

NEWSLETTER



A MESSAGE FROM ACHA BOARD PRESIDENT, Don Edgeworth

It has been an unusual year 2020 in the life of ACHA as it has for all of us. I have been privileged to serve as president this year and I appreciate the service of all our volunteer Board members and the many volunteers who serve in many different areas of the organization in spite of the challenges of covid-19.

In February we held our 1st quarter General Membership Meeting and our "We Love Our Volunteers" luncheon at Buena Vista. We were also chosen by the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) to receive the James Ray Kuykendall Award 2020, one of the highest awards to honor a local historical organization in the state.

AHF CARES
The Humanities Connection



ACHA awarded a \$7500 grant from the Alabama Humanities Foundation.

In May we were notified that we were one of 79 nonprofits out of a total of 103 requests to receive an award. Due to the Covid-19 shutdown, ACHA had to cancel its largest annual fundraiser, losing financial support for all of our preservation endeavors including the Prattaugan Museum and the Daniel Pratt/ Continental Gin Company Preservation Project, and Buena Vista. In addition, many events at beautiful Buena Vista were canceled or postponed resulting in loss of income for the upkeep and maintenance of this historic treasure. Thankfully, the Alabama Humanities Foundation received funding from the CARES act to assist non-profits to get through these difficult times. This grant is for reimbursement of general operating expenses, including salaries, rent, property maintenance, utilities, supplies and equipment during the period June - September 2020. No matching funds are required. ACHA is most grateful for the grant we received. It will literally help us keep the lights on!

Buena Vista Restroom Project



The restroom project was finally started in August 2020 after the necessary preplanning and delays associated with covid-19. We received a 2020 grant from the Alabama Historical Commission for \$17,750 and an additional \$14,000 in financial contributions from individuals and businesses. We have also received in-kind products and services from several volunteers and businesses, most notably our project manager, Contentment Homes, LLC. We expect to receive some additional funding from other resources through additional grant submissions and in-kind services from businesses and individuals. We wish to thank all individuals and businesses for their contributions to this project.



James Ray Kuykendall Award 2020

The Autauga County Heritage Association was chosen in February 2020 by the Alabama Historical Association (AHA) to receive the James Ray Kuykendall Award 2020, one of the highest awards to honor a local historical organization in the state. The award was to be presented at the AHC 73rd Annual Meeting in Florence, Alabama during the annual awards banquet on Friday, April 3, 2020, but was cancelled due to covid-19 to be rescheduled for 2021. Named for the late James Ray Kuykendall, AHA past president and founding president of Landmarks of DeKalb County, this award honors a local historical organization in Alabama for outstanding achievements and for significant contributions to a greater appreciation of community and state history. Ann Boutwell prepared the past ten years summary that constituted the heart of the award. Everyone associated with ACHA in any way, Board Member, Volunteer, a member at large, etc. can be proud of ACHA accomplishments these last 10 years. A copy of the summary follows:

The Autauga County Heritage Association – The Past Ten Years

The Autauga County Heritage Association (ACHA) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit membership organization. Founded in 1976 in response to the destruction of the historic Daniel Pratt house years earlier, the ACHA seeks to preserve and interpret our local history through a broad range of resources. Over the last ten years efforts have continued to discover and collect any material which may help establish or illustrate Autauga County's history and ancestry. The organization seeks to save, preserve, protect, and share the local history by holding quarterly meetings, publishing a quarterly newsletter, giving lectures, holding special events and preserving historic sites. The Association continues the operation of the Prattaugan Museum, opened in 1995, in the historic 1848 Greek Revival-style McWilliams-Smith-Rice House in the Daniel Pratt Historic District. The museum contains permanent and rotating exhibits and maintains regular operating hours. It is currently staffed by volunteers. Each April Walking Tours of Historic Downtown Prattville are conducted by volunteers. A website (www.ataugahistory.org) and a genealogy library are also maintained by the association.

ACHA continues the maintenance and restoration of the 1840s Greek Revival-style Buena Vista mansion, given to the organization in 2006 by International Paper. Buena Vista was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. The beautiful home is open for tours and leased for special events. In 2019, on receiving a grant from the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), the association was able to complete the repair and painting of the exterior and interior of the historic home. In 2019 ACHA received another grant from ACH which will go toward the construction of ground-level restrooms. ACHA holds an annual Low Country Boil at Buena Vista each year as its big fundraiser each year.

ACHA also owns the c1850 Robinson-Smith House, a former Stage Coach stop on twelve acres on Highway 14 in Prattville. After extensive renovations, the home is now leased to a commercial entity, providing income for later ventures.

When Continental Eagle Corporation, the successor company of the original Daniel Pratt Gin Company, ceased operations in 2012, ACHA led the way to save the historic content from the 180-year-old company. In 2015, the organization mounted a volunteer effort to preserve the Daniel Pratt/Continental Gin Company (DP/CGC) Archival Collection, dating from 1833 – 2012. A local bank has provided a 5,000 sq. ft. workspace for this effort. Over twenty-five volunteers have been working two days a week for over four years, to clean, preserve, and catalog the extensive collection. To date, over 39,000 engineering drawings, 300 leather-bound ledgers, 400 patents, 500 machinery manuals, thousands of documents, have been preserved, as well as 2350 photos have been digitized. The volunteers, all local retired citizens, have laughed and said they will have to take the collection and finish it at the nursing home!

With the closure of this historic company, ACHA led the efforts to save and preserve these historic structures. After long and arduous years, the original Daniel Pratt Gin Company complex is under contract and the repurposing into loft apartments is slated to begin in spring 2020.

ACHA received grants from the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the Bicentennial Commission awarded the only Legacy Grant to the DP/CGC Preservation Project. These grants have

allowed the purchase of needed archival materials and provided the means to temporarily display the collection. The funds enabled ACHA to create display panels, brochures and do a reprint of a booklet on Daniel Pratt's history. The organization is currently applying for a National Endowment for the Humanities planning grant which will allow a feasibility study and operations plan as ACHA seeks to develop an interpretive center and interpretive trails for The Pratt Museum of Southern Industry.

In 2016, the DP/CGC volunteer group held a "Photo Identification Day" where former Gin Shop employees and old-time local citizens were invited to come and help identify individuals in the photos. The event was a resounding success, with many photos identified, but more importantly, a tremendous feeling of community and reunion resulting in the day. Video interviews were also made of willing participants sharing their history with the company.

In 2017 a c1895 Pratt Cotton Gin was sent to South Carolina for restoration. In 2018, this restorer brought his 1876 Pratt 40 saw gin to Prattville for the "Come See How We Do Gin!", a Bicentennial event. Attendees were treated to a day of seeing a Pratt Gin ginning cotton 142 years after its production at the Prattville gin factory, along with displays of items from the DP/CGC Collection. On Founder's Day in July 2018, ACHA demonstrated our own c1895 Pratt Gin following the annual wreath-laying at the Pratt Cemetery. ACHA demonstrated the gin again at the Autauga County History Fair in November 2018. Over 800 students witnessed the ginning of cotton for the first time as well as many adult attendees. The Pratt Gin was on display and in operation at the 2019 Bicentennial Finale in front of the State Capitol.

In 2018, Fred Hunter with "Absolutely Alabama" filmed a segment entitled "The Old Cotton Gin" which featured the 1876 cotton gin and Daniel Pratt history. Dr. Doug Phillips with "Discovering Alabama" created a film on Prattville/ Autauga County as a Bicentennial film in 2019. A Premier was held in Prattville in May 2019 and aired on Alabama Public TV in June 2019. Also in May 2019, a film crew from London came to film the original Daniel Pratt Gin Company. In October 2019 the Gin Shop complex and Pratt's history were featured on the television series "Mysteries of the Abandoned" to a worldwide audience.

Through the past ten years, the significant history of Daniel Pratt, the Gin Shop and Alabama's New England Village of the South has been shared many times to local civic groups as well as to groups visiting Prattville. ACHA, one of the state's most active historical organizations, is always ready to create awareness and put our history on display!

Prattaugan Museum



Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a shortage of volunteers able to work during this time, the Prattaugan Museum will only be open by appointment. Please call 334-361-0961 or 334-294-2362. We apologize for any inconvenience and hope we can announce reopening in the new year.

The time during the Covid-19 shutdown was used to do some needed renovations by the City and painting and new exhibits installed by Barbara Gaston, volunteer Museum Director. The museum property, which is owned by the City of Prattville, was gifted to the city by the Rice family with the stipulation that it be used as a museum. The ACHA manages and conducts all the business of the museum maintaining the exhibits and genealogy files, providing assistance, giving tours, securing and sharing the history of our county.

Museum Handicap Lift Replacement - The city Public Works replaced the Museum Handicap lift due to the old lift being condemned by the State Dept. of Labor. We appreciate the efforts of the Prattville Public Works in completing this project. The city is to be commended with all of their support in maintaining the Museum property.



Buena Vista written by Darlene Leistner, Buena Vista Coordinator

On March 21st Buena Vista had its last wedding as COVID19 struck our country with mass closures of businesses. It wasn't until July 11th that the doors were opened again to renters using our beautiful facility. (I can't say whether those months in between went by fast or slow. But, I do know that the cancellations and postponements were quite disheartening.) We had over 50 events in 2019 and had scheduled

over 50 in 2020, but due to cancellations our final number will be 18, a 64 percent decrease.

Things are beginning to pick up again, although some of the fall weddings have cancelled also. On August 14th I had a real scare when I walked in one night to turn on the air-conditioning for the next day and found water leaking from the ceiling in the double parlor. With the help of my husband, and some volunteers, one of the rugs that was soaked with water was dragged onto the wheelchair ramp out back. Thankfully, the rug was saved and later cleaned, the toilet in the bride's room was replaced (the tank was cracked), and there was no damage to the wooden floors. Many people who visit and tour Buena Vista are amazed at its grandeur and beauty. I'm so thankful that it continues to make its historical presence in Autauga County! Buena Vista will be decorated for Christmas (A Big Thank You to the Yaupon Garden Club, who decorates the outside of the house.

Buena Vista is open for Historic Tours Tuesday from **10am to 2pm** or other times by appointment. Donations are accepted. You may also contact us to find out how your wedding, personal or corporate events can become part of the unique history to take place within the walls of this gracious home.

Contact Darlene Leistner

(334) 365-3690

Email: buonavista@autaugahistory.org



Adam Holtzscher & John Hudak Eagle Scout Project

Adam Holtzscher and John Hudak, Eagle Scouts and their team of volunteers finished their Eagle Scout project at Buena Vista in September 2020. The project provides a privacy fence covering the entire north backside of the property. We plan to brush cut the north backside of the property to open up the beautiful grounds at Buena Vista. Thanks to Adam & John and all the volunteers that worked this project. We are proud of these young men and the character they display in community service.



Alabama 200 Bicentennial Legacy Award

Daniel Pratt/Continental Gin Company Preservation Project

written by Ann Boutwell, DP/CGC Project Leader

ACHA RECEIVES BICENTENNIAL LEGACY AWARD

The Autauga County Heritage Association is pleased to announce that the Daniel Pratt/Continental Gin Company Preservation Project has been honored by the Alabama Bicentennial Commission with an Alabama Bicentennial Legacy award. The honor recognizes outstanding projects by communities and organizations that were part of the commemoration of the statehood anniversary. The honor recognizes outstanding projects by communities and organizations that were part of the commemoration of the statehood anniversary.

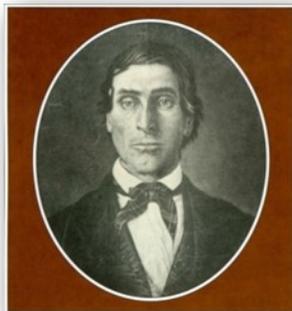
The DP/CGC Preservation Project is a volunteer effort of the ACHA to preserve the significantly historical archival collection from the original Daniel Pratt Gin Company and its successor company, Continental Gin Company. The collection, made up of engineering drawings, photos, ledgers, patents, machinery manuals, advertising, artwork, export files, contracts, maps and deeds, as well as machinery, signage, and patterns made by the company, covers nearly 180 years of history. Daniel Pratt founded the company in 1833 which became the world's largest cotton gin factory shipping cotton gins internationally, wherever cotton was grown.

The group of volunteers has worked for five years cleaning, organizing and cataloging the collection into museum software and the work continues. In the future, ACHA hopes to make the collection accessible to the public by establishing an interpretive center to tell the story of Daniel Pratt and Southern Industrialization.

“Communities invested time and resources in an amazing range of projects,” noted Alabama Bicentennial Commission chairman Sen. Arthur Orr. “Our successful bicentennial celebration owes a real debt to their efforts, especially for projects that will be important to the state, its communities and its citizens for a long time to come.” Awards were given in two categories: commendations for outstanding bicentennial programs and projects and legacy awards for projects of exceptional and lasting impact. Forty-one commendations and 21 legacy awards were given, representing more than 40 municipalities in 35 counties.

ACHA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mission Statement: *The mission of Autauga County Heritage Association is to collect, preserve and disseminate information and display artifacts concerning the history of Autauga County and its people.*



Date _____

Name _____

City _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

Phone # _____ Cell # _____

Email Address _____

- ◇ Individual Membership \$50
- ◇ Couple Membership \$75
- ◇ Contributing Membership \$100
- ◇ Lifetime Membership \$1000

Make checks payable to ACHA and mail to:
 102 E, Main Street, Prattville, AL 36067.
 You can also join and pay dues online at
www.ataugahistory.org.

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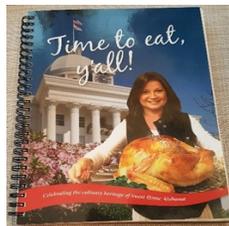
**Autauga County Heritage
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 334-361-0961

www.ataugahistory.org

ACHA Membership

Thanks to all of you who joined or renewed your ACHA membership for 2020. Remember the organization has transitioned to an annual membership. Please renew your 2021 membership as soon as possible. Membership dues are used to carry out ACHA activities including newsletters, events, general meetings and Museum improvements. Members who pay dues and volunteer are the lifeblood of the organization.

**The Autauga County Heritage Association 1st Quarter General Membership Meeting
on Sunday, February 2, 2020 at 2PM at Buena Vista Mansion**



Our guest speaker was Danna Standridge, author of the AL 200 Bi-Centennial Cookbook, "Time to eat, y'all!" Danna shared stories from her own family's gatherings around the table with much humor and deep affection for both family and food. Those in attendance were able to sample foods prepared from some of the recipes in the cookbook. The cookbooks were also made available for purchase at the meeting and all but 4 were sold! Danna was happy to personalize the books for those purchasing. Proceeds from the sale of this book will benefit the preservation and maintenance of the beautiful Alabama State Capito. In addition, a few dollars for each book sale will go directly to ACHA.

Volunteer Luncheon

ACHA Board members hosted a luncheon at the beautiful Buena Vista Mansion on Thursday, February 13, 2020, to honor and in appreciation of our hardworking volunteers. The event was attended by 36 guests who enjoyed lunch and desserts. Without their dedication much of our precious history would not exist to be shared with Prattville and Autauga County's current residents and visitors, or for our future generations. The value of their contributions truly can't be measured. We are blessed to have such talented and wonderful volunteers in ACHA..

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