



## CITRONELLE HISTORICAL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

19000 South Center Street, Citronelle, AL 36522

### A Brief History of Citronelle

Citronelle was for thousands of years part of the territory of indigenous peoples. By the time of European contact, members of the historical tribes of the Choctaw and Creek hunted the area. Citronelle was first recorded as an Indian Settlement in 1702.

“The name and fame of Citronelle as a health resort began long years before the modern winter tourist ever though wending his way to the pretty little town standing on the summit of the pine clad hills of Southern Alabama. There is an old Indian legend which tells how the the dusky Red Men roamed far and wide through the Gulf Coast country, and would not stop until, guided by an unerring instinct they reached a summit crowned with tall trees, beautiful flowers and life-giving plants, and where springs bubbled forth, flowing water as sparkling as the mountain dew and as pure as the nectar of the gods. Here they reared their wigwams and dwelt in peaceful, happy life, bringing the sick from other tribes, and with naught but pure air, pure water, and the healing virtues of shrubs and herbs, nursing them back to life and health again; and here they would have dwelt until the present day had not fate and the decree of the Paleface wrested their heritage from them. They went in sadness, but left the name “Citronelle” (which, in their language, means “I Heal”) as a tribute to the memory of blessings so freely bestowed, and which were once their own.”

In 1777, William Bartram, an American botanist, took a canoe trip of thirty miles up the river from Mobile to find a plant which his Indian allies assured him would cure him of malaria. He found the plant and named it “Citronella”. Citronella then grew in profusion on a plateau thirty miles from Mobile, to which the Mobile and Ohio Railway built the first railroad in south Alabama in 1851 and where the railroad company appropriately named a station Citronelle. Citronelle was found to possess healing herbs and mineral springs. The area was first settled in 1811 and established as a jurisdiction in 1892.

On May 4, 1865, one of the last significant Confederate armies was surrendered by General Richard Taylor under the “Surrender Oak”. This was the third in a series of five major surrenders of the war. The two previous surrenders occurred at Appomattox Court House, Virginia between General Robert E. Lee and General Ulysses S. Grant; and the second and largest at Bennett Place near Durham, North Carolina between General William T. Sherman and General Joseph E. Johnston.

The Nemean’s Club of Citronelle reported that the large white oak tree under which the final surrender of the Civil War took place was blown down in the hurricane of September 1906. The Citronelle Business Men’s Association wrote Col. W. D. Mann, who very

generously donated the fallen tree to the Association for the purpose of advertising Citronelle. The wood was made into gavels, walking canes and other souvenirs. Each article sent out is marked "Surrender Oak, Citronelle, Alabama," and a certificate stating that the article is genuine accompanies it. The remains of the old stump have disappeared and a historical marker has been placed at the site to commemorate the surrender. "The Surrender Oak Festival", a living history/reenactment of the surrender sponsored by the Citronelle Historical Preservation Society, occurs each year in Citronelle on the first Saturday in May.

In the late 19th century, the town became a popular resort destination because of the climate, herbs, and healing waters. Many resort hotels were built to accommodate the surge of visitors. Citronelle The Land of Healing Waters: There are several chalybeate and other mineral springs near Citronelle, one of which is of great diuretic value, but the water that chiefly induced the representative of the The Chicago Clinic and Pure Water Journal to take a journey of nearly a thousand miles, is the one supplying the Hotel Citronelle. The American water which most closely approaches the Citronelle water is that of the Poland Springs of Maine, which owes its deserved reputation to its comparative freedom from mineral salts. For many years the value of these springs and the salubrity of the Citronelle climate have been known to the American people. Alabama -- "Here We Rest" -- perpetual Alabama in Citronelle.

The situation is one on a high elevation, (365 feet above sea level) reputed the highest point at similar distance from the coast from Maine to Texas. The country is covered with pine, the air is salubrious, the climate good at all times of the year and well suited to disorders of the respiratory tract. The mineral springs are many and interesting, ferruginous and remarkably lightly mineralized waters being found. The value of a water with so small a percentage of mineral salts is apparent to any physician.

The Citronelle Chautauqua Association was organized in 1904 for the purpose of maintaining and operating an institution for "entertainment, instruction, and culture - literary, scientific, religious, and otherwise." Composed of 141 members, it opened each year from March 2 to March 29. Twenty-two acres were purchased, located on the present Baptist Assembly grounds on Center Street. The auditorium seated 2,000. Many times standing room only. There were several dressing rooms, a large stage, wooden benches and a sawdust floor. Just north of the Auditorium was a lake made to the depth of 90 feet. The cost of a 27 day season ticket was \$3.50 a single attendance ticket was 25 cents. In the 1930's the Chautauqua was condemned. Deemed unsafe, it was torn down.

The first public school building was built in Citronelle in 1885-1886. Prior to the building of this school building, a one-room school (built circa 1860's) stood approximately where the

present football stadium is today at the corner of State Street and Rowe Avenue. There were also several private homes in Citronelle that served as school houses as well. The property for this school was deeded by the M&O Railroad to the Mobile County School Board in 1884. This school only went through 8th grade. If one wanted to graduate from the 11th grade (at that time there was no 12th grade), one had to take the "Accommodation Train" train to Mobile to attend Barton Academy. Initially, this school was built as a two-room school and stood on the corner of Lebaron and Rowe Avenues where the parking lot to the main entrance to CHS is today.

In 1913-1914 a three story brick building was erected next to the first school house. This housed Elementary grades five, six, and seven and four grades (8-11) of High School (at that time there was no 12<sup>th</sup> grade). The second and third stories were used as classrooms and the basement was used as a cafeteria. Citronelle High School, at that time, was the only accredited school in Mobile County outside the city limits of Mobile. In 1930, another high school was built to the right of the three story building and the A-Hall was built in the 1960s. The three story building was deemed unsafe and torn down in 2014. As of 2014, a new high school is being built across the street in the old practice field and will take up much of the entire block.

Rosa A. Lott was born in Citronelle, Alabama where she spent most of her life. After graduating from high school, she continued her formal education at Alabama State Teachers College. Not only was she a great educator, she was a renowned humanitarian as well. Because of her love for and commitment to young people, she saw the need of a high school for black students in the Citronelle area. With the support of the community, she used her own money to travel on the Gulf Transport Bus month after month to the Mobile County School Board pleading for a high school for black students in Citronelle. It was largely through her untiring effort that the Citronelle Consolidated School was built in 1949. She served as principal until her death in 1952. In 1958, the school was renamed Rosa A. Lott in honor and memory of her. The school has served as a high school, an elementary school, and most recently, a middle school.

In 1955, oil was discovered in the area. In a nine-year period, over 400 oil wells appeared and Citronelle became known as the Oil Capital of Alabama.

Today, Citronelle is still a warm and welcoming community that has a lot to offer new residents and businesses alike. The city has many amenities such as an 18 hole golf course, beautiful parks, baseball and football fields. We have a gas lighted walking trail that extends three miles, a museum, and many historic homes and buildings.