

Town of Geneva Incorporated

Geneva was incorporated in 1871. Thomas Nelson was the first Mayor with the princely salary of \$12.00 per month. Duncan Campbell was the first Marshall. Thomas Nelson had been a Justice of the Peace for several years. The Marshall was allowed to engage in other work and was only expected to make arrests when needed. The town then had about 20 inhabitants.

About 1880, Captain R. H. Gray commenced to run a hotel, which for several years was noted for a well kept table and other comforts. About that time, Asher & Bernstein, a firm which had occupied a store standing on Commerce Street for five or six years, sold out their stock and the members returned to their old home in Eufaula. Their stay in Geneva had been profitable as they made "good money" trading hides. Their storehouse was moved next to Kenan's Livery Stable and used for a restaurant, J. D. Holloway commenced business in the Hinson store while Asher & Bernstein were here.

About 1880 to 1885 the following newcomers are to be noted: H.H. Foster, W.T. Harper, G.W. Black, Warren, J.J. Johnson, Captain G.Y. Malone, AW. Bean, W.W. Barnett, Nace Collins, J.M. DeWitt, J.M. Jeter, Dr. S.F. Latimer, R.Y. Daniels, H.G. McLaney and Dr. H.P. Treadwell. Baldwin and Kenan, a firm composed of Samuel Baldwin and William Kenan, and Lyons & Jackson of Columbus Yarbrough & Company were all in business for a few years during the early 1880s. Nat Pace had a small confectionery and grocery store. During this time also John B. Harper and Thomas Laney, under the firm name of Harper & Laney, did a flourishing business for about five years. Dr. James Ard came about 1886, G. W. Johnson in 1887 and G. W. Williams in 1889. Mace Hutchinson and John Wilson, as Hutchinson & Wilson (saloon) had a land office business for several years during this period.

Captain Malone was for a year in partnership with J. J. Johnson. He later purchased the stock of Baldwin & Kenan and formed a partnership with Nace Collins.

A very disastrous fire occurred in Geneva in February 1888 and a great part of the business portion to the town was burned. At that time, Malone & Collins, T.J. Yarbrough, J.B. Harper, J.D. Holloway and Nat Pace were doing business on the west side of Commerce Street. All of these stores were burned and most of the contents also. T.H. Yarbrough (brother of H. C. Yarbrough) had then been merchandising for some years. He rebuilt on the same spot and erected a brick house, which was the armory of the Herbert Light Infantry. The upper room was the Masonic Hall and the Castle Hall of the Knights of Pythias. Malone and Collins built the brick storehouse occupied by C. D. Chapman &

Company. R. Tillis had the store W. C. Rogers & Company erected. The Johnson building and other brick storehouses were started and finished a few years later.

In 1888, Richard Tillis, C.A. O'Neal and George F. Emerson commenced to trade in stock and wagons in Geneva. The next year, Tillis and O'Neal started the mercantile business as partners for a short time as Holloway & Gilchrist.

From 1875 to the present time, Geneva has had a steady growth in population at present day Geneva's population is 25,764.

Some business in operation in 2001 are: The American Bank, The Citizens Bank, Hayes Tire & Auto, Ron's Firestone, The *Geneva County Reaper*, B. C. Moore & Sons, Wal-Mart, Gilstrap Drug, Center Drug, Benco Credit Union, LaMarra's Studio of Photography, Devco Restaurant, Spann's Grocery, C&M Discount Grocery, Piggly-Wiggly, JMB Discount Grocery, Briarwood Inn, Westbrook Assisted Living, Greenwood Place Assisted Living Facility, Sherwood Milling and Hardware, Geneva ACE Hardware, Commanders Heating and Cooling, Reliable Products, Outdoor Aluminum, Geneva Sheet Metal, Geneva Florist & Gift, Faye's Cut & Style Inn, Center Insurance Agency, River Oaks Golf Course, Sconyers Insurance Agency, Alfa Insurance, State Farm Insurance, Jones-Baird Chevrolet-Oldsmobile, Ward Motor Company, Martin-Farms Tractor and Convenience Store, Wiregrass Medical Center and Nursing Home.

Written and submitted by Rhonda Stone, 1569 Westmont Street, Geneva, AL

Source: Geneva County Reapers, Geneva Woman's Club Book, and Family sources

A Bit About the Town of Geneva

Early records indicate that the town of Geneva was established about 1830 at the junction of the Choctawhatchee and Talakhatchee (the Indian name for the Pea River) Rivers by a 19 year old Swiss emigrant named Henry A. Yonge. He gave the town it's name. In 1836, Geneva was the center of some of the Creek Indian uprisings. The 1850 census shows Geneva County with a population of 27 families and 255 people. In 1868 Geneva County was formed and the town of Geneva was granted a charter in it's name in 1875. Steamboats and barges on the Choctawhatchee were the main source of transportation south to the Gulf of Mexico during the early years of the town's history.

Schools and churches came early to Geneva and The Academy was one of the buildings moved from the "old" town to the "new" town after the flood of 1865. Here, school was held and circuit riders came to preach on Sunday. In the 1880's a courthouse was built and turpentine and naval stores and lumber were the big businesses of the day. Geneva

was at one time one of the largest and most important sawmill towns for miles around. Stately pine forests stretched for miles around the town. Homesteaders came in on covered wagons, drawn by oxen to engage in the lumber business. Geneva grew in importance because it had steamboat navigation. A stage coach line from Pensacola to Tallahassee, via Geneva, brought mail here twice weekly in these early days. From 1860 through the years of the Civil War, this town, like all others, was bereft of its young men. Only the old men and the young boys were left to care for and protect the women and children. The year 1865, when Lincoln was assassinated, saw Geneva's fortunes sink to their lowest level with the coming of the "Lincoln Flood".

Floods causing damage have been reported in the Geneva area as early as 1861. The "Hoover Flood" which happened in March of 1929 was the largest on record. Another big one is referred to as the "Lincoln Flood". It happened in 1865, others came in January 1925, April 1928, and April 1960 and April 1975. The "Lincoln Flood" of 1865 was the first flood to come after the town was formed. It washed away the whole town and caused the town to remove itself to higher ground from the junction of the two rivers. The flood of 1929 was the largest on record which brought 29.60 inches of rain. It was after this flood that the town built the flood levee around the town to protect itself in the future.

Submitted by Richard A. Lewis, Jr. former resident of Geneva County, Alabama
Sources: Old copies of the Geneva County Reaper, Geneva, Alabama.