Williamson Hawkins Bell

Presented To
St. Johns Episcopal Church
Elyton, Ala.
By Williamson Hawkins, Sr.
March, 1872

484 Pounds of Bronze

Movers from Road Runner Moving Service (Vladimir Marinov, Branden Pair and owner, Jim Owens) with the assistance of Dr. Ed Stevenson, bring the Williamson Hawkins Bell to the History Center.
Letter from the Director/Jerry Desmond

Many thanks to Dr. Ed Stevenson and the movers of the Road Runner Moving Service for bringing the Williamson Hawkins bell to the History Center. Jim Owens, the owner of Road Runner, donated his company’s services and time for this project.

For many years the bell was part of an outdoor display at the St. John’s Episcopal Church for the Deaf in Cahaba Heights. Dr. Stevenson, a Birmingham History Center board member, and our much missed curator, Dr. Marvin Whiting, were instrumental in arranging this donation. Moving the 484 lb. bell from its outdoor perch in Vestavia to the History Center was quite a task. Mr. Owens and his assistants, Branden Pair and Vladimir Marinov (see photograph on page one), accomplished the feat with nary a scratch. As an outstanding artifact of early church history in Jefferson County, it is now on exhibit at the Birmingham History Center.

Dr. Nathaniel Hawkins, and his wife, Maria Welton Hawkins, helped to organize St. John’s Episcopal Church in Elyton in 1850. His father, Williamson Hawkins, Sr., one of Jefferson County’s early settlers, donated the bell to the church in 1872.

Featured New Artifact

This letter was donated by John Morse, local historian and founder of Bhamwiki. It is an invitation sent to Claude Lawson (spelled without the “e” on the invitation), the Superintendent at Sloss-Sheffield, and his wife to attend the launching of the USS Birmingham on March 20, 1942. Mrs. W. Cooper Green, wife of the President of the Birmingham City Commission had been chosen to christen the ship. The Newport News Shipbuilding Company of Virginia built 243 ships during World War II. In 1952, the company built the SS United States luxury liner, still the westbound record holder for the fastest crossing of the Atlantic Ocean.
On Exhibit – Motlow Brothers Distillers Letter

Our Vice-President, and chairman of our collections committee, Tommy West, tells us that this letter may be the most expensive artifact ever purchased for the History Center. It is certainly very rare as it contains the letterhead of the Motlow Brothers Distillers of Birmingham, Alabama – an item coveted by serious collectors of Jack Daniel memorabilia.

What is Birmingham’s connection to the famous Jack Daniel’s Distillery of Lynchburg, Tennessee? The answer relates to the Prohibition movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It seemed that every time the company established itself in a community, that county or state would pass laws prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages. It happened first in Jack Daniel’s home, Moore County, Tennessee soon after his distillery gained fame by winning the gold medal for the best whiskey at the St. Louis World Fair of 1904.

Jack Daniel’s nephews, led by Lem Motlow, then began a distillery in Birmingham that same year. Lem’s brother, John Franklin “Spoons” Motlow was President of the company. Another brother, Jesse Butler Motlow, served as the Vice President and Secretary. Jesse Motlow also served as master distiller. He and his wife, Alice, moved to Birmingham sometime in 1904.

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On Exhibit – Motlow Brothers Distillers Letter

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1905 Birmingham City Directory Listing of the Motlow Distilling Company

The 1905 Birmingham City Directory listed the address of the company as 1215 Avenue B (now Second Avenue, South). However, on January 1, 1908 the local Jefferson County prohibition laws went into effect and the business was closed down only to reopen in 1911 when the county voted to again allow the sale of alcohol. This time, Lem Motlow served as President of the Jack Daniel Distilling Company and the Jack Daniel Distributing Company, located on 2nd Avenue North. When the Alabama legislature passed a state-wide prohibition law in 1915 (five years before National Prohibition), Motlow moved his company to St. Louis only to return to Lynchburg, Tennessee following the repeal of National Prohibition in the 1930s.

Our letter is dated August 13, 1905. It is from Jesse Motlow to the youngest Motlow brother, Felix W. Motlow. Felix had recently graduated from the West Point Military Academy in June of 1905 and had returned to Lynchburg to see the family before being assigned a post. In the letter, Jesse writes to his brother that he was “hoping to see you before you go away.” He also makes reference to the fact that it was safe to visit “as [there is] no yellow fever here yet, so you need not be afraid to come down and stay a few days with us.”
The History Center has 2nd edition hardcover copies of Historic Birmingham and Jefferson County by James R. Bennett on sale for $39.00, tax included. For an extra $6 we will ship it anywhere in the country. Pick one up at the Center or call 205-202-4146 to reserve your copy.

**Need a Public Speaker for Your Meeting or Event?**

Our Executive Director, Jerry Desmond, is available to give talks about the History Center or other topics in local or American History. Donations to the Center are accepted but not required, last minute requests are considered. Call 205-202-4146 or e-mail at jdesmond@bham.rr.com.
Volunteers

If you’re interested in history and want to get in on the ground floor of a developing museum, consider volunteering. It took many hands to get the museum open in April, 2010, and more volunteer opportunities will open as time goes by. Right now, we have work waiting for archives assistants. Archives assistants are curatorial volunteers who help speed record-keeping and other caretaking duties. An archive assistant gets to see artifacts as they come in and helps make sure objects, papers, and photographs are properly documented and cared for.

For more information on becoming a volunteer go to our website at www.birminghamhistorycenter.org or, call for more information, (205) 202-4146.

Gary Gerlach, volunteer curator, works every Monday at the BHC.
Enduring Companies Project

The History Center is planning an event for the fall of 2011 to honor 75 year old companies in Jefferson County. So far, our research has found over 100 companies that meet the age requirement. Look for details in future newsletters. Let us know if you know of any other business organizations in the area that qualify.

Companies Founded in Jefferson County before 1937

Birmingham History Center

Recently opened in the Spring of 2010, the BHC features exhibitions of historical events of Birmingham and Jefferson County from the 18th century to the present. Admission charged; $4 adults, $3 seniors and veterans, $2 students, children under 6 free. Visa, Discover, Master Card accepted, tickets available also by phone. Group rates available, free parking. Open 9:00 am - 4:30 pm, Monday - Friday. Located at the corner of 18th Street and First Avenue North in Birmingham at the historic Young and Vann Building.

Directions

| I-65            | Gadsden
| Nashville       | Chattanooga
| Tuscaloosa      | Atlanta
| Montgomery      | Interstate 20/59

| 17th Street     | 8th Ave N |
| 18th Street     | 22nd Street |

BHC  First Avenue North

1731 First Avenue North
Birmingham, AL  35203

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