

**THE HISTORY OF THE FAMILY OF WILLIAM HENRY HOOVER, SR.
FOUNDER OF THE CITY, HOOVER, ALABAMA**

By Jane Hoover Parrish

The purpose in writing this history is to preserve for the present and future residents of Hoover the background knowledge of the city's birth and insight into the character and personality of its founder.

I think that it is interesting to note that in my research, the name Hoover came from an old German word "Hube" which became Huber and later changed to Hoover by early immigrants in the 1700's. The word Hube means a possessor of a tract of land.

William Henry Hoover, Sr. was born in Russellville, Alabama, June 12, 1890. He was the son of Lucia Leonard Peoples, born August 3, 1864 to Dr. Elias P. Peoples and his first wife, Minerva Leonard Peoples and William Henry Hoover born 1850 in Virginia to J. D. and Bettie Hoover born in Tennessee.

His father and mother were married in September, 1879, in old Elyton now Birmingham, Alabama. They had two other sons, Daniel V. S. Hoover born September 9, 1888, in Russellville, Alabama and "General" George Washington Hoover, also born July 4, 1893 in Russellville.

My grandfather had a brick manufacturing business near Russellville. He intended to build a town for the workmen and name it Hooverville, but before it could become a reality, he lost his business during an economic depression in the late 1800's. This became a childhood dream of my father to someday fulfill his father's dream and develop a city.

It is interesting to note that my grandfather made the brick for the first brick building in Birmingham—the O'Brien Opera House and helped lay the brick on some of the buildings built on Morris Avenue during the 1880's.

In 1895 my grandfather moved his family to Jasper, Alabama. Then in early 1896 moved to South McAlester Indian Territory where my father went to school in a one room school house with American Indians that had long black shiney hair and wore moccasins. Just two years later they moved back to Jasper and my father remained there until July 5, 1911 when he moved to Bessemer, Alabama.

When we were children, he told us that he was a bookkeeper in a bank when he was just ten years old. After we all expressed amazement, he would then say that he straightened and dusted off the books for a bank before he went to school each morning. We all had a good laugh.

In 1910 he married Bertha Christian. They had two daughters, Maydelle Hoover born August 14, 1913, and Sarah Elizabeth Hoover born February 14, 1918.

Soon after 1910 he enrolled in a correspondence course in Pharmacy with LaSalle University in Chicago, Illinois. He worked at Gunn's Drug Store in Bessemer. Little did he know that he was working for the grandfather of his future daughter-in-law, Julie, who married his son, Bill, Jr. After the store closed at night he would study and use the facilities to learn pharmacy, sometimes working late into the night. He took the pharmaceutical exam in Montgomery and became a licensed pharmacist. He continued to work in the same drug store, but soon discovered that because of a hearing problem he could not understand the doctors giving the prescriptions over the phone. Much to his disappointment, he realized that he would have to pursue another occupation.

In 1912 he entered the insurance business, selling accident and health insurance for Continental Casualty; later appointed agency supervisor and State Agent. He worked for various companies and in various capacities in casualty, fire and life. During this time as an agent, he would have some days when he would call on people all day and not sell a single policy. He would come back to his office tired and discouraged. Soon he devised a plan of reviewing the previous sales made, written on cards, kept in a small wooden box. One by one he would go through them and recall everything about each one. By the time he got through he was encouraged and motivated to start again the next morning.

In 1921, working alone, without salary, he set about the monumental task of forming Employers Mutual of Alabama. He convinced leading business men of Birmingham to drop their insurance with established companies and place it with his company not yet in operation. Forty-one workmens compensation policies were written, which amounted to \$51,275.00 in annual premiums. \$50,000.00 was the required amount of premiums under the law to start a company. On October 23, 1922 the first board meeting was held at the old Tutwiler Hotel in Birmingham. The directors list consisted of prominent Alabama businessmen. My father was elected vice president and general manager. On December 2, 1922, Employers Mutual of Alabama was open for business. Sometime in the 1930's my father's brothers, General and V. came with the company. Later on his two sons, Bill, Jr. and Tom started their careers with the company.

In its first year the company operated from a cramped one room office with an operating staff of three people in downtown Birmingham. From that modest beginning the company had a steady and healthy growth, emerging from the depression years as one of the most sound casualty companies in the nation. My father was instrumental in bringing workmens compensation laws to Alabama.

In 1929 the company was converted from a mutual company to a stock company—Employers Insurance Company of Alabama, Inc., electing my father president on June 26. Up until 1949, Employers was the only stock casualty company ever to be organized and successfully operated in Alabama. Later on in 1944 Employers Life Insurance Company was formed.

He had the following to say about the insurance business:

"Ours is a necessary business. Personally I have always been determined not to be engaged in any business which was not necessary and which would not benefit those with whom I expect to do business. Today insurance is as necessary in the construction of a building as the material and lumber which go into it; as necessary in the conduct of a mercantile business as the merchandise itself. There could be no factories built, bridges or highways, were it not for the guarantee afforded by insurance. Our agents are not selling a luxury but a necessity."

As president of the Jefferson County Safety Council, he coined the national phrase, "Drive carefully, the life you save may be your own."

He was active in numerous other civic organizations which will be listed at the end.

On November 19, 1932, in Cullman, Alabama my father married my mother, Helen Gould Carnes born March 16, 1902, in Oneonta, Alabama to Lucy Cole Wooten and Thomas Jefferson Carnes. My grandfather Carnes lived on a farm and was in the mercantile business in Albertville, Alabama most of his life. My mother had thirteen brothers and sisters.

My father and mother lived in an apartment off Highland Avenue, Birmingham, Alabama when they were first married. Later they moved to a house in Mayfair—3521 Whitehall Road, Homewood, Alabama where they were living when I was born on July 1, 1934. Two years later on June 27, 1936, they had twins, William Henry Hoover, Jr. and Helen Gould Hoover. Then in 1945 on July 12, another son was born, Thomas Herbert Hoover.

Some of my fondest memories were spent growing up in this house and on 1500 acres of land in Shelby County purchased in 1936 for \$1.00 an acre. Although my father was very busy, he always took time for us to do things together as a family. He was the "wheel" and my mother was the "hub." Almost every weekend we would go to our property in Shelby County. A couple of the houses built there, with the actual physical help of my father, are still standing and being lived in. When we stayed overnight there, we had to eat by the light of kerosine lamps. In 1944 my parents purchased 160 acres along Tyler Road on Shades Mountain. Tyler Road was a narrow dirt road at this time, houses were few with a general store selling groceries on Shades Crest operated by V. C. McAlister. We always stopped there for food and supplies before driving on to a two room log cabin built on the Tyler Road property.

The cabin was built from lumber taken off the property and cut at Sellers Saw Mill down Tyler Road from our property. There is a Union 76 service station there now. We had a wood stove, purchased from Yeilding Department Store then

located in downtown Birmingham. Fun times were spent there at company picnics, hiking in the woods down to a creek and an artesian well. We had a possum hunt once that was an experience with full moon and carrying lanterns and flash lights. We would go through the woods and corn fields, now Mill Run, following the sound of the hound dogs chasing the possums. Approximately 20 acres of the land that the Mill Run development is on now, used to be cultivated in corn and various crops with a barn and livestock.

In 1946 we purchased a colonial house on Overhill Road, Mountain Brook, which later became the 1990 Decorator's Showhouse. My father built one of the first swimming pools in that area. The pool was built by the old fashioned method of mule and pan. Sometime in 1948 my father and Elliott Carper worked out an arrangement to exchange homes, and we moved to their home on Surrey Road, Mountain Brook. My parents began to plan and start building the house on Tyler Road. It took almost two years to build because materials were hard to get after the second World War.

In February, 1950, we moved into our new home on Tyler Road, Shades Mountain. There were very few houses and we were really out in the country. All we had in the beginning was McAllister's General Store. A few years later Coppredge Drug Store and service station were built on the crest. The first fire station in Bluff Park came into existence about late 1950 or 1951. In the early fifties my father started buying up property along Highway 31, south of Vestavia, about 682 acres. He chose this site because it was between Birmingham and the state capital. This land at that time was really out in the boondocks. Some people called his venture Hoover's Folly. He could visualize the growth of Birmingham moving southward. With that foresight and much energy, money, planning and courage he founded the community of Hoover in February, 1954, which later became incorporated in April of 1967 with a population of 406.

The original area was described as four blocks long and one block wide. The original streets were Whispering Pine and Helen (named after my mother) Circles, a segment of Deo Dara Drive, Greenvale Road and Valgreen Lane. Deo Dara Drive was named for the Deo Dara Cedar trees planted along that street by my father.

Ten acres was donated to the Jefferson County Board of Education for a school. Green Valley Community School stands on that land today. After Hoover's incorporation, land was also donated where the first city hall was built; Star Lake was also donated to the city. He sold lots for much less than what they were worth in the beginning to motivate businesses and people to move to Hoover.

Roberts & Son, Birmingham's oldest business was the second business to move to Hoover.

I can remember the family having a picnic on a small pond with a hillside of pasture land and grazing cows where Star Lake and the surrounding homes

are now. Green Valley Country Club property was nothing but a wood thicket.

Later on when the golf course of Green Valley County Club was finished, its founder at the age of 72 started playing golf for the first time. He used to think it was silly for people to chase that little white ball around, but after he got the hang of it my mother became a golf widow.

The ground breaking for Employers Insurance Company of Alabama's new home office building was December 1957; it was finished in September 1958, and from there the rest of the city's businesses began to spring up.

The first Parade of Homes was held in 1959, consisting of Valgreen Lane and with that exposure to the public the residential area began to grow also.

In April of 1975, a long awaited day, the family home on Tyler Road was annexed into the City of Hoover.

In the spring of 1973 my father was diagnosed as having Myasthenia Gravis and his health began to decline. Over the next six years my mother faithfully cared for him until his death on September 5, 1979.

My mother continued to live in their home until her death from cancer on May 15, 1987.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than
great riches - "

Proverb 22:1

Member of the following:

Southern Research Institute - Director
 Birmingham Chamber of Commerce
 Committee of 100
 Jefferson County Safety Council - President
 The Club - President and Director
 Who's Who in Insurance - 1950 National Publication
 Birmingham Jaycees
 Green Valley Country Club - Founder, President, Director
 Exchange Club
 Vestavia Country Club - Director