

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

IF YOU walked around town and asked five or six elder citizens where the old "tan-yard" was located chances are that more than one would ask, "what's a tan-yard?"

The dictionary defines tanning as "to convert (a skin) into leather; originally and still generally by impregnation with an infusion of oak bark or other form of tannic acid." The resulting leather is tan in color, hence the name. A tan-yard is a place where this process is carried out.

The most recent tan-yard in this city was probably located at the north end of Monroe St. (23rd Ave.) close to the Warrior River. It is shown on the projection map of

Tuscaloosa dated 1887 as the small building next to the river. This is the one I remember.

An older and larger tan-yard is mentioned in Matt Clinton's history of Tuscaloosa on page 46. This was owned by Petite Marlow, a wealthy free Negro. It was indicated on an old map as being between the Sander's Ferry Road and the river and what would be 42nd St. (just west of the present Tuscaloosa Country Club).

An interesting by-product of a tannery is the discarded oak bark after it has served in the leathermaking process. It is considered ideal for circus rings, athletic running tracks, and if enough is available, for horse racing tracks.