

The History of Hueytown

Compiled by Mary K. Roberts
December 1990

Introduction

Hueytown is basically a residential community. It is a suburb of Birmingham and is located southwest of Birmingham. Although Hueytown is a young city, it is rapidly growing into a very substantial one with about 15,000 inhabitants. Of the residents of Hueytown there are many occupations. There are all types of recreational functions, also. Hueytown is governed by a Mayor and Five Councilmen. There are over 16 churches in Hueytown, and hospitals are within minutes. Although we live in this community, many of us never think of its background or those who contributed to its growth and success. The purpose of this paper is to make known to those around me Hueytown's history, or a small part of it, so that we will be made more aware of the City in which we live, work, and play.

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In 1783 William Brown was born in South Carolina. After marrying, he and his wife left South Carolina and went to Giles County, Tennessee. William Brown left his family in Tennessee and traveled south until he reached what is known as "Possum Valley". He drove his stake where the plant of Westfield now operates. He began to clear the land and build a home. After the fall harvest he returned to Tennessee for his family.

Two years before Brown came to this section of the country, his brother-in-law, James Jones, had come and settled what is now known as Jones Valley.

In the following year, 1816, Old Billy Hawkins set out in an ox cart and followed William Brown's hatchet marks from Tennessee and drove his stake where the Thomas Furnace now stands. He acquired a lot of land and became known as one of the wealthiest men of his time. At the end of the (Civil) war he freed around 200 slaves.

The Rutledges, another old pioneer family, followed William Brown and Billy Hawkins soon after they came to this country. Sometime during the year of 1818 a Negro man by the name of Adam, and Uncle Billy Brown and Jimmie Rutledge built the Bethlehem Church near Dolomite, the 1st church in Jefferson County. The preachers of that time were known as circuit riders because they didn't stay at the same church all the time, but instead, traveled on horse from one church to another. The circuit rider of the Bethlehem church preached from what is now known as Jonesboro to Crumly's Chapel.

William Brown became friends with the Indians inhabiting this section of the country. They taught him many of their skills and some of the food dishes. Although different, they became lifetime friends.

One day while riding, Brown decided to follow a creek downstream. Soon he noticed that he was going upstream. He went back to the fording of the two creeks and named the one running downstream "Rock Creek" and the one running upstream "Valley Creek".

William Brown was the father of ten children. One of his sons, Jim Brown, settled at what is now known as Ensley.

William B. Brown, born in 1822, was one of Uncle Billy Brown's sons and the father of Joe Brown. Joe Brown was born on June 7, 1850. All of his deceased family are buried in a city that was once called "Brown Town". Although no one else can be buried there because the Tennessee Company bought all of the surrounding land, no one can disturb this family cemetery. The Browns still own the deed to this land. Where Mr. Brown once

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saw fields of corn and cotton, the city of Fairfield now stands. Mr. Brown lived at the old home place until 1910 when he sold out to the United States Steel Corporation.

As time went on, other settlers came to this part of the country. In 1825 Abner McGee obtained some land in what is now known as Hueytown. Eleven years later Octavius Spencer also bought land in this community. In 1833 Mortimer Jordan purchased thousands of acres from these men and sold it all at auction, between the years of 1842 and 1866.

John Crooks, Sam and Jesse Huey (twins), and Calvin Waldrop all settled in the lower section of Jefferson County near what became known as Toadvine. Joe Waldrop, Calvin's father, bought land in the Toadvine community in 1823. The Huey brothers bought land on Valley Creek that became the Rock Creek Community.

Jesse Huey married Catherine Lacy before moving to Hueytown. Sam married several times, finally to Matilda Waldrop. They had two sons who were responsible for Sam moving to Hueytown.

Calvin Waldrop began to acquire land on Warrior River. He entered a tract of land along Locust Fork in 1839. He built a house near Alliance School that still stands today.

Like Calvin Waldrop, Tillman Salter obtained land along the river. He later moved to the Concord Community where he operated a saw mill. The Huey boys came down and married Salter girls, and the Salter boys married Waldrop girls. Thus the Salters had intermarried with Hueytown families and became part of the development of our community.

These first families made many contributions. Mr. Waldrop had always had an interest in public affairs and became an asset to the progressing of the city. Not only was Hueytown named for the Huey's, they also added many citizens. Jesse and Sam Huey remained in Hueytown along with many of their kin.

Other families contributing to the growth and progress of Hueytown include the Dabbs family. Mr. Calloway Dabbs is the best known, because he taught school for many years before going into politics. The Robertson family with Manoah Robertson was a charter member of the Pleasant Ridge Church. Mr. H. B. Robertson sold the land that was used for the 1st church and school.

Ira G. Smith's daughter, Malissa, married Hewitt Thompson. They took over his father's store, that was once the biggest store between Lee's Junction and Warrior River. One of their daughters, Mrs. Myrtle Thompson Durrett, became a teacher and also was a member of the 1st city council. Cousins of I. G. Smith, Horace and Elisha Ray, came to Hueytown and set up stores. Their stores were located on Hueytown Road at approximately the spot where Hill's Grocery and Foodtown stood. In that location today are the Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church Family Life Center and the Hueytown Public Library. Other influential families were the Vines, Parsons and Skates.

The first church established in Hueytown was known as Pleasant Ridge Church and all denominations met there for services. Rev. E. B. Waldrop was the 1st pastor of that church which was founded in 1875. Sometime during the twenties (1920s) the Hueytown Methodist Church was organized and held services at a meeting place on Crest Road. Today this is the parsonage, and the church is located on Sunset Drive and Hueytown Road. It is one of the most beautiful churches in our city.

Vineland Park Baptist Church was organized in 1924. Rev. Pate was the 1st pastor. The present building was erected in 1925. In the last few years a Church of Christ has been built near the Old High School building and at the "Y" a Church of God now stands. At Lee's Junction, North Highlands Baptist Church was founded, and on

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Hueytown Road not far from it is the First Presbyterian Church of Hueytown. Other churches of the area are Seventh Day Adventists, Church of the Nazarene, Industrial City Baptist, Brooklane Baptist, and several newer churches built in the last few years.

The 1st school stood back of the present Pleasant Ridge Church building. Rev. M. M. Wood was one of the 1st teachers and he was also an early pastor of the church. The school was a church school and many of the items used by the school were also used by the church. The school was founded in 1902. This school lasted until sometime in the year of 1906. Many of the people of the church taught in the school. Two of the main teachers were W. B. Kyle and Mrs. Rose Robertson. The Principal was B. B. Waldrop. Although there were 30 students on roll, sometimes younger brothers and sisters would come with older kids to school. Some of the expenses of the school were:

- a load of coal @\$2.60
- stamps 19¢
- oil \$1.00
- lamp wicks 5¢
- chalk 45¢
- locks for the school \$1.20
- books \$2.25

The salary for Mr. Kyle was \$65.00 and Mrs. Robertson's salary was \$12.50.

In 1907 the school was housed in a frame building across the street from the Pleasant Ridge Church. Prof. W. R. Copeland was the principal for several years before becoming Assistant County Superintendent of Schools. Prof. T. M. Fricks succeeded Prof. Copeland, and after his retirement, Mrs. Margaret Davis became the principal. She held this job for almost 40 years. In 1948 while she was principal, the school burned down and classes were held in Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church.

The present site for the school was obtained from Bernice Dabbs, John Dabbs, and Robert Plyler. Later, land obtained from Mrs. Minnie Waldrop was added to the site. There was an exchange of property with John Dabbs. A new school was constructed by E. C. Coston in 1949. The cost of this new building amounted to \$165,946.00 and the new building included 18 classrooms, a lunchroom, offices, restrooms, etc. On February 5, 1976 an additional facility was dedicated to the Elementary School. It contained 9 classrooms, 2 multipurpose rooms, offices, etc. This addition cost the board twice that the original building cost.

In 1921, Hueytown High School was founded and Harley G. Gilmore was principal. Charles Vines, his son-in-law, succeeded him and remained principal until he was appointed to the County Superintendent's Office. In 1958 the High School moved to Dabbs Avenue. The building vacated by the High School was then occupied by W. I. Pittman Jr. High School, with Prof. Dwight Riley as Principal. In 1967 a new building was erected and began being used by the W. I. Pittman Jr. High School. This building is still in use today, located on Sunrise Blvd. and now called Pittman Middle School.

As the North Highlands area grew, a two-room school building was established to house the 1st and 2nd grades. It now holds first through fifth grades. The Principal when founded was Mrs. M. P. McIntosh.

The first organized club was the Culture Club. It was founded in 1925. The clubs are all federated by the State Federation of Clubs. A Little League program is sponsored with several teams of youngsters on Brooklane Drive and there is also a community center located there.

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Hueytown held its 1st municipal election in January of 1960. Of the 6200 persons in the city, 1371 voted. Majors Nordan was elected Mayor. The Aldermen elected were Joel P. Campbell, Prude Cowen, Sr., R. Graham Wall, Mrs. Myrtle Thompson Durrett, and Claude H. Huey. Hueytown's validity as an incorporated city was challenged in the Circuit Court. The 1st election was ruled invalid and all officials were said to be holding office without legal authority. There would be another election. The city was officially incorporated on April 29, 1960.

The next election was held on June 15, 1960. Majors Nordan was officially elected mayor. His only opponent was L. W. Jackson, and Majors Nordan won by a vote of 801 to 199. In a previous election with seven candidates running for Mayor, Nordan won by a single vote. All of the Aldermen were elected again with the exception of Claude H. Huey. David N. Kornegay was elected in his place.

Also in 1960, Frank Lester was named as Hueytown's 1st Public Safety Director. He was 38 yrs old and had the responsibilities of police and fire chief. A fire truck and other needed equipment was ordered and the city was at this time represented by a volunteer fire department.

In December of 1960 a Planning and Zoning Committee was established to seek out a site for the new City Hall to be erected. The new firetruck was to be delivered soon and there needed to be a place for its shelter. The new firetruck cost about \$14,000.

In 1962 the site for the City Hall was established and it was stated that it would be completed on September 1. It was located on Hueytown Road and the established cost was \$110,000. It accommodates the fire station and police headquarters. On January 31, 1963 the City Hall was formerly opened. At its opening there was an open house and more than 1,000 people came.

The population census was taken in 1974 indicated that there was 11,060 people living in the city. We have annexed land since then and our population has grown to over 15,000 and is growing daily.

We have a mayor-council type of government set up. There is a 4 year term for office holders. There is now a rescue service offered by the fire department. A new fire station is to be built in the Virginia Mines community to better serve our growing community. The police department is also expanding in order to handle the 911 Emergency System.

In 1965 Mayor Wallace Watson appointed the first Library Board of Hueytown. During J. P. Campbell's term books and supplies were bought and donated for the establishment of the new library. In 1969 Mrs. Mary Roberts was asked to establish a library by Steve Christian, the Chairman of the Library Board.

On June 7, 1969 the Hueytown Public Library was officially opened. It's first location was a small hallway in the City Hall Building. It was then moved to the Mayor's office (the Mayor used the office in the morning and the library used it in the afternoon). The library was then moved to the room next to the Mayor's office. When this became too small, the library was moved to the space once designated for a jail, but unused as such.

In March 1975 the library was moved to an area adjacent to the Police department, located under the City Hall building and opened in the morning and evening hours. When the City Hall expanded its facilities, the library expanded to more room. In October 1990 the library moved from the City Hall building to a facility all its own located in what is now know as "Knight's Triangle". See library history for more details (included in capsule). The library offers books, films, and needed books for people with reading problems along with many other services. Annual circulation is over 75,000 books. The library is open every day except Sunday.

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During the administration of Wade Jackson and P. E. Darden the city of Hueytown has continued to grow both residentially and commercially. Several shopping centers have been added for the convenience of residents.

During the term of P. E. Darden, the type of City Government was changed to Districts with councilmen representing a designated district.

In 1988 Lillian P. Howard began her term as Mayor. Under her administration the City continues to grow and prosper.