

The first settler in the Wilsonville area was Henry W. Robertson, who brought his family from South Carolina in 1812 and settled one thousand acres on the location which includes the present farms of W. F. Robertson, James Robertson, and Ralph Robinson—the last being no relation to the Robertsons. At this time, the closest neighbors were one family of settlers in the Easonville area (a few miles south of Pell City) and one in the Montevallo area. Alabama became a state in 1819, and in 1822, a land office was opened in Tuscaloosa. Mr. Robertson, Mr. Wallace who stayed with the Robertsons while picking the land he wished to claim and other settlers rode horseback to Tuscaloosa to claim their land. The Wallace plantation house still stands four miles north of Wilsonville where Highway 76 connects with Highway 25.

The town of Wilsonville was begun about the time the Indians were driven out of the northern part of Alabama. Some are reported to have passed through the site on which the town is now located.

Notes from the Teague Memoirs of Shelby County tell of a man who lived on this side of the river at McGowan's Ferry (just south of the site of the SEGCO Steam Plant). He had an understanding with an Indian friend on the Talladega County side. The Indian has promised to warn his friend when his people were on a rampage.

One day, the white man saw the smoke signal and spread the alarm that the Indians were coming. It was related that ribbons, corsets, and many bits of paraphernalia were strewn along the road from Wilsonville to Montevallo as the residents left in great haste.

A Dutchman, named Avehard "ran the first store" and was also the first resident. He was the first to be buried in the Wilsonville Cemetery. One of the next settlers was Jack Owens who "ran a store and a saloon" in a wooden building where the large brick one, owned by B. B. Mooney, now stands. By then, there were two more families in the community.

Wilsonville was named for Adam Wilson, who came to Shelby County very early. His son, James, was a farmer and physician. James Wilson's daughter, Rebecca, married Sampson Holland, another early settler who moved to Alabama from North Carolina. Their son, Elisha WilsonHolland, ran a grist and flour mill which was located between the present home of James Earl Campbell and the gin.

Mr. Holland later formed a partnership, Weldon and Holland, to operate a general mercantile store. He was also a Justice of the Peace. His daughter, Perdie, willed the home to the Wilsonville Methodist Church. It was removed to build the present Methodist parsonage.

Wilsonville was situated on the old Montgomery stagecoach road. An elderly settler named Russell owned the mail route. The mail was carried on horseback, and there was a relay station at the Macon Field, at the old steel bridge on the W. F. Robertson place.

Later, a wide gauge railroad was built with wooden rails through Wilsonville. Mrs. John Robertson, called "Big Ma", was the first woman to ride the train from Wilsonville to Talladega. The bridges were wooden and watchmen were needed to keep them from burning.

At first, trains ran from Selma to Talladega. Their runs were extended at a later date to Rome, Georgia. Sometime after, a depot was built—the first in Shelby County. It was put together with wooden pegs. Early carload shipments from the north had to be reloaded onto cars that could be used on the wide track. In the 1880's, the track was narrowed to standard gauge, and finally, steel rails replaced the wooden ones.

Throughout the early 1900's, all travel to and from Wilsonville was by train. Salesmen called "drummers" brought their samples in trunks and "put up" at the Henry Weldon Hotel, which is now

the home of Mrs. Carroll Gardner. The H. E. Smith home, present home of Sherrell McClure, also furnished hotel accommodations. The James A. Spearman home was another hotel through the 1930's. This home is now owned by James Lewis Bolton.

During the twenties and thirties, there were six trains a day. One, made up of a small engine, a baggage car, and two coaches was called "The Dude". It made a round trip every day between Wilton and Anniston. One of the pastimes of the early days was to "meet the train". Col. W. T. Smith, grandfather of Oland and William Arthur Smith, was depot agent. He was instrumental in the organizational meeting of the Wilsonville Baptist Church which took place in the depot.

An agent was kept on duty until the end of 1954. Jerry N. Brantley was the last agent. The depot was removed in 1961 by W. F. Robertson who paid \$51.19 for it.

During the Civil War, forts at the Yellowleaf Creek and Coosa River bridges, built by Capt. Andrew T. Smith of Bibb County (grandfather of Mrs. J. L. Batson, Jr. and T. O. Smith, Jr.) were overrun by the Yankees. As they passed through the area, Yankee soldiers camped at the Fourmile Creek bridge site at the foot of Batton Hill. A family of Battons lived nearby, from which the hill received its name.

After the war, the town of Wilsonville grew rapidly. The Jack Owens business was bought by Col. W. T. Smith who later sold to J. F. Pope and a Mr. McGowan. The wooden building was torn down and a large brick building erected in 1895. This building still stands and houses the John Deere Tractor Company, owned by B. B. and Joe Mooney, a washeteria, and the Mooney Furniture Company. During the first quarter of the century, this was the largest general mercantile store in Shelby County.

In 1900, the population had grown to 1600 and was at that time, the largest town in the county. There was a drug store next to the railroad and across from the depot, three hotels, a bank, a Farmer's Alliance store, several other general merchandise stores, several blacksmith shops, a grist and flour mill, and other businesses that are not now in existence. Mr. Elisha Holland was the last miller.

One early family, the McQuaries, had a store and lived in the W. H. Pope home, later the home of Miss Aileen Pope, situated between the homes of Mrs. Amos Daniel, Jr. and the Baptist parsonage. This house burned in 1959. The Denslers had a general merchandise store between the present Campbell's Sales Service and the railroad. The Densler's home is now the home of Mrs. W. J. Weldon and is situated on Highway 25.

John Robertson, grandfather of W. F. Robertson and Fate Ray, owned a general merchandise store and sold school books, some of which are still in the community. This partnership firm handled another early business—that of making charcoal on land in the "piney woods" area somewhere between the farms of J. L. Batson, Jr. and Mr. E. B. Ray. Wagons hauled the charcoal to Wilsonville where it was loaded onto freight cars to ship to the Shelby Iron Works for fuel for the furnaces. Later, a Mr. Elliott bought the Robertson-Ray store. It was situated where Highway 25 passes between Waldrop's Grocery and Campbell's Sales Service.

Mr. Reese Weldon, father of W. J. and Calvin Weldon and Mrs. Jack Story, bought the Farmer's Alliance store and made a general merchandise store of it. It now houses the McCloud Real Estate office, Helene's Variety Store, and, at the back, "Servisoft", a water purifying service.

The Riddle brothers, Walter and Will, had a store in the middle of the block of stores from the railroad to the Farmer's Alliance Store, later Weldon's Store.

There was also a store north of the Wilsonville Baptist Church, facing the Fourmile Road. It was run by Jim Ray; later a Jewish citizen and then the Ginn Brothers who also peddled wares from the store with horses and a wagon. Next to this store was the small office building of Dr. T. O. Smith. Behind these was Tinney's Shop. It was a combination blacksmith and cabinet shop. Many fancy bannisters, rails, and outside house trim decorations were cut there. Earlier, Dr. Edwards' office stood facing the Fourmile Road but back from it, where the swings are located behind the present housing project.

The J. F. Pope home stood where the late Mrs. Juanita Williams home stands. It was recently sold to Robert Ray and faces the W. J. Weldon home on Highway 25.

The Thayer blacksmith shop, at first situated on the Lee Reinhardt place, was moved to town. The last blacksmith was Tint Merrell, father of Mrs. Christine Fulmer.

James Wilson, son of Adam Wilson, for whom the town was named, was a physician, as mentioned earlier. Another early doctor was Dr. Edwards, grandfather of the late Rev. W. T., Rev. Ivey, and Claud Edwards, and great grandfather of Paul Edwards. Dr. J. B. Boyer mover to Wilsonville from Kentucky in the early 1900's. His home was adjacent to the school and was torn down in recent years. Dr. O. E. Black, brother of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, served the town in the early 1900's until his death in 1906. He owned the second automobile in Wilsonville (Claude Jackson owned the first). A Dr. Sorrell practiced dentistry and lived in the Ernest Robinson house. Dr. T. O. Smith moved from Bibb County in 1914 and practiced until retirement in 1944. A Dr. Reeves served the community for a few years before the 1920's. During the 1920's, Dr. H. T. Dickens moved to Wilsonville and did general practice. Dr. K. N. Gould came in 1931 and established a clinic in the old J. F. Pope home, owned at the time by C. W. Williams. It burned in 1936, and for a year, the clinic was housed in the bank building across from the Wilsonville Baptist Church. In 1937, Dr. Gould built a clinic, which was converted into apartments several years after he moved to Chattanooga, in 1950. For a short while, Mr. Marian Morgan was the town's doctor. She was followed by a Dr. Cobb, a retired Navy doctor who stayed only a few years. Since the mid-fifties, the town has had no doctor.

Berry Robertson built the first gin in the area. It was situated between the James and W. F. Robertson homes. It was similar to a sorghum mill and turned by mule power. It took a day and a night to gin a bale of cotton. After the crops were "laid by", long poplar logs were cut and a raft constructed on Yellowleaf Creed on which bales of cotton were floated during high enough water to clear the river shoals, to Wetumpka to sell. The raft, too, was sold—for fifty cents. John Bolin, on whose land stands Old Chapel Church, owned the first lumber mill.

Col. W. T. Smith was born in Petersburg, Virginia, in 1844, and moved to Wilsonville between 1876 and 1878. He built his home south of Wilsonville. It still stands (1968) and is known as the "Aunt Bet" Weaver place. Col. Smith ran a lumber mill and owned land within the town proper. He donated the land for the Wilsonville Baptist Church. He is mentioned earlier as a merchant and depot agent.

Col. Smith also ran the first cotton gin in the town. This gin was later bought by W. J. Taylor, father of Henry Taylor. It had a coffee pot engine and ginned two bales a day. Later, a better engine was installed which could gin a hundred bales in a day and a night. In 1923, 3700 bales of cotton were ginned. This gin burned, and the one now standing was built. It has been modernized with the latest electrical equipment, and is owned by D. F. Bolton. A feed mill now stands beside the gin, owned by Sherrell McClure.

The Methodist church is the oldest church in Wilsonville. The first building stood in the old part of the cemetery. Later, the Methodists built the church which still stands on the hill across the Fourmile Road from the cemetery. It faces the town and is adjacent to the school. The first parsonage stood between the church and the Fourmile Road. It was removed in 1961. The present parsonage stands in front of the school and faces the Post Office.

In 1946, the Methodist Church was remodeled; a kitchen and Sunday School rooms were added at the rear, and in 1966, stained glass windows were installed. Facing the Fourmile Road, in the newer part of the cemetery was a Campbellite Church. The members had bought and moved the building from its Fourmile location where it had been a "Hardshell Baptist" Church. ("Hardshells" are now the Primitive Baptist Group).

The Presbyterian church was originally about four miles north of Wilsonville on Yellowleaf Creek. This building later became the Scotts' Grove Church. Flooding, due to spring "freshets" caused the Presbyterian congregation to build elsewhere. This church building is now the Masonic

Hall situated in front of the home of Mrs. Mertye Daniel. Their last member was Miss Selina Sommerville. She and her family are buried in the Wilsonville Cemetery.

The Wilsonville Baptist Church, organized in 1879 in the depot, met for several years in the Methodist Church. Their first church building faced the Fourmile Road. In 1901, a larger building was built on the same site, but it faced south. Sunday School rooms were added from the lumber of the old Campbellite church. In 1956, a brick educational building was constructed on the west side of the church facing the Masonic Hall, on the site of the former pastorium which has earlier been the last home of Mrs. W. T. Smith, widow of Col. Smith. In February, 1968, the Wilsonville Baptist Church building was taken down in order to erect the new brick building.

The Dry Branch Baptist Church was organized in 1894, a few miles north of Wilsonville in a brush arbor. The building erected by the members was built at the Crossroads Community on land given by J. R. Taylor and M. A. Taylor, his wife. This building was blown down in 1923 and rebuilt in 1924. Mr. B. M. T. Strickland built the steeple. It was remodeled in 1962, and that year, the congregation voted to change the name to the First Baptist Church. Rev. Gabriel Cook was the pastor. In 1968, Rev. James Adams, Sr. is pastor and the deacons are: Oliver Millender, Thomas Barnett, O. C. Cook, Charlie Brasher, and James Isabell.

The Star of Bethlehem Baptist Church, situated on the Fourmile Road, just north of the cemetery, was organized May 30, 1887, and repaired January 10, 1899. The first pastor was Rev. C. A. J. Mallory and J. R. Robinson was a deacon. The charter members included: Rev. and Mrs. E. L. M. Wallace and family, J. R. Robinson and family, Hezekiah Wallace and family, W. W. Kendrick and family, W. W. Edwards and family, and H. B. Edwards and family. The present pastor, in 1968, is Rev. M. Poole. James H. Bush, Sr. and Ceal Cahill are deacons and Walter Brasher, Willie Marion Bush, Sr., and Fred Wilson are trustees.

A congregation of Negro Methodists built a church in what was later called "Jacksontown". The building stood somewhere behind the present home of Mrs. Tint Merrell and The Virgil Fulmers. This church did not remain active many years. The building was used later as a school. One of the surviving pupils is Mrs. Gina (Pinkard) Flambo.

For many years, the Negro school stood on the site of the present home of Fred Wilson. It was a two story building. Professor Nathan Hall was the last of the principals who moved with the school in 1936, to the new one built on the Jesse Woods place which is now owned by Mrs. Bernice (Brothers) Valentine. This school was closed in 1953, and its pupils transported to the consolidated school in Columbiana.

On the hill near the residences of Sam Stoudenmire, Mrs. R. G. Weaver, and William A. Smith was a very large sawmill owned by the Jackson brothers, Henry and Claude. The latter married Mattie Weldon, sister of Mrs. Jack Story, W. J. Weldon and Calvin Weldon. All the workers had their homes close together, so the community was called "Jacksontown". Where the garage and stores are located now on Highway 25 across from the home of Mrs. R. G. Weaver—those of Laddie and Patterson Repair Shop and James Glan—there was during the sawmill's day a commissary and a blacksmith shop.

There was an old school where the Vickery home stands. This had been the homeplace of Amos Daniel, Sr., then that of Tom Taylor, Sr., who sold to Henry Stewart. After his death, the house burned, and Mrs. Carrie Stewart built another one and sold it to the Vickerys.

A modern school was built on the hill where the Wilsonville Junior High School now stands. It had only two rooms. Later, more were added. An upstairs and downstairs room on each end of the building were connected with a one-story section and a gallery. The Masons met in one of the upstairs rooms. Classed were held in the other whose only entrances were outside stairways.

This school burned in 1918, and for the next year, school was held in two vacant houses owned by W. J. Weldon in "Jacksontown". Mr. Weldon, Dr. T. O. Smith, and W. E. Riddle were trustees of the school during the time it was conducted in the temporary quarters. Some early professors were: Professors Hammond, Kilpatrick, Ellenberg, "Teach" Harris, Woodrow Ingram, and Ben King.

In 1919, the brick school building, which still stands, was built by the citizens of Wilsonville. The final payment was made in 1952. It was deeded to the State Board of Education.

During World War II, a wing, consisting of one large room, was added to the west side of the building. An active P. Y. A. added the lunchroom, restrooms, and fire escapes. In 1962, five classrooms and restrooms were added on the front. And the auditorium and four classrooms were converted into a gymnasium.

In 1932, the Wilsonville State Bank failed. The cotton economy of the entire area made the depression years a period of hardship and anxiety. the number of businesses decreased.

Although the population continued to decrease from its 1900 peak, the World War II years (1940-1947) brought many defense workers to survey, construct, and operate a huge DuPont powder plant in Childersburg under a "cost-plus" contract with the Federal Government. Wilsonville was "overflowing", as was every neighboring town, with two, three, or four families in nearly every house. Some of these families remained in Wilsonville when the powder plant was converted into a paper mill.

During the 1940's, Mrs. Juanita Williams built a store on Highway 25 adjacent to her home and across the highway from Jack Story's Hardware Store. This is now the Scruggs Furniture and Carpet Store. Mrs. Roland Blackerby's Beauty Shop is adjoining.

The McGowan Ferry, one mile east of Wilsonville, ceased operation in 1942. Mardis Ferry, two miles south of Wilsonville on the Lokey farm, operated until 1946.

Fires claimed many old homes and in 1953, a tornado demolished the homes of O. F. Lokey and Albert Lokey at Mardis Ferry, and in the community beyond—those of Buster Brasher, Robert Hall, and Callie Flambo. In the same year (1953), the Federal Housing Project was completed.

In 1957, the Southern Electric Generating Company (SEGCO) began construction on a \$150 million steam plant situated between Yellowleaf Creek and the Coosa River. Operation began in 1960. Power is generated which is fed into the Alabama and Georgia Power systems. The plant uses 10,000 tons of coal a day, about 90 carloads. Eighty per cent of the coal used is mined from the company's own mines. A number of homes were built and many fine families moved to Wilsonville to take positions in the steam plant. One-hundred-seventy-five people are employed in its operation.

In 1958, a branch of the First National Bank of Columbiana was opened in the old bank building.

In 1960, S. S. McEwen built the new Post Office building. Former Post Offices were in a building between the railroad and the drug store, later in the building now occupied by Campbell's Sales Service, then in the part of the Weldon building which is now Helene's Variety Store (owned by Mrs. Helene Ray Oliver). In 1961, the Post Office moved to the new building which faces the Fourmile Road and is just south of the cemetery. T. O. Smith, Jr. has served as postmaster since 1935. George Baker preceded him and Tony Daniel served before Mr. Baker.

S. S. McEwen also built a large supermarket, Giant Foods, on the site of the H. G. McEwen homeplace originally built by W. H. Pope. The Giant Foods Store also faces the Fourmile Road and is claimed to be the largest supermarket in Shelby County.

The Wilsonville Civitan Club, organized in 1947, with thirty-six charter members, has successfully carried out many civic projects. They sponsored Boy Scout Troop 85 for many years. T. O. Smith, Jr. served as Scoutmaster for a period of twenty years. Mrs. Joel Carey served as Girl Scout leader for several years during the 1960's. In 1968, the Civitan Club cooperated with the town of Wilsonville and the Shelby County Board of Revenue in constructing a Little League Ball Park with a lighted playing field, bleachers, and concession stand at a cost of \$15,000.

The town library was begun in the mid-thirties. It was originally housed in the former office of Dr. T. O. Smith. Mrs. Fred Miller was the first librarian. Her salary was paid by the town council. Today, it is housed in the Town Hall building which was completed in 1963. this building includes the Fire Station, kitchen facilities and two voting machines.

Volunteer firemen served even before the town bought a fire truck, using hose unrolled from a portable cart in 1947. After the purchase of the first fire truck, LaVert (Beebe) Hobbs was made the first fire chief. The town now owns fire trucks.

Prior to 1930, the telephone exchange was owned by the town. A few people owned acetylene light plants, and later Delco systems. In 1929, Alabama Power Company brought electricity. Highway 25 was paved in 1933, and the town streets in 1936. A federal loan was granted for water works in 1939, and another for sewerage in 1962.

Wilsonville was first incorporated in 1897. G. W. McGowan was the first mayor and Sam Thomas was the marshall. The town limits extended to Fourmile and Yellowleaf Creeks and where there were no natural boundaries, included all within two and one-half miles. In 1952, the limits were decreased to a radius of one mile. Only one record of a town election has been located to date—a printed official ballot of the Wilsonville Municipal Election, April 3, 1899 reads as follows:

“Make a cross mark (x) before the name of the candidate of your choice.

For Mayor

Vote for one

J. H. Weldon	44	(uncle of Mrs. Jack Story)
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For Aldermen

Vote for five

E. W. Holland	44	
H. A. Jackson	45	
F. M. McEwing	45	
H. H. Stoudenmire	44	(grandfather of Sam Stoudenmire)
William Tinney	44	(grandfather of Mrs. Stinson Hill)

Some of the mayors prior to 1944 were: Dr. H. T. Dickens, William R. Blount (now a Methodist minister), Henry Stewart, W. W. Williams, George Baker (father of Kermit Baker and Mrs. J. C. Roper). Since 1944, these followed: 1944, E. B. Lindsey; 1948, E. H. Alley; 1949, Jack Story; 1952, S. S. McEwen; 1956, Austin Mitchell; 1960, R. G. Stephenson; 1964 and 1968, James E. Morris. Present councilmen are: D. F. Bolton, Reed Smith, Robert L. Cook, Woodrow Foster, and N. E. Revis. Lowell Jackson is the town marshall.

Among those citizens of Wilsonville who have brought honor to their home town are: Rev. W. T. Edwards, Rev. Ivey Edwards, Dr. W. T. Edwards, Jr., Dr. Davis Woolley, Baptist preachers; Rev. William Blount, Rev. George Archer, Methodist ministers; Dr. Clifton Woolley of Memphis, Tenn., Dr. M. Reeves Pope of Plant City, Fla.; Dr. Noble McEwen, professor at Duke University, Guy W. Ray, American Consul in several countries and appointed to be ambassador to Mexico (a fatal illness prevented him serving at this post. His successor was former Mayor Laguardia of New York City), and Howard Hill, world famous archer and movie producer (now retired and living in Vincent, Alabama).

In 1968, the water of the Coosa River was raised fourteen feet after heightening Lay Dam (near Clanton). Many riverside homes have been built, and resort areas are expected to develop in the future.