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Birmingham History Center

Volume 1, Number 6

November 1, 2011

A Gathering of Spirits October 28th – 4:30-7:00 PM



Reserve a place now to mingle with a dozen spirits of Birmingham's past at the History Center for drinks and an historic good time.

Meet Lou Wooster, the gold-hearted Madam, Emma Hawes, whose murder started a riot, railroad capitalist James Sloss, and undertaker Edward Erswell, among others.

Tickets \$12,
\$10 for members

Reservations by cash, credit card or check payable to the Birmingham History Center. They may also be purchased online at our website.

Birmingham History Center

THOMAS E. JERNIGAN SR. MEMORIAL

To join our E-mail List send us an E-mail at:
info@birminghamhistorycenter.org



Letter from the Director/Jerry Desmond

It was wonderful to have so many school children in the History Center in September. Over 300 middle school students toured the Freedom Rides exhibit and met with one of the heroes of those rides – Catherine Burks-Brooks. The students sat in rapt attention as she described her experiences in the Civil Rights movement, included her arrest in Jackson, Mississippi.

The thing that struck me the most was the reverence that the teachers and chaperones displayed towards Catherine. They understood even more than the children what they personally owed to pioneers of the Civil Rights movement and the changes in our community that they advanced over 50 years ago.

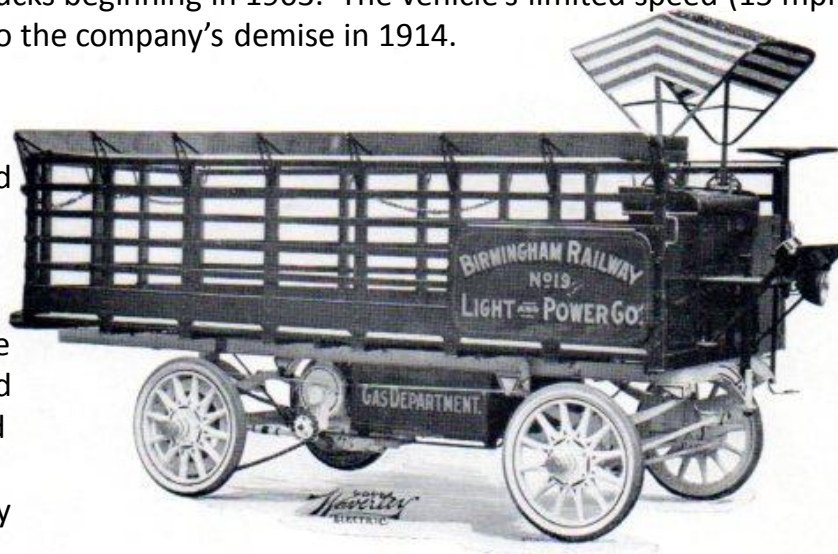
On another note, I hope that you will come down to the History Center on October 28th for our program in cooperation with the Oak Hill Cemetery. Players in costume will take on the personalities of the dearly departed throughout our museum. Refreshments will be served starting at 4:30 PM. Make your reservation and have conversations with the dead. For more permanent reservations, please call the Oak Hill Cemetery. Space is still available.

DEZ

Featured New Artifact

Our intrepid Vice President, Tommy West, is always finding interesting Birmingham-related items on the internet. A few weeks ago he brought in an advertisement for the Pope Motor Car Company of Indianapolis, Indiana. Also known as Pope-Waverley, the company produced electric cars and trucks beginning in 1903. The vehicle's limited speed (15 mph) and distance eventually led to the company's demise in 1914.

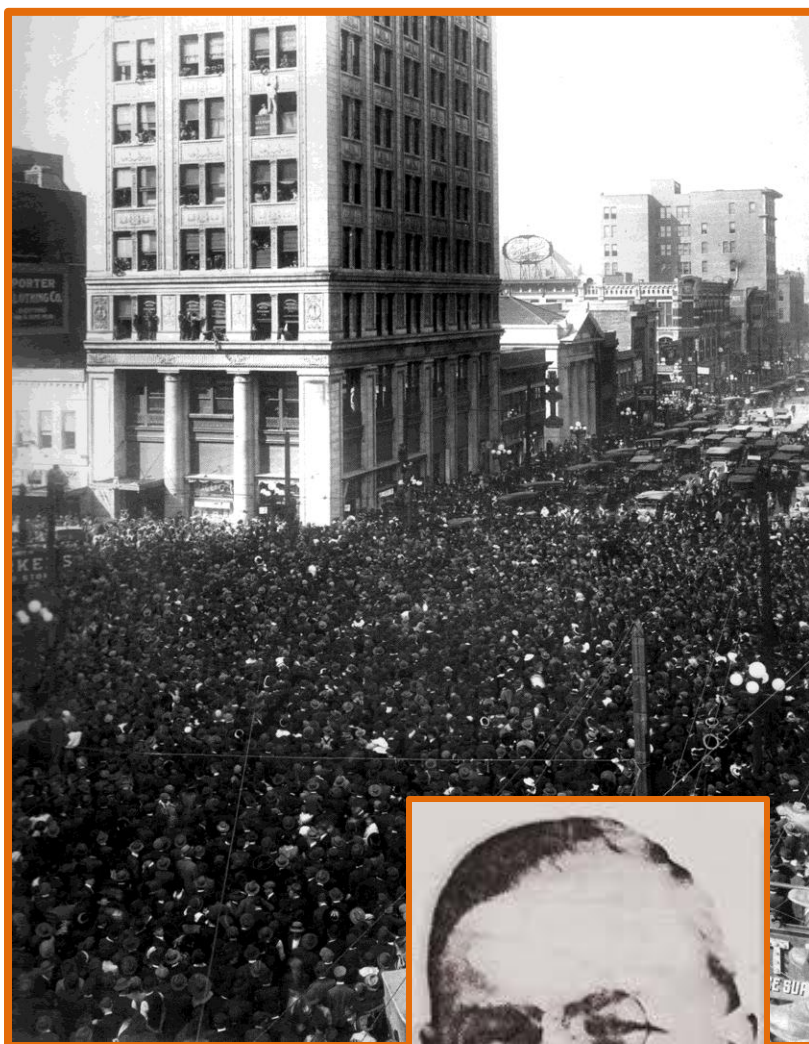
The two ton truck pictured in the advertisement has Birmingham Railway Light and Power Co printed on its side. Forty-two cells of Exide batteries, located under the body, powered the truck. The Birmingham Railway Light and Power Company was founded in 1898. It was sold to the Birmingham Electric Company in 1921.



On Exhibit – The Human Fly



It was Tuesday, January 30, 1917, and the man President Grover Cleveland once dubbed the “Human Fly” did his thing. One of the largest crowds ever assembled in Birmingham (estimated at 35,000) gathered to watch Harry H. Gardiner scale the exterior of the 16 story Empire Building on First Avenue.



Harry H. Gardiner,
the “Human Fly”

During the Roaring '20s, there was no shortage of daredevils claiming to be human flies, but Gardiner was the genuine article. By the time Gardiner arrived in Birmingham, he was in his forties — and famous for climbing some of the tallest buildings in the country. He started his dangerous occupation in 1905, and during his “buildering” career was said to have climbed more than 700 tall buildings.

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Birmingham History Center

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On Exhibit – The Human Fly

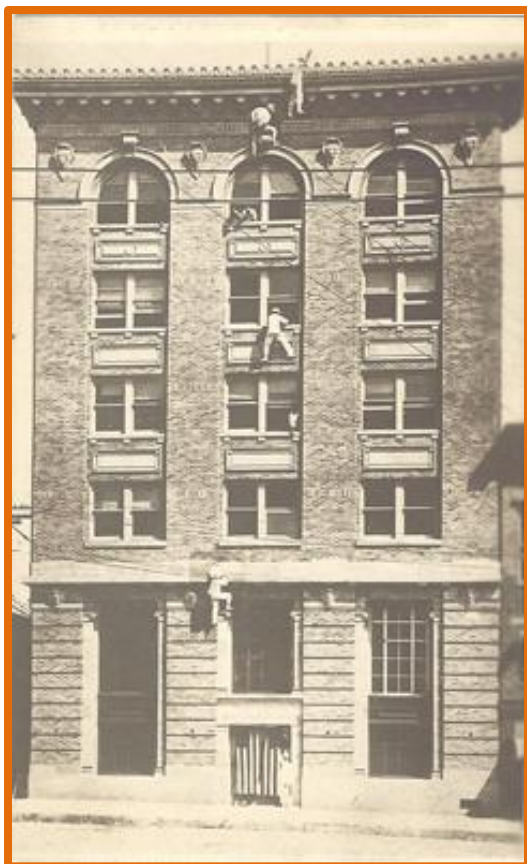
(Continued from page 3)

One of his most famous climbs occurred on Nov. 11, 1918, to celebrate the end of World War I. That day he scaled the towering Bank of Hamilton building in Canada. On the way up, he paused at an open window to sign insurance papers. Until then no insurance company had been willing to take the risk and write him a policy.

Using a low-tech approach, Gardiner did his climbing in ordinary street clothes — usually all white, in order to stand out clearly. Before each climb, he would exchange his regular shoes for sneakers, but wouldn't use the aid of any climbing devices.



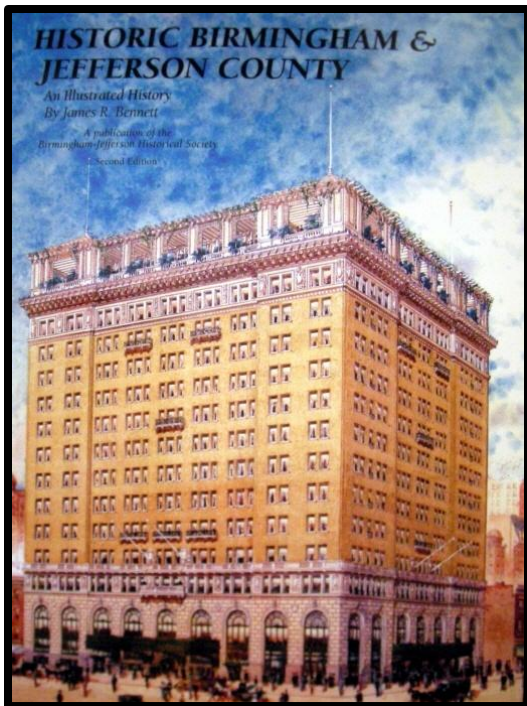
Climbing the Bank of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada



Gardiner would carefully plan out his ascent and would not take on a building with too many obstacles. This indicated he was far from foolhardy, which could not be said for others who tried to emulate him. As the death toll of building climbers increased, so did the states that passed laws banning such activity.

Some have speculated that Gardiner left the U.S. and continued climbing structures in Europe. Michael Largo, author of "The Portable Obituary," says a person matching Gardiner's description was found dead at the bottom of the Eiffel Tower in Paris in 1933. Perhaps it was his last climb.

(at left, a postcard of Gardiner climbing the People's Savings and Loan of Wooster, Ohio showing 5 different phases of the climb.)



BOOK SALE

The History Center has 2nd edition hardcover copies of Historic Birmingham and Jefferson County by James R. Bennett on sale for \$45.00, 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 NEXT 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.



Wire Desmond



BHC Wish List

More Visitor Reviews:

"Great for our home school field trip" – Angel Prince

"A Convention Center recommendation – well done" – Laura Lambert

"It is a very fun/interesting museum" – Gavin (age 11)

"Want to bring teen sons to see soon" – Cory and Susan Thomas

"Great information and nicely laid out" – David and Kathleen Henning (Alberta, Canada)

"Can't wait to see you grow" – Richard Crabb

"Super great" – Helen Price

"A great resource for my students" – Ashley Adams

"It was a walk back through time. Thank you" – Tamika Dunner

Dear Santa,



As you can see from our visitor reviews, we have been very good this year, but we would like to get better. These are some things we would like to have:

- 1. A building of our very own in the historic district*
- 2. Exhibit cases - tall or wide, lockable*
- 3. Artifacts from Birmingham and Jefferson County History - photos, letters, diaries, vintage men's clothing, menus, sports memorabilia, business memorabilia, etc.*



See what you can do, I appreciate it.

Signed Dez

Age - too old to be writing to Santa

Freedom Ride Memories

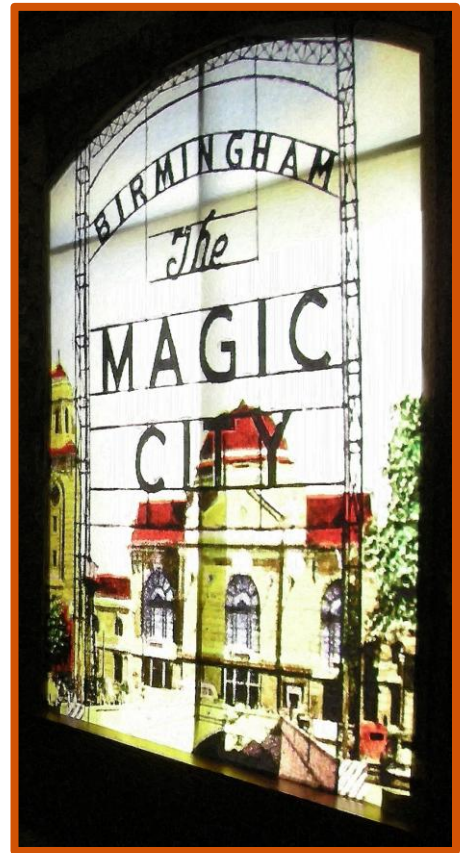
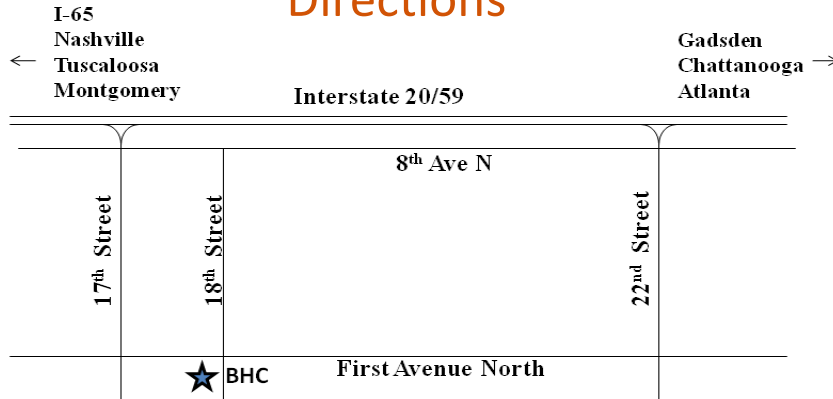


Catherine Burks-Brooks with Putnam Middle School and Philips Academy Students, September, 2011

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, Saturday 10:00 am – 4:00 pm. Located at the corner of 18th Street and First Avenue North in Birmingham at the historic Young and Vann Building.

Directions



Birmingham History Center

1731 First Avenue North
Birmingham, AL 35203

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