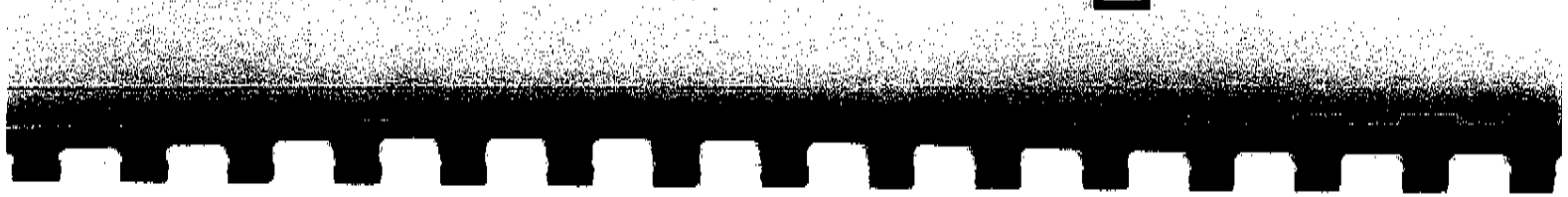


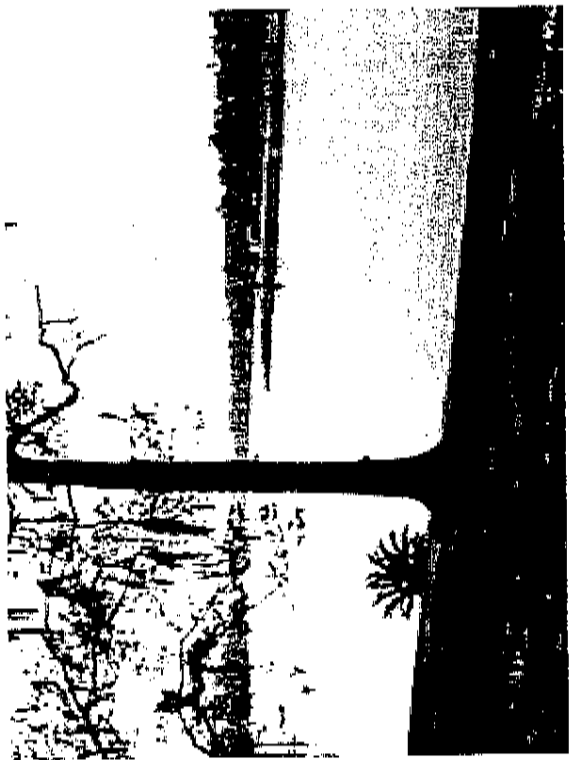


**65 Years
of
Dog River Memories**

**By
Howard Barney**

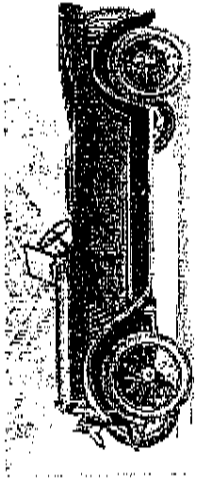


Dog River



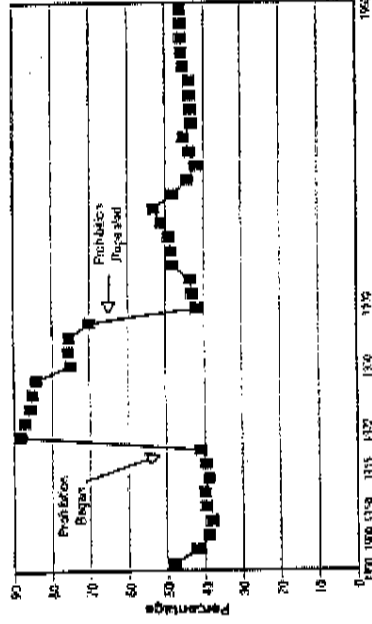
The remoteness, isolation and tranquility of the River Park area of Dog River have always been appealing, even if these attributes were more pronounced nearly a century ago. The old Louisville & Nashville Railroad tracks, with its modest Venetia station building just west of the vehicular intersection, marked the northern border of the cul-de-sac formed by the rail tracks and the river on the south.

The only non-river access to the area during the early days was by clay and gravel from Hall's Mill Road to the waterfront area. In the late 20's, for a little boy atop the back seat of an old Paige touring car, it seemed an all day, interminable trip from Mobile to the scuppernong vineyards of Monsieur Legere.



The object of the safari was to buy grapes and wine made during the days of Prohibition.

Total Expenditure on Distilled Spirits as a Percentage of Total Alcohol Sales (1890-1960)



Source: Clark Warburton, *The Economic Result of Prohibition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 114-15; and *Licensed Beverage Industry, Facts about the Licensed Beverage Industry* (New York: LBI, 1961)

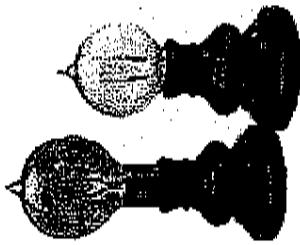
The old Frenchman lived on the easternmost promontory of what is now known as Venetia Road to Point Legere. But he planted more than grapes; the roadway to his rustic home was bordered by scores of cedars, some of which remain along the route to more modern homes now occupying the winemaker's property.

Lending credence to the reputed health qualities of the neighborhood was the longevity of both Legere and an old Belgian who once lived with his creole companion, named Clara on the eastern border of what is now the Bender compound. All three lived into their nineties. Mr. Portier, if that's the correct spelling, was housebound during the late 30's or early 40's, but Clara was a familiar figure as she and her basket walked along Venetia Road to head north to a little grocery store operated by a husband and wife team named Green across Navco Road from the Morgan shop. This was no

supermarket, but was the convenience store of its day and was shopped by the relatively few who lived then in the area. There also was another store at Hall's Mill and the precursor of Navco Road. T-bone steaks were 25 cents each. There were no utilities south of the railroad tracks



to make life more comfortable. The first was telephone service largely financed by affluent Mobilians who had bought summer homes on the river.

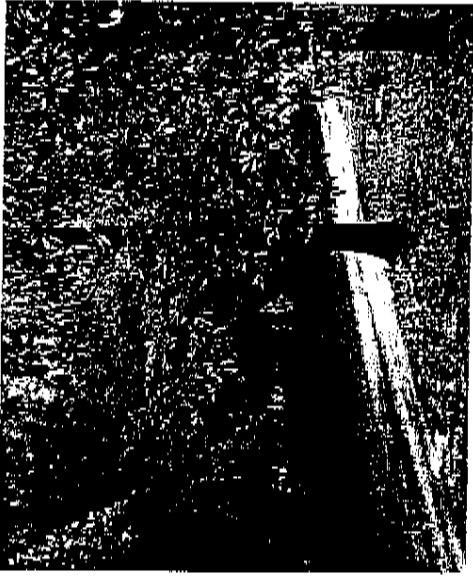


Electric power probably came at about the same time. Before

natural gas there were open fireplaces and 50-gal. drums that dripped heating oil into small furnaces.



There were
relatively few
homes along the
unpaved route
to River Park..



The road was then called Hemley Road, according to city
engineers. And there were several sizeable truck gardens
along the route, one of which was just south of Hall's
Mill Road and was owned by Joe Norton, a Mobile
banker who moonlighted as a gentleman farmer.
Because of the dearth of homes, the county was slow in
hard-surfacing this lifeline to Dog River; asphalt trucks
didn't make their way south until probably the early
forties.

Improved access was soon followed by construction of more homes and other developments along the route to the railroad tracks.



Railroad map shown above

As mentioned earlier, the railroad way station was named "Venetia" and shows as such on old L&N maps. Among early builders of summer homes along this area of the river were members of the Danner family of Mobile. The president of the L&N at that time was friendly to a Civil War veteran by the name of Capt. Albert Carey Danner, and the station was named as a

tribute to his wife Venetia. The name of the station was changed to NAVCO (New Albany Veneer Company) after the mill was established there by the Knights of Indiana. Colonel Knight, founder of the company, and his family lived in a beautiful old home amid the oak grove on the site of Luscher Park. The home had been earlier built by Henry Tacon, a resident of Mobile, for his

French bride, the daughter of a Parisian baron.



The original station was a typical, gabled small town one but was replaced by an ignominious boxcar that eventually was set afire by the homeless of the day called hobos.

There were a number of unforgettable characters who lived in River Park, but one of the most memorable was Mrs. Alice Lewis, who lived alone to an advanced age at her simple home on Venetia Road behind the Deaton

property. She was indomitable, stalwart and was so shrunken she could hardly be seen over the dashboard of her old automobile. She also was deaf, but that did not deter her from occasional baby-sitting for both young and elderly to supplement her meager income. Her only medication against infirmity and advancing years seemed to be strenuous labor in her sizeable vegetable garden behind the house.



Her only companion was Speedy, a beloved black and white fox terrier. She loved the little dog so much that when his teeth began to fail she would pre-chew human food for him as they sat before a log fire. The logs normally were tightly rolled newspapers that probably provided the only heat in the house.

Mrs. Lewis was courageous until nearly the end of her lifetime: knowing there was no one to look after the decrepit Speedy, she bravely had him put down before

she admitted herself to a nursing home, where she ended her days.

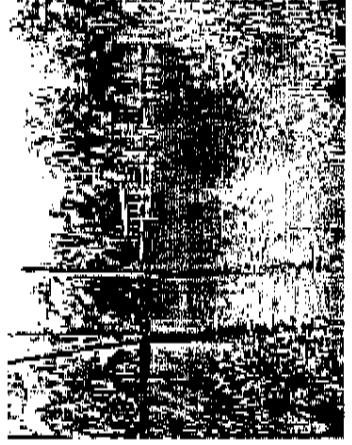
Mrs. Lewis' home, once occupied by a Benton family, was adjacent to the *Dandelion Lodge*, a night spot on the present Deaton property, operated by a Dan Fisher from St. Louis. In those days it probably would best be described as a "road house" or nightclub that provided lots of BYOB entertainment for Mobile's younger generation during the prohibition era. Part of the old club is incorporated into the Deaton house.

The nightspot was preceded for many years by sawmill activity in the immediate area. The riverfront immediately to the west was long marked by a remnant of a wooden corduroy ramp leading from the water to shore; and alongside in the mud remained several large logs, with peg holes, part of a log raft that supplied the saw mill from either upstream or down. Most of the big

piners at the site had never been cut, until they were felled by the 1979 hurricane.

The only other known industrial activity along the river was a small cotton mill just south of the bridge across the river at McVay. Discovery, in the 1940s, of a mysterious brick tunnel or conduit leading to the river caused a flurry of interest before it was determined the tunnel served a mill and not a secret cave for pirates.

The tunnel's mystery was temporarily provocative but not nearly as much as a violent murder that occurred in the same neighborhood on the eastside of the river at the bridge. An oversized man by the name of Tiny operated a fishing camp there that included several rustic cabins.



Tiny was murdered at his camp. His murder was never solved but

speculation at the time had him surprising the wrong person in the wrong cabin at the wrong time.

Some of the earliest evidence of the

existence of Indian life in the River Park

area has also been found along the

waterfront in the small shell mounds of the

river's north bank. Many shards and a

number of flint arrowheads have been



collected by early residents of that area.

River Park may be a tight

little island in the Dog River

watershed, but it's existence

since Spanish Land Grant

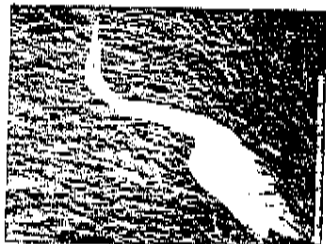


days has been an interesting and memorable one, with the

foregoing account of people, places and things delivered

from the memories of just one of the old-timers who has

enjoyed nearly 65 years of its delights.



These memories were recorded by Mr. Barney at the request of the River Park Association in a beginning attempt to compile a history of our area and the whole of

Dog River.

Thank you, Mr. Barney, for a GREAT BEGINNING!

