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Alabama  
A Documentary History to 1900

Revised and Enlarged Edition

Lucille Griffith

The University of Alabama Press  
*Tuscaloosa & London*

*For my Griffith nephews  
Ralph, John, Nicky,  
Edwin, and Larry  
With love*

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## Preface

This book grew out of frustration! In giving a course in Alabama history to history and elementary education majors at the University of Montevallo, I have always felt hampered by the dearth of accessible teaching materials. Aside from the contents of *The Alabama Historical Quarterly* and *The Alabama Review*, source collections for the state are both very meager and widely scattered. An occasional item appears in other journals and a few major things have been republished. Some of the best earlier works are long out of print and cannot be bought at reasonable prices. Therefore, I concluded that what my students needed was a book containing representative selections from good sources which were otherwise impossible or difficult to get. I also found that prospective teachers and students of Alabama history were eagerly looking for some publication that they could use to supplement the textbook, something with more meat in it than simple "history stories." This volume is my answer to these felt needs.

This book of readings is based on the theory that the most interesting history is that told by contemporary participants or observers. Few secondary accounts give the reader quite the same feeling of being a participant, or at least a close bystander, as do accounts written in the midst of life by the people who were there. Personal accounts, however, by their very nature are the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle which the historian must fit together to make the whole picture. This book is designed to furnish some of the pieces along with the essential framework.

I have followed a fairly simple outline. Since material before 1798 is scarce, I have put it in one section. Thereafter, I have assorted material into chronological periods and also topical classifications. I have chosen arbitrarily to end the book about 1900. This decision is open to question, but it had to end *somewhere* and that seemed a reasonable terminal date. With a new constitution, a new day in politics, and an acceleration in industry, a new era was ushered in with the new century; it should have more space than I could give it. Also, a source book of readings, like a Hall of Fame, should allow a decent interval between life and "immortality."

In selecting the topics to be used, I have tried to stay in the mainstream of Alabama history but by using more than the tradi-



tional sources. I have let all kinds of people, young and old, men, women and children, black and white, slave and free, educated and uneducated, governors and tenant farmers, from every section of the state have a part in this book. While I hope the reader will find it interesting, my chief concern has been accuracy, accuracy of fact and also of spirit. Therefore, most passages herein quoted could be duplicated many times over because they are typical of what was going on at that time. In short, I have made no attempt to use unique illustrations, only representative ones.

Except in cases where deviations from accepted standards were obviously human errors, I have kept the spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing as they appeared in the original. To make the documents easily discernible, yet not too obvious, they are set in slightly different type and with somewhat wider margins.

While I intend this work for college students and had my own in mind as I prepared it, the very nature of the letters, diaries, and other personal accounts makes it useful for high school students as well. Arranged topically as it is, it should prove useful as a textbook, and the general reader should find this a fresh approach to the history of the state.

In preparing this volume I have accumulated many debts which I gladly acknowledge. The original idea came out of a conversation with the late Dr. Hallie Farmer before her retirement. It soon became apparent that the small volume of basic documents we envisioned would be inadequate and should be replaced by something more elaborate, so the project grew. Encouraged by the kind reception of the first edition and stimulated by suggestions for improvement, we now offer a new and enlarged version.

I owe special debts to many people who have helped in many ways: to the personnel at the Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, and especially to Mrs. Virginia K. Jones and Mrs. Jessie Cobb; to Miss Mary Frances Tipton, reference librarian at the Carmichael Library, University of Montevallo, who good-naturedly complained I always gave her only the hard problems but who always came up with the right answer; to Mrs. Carolyn M. Reid, Miss Susan Vaughn and Mr. Reuben Triplett, who helped with typing; to Dr. Lorraine Pierson, who has read the whole manuscript and made many wise criticisms of it; to Dr. Kermit Johnson and the University of Montevallo for a grant from the Faculty Research Fund; and to many individuals who have helped in lesser but nevertheless significant ways.

LUCILLE GRIFFITH  
MONTEVALLO  
NOVEMBER 1971

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## TO ALABAMA

I sigh for the scenes of my earlier years,  
     For the sweet little cot that stood in the lawn,  
 For the loved one who then oft melted to tears  
     At the tale of the griefs of my life's early dawn:  
 For the song of the birds which rang in the grove,  
     For the rush of the streamlet o'er clustered with  
         vines,  
 For the shadowing oak, whose deep branches wove  
     A sigh to the whistle of the tall waving pines.  
 I sigh for the shades of thy woodlands and brakes,  
     For thy mountains and valleys, rich in fruits  
         and in flowers,  
 For the zephyrs that move on thy rivers and lakes;  
     Thine odor-balmed dews, thy sweet-scented  
         showers;  
 For thy wide-spread prairies, enamelled and green,  
     For the chase of the wild deer that over them  
         roam,  
 For the glow of thy sunset which sheds o'er each  
     scene  
     An halo of glory, like a vision of home.

I sigh for the girls, who, in health and in beauty,  
     Are the fairest and loveliest that ever charmed  
         youth,  
 Who in friendship or love in virtue or duty,  
     Are pure as the angels and stainless as truth;  
 I sigh for the flash of their bright beaming eyes,  
     For the words of kind impact that fall from  
         their lips,  
 For the romp and the ramble, 'neath the clear  
     evening skies,  
     Where the white lilies bloom and the honey-bee  
         sips.

I sigh for the smile of those true-hearted friends,  
     Whose kindly regard no clouds could o'er cast,  
 Whose mem'ry, like hope, now soothingly blends  
     The visions to come, with the dreams of the past;  
 For the grasp of the hand I met with of yore,  
     For the union of soul that linked us then,  
 For that pledge of the wine-cup, which opened the

store  
Of emotions and feelings we'll ne'er know again.

Sweet clime of the South may this be thy glory,  
In peace or in war on land or on sea  
In laws and in letters in legend or story  
The foremost and proudest of this land of the  
free;  
May thine be the garden the Eden of earth,  
Where pleasure and plenty spring up from the soil:  
Where religion and virtue preside o'er each hearth,  
Giving incense to love, and sweetness to toil.

*July 1839* GEORGE D. SHORTRIDGE

## Chapter 1

### The Colonial Period

#### The Madoc Story

Spain was the first European nation to claim what is now Alabama, but there may have been white men in the area before the Spaniards. There is a persistent legend that Madoc, a Welsh prince of the twelfth century, landed somewhere on the Gulf coast, very possibly Mobile Bay, in 1170 some three hundred years before Columbus set foot on the western hemisphere.

According to the legend:

Madoc, one of 17 sons of the ruler of Wales, could not stomach the possibility of a violent interfamily fight over the throne when their father died. Howel was the eldest son, he knew, but was basely born of an Irish woman. Next in line was David, and as sure as the fog rose from the castle moat every morning, David would not brook his brother's ascendance. A fight perhaps even civil war was inevitable.

Madoc himself was far down on the list, out of the running. And besides, Madoc seemed to be born for less petty things than fraternal blood-letting. The sea had always been his attraction, and to the icy waters of the North Atlantic he soon turned his eyes.

With four of his brothers and some women, including a sister, he gathered a small band and set out in 10 sailing ships toward the unknown west.

The next land the adventurers saw, no one knows exactly how long later, was the gleaming white beach of the Gulf Coast. There they sailed until they discovered a magnificent bay, circled with such trees as they had never seen in Wales. The group landed and found the land to be gentle to them fertile and pleasant. A land, Madoc said to his brothers, which any Welshman would be proud to live in.

He was excited if he could convince others of his country to cross the sea, they could stop wasting their time vying for only a ragged

portion of rocks and mountains. They could live in ease and enjoyment.

So leaving part of his company behind to secure a settlement, the prince returned to his homeland. Before too long he was on his way back to the Gulf. Hugh N. Starnes with Hank Black, *The Birmingham News Magazine*, March 5, 1967.

The Madocians prospered, and branches of them spread into many parts of the American continent, so the legend goes. Daniel Boone and John Sevier are both said to have seen them in their travels. Sevier wrote to a friend that in 1782 on a campaign against some of the Cherokees he had discovered traces of a very ancient fortification that could have been built only by Europeans. Sometimes afterwards in talking with a very elderly chief of the Cherokee he was told that "it was handed down by the forefathers that the works had been made by white people who had formerly inhabited the country" and with whom the Indians were at war for many years. The whites decided to leave and at Muscle Shoals a great battle took place. Just who was victorious is not quite certain but according to the story the whites agreed to leave, never to return. Reportedly they went down the Tennessee River to the Mississippi River and hence up it to the Missouri on their way north and west. The elderly chief remembered being told that these people were called Welsh.

At this late date it is impossible to know how much of this testimony was remembered by the chief from his elders, and how much was prompted by the questions of Sevier. No one has ever produced enough evidence to convince the historian that the story is true, and until that happens it must remain what it is, a legend.

#### The First Spanish Period 1507-1699

Spain was the first European nation known to historians to claim what is now Alabama. It is not certain just when the first Spanish explorers touched these shores but it was within a decade or so after the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus. The easily recognized outlines of Mobile Bay (known to early cartographers as Bahía Espiritu Santo) appear on the 1507 map by Martin Waldseemüller, the young geography professor at the college of St. Die. This was the same map to first use the name America. However, there is no account of an actual exploration of the area until 1519 when Pineda, Commander for Governor Garay of Jamaica, set out on an exploring expedition along the northern Gulf of Mexico. Pineda reports discovering a great river flowing into a large bay and native towns in abundance along the

banks. While there has been controversy over the exact location of the Spanish landing, modern evidence points to Mobile rather than

the mouth of the Mississippi River. As Pineda moved upstream, he counted forty Indian villages within the first six leagues. The exact circumstances under which the party set foot on Alabama soil are unknown, but they spent some forty days caulking their ships. No doubt, they kept an eye open for signs of gold; if they found anything valuable, there is no record of it.

Less than ten years later (1528) Pánfilo de Narváez, an experienced conquistador who had spent twenty-six years in the New World, made a forced landing on the banks of Mobile Bay. Narváez, described as tall, fair, of commanding person and agreeable address, had lost an eye when he led an expedition of 900 troops into Mexico to arrest the free-wheeling Hernando Cortez. Covey describes Narváez as a "grasping bungler" who by his "stupid decision to separate his cavalry and infantry from their sustaining ships sealed the doom of his expedition in Florida."

Narváez by 1527 was a veteran of enough distinction that the Council of the Indies appointed him governor with authority to conquer lands extending from the Rio de las Palmas (Rio Grande) to the Cape of Florida. He was to have the "routine titles and concessions" that came with the office. Setting out from Santo Domingo and after prolonged stays in Trinidad and Havana, he and his party of some 400 men and 80 horses landed at Tampa Bay on April 14, 1528. After many indecisions and much consultation between the governor and his subordinates, the party started westward, heading for Mexico. Having lost many of their ships (and using rafts the men had improvised from logs, horse hides, palmetto and horse hair for ropes, and even their shirts for sails), and encountering troubles with the natives whenever they ventured ashore, they reached the Mobile area in the late fall of 1528. Short of fresh water, the party under Commander Cabeza de Vaca landed at Mobile Bay early in November. Cabeza de Vaca, who proved to be the historian of the expedition, gives here an "unvarnished, soldierly account" of what they went through:

Continuing along the coast, we entered an estuary [Mobile Bay] where we saw a canoe of Indians coming toward us. We hailed them and, when they drew close to the Governor's boat, he asked for water. They showed themselves willing to get some if we furnished containers. That Greek, Doroteo Teodoro said he would go, too. The Governor and others failed to dissuade him. He took along a Negro, and the Indians left two of their number as hostages.

It was night when the Indians returned, without water in the containers and without the Christians.

When these returning Indians spoke to our two hostages, the latter started to dive into the water; but some of our soldiers held them back in the barge. The canoe sped away, leaving us very confused and de-

jected over the loss of our comrades. Cabeza de Vaca, *Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*, translated by Cyclone Covey (New York: The Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., 1961), pp. 5051. First published in 1542.

Narváez later was lost when he was swept overboard by a storm; but Cabeza de Vaca, after many adventures in the effort to join his compatriots in Mexico, returned home to Spain in 1537.

Three months before he set foot on home soil, Hernando de Soto had been named governor of Florida, a post Cabeza longed for. The new governor was, like most of the big names in Spanish exploration, a veteran of earlier expeditions. He had followed Pedrarias de Ávila to the West Indies, served under him in Nicaragua (and eventually married his daughter, Doña Isabel), and had won great distinction under Pizarro in the conquest of Peru. By marriage he was a brother-in-law of Balboa; several of his own relatives would serve with him in his expedition through the interior of North America.

Even though de Soto had participated in several expeditions, he was only in his middle thirties. A man of above average height and a skilled horseman, he was an agreeable figure in court circles. He was blessed with a strong constitution, without which he would never have been able to endure the long marches and extended periods of privation in the wilderness. He had returned from Peru with great wealth, much of it "lavished on him" by the Inca Atahualpa who had been his royal captive. Surrounded by stewards, ushers, equerries, and pages, he lived in "all the glitter and pageant of a rich nobleman." However, the young man chafed under the restrictions of court life and sought new worlds to conquer. Emperor Charles V granted him "a royal asiento and capitulation to conquer, pacify, and people" in the territory between the Rio de las Palmas and the Cape of Florida. Furthermore, he was made governor of Cuba. The task of recruiting men for the expedition was made easy by the stories Cabeza de Vaca told of clothes made of cotton, wool, vast amounts of gold, silver, and precious stones which he had seen in the "richest country in the world." On April 6, 1558, de Soto set sail from San Lucar with a fleet of seven large and three small vessels, at least 600 soldiers, several monks, and the usual number of royal officials. By the latter part of May, he had reached Cuba, where he busied himself with arrangements to leave the island under the care of a lieutenant and with preparations for the exploration of Florida. Having learned from his subordinates who had been sent to reconnoiter the coast that Tampa Bay was the best place to land, he sailed on May 18, 1539; on June 3 he