significant news concerning the accused. The lake at Lakeview was partially drained, yielding the body of Irene. Willie was found alive, living in Georgia at the home of Hawes' brother, Jim. Just before Christmas of 1888, the Grand Jury indicted the accused for the murder of all three. The trial was scheduled to begin April 22, 1889. Although Dick Hawes was charged with murdering May, Emma, and Irene, the state decided its strongest case included the facts surrounding the death of May Hawes. Accordingly, this indictment was the first to be brought to trial.

As the weeks stretched into months, and the awful events of the previous December faded into memory, tensions subsided somewhat. A maudlin curiosity and fascination concerning the accused replaced the abject hatred earlier directed at the same target. On April 1, 1889 — April Fool's Day — the Age-Herald greeted its readers with what appeared to be sensational news: the escape of the prisoner Hawes! With a bold heading and a triple lead, the newspaper's account ran thusly:

> At about 3 o'clock Monday morning three men came to the jail, two of whom pretended to be officers bringing in a prisoner. One of the three was securely bound, and when the jailor unlocked the door to admit the pretended prisoner, he was knocked insensible, and fearfully beaten. In the meantime the key to Hawes' cell was secured, the cell unlocked and Hawes liberated. Hawes was up and dressed, evidently knowing that help for his rescue was at hand. The rescuers with Hawes then walked out and disappeared.\(^3\)

\(^3\)Quoted under the heading "Dick Hawes at Liberty" in The Greenville Advocate, April 3, 1889.
In an amazing change in temperament, the Age-Herald had just subjected the city’s avid readers to an April Fool’s joke.

The principal figure at the trial, obviously enough, was Richard Hawes. Every nuance of facial expression, every sidelong glance was reported, examined, and dissected by the reporters present, and was devoured by the local populace unable to wedge themselves into the courtroom. The coverage of the Age-Herald reveals an almost comic game of cat and mouse that must have been played between the defendant and the gentlemen of the press:

Once or twice during the afternoon [Hawes] half shaded his face with his hand and handkerchief, and then, when he caught the newspapermen looking at him, as if conscious that whatever move he made was observed and would be recorded, and that this might be construed as an exhibition of weakness, he would put his cambric aside and look unconcernedly and not unpleasantly at whoever he detected observing him.4

On his behalf, Hawes had enlisted the aid of four attorneys. E. T. Taliaferro was the leading counsel, a native of Tennessee (b. 1849) who studied law under

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Governor John C. Brown of that state. After a distinguished career in the Tennessee state legislature (including service as Speaker of the House), he retired from politics in 1880 to devote all his time to the profession of law. In 1885 he arrived in Birmingham, having married Eva Sloss, daughter of Col. J. W. Sloss, six years previously. He rapidly gained a reputation as a criminal lawyer. A commanding figure of over six feet in height, Taliaferro was a striking, central personality in the trial. J. R. McIntosh, born in 1837, was a native of Marengo County. He was educated in the law at the University of Mississippi, served for some time in the legislature of that state, and moved to Birmingham in 1887. John J. Altman, a native of Sumter County and thirty-seven years of age at the time of the trial, practiced law in Livingston, Alabama, until he came to Birmingham in 1886. The youngest of the four, Frank S. Barnett, was only twenty-three years of age. Born in Eufala, he studied law at Vanderbilt and the University of Alabama, and had spent considerable time in Europe. The attorneys for the defense thus provided a formidable array of legal expertise.5

Their alter egos on the other side of the courtroom, representing the interests of the state, were no less ex-

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5“Todays’ Illustrations,” The Weekly Age-Herald, May 1, 1889.
experienced. Solicitor James E. Hawkins was born in Elyton in 1851, the son of Dr. Nathaniel Hawkins, also a native of Jefferson County. Mr. Hawkins was educated at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, and was an apprentice student of law under Judge Mudd of Birmingham. In 1874 he moved to Shelby County, where in the practice of law and as editor of the *Shelby Sentinel*, he “did some hard work for white supremacy and in redeeming the state from negro rule,” according to the *Age-Herald*. In 1883 he was voted into the Alabama Legislature, followed in 1884 by his election as solicitor for Jefferson County. His assistants in the prosecution of the Hawes case were Judge George B. Denison and Charles W. Ferguson. Denison was a native of Ohio, born in 1846. He settled into the practice of law in Memphis in 1873, moving to Little Rock in 1876. In Arkansas he became a judge of the circuit court. Upon moving to Birmingham in 1887, the title became an honorary one. Ferguson was the thirty-four-year-old solicitor for the Tenth Judicial Circuit, and in that capacity assisted at the trial. He was born in Dallas County, and had lived in Birmingham since 1877.

The judge of the Criminal Court of Jefferson County at the time of the Hawes trial was Samuel Earle Greene. Educated at Washington and Lee University, Greene afterwards taught in the schools of Elyton and Birmingham. He studied in the law offices of Porter and Martin, and was admitted to the bar in 1880. After serving one term in the state legislature, he declined to run again. Interestingly enough, in 1885 he formed a law partnership with James E. Hawkins, the same man who was to argue the state’s case in Judge Greene’s court. This partnership lasted until 1887, when Greene was appointed judge.

Proceedings began as scheduled on Monday, April 22. By Friday, May 3, the verdict of the jury had been rendered. The first two days of the trial and a portion of the third were taken with jury selection. The process was a tedious one, and many prospective jurors were released because they had previously formed opinions in the case. The defense, in fact, exhausted its quota of exemptions, and several jurors afterwards admitted were objected to by defense counsel. The last five days of the trial, from Monday afternoon, April 29, until Friday morning, May 3, were consumed with closing arguments. In the intervening five days, testimony was given.

*Footnotes*

6His grandfather, Williamson Hawkins, had first settled in the county in 1813, and owned the land on which the Thomas furnace stood.

7"Todays' Illustrations," *The Weekly Age-Herald*, May 1, 1889.

8Judge Greene’s parents were descended from old and distinguished Birmingham area families. His father was the son of George L. and Jane Y. Greene, of South Carolina, and was one of the earliest settlers of Jefferson County. His mother was the daughter of Dr. Samuel L. and Harriet H. Earle, also among the early settlers.


The Jefferson County Courthouse where the Hawes case was tried. Completed in 1889, the courthouse was the site of many famous trials, but certainly few matched the drama of the Hawes trial. Photograph from the collections of the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.

The prosecution’s case was built entirely around circumstantial evidence, since no one but the murderer had apparently seen the killing of May Hawes. The state showed, through the testimony of several eyewitnesses, that May had been staying at a boarding house with Fannie Bryant on the night of December 3. Fannie was a mulatto woman who had intermittently served the Hawes family as maid and babysitter. Between the hours of seven and eight p.m., Richard Hawes had arrived at Fannie’s boarding house, picked up May, and boarded the Highland Avenue dummy line that circled into the downtown area. A short time afterwards, both father and daughter boarded the East Lake dummy. This was another circular rail line that served East Lake, at that time a resort suburb of Birmingham. Upon reaching the pavilion at East Lake, a scheduled stop on the line and very near the location where Matt’s body was found, the two got off the train. Less than an hour later, on a return run, Dick Hawes, or someone who looked very much like him, boarded the East Lake dummy and returned to Birmingham, alone. On the next morning, Tuesday morning, Dick Hawes left Birmingham for Columbus, Mississippi, and marriage to Mayes Story on Wednesday. His motive? According to the prosecution, May probably knew of the previous murder of her mother and younger sister, all of whom had been regarded by the accused as encumbrances to his forthcoming marriage.

The defense claimed, on the other hand, and in its cross-examining of witnesses attempted to prove, that Richard Hawes had not been at Fannie Bryant’s house on Monday night, December 3. Indeed, the en-
spent several more hours in town, arriving back at his home later the same evening around 8:30 p.m. At that point, Hawes then returned to the city a second time, on this trip accompanied by his son, Willie, who was placed on a train bound for Atlanta. Once there, he was to stay at the home of Dick's brother, Jim. Hawes spent several more hours in town, arriving back at his own family's home around one or two a.m. Sunday morning. There he found the door open, his wife and two daughters gone. According to the story constructed by the defense, Saturday evening was the last time he saw those members of his family alive. Sunday Hawes wandered around the area of Lakeview, supposing all was well for the family. The father and daughter returned home later that night, and Hawes claimed he was initiating a plan to place his children in a convent in Mobile. In all other matters, however, the state could not force the accused to admit to other misstatements, or in any other way shake his story.12

Final arguments began on the afternoon of Monday, April 29, and continued until the end of the week. Ferguson led off for the state, followed by McIntosh and Barnett for the defense, then Judge Denison for the prosecution, Taliaferro for the defense, and Hawkins concluded for the state. If the newspaper accounts are to be believed, the summations were emotionally intense and eloquently argued. Solicitor Ferguson explained that Hawes' motive was one of lust: marriage to Miss Story was impossible unless his wife and children were put out of the way. McIntosh and Barnett countered by arguing points of law. The former observed that the jurors should be careful not to allow extraneous matters, such as the unhappy history of the Hawes' marriage, the alleged divorce, and testimony as to the murders of Emma and Irene Hawes, to affect their judgment. Mr. Barnett discussed the problems inherent in trying a man on circumstantial evidence, and urged the jury to consider this when deliberating Hawes' guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt." Judge Denison attacked the veracity of Hawes' statements when compared to the testimony of so many other witnesses arrayed against him. Taliaferro took the floor at 10:45 Thursday morning, and except for a lunch break, spoke until 5:30 that afternoon. In an impassioned speech, the "tall sycamore," as he was...

Hawes' defense was based almost solely on his own testimony, since no one could be found who would back up his alibi, except for the aforementioned hack driver. Even the witness stand statements of his brother Jim seemed to hinder rather than help his case. The Hawes brothers had been together on the evening of Monday, December 3, but Jim could not say with any certainty that his brother had been with him at the time other witnesses had stated that they had seen the accused on the dummy line. Jim Hawes admitted that their parting had left Dick enough time to pick up May and proceed to East Lake. There were several besides Richard Hawes' brother who were called to speak of the defendant's good character and even disposition, but these endorsements paled when compared to the grisly accounts of the multiple murders.11

The accused protested that Emma Hawes was a drunkard with questionable moral habits. He argued repeatedly that he believed himself to have been divorced from his wife, and that she too recognized the divorce and was fully cognizant of his impending marriage to Mayes Story. At the time of the murders, Hawes claimed he was initiating a plan to place his children in a convent in Mobile. In so testifying, he tacitly admitted an earlier lie made to other witnesses soon after his arrest, wherein he claimed to have already sent his daughters to Mobile. In all other matters, however, the state could not force the accused to admit to other misstatements, or in any other way shake his story.12


11Ibid.

12“Hawes' Statement,” The Weekly Age-Herald, May 1, 1889.
An extremely rare photograph of the Hawes jury made by J. Horgan, Jr. From left to right, the jurors are: first row, D. R. Dunlap; N. F. Thompson; E. T. Cox; G. W. Cross; and Hiram Ellis; standing, second row, J. M. Young; J. R. Rockett; W. W. McGlathery; J. B. Perkins; F. G. Shepard; J. A. Griffin; and T. H. Friel. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Clair Snider.

nicknamed, reviewed the facts in the trial testimony that tended to favor his client, summarized the arguments of his predecessors, and exhorted the jury to weigh the effect public sentiment must have had in prejudging the testimony of the eyewitnesses. All that was left then were the concluding remarks of Solicitor Hawkins, and these were made on Friday morning. He, too, reviewed the basic facts in the case that tended to prove guilt, reviewed the premises of his co-horts on the prosecution, and called for the death penalty.13

In Judge Greene's charge to the jury, he defined four possible verdicts that might be reached by that group of twelve men. If guilty of manslaughter in the first degree, Hawes would be sentenced to imprisonment for not less than one nor more than ten years. If guilty of murder in the second degree, the accused would be confined to the penitentiary for not less than ten years, but possibly for a greater period. If guilty of murder in the first degree, Hawes would be sentenced to life imprisonment or to the death penalty, as the jury might decide. The fourth possibility was the verdict "not guilty." And so the jury retired to deliberate the future of Richard Hawes, and to eat lunch.14

The twelve who composed Hawes' jury were a microcosm of the respectable middle and upper classes of Birmingham's citizenry. Their professions reflect the business of Birmingham — growth, a marriage of land and mineral wealth, a rail center, and a magnet for ambitious men seeking their fortune. All the jurors

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were white males. N. F. Thompson, a forty-four-year-old lawyer and real estate agent, was elected foreman. E. T. Cox, thirty-three, was with the transportation department of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. T. H. Friel, twenty-eight, was the son of the owner of the Friel coal mines near Blue Creek. J. A. Griffin was a middle-aged carpenter. J. D. Perkins, born in England thirty-five years before, was in the building and contracting trade. J. M. Young, aged thirty, was a farmer, as was G. W. Cross, thirty-eight years old. D. R. Dunlap, forty-three, was a real estate agent who had been made a U.S. Marshall shortly after Grover Cleveland’s election. F. G. Sheppard, in his mid-forties, was English. He was a builder-contractor, who at the time of the trial was operating a coal and wood yard. Hiram Ellis was described as a “prosperous” thirty-seven-year-old farmer. W. W. McGlathery, the oldest of the jurors at age fifty, was a lawyer and merchant, and J. R. Rockett, forty-seven, was a lawyer, merchant and business entrepreneur. With this group of rather upper-class peers lay the future of Richard Hawes.15

Before the jury retired for mid-day dinner, a vote was taken on the question of guilt or innocence. They were unanimous for guilt. Obviously men possessing strong constitutions, they then broke for lunch. After dinner, two ballots were taken on the question of punishment. On the first, eleven voted for the death penalty, one for life imprisonment. The identity of that minority of one has not been recorded, but it was of no real significance. On the second ballot, the jurors were unanimous for death. They had deliberated for fifty-five minutes.16

The jury returned to the courtroom, and were directed by Judge Greene to hand their written verdict to the clerk, which foreman Thompson did. The clerk read the verdict before the court, and the Age-Herald recorded the dramatic scene that followed:

*There was an interval of silence when all eyes were turned on the prisoner.*

*He had been looking directly at the clerk as the latter read the verdict. Now he swallowed as though there had come a lump in his throat, and passed his hand across his forehead. He let it remain where it would shade his eyes, and resting his elbow on the table, looked down at a bit of paper before him. He did not change color nor was there any sign of emotion beyond those noted.*17

Judge Greene selected a day for the hanging, but that date came and passed without incident. The reason for this was that defense counsel had appealed the case before the Alabama Supreme Court, and that

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17Ibid.

The jury sheet for the Hawes trial, with the signatures of the jurors. Document from the collections of the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.
court. Primary among their arguments was the rejection of three motions for a change of venue, filed on January 24, February 8, and April 22, 1889. Taliaferro protested that the Hawes riot, the inflammatory nature of the newspaper coverage, and the publication and widespread dissemination of Goldsmith B. West’s little book, *The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham: A Truthful Story of What Happened*, all had prevented Hawes from obtaining a fair and unprejudiced hearing from a panel of his peers in Jefferson County. Defense counsel also argued that the admission of testimony concerning the murders of Emma and Irene Hawes was also prejudicial to the jury. These and other, more legally technical exceptions were taken under advisement by the highest tribunal in the state. On Monday, January 13, 1890, in an opinion written by Justice McClellan, the decision in the appeal of the case of *Hawes vs. the State of Alabama* was rendered: the judgment of the Criminal Court of Jefferson County was affirmed. Every exception had been rejected. The Supreme Court reset the date of execution for February 28, 1890.18

Richard Hawes, last month in jail proved unsatisfactory for those who wished for a denouement of the murder plot. Straightforward confessions from the lips of the condemned man were not immediately forthcoming. His brother Jim tearfully pleaded with Dick to tell all, so that Jim’s own name would be cleared of any wrongdoing in the public eye. His conscience having been touched by sibling devotion, Hawes then admitted to his brother and Sheriff Smith that he had hired one John Wylie to kill Emma, Irene, and May, and that that job had been accomplished on Saturday night, December 1. This was not widely believed, as it still flew in the face of the preponderance of testimony of those who had supposedly seen Hawes with May on Monday night. A few days later Dick allegedly confessed to a guard that he had indeed hired John Wylie to commit murder, but only for the purpose of doing away with Emma and Irene; Hawes explained that he intended to keep May. But when it appeared that May might have some knowledge of the murder of her mother and sister, Hawes admitted that he felt obliged to get May drunk, take her out to East Lake, and drown her. When the guard made this more plausible confession public, Hawes denied having ever uttered the story. However, since he had admitted in both “confessions” that he had either murdered or hired a murderer, the public conscience was mollified.19

Hangings were not unusual events in Birmingham. Gilbert Lowe, a condemned jailmate of Hawes, swung at the end of rope on February 21. As February 28 approached, however, the collective pulse of the city quickened. Few men’s lives had m addened and frus-


20“Suicide!” *The Weekly Age-Herald*, February 19, 1890.

soon after entering prison at Wetumpka. John Wylie was also brought to trial for the murders of Irene and Emma, but the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. Mayes Story Hawes filed for a divorce and petitioned the Mississippi legislature in order to restore her maiden name.

As for the city itself, the ugly blemish of the Hawes affair was soon covered and all but forgotten. The renewed fervor of image-conscious entrepreneurs and the passage of time provided a most effective whitewash for Birmingham’s historical facade. Its businessmen, newspapers, and public officials prepared for the turn of the twentieth century with a civic pride tempered by the harsh realities of life. Sinclair Lewis’s novel of rampant, unfeeling commercialism set in the fictional mid-West metropolis of Zenith was not unlike the unabashed boosterism that enveloped Birmingham’s business elite. Fifteen people had been killed in the city as a direct result of the Hawes affair: three had been brutally murdered, one had been hanged for those murders, and eleven had died as a result of the riot in front of the jail. Responsibility for the deaths of these last was never determined. Although there is little doubt of the ultimate guilt of Richard Hawes, his trial was a farce. The role of the newspapers in reporting “what must have happened” and their conclusion, months before the trial took place, that Hawes was guilty, was reason enough for a change of venue. Besides the widespread and sensational nature of the reporting of the murders, the riot itself was yet another reason to believe that Hawes could never receive an impartial trial from unprejudiced jurors within Jefferson County. But Birmingham was anxious to exculpate itself of the Hawes Horror, with the result that boosterism was served and justice was slighted. It took another seventy years and a still more painful confrontation with unequal justice and painful publicity for Birmingham’s business community to realize the importance of impartiality. It was a pity. A lesson that could have been learned in the 1890’s might have saved Birmingham from some of the turmoil it suffered in the 1960’s.
THE BIRMINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY
From Its Beginning until 1927
Chapters III and IV

Chapter III
GROWING PAINS, 1900 - 1907

By 1900 Birmingham was producing high-grade steel. Furnaces, rolling mills, and other plants for the fabrication of iron and steel products were in operation. Almost overnight Birmingham had become the largest city in the state, with a population of 38,415. This rapid growth was felt in all areas of city life, but nowhere more drastically than in the public schools.

The Enslen Building, where the Ridgely Apartments stand today, still housed the public library—adjacent to Superintendent John Herbert Phillips' office—and 240 high school students. The need for a larger and a separate building for the high school had become an imperative. To meet that need, Central High School, later named in honor of Superintendent Phillips, was built at Seventh Avenue, North, Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Streets; and the high school moved there in 1906.

Meanwhile, an interesting development concerning a library building was taking place between the Commercial Club of Birmingham and Andrew Carnegie, who was making funds available for library construction all over the country. The club approached the great philanthropist about a public library building for Birmingham as early as 1901. W. N. Malone, on behalf of the Commercial Club, wrote Carnegie asking if he would feel favorably inclined . . . for the establishment of a Public Library and what would be [his] requirements of the citizens and the City Council.

In all library grants that he made, Carnegie required the city to provide yearly ten percent of the amount of the gift for the maintenance of the library. As Carnegie had delegated all decisions about such grants to his secretary, James Bertram, it was Bertram who responded to Malone's letter, enclosing a form "to facilitate Mr. Carnegie's consideration of your appeal."

Six months later Malone returned the completed form to Bertram with apologies for the delay due to the "embarrassed" condition of the city's finances. This form reveals that the city guaranteed nothing in taxes or otherwise for support of the library. Malone, however, wrote Bertram that he was hopeful that the city would soon be able to set a definite amount it would pay for the maintenance of a library. But the city never did, and the initial effort of the Commercial Club failed.

The next correspondence with Carnegie came three years later when Superintendent Phillips wrote Carnegie, "The people of Birmingham have long desired to participate in the benefits of your splendid library work. We need a $100,000 library building for this rapidly growing industrial city. I believe our people are now ready to comply with the conditions of your gift." Somewhat tartly Bertram replied that "something less than a $100,000 library building might do for Birmingham in view of what it can get along with at present." He also wanted a definite statement from the city's Board of Alderman as to what it would provide for maintenance. Evidently such commitments once again could not be had from the city government.

Carnegie later made grants of $10,000 each for libraries in Ensley (1906), Bessemer (1907), Avondale (1907), and West End (1909). These cities, separate from Birmingham at that time, met the ten percent requirement for maintenance.

In 1902 Birmingham city government occupied a newly-constructed city hall at the corner of Fourth Avenue, North and Nineteenth Street. In 1904 the public library moved from the overcrowded high school building to quarters in City Hall. Superintendent Phillips moved his offices also.

Even though located on the fourth floor of the new municipal building, the library was more accessible to more people in its new location. Its quarters consisted of one well-lighted reading room, a small reference room, and a librarian's office, which also con-
Mr. Andrew Carnegie,
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—

The Commercial Club of this City have appointed a Committee, of which I am Chairman, to ask if you would consider appropriating whatever amount you feel so inclined to, for the establishment of a Public Library or a School of Technology, and should you feel favorably inclined to the project, kindly let us know what would be your requirements of the citizens, and the City Council.

You have been so generous in this line, that we hesitate to write you a letter of this kind, though our citizens realize the very great importance that such an institution would be to it's community and district, that we will thank you for any appropriation that you might kindly consider.

Begging pardon for trespassing upon your time and patience, I beg to remain,

Yours very truly,

By

Chairman.
tained the shelves for a circulation department. Mrs. W. L. Murdoch years later recalled that the library had "rows and rows of shelves going up to the ceiling and a ladder like those in shoe stores running along the walls. One must ask for the book wanted and it was brought."¹¹

The new quarters, although more accessible and commodious, were far from ideal. The city jail, located one floor below, subjected library users to the "ravings of the intoxicated" as well as to the clang of the patrol wagon. Further distractions came from the city market adjoining the building on Fourth Avenue, North, where "the killing of chickens disturbed the children in quiet study."¹² The disadvantages of the library location were continually pointed out in newspaper articles, but to little avail.


¹²Erna Oleson Xan, "40-Year Battle Gave City a Fine Public Library," The Birmingham News, October 11, 1959.
Once again, in 1907, the Commercial Club approached Andrew Carnegie for help in obtaining a public library building. And again, James Bertram tersely replied that the “city authorities should address Mr. Carnegie on the subject, stating what the city is willing to do for its part.”

At this juncture Thomas Parke emerged as Birmingham’s outstanding volunteer worker for a free public library. Dr. Parke had moved to Birmingham in 1887 from his home in Selma to practice pediatrics, having previously graduated from the Louisville Medical College and the University of New York. He arrived in Birmingham at about the same time as a young nurse who later was to become his wife, Amy Smith from Ontario, Canada. It was she who helped organize and manage a charity hospital for which Parke served as physician and supervisor, and it was the doctor who later founded the Children’s Hospital and was instrumental in the creation of the city’s first Board of Health.

Parke wrote many letters and articles in the Birmingham News on the benefits of a library for all. “Birmingham,” he observed in one of these articles, “has churches built by the people, beautiful ones. Does she not realize that a library is as essential to the growth of the people? Talladega has a little gem of a library. Selma has her own library. Is Birmingham less interested in the progress of her people?”

He also recognized that the first step in acquiring a free library in its own building would have to be the formation of a group of “friends of the library.” On May 9, 1907, he was instrumental in gathering interested citizens together at the Majestic Theatre and there, the Birmingham Public Library Association was formed. Its officers were as follows: W. H. Sims, president; T. D. Parke, first vice-president; George B. Ward, second vice-president; Miss Willie Allen, third vice-president; Mrs. James Weatherly, fourth vice-president; Mrs. J. A. Rountree, fifth vice-president; and John Herbert Phillips, secretary and treasurer.

William Henry Sims, father of the well-known Birmingham lawyer Henry Upson Sims, had been Lieutenant Governor of Mississippi and Assistant Secretary of the Interior under President Grover Cleveland. Such a prominent figure as Sims for its head augured well for the new group. In 1920, when Sims died, the library benefited from a $50,000 trust fund created for books in his memory.

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13Commercial Club (Robert L. Leatherwood) to James Bertram, May 15, 1907, from Carnegie Foundation Microfilm.
14James Bertram to Robert L. Leatherwood, November 19, 1907.
15The Birmingham Library Board, “A Tribute to Dr. and Mrs. Parke,” June 1945, p. 1.
16Murdoch, “Vision.”
17Membership card, Birmingham Public Library Association, August 28, 1907.
18Murdoch, “Vision.”
19Ibid.
20Membership card, Birmingham Public Library Association, September 28, 1907.
21Membership card, Birmingham Public Library Association, no date.
Chapter IV
GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS,
1908-1909

The Birmingham Public Library Association, formed in 1907, had a twofold purpose: first, to develop community support for the library and second, to secure funds to build a library building. Recognizing the need of a professional worker to help carry out these purposes, the association turned to Dr. Thomas M. Owen, Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History and head of the Library Extension Division, to recommend a suitable person.

Dr. Owen suggested Frances Nimmo Greene. Miss Greene had worked with Dr. Owen, her uncle, traveling the state to stimulate interest in founding municipal and school libraries. Funds were needed to hire Miss Greene; and contributions were received from Birmingham citizens whose names included Kaul, Marx, Hillman, Milner, Talley, Woodward, Jemison, Loveman, Joseph, Loeb, Blach, Saks, Cabaniss, Earle, Rushton, and Pizitz.

Miss Greene began her work as secretary to the Birmingham Public Library Association in January 1909. She was already well known as a teacher and as a writer. Her books included several children’s titles on patriotic subjects e.g., My Country’s Voice. For her first novel, Into the Night, she and Marie Bankhead Owen went to New Orleans. There they disguised themselves as Salvation Army workers to get Mafia background for the book. Miss Greene also wrote poems which were published in the Philadelphia Times. Frequently she used the nom de plume “Dixie.”

Brilliant and charming, Miss Greene won many new friends for the library through her talks to clubs and through articles in the newspaper. In an interview in The Birmingham Ledger she praised what Birmingham had already accomplished. She said, “There are 10,000 volumes in the library in the City Hall, and I consider it is one of the best collections I have ever seen.” She lauded the work of John Herbert Phillips and urged the addition of more books on technical subjects for people working in the steel mills and industrial plants. She felt that the $2.00 charge for library users should be abolished and that Birmingham’s library should be absolutely free. She concluded the interview with a strong plea for a library building. “The promoters of the library movement consider that $200,000 will be needed for a building. . . . Capitol Park is considered as the most ideal location for the new library,” she stated.

Once again, Birmingham turned to the great philanthropist of libraries, Andrew Carnegie, for help in obtaining that $200,000. On April 12, 1909, Mayor George Ward wrote Carnegie’s secretary summarizing Birmingham’s library situation. He pointed out that the library, housed on the fourth floor of City Hall, was so far from the street. He added that a public movement had got underway for a new library and that Frances Nimmo Greene had been hired to spearhead the drive as well as to “rearrange the present library in more attractive shape.” He then asked if Mr. Carnegie would give $100,000 if the people of Birmingham would raise another $100,000 for the building. He was confident that the municipal authorities would provide the site.

Carnegie replied that this was the first time he had been requested to go equal partners in the erection of a library building but that he would be delighted to become a partner with the citizens of Birmingham. He would expect to see the plans before any expenditures were made, however, and recommended that an architect experienced in library construction be hired.

John Herbert Phillips supported Mayor Ward’s proposal wholeheartedly and felt there would be no difficulty in raising Birmingham’s share by subscription. James Mowron pointed out that Carnegie had profited greatly from the “riches of Birmingham’s mineral wealth and there is no reason he should not help with Birmingham’s education. His money is good and the opportunity should not slip. He will not live forever.”

Meanwhile, improvement had to be made in the City Hall quarters of the library. The city spent $500 to double the space of the library by flooring the area between the balconies of the old council chamber. New shelving was built in all available wall space, and double book stacks were added.

The greatest need of the library, however, was for a professionally trained librarian to run the library and to organize and catalog the collection. The Library Committee of the Board of Education selected Lila May Chapman, a graduate of the Carnegie Library School of Atlanta, for the job. She was hired for six months to put the library in order. She remained for

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

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7. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
38 years. Under her supervision the Birmingham Public Library grew to be the largest in Alabama and one of the great library systems of the country.

Born in Dadeville, Alabama, in 1872, Miss Chapman was reared in Macon, Georgia, and graduated from Wesleyan College there in 1890. She taught school in Macon for several years. When the Carnegie Library School opened in 1905, Miss Chapman was among the first ten students to enroll; she was in the first graduating class. During her year of study, Dr. Owen addressed the class about the need for trained librarians in Alabama. While still a student, Miss Chapman was sent by the library school to organize and catalog the books in the new Carnegie Library in Ensley, Alabama. After graduation she cataloged the holdings of the public library at Gadsden, Alabama. Then, she served two years in Corsicana, Texas, as librarian before coming to Birmingham.13

By May of 1909, Miss Chapman was busy classifying and cataloging books along with her other library duties. She had one assistant, Louise Roberts, a student of Dr. Owen’s library science class in Montgomery.14 Later, Miss Chapman recalled that during the summer of 1909 only 3,329 books were circulated, and her time could be given to classifying books and preparing a card catalog.15

In July 1909 the Birmingham Public Library Association met in the library assembly room in the City Hall. A. H. Ford, President of Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Company, was elected to succeed W. H. Sims as president. Ford spoke confidently of securing a proper library building soon and urged the association to consider new ways to achieve this goal since the Carnegie grant was doubtful. Thomas Parke, who resigned as vice-president, spoke on the growth

13Typescript in family history papers furnished by Claire Chapman Harrison, niece of Lila May Chapman.


15The Birmingham News, March 11, 1926.
of interest in the library and urged each member of
the association personally to promote a free library
for Birmingham.16

On October 1, 1909, the real opening of the newly
refurbished library was celebrated; and there was
cause for celebration. Not only were there better
quarters, but, for the first time in its history, Birming­
ham also had a free public library, the $2.00 subscrip­
tion fee having been abolished at last. Newspapers of
the day lauded the newly remodeled and expanded
quarters of the library. Attention was called to the
excellent elevator service to the fourth floor of the
City Hall. Under Miss Greene and Miss Chapman, it
was noted, there had been a great improvement in
library service and a large increase in the number of
books in the library — from 19,000 to 20,000. An at­
tractive folder of information for the public was pre­
pared and widely distributed. It pointed out that the
library area was quiet and attractive and that it had
an excellent reference collection with many bound
periodicals, a children’s library, and a depository for
government documents. The library was open from
9 a.m. to 6 p.m., except on Friday and Saturday when
it remained open to 9 p.m. to serve working people.17

During the first month of operation in its refurb­
ished and enlarged quarters, the library enrolled 835 persons
as members, circulated 1,904 books.18 At the same
juncture Thomas Parke was continuing his canvass for
supporters of the Library Association with a series of
four “short talks” published in The Birmingham Age­
Herald in October and November 1909. He pointed
out that 500 volumes had been donated by the women’s
clubs and that the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad
Company had given valuable technical works. In addi­
tion, the association had raised $1,600 for the pur­
chase of books. But, Dr. Parke reminded his readers,
“the present library is inadequate. Books are needed.
A building is needed.”19

16The Birmingham Ledger, July 16, 1909.

17The Birmingham Age-Herald, September 26, 1909.
of the Birmingham Public Schools for the Year Ending June 30,
19Parke, Scrapbook.
ROSTER OF MEMBERS
Birmingham Historical Society, 1979

Mrs. Milton Abrams
3623 Locksley Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. William M. Acker, Jr.
2504 Watkins Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Carl Adams, Jr.
3263 Dell Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. John P. Adams
3518 Lenox Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Thomas J. Adams, Jr.
3902 Montevallo Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Julian Adler
4313 Overlook Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. Law Lamar Ager
1105 Thirty-first Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Ms. Camille Agricola
421 Johnson Hall
411 West One Hundred Sixteenth Street
New York, New York 10027

Rev. Hugh W. Agricola
315 Signal Point Road
Guntersville, Alabama 35976

Ms. Jean Alexander
3729 Woodvale Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Miss Lucile Alexander
8336 Third Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35206

Mrs. W. A. Alexander
2510 Park Lane Court, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Mary Elizabeth Allan
1201 Monterey Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35235

Mrs. James B. Allen
7405 Hallcrest Drive
McLean, Virginia 22101

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin T. Allen
871 Fifth Street, West
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

Mr. Fletcher Anderson
367 Wesleyan Drive
Macon, Georgia 31210

Mrs. Pelham H. Anderson, Jr.
2954 Pine Haven Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. J. Weley Anderton
20 Glen Iris Park
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Paul F. Anderton
4208 Stone River Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Gail C. Andrews
3350 Altamont Road, Apt. B-9
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. John T. Andrews, Jr.
1016 Twenty-eighth Place, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Nat Andrews, Jr.
111 Bonita Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. Margaret E. Armbruster
404 Shadeswood Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mrs. G. Maxwell Armor, Jr.
26 Olmsted Green
Village of Cross Keys
Baltimore, Maryland 21210

Mr. Richard C. Atkerson
552 Camellia Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35215

Mrs. George Atkins, Sr.
911 Westover Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Leah R. Atkins
2309 Ponderosa Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35216
Mrs. J. Lloyd Austin  
3744 Crest Brook Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Crawford Badham  
1305 Wickford Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Ms. Louise E. Badham  
755 Montclair Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Bagley  
2540 Mountain Brook Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Mel Bailey  
5401 Eighth Avenue, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Ann Baker  
2700 Heathermoor Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Dr. and Mrs. James H. Bankston  
509 Monroe Street  
Alexander City, Alabama 35010

Mr. Hugh Barber  
2615 Aberdeen Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Monte Barksdale  
2529 Twenty-third Street, West  
Birmingham, Alabama 35208

Mr. Andrew H. Barncastle, III  
561 Shades Crest Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Ms. Anita H. Barnes  
450 Ridge Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35206

Mr. and Mrs. Mervyn Barstein  
140 West Oximoor Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Martha Bartlett  
3672 Crestside Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Mary Bashinsky  
3526 Lenox Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Yvonne E. Baskin  
Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau  
940 First Alabama Bank Building  
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Ms. Helen Bass  
1106 Twenty-eighth Place, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. Frances M. Bates  
3648 Kingshill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Jesse M. Bates, Jr.  
2701 Avenue S  
Birmingham, Alabama 35218

Dr. and Mrs. Joseph B. Beaird, Jr.  
3664 Rockhill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. James F. Beall  
Post Office Box 37  
Birmingham, Alabama 35201

Mr. and Mrs. Sterling Beaumont  
837 Linwood Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. Flora Jones Beavers  
301 Crest Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Martha Milner Benedict  
3629 Mountain Park Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Morris Benners  
3808 Forest Glen  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. W. C. Bentley  
717 Thirty-ninth Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Dr. Carry P. Bergerow  
3924 Seven Barks Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. Abe Berkowitz  
2112-A Cahaba Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Robert C. Berry  
122 Overbrook Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Anne L. Berte  
816 Eighth Avenue, West  
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

Dr. Neal Berte  
816 Eighth Avenue, West  
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

Mrs. Barron Bethea  
4963 Spring Rock Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Malcolm Bethea  
3504 South Woodridge Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223
Ms. Cynthia P. Bibb
1404 Morningside Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. William Wyatt Bibb
917 Rockford Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. Paul Bishop
4225 Sharpsburg Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. William C. Blackwell
4228 Caldwell Mill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. Gloria H. Blair
1638-H Twenty-eighth Court, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. J. C. Blakey
4 Norman Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Block
1333 Round Hill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. John W. Bloomer
2717 Highland Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Thomas A. Blount
533 Martha Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36104

Mrs. B. R. Bonds
2412 Chestnut Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. W. A. Boone
509 Tenth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. Ralph Bee Booth
4625 Seventh Court, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mr. and Mrs. Wallace J. Boothby, Jr.
1994 Shades Crest Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Dr. Buris R. Boshell
1808 Seventh Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Ms. Helen P. Boulanger
Bankhead Towers, Apt. 705
2300 Fifth Avenue, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mrs. T. M. Boulware
4247 Chickamauga Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Richard E. Bowling
Route 1, Box 649
Leeds, Alabama 35094

Mrs. S. C. Bowman
2756 Cherokee Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. Richard A. Bowron
600 Eighteenth Street, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35291

Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Bowron, Jr.
2311 Chester Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Alice M. Bowsher
5 Norman Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Dan G. Bradley
2531 Park Lane Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. John M. Bradley
5006 Applecross Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. John Bradshaw
2024 Twenty-eighth Street, West
Birmingham, Alabama 35218

Mr. Joe H. Brady, Jr.
28 Fairway Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Emily Austin Bramlett
2625 Highland Avenue, Apt. 509
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. David M. Brendel
15 Norman Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Lela Anne Brewer
2421 Chestnut Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. Houston A. Brice, Jr.
Post Office Box 1028
Birmingham, Alabama 35201

Ms. London Bridges
3024 Thirteenth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Harry B. Brock, Jr.
3904 Royal Oak Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. and Mrs. Gene Bromberg
25 Ridge Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
Mr. and Mrs. Dixon Brooke, Jr.
2904 Virginia Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Bestor Brown
2303 Chestnut Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Carl C. Brown
3070 Sterling Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Charles A. Brown
928 Fifth Street, West
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

Mr. Rex A. Brown
300 Greene Avenue
Cordova, Alabama 35550

Richard Hail Brown
6 Rockledge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Sterling F. Brown
2100 Mountainview Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas B. Brown, III
712 Hillmoor Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. Pat Browne
1720 Saulter Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. George G. Brownell
3249 Dell Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Sara H. Bruce
1407 Windsor Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. T. Paul Brunson
3422 Sagebrook Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. and Mrs. John E. Bryan
3008 Thirteenth Avenue, South, Apt. 2
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Dr. and Mrs. John E. Bryan
3040 Warrington Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. C. Richard Byrd, Jr.
2833 Canterbury Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

The Hon. John H. Buchanan, Jr.
2159 Rayburn Building
Washington, D. C. 20515

Ms. Mary S. Buckley
535-B Broadway
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Punky Burwinkle
319 LaPrado Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. James M. Burt
3420 Sherwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Miss Rosa Lee Busby
2024 Twenty-first Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. Frank E. Butler, Jr.
120 Windsor Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. David Byrd
1217 Highland Drive
Fairfield, Alabama 35064

Mrs. Max Byrd
3632 Mountain Park Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Miss Susan Byrd
364 Killough Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35215

Mr. William J. Cabaniss
813 Shades Creek Parkway, Suite 225
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. Fred Calder
3621 Ridgeview Drive, West
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. William Callahan
3633 Spring Valley Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. William P. Cama
3832 Asbury Place
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. E. A. Camp, III
3621 Rockhill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Ehney Camp, Jr.
3232 East Briarcliff Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Dr. and Mrs. Lachlan L. Campbell
242 Big Springs Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Jack D. Carl
5 Clarendon Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
Dr. and Mrs. W. Roger Carlisle
920 Conroy Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Dr. Emmett B. Carmichael
3501 Redmont Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. J. Donald Carmichael
2857 Canterbury Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Dr. John L. Carmichael
2011 Ninth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. D. Arlen Carpenter
3501 Cherokee Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. H. Y. Carson
501 Valley Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35206

Mr. John L. Carter
4021 North Cahaba Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. John L. Casey
3624 Country Club Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Stanley A. Cash
2000 Twenty-first Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. G. G. Casten
2936 Donita Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. William M. Chambers
Greer, Holmquist and Chambers
Stallings Building
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mr. Jack F. Chamblee, Jr.
1749 Sam Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35235

Mr. William V. Chandler
429 Carriage Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35214

Mr. Joe B. Chapman
314 Massey Building
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Ms. Barbara M. Chenoweth
1313-C Thirty-fourth Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. J. D. Chichester, III
3013 Overton Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Jacky Christian
2532 Gerard Way
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel F. Clabaugh
4000 Cathedral Avenue
Washington, D. C. 20016

Mr. James H. Clark
5206 Clairmont Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Ms. Joan L. Clark
1400 Wellington Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Charlotte E. Clasen
411 Sterrett Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. Charles T. Clayton
1417 Timberland Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Dr. and Mrs. O. W. Clayton
3133 Ryecroft Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Elenore Cochrane
10851 Yunder Drive
Largo, Florida 33540

Mrs. J. J. Cochrane
17 Glen Iris Park
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. Charles H. Codding
2136 Vestavia Lake Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. Irby M. Cohen
3612 Spring Valley Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. John J. Coleman, Jr.
1500 Brown Marx Building
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Coleman
Route 15, Box 1094
Birmingham, Alabama 35224

Mr. Clinton Jackson Coley, Jr.
Post Office Box 58
Alexander City, Alabama 35010

Dr. and Mrs. John Coley
2717 Highland Avenue, Apt. 506
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. David Comfort
300 Mountain Brook Parkway
Birmingham, Alabama 35223
Mrs. J. D. Conwell  
2018 Wedgwood Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Cook  
3245 Star Lake Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. Liston H. Cook  
1168 Fifty-second Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35212

Mr. Grady C. Cooley  
900 Essex Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mr. L. K. Cooper  
2421 Fifteenth Avenue, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey H. Copeland  
641 Shades Crest Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. Hunter Copeland  
3460 Manor Lane, Apt. 108  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Corley  
2021 Twenty-eighth Street, West  
Birmingham, Alabama 35218

Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Cort, Jr.  
3525 Crestbrook Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Margaret L. Cotten  
2904 Tenth Court, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Chester R. Cowan, Jr.  
963 South Main Street  
Graysville, Alabama 35073

Mr. Claude A. Cowan  
638 Idlewild Circle, Apt. 22  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Peter G. Cowin  
Post Office Box 175  
Birmingham, Alabama 35201

Mrs. H. R. Cox  
3861 Glencoe Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. James L. Cox  
1214 Brown Marx Building  
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mrs. Thomas Cox, Jr.  
3517 South Woodridge Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Cherry Crawford  
2250 Highland Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Ms. Marian Crawford  
2641 Park Lane Court, East  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Davis H. Crenshaw  
406 O'Neal Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Z. Crockett  
3912 Royal Oak Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Dr. Charles D. Cross, II  
1143 Thornwood Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Kathy S. Cross  
1143 Thornwood Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Crowe  
1018 Thirty-second Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. M. C. Crumpton  
Miss Johnnie Lee Crumpton  
7608 Second Avenue, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35206

Mrs. J. Clyde Cruse  
136 Memory Court  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Emily Culberson  
324 Rosewood Street  
Birmingham, Alabama 35150

Mr. and Mrs. Emory Cunningham  
2441 Vestavia Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mrs. George B. Cunningham  
2250 Highland Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. Winning A. Currie, Jr.  
2504 Heathermoor Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. L. B. Curry  
4148 Old Leeds Lane  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Boris C. L. Datnow  
4634 Battery Lane  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Dr. and Mrs. Roy G. Davidson, Jr.  
2224 Gay Way  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216
Mr. Alex V. Davies
2600 Watkins Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Grace Hays Davis
Route Two, Box 1646
Alabaster, Alabama 35007

Mr. and Mrs. John H. Davis, Jr.
2741 Abingdon Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. S. D. "Yana" Davis
207 Euclid Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Vivian B. Davis
1329 Thirty-third Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. J. Frank Day, Jr.
3441 Brookwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Miss E. Irene Day
3000 Thirteenth Avenue, South, Apt. 1
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Miss W. Vernon Day
3000 Thirteenth Avenue, South, Apt. 1
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. John F. DeBuys
2501 Watkins Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Michael DeCarlo-Barclay
101 Azalea Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Deborah D. Denson
1 Winthrop Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. S. Rodgers Dewey
2028 Lancaster Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. C. A. Diehl
2830 Tenth Court, South, Apt. B-8
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Ms. Elsie H. Dillon
3416 Crayrich Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Miss Barbara N. Dixon
Post Office Box 242
Mt. Olive, Alabama 35117

Mr. William Edward Dobbett, III
7901 First Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35206

Mrs. W. S. Donovan
3246 Dell Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Mary Donworth
2619 Watkins Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Miss Virginia Ann Dorough
2140 Shadybrook Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. Luther L. Doty
2217 Lane Park Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Trent Douglass, Jr.
14 Club View Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Charles W. Downs
1309 Saulter Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Marsha W. Drennen
3916 Tenth Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. John J. Drew
1108 Center Street, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

Dr. L. Aubrey Drewry, Jr.
320 North Burbank Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. William A. Dry
2930 Clairmont Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. Thomas P. Dudley
3624 Hunters Hill Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35210

Mr. and Mrs. D. J. Duffee, Jr.
3100 North Woodridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Duffey, Jr.
3401 Coventry Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. Lawrence Dumas, Jr.
3251 Dell Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. William M. Dunbar
1404 Wellington Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Evans Dunn
2749 Abingdon Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243
Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Dunning, Jr.  
Route 2, Box 61  
Odenville, Alabama 35120

Mrs. Ruth C. Dupuy  
2327 Twenty-ninth Street, West  
Birmingham, Alabama 35208

Mr. and Mrs. Paul H. Earle  
4131 Glenbrook Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. John L. Ebaugh  
3850 Eleventh Avenue, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Ms. Barbara Ann Edgin  
3451 Cliff Terrace  
Birmingham, Alabama 35233

Mr. and Mrs. Michael L. Edwards  
2304 Chester Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Robert A. Edwards  
1226 Twenty-ninth Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Dr. and Mrs. Richard Elkus  
909 Sheridan Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. George B. Elliott  
3336 East Briarcliff Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. M. Porter Ellis  
1015 Thirtieth Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Ms. Geraldine Emerson  
2800 Vestavia Forest Place  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. Marvin R. Engel  
300 Bank for Savings Building  
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mr. Edmund B. England  
Post Office Box 7497  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Ben Erdreich  
4326 Kennesaw Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. M. K. Erdreich  
3836 Glencoe Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Erdreich  
3560 River Bend Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. Bessie S. Estell  
620 Center Way, S. W.  
Birmingham, Alabama 35211

Mrs. Gomer Evans  
2501 Montevallo Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Jack D. Evans, Jr.  
936 Kathyne Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35235

Dr. Walter B. Evans  
2504 Watkins Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. W. M. Facker  
3539 Rockhill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. James V. Fairley  
3652 Brookwood Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Frank B. Falkenburg  
Post Office Box 7644  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Joseph M. Farley  
3333 Dell Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. David Farmer  
Commission for Educational Exchange  
Boulevard du Régent, 29  
1000 Brussels, Belgium

Mrs. Holland Faught  
2216 Chestnut Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. D. L. Faulkner  
4212 Stone River Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Robert L. Fausett  
1313 Forty-third Street  
Birmingham, Alabama 35208

Mrs. M. M. Fennoy  
5500 Court G  
Fairfield, Alabama 35064

Mr. Frederick Ferguson  
2400 Henrietta Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Gene L. Fies  
2000 Warwick Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Dr. and Mrs. James O. Finney, Jr.  
4405 Fredericksburg Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
Mr. and Mrs. Gene Fitzgerald  
Route 1, Box 360  
Finson, Alabama 35126

Mr. J. Robert Fleenor  
3517 Lenox Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. MacDonald B. Fleming  
Route 1, Box 473  
Helena, Alabama 35080

Mrs. Pride B. Forney  
1943 Twentieth Avenue, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Fowler, III  
2068 Lakewood Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Ray B. Fowler  
616 Green Springs Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. W. M. Frank  
2828 Vestavia Forest Place  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel H. Frazier  
4310 Ninth Court, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Freeman, III  
3233 East Briarcliff Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Miss Nan Freeman  
5304 Avenue K  
Birmingham, Alabama 35208

Mr. Robert W. French  
2717 Highland Avenue, Apt. 806  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. Howard Friedel  
1973 Southwood Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. Frank Friedman  
2140 Hillside Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. E. M. Friend, Jr.  
22 Woodhill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Edward M. Friend, III  
Post Office Box 3364-A  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. D. J. Fugazzotto  
2708 Cherokee Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. R. Craig Fulford  
325 Heath Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. Edmund Gardien  
505 Woodland Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. Ed I. Gardner  
Realty Sales and Mortgage Co.  
9131 Parkway, East  
Birmingham, Alabama 35206

Dr. and Mrs. Marshall Garrett  
4216 Shiloh Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Dr. and Mrs. A. G. Gaston  
Post Office Box 697  
Birmingham, Alabama 35201

Mr. and Mrs. E. C. Gaston  
91 Lucerne Boulevard  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. William D. Geer  
2703 Lakewood Trail  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. Robert S. Glasgow, Jr.  
5012 Adams Avenue  
Adamsville, Alabama 35005

Mr. and Mrs. David W. Glover  
2716 Millbrook Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. Harold H. Goings  
3805 Jackson Boulevard  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Hubert W. Goings  
3328 Country Club Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Janet Goldfarb  
3692 Rockhill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Henry C. Goodrich  
44 Wellington Road  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46260

Mr. and Mrs. T. M. Goodrich  
2862 Surrey Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Ethel M. Gorman  
409 St. Charles Street  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Rabbi Milton Grafman  
2100 Highland Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205
Mrs. Henry V. Graham  
4228 Antietam Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Tandy S. Graves  
141 Memory Court  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. C. H. Grayson  
3069 Salisbury Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. James Grayson  
31 Country Club Boulevard  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. William C. Green, Jr.  
3262 Overton Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Mike Greer  
1705 Sixth Place, N.W.  
Birmingham, Alabama 35215

Miss Gloria Jean Griffith  
911 Valley Avenue, Apt. I  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. Boyce E. Guthrie  
1617 Colesbury Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Dr. Robert D. Guyton  
3809 North Woodridge Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. D. Ward Haarbauer  
3132 Spruce Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Ms. Elizabeth M. Hacker  
Post Office Box 9044  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Marilyn D. Hahn  
1920-A Laurel Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. John Hall  
3316 Country Club Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. W. H. Halsey  
2980 Cherokee Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Friedrich Peter Hamer  
3713 Forest Run Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Carl Martin Hames  
3317-D Old Montgomery Highway  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Ann Hamilton  
905 Sixth Avenue, West, Apt. C  
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

Mrs. R. Cabot Hamilton  
3466 Heather Lane  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mrs. Terry Hamilton  
815 Essex Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Ms. Virginia V. Hamilton  
Department of History  
University of Alabama in Birmingham  
Birmingham, Alabama 35294

Mrs. Earl R. Hammett  
2520 Beaumont Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. William F. Hampton, Jr.  
2231 Twenty-second Avenue, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Dr. and Mrs. John G. Hankins  
2409 Henrietta Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Barbara B. Hanley  
2826 Surrey Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. E. S. Hansberger, Jr.  
929 Conroy Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. Victor Hanson  
2250 Highland Avenue, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. John R. Harbert, III  
2700 Woodridge Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. Frank L. Hardy  
45 Ridge Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. J. Tyra Harris  
Jefferson State Junior College, Box 92  
Birmingham, Alabama 35215

Ms. Maria P. Harris  
911 Sixteenth Street, South, Apt. 18  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Virgil L. Harris  
Route 6, Box 529  
Birmingham, Alabama 35217

Mr. William D. Harris  
829 Conroy Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222
Mr. Thomas W. Harrison, Jr.
161 Twenty-third Street
Vineland Park
Hueytown, Alabama 35020

Mr. and Mrs. Allen W. Haskell
2880 Hastings Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Wyatt R. Haskell
6 Beechwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. J. B. Haslam
Post Office Box 243
Highlands, North Carolina 28741

Mrs. Richard C. Hassinger
3758 Montevallo Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. E. Hassinger-Burdette
3017 Warrington Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Robert G. Haughton
1002 Tenth Street, South, Apt. C
Gadsden, Alabama 35901

Dr. W. Kirkland Hawley
1012 East Mountain Top Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35212

Dr. William L. Hawley
2617 Tenth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. Beverly Head, Jr.
3528 Victoria Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. T. K. Hearns, Jr.
372 Park Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Ms. Ann Heaton
26 Rhodes Circle, Apt. 209
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Max Heldman
701 Fairfax Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. Howard Helzberg
3532 Brookwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Dr. and Mrs. R. E. Henderson
4301 Kennesaw Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Roberta Henderson
314 Sterrett Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. John F. Hendon
2 Country Club Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. John C. Henley, III
130 Nineteenth Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35233

Mr. Walter E. Henley, III
130 Nineteenth Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35233

Mrs. Mary Henricks
203 Gardenview Lane
Gardendale, Alabama 35071

Mrs. Katherine J. Henson
Post Office Box 45
Pinson, Alabama 35126

Mr. David S. Herring
Post Office Box 3403
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Roy D. Hickman
3357 Hermitage Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Robert H. Hill
Post Office Box 9271
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. John L. Hillhouse
3721 Redmont Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. John L. Hillhouse, Jr.
3525 Blue Jay Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Dr. and Mrs. Robert S. Hogan
2926 Canterbury Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. H. W. Hoile
2823 Thornhill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. James Lee Holland, Jr.
909 Essex Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Ms. Margaret Holland
1712 Forestdale Boulevard
Birmingham, Alabama 35214

Mr. Howard L. Holley
4016 Old Leeds Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Gene P. Holman
1232 Forty-first Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222
Miss Mary Elizabeth Holmes
2704 Hanover Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Thad Holt
The Claridge
1100 Twenty-seventh Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Phil Hontzas
897 Delcris Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mrs. R. E. Howard, Jr.
504 Hampton Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. Richard F. Howard
3920 Ninth Court, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. George Huddleston, Jr.
3648 Shamley Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Alvin W. Hudson
617 Sundale Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35235

Mrs. Dan R. Hudson
3704-A Country Club Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Edward E. Huff
Redrock Construction Company
2719 Nineteenth Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. J. Terry Huffstutler
2656 Park Lane, East
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. William C. Hulsey
120 Delmar Terrace
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. W. H. Huskey
2980 Cherokee Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Homer A. Jackson, Jr.
3373 Overbrook Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Jeff, Jr.
5600 Eighth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35212

Ms. Marie S. Jemison
3328 Dell Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

M. George L. Jenkins
2333 Lane Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Rebecca Jennings
3024 Thirteenth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. J. Burns Johns
3210 Salisbury Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Anne Terry Johnson
3902 Jackson Boulevard
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Crawford Johnson, III
Post Office Box 2006
Birmingham, Alabama 35201

Mrs. Lyle E. Johnson
1561 Holly Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Johnson
1104 Fifty-third Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Ms. V. Carroll Johnson
1104 Fifty-third Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mr. and Mrs. D. Clark Johnston, Jr.
3100 Carlisle Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. George Johnston, Jr.
3435 Cherokee Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. George Johnston, III
3516 Stonehenge Place
Birmingham, Alabama 35210

Mr. Henry P. Johnston
Post Office Box 7661
Mountain Brook Station
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. A. W. Jones
2617 Abingdon Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Ms. Emily W. Jones
66 Pinecrest Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Frank M. Jones
Post Office Box 43305
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. Fred S. Jones, Jr.
106 Crestview Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
Mr. G. Ernest Jones, Jr.
1036 Thirty-first Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Ms. Helen Hickman Jones
2321 Crest Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Jan Jones
401-A Poplar Place
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. John Paul Jones
2643-D Park Lane Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Lister H. Jones
2808 Eighth Street, N.E.
Birmingham, Alabama 35215

Mr. and Mrs. Saunders Jones
3605 Randall Mill Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30327

Ms. Virginia Riddle Jones
2117 Vestavia Lake Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. William C. Jones
53 Norman Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer H. Jordan
87 Fairway Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Charles M. Joyner
3404 North Woodridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Margaret Y. Kappel
3748 North Woodridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Josephine M. Kaplan
1930 Mayfair Park Drive, Apt. 203
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Kassouf
3347 Brookwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Leo Kayser, Jr.
2775 Altadena Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. and Mrs. Ray Kenderdine
2511 Aberdeen Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Irvin C. Kenney, Jr.
Post Office Box 9115
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Dr. and Mrs. John E. Kent
2561 Mountain Woods Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Dr. Warren W. Kent, Sr.
3222 Sixth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Dr. and Mrs. Charles Robert Kessler
3533 Mountain Park Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Dr. and Mrs. William H. Kessler
3353 Faring Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Kenneth N. Key
837 Forty-second Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. Rutherford Lyle Key
303 Westover Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Mary Louise Kile
102 East Edgewood Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. Amanda A. Kimbrough
337 Cherry Street
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Ralph E. Kinnane, Sr.
5620 Sixth Court, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35212

Ms. Mary Bess Kirksey
1112-F Thornwood Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. Emory Kirkwood
2758 Hanover Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Andrew H. Knight
1412 Avon Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Betty Knight
Route 2, Box 589
Remlap, Alabama 35133

Mr. Gustav A. Koenig
1028 Fiftieth Place, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Dr. Frederick W. Kraus
114 Stratford Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Kay Kuykendall
2101 Maplecrest Drive
Fultondale, Alabama 35068
Mr. James W. Kyle
4109 Shiloh Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Alex Lacy
Alabama Gas Corporation
1918 First Avenue, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mrs. Clifford L. Lamar
3136 Pine Ridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Law Lamar
2842 Canterbury Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Edward S. LaMonte
4230 Ninth Court, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mr. Kurt Lang
2201 Lester Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. Frank E. Lankford
2975 Brookwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald J. Laubenthal
513 Windsor Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. and Mrs. John Lauriello
1433 Milner Street
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Dr. Thomas C. Lawson, Jr.
3012 Southwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. James C. Lee, Jr.
2916 Cherokee Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Norma G. Lehman
4201 Seventh Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Ms. Bessie H. Lester
818 Essex Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mr. Jerry Levin
1243-E Beacon Parkway, East
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mr. Art Levine
2319 Twentieth Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Frances M. Levine
2622 South Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Ida Mae Levio
4109 Old Leeds Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Roy C. Lightsey
441 Sunset Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Don B. Ling, Jr.
2007 Warwick Court
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. Margaret Livingston
12 Country Club Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Patricia Lin Livingston
WBHM Radio Station
1028 Seventh Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35294

Mrs. Frank B. Lockridge
1816 Catala Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Sprott Long
3217 Pine Ridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Jack B. Long
634 Lakeshore Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. Thad G. Long
3409 South Brookwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. A. R. Lower
525 Yorkshire Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Ms. Peggy J. Lowry
3435 Cliff Terrace
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Henry S. Lynn
2878 Shook Hill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Lynn
4225 Cliff Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. J. T. McCarty, Jr.
4211 Old Brook Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. and Mrs. James H. McCary
43 Country Club Boulevard
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Sarah C. McClure
4324 Cliff Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35222
Mrs. Nancy B. McCormack
1825 Forest Haven Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Dr. and Mrs. Walter C. McCoy
3508 Cypress Cove
Birmingham, Alabama 35210

Mr. G. W. McCracken
2606 Cahaba River Estates
Bessemer, Alabama 35020

Mr. S. McDaniel
2351 Tyrol Place
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mrs. William C. McDonald
2201 Crest Road, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Dr. Travis R. McElroy
1901 Dartmouth Avenue
Bessemer, Alabama 35020

Mrs. Frank H. McFadden
3015 Briarcliff Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Michael McKerley
704 Mohican Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35214

Mr. and Mrs. William Porter McKibbin
Lakefront Circle, Southside
Gadsden, Alabama 35901

Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. McKinnon
3856 Buckingham Place
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. John M. McMahon
106 Waverly Circle
Bessemer, Alabama 35020

Mr. and Mrs. Berry F. McNally
1524 Cotton Avenue, S. W.
Birmingham, Alabama 35211

Miss Elizabeth McNeil
25 Montcrest Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Francis Lee McRae
4608 Scenic View Drive
Bessemer, Alabama 35020

Mrs. Jack McSpadden
2641 Crest Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. W. W. McTyeire
4218 Old Leeds Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Tennant S. McWilliams
Department of History
University of Alabama in Birmingham
Birmingham, Alabama 35294

Mrs. George O. Mabry
4317 Linwood Drive, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. John D. MacDonald
3746 Colchester Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur E. Malone, Jr.
140 Lake Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. J. V. Manning
3208 East Briarcliff Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Sarah Maring
1315-D Thirty-fourth Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Markstein, III
29 Fairway Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. F. S. Martin
2240 Marion Street
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Marx
3007 North Woodridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. William Marx
3006 North Woodridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Jacqueline A. Matte
1714 Kestwick Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. George A. Mattison, Jr.
701 Transportation Building
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mr. and Mrs. Harold B. Mayer
1440 Timberlane Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Bert Meadow
2900 Mountain Brook Parkway
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. Ruth H. Meadows
608 Twenty-first Street, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mr. and Mrs. Willis J. Meriwether, Jr.
3135 Pine Ridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
Mr. Lee Merrill
2007-D Longleaf Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Ms. Ann Brantley Merrin
3828 Brook Hollow Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. Frederick Middleton
3216 Country Club Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Nina Miglionico
1007 City National Bank Building
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mr. and Mrs. Edwin B. Miller
10 Norman Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. M. Jean Miller
1224 Forty-first Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Ms. Margaret Miller
Claridge Apartments
100 Twenty-seventh Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. Thomas P. Miller
2136 Pine Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Miller
1069 Lakeview Crescent
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. W. M. Miller
4232 Caldwell Mill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. William H. Mills
1418 Sharpsburg Circle
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Ms. Corietta L. Mitchell
612 First Street, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35204

Mr. Garry D. Mitchell
625 Thirty-ninth Street, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. Jane Mitchell
2512 Dolly Ridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. and Mrs. Michael H. Mobbs
715 Fairway Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Monaghan
58 Country Club Boulevard
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Dr. Florence M. Monroe
2947 Pump House Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. and Mrs. J. Raymond Monroe
411 Hambaugh Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. Pauline Montgomery
2702 Loveless Street
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Mrs. E. D. Moody
1901 Post Oak Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. Philip A. Morris
Post Office Box 523
Birmingham, Alabama 35201

Mr. and Mrs. Steve Morton
3740 Locksley Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Stanley Moss
Post Office Box 335
Pinson, Alabama 35126

Mr. and Mrs. William Moughon
3155 Pine Ridge Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Richard Moxley, Jr.
2461 Shades Crest Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. and Mrs. L. P. Munger, Jr.
15 Woodhill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Rose McDavid Munger
2603 Montevallo Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Murray, Jr.
3332 Spring Valley Court
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Drayton Nabers
3416 Sherwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. F. Marshall Neilson
2520-F Park Lane Court, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Bart Nelson
3832 River View Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Ms. Elizabeth Daniel Nelson
3437-D Sandner Court
Birmingham, Alabama 35209
Mr. and Mrs. G. Thornton Nelson
2619 Crest Road, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Suzane W. Nesbit
3746 Mountain Park Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Sarah L. Nesbitt
2513 Park Lane Court, South, Apt. G
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Alex W. Newton
2837 Canoe Brook Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. and Mrs. Grady B. Nichols
608 Winwood Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35226

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth V. Nickell
40 Norman Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Mark G. Noel
2910 Westmoreland Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Norman
3925 Royal Oak Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mr. Charles S. Notthen, Jr.
3115 Overhill Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. Lloyd Nutter, Jr.
1612 First Street, N. W.
Birmingham, Alabama 35215

Mr. Richard F. Ogle
2737 Cherokee Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Mr. William F. Owens, Jr.
54 Fairway Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. William H. Paceley
1804 Mayfair Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Dr. and Mrs. John M. Packard
2322 Hunters' Cove
Birmingham, Alabama 35216

Dr. and Mrs. Jerry L. Parker
4141 Sharpsburg Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. George D. Patterson
2432 Henrietta Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

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333 Cherry Street
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. Randall P. Payne
2180 Cornell Road
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Mr. and Mrs. B. W. Peake
4125 Cahaba Road
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Mrs. Dudley Pendleton, III
3604 Crestside Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Ms. Peggy Perkins
Route 15, Box 942
Birmingham, Alabama 35224

Ms. Terry Pfaffman
204 Main Street
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Mr. and Mrs. Gray Plosser, Jr.
108 Greenbrier Lane
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1241 Greensboro Road
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1357 Westminster Place
Birmingham, Alabama 35235

Mrs. Winston Porter
4224 Antietam Drive
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Anne H. Powell
2848 Highland Avenue
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mrs. C. P. Powell
3012 Briarcliff Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. and Mrs. J. Fred Powell
3744-E Fairway Drive
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3621 Westbury Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

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3309 Thornton Drive
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140 Main Street
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1502 Tuscaloosa Street  
Greensboro, Alabama 36744  

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2533 Mountain Brook Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223  

Mr. and Mrs. James L. Pugh  
129 Glenhill Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213  

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1200 Sauter Road  
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3349 Hermitage Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223  

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1419 Timberlane Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213  

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135 Memory Court  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213  

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4314 Kennesaw Drive  
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Mr. and Mrs. Robert M. Ramsay  
3049 Cherokee Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223  

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2250 Highland Avenue, South  
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Mr. and Mrs. Richard R. Randolph, III  
3846 Cove Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213  

Mr. and Mrs. William H. Ray, Jr.  
3624 Westbury Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223  

Mrs. Carol J. Reese  
6 Woodhill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213  

Mrs. Billy E. Reeves  
8712 Second Court, North  
Birmingham, Alabama 35206  

Mr. J. G. Reeves  
4461 Clairmont Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222  

Mr. and Mrs. Robert R. Reid, Jr.  
2616 Mountain Brook Parkway  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223  

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Rich  
1220 Twenty-eighth Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205  

Mr. Doyle E. Richmond  
Post Office Box 771  
Birmingham, Alabama 35216  

Mrs. Topsy Smith Rigney  
1315 Twenty-second Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205  

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3813 Asbury Place  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243  

Mr. and Mrs. David Roberts, III  
229 Vestavia Circle  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223  

Mr. and Mrs. David Roberts, IV  
2217 Vestavia Drive  
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Miss Naldo Roberts  
37 Clarendon Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213  

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3748-C Country Club Drive  
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Birmingham, Alabama 35209  

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3756 Country Club Drive  
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614 Royal Street  
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2970 St. Johns Avenue  
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Fort Sumter National Monument  
Drawer R  
Sullivan's Island, South Carolina 29482

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3528 Spring Valley Court  
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Route 1, Box 165-A  
Morris, Alabama 35116

Mrs. A. Page Sloss  
3840 Forest Glen Drive  
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8336 Third Avenue, South  
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Dr. and Mrs. F. B. Smith  
2700 Vestavia Forrest Terrace  
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3625 Mountain Park Drive  
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4245 Caldwell Mill Road  
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Mr. Hester M. Smith  
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2250 Highland Avenue, Apt. 505  
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Birmingham, Alabama 35210

Miss Kate Smith  
2625 Highland Avenue, Apt. 406  
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

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1035 Sims Avenue  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Paul Smith  
601 Grove Street  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

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216 Beech Road  
Gardendale, Alabama 35071

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125 Pinewood Avenue  
Hueytown, Alabama 35020

Mrs. Charles Snook, Jr.  
2830 Hastings Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. James Somerville  
Post Office Box 27  
Vandiver, Alabama 35176

Mrs. Ormond Somerville  
3336 Dell Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. C. H. Sosnin  
725 Thirty-fifth Street, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mr. and Mrs. H. deLeon Southerland, Jr.  
47 Greenway Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mr. and Mrs. Frank E. Spain  
3100 Overhill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mrs. John Speegle  
809 Forty-eighth Street, North  
Birmingham, Alabama 35212

Mr. William B. Speir  
Post Office Box 7422  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. John M. Spence  
4521 Linwood Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mr. Paul H. Spence  
614 Warwick Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35209

Dr. and Mrs. Terrell Spencer  
4212 Antietam Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
Mr. William M. Spencer  
Suite 1510, First National-Southern Natural Building  
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

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5519 Twelfth Avenue, South  
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3632 Montevallo Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

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148 Glenhill Drive  
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Mr. Samuel N. Stayer  
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Birmingham, Alabama 35222

Mrs. Myrtle Jones Steele  
5342 Fourth Court, South  
Birmingham, Alabama 35212

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Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Mr. J. T. Stephens  
3710 Redmont Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

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2437 Tyler Road  
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Mr. Arthur W. Stewart  
2969 Pump House Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Ms. Frances M. Stewart  
Route 5, Box 528  
Birmingham, Alabama 35215

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1865 Forty-ninth Street  
Birmingham, Alabama 35208

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Birmingham, Alabama 35223

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317 East Farris Road  
Greenville, South Carolina 29605

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3832 Tenth Avenue, South  
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3015 North Woodridge Road  
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128 Woodside Drive  
Birmingham, Alabama 35210

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2027-A Longleaf Drive  
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2632 Mountain Brook Parkway  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

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2632 Mountain Brook Parkway  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

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3500 River Bend Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

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808 Hillview Drive  
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908 Twenty-first Street, South  
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1353 Wilshire Drive  
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10 Club View Drive  
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Dr. and Mrs. Lamar Thomas  
3573 Rockhill Road  
Birmingham, Alabama 35223
Mrs. Hall W. Thompson
Post Office Box 7407-A
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

Miss Mary Throckmorton
101-D Memory Court
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Mr. David Thurlow
2604 Caldwell Mill Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

Mrs. W. G. Thuss
2837 Southwood Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35223

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3220 Sterling Road
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Birmingham, Alabama 35223

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2020 Winsnboro Road
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Mayor
City Hall
710 Twentieth Street, North
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

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4142 Appomatox Lane
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3212 Tyrol Road
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744 Euclid Avenue
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2768 Hanover Circle
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Birmingham, Alabama 35205

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Mr. William C. Welch
4153 Old Leeds Lane
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
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<td>2836 Shook Hill Road</td>
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<td>Ms. Margaret E. White</td>
<td>2250 Highland Avenue, South</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35205</td>
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<td>Ms. Sarah Ann White</td>
<td>8712 Second Court, North</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35206</td>
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<td>Mr. and Mrs. William E. White, Jr.</td>
<td>3404 River Bend Road</td>
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<td>606 Woodland Village</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35216</td>
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<td>Ms. Barbara H. Whitman</td>
<td>Route 1, Box 368</td>
<td>Helena, AL 35080</td>
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<td>Mr. Bryant A. Whitmire</td>
<td>3300 Cherokee Road</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35223</td>
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<td>132 Glenview Drive</td>
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<td>202-A Chastaine Circle</td>
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<td>3545 Brookwood Road</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35223</td>
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<tr>
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<td>203 Foxhall Road</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35213</td>
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<td>3308 Hermitage Road</td>
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<td>Mr. Mike Woodruff</td>
<td>1373 Willoughby Road</td>
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<td>Mr. A. H. Woodward, Jr.</td>
<td>8 Cross Creek Park</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35213</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Hollis E. Woodyerd</td>
<td>3810 Ninth Court, South</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35222</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Bartee Worthington</td>
<td>Post Office Box 425</td>
<td>Gardendale, AL 35071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Earl J. Wright, Jr.</td>
<td>2122 Rocky Ridge Road</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Wright</td>
<td>1508 Panorama Drive</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL 35216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr. and Mrs. Valentine Yarbrough
3754 Montevallo Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213

Mrs. Jack Yauger
2717 Highland Avenue, South
Birmingham, Alabama 35205

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Young, III
3624 Ridgeview Drive
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3715 Old Leeds Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
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