

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

ONE OF Tuscaloosa's popular Summer resorts about 24 miles north on Highway 69 is Windham Springs. Today it is an easy 30-minute automobile ride on a paved road, but in 1900 it was a long all day trip by mule team and wagon.

Windham Springs (post office address - Oregonia- was noted for its fine sulphur spring which was supposed to have wonderful medicinal qualities. There was also a well and another Spring that supplied "free-stone" water for dinner table use.

For a mental picture of this resort let's start with the bold sulphur spring which bubbled through a man made rock basin. The Spring was the social gathering place for all visitors and guests. It was fun to watch newcomers who usually had to hold their nose in order to drink the strong sulphur water. It frequently required

about one week in order for them to drink the water straight without making a face or holding their nose.

Just north of the spring was the fenced in compound called the campground. A row of about 6-8 cottages extended northward along the west boundary of the grounds. Next was the hotel of log cabin type construction. Next, but outside the compound, was the newer frame type of store building with two large rooms on the second floor and an exterior stairway.

I was told the front (east) room was a Masonic meeting hall and the other was occupied by the W. of W. The east side of the compound was open space for camping where groups could pitch their tents for a several day sojourn. All day singing with dinner on the grounds was quite a festive and interesting event.

It was here that I first heard gospel

hymns sung with the name of the musical notes—do-re-me—used instead of words. There was a small log building on the campgrounds securely locked with a rusty padlock. It was told that it was an old cotton house for storing freshly picked cotton, but before the Summer was over my curiosity was satiated in an exciting manner to be outlined later.

Mr. George Christian had a permanent Summer home at Windham just across the road from the spring. Mr. Tom Christian and Dr. Emil Shirley seemed to have a permanent lease on the two cottages within the compound and nearest the spring. I recall that Mr. Tom Christian had a gramophone, a forerunner of the phonograph, that aroused the curiosity of the natives who would call by to see "that 'ar thing that talks." One of the records was a monolog by an aged father bidding his son goodby to go to the Spanish-American War. When it ended in a quavering voice, "goodby, Jim, take care of yourself" it moved many to actual tears.

The trip from Tuscaloosa to Wind-

ham was a memorable and gruesome experience. We left at daybreak in a wagon drawn by a two mule team and loaded with a driver, family, two big trunks and a lot of miscellaneous packages. We made a short stop about every four miles to allow the mules to catch their breath or to "blow" as it was called.

The first real challenge was North River hill, about eight miles from town. This winding road up the hill was long and steep and with deep sand ruts and frequent large stone which made it difficult to negotiate. All passengers, except driver, were required to dismount and walk up the hill. At least two stops were necessary to allow the mules to "blow."

My job was to place a large stone behind each of the rear wheels of the wagon to "scotch" it and relieve the mules from having to hold the wagon against the pull of gravity. This routine was repeated in a lesser degree at Turkey Creek Hill.

(To be continued next week.)