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THE

GROUNDHOG

Mentone, Valley Head, Hammondville, Menlo, Cloudland
P. O. Box 387, Mentone, AL 35984

Volume 33, No. 4

“Neighborhood News from the Heart of Lookout Mountain”

April 2014

A Tribute to The Grand Old Lady--The Mentone Springs Hotel (1884-2014)

The Mentone Springs Hotel 1884

*From the minds of men with vision, I was built upon this ground.
By their hearts and craftsman hands, My beauty would be found*

*I rose against the sunset, so many years ago,
To take my place as watchman, For the valley far below.*

*My grandeur was, as promised, For all to come and see,
With songs, love, and laughter, They put the soul in me.*

*Generations came for comfort, To rest, relax and stay;
Memories of lifetimes shared, Would began anew each day.*

*From horse hooves to the sound of wheels, A time too soon began
When I would see the uphill fight, To gain my relevance once again.*

*As the seasons had so swiftly passed, (I was long since passed my prime)
Your hands reached deep inside of me, To save me just in time.*

*But the lonely years of aging, As reality has taken its toll,
Only prove that beauty was not outside, True beauty was in the soul.*

*To those I owed my existence, And all of those who loved and cared
I leave this site forever more, To fond memories we have shared.*

*So do not pass me by with sorrow now, As though nothing is left to see,
Reminisce the songs, the love and laughter
“Remember the soul in me”*

*Written by Eddie Smith
Given to Sandra and Ray Padgett
March 6, 2014*



Photo By Ray Padgett

1981



2013

Evening Shade and Friends

By Ray Padgett

She sat precarious and lonely amidst kudzu and scattered stonewalls, looking sadly like a neglected Cinderella out of a children's fairy tale. Dilapidated was an understatement – near death was a better description. The once magnificent front porch that flowed and curved around her turrets was completely gone and a grotesque concrete block “apartment” was stuck in the middle of her front entrance. Windows were missing, sideboards had lost all their paint and many were missing or hung by a single rusty nail. The visible holes in her roof stood out and seemed to be in step with the weathered and broken steeples atop each turret. Kudzu was slowly beginning to climb the stone foundation. This is the picture that grabbed my family and me when we rounded the last little curve coming into Mentone from our first Desoto Falls picnic.

While everyone's mouth was open in amazement, no one spoke, until finally Sandra said “She is going to die” and then “we have got to save her”. These words shaped and molded my family's every activity for the next ten years – our relationship with the Mentone Springs Hotel will remain in our hearts and minds for the rest of our lives. We purchased her on Sandra's birthday, October 23, 1980 and we began the single-minded task of saving the Mentone Springs Hotel. Almost every weekend of the decade we owned it was spent breathing life into the Grand Old Lady.

We were always amazed at the people willing to help: Sandy made the butterfly windows, Will lent his construction knowledge and expertise, Prez cooked and helped with hammer and nail, the Peterson boys repaired and shingled the roof, Carl helped level the building, Jack added the porch, Richard fixed doors and windows, and Terry picked and sang at night. Everyone pitched in when we replaced the east wing. Some were paid, but most just volunteered their time and labor. Many, many more helped with emptying the building of pipe organ pipes and parts (every room and hallway was full), constant scraping, cleaning and painting. It seemed Mentone, and



Photo By Ray Padgett

Painting Turret - 1983

all its visitors, had stories to tell and advice to give. At times it was more of a social event than a construction project.

Most of the construction details of saving the hotel have faded in the past thirty years; however, some linger like memories of old friends. These are some of the things we did that now appear foolhardy, impossible and a little scary. This was done with friends who volunteered, because no sane construction crew would do it or because we had no money to have it done.

The steep roof belied the rotten decking underneath and many a foot broke through before it was all repaired. When the roof was on, Bob cut an oak steeple for each turret and my newfound friends and I pushed it up through

the hole and attached it securely in place. Then “someone” went up on the roof and sealed around the new steeple. With rented nail gun and ladder, Prez and I repaired, replaced and re-nailed every exterior board on the old hotel.

Carl spent many weekends “leveling” floors and replacing floor and ceiling boards, major columns, and beams in the main lobby. However, our most innovative project was replacing the main sills on the west wing. We rented railroad jacks from Southern Rail in Atlanta and raised the entire wing, poured concrete footings, and replaced the rotten sills – all over a three-day weekend.

Julia calls that decade our Mentone “Daze” – our free time was spent working on the hotel and it seemed we were always broke. Yet this was probably the most enjoyable and rewarding period of our lives. Our efforts to save the hotel brought us in contact with a steady stream of interesting people with diverse backgrounds, and we are still friends with many today. In fact, most of our good friends we met as a result of the purchase and work on the Mentone Springs Hotel. We were fortunate to have been stewards of her for such a long period of time. We are happy that others continued to improve “our” grand old building.

The Mentone Springs Hotel had recaptured some of her former glory before the end. She was a special place for folks to meet, relax, talk and become friends. The Mentone Springs Hotel was a direct tie to Mentone's immediate past. She reminded everyone of the joys of a slower pace of life, of sauntering and of sitting in the evening shade sipping ice tea. This is a memory worth preserving.

Something will rise in her place that reflects the heart and soul of Mentone and its people, but she will live on in the memory of those who enjoyed her hospitality.

Note: We have included some pictures of the hotel taken within the first year or two of our stewardship.

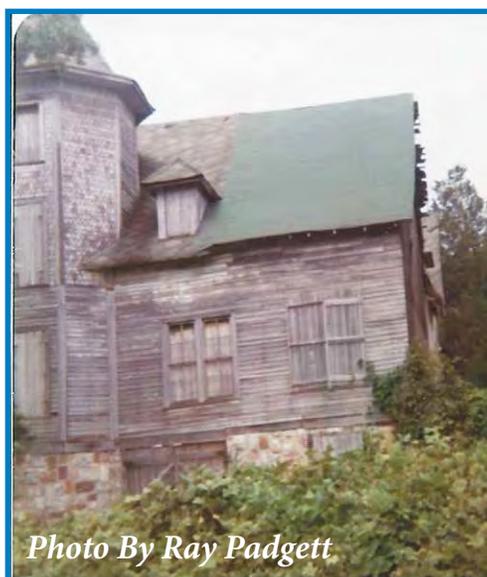


Photo By Ray Padgett

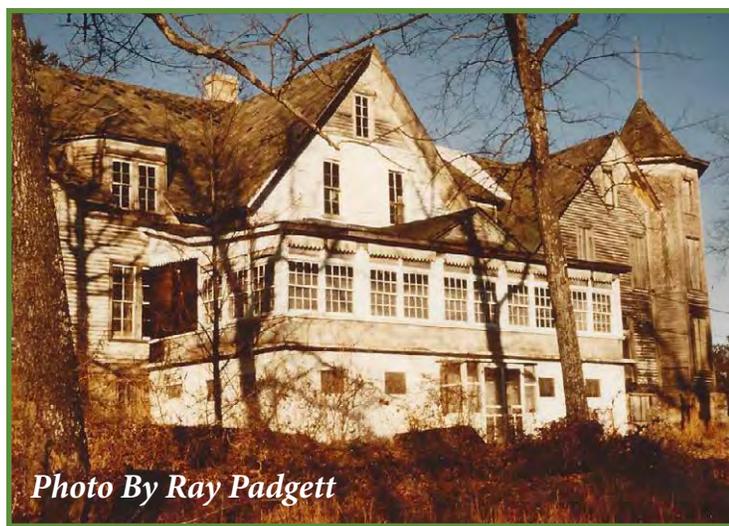


Photo By Ray Padgett

Left - Ragged edge shows where east wing had been removed; middle - hotel in 1980; right - spring 1981

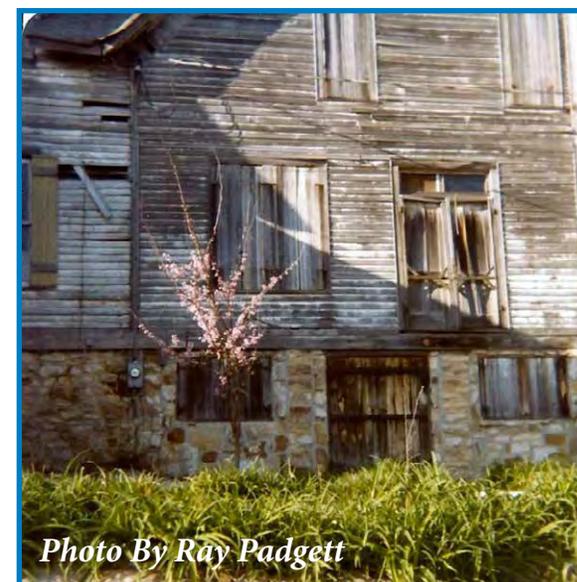


Photo By Ray Padgett

THE GROUNDHOG

P. O. Box 387
Mentone, AL 35984

Published monthly by the Mentone Area Preservation Association, MAPA was first conceived on Groundhog Day, 1982, and organized April 5, 1982, for the purpose of preserving and protecting the heritage, natural environment and other unique qualities of life in the Mentone area, and is chartered as a 501c3 non-profit corporation.



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Mentone Matters

By Mayor Rob Hammond



The first time I saw the Mentone Springs Hotel was in 1961. I was eleven years old and a camper at Camp Laney. On Sundays, the whole camp would hike from Laney to Brow Park for a picnic supper. Coach Laney did not want us leaving the mountain without viewing a sunset. ("Boys, boys, look at that beautiful sunset!") Our route took us up Cutler

and we crossed 117 at the hotel. We didn't know the name of it and it appeared unoccupied. The hotel was in bad need of a paint job, and some of the windows were broken out. It did not take much convincing from the veteran campers that the place was haunted. We would quicken our pace when we walked by it.

My first adult experience inside the hotel took place at a MAPA forum for candidates the first time I ran for mayor in the 80's. My opponent was Bruce Bon Fleur, and we were given the opportunity to speak and answer questions. It was all civil and good natured.

In subsequent years, San and I enjoyed many meals there with family and friends. Any time we brought out-of-town guests, they left impressed with the hotel and its restoration.

The last time I was there for an event was last fall. The municipal district clerk's meeting was held there. After lunch Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs Director Jim Byard spoke. When I left, he was outside taking pictures of the hotel.

From The Editor

This month's issue is bittersweet for all of us. Following the devastating loss of our beloved Mentone Springs Hotel and what was originally its annex, the White Elephant Galleries, on March 1st, MAPA board members voted to devote the entire April issue of The Groundhog to memories of the two historic structures. We've invited local residents to share their memories of these historic buildings, and the heartwarming stories in this issue may give you some idea of the impact these buildings had on Mentone life.

It is especially tragic that the hotel was lost in the year of its 130th anniversary. Owners Jim and Darlene Rotch had several celebratory public events planned throughout the year. Interior and exterior renovations were in the works, including a new landscape design that would transform the parking area in front of the hotel into a rose garden.

We've enjoyed reading the submissions from local residents and trust you will too. Especially interesting is Ray Padgett's account of the work that went into saving the hotel from complete collapse, thus laying the foundation for a process of restoration that continued for several decades.

Although I wasn't a resident of Mentone as a child, I spent many, many weekends here visiting all the grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins who were residents here. I guess I was having too much fun to pay much attention to the hotel or the White Elephant...until Mom and her sister tried to talk Dad and her sister's husband into buying the White Elephant back in the 70's. I remember walking through the building with them as they examined it. I have a vivid memory of looking up and seeing the wonderful skylight over the staircase, and then finding the original cast iron bathtubs in all the bathrooms. I fell in love with the place immediately, and was quite disappointed when Dad and my uncle wouldn't buy the place.

The destruction of the hotel and White Elephant are perhaps the greatest structural loss in Mentone's

history, but Mentone did not die with them. This community will survive, even thrive, despite the loss. With an active arts council pulling in artists from throughout the South, plans being developed for a multipurpose community building, the recent opening of several new businesses, and a town council that supports growth and tourism, Mentone is on the upswing and will continue to be, despite a struggling national economy. We truly believe our best days are ahead.

By Doreen Crow Waters

for The Mentone Area Preservation Association, Inc.
Board of Directors



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Grand Dames

If the Mentone Springs, a hotel, was the heart of the historical district of Mentone, then it seems fitting that the heart of our family, Kathryn McDorman, would have known it and loved it for almost one hundred years.

Mother first came to Mentone while a young teacher in Gadsden in the mid-1920s. Her chums in Gadsden came to Mentone to dance at the hotel and the Hitching Post. My naive young mother found these outings a bit "wild," and as she told her tales to generations of her children and grandchildren, we all smiled at how innocent that entertainment really was. She well remembered ascending the mountain over ridges of eroded shale rock, drawn by horse cart. That always seemed unimaginable to us, accustomed as we were to highway travel. Years later we all reported feeling a ripple of excitement as we started up the mountain; and as the hotel came into view, our excitement peaked.

After our parents married in 1929 and spent part of their honeymoon in Mentone, mother became a regular visitor to the mountain. In fact, we always stayed for the summer, or a good part of it, at our family place down the road; but throughout the years, mother always insisted that special events and times be celebrated at "the old hotel." Over the next four decades, as the hotel's fortunes rose and fell, she watched: sometimes in dismay, sometimes in celebration. Whenever it was opened and offered meals; however, we could always be found enjoying the atmosphere and the food. She was so delighted when the Padgetts saved the building and MAPA was born, but the great hotel was not yet restored to its full glory until Andy Talton and Mark Elaqua assumed ownership. Mother declared that--like a long absent friend--the hotel was truly back more like she remembered it. By those years, she was increasingly frail and gradually lost her sight. We are so grateful that the last image that she had of her old friend was that of elegance and class...sort of like mother,

By The McDorman Family

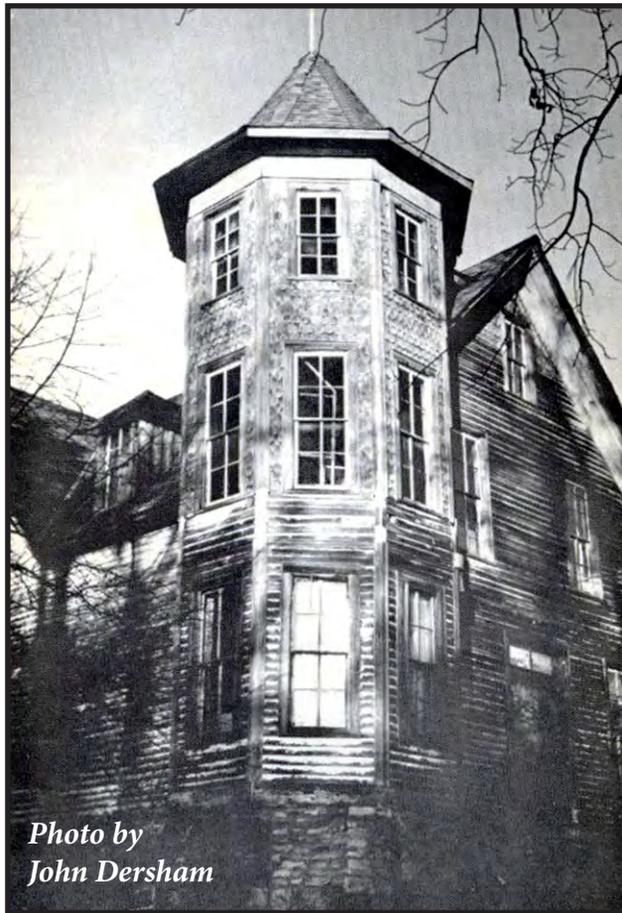


Photo by
John Dersham

herself. Andy and Mark more than returned the admiration. When a family friend married upstairs in the ballroom, and mother could not climb stairs, those two strong men scooped her up on their arms and carried her upstairs so that she could hear the wedding vows and toast the bride and groom.

On Kathryn McDorman's one hundredth birthday, Andy and Mark insisted upon giving a party for her to celebrate the special day with Mentone family. Once again, mother was back with her beloved friend, the Mentone Springs Hotel; and as she celebrated her centennial, the hotel itself turned one hundred twenty-two. It was a happy birthday indeed as the Grand Dames bowed in tribute to one another and to the staying power and fortitude both had shown over the years. In what proved to be Kathryn's



1954 photo found at the hotel after Ray and Sandra Padgett bought it.



Photo from Dorma and Terry Hutcheson



Roof repair in 1981 - Photo By Ray Padgett

waning years, she died two years later; the hotel survived her by six years...both the woman and the place symbols of elegance, endurance and gracious Southern hospitality.

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In the Shadow of the Old Hotel

By Julia Padgett

It's an odd thing growing up in a rotting castle. Maybe it is the juxtaposition of being so young in such an old thing, or maybe it's all of that space to ramble around and hide from the world. Whatever it is, there is no doubt that the Mentone Springs Hotel had an impact on me. Not the fascinating people I met or the childhood friends and my cousins I played hide-and-seek with. Not all the nature that surrounded it --- Beauty Springs, DeSoto Falls, the brow. Not even all the oddities that I stumbled on that were abandoned by its previous owners. Absolutely all of those things changed my life and impacted me, but that is not what this is about. What I'm referring to here is something else ---the space and place that was the old hotel.

I was not quite ten years old when I first crossed the threshold. My first memory of its inner being was the basement. That is where Norville Hall lived and eventually where my family stayed. There was little to no natural light --- but the small amount that came through revealed two plastic sidelight windows next to the opening that led to the dungeon. We called it the dungeon--- but it was a cellar that had a massive four foot wide wooden beam door. Between the eerie red lights and the bellowing



Photo by John Dersham - 1999

sound of the dungeon door my imagination ran dark fairly quickly. The floors were slate black and the air was damp even on that late summer day. To say I was hesitant to enter would be to put it mildly and the goose bumps on my arms stood out as a testament to my fear. But my parents and brother entered, so naturally I followed. It's the plight of being the youngest (or maybe that's a gift).

After that, the old hotel and I began an understanding with each other. It had a captive audience of a ten-year-old girl and it cast a spell on me. The sudden shadows, the creaks, the groans of old wood, the oddly placed doors and handrails, the angles, those fantastic turret rooms --- all of them blended into a hodgepodge of fantasies. "What was that? Did you see that?" My skin would crawl with the

unknown. Those abandoned rooms needed airing out. So that's what we did. We lightened the load on the structure. We put a roof on. And painted and painted and painted again. And the place flowed with people---the curious passersby, friends, strangers, family. All those dark corners would ebb almost to nothing and the fireplace glowed doubt away.

But in the two years I lived in it with mom and Duncan, during the week it would go back to being a rotting castle. Some of the shadows would reclaim a room and fix their place in my mind again. A place I had previously walked with head held high would find me wide eyed and terrified all over again. My bravery wilted in the quiet of the Mentone Springs Hotel's dusty halls and stairs. The building didn't seem ready to change and no one else seemed to notice but me. Indeed, my dad would come up on the weekends straight from Atlanta and tackle this and tackle that. The flow of helping friends converged. Prez would make spaghetti and meatballs, Terry would pick guitar and sing, Sandy would lend one hand and drink with the other, dad directed traffic and made sure none of us were too idle for too long, mom laughed and talked, and everyone got covered in dirt. And that is the slow way to change a building.

And change it did---and we did with it. I stopped trying to escape to the outside so much. I even began staying upstairs and out of the dungeon. The windows seem to let more light in and the walls took on brighter and lighter colors. The rotten boards were replaced. Some of the groans subsided. The old lady began to feel herself again and remember who she was as more and more life poured through the doors. May we all be so lucky to let light in. Rest in peace MSH-I'm glad you found yourself before the end.

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THE MENTONE SPRINGS HOTEL AND ME

By Linda Brown

The first time I came to Mentone I was thirteen years of age. I came with a Mentone summer person who was planning a party. She asked me and another girl from the neighborhood to come with her to serve the food to her guests. We came through Valley Head, and I still remember the awe I felt when I saw the Mentone Springs Hotel. It was the largest building I had ever seen for people to stay in. The lady knew its history and told us all about it. I remember wondering if the community respected this building as it should be. Little did I know that I was destined to learn the answer.

Four years later, I came to Mentone in a baby blue Ford. I was dating a Mentone boy, and he came to see me on Sunday afternoon. We went to the Mentone Methodist Church (later United) youth program at night. Every Sunday, I saw the Hotel standing guard over the town. Always, I looked to see how much of the wonderful building I could see as we came to the top of the mountain.

Fate would have it that I would marry this young man, and I would form a bond of my own with the Hotel. Soon after our marriage, we moved to Mentone and were never far from the cross roads and the hotel. As the years went on, I learned more and more how the Grand Old Lady, as she came to be called, influenced the lives of Mentone folks. It stood as a memory to another lifestyle.

Then little by little the hotel got into a sad state of disrepair. The boards fell off of the walls and holes came in the roof. Most important was that the doors were never locked and the local boys found the perfect place to party. This must have been in the late sixties. I think that it was about

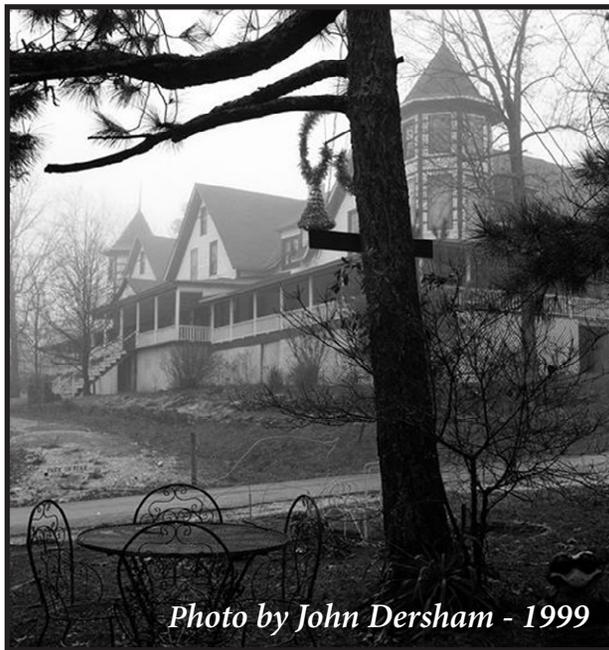


Photo by John Dersham - 1999

this time that a man who must have owned it used it to store organ parts.

The community did not abandon the hotel. Several groups tried to come up with enough money to buy the hotel. I was a member of the board of The Heritage Foundation. Our sole intent was to buy and preserve the hotel as a community center and a museum. With the help of donations and grants, we came up with enough to buy the hotel but quickly determined that we could not

afford insurance and daily upkeep. We dropped our offer to buy, refunded what money we could and used the rest for projects around town.

It was a happy day when I realized that someone had purchased the hotel and was repairing it. Over several years and several owners, the hotel was restored to its original state and was being used as a Bed and Breakfast. The lights were always on, and it was always a welcome sight as we came to the top of the mountain.

On Saturday, March 1, 2014, my daughter came into the room and said the words I had hoped to not live to hear--The Hotel is burning. I knew that many were going to watch as we lost our Grand Old Lady but I could not go. I could not move from my chair. Finally, on Sunday afternoon my husband drove me up to see. A quick look was all that I could muster and I cried.

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**THE
RECIPE CORNER
BY
ANGIE CARDEN**

The Lady

Having been born and raised here, I have a lifetime of memories of the Mentone Springs Hotel. I recall as a small child, riding by and being amazed at her towering presence. I knew that she was the largest “house” I would ever see. She was, in my mind, the “castle” in Mentone.

When I was in elementary school, my grandfather ran the Mentone Inn. My great-grandmother cooked there. I spent so much time at the Inn, gazing across the street at my “castle”. I day dreamed that some day, I would walk right into that castle! I had plenty of time to study her from the back entrance as well. I stayed at my Aunt Ruby’s quite often, which was right behind the hotel. One day, I must have been around ten years old, I was at my Aunt’s house, playing with my cousin Connie. And the impossible happened! We were invited for a “play date” with my cousin’s friend, Julia. I was excited until I found out that her parents owned the hotel and that was where we were going, then I became ecstatic! (Thank you Ray and Sandra for having a daughter near my age!!!) As we walked across Aunt Ruby’s lawn to the parking lot of the hotel, I could not feel my legs. My stomach was full of butterflies! Julia met us out back and led us into the entrance. I have no recollection of what

we girls did that day, my memory is of stepping inside and attempting to soak in everything I saw as I stood there awestruck!

A couple of years later, while I was taking gymnastics, tap and ballet from Gail Jones, we had to change venues and every Tuesday night, we met for class...in the hotel! Once again, I was inside my beautiful castle.

Later, while I was in high school, I had a good friend named Nancy. And if you can believe it, Nancy lived in the hotel with her mother, local artist Lucy Mitchell. I was in utter disbelief! But oh so fortunate to spend many nights with Nancy in my “castle”!

In 1988, I found myself inside the hotel once more for my Sweet 16th birthday party! That is certainly the birthday I will never forget!

Twenty-four years later, my oldest daughter had her picture made in front of the hotel before her senior prom.

I feel blessed to have had the Mentone Springs Hotel share my childhood with me and to grace my children’s lives. I will feel a great void, for the rest of my days, each time I pass her lonely hill. Thank you to the “Lady” for so many wonderful memories.

April Birthdays

- April 1 – Michele Kincer
- April 2 - Milton Chambers
- April 2 – Ellie Cox
- April 2 - Jayken Lawton
- April 3 – Ray Padgett
- April 4 – Jamie Vest
- April 4 – Mina Blalock
- April 4 – Sherry Barkley
- April 5 – Kaitlyn Dean
- April 5 – Jana Goss
- April 6 – Jennifer Cruse
- April 6 – John Chambers
- April 6 – Ethel Manifold
- April 7 – Shannon Chappell

- April 7 – Kansas Lee
- April 7 – Priscilla Monroe
- April 8 – Angie Lawton
- April 8 – Jackson Rosson
- April 8 – Sharon Coots
- April 9 – Josh Goss
- April 10 - Brittany Bain
- April 10 – Newly Ingram
- April 10 – Paul Ethan Blackwell
- April 10- Lindsey Webb
- April 10 – Lisa Moore
- April 11 – Jordan Beasley
- April 11 – Joey Garrett
- April 11 – Josie Crider
- April 12 – Kyle Coots
- April 12 – Haley Battles
- (in memory of)
- April 13 – Brian Blalock
- April 14 – Carl Tubberville
- April 14 – Georgette McGee

- (in memory of)
- April 15 – Tim Carden
- (in memory of)
- April 15 – Barbara Busby Rape
- April 16 – Preston Kirby
- April 16 – Danny Hopper
- April 16 – Al Blackburn
- April 17 – Ann Cash Harrell
- April 18 – Taylor Verdon
- April 18 – Shan Smith
- April 19 – Butch Manifold
- April 20 – Lane Ingram
- April 20 – Brenda Clinton
- April 21 – Charlene Smith
- April 22 – Thelma Coots
- April 23 – Lauren McGee
- April 23 – John P. Smith Jr.
- April 24 – Courtney Meadows
- April 25 – Cooper Kirby
- April 26 – Molly Manifold

- April 26 – Eloise Lance
- April 26 – John Moore
- April 26 – Phyllis James
- April 27 – Kaden Johnson
- April 27 – Emily Miller
- April 28 – Stacey Bowman
- April 28 – Austin Reed
- April 30 – Mandi Browder Goza
- April 30 – Shane McMahan

April Anniversaries

- April 1 – Raymond & Sharon Coots
- April 7 – Milton & Gail Chambers
- April 11 – Nathan & Lacie Keith

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Mentone Springs Hotel - Early Years

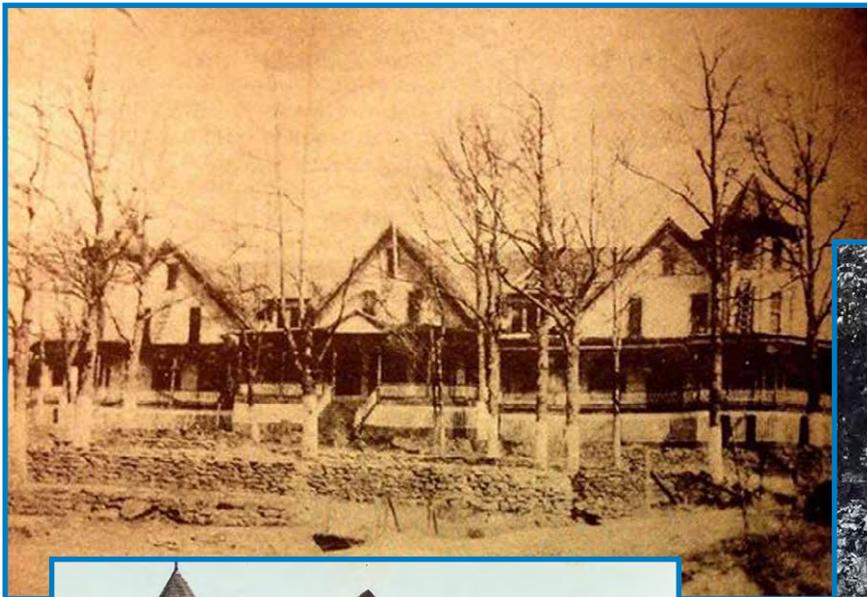
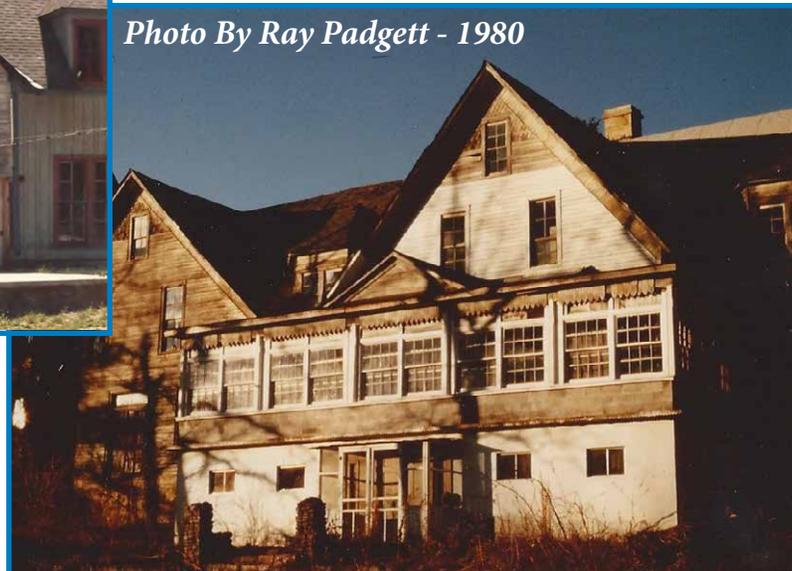


Photo By Ray Padgett - 1980



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MABEL CROW (KIRKI), INSET

A WALTZ AT MENTONE SPRINGS

THE YEAR WAS 1920, AND MABEL CROW WAS A YOUNG GIRL OF THIRTEEN. SHE HAD JUST GOTTEN HER FIRST JOB AS A MEMBER OF THE HOUSEKEEPING STAFF AT THE MENTONE SPRINGS HOTEL, AND LIFE WAS PROVING TO BE VERY EXCITING.

"I TOOK FRESH LINENS TO THE ROOMS AS THE GUEST NEEDED THEM," MABEL SAID, "AND I DUSTED THE FURNITURE IN THE LOBBY DAILY." THE PAY WAS ONE DOLLAR PER DAY, AND THE HOUSEKEEPING STAFF LIVED AT THE HOTEL. THE HOTEL WAS PROSPERING IN THOSE DAYS, AND ACCOMMODATED ABOUT 200 GUESTS. GAS LIGHTS WERE USED TO ILLUMINATE THE BUILDING, AND THE MEALS WERE PREPARED BY A COOK NAMED ROSA WHO "MADE THE MOST DELICIOUS PIES AND YEAST BREADS."

THAT SUMMER, YOUNG MABEL WAS INTRODUCED TO THE BEAUTY OF CLASSICAL MUSIC. SHE WOULD HIDE BEHIND THE DINING ROOM DOORS AND LISTEN TO THE ORCHESTRA PRACTICE FOR THE EVENING PROGRAM. THE FURNITURE WOULD BE PLACED ALONG THE WALLS, AND GUESTS WOULD DANCE BENEATH THE GAS LIGHT ON POLISHED WOODEN FLOORS.

ON ONE PARTICULAR EVENING, AS MABEL LISTENED IN HER USUAL PLACE, THE YOUNG DOORMAN SPIED HER THERE AND SPOKE, "WOULD YOU LIKE TO DANCE A WALTZ WITH ME?" "BUT I CANNOT DANCE," MABEL REPLIED. "OH YES YOU CAN" TOMMY ZIEGLER SAID AS HE REACHED HIS HAND TO HER, "COME."

MRS. PHILLIPS, THE VIOLINIST, BEGAN TO PLAY THE LILTING STRAINS OF THE BLUE DANUDE AND THE BROWN-EYED BOY OF FIFTEEN, FAR FROM HOME, WHIRLED THE YOUNG MOUNTAIN GIRL

YEARS LATER WHEN MABEL'S OWN YOUNG DAUGHTER, AMELIA, WALTZED IN THE SPOT LIGHT WITH HER PARTNER, MABEL REMEMBERED HER OWN DANCE WITH THE HANDSOME JEWISH BOY AT THE GRAND OLD HOTEL. "HER GOWN WAS GOLD, AND THERE WERE GOLDEN SLIPPERS ON HER FEET," MABEL REFLECTED, "AND SHE WAS AS LOVELY AS I FELT ON THAT DAY IN MY 13TH SUMMER."



THESE GIRLS ASSISTED MRS. MILLER, HOUSEKEEPER AT THE HOTEL DURING THE SUMMER, 1920. FRONT, (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) MRS. APPEGGATE, RACK, BUTL...

Article published in The Groundhog, May 1987.

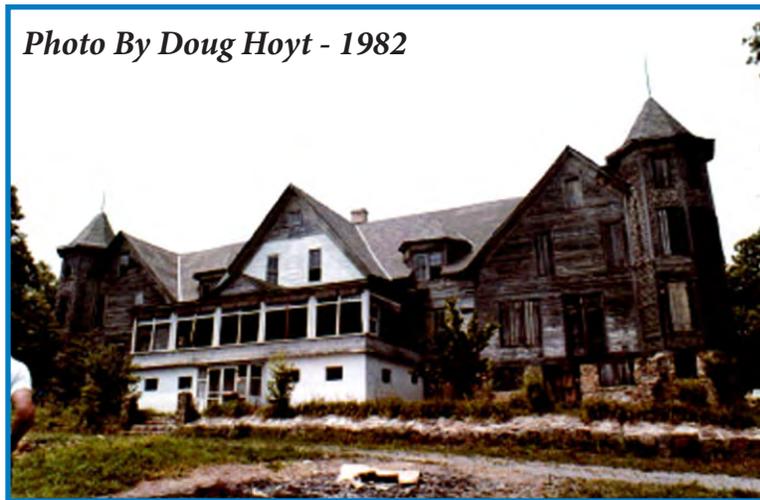


Photo By Doug Hoyt - 1982



Photo By Dorma Hutcheson

James Bryan and Terry Hutcheson playing in back of hotel - 1983.



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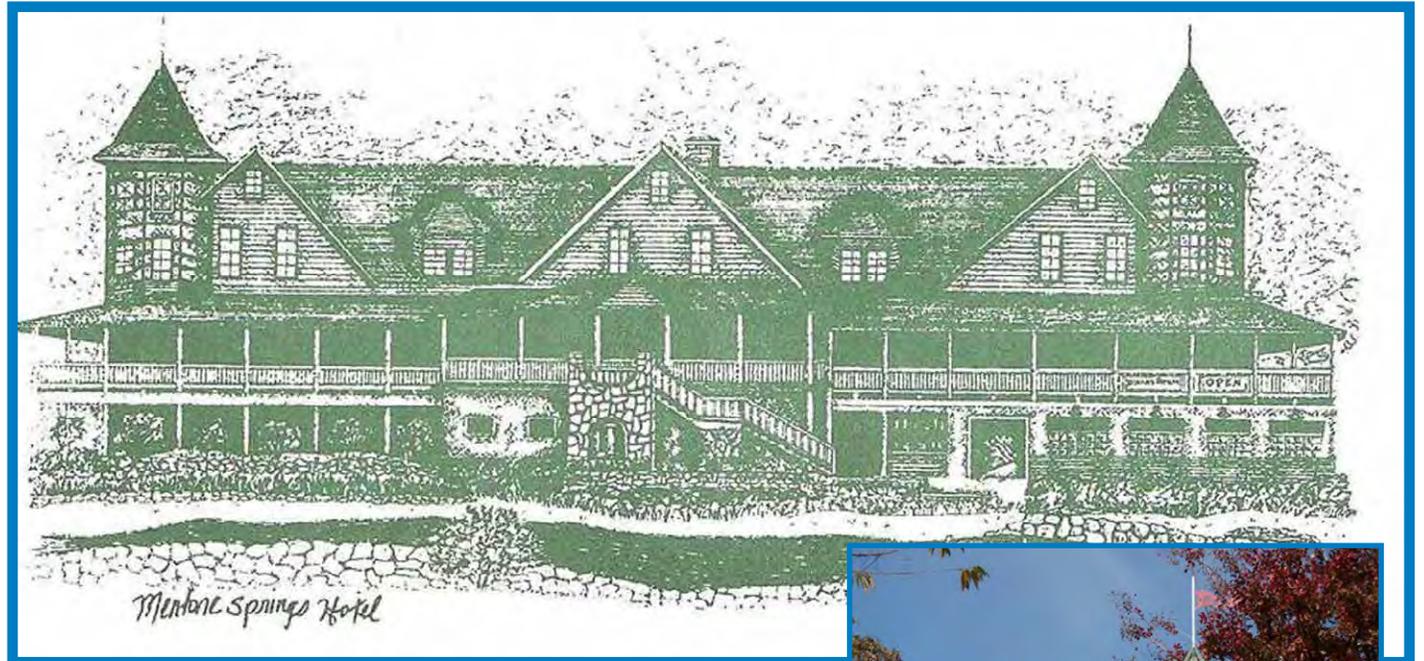


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THE GRAND OLD LADY IN HER PRIME...

Thank you to everyone for the kind words of support and sharing wonderful memories of the Mentone Springs Hotel and White Elephant. Please keep them coming--we, and everyone in our little mountain town--mourn this loss and take comfort in the stories and photos you've shared of great times had by all. A special thank you to all of the firefighters and police from Mentone and surrounding towns who have so much heart and tried to save an icon."

Darlene & Jim Rotch



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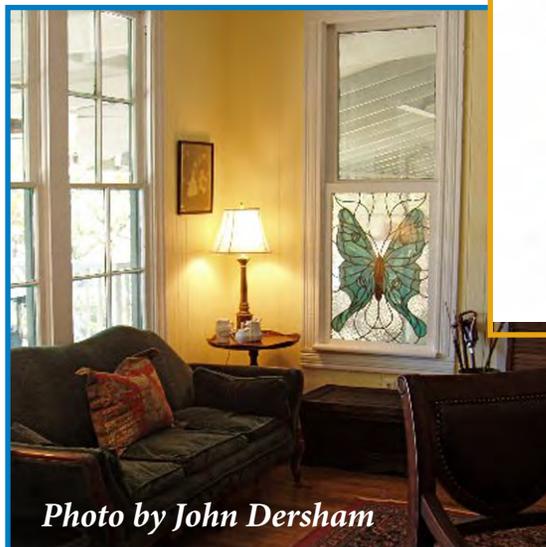


Photo by John Dersham



Photo by John Dersham



Thank You Jim and Darlene Rotch for allowing us to use photographs from the Mentone Springs Hotel Facebook Page.



Request for Films of the Mentone Springs Hotel

We are considering the production of a DVD of the Mentone Springs Hotel. Its history and beauty have been the heart and soul of Mentone. With stills and film combined, we can preserve it's history in a DVD. Any format can be duplicated and returned. Please contact Cloudland Productions, Chuck Peters, cloudland@mindspring.com, 706-398-0078.

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Volunteers....We Depend On Them

By Kayla Worthey

March 1, 2014, started out like any other regular Saturday night for us. My family and I went to dinner at the Moonlight Bistro with friends, both of whom happen to be volunteer fire fighters. After ordering our food, we enjoyed some casual conversation among ourselves and with some friends who made their way into the restaurant. Our appetizers and salads were served while waitresses scurried around taking orders, refilling drinks and conversing with patrons. Then our food arrived and with it came a call across the fire radio. At 7:45pm, North Lookout Mountain Fire Protection District was being dispatched to a fire that appeared to be next door to us. The coordinated chaos that followed was indescribable.

Because the Mentone Springs Hotel and the White Elephant were both wooden structures, constructed of mostly pine, and so close in proximity, the NLMFPD had set up a pre-plan. According to Fire Chief Joseph Lee and Assistant Chief Toby Manifold, the fire department had begun planning about eight years ago, knowing that if it ever happened, they would need all of the assistance they could get. They walked through both structures to familiarize themselves with the layouts, planned truck locations in relation to hydrants, studied the surroundings, and met with many county officials, local departments and town business

owners.

That all sounds very easily coordinated, but when you actually take into consideration the vast numbers that makes up those county officials, local departments and business owners, that list becomes a whole lot more complicated. After confirming that "The Grand Ole Lady", as she was sometimes referred, had reported the fire in its building, NLMFPD arrived on the scene within minutes and began showering the building with water. All surrounding buildings were evacuated, which was part of the pre-plan as a precaution, and additional fire departments were dispatched. Those departments that responded were Valley Head Volunteer Fire Department, Hammondville Volunteer Fire Department, Ider Volunteer Fire Department, Henagar Volunteer Fire Department, Dogtown Volunteer Fire Department, Shiloh Volunteer Fire Department, Adamsburg Volunteer Fire Department and two Fort Payne Fire and Rescue squads.

Sand Mountain Electric Coop is always called to structure fires. This is necessary to disconnect the structure's power, separating electricity from the fire, making it safe for firemen to spray water on the burning building and to keep live power lines and service entrance wires from causing harm on the ground. Two SMEC crews were called to the scene.

Mentone Police, Valley Head Police, DeKalb

County Sheriff's Department and Alabama State Troopers were requested to assist with traffic control on AL Hwy 117 and connecting streets. Mentone and Fort Payne Water Departments were contacted for assistance with water capacities and pump distribution. Both departments had men on-site for hours. DeSoto Rescue Squad, DeKalb Ambulance Service, and DeKalb County Emergency Management Agency were all on stand-by and ready to aid if needed.

Alabama Forestry Commission was called in to handle some small fires that were started due to heavy embers blowing from the fires. They fought wood fires for many hours.

Chief Lee said, "On behalf of myself and my department, I would like to thank every department and individual who assisted us, and to the other Fire Departments, we really appreciate everything; you were the bloodlines to our heart. I am so proud and appreciative of everyone's effort."



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Cynthia Stinson of the Mentone Inn nominated the North Lookout Mountain Fire District for the "Pay it Forward" segment of WHNT Channel 19 in Huntsville. Clarissa McLain of WHNT presented David Tucker \$319 CASH on March 17. Stinson said, "These guys go above and beyond the call of community service." They are diligent in keeping our roads safe during ice and snow. They assist the Police Department and Rescue Squad. They are an all-around great group of guys, and we appreciate them. They deserve our gratitude.....all year! The segment aired on Monday, March 24, 2014, at 6:30 on WHNT.

A Newbie's Observation

By John Carr

I am a newbie to Mentone. My first visit to the mountain was on December 28, 2013. Within five short weeks I had closed on the purchase of a cabin on the western brow. When I first walked out on the property and looked over the valley below it grabbed me, and I said I must have this for my family and the generations to follow. And thus my family is blessed to have it.

I could write an article on being a newbie, and my first impressions of mountain life, of the diverse group of wonderful people I have met, of how a flatlander from Florida Gulf Coast fell in love with this mountain, and how his Jeremiah Johnson yearnings have finally been met; but with the events of Saturday March 1, I must say something about the tragic loss of the landmark Mentone Springs Hotel.

Since I only knew of the hotel for less than a month, I can speak without a long emotional attachment. On that night, I had left Mentone headed home to the Florida panhandle. I was approaching Montgomery when I got a call from my dear friend Sandra Padgett, telling me the horrific news of the fire. In her voice I could feel the pain and loss--it was as if a love one had died.

I immediately turned around and drove back to Mentone, if for no other reason then to act as a new member of the community and help in any way possible, even if that was just to give Sandra a hug. Arriving and seeing the smoldering ashes of this proud building was disturbing.

It was a sad time for this community, but as grand as the old lady hotel was, and she was grand, she did not define Mentone and this mountain community--and certainly her fire and destruction will not define this community.



No, what has defined and will define this mountain community are the wonderful people who have lived their entire lives here and those who have decided to move here. The folks who choose to live on this mountain hear something others just do not hear.

Mentonians hear the music in the wind, feel the trees budding, search for wildflowers, and wait with anticipation to hear in the valley below the late afternoon train whistle. They embrace the cold and plan festivals for the spring flowers. They appreciate the natural beauty of this mountain and willingly take on the role of being good stewards for these natural beauties. But most importantly, they especially and deeply care about each other. Following the tragic fire, the hugs were often and everywhere--neighbor seeing after neighbor. In my humble opinion, that is what defines this beautiful mountain community of Mentone.

In a brief time, I have realized that along with natural beauty this little town also has personal dignity and a love for their neighbor. I am proud to be a newbie member of this community.

The Heart of Mentone

By Elaine Gauldin

Through the years when we visited Mentone, I sadly viewed the neglected and weathered shell, trying to imagine her past. The porch, completely fallen away, must have been a favorite place for ladies in white summer dresses and men in light suits and straw bowlers to sit enjoying the mild weather. It was the 70's when I first trespassed inside; the back door was the only human entrance. Obviously, animals had found other places to enter and birds flew in and out through the many missing windowpanes, building nests. Bird droppings and shells littered the floor from the hatching young. The leaking, sagging roof had allowed rain to damage the floors and walls. The building was destined to collapse from neglect.

Thankfully, in the 1980's Sandra and Ray Padgett rescued her and the arduous task of restoration began. Endless hours of loving labor as well as money began the slow recovery. Through the years, subsequent owners continued to build on the foundation of their dreams. Through borrowed years, we have enjoyed memories of meals, music and especially friends sitting leisurely on the porch.

Recently some unknowing soul said, "The heart of Mentone is gone." We live in a place of indescribable beauty and a mysterious aura of peace. Mentonians are uniquely unjudgemental and unpretentious. It is not important to know who you might have been or who you knew in your past life. Differences are embraced with an appreciation for artists, writers and dreamers. Volunteer spirit is evidenced around us with the attention to Moon Lake School, lunches for seniors, scout leaders, our dedicated Volunteer Fire Department and so many others. This is the true "Heart of Mentone."



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Mountain Fog: Good Times Ain't Over For Good

By DeSoto Red

I've got a lot of thoughts about The Mentone Springs Hotel swirling around in my old red head today, neighbor. It's pretty obvious that a lot of us are going to miss that old gal. She was, without a doubt, "The Grand Old Lady of Mentone."

I think it best to let some of them more eloquent speaking folks eulogize our fallen lady. I've got a different mission. I'm here today to tell you about Merle Haggard! Well, more specifically, I'm here to talk about a song old Merle wrote way back in 1981. That song has a lot to do with all of us here in Mentone today. The name of the song is "Are the Good Times Really Over for Good?"

Merle's song gives a few examples of wonderful times in the past and then asks if the good times are over for good. He gives a few more wonderful examples and poses his

question again. You remember. He had lines like "When a girl could still cook and still would" and "Back before Nixon lied to us all on TV." Anyway, the very last line of Merle's song is: "The good times ain't over for good". I'm here today to echo those same words: The good times ain't over for good.

Losing The White Elephant and The Mentone Springs Hotel is a tremendous tragedy for our little town. Together, these two majestic buildings were backdrops or stages for more than a century of good times and precious memories. They were backdrops and stages for the magic of Mentone. As close as they came, these two man made structures fell short of the natural beauty that surrounds our little town. And the magic, the real magic of Mentone is the people.

Today we need to tuck The White Elephant and The Mentone Springs Hotel into a special corner of our hearts and move on. They should never be forgotten. We need to also remember, as foreign as it might seem right now, the good times ain't over for good.

I'll see you next time neighbor.

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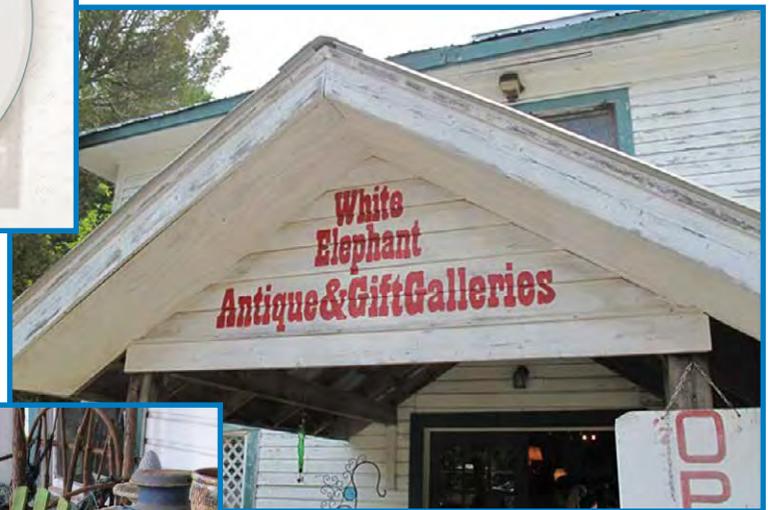
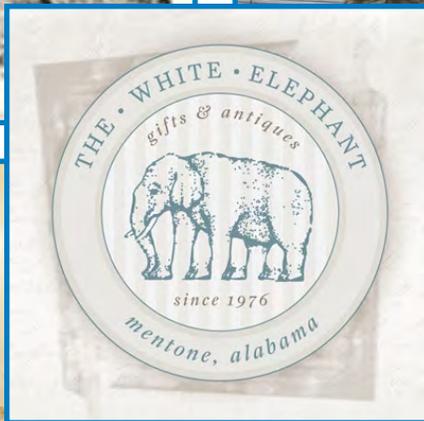
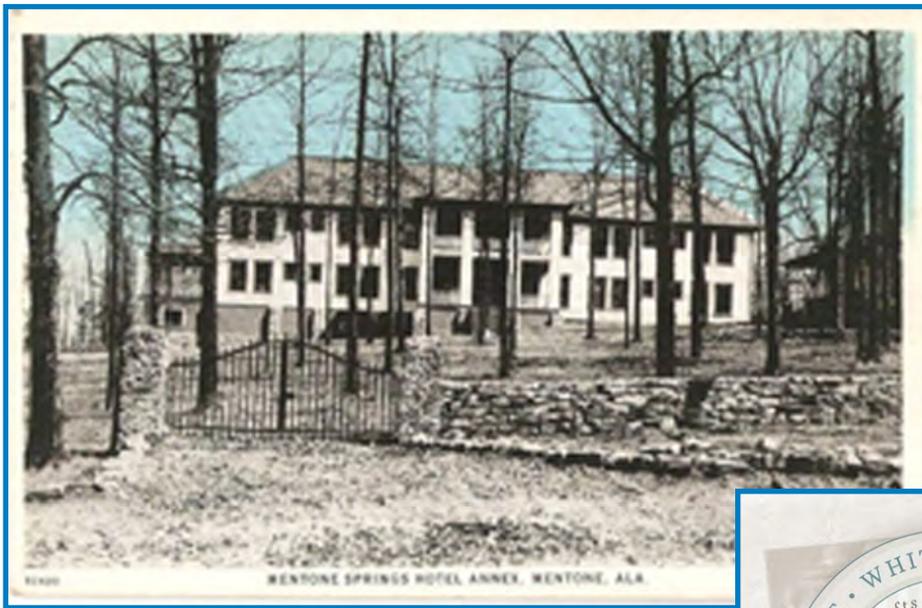


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Remembering The White Elephant (1915-2014)



Most photos from The White Elephant Facebook Page

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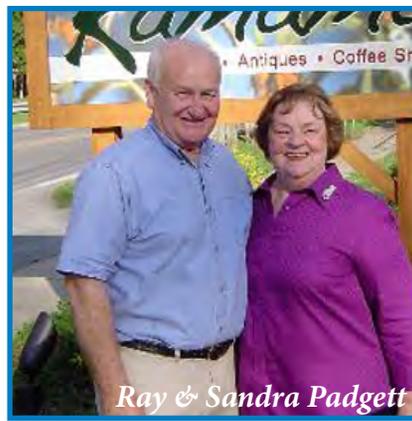
With Fond Memories, We Say Our Goodbyes



“The daffodils bloom to remind us that there is always life after death; the flag hangs in the tree to remind us of the strength and resilience we have; the foundation remains as the core--the anchor. With all of these, Mentone will more than survive, it will continue to be loved by so many and be that little piece of heaven on earth.”

Chanelle Ciaccio

A Heartfelt “Thank You” to the stewards of The Mentone Springs Hotel over the years.



As we mourn the loss of both The Mentone Springs Hotel and The White Elephant, we would like to recognize those dedicated families who sacrificed their time, talents and finances to bring The Grand Old Lady back to life. After years and years of neglect and deterioration, Ray and Sandra Padgett were the ones who fixed her broken bones. They owned the hotel from 1980-1991. They sold the hotel to Charles Johnson, who owned it for five years. Then, in 1996 Dave and Claudia Wassum purchased it and sold it to Andy Talton in 2001. He continued to breath life into her until his death in 2009. Jim and Darlene Rotch bought the hotel in 2010 and brought the Lady into her prime of life at 130 years old this year. They had also owned The White Elephant for several years.

Open Easter Sunday!
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