

Hueytown, Alabama

From a country settlement to a city in one hundred thirty-five years

Written by Simon J. Smith
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In 1825 Abner McGee entered a tract of land in what is known today as Hueytown. Eleven years later Octavus Spencer entered another tract in the same community. In 1833 Mortimer Jordan purchased thousands of acres from these gentlemen in this community. This estate was sold at auction and otherwise to other people from 1842 to 1866 when the big auction was held.

John Crooks, Sam and Jesse Huey, twins, and Calvin Waldrop had settled in the lower part of the country near what later became known as Toadvine. Calvin Waldrop's father, Joe, entered land in Toadvine country in 1823. The Hueys obtained land on Valley Creek near the Rock Creek settlement.

In 1842 John Crooks bought land from Mortimer Jordan on the road to Dolomite. For this land he paid \$4 an acre. In 1866 Sam Huey bought 1100 acres from the Jordan estate for \$4.41 an acre. Calvin Waldrop also bought land from the Jordan Estate about the same time. Jesse Huey, Sam's twin brother purchased 750 acres of land from the Jordan Estate, his land reaching almost to the Honeycutt Hill.

Jesse Huey married Catherine Lacey in 1849 before he moved to Hueytown. His brother, Sam, married several times, all his wives dying before any children were born until he married Matilda Waldrop. To this union were born several children, but two of his sons were responsible for Sam's moving from the Toadvine country to Hueytown.

There came a June freshet that washed everything the Huey family had away. Sol and Van, sons of Sam Huey told their father that they were not going to stay where they could not be sure their crops would not be washed away. They were leaving, and he could come with them or stay there. He elected to go with them and so it was that he bought the 11 (1,100) acres of land from the Jordan Estate.

Calvin Waldrop began early to acquire the land down on the river. He entered a tract along the Locust Fork of Warrior River in 1836. At various other times he entered land in that vicinity until in 1860 he owned some 600 acres. He built a two story log house near Alliance School about 1859. That house still stands. But in 1866 he sold this house to Jasper Vines and bought the land in Hueytown.

Mr. Waldrop had an intense interest in public affairs in this county. The records of the old County Commissioner's Court are replete with the deeds of Calvin Waldrop in public affairs. So he was a decided asset to this progressive community.

They Hueys have not only given to the community their name but they have been a decided influence for the character of its citizenry. From them came a missionary who carried the Gospel to foreign lands in the person of Miss Alice Huey, granddaughter of Sam Huey. Before her, her grandfather, Sam Huey, served as one of the County Commissioners. Sons of Van Huey, who was a son of Sam Huey, have filled many public offices in the county. Major Tom Huey was on the personnel board of the Civil Service in this county for many years. Mr. Rose Huey was clerk of the Circuit Court in Bessemer for a long time. Sam Huey was at one time Deputy Probate Judge. A granddaughter of Sam Huey, Mrs. Mae Huey Dabbs was a teacher in the county schools for years.

Sons of Jesse Huey did their part in the development of the community by educating their children to teach in the schools and to enter the business world. One of them, M. W., was in the wholesale grocery business for years. His brother, Newman Huey, was associated with him, making many friends for the firm. Mrs. Elizabeth Huey Higdon is a prominent teacher in the county schools. Mrs. Alma Huey Vines is the wife of Mr. Howell Vines, author of two novels. She taught for a number of years before becoming associated with the State Welfare Board of Montgomery.

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One of the Jesse Huey descendants has made a decided reputation for himself in the business world. Hiram Huey attended the University of Alabama and took a business administration course, majoring in banking. Today he is an official in the First National Bank of Birmingham with his office in the Bessemer branch.

The Waldrops, too, have done their bit toward the development of the community and the surrounding area. Dr. R. W. Waldrop, noted surgeon and owner of Bessemer General Hospital when he died, was the grandson of Calvin Waldrop. Dr. Will Waldrop, eye, ear and nose specialist, was another grandson. Dr. Edwin Waldrop is a great grandson of Calvin Waldrop.

Mr. C. T. Crooks, living in Hueytown today, is a descendant of John Crooks, first settler in Hueytown. He is in a wholesale business in Ensley.

Other families coming to this community in the early days include that of the Dabbs family. In that family Mr. Cal Dabbs is perhaps the best known. He taught school for a number of years before settling down to farming and contracting to furnish timber for the mines at Dolomite. While in that business he became interested in politics and from then on was active in that profession. He served for a number of years as Chief Deputy Sheriff in the Bessemer Cutoff.

In 1866 the Robertson family bought land from the Jordan Estate, and they therefore became one of the leading families of the community. From them came such men as Manoah Robertson who was a charter member of the Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church. Others of that family who were on that first roll of Pleasant Ridge Church, were F. M. Robertson, Martha, Mary and Malissa Robertson.

It was a Robertson who sold the land to the church which was first known as Trigg's Spring Church to the trustees of that church. Mr. H. B. Robertson sold four acres of land for a dollar an acre to be used for church and school.

The Vines family also made its contribution to the life of Hueytown. Mr. William Benton Vines was at one time a member of the Board of Revenue for Jefferson County. His name was on the corner stone of the old court house in Birmingham which stood on Twenty-first Street and Third Avenue. His daughter, Miss Cecil Vines was a teacher in the Hueytown Elementary School for nearly fifty years. Another Vines of this community who did his bit in public life was Mr. Bascom Vines who served as Chief Deputy Sheriff under his father-in-law, Mr. Thomas J. Batson. The Vines family is still active in the life of the community with Charles Vines as principal of the High School, and his brother, Melvin, coach of the same school.

The Smiths have done their bit also with Ira G. (Buddy) Smith moving from Toadvine fifty-four years ago and establishing a home on part of the Calvin Waldrop purchase of the Jordan Estate. His daughter, Malissa, married Hewitt Thompson, who was active in the mercantile business for many years. He took over his father, Jim Thompson's store, and for a long time was the leading store between Lee's Junction and the Warrior River. His four daughters, Myrtle, Ethyl, Mildred and Maurine, all graduated from college and all taught for a while. Mrs. Myrtle Thompson Durrett is teaching now in North Highlands School and is a member of the city council of the newly incorporated City of Hueytown. She was one of the early teachers in the High School of Hueytown.

Milton Smith, Buddy's youngest son, was one of the founders of Smith Dry Cleaning Company. He sold his interest, however, and has been engaged as an accountant with a leading firm in Birmingham for a number of years. His home is in Hueytown.

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Several years after I.G. Smith moved to Hueytown his brother Phillip came. He put up a blacksmith shop and continued the work he had followed all his life in Toadvine. His sons were active in the business life of the community, Alf was a blacksmith, but did quite a bit of farming; Bart was an employee of the post office in Bessemer until his retirement. Jake and Lane were connected with the founding of the Smith Dry Cleaning Company. Lane sold his interest, however, and was connected with another concern when he died. Jake is now owner of the Mitchell and Thomas Coal Yard.

Two cousins, Elisha and Horace Ray, came to Hueytown in its early life. Both of them had stores, Horace on the east side of the road about where Hill's Super Store is. This store was only about ten feet square. Elisha had a bigger store on the corner in front of where Food Town stands today. Later Jack Knight ran that store, then his son, Rick, and finally his grandson, Rick, who is associated with Food Town at present. Jim Thompson's store was the first continuing store in the community. It stood where Wills Radio Shop stands today.

Other families coming to Hueytown later who had much to do with its development were the Parsons, House, Stoves, Hammonds, Skates, Faust, Moyer, Rogers and McDonalds. One of the earliest business places was the blacksmith shop run by Mr. Bill McDonald. It stood between the Thompson store and the church on the west side of the road.

The schools of Hueytown today are a far cry from the first one. That school stood on the hill just back of the present Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church. As before stated land was sold to the church for the purpose of school and church. Rev. M. M. Wood was one of the first teachers. He also served as pastor of the church for a long time. Rev. E. B. Waldrop was the first pastor of this church. The church was founded in 1875.

Later the school was built on a plot of ground across the road from the church and Prof. W. R. Copeland was the teacher for many years. He later became assistant superintendent of education for Jefferson County.

Prof. T. M. Fricks was principal of the school for a time and under his direction the school made forward steps in education. He was succeeded by Mrs. Margaret Davis who is still filling the place with distinction after approximately thirty years.

In 1921 Hueytown High School opened its doors for the high school students with Prof. Harley F. Gilmore as its principal. He remained in that position until his retirement in 1956. His son-in-law, Charles Vines, is principal at the present time.

Two years ago Hueytown High School moved into the magnificent plant on Dabbs Avenue, which has the appearance more of a college than of a high school.

The plant from which the High School moved is being used for a Junior High School known as Pittman Junior High, with Prof. Dwight M. Riley as principal.

With the growth of the North Highland area, need of a school in this section was recognized several years before it was met. Mrs. M. T. Hatton, always civic minded and hard working for the good of the community, was instrumental in organizing a civic club in North Highlands through which agitation was started and carried through to obtain a school.

The first step was to get land. This was solved by the Bessemer Coal, Iron & Land Co., donating several lots for a school, with the stipulation that the school would have to be erected within a certain time.

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Just before the time limit ran out the County Board began a two-room building. This building has grown until we now have a six-room building with lunch room. Mrs. McInish is the principal of their fine school.

At first there was only one church in Hueytown, the Pleasant Ridge Baptist. All denominations attended it, Prof. W. R. Copeland, who was a Methodist, being one of the teachers in the Sunday School. But sometime in the late twenties the Hueytown Methodist Church was organized and began holding services in a dwelling house on Crest Road which is the parsonage today. At present the Hueytown Methodist Church is one of the beautiful churches of the city.

About 1924 the Vineland Park Baptist Church was organized. Rev. Pate was its first pastor. The present building was erected in 1925 and 1926.

In the last few years the Church of Christ has erected a fine brick building on High School Road near Pittman Junior High. At the “Y” the Church of God stands to welcome people of that persuasion to its doors.

Down at Lee’s Junction stands the North Highlands Baptist Church which has had the most phenomenal growth of any church in the city of Hueytown. A few yards from it on Hueytown Road stands the North Highlands Presbyterian Church. Hard by this church the Seventh Day Adventists have recently built a lovely church house. A few yards from North Highlands Baptist on Lovers Lane, stands the Lovers Lane Methodist Church. And up the road one block on the corner of 27th Avenue, stands the North Highlands Nazarene Church. Over in Industrial City, which is a part of the Hueytown community, we find the Industrial City Baptist Church and the Brooklane Baptist Church.

Hueytown abounds with clubs. The first one to be organized was the Culture Club which was founded about thirty-five years ago. Soon after it came into existence the Study Club was organized. Then came the Lions Club. Since then several others have been organized including the Hueytown Hobby Club, the Hueytown Whirlers Club (square dancing), the Hueytown Educational Citizens Council, Our Neighbors, Plain Dirt Gardeners, Gay Gardeners, Creative Gardeners, Hueytown Civitan Club, the Hueytown Cotillion Club, and the North Highlands Civitan Club.

All these clubs are federated with the state Federation of Clubs and are also joined together in Hueytown as the Hueytown Council of Clubs. These clubs contribute to the development of the Hueytown Community Center. A Little League baseball program is sponsored with several ball teams of youngsters who play a baseball game that would make a professional player sit up and take notice. North Highlands Civitan Club has sponsored a community center on Lovers Lane. A Little League is active there.

In addition to the clubs of the city each school has an active and aggressive Parent-Teachers Association. Rev. Stevenson, pastor of the Church of Christ, is president of the Elementary PTA; Mrs. Roy Hampton of the Pittman Junior High, and Mrs. DeVore of the Hueytown High PTA. Mrs. Carl Rogers is president of the North Highlands PTA.

Thirty-five years ago (~1927) I carried the mail for this community. At that time there were three grocery stores, one drug store part of the time, two service stations, three churches, one elementary school, one high school, one mail route and one garage.

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Today (1962) there are ten groceries, three drug stores, two auto supply stores, one dime store, three radio and TV shops, five hardware stores, ten service stations, one laundry-mat, three dry cleaners, five barber shops, five restaurants, one clinic, two dentists, one physiotherapist, a post office, three city mail routes, three rural routes, one lodge hall, one bank and twelve churches.

My first impression of Hueytown the day I rode through it on a one-mule wagon from my home on the river to Bessemer was that it was a community of beautiful homes. The first home that struck me as being a pretty house was the Nelson Huey home, built of wood, to give the appearance of brick. On past the store in Hueytown I remember a house on the left of the road where M. H. H. Bailey lived that I thought was a beauty. The next house I remember still stands, but has been brick veneered and refinished. I thought it was the finest home I had ever seen. Mr. Will Coston lived there and his son, Roscoe, lives there today. I think the next fine home in Hueytown was that of Mr. Bascom Vines, off the road about a half block.

Of course none of those homes would be in the class with many of the lovely dwellings that dot the Hueytown landscape today. However, it is not the homes that make Hueytown noe of the finest cities in the United States. It is the people who live in those homes. It will be noted that in the list of business establishments of Hueytown not one beer hall nor package store, nor any other place that sells beer and whisky is listed. Nor will one be listed for a long time is my prediction.