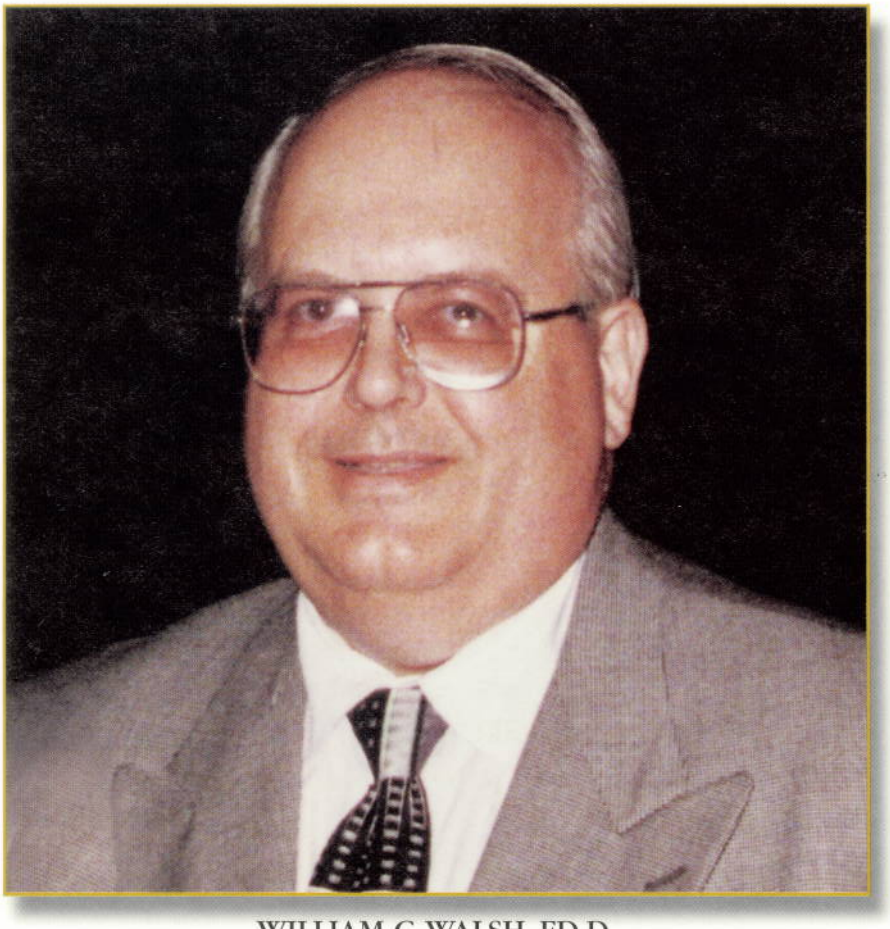
THE RSA PAVILION PARK

January 6, 2000

Purpose Statement

The RSA Pavilion Park is a tribute to Montgomery's history and six unsung heroes who played a great role in shaping the city of Montgomery. As we look to the future, the RSA Pavilion Park is a reminder of the path we have taken and a glimpse at the road ahead for the next generation in the new millennium.



WILLIAM C. WALSH, ED.D.
1942 - 1998

Dr. Bill Walsh served as Deputy Director of the Retirement Systems of Alabama from 1974 until his untimely death in 1998. During his 24 years in that office he made invaluable contributions to the successful operation of the RSA and earned the respect and gratitude of its members. Through numerous volunteer activities, Bill Walsh constantly gave of himself for the betterment of his community and all its citizens. This park is dedicated to his memory and to the men and women who forged Montgomery in past eras.

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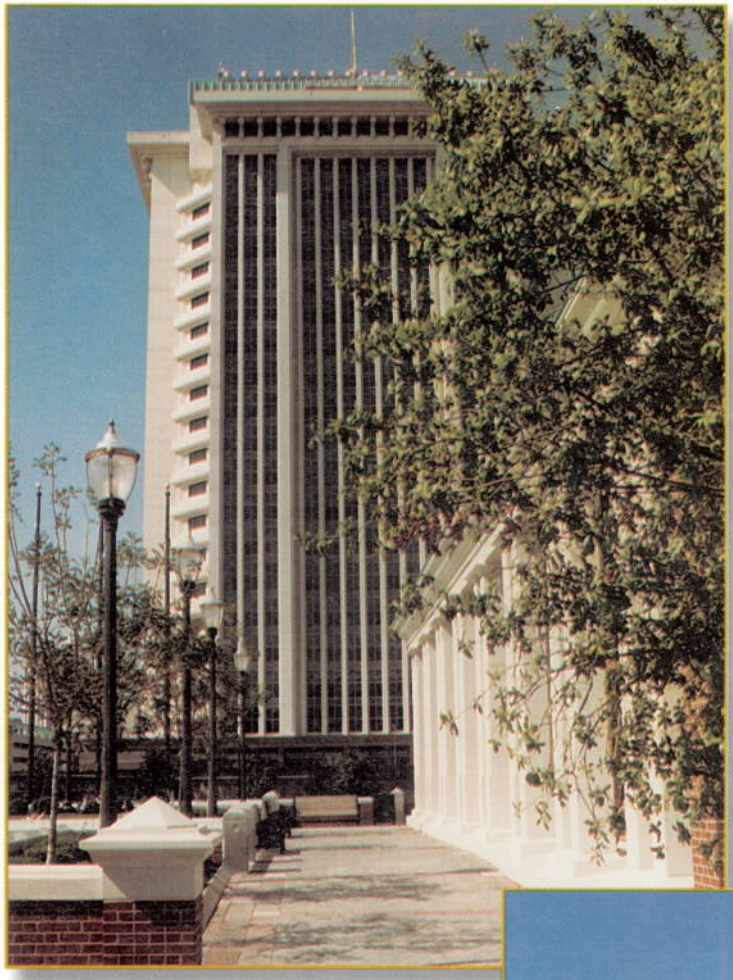


The RSA Tower overlooks the Park's Wall of History, which displays tablets representing the seven eras of Montgomery's history. The 24-story RSA Tower and the RSA Pavilion Park are part of the revitalization of downtown Montgomery.

The Pavilion at the park entrance displays tablets dedicated to six unsung heroes whose contributions greatly impacted the development of the city of Montgomery.

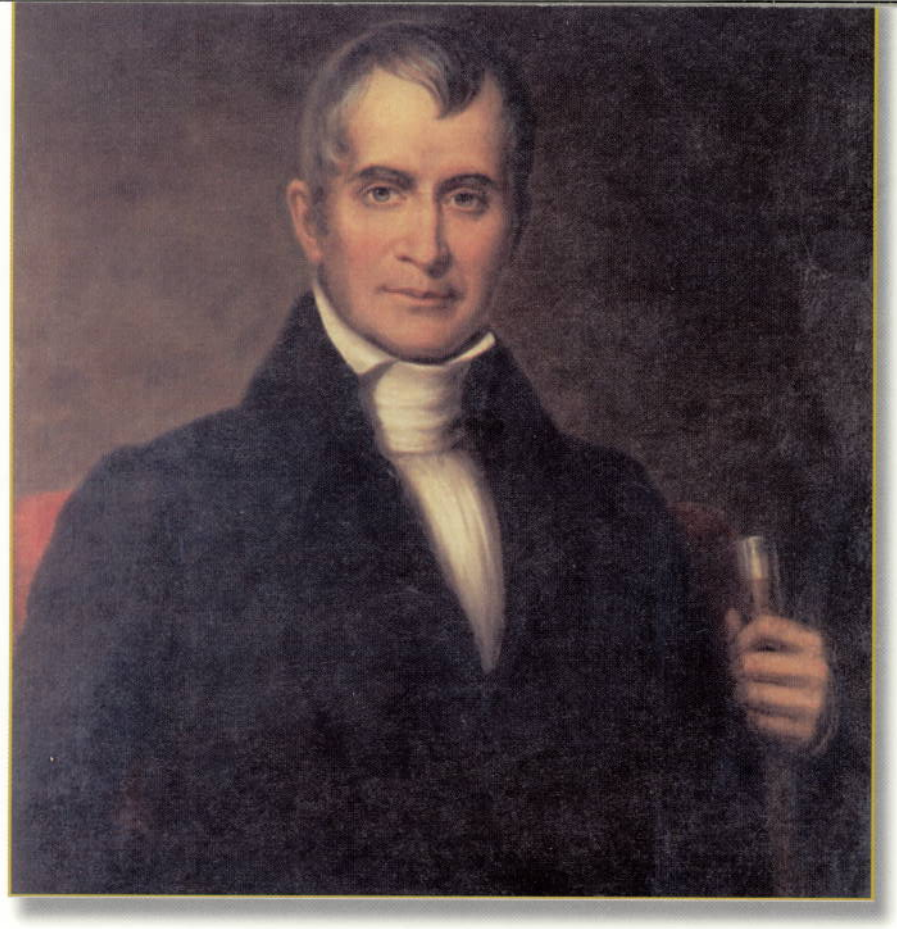
(Photograph by Russ Baxley)

SIX UNSUNG HONOREES

The RSA Pavilion Park honors an unsung hero for each of the six eras of Montgomery's history. In a world too prone to destroy what others accomplish, these leaders were builders. Montgomery owes these six unsung heroes a great debt of gratitude for the contributions they made to the city of Montgomery.

1540 - 1820 Exploration and Settlement.....John Scott
1820 - 1860 Antebellum Prosperity.....Abner McGehee
1860 - 1880 Civil War and Reconstruction...Henry Washington Hilliard
1880 - 1914 The Age of Advancement.....William Burns Paterson
1917 - 1953 The World at War.....William Adams Gunter
1950 - 1980 The Civil Rights Movement.....Edgar Daniel Nixon

(Photograph by Russ Baxley)

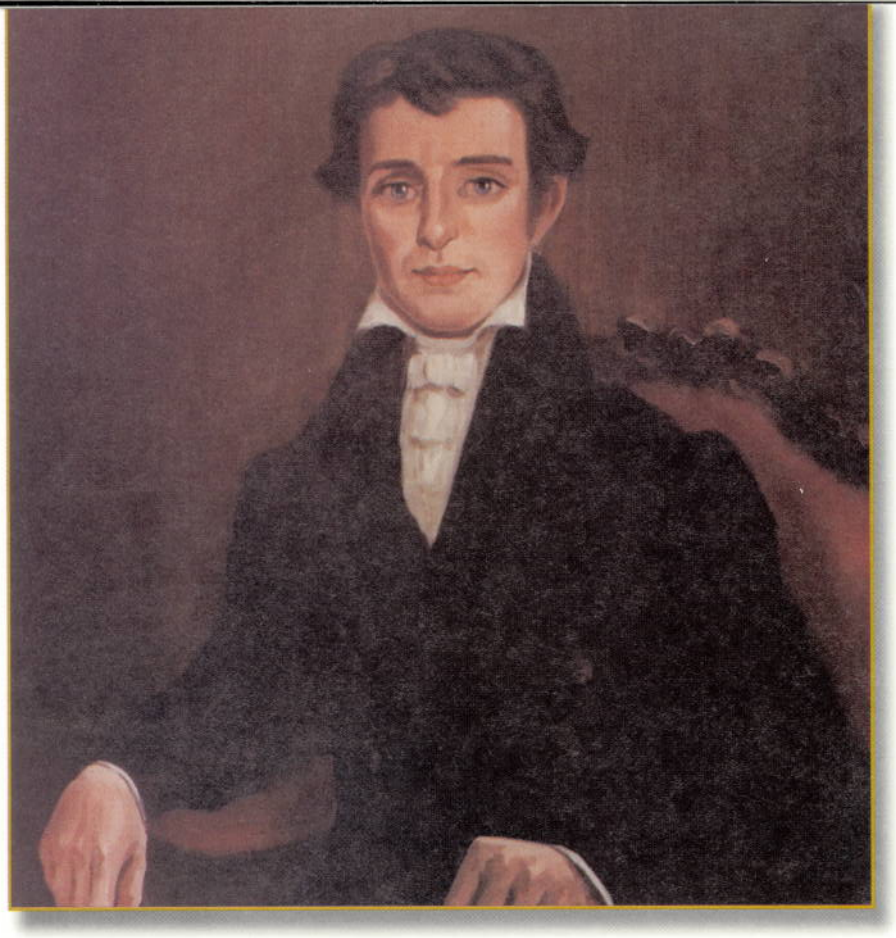


Exploration and Settlement
John Scott
1773-1839

One of the founders of Montgomery and a native of Virginia, John Baytop Scott served in the Revolutionary War, moving to Georgia into the Broad River area after Independence. A planter, Scott was also a political leader and even a designer, receiving credit for the 1805 capitol in Milledgeville.

When the Alabama Territory opened for settlement in 1817, Scott purchased, along with other investors, a parcel of land on the Alabama River for the establishment of a village to serve as a trade and transportation center for the developing cotton farms and plantations in the region. Although the first hamlet, Alabama Town, was not successful, the entrepreneurial Scott and his fellows acquired another quarter section and established East Alabama Town which, with another small village, New Philadelphia, the Alabama Territorial Legislature incorporated in 1819 as the town of Montgomery.

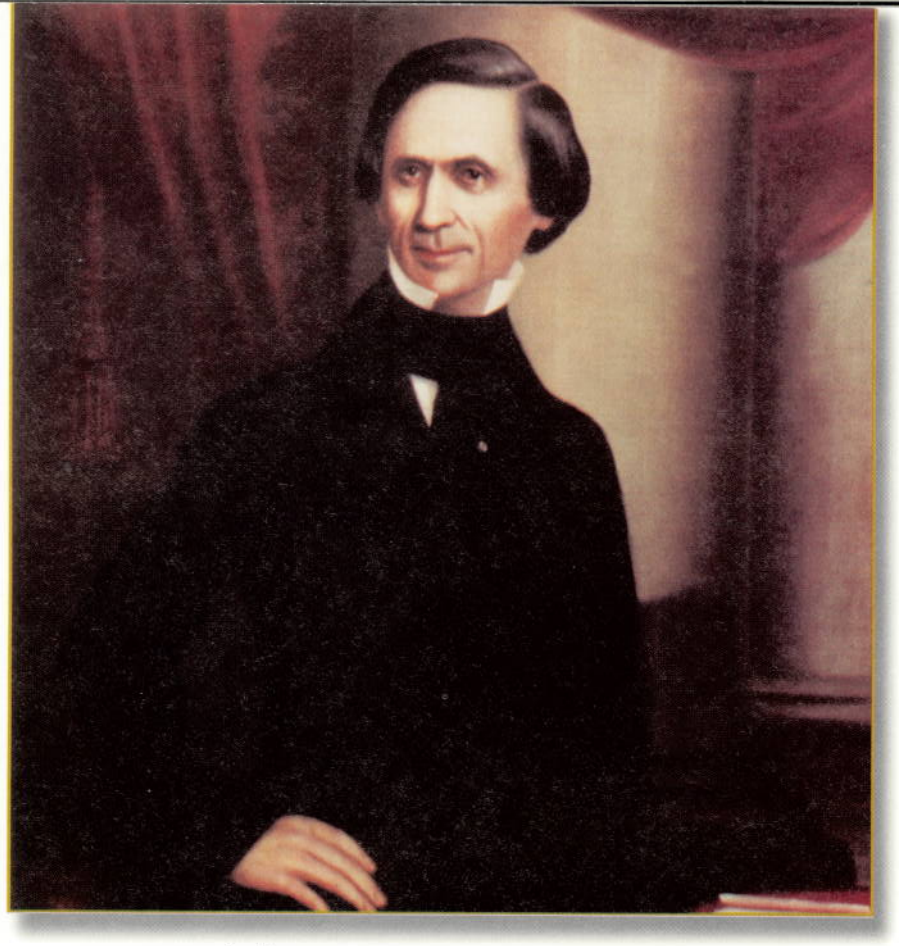
Scott had wide farming interests throughout the area and is reputedly buried on his plantation in Lowndes County. Generous and community minded, he gave land for Oakwood Cemetery, the Court Street Methodist Church (where the Federal Building now stands), property to St. Johns Episcopal Church and assisted a number of those less fortunate in acquiring homesteads.



Antebellum Prosperity
Abner McGehee
1770-1855

Native Virginian Abner McGehee was a prosperous planter in the Broad River area of Georgia before coming to Alabama as the area opened for settlement. Sensing the opportunities open to enterprising men, McGehee moved to south Montgomery County and established a plantation in the area of Hope Hull. Another entrepreneurial spirit, McGehee built one of Montgomery's first large hotels, the Planter's Hotel on Court Square, but one of his major undertakings was the goal of building a railroad to Georgia, linking the growing Alabama heartland to the Northeast and Midwest by rail, a project which got underway in the late 1830s. Although there were many problems and delays, the railroad reached Georgia in 1851.

Besides being a developer and builder, McGehee was also a devout Methodist who founded the Alabama Bible Society.



Civil War and Reconstruction
Henry Washington Hilliard
1808-1892

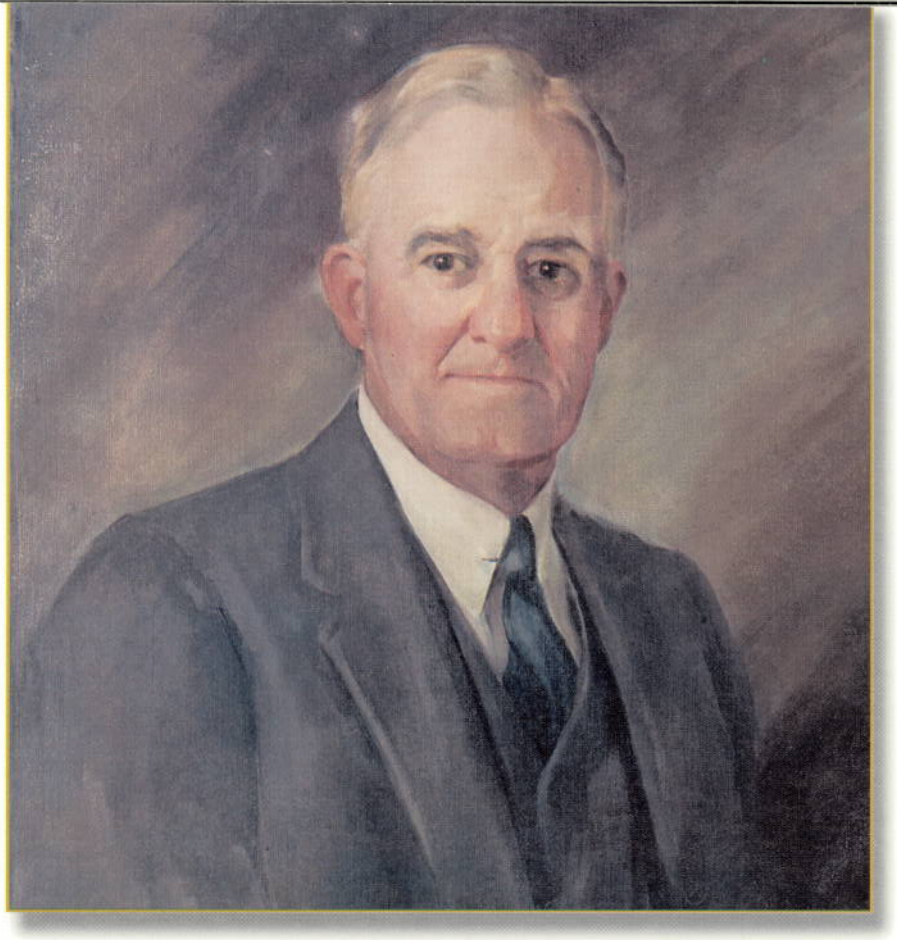
Henry Washington Hilliard, born in North Carolina in 1808, received his education at South Carolina College and read law in offices of lawyers in that state and Georgia. He came to Alabama as a professor at the University of Alabama in 1831 but resigned to practice law in Montgomery in the mid-1830s. He also was a lay reader and minister in the Methodist Church. A strong Whig, Hilliard received an appointment from John Tyler as Charge d'affaires to Belgium from 1842 to 1844 and returned to earn a seat in Congress for three terms. He supported the Compromise of 1850 and opposed the extreme states' rights policies of the South, debating William Lowndes Yancey on his secessionist philosophy.

When secession and war came, Hilliard supported his native South, raising Hilliard's Legion in 1862 but resigning his commission shortly thereafter. He practiced law in Augusta and Atlanta, Georgia and was appointed U.S. Minister to Belgium by President Rutherford B. Hayes from 1877 to 1881, being instrumental in assisting in the emancipation movement in that country. He died in 1892 in Atlanta.

The Age of Advancement
William Burns Paterson
1850-1913

An educator and horticulturist, William Burns Paterson was a native of Tullibody, Scotland, who came to the United States in 1869, going to work on the railroad being built out of Selma. Concerned with the plight of former slaves and their desire for education, he opened a school in 1870 near Greensboro, naming it Tullibody Academy. Moving to Marion, Alabama, he became president of the Lincoln Normal School. Understanding the need for state support, Mr. Paterson worked diligently for this help and recognition. Finally, in 1889, Paterson received an appropriation and legislative approval for the establishment of a State Normal School for African-American students in Montgomery. Today, the school is Alabama State University.

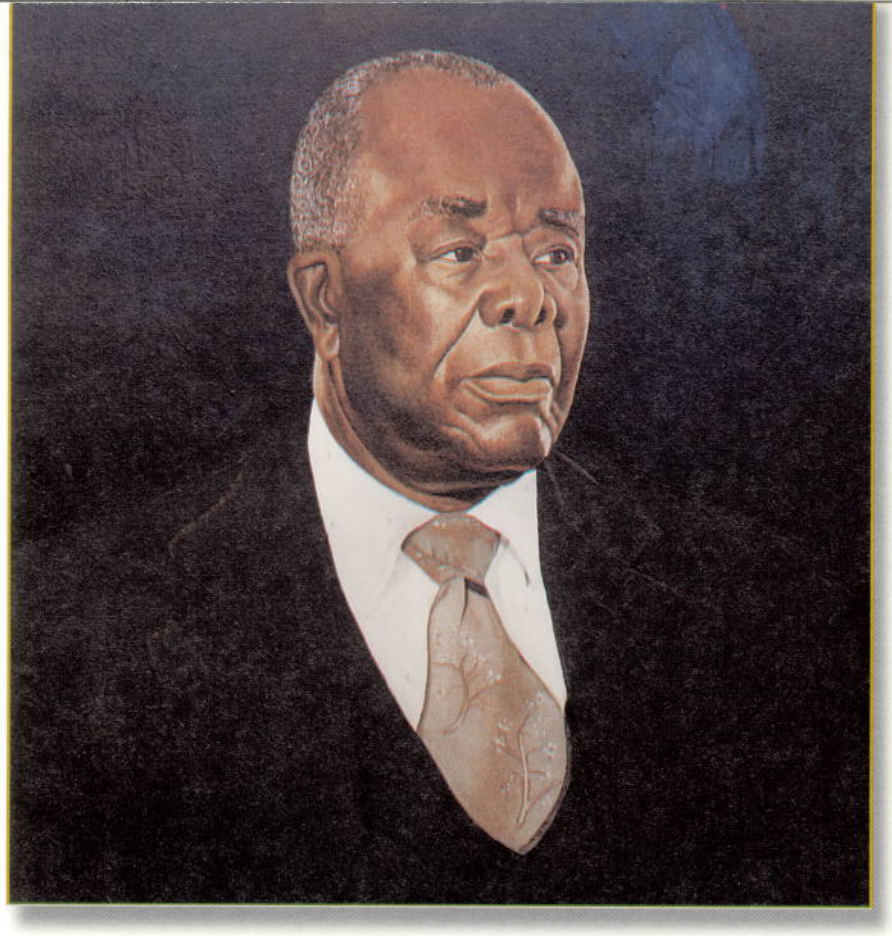
Mr. Paterson was also interested in horticulture, founding Rosemont Gardens while continuing his position as president of the Normal School.



The World At War
William Adams Gunter
1872-1940

A noted Montgomery political leader, William Adams Gunter, born in 1872, became the first mayor of the city in 1910. Within the next year, the form of government changed to that of City Commission with Gunter as president of the Commission. Playing a leading role in the reorganization process, he served in the office until 1915. In 1919, he was elected state senator, but the following year became president of the City Commission and remained in the office until his death in 1940.

Gunter was active in many areas of community, regional and national life, and throughout his administrations Montgomery made great strides. One of his many accomplishments was the opening of the city's first municipal airport which during World War II the federal government bought for $1.00. Named Gunter Field, it was a facility for the Army Air Corps, and today remains an active Air Force base, now a part of the Air University.



The Civil Rights Movement
Edgar Daniel Nixon
1899-1987

A Pullman car porter, E.D. Nixon practiced a restrained leadership that paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement. He served as president of local and state NAACP chapters and was a coordinator of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and a staunch advocate of voter registration.

When Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955, her mother called Nixon who with Clifford and Virginia Durr posted Mrs. Parks' bond at the jail. Nixon then began contacting other black leaders, issuing a call for a boycott of city buses for December 5, the day of the trial. He also initiated a meeting at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to discuss the boycott idea. This resulted in the organization of the Montgomery Improvement Association which elected Dr. Martin Luther King as president.

1540

EXPLORATION AND SETTLEMENT

While thousands of years of prehistoric Indian culture are acknowledged, the historic era for this region began in 1540 when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto led his army into Alabama, camping near present-day Maxwell AFB. De Soto made the first European contacts with the Native Americans, but it was not until 1702 with the French settlement of Mobile that permanent changes began to take place. By 1717, the French had built Ft. Toulouse where the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers join to form the Alabama River, only twelve miles upstream from present-day downtown Montgomery. French and English traders clashed over control of the area until the French defeat in 1763. The victory of the Americans in the Revolutionary War again brought competition over frontier land. In 1814 Andrew Jackson defeated the Creek Indians at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, opening Alabama for settlement. John Scott and Andrew Dexter each founded small villages here, which merged in 1819 to form the town of Montgomery. Alabama became a state in the same year.

1820

1820

ANTEBELLUM PROSPERITY

In this remarkable forty-year period, the frontier wilderness gave way to farms, plantations, and an urban community with cotton as its economic basis. Montgomery developed as a trade and transportation hub and in 1846 became the state capital. Principal transportation was by riverboat, but in 1851 the Montgomery and West Point Railroad connected with lines in Georgia, lining this area with the Northeast and Midwest, thus improving the movement of goods and people. While yeoman farmers worked the fields with their families and perhaps one or two slaves, large plantations utilized the labor of many. Even so, only a third of Alabama households owned slaves.

Many African-Americans became skilled craftsmen who made significant contributions to the building environment. One of these was Horace King, a noted bridge-builder who also received credit for the handsome cantilevered staircases in the State Capitol.

1860

1860

CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

In 1860, as tension increased between northern and southern states, Montgomerian William Lowndes Yancey emerged as the South's strongest advocate for secession. When war came, Montgomery served as the first capital of the Confederacy, and its first president, Jefferson Davis, was inaugurated on the steps of Alabama's capitol. In April 1861, the Confederate government sent telegraphic orders from the Winter Building on Court Square to its forces in Charleston to remove the Federal troops from Fort Sumter. This action marked the start of the Civil War. Although Richmond became the permanent Confederate capital, Montgomery continued to play a vital role as a supplier of men and materials and was the site of six military hospitals and a military prison.

Federal reconstruction followed the war, bringing social, economic, and political upheaval to the South. During this period, Montgomerian James Hale, a former slave, became a wealthy contractor, exemplifying the transitions taking place. He built and donated Hales Infirmary to the African-American Community, the first facility of this kind in the city.

1880

1880

THE AGE OF ADVANCEMENT

Scientific advances marked the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th with telephones, electric lights, nickelodeons, a citywide waterworks, and the Court Square fountain, bringing Montgomery a new sense of urbanization. The Lightning Route opened in 1886 and became the first all-electric streetcar system in the nation. As railroads expanded, the city became a major rail hub with over 40 passenger trains serving the city daily. The L&N Railroad built the magnificent Union Station in 1898. Montgomery's role in transportation history became even more significant in 1910 when the Wright Brothers opened the nation's first civilian flying school at the site of present-day Maxwell AFB. The automobile was now a frequent sight along city streets. In the medical field, an amazing feat occurred here in 1902, when Dr. Luther L. Hill performed the world's first successful open-heart surgery on a young man who had suffered a critical chest wound. The 20th century held great promise for Montgomery.

1914

1917

THE WORLD AT WAR

Turbulent years, this era involved Montgomery in three wars, the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression. During World War I, the U.S. Army opened the ARDMONT air repair depot on the site of the Wright Flying School, and the facility was renamed Maxwell Field in 1922. Also during the war years, thousands of infantrymen trained at Camp Sheridan in Chisholm, including the novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald who met and married local belle Zelda Sayre. These two became national symbols of the "Jazz Age" in the decade of the twenties. During the thirties, Montgomerians faced the Depression and established a municipal welfare program. In 1938, country singer and song-writer Hank Williams won a musical contest at the Empire Theater on Montgomery Street, which launched his country music career. As World War II unfolded, Montgomery saw the famous Flying Tigers train at Maxwell Field, sent its Dixie Division to the front, gave its municipal airport to the war effort, and joined the rest of the nation in rationing, promoting war-bond drives, and following the war news on the radio. Before the Korean War was over, Maxwell AFB had become the home of the Air University.

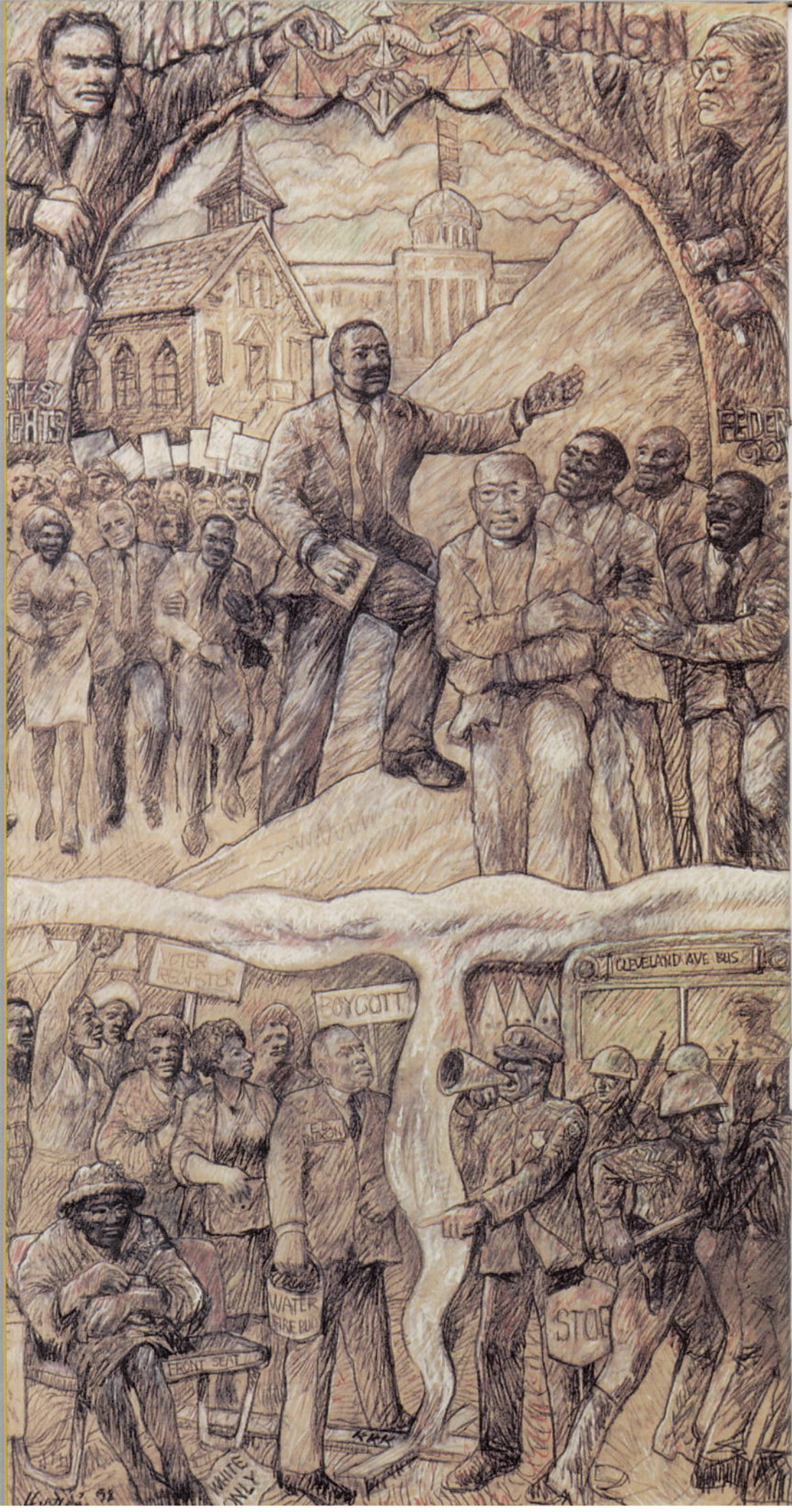
1953

1950

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The national movement for Civil Rights had its origins in Montgomery and drew its strength from here. E.D. Nixon's quiet leadership paved the way for Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. The Boycott served as a springboard from which Martin Luther King assumed national leadership of the Civil Rights Movement. The attack on the Freedom Riders at the Montgomery Bus Station in 1961 fueled the passions, and the Selma-Montgomery March in 1965 solidified national resolve. Television news came of age and displayed Montgomery's agony to the nation. During this period, Alabama's Governor George C. Wallace and Federal Judge Frank M. Johnson dueled legally over issues relating to States Rights and the ending of segregation in all its forms. Wallace launched his campaigns for the presidency on a States Rights platform, but was seriously wounded in an assassination attempt in Maryland in 1972. This turbulent era resulted in the integration of schools and the opening of many doors to all races.

1980



The New Millennium

The era of the new millennium for Montgomery actually began in the 1980s with the restoration of the downtown district, the renovation of the State Capitol, and the introduction of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. No one knows when this era will end, what it will be called, or what will have been accomplished. Montgomery's progress to date has been molded by the presence of State government, by contributions of the U.S. Air Force officers and personnel at Maxwell AFB, and by the programs of its five universities and colleges. The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, the pristine Blount Cultural Park, an outstanding zoo, and other enhancements have also greatly enriched our city. The renaissance of the downtown area in such a short period proves that changes for the better can be made by the combined efforts of various forces. Further progress in this next era will likely be made through the mutual endeavors of Commerce and Education, each assisting the other. As the torch passes into the next millennium, we look to the rising generation to set our course and achieve a greater destiny for our City.

Flag of the United States

With the exception of the Secession years, Old Glory has flown over this region since 1814, when its field contained only fifteen stars. Congress admitted Alabama to the Union in 1819, which added the 22nd star.

Alabama State Flag

The State of Alabama flag displays the cross of St. Andrew and was adopted by the State Legislature in 1895. It has flown over our State Capitol since that time.

Flag of the Confederacy

The "Stars and Bars" was adopted by the Congress of the Confederate States while it was in session in Montgomery. It flew over our State Capitol from 1861 to 1863, and was one of three Confederate banners.

Republic of Alabama Flag

For three weeks after Alabama seceded from the Union in 1861, but before the formation of the Confederate States, the flag of the Republic of Alabama was hoisted over the State Capitol.

Flag of Great Britian

British settlements along the Atlantic coast spread their influence and the King's colors across this territory during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Flag of France

French dominion over this territory extended from a 1702 French settlement on Mobile Bay. Later the French established Ft. Toulouse only 12 miles from present-day downtown Montgomery.

Flag of Spain

The Castilian flag was carried across this region by Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto in 1540. On his march down the Coosa and Alabama Rivers, he camped at the present location of Maxwell AFB.

Acknowledgements

Robert Lawrence Godwin
Artist

Larry Godwin, a native of Alabama, built and opened a roadside gallery near Brundidge over 35 years ago. He worked and studied with Theodore Roszak of New York City and at Pratt Graphics Center N.Y. His works include large scale public sculptures, fountains, memorial sculptures, and portraits. Mr. Godwin currently directs his own foundry and gallery in Brundidge, Alabama.

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