



A Commercial History of Shellman (1844-1950)

1. Introduction

This overview of the development of commercial enterprises in the vicinity of Shellman covers the period from 1844 until around 1950. The information is incomplete. Retail businesses were often located in leased quarters; the businesses changed hands often, normally without a deed since there was no sale of property. As a result, the history comes from a combination of deeds and old newspapers, neither of which are complete. Also, the newspaper ads describe the goods/services being offered, but seldom give the location of the business.

This is a summary; in many cases, more information about the businesses and their operators is available in *Shellman Historic Buildings*, also published on this website. Street number references are provided to direct the reader to the specific location in *Shellman Historic Buildings* containing the additional details.

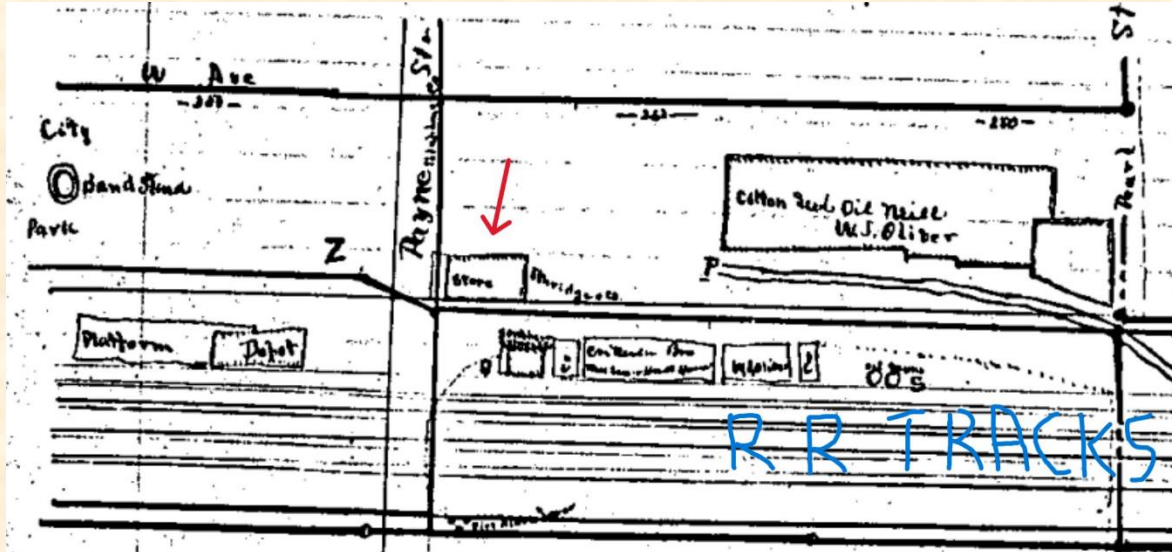
2. The Early Years

When the pioneers settled the area around Shellman, farms were as self-sufficient as it was feasible to make them. Essential services, such as stores and mills, were many miles away. *“At this early time, with the nearest grist mills being located either at Columbus or Ft. Gaines, neighbors took turns carrying grist to the mills. They blazed trails through the dense forests by notching the trees. One neighbor would blow his horn, and another neighbor would blaze the trees, following the direction of the sound until he reached the blower.”* [RANDOLPH COUNTY, GEORGIA. A COMPILATION OF FACTS, RECOLLECTIONS, AND FAMILY HISTORIES. Randolph County Historical Society. 1977. Page 163]. Given this hardship, it is not surprising that the earliest commercial structure known in the vicinity of Shellman was the grist mill built by James Oliver and Harmon Hargraves in 1844. John Ward purchased their log millhouse in December, 1850. He replaced and expanded the mill, which became known as Ward’s Mill. The mill was later known as Crittenden’s Mill and Merritt’s Mill.

The arrival of the railroad was the catalyst for the growth of a settlement which eventually became the town of Shellman. See *Land Ownership Around Shellman (1827-1883), Appendix C: The Railroad* for a discussion of the history of the railroad in Southwest Georgia and how it came to this area ([link](#)). When the railroad arrived, a depot was built which became the economic hub of the area (See 58 Park Ave). The commercial district formed around it to the south and east. When Ward was incorporated in 1883, the corporate limits were defined as circle around the depot with a radius of one mile.

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The farmers who visited the depot presented the first opportunity for a retail business in the limits of present-day Shellman. By 1860, Z T Phelps, the railroad stationmaster, was granted a privilege to operate a stable and store on the SW railroad reserve near the depot (See 40 Payne St). A newspaper called it a "family grocery store" in 1861. This was the only store in Ward's Station until the Crittenden Brothers opened their store in 1872/3 (See 41 W Railroad St). Phelps died in 1891, and his family sold the store in 1894. It continued to operate as a grocery store and meat market under several owners until it burned in the 1940's, owned at that time by Lewis Crittenden. The location of the store is shown in the hand-drawn plat below, drawn in 1904; the red arrow marks the store.





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3. The Emerging Town of Ward

The building of the depot was sure to encourage commercial development around it, but the war and the ensuing depression delayed it for over a decade. John Ward moved to Florida before he could capitalize on his vision; that lot would fall to others, especially the Crittenden family.

Hiram Crittenden focused on the commercial endeavors of the family. He envisioned a commercial district, south of and centered on the depot, which is today Shellman's "downtown." The first stores occupied a strip of land running along the south side of the railroad right-of-way. No plan or plat has been found, but there was a clear organization scheme.

- The strip between Calhoun St and Buford St was subdivided into plots that were 29' wide; these were used by the Crittenden family.
- The strip from Buford St. to Arthur St was subdivided into plots that were 30' wide; these were primarily leased (and later sold) to non-family.

By 1873, the Crittendens were operating a store which still stands, although it is now gutted. It is the earliest known brick structure in Shellman. By the time that the town of Ward was incorporated in 1883, stores had been opened by B K Arthur & Sons and W J Oliver. John M Anthony operated a blacksmith shop and wood shop, and there was a livery stable. Shortly after incorporation, development accelerated: additional stores, warehouses and a hotel were all open by 1885.

The Crittendens sold tracts to the Payne family and the Arthur family, both of whom developed their own businesses as well as subdividing their tracts for sale to others. Arthur St became the gateway to the depot from the south, and was lined by stores and warehouses. By the late 1880's, Shellman was a bustling hub of commercial activity for surrounding farms. The article at right is from the *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, January 30, 1889 ([link](#)).

SHELLMAN.

**Description of the Thriving Little Town.
The Mayor's Election Yesterday.**

SHELLMAN, Ga., Jan. 29.—Shellman is comparatively a new town of 700 inhabitants, situated on the southwestern division of the Central Railroad, midway between Macon and Montgomery, in Randolph county, and in the best farming section of Georgia. The lands around the town are quite even, admirably adapted to fertilization, and productive of every plant known to this climate. The town is backed by staunch farmers and in the face of its growth can be seen the loveliest and most progressive merchants extant.

Seven thousand five hundred bales of cotton, and fifteen hundred tons of guano are sold here annually. This alone will show the activeness of its business men and will be convincing proof of the fact that Shellman is a good business point. There are fifteen stores here and the amount of general merchandise sold is enormous.

Its school facilities are the best of any town of its size anywhere. Prof. C. E. Grubbs, a most skillful educator, is president of Shellman Institute, and is assisted by an able corps of teachers. It is a chartered institution and diplomas are granted at each commencement.

A Methodist and a Baptist church are located in town. Religious services are held each Sabbath.

The health of the town is just as good as that of the mountains. Its drainage perfect. In fact, a chill was never heard of in the city.

This will give your readers a faint idea of Shellman, its location and advantages. In the municipal election yesterday the following gentlemen were elected: F. B. Arthur, Mayor; A. E. Mizell, J. F. Crittenden, C. M. Cheney, R. R. Arthur and C. W. Martin, Councilmen. The race for Mayor was closely contested by Mr. Arthur and Dr. G. L. Clark, Mr. Arthur defeating Dr. Clark by only seven votes. Mayor Arthur is one of our most energetic merchants, with steady, temperate habits, and has the interests of the town at heart. His administration will no doubt be agreeable to all.

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4. The Fire of 1894

The largest fire in Shellman's history began on Friday night, August 24, 1894. The fire began in the store of W W Cheney on Arthur St; the cause was not known. A dozen stores (comprising a town block) were

SWEPT BY THE FLAMES
THE TOWN OF SHELLMAN IS ALMOST DESTROYED

By a Disastrous Fire Early Saturday Morning.--Many Business Houses Burned With Contents.--Some of the Losses by the Fire.

The little town of Shellman, on the Central railroad thirty-eight miles below Americus, was nearly wiped out of existence by a disastrous fire that started late Friday night and raged until early yesterday morning.

A brief mention of the fire was made in yesterday's *Times-Recorder*, but none of the particulars could be obtained at that hour. The buildings destroyed and damaged are as follows:

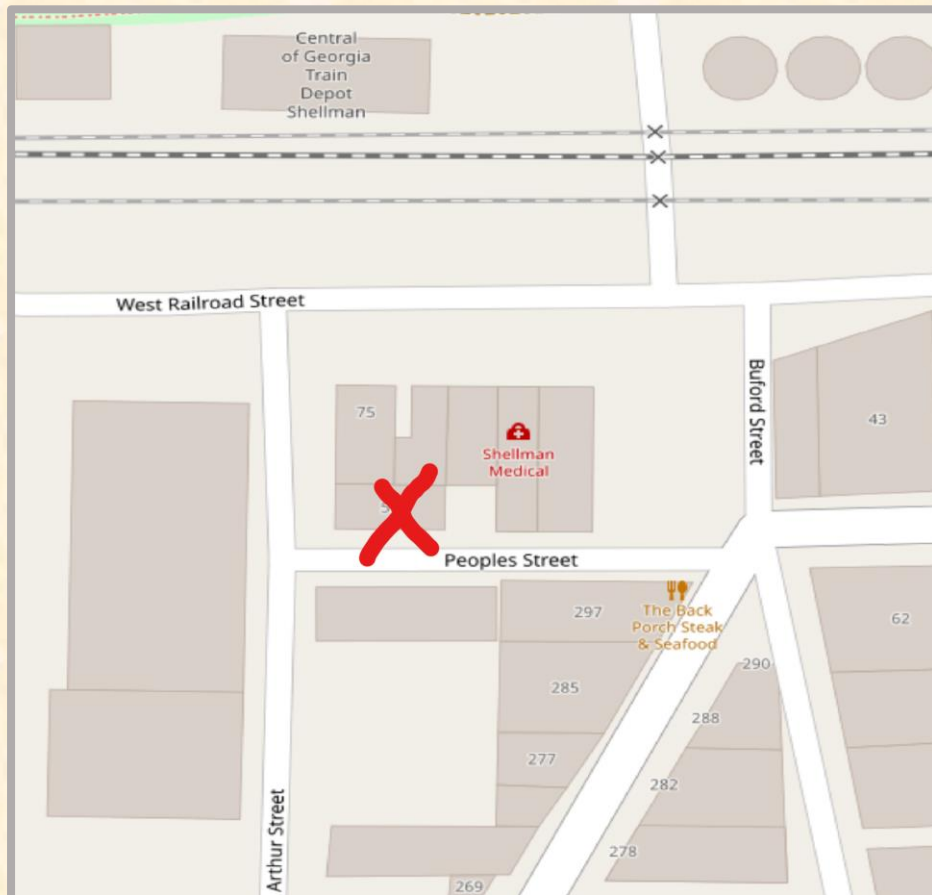
Shellman Banking Company building, on which there was some insurance. The exact loss on this structure is not yet ascertained.

W. J. Oliver, stock, merchandise and house; loss \$7,000. No insurance.
Etheridge & Son, house and \$3,000 stock; total loss. \$1,000 insurance.
 T. H. Artour vacant brick building; total loss. Partially insured.
 Arthur Bros. & Co., brick building and stock partially damaged. Partially insured.
 Cheatham, Dantzer & Co., drug store torn down and goods demolished; total loss; \$2,000 damages.
 C. M. Cheney, house and stock badly damaged. Some insurance.
 G. W. Harrel, stock of merchandise; total loss. Insurance \$800.
 Martin Bros, storage room heavy groceries. No insurance.
 Mrs. L. M. Crittenden, stock of millinery, partially saved.
 W. W. Cheney, house and stock of merchandise; total loss. Insured.
 Also store houses occupied by Harrell and Mrs. Crittenden, total loss. No insurance. It was owned by the Shellman Banking Company. The fire originated in the storehouse of W. W. Cheney. The cause is unknown. The total loss is \$20,000.

destroyed or badly damaged. The damage was estimated at \$20,000. The fire burned itself out on Saturday morning. It was widely reported in newspapers around Georgia; see the story at left from the *Americus times-recorder*, August 26, 1894 [Page 4](#).

The approximate location of Cheney's store is marked by an X in the map below.

The structures facing on Railroad St were repaired or rebuilt soon after the fire, but the Cheney lot where the fire began remained vacant until 1947.





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5. Subsequent Development

Shellman's businesses rebuilt and expanded after the fire of 1894. In 1904, the *Greater Georgia Gazetteer* (Business Directory) listed the following businesses in the vicinity. ([link](#)).

SHELLMAN, Randolph County	
Allen & Spurlock, Gen Store	Oliver W J & Son, Gen Store
Boyett & Russell, D Gds	Peoples' Bank, H A Crittendon Pres,
Cheney C M, Gen Store	H O Crittendon Cash
Cheney Mrs S E, Millinery	Pruitt J W Sr, Gen Store
Cheney E R & Co, Gen Store	Roberts J J, Blacksmith
Compton R L (agt), Gen Store	Sasser F B (Mrs J G), Hotel
Cox & Radford, Saw Mill	Shellman Banking Co, W J Oliver Pres
Coxwell William V, Gen Store	T R Arthur Cash
Crittenden Miss Ida, Millinery	Shellman Drug Co
Crittenden Bros, Gen Store	Short Bros & Hayes, Gen Store
Crittendon Warehouse,	Smith W E, Gen Store
Curry (The) Co, Live Stock, Etc	Terry Bros, Gen Store
Edwards W S, Gen Store & Gin	
Etheridge Jos & Son, Gen Store	
Green C J, Gen Store	
Hart H H, Gen Store	
Hook W J, Gen Store	
Knighton C H & Co, Gen Store	
Marlin R B, Gen Store	
Martin I A & C W (The) Co, Gen Store	
Millirons L E, Gen Store	
Oliver W J, Gin & Cotton Seed Oil	

There are no published data to track commercial activity in Shellman, but the downtown area remained vibrant, and its stores occupied, into the 1950's. In later years, retail activity declined as the residents opted to shop in larger nearby towns.



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6. Retail Business

Medicine

In the 19th century, the title “Doctor” was often used by pharmacists as well as medical doctors, and the pharmacists probably crossed over the line we currently understand as separating the two professions. In the 1880 census, Jacob D Dantzler is listed as a doctor living in present-day Shellman. Later he was associated with Cheatham, Dantzler, & Co., who operated a drugstore in Shellman. This suggests he may have been more of a pharmacist. See 3299 Pearl St for more information.

Dr. B E Bridgeman was without question a medical doctor. He married Elizabeth Phelps (daughter of Z T Phelps) in 1867. The family moved to Shellman in 1872. He became a doctor in 1882, and enjoyed a successful, well-regarded practice ([link](#)) until his death in 1908. Many doctors based their practice in their home (house calls were common), but Dr. Bridgeman had an office on Park Ave (See 3600 Pearl St).

Shellman generally had two (or more) doctors at any given time until the 1950s. However, it was common for them to also become businessmen, and it is not certain that they were practicing medicine at all times. The doctors included G L Clark (See 173 W Phelps St), C A Roberts (See 3278 Pearl St), W R Terry (See 6 E Railroad St), A F Weathers, Sr. (See 3299 Pearl St), A L Crittenden (See 29 College St), E C McCurdy (See 81 Park St), France Martin (See 3256 Pearl St), Loran Gary (See 202 Pecan St), and Walter Martin (See 3518 Pearl St).

Drugstores

Generally, Shellman had two drugstores in operation at any given time.

- In 1889, the city’s only druggist, Dr. D W Brown, retired due to ill health ([link](#)).
- The firm of Cheatham, Dantzler, & Co., operated a drugstore in Shellman that was destroyed in the fire of 1894. It was likely on Arthur St.
- R L Cheney was a pharmacist, and was partner of T R Arthur at 69 W Railroad St from 1890-1893. Their business was very possibly a pharmacy until at least 1893. The store was used for other purposes after the fire of 1894.
- The 1900 census listed two pharmacists in Shellman: R L Cheney ([link](#)) and Charlie Miller ([link](#)).
- C J Greene and his stepson-in-law, B M Davidson, purchased the store at 69 W Railroad St in 1901. In 1902, they took over the Shellman Drug Co. (location not known) and located it here. Davidson owned the Davidson Drug Co. in Dawson. He sent his son, Edgar Davidson, to set up the new operation ([link](#)). In 1906, Greene took sole ownership of the building. At that time, the drugstore was operated by Louis Dozier ([link](#)), who continued until 1910, when he purchased a drugstore in LaGrange ([link](#)).
- In Shellman’s 1910 census, drugstores were operated by Dozier ([link](#)) and by C D Roberts ([link](#), [link](#)). Cheney had changed professions by this time.
- In 1913, Roberts Pharmacy was listed as a drugstore in Shellman ([link](#)).
- In 1916, Redding Drug & Seed Co, was listed as a drugstore in Shellman ([link](#)).
- John Mercer Bell, Jr. operated the only drugstore listed in Shellman’s 1920 census ([link](#), [link](#)). George Hill was a pharmacist there.
- In the 1930 census, Walter Lewis and James Sapp were listed as druggists; the proprietor(s) of the drugstore(s) is(are) not identified ([link](#)).



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- Bledsoe Dozier, from Dawson, worked with the pharmacy of Louis Dozier in LaGrange. In 1925, Bledsoe returned to Dawson to work with the Dozier Pharmacy there ([link](#)). The Doziers were also operating a drugstore in Shellman, probably in the 1920s, and certainly in the 1930s. It was located in space rented from Mrs. A R Kenney, likely 278 Buford St. Dozier was killed in an automobile accident in 1936 ([link](#)).
- Elmer Cromartie purchased the stock of the Dozier Drugstore from Dozier's estate (Deed Book XX/560). He was proprietor of the drugstore until at least 1940 ([link](#)).
- Walter Lewis was also proprietor of a drugstore ([link](#)).
- In 1947, Julian Gill purchased the Shellman Drug Co. from Dr. J B Cherry ([link](#)). The is almost certainly the old Dozier Drugstore. Gill operated a Rexall pharmacy at 278 Buford St until around 1970.
- In 1950, Weldon Jones operated a pharmacy at 62 Randolph St, and continued until around the time of his death in 1965.

Lodging and Dining

As the business district began to develop in the 1870's, new businesses opened which required workers to move here. It took time for the new residents to establish themselves and build new houses, so they often initially boarded at the homes of relatives or store owners. Shellman soon grew to the stage that it demanded a true hotel, and eventually had two.

The Arthur House Hotel

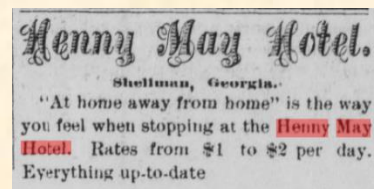
Basil K Arthur built a hotel with stables on Arthur St in early 1884 ([link](#)). The hotel had a great hall for dancing; the dining room was large enough to accommodate banquets ([link](#)). The hotel was a success; in 1889, Arthur added a second story ([link](#)).

In 1890, Lawson Stapleton of Americus and Charley Johnson of Columbus bought the Arthur House, proposing "to convert it into a model 'drummer's' home." ([link](#)) They continued to use the name Arthur House. The hotel changed hands several times before closing around 1920. See 15 Arthur St for more information.

The Sasser/Hennie May Hotel

Justice G Sasser purchased a two-acre vacant lot in 1895 at the corner of Payne St and Park Ave. The Sassers built a hotel on the southern half of the lot, facing on Park Ave, in 1896 or early 1897. It was known as the Hennie May Hotel, presumably for Mrs. E R (Hennie May) Cheney ([link](#)).

In 1898, the hotel advertised in the *Morgan Monitor* (at right, [link](#)). The hotel had 12 bedrooms, a dining hall, and a parlor. Later an annex with six bedrooms was added.



In 1910, E R Cheney purchased the hotel. Cheney lived nearby (230 W Phelps St) and owned a grocery store across Park Ave (40 Payne St). The hotel was completely destroyed by fire on 8/17/1921. Newspaper articles give a detailed account of the fire as well as a history of the hotel ([link](#), [link](#)). See 89 Park Ave for more information.

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Boarding Houses

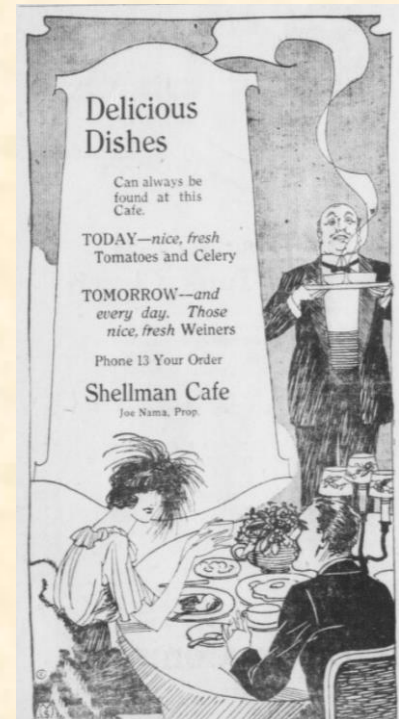
After 1921, Shellman did not have a hotel, but homes continued the earlier practice of taking in boarders. School teachers were often single women who were hired from out of town, and needed a place to stay during the school term. Students as well sometimes boarded rather than commute. Also, during times of poor economic conditions, such as 1930, many homes took in a boarder or two to help ends meet. The only means of identifying those homes with boarders is the censuses, which were taken once each decade, so a complete list is not possible. The censuses reveal that a few houses seemed to be more like small hotels than homes that took in an occasional boarder to help ends meet. These included 3278 Pearl St, 3351 Pearl St, 236 W Phelps St, and 170 E Railroad St. The practice seems to have died out in the 1940's, In the 1950 census, there was no boarding house left in Shellman.

Dining

The hotels and boarding houses of course provided meals to their guests, and presumably to non-guests as well.

Shellman has also had restaurants and cafés, but information on them is sketchy.

- The first restaurant documented in Shellman appears on the 1902 map, located at 20 Randolph St. The owner may have been Anderson Barnes.
- The Shellman Café was in operation in the early 1920s, as advertised at right. See 59 W Railroad St for more information.
- In the 1930 census, two residents listed themselves as proprietors of a restaurant: William H Blanton and Hamp Bruner. This is the only Shellman census identifying a restaurant proprietor.



Sale of Spirits

One commercial activity notably absent from Shellman was the sale of alcoholic spirits. The ban predates the city itself. In 1863, Z T Phelps purchased eight acres from B F Adams. The deed prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages (Deed Book/BB/771, also see 3377 Pearl St). No earlier deeds with this prohibition have been found, so Adams likely originated it. Adams's holdings were later acquired by the Crittendens; when they later resold the land, the deeds contained the identical wording, implying that the Adams's ban applied to all of the old Ward Home Place.



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An act of the Georgia Legislature passed in 1873 regulated the sale of alcohol. In 1875, an act was passed specifically prohibiting the sale of spiritous liquors within one mile of Ward's Station, apparently needed to clarify that the 1873 act did not authorize the sale of spirits ([link](#)). In 1877, an act later reduced the distance to ¼ mile.

In 1883, the prohibition was included in the Act of Incorporation for the entire corporate limits of the Town of Ward (one mile).

Sec. XII. Be it further enacted, That the manufacture or sale of spirituous, vinous, malt or intoxicating liquors of any kind and in any quantity shall be and is hereby prohibited and forbidden within the corporate limits of said town; and any person violating this clause of this Act shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and be subject to indictment by the grand jury of said county, and on conviction shall be punished as prescribed in section 4310 of the Code of 1882.

Rehoboth Church was too far from the depot to be covered by the Act, so that year they had a separate Act passed which prohibited the sale within three miles of the church ([link](#)).

In 1909, W T Saxon opened a "near beer stand" in Shellman ([link](#)). The town charter was soon amended to state that the prohibition applied to all beverages with an alcoholic content of ¼ of 1% or more ([link](#)). Saxon challenged, and was granted an injunction by a lower court, but the Georgia Supreme Court upheld the ordinance; Shellman remained dry ([link](#)).

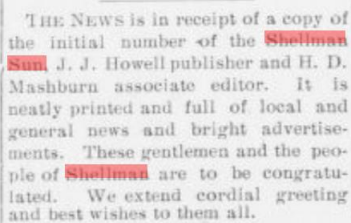
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Newspapers

Between 1888 and 1914, Shellman boasted at least four newspapers:

- In 1888, Jack Powell started the Shellman Progress ([link](#)). He moved from Bronwood, where he had published a newspaper that was discontinued ([link](#)).
- In 1889, T D Jackson operated the Shellman Herald. It apparently was not doing well, as he was exploring moving it to Preston ([link](#)).
- In 1898, the Shellman Observer, edited by George C Williams, published its first edition ([link](#)).

The Shellman Sun, a semi-weekly, lasted for at least eight years. It

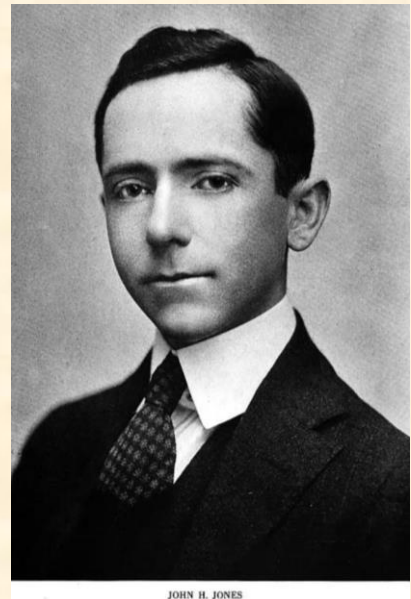


THE NEWS is in receipt of a copy of the initial number of the **Shellman Sun**. J. J. Howell publisher and H. D. Mashburn associate editor. It is neatly printed and full of local and general news and bright advertisements. These gentlemen and the people of **Shellman** are to be congratulated. We extend cordial greeting and best wishes to them all.

published its first edition in February, 1906 ([link](#)). The paper continued operations, but struggled, and was sold in 1910 to John H (Johnny) Jones ([link](#)). Only 17 at the time, Jones had at the age of 14 become the nation's youngest newspaper publisher in

Clio, Alabama. He acquired new printing equipment for the Sun (Deed Book MM/101).

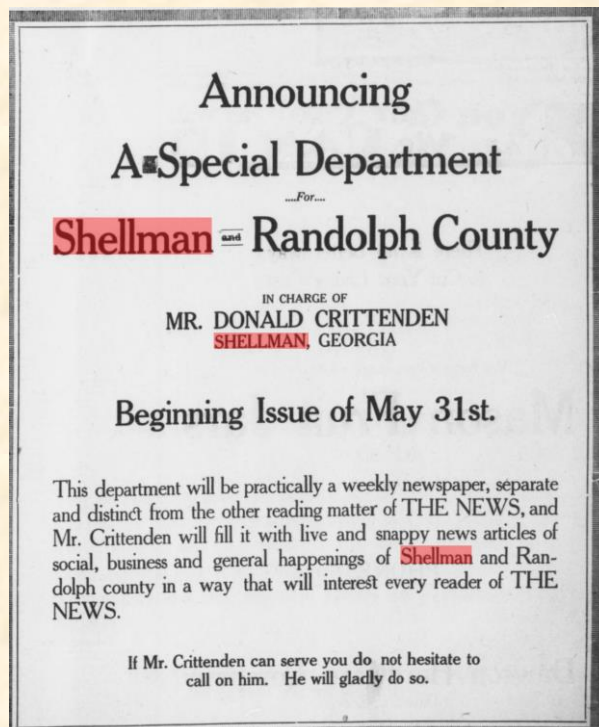
Jones did not stay with the *Sun* for long. He advertised it for sale in December, 1911 ([link](#)). In 1912, he leased the paper to a Mr. Lockwood so that he could travel in Europe ([link](#)). He returned to Georgia to become a writer and newspaper publisher in Fitzgerald and Lagrange ([link](#)). It is not known when the *Sun* ceased operations, but it was



JOHN H. JONES

active in 1914

([link](#)), when the editor was J L Jay, brother of W T Jay ([link](#)).



Announcing
A Special Department
...For...
Shellman and Randolph County
IN CHARGE OF
MR. DONALD CRITTENDEN
SHELLMAN, GEORGIA
Beginning Issue of May 31st.

This department will be practically a weekly newspaper, separate and distinct from the other reading matter of THE NEWS, and Mr. Crittenden will fill it with live and snappy news articles of social, business and general happenings of **Shellman** and Randolph county in a way that will interest every reader of THE NEWS.

If Mr. Crittenden can serve you do not hesitate to call on him. He will gladly do so.

At times when Shellman did not have a newspaper, nearby towns seized the opportunity to cover Shellman's news. In 1890, the Cuthbert Liberal has a Shellman Department ([link](#)). In May, 1921, the Dawson News launched a Shellman Department managed by Donald Crittenden ([link](#)). Crittenden was also manager of the Princess Theater at the time (See 85 Payne St).



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Theaters

In its early days, the town's venue for theatrical productions was the auditorium of the Shellman Institute. Reid Crittenden opened Shellman's first stand-alone theater –The Princess Theater--on October 31, 1913 ([link](#)). The *Dawson News* called it “a new enterprise which causes Dawson to turn green with envy- a new and modern opera house worthy of the name with modern scenery and other equipment. A moving picture show, which opens tonight, will occupy the building except when special attractions are on.” The advertisement at right was published in the *Dawson News* in 1921.

In 1922, there was an explosion in the projection room. The theater was full; no one was hurt, but the theater was completely destroyed. It was uninsured, and there is no evidence that it was rebuilt ([link](#)). See 85 Payne St for more information.

Shellman was apparently without a theater until 1939, when the Lee Amusement Co. purchased the vacant lot at 35 W Railroad St to erect a brick theater. In 1944, Lee sold its theaters, including this one, to Martin Theaters, a larger chain which operated 100 theaters ([link](#)). The theater closed around 1960. See 35 W Railroad St for more information.

PRINCESS THEATRE
The Home of Good Pictures
Donald Crittenden, Mgr.

TODAY, TUESDAY, MAY 31ST
PAULINE FREDERICK in “**OUT OF THE SHADOW**”
How mad a thing is the unwarranted jealousy of a brutal man! Ruth Minchin innocently aroused her husband's hate and it led to his death. It was long before she emerged “**OUT OF THE SHADOW.**”
Show hour 8 P. M. Admission 15c and 25c. Gallery, negroes only, 15c.

FRIDAY, JUNE 3RD.
REGULAR PICTURE PROGRAM.
The picture title has not been received.

SATURDAY, JUNE 4TH.
BEBE DANIELS in “**YOU NEVER CAN TELL**”
A check-room girl. A millionaire fur merchant. A taxi driver. There is plenty of pep and the titles just bubble with laughter. Show hour 8:00 P. M. Admission 15c and 25c. Gallery, negroes only, 15c.



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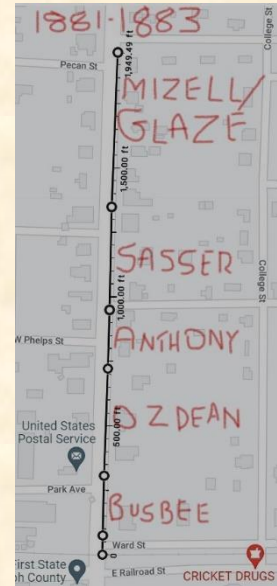
7. Real Estate Development

Real estate development denotes the process of dividing tracts of land into smaller lots for the purpose of building on them. It can be done via a planned approach, or merely the opportunistic selling of lots; Shellman has seen both approaches.

As discussed earlier, the Crittenden Brothers planned the development of commercial property on their tract south of the railroad by the early 1870's. There was no master plan for residential development, such as the one that was used in Cuthbert a few decades earlier.

Residential development of present-day Shellman began before Ward was incorporated. In 1881, the Crittendens began to sell residential lots of two-four acres along the east side of Pearl St (See map at right). Over time these lots were further divided to form the current lots of one acre or less.

In the 1890s, farmers began moving to town to take advantage of the modern services that had become available: doctors, schools, shopping, etc. This trend accelerated after 1900; Shellman grew by 69% in the first decade of the 20th century, reaching a size of roughly 1,000 which the town has more or less maintained ever since.



Year	Population	Growth
1890	462	—
1900	584	26%
1910	985	69%
1920	1,074	9%

Z T Phelps amassed land which was later developed by his heirs.

- In 1863, he purchased eight acres from B F Adams. Located along the west side of Pearl St, the plot was bounded on the north by his house (3377 Pearl St) and extended southward to the railroad reserve (Park Ave). This plot was subdivided beginning in 1887; the homes were built by Phelps's son-in-law, Wistar T Jay.
- In 1873, he purchased 53 acres, comprising the northern portion of Land Lot 5/269, from the Crittendens. He and his descendants built their homes on this plot, and later subdivided it. These homes face on W Phelps St, Park St, and Park Ave (See Z T Phelps Tract).

In 1895, Fanny (Mrs. C M) Cheney acquired sixty acres from her father, H A Crittenden. She sold a few lots before her death in 1904. Her widower then sold the rest, spread over many years (See Fanny Cheney Tract, Cheney St).



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In 1910, Cheney developed Shellman's first subdivision, or "addition" as they were known in those days. The land was surveyed, divided into lots (generally 50' x 150'), and new streets were built. The lots were offered at auction, replete with a band concert and an auctioneer from Pittsburg (See College Place Addition, Cheney St).

PAGE TWELVE THE DAWSON NEWS MARCH 23, 1910

Grand Auction Sale of Lots At "College Place"

Shellman, Georgia, Beginning at 10 O'clock, A. M.

50 beautifully located lots in this new residential addition to Shellman will positively be sold on the above date to the highest bidder. Shellman is on the eve of great expansion and has outgrown her original limitations. New territory has to be opened up for the homeseeker who would make Shellman his home. It is to meet the demand for choice residence property within reasonable distance from the business section that College Place has been developed, and it is to encourage immediate building that 50 desirable lots in this addition will be offered for sale. New streets are laid out and being graded; the lots are all surveyed and numbered; shade trees are being planted, and every improvement added that will make it a thoroughly up-to-date residence section.

<h4>Why Pay Rent</h4> <p>When for a small sum invested here you can be your own landlord? Easy terms will permit you to do this. Shellman is growing fast. Buy now and reap the reward in the rapid growth of values sure to come in an investment in College Place.</p>	<h4>A Hint for Country Folks.</h4> <p>You could not move to a better community to educate your children, for here in Shellman you will have the best educational facilities. College Place is within one minute's walk of the Public School building. Your family here will be surrounded by the most healthful and refined influences of a splendid society of folks. Real estate is the safest investment and most productive investment in the world. College Place is your opportunity.</p>
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A \$250 Lot Will Be Given Away Free on the Day of Sale. Also \$20 in Gold.

The Shellman Military Band has been specially engaged for the day and will give one of their famous band concerts for the entertainment of those present. Col. J. C. Morrow of Pittsburg, Pa., the famous real estate auctioneer, will conduct the sale. It will be a treat to hear him alone. Railroad fare returned to persons purchasing a lot who reside within 100 miles of Shellman. Everybody invited. Everybody welcome. Remember the date,

Thursday, March 24th, 1910

Southern Land Development Co.

R. E. MORROW, Sales Manager. — — — Shellman, Georgia.

The Sheffield Brothers (Sam & M C) actively developed real estate soon after they arrived in Shellman. They were also in the construction business; they built houses on their lots. They sometimes kept the houses as rental property for a number of years before selling them. They began in 1907, when they purchased 7 ¾ acres from Mattie Oliver. They divided it and built homes on the south side of W Phelps St and Sheffield Alley, now known as Short St (See Sheffield Tract, W Phelps St). Later they acquired lots and built homes on Pecan St and in other parts of town.

M W Cox acquired 140 acres in the SW quadrant of Shellman in 1909, part of the old David Ferguson Place. He surveyed and divided a portion of the tract, which he began selling in 1910. These lots line the west side of Fountain Bridge Rd, the east side of Prince Rd, Buford Circle, and Carver St (See Cox Addition, Buford Circle).



A Commercial History of Shellman (1844-1950)

Other additions were developed in Shellman, but generally met with limited success:

- Phillips & Hickey Addition: 29 acres, developed in 1911 (See Phillips & Hickey Addition, Pearl St)
- A F Weathers, Sr., Tract: 16 acres, developed in 1913 (See A F Weathers Tract, E Ward St)
- Wooten Addition: Developed in 1957 (See Wooten Addition, Pearl St)

Construction

Wistar Jay operated what was undoubtedly the largest construction company in Shellman's history. He built many large commercial and government buildings in Southwest Georgia. The advertisement at left

W. T. JAY & CO.,
W. T. Jay and Company offer their services to the people of Americus and vicinity. They are probably the oldest firm of contractors in South Georgia. Thirty years practical experience.
HOME OFFICE, Shellman, Ga., Branch Offices, Americus, Ga., and Pelham, Ga.

was published in the *Americus weekly times recorder* in 1911.

Jay purchased several lots from his father-in-law. On them, he built many of the fine homes of Shellman, as well as the First Baptist Church. In 1908, he formed a partnership with J S Pratt; Pratt & Jay built houses along the north side of W Phelps St and later on the old Glaze estate on Pearl St.

The Sheffield Brothers built many homes along the southern side of W Phelps St, Pecan St, and Short St (originally Sheffield Alley). These were more modest than the homes built by Jay, and sometimes kept as rental property by the Sheffields.

8. Agriculture/Agribusiness

Overview

A 1924 survey published by the US Department of Agriculture summarized 19th century agriculture in Randolph County:

"The crops grown by the early settlers were largely subsistence crops, such as corn, oats, rye, and wheat. Cattle and hogs were allowed to range the open woods. These animals, with an abundance of game, furnished meat for the settlers. Transportation facilities to the north in the early days consisted principally of coach roads from Lumpkin and Columbus. Fort Gaines, on Chattahoochee River, was the principal shipping point for produce and supplies before the advent of the railroad about 1860. After the Civil War the farmers were much impoverished and the need of a cash crop was so urgent that the growing of cotton, which was greatly needed in the North and brought ready cash, resulted in a system of cotton farming. Few farmers at that time raised sufficient foodstuffs and feed to supply their own needs."

Soil survey. Randolph County, Georgia. 1924. Pages 16-17.



A Commercial History of Shellman (1844-1950)

After the civil war, agriculture became more diversified and more focused on producing income, i.e., cash crops. Shellman's farmers were progressive in this pursuit; several among them were recognized for their leadership.

- Col. R F Crittenden was both a State Senator and a member of the State Agricultural Society, serving as its vice-president for many years. He was often invited to speak on agricultural topics, and frequently cited in newspaper articles as an authority. The Crittendens introduced many new crops and new practices to Shellman farmers. See 2836 US Highway 82 for more information.
- W J Oliver operated a large farm and several mills. His operations were featured in newspaper articles:
 - 1907: "A Hustling Farmer" [link](#),
 - 1909: "Steam Plow Doubles Productivity" [link](#), and
 - 1914: "The W J Oliver Farm" [link](#).See 129 W Railroad St for more information.
- C W Martin was a prominent farmer, as well as being involved in agribusiness. His operations were described in a newspaper article in 1914 [link](#).

Local farmers organized various clubs and trade associations to promote their mutual interests. In 1882, they formed the Ward Station Agricultural Club. Their kick-off project was an agricultural fair, which was canceled at the last minute. The club itself was soon inactive ([link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#)). They also formed clubs to promote and market specific crops, such as a corn club, a peanut association, and a peach growers association.

An article in *The Americus Daily Recorder* in 1886 touted the great variety of crops grown in the area, "wheat, corn, rye, oats, rice, Irish and sweet potatoes, peanuts, chufas, cotton, peas, sugar cane, apples, pears, peaches, grapes, plums and other fruits." The remainder of this section discusses the most important of those crops and the agribusinesses they supplied. The information comes primarily from newspaper articles (for which links are provided) as well as the 1924 survey published by the US Department of Agriculture: *Soil survey. Randolph County, Georgia*. 1924. [link](#).

Cotton

For a history of cotton production and how it shaped the economy of Georgia, visit [link](#). For a step-by-step explanation of how cotton moved from the field to the mill circa 1925, refer here [link](#). The process involved three commercial entities.

- **Gin**: Farmers took their loose cotton bolls (seed cotton) to the gin, where the seeds were removed. The de-seeded cotton (lint) was assembled into loose bales (running bales) of about 500 pounds.
- **Oil Mill**: Farmers held enough seed to plant the next crop and sold the rest to an oil mill. The oil mill would extract the oil and then sell the hulls to be used for animal feed or as a soil additive.
- **Warehouse**: Farmers then took the cotton to a warehouse for immediate sale or to store for later sale.

A Commercial History of Shellman (1844-1950)

The cotton gin was patented in 1794 and revolutionized the cotton industry. One person could process about five pounds of cotton a day by hand; that same person operating a gin could process 50 pounds a day. The gin itself was fairly simple and inexpensive, so gins spread rapidly throughout the South; initially they were located on the larger plantations. Gins gradually became more complex and expensive, and progressed from hand-powered to horse-powered to steam-powered. This caused them to become centralized in the towns. The image at right depicts a gin with a press, and makes obvious the fact that the warehouses were at high risk of fire.

Early gins in the vicinity of Ward's Station included:

- Z T Phelps, J B Payne, and a Mr. Chambless operated a gin and press in Ward's Station which was destroyed by fire in 1877 [link](#).
- W J Oliver operated a steam-driven gin and press at his homeplace on the Cuthbert-Dawson Rd in 1882 [link](#).
- T E Dean operated a gin near Ward in 1883, when he prohibited fishing in his gin pond [link](#)
- Z T Phelps & W J Oliver operated a gin and mill in 1883 [link](#)

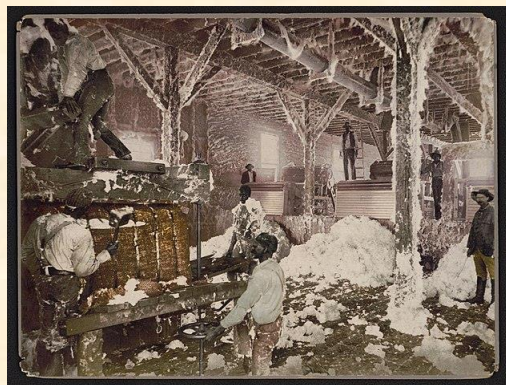
Later gins in Shellman included:

- J B Payne Gin (See 113 Church St)
- Crittenden Ginnery (See 40 Bethea St)
- Shellman Gin Co. (See 200 Buford St)
- Sutton Family Gin (See 113 Buford St)

Warehouses played an important role in aggregating the cotton crop for sale to the mills. The warehouses compressed the running bales and graded the cotton. The farmer could sell his cotton to the warehouse at their offering price, or store it there (for a fee) in hopes of a better price later. The warehouses sold their bales to factors or to mills. When they accepted offers for a certain quantity of a certain grade of cotton, they would then arrange shipment. Thus, warehouses were located near transportation hubs (river ports and, in the case of Shellman, train depots).

Warehousing was a capital-intensive business at great risk from fire. As a result, warehouses tended to be operated as partnerships, with the partners changing often. This makes it difficult to match early deeds (which identify property owners) with newspaper articles (which identify warehouse operators). Following is a list of the early warehouses that can be identified in Ward's Station:

- The first warehouse was built in 1881 by D L Ferguson & W J Oliver. The partnership operated as Planters Warehouse; they advertised weekly in the Dawson and Cuthbert newspapers for the 1881-2 season ([link](#)). The warehouse was located on Arthur St, and seems to have been converted into a livery stable around 1896 (See 55 Arthur St).





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- O B Stevens of Dawson built the second warehouse in 1882 ([link](#)). This is probably the warehouse described in an article from later in 1882, operated by D L Ferguson & Dr. B E Bridgman ([link](#)). This warehouse later became Peoples Warehouse (See 10 Peoples St).
- In March of 1883, the Atlanta Constitution published the information at right.
- J A Payne built a warehouse in 1885 ([link](#)). This warehouse was later owned by W T Saxon (See 254 Buford St).
- Farmers Warehouse was organized by W J Oliver and other partners in 1904 (See 51 Arthur St). It was managed by James M Wooten, who eventually became sole owner. It became the largest warehouse in Shellman, and continued operating until being sold to Shellman Motor Co. in 1948.

At Ward's station, says the Newnan Herald, there have been received, up to March 5th, 4,505 bales of cotton, as shown by books of our two warehouses. Messrs. Oliver & Goode have received 3,568 bales, and Messrs. Ferguson & Bridgeman 927 bales. There is yet some 100 bales to come in before the season closes.

The early settlers in Randolph County did not plant cotton, but began doing so because it was an excellent cash crop. It became the principal crop, and continued so until the arrival of the boll weevil. The boll weevil came into Texas from Mexico in 1892, and slowly spread eastward. Its devastating impact was common knowledge, and entomologists were able to predict the rate at which it spread, so that Georgia farmers knew when it would arrive, but could do nothing to stop it ([link](#)). By 1915 was decimating the cotton crop around Shellman. Cotton acreage in Randolph County peaked in 1909; by 1924, it was down by 40%. During the Depression, the government further reduced cotton acreage to try to stabilize prices. Then synthetic fibers were developed, which further reduced demand for cotton. Cotton production continued to fall until a means of eradicating the boll weevil was developed in 1987.

Cotton had a major influence on demographics in the South. When Eli Whitney developed the cotton gin, he expected that it would reduce the need for enslaved labor. However, it made cotton farming so profitable that it had the opposite effect; the use of enslaved labor greatly increased. Later, many of their descendants continued to farm cotton as tenant farmers and sharecroppers. When production plummeted, many had no means of support, which led to the Great Migration from the agricultural South to the industrial North and Midwest, which continued into World War II and beyond. This in turn led to a shortage of farm labor in the South, which reduced the acreage under cultivation.



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Corn

Early settlers depended on corn for cornmeal and feed for livestock. Cotton became the most important crop, but corn was the second most important. The two were codependent; larger cotton crops meant more mules and farmhands to feed. In addition, it was common to rotate the two crops, so that a field planted in cotton for two-three years would next be planted in corn for a like time.

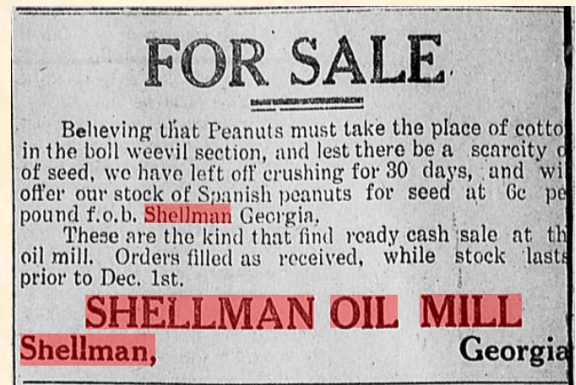
Acreage planted in corn grew each decade in the 19th century, reaching a maximum in 1899. By 1911, local farmers were anticipating the arrival of the boll weevil, and looking to alternative crops. One solution --increasing swine production--demanded larger corn crops. This idea was championed by W J Oliver ([link](#)). Shellman farmers organized a corn club which promoted corn production by offering prizes ([link](#)). When cotton acreage did in fact decline due to the boll weevil, corn acreage increased slightly; in 1919, about 33% of the arable land in Randolph County was planted in corn, whereas cotton had declined to 29%.

Peanuts

Peanuts originated in South America and migrated to Africa, from where they were imported to the American South in the early 1800's. They were originally grown as a garden crop and also for livestock feed. The US Department of Agriculture began encouraging farmers to grow peanuts in the late 1800s, aided by the research of George Washington Carver. Peanuts did not become a commercial crop until the boll weevil devastated the cotton crop beginning after 1910. Peanuts gradually became the major cash crop in SW Georgia. The Spanish peanut was the predominate variety grown for market, whereas runner peanuts were grown for grazing hogs. The vines were used for hay.

Newspaper accounts give a picture of peanut production in 1916, a time when farmers were being actively encouraged to adopt peanuts as a cash crop.

- W R Terry planted 200 acres of peanuts. He reported income of \$9,000 on his peanut crop and \$2,000 on the peanut hay ([link](#)).
- D W Howell operated a peanut sheller. It produced seed peanuts, with a capacity of 75 bushels a day ([link](#)).
- The Oliver Oil Mill was producing peanut oil as well as cottonseed oil, and offering seed peanuts, as shown in the advertisement at right ([link](#)).



In 1917, the Peanut Growers and Manufacturers Association of Georgia was organized at a meeting in Cuthbert ([link](#)). The Association generally promoted the interests of the industry, especially price stability, and introduced the grading of peanuts. W J Oliver was prominent in the Association ([link](#)). Randolph County remained a leader in the peanut industry. In 1920, US Senator Hoke Smith chose Shellman and Cuthbert as sites to announce his support of protective tariffs for peanuts ([link](#)).

In 1924, Oscar Crittenden was buying peanuts, probably in the old Shellman Oil Mill facility which he acquired from W J Oliver ([link](#)).



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The Columbian Peanut Co. operated Shellman's largest peanut mill.

- The company was based in Norfolk, VA, a center for the peanut industry in the US. Columbian began building mills in South Georgia and Alabama in 1919. It appears that Columbian expanded into Randolph County from its mill in Ft. Gaines.
- Columbian acquired its Shellman mill (217 W Railroad St) around 1929.
- Columbian's Shellman mill consisted of an office, several warehouses for storing the peanuts which were purchased in the fall, a mill for shelling the peanuts, and a railroad spur for shipping the shelled nuts. It was a major employer in Shellman.
- Rupert Puckett was the manager of the mill for many years (See 129 W Railroad St). Brooks Wooten followed Rupert Puckett as manager, serving until he retired in 1985 (See 3333 Pearl St).
- Columbian was acquired by Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) in 1982. ADM and Gold Kist later merged their peanut operations into a new entity, Golden Peanut Co., which acquired the mill in 2000.

Fruit and Nuts

Early settlers planted fruit trees for their own needs, and likely some of the farmers planted orchards large enough to sell fruit to their neighbors. In 1873, A J Surlis of Georgetown advertised his nursery selling "*Apples, Pears, Peaches, Apricots, Plums, Mulberries, etc.--Also Table and Wine Grapes*"; Dr. B C Mitchell acted as his agent in Randolph County ([link](#)). Farmers planted many types of trees on a small scale, but two became major commercial crops: peaches and pecans.

The Crittendens were early leaders in the cultivation of fruit on a commercial scale. They were partners with Dr. Samuel Hape of Atlanta, for whom the city of Hapeville was named. R F Crittenden and Dr. Hape served together on the Georgia Agricultural Commission. They planted 400 acres of orchards in 1880-81, thought to be the largest orchard in Georgia at that time. Several types of fruit were planted, but peaches were likely the largest crop ([link](#), [link](#)).

—Dr. S. Hape, of Atlanta, and Messrs. R. F. and H. A. Crittenden, of Randolph county, are now planting at Ward Station, in that county, probably the largest orchard and vineyard in the state. They have already planted about two hundred and twenty-five acres, and by another season expect to have four hundred acres in trees and vines. Fruit of all kinds suitable to the latitude thrive in Randolph.

Peaches

For a brief history of peach growing in Georgia, refer to [link](#).

Shellman was attractive as a location for peach orchards due to its suitable soil and also because it was further south than most of Georgia's peach industry. This allowed the crop to be harvested earlier and sell for a premium.

The Crittendens and Dr. Hape (see above) were the earliest known commercial peach growers in Shellman, but others soon joined them. Joseph B Payne opened a crate and canning plant to serve the growers around Shellman in 1899 ([link](#)).



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Disease limited the success of early growers, but control measures were developed ([link](#)); around 1916, farmers in the vicinity of Shellman began planting new orchards. By 1921, the orchards totaled over 150,000 trees. The growers formed the Shellman Peach Growers Association “for mutual protection and for the benefit of the industry.” A 1921 newspaper article declared Shellman “The Peach Town” and listed the growers (at right, [link](#)). Shellman peaches were recognized as superior. A New Orleans fruit dealer displayed a sign declaring, “We handle Shellman Georgia peaches.” ([link](#))

Major producers included:

- The Oliver Orchard Co., a partnership of W J Oliver & A J Evans. Their packing plant was located near the Oliver homeplace on US 82 ([link](#)).
- C P Prothro & Son (C P Prothro and his son, Howell), who moved to Shellman from Griffin around the end of 1915. Their packing plant was located just west of Shellman, on the extension of W Ward St.
- The Crittenden Fruit Co., an equal partnership of five Crittendens: J F, H O, R S, A L, & W R. Their orchard was connected to Calhoun St by Peach Orchard Rd (See 2850 Calhoun St). The orchard was planted in peaches no later than 1901, and was likely the site where the first Crittenden peach orchards had been planted in 1880.

Practically all will be bearing by next season. The orchards in the Shellman district are:

Name.	No. Trees.
Oliver Orchard Co. -----	30,000
C. P. Prothro & Son -----	23,500
Crittenden Fruit Co. -----	15,000
G. W. & J. W. Bell -----	15,000
Watson & Evans Farm -----	15,000
Iona Fruit Farm -----	14,000
Red Hill Fruit Farm -----	12,000
W. R. Helm -----	9,500
T. R. Arthur -----	5,000
J. N. Watts -----	5,000
W. R. Terry -----	2,500
H. C. Bower -----	2,000
D. G. Borum -----	1,500
B. F. Crittenden -----	1,000
Total -----	156,000

Improved disease control removed some of the risk of growing peaches, but the crops remained vulnerable to weather conditions.

- There must be sufficient cold to set the blooms. Shellman crops, being among the most southerly, were at greater risk for this.
- Once the trees bloom, they are vulnerable to frosts/freezes. To protect against this, growers burned fires in smudge pots ([link](#))
- Ripe peaches are heavy; strong winds can blow them off the trees.

Peach production peaked in Georgia in 1928 and then gradually declined.

Pecans

By 1893, pecans were a major commercial crop in Texas, and were beginning to be planted in Georgia ([link](#)). Around 1910, SW Georgia landowners started planting thousands of acres of pecans. These early plantings were primarily a real estate enterprise. Most of the acreage planted during the fifteen-year boom (from 1910 to 1925) were sold as five- to ten-acre plots for homes or small farms, which were concentrated in Dougherty and Mitchell counties ([link](#)).

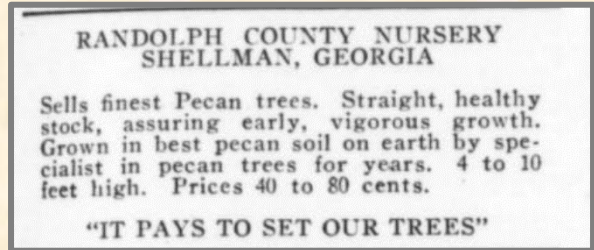
The planting of pecan orchards was promoted by the *Dawson News*, January 8, 1908 ([link](#)).

“The pecan is native to this section, and grows to great size and perfection. Although the wild crop is still immensely profitable pecan groves are being extensively planted. The trees are put 40 feet apart, or 47



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to the acre, and the land can be cultivated for the first seven years, when the trees yield a crop. The first crop is on an average of \$6 a tree, and thereafter for the next 10 years or 15 years the average value of the crop increases \$1 a tree every year. Three or four hundred dollars an acre are not uncommon returns, and the crop, being easy and inexpensive to handle, is growing in favor. Rapid as has been the development of this industry the demand far exceeds the supply. Since the pecan keeps indefinitely after being shelled, and is one of the most healthful of nuts, there is a great and growing demand for it in the big centers, especially New York and Chicago."



The development of "papershell" varieties by 1920 was a catalyst for increasing pecan production. Joseph Hammock moved to Shellman around 1910 (See 3020 Calhoun St). He soon planted pecan trees on the land around his home, and opened a pecan nursery in 1919 ([link](#)). In 1929, he advertised in *The Progressive Farmer* ([link](#)).

In addition to large-scale commercial groves, pecans were literally a cottage industry. Around 1910-1920, it became common for Shellman homes to plant pecan trees as shade trees ([link](#)). The nuts were gathered and sold; the tradition is that the income was used to pay property taxes.

The 1924 Agricultural Survey of Randolph County reported that "*pecan trees are rapidly being set out, in many places being interplanted in the peach orchards.*" That fall, the National Pecan Growers' Association convened in Cuthbert, a testimony to the prominence of Randolph County in the industry ([link](#)).

J P Gunnells (see 198 E Railroad St) was prominent in Shellman's pecan industry. He came to Shellman to teach vocational agriculture; by 1942, he was already organizing local pecan producers and sponsoring collective sales at the school ([link](#)). By 1947, Gunnells was operating a pecan business in partnership with J E McGlaun ([link](#)). He was president of the Southeastern Pecan Growers Association in 1947 and 1948, and chosen by them to lobby Congress for changes to foreign trade policy ([link](#)).

Lumbering and Sawmills

The first settlers found a land of heavy forest; the trees were an obstacle to be cleared:

"The people endured great hardships in clearing the land of the virgin forests, and building homes. As the trees were felled, great bonfires were built to burn them. The fertile land had to be cleared to plant crops."

Soon timber became a valuable commodity. It was the most productive use of the land for certain soil types.

No doubt small-scale mills produced lumber for local construction, but the earliest documented large-scale





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lumber mill in Ward's Station was operated by Mangham & Pittman in 1874 ([link](#)). This mill may have been located on or near the lot which housed the Payne gin (See 40 Church St).

W J Oliver added a sawmill and planing mill to his complex of mills in 1890 ([link](#)). In 1901, the Georgia Department of Agriculture reported three sawmills in the area.

The Sheffield Brothers (Sam & M C) opened a lumberyard and planing mill at 1383 W Ward St. in 1907. The steam-powered mill grew, adding a coal bin on the RR right-of-way in 1909 and an RR spur line in 1912. The Sheffields also built homes in Shellman, and no doubt were major customers of their mill's output. The mill ceased operation in the 1940's.

In 1927, the Church-Smith Lumber Co., based in Cusseta, began harvesting timber around Shellman. In 1929, they reorganized as Church-Robinett Lumber Co., based in Shellman. Harvey Church was president; Edgar Robinett managed the company. After Church died in 1931, the company evolved into the Robinett Lumber Co., Robinett Manufacturing Co., and Robinett Frame Co. During the 1930s, Robinett harvested timber from thousands of acres in Randolph County. Edgar and his sons-- Max, Dean, and George--operated these businesses for many years. See 670 E Railroad St for more information.

Fertilizer Mixing

Crittenden Guano Co., Shellman, Ga.-----	Crittenden's Randolph Guano No. 1-----
	Crittenden's Randolph Guano No. 23-----
	Crittenden's Randolph Guano No. 933-----
	Acid Phosphate 14%-----
	Acid Phosphate 16%-----

Guano (the excrement of bats and sea birds) was the primary fertilizer of Southern farmers in the latter 19th century. The guano was mixed with various materials to provide a more complete fertilizer, including cottonseed meal, acid phosphate, nitrate of soda, ammonium phosphate, muriate of potash, and bone meal. Synthetic fertilizer was invented in 1913, and

gradually replaced guano. For a description of the evolution of the guano trade, refer to Wikipedia ([link](#)).

Crittenden & Brother built a guano mixing and storage plant by 1886. It was located on the railroad right-of-way, just north of the tracks and east of the depot. R F Crittenden, who was an active member of the Georgia Agricultural Commission, often spoke on the topic of fertilizer at its meetings. In 1909, the company offered five blends (at left, [link](#)). It ceased operations in the 1930s.

The Oliver Cotton Oil Mill offered cotton seed hulls as a soil amendment from its opening in 1901. It expanded into a line of fertilizers by 1906. It closed in 1922. Refer to 116 Park Ave for more information.

The Home Mixture Guano Company, based in Columbus, was in operation by 1884 ([link](#)). As the use of guano increased, the company affiliated with local businessmen to build mixing plants in nearby towns. By 1913, there were 12 affiliates ([link](#)). The Shellman Home Mixture Guano Company was





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organized in 1907 by C W Martin (See 237 W Railroad St). It transitioned to synthetic fertilizers and remained in business into the 1950s.

In 1914, the capacities of the plants were ([link](#)):

- Oliver: 60,000 tons
- Home Mixture: 4,000 tons
- Crittenden: 2,000 tons.

The Notchaway Fertilizer Co. was founded by O A Crittenden in 1925 as the Crittenden Guano Co. was declining due to competition from synthetic fertilizers. It had the capacity to mix 1,000 tons ([link](#)). Refer to 116 Park Ave for more information.

Blacksmith Shops and Wood Shops

Blacksmiths were essential to the 19th century economy. They constructed and repaired horseshoes, plows, wagon wheels, nails, and all manner of farm equipment. Early farms either had a blacksmith or access to one on a neighboring farm. As towns developed, a commercial blacksmith shop would be one of the first businesses to locate there.

Blacksmith shops often operated in conjunction with “*wood shops*”. These were rough carpentry shops that, among other things, repaired wagons and buggies. They were located in separate buildings to protect them from the fire in the blacksmith shops.

When Z T Phelps purchased his 53-acre tract from the Crittendens in 1873, the deed references an old blacksmith or wood shop, which is operated by someone whose name is illegible, but may be Zuniel Pounds. This is the earliest documented blacksmith in what was to become Shellman; the location was convenient to the depot and the farmers who used it.

John M Anthony moved to Ward’s Station and opened a blacksmith shop and wood shop in 1881. He sold the shops back to the Crittendens in 1884 (See 274 Buford St). Some early blacksmiths were A A Dantzler (See 50 Church St), J J Roberts (See 3422 Pearl St), W J Bass (See 92 E Railroad St), and Jim Johns (See 48 W Phelps St).

Blacksmiths were often African-American. Prominent among them was William Paschal, whose father had been a blacksmith in Fort Valley. William was already a respected blacksmith in Shellman in 1888, when he was mentioned in *The Southwestern News* ([link](#)).

“While here we met with Wm. Paschal, a colored man, who is an honor to his race, and whose reliability, intelligence, and business tact places him in the confidence of everyone. As a blacksmith he has no superior.”

In 1893, Paschal purchased the blacksmith shop at 44 Randolph St. He operated the shop until he turned it over to his son Alonzo between 1912 and 1920 (See 44 Randolph St). Other African-American blacksmiths included Cince Winn (see 12 Bethea St), Ben Shed (See 100 Buford St), Wilson Jones (See 1263 W Ward St)



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The need for blacksmiths gradually declined with the adoption of automobiles and tractors. Niles Holley purchased the blacksmith shop of Cince Winn in 1947 and operated it until his death in 1967 (See 49 Arthur St). He was the last blacksmith in Shellman.

9. Public Services

This section discusses public services (e.g., mail, utilities) in the early days of Shellman.

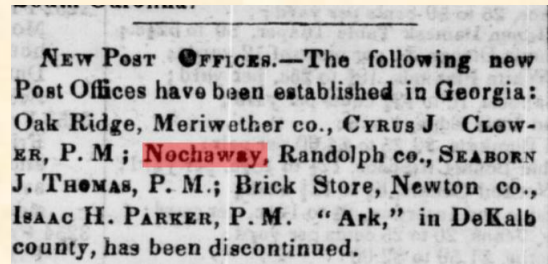
Postal Service

Mail was delivered to the area soon after the first settlers arrived in the 1830s.

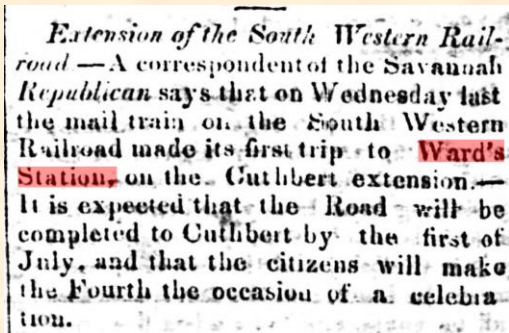
“A stage coach carried mail and passengers to Eufaula, making one round trip per week by the Dawson road. The stage coach stop was west of town on the Cuthbert road, near where Tom Whaley now lives. John Fulton carried mail by horseback from Albany to Georgetown coming to Notchaway once a week.”

RANDOLPH COUNTY, GEORGIA. A COMPILATION OF FACTS, RECOLLECTIONS, AND FAMILY HISTORIES.
Randolph County Historical Society. 1977: [Page 163].

The area was known as Notchaway. The name did not refer to a specific settlement, but rather to the general area, and was necessary for mail delivery. It was similar to today's zip codes. A Notchaway post office was established in present-day Brooksville in 1851 (image at right, [link](#)).



When the railroad came to Ward's Station, mail was no longer delivered by horseback. The first mail train arrived on March 17, 1859 (image at left, [link](#)). Z T



Phelps was stationmaster and also served as postmaster for many years. He took the position before the Civil War, and continued serving (under the Confederate government) during the Civil War. Afterwards he received a pardon in 1866 ([link](#)) so that he could be reappointed under the US government. In 1875, the citizens of Morgan petitioned the US Congress to create a postal route to Ward's Station to improve their service ([link](#)). It was finally approved in 1881. In 1900, the Shellman post office began rural free delivery (RFD) service to surrounding farms ([link](#)).

Postmasters were well paid by the standards of those days, *“The Post Office grew from a \$61.00 per year expense as Notchaway to a \$9,000 per year index in the early years of this century, with the postmaster's salary being \$1,600 per annum at that time.”* IBID [Page 170] In addition to the salary, there was a lease payment for the post office itself, often to the postmaster/postmistress, making the appointment a double source of cash which was hard to come by for much of this period. Seeking the



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appointment was often a highly competitive process, and candidates were “recommended” to the postal service by the Congressman serving the area ([link](#)).

Below is a list of known postmasters and postmistresses serving after Z T Phelps.

Period	Postmaster/Postmistress	Location
1884?- 1887	G W Oliver	??
1887-1889	Joseph Ethridge	73 W Railroad St (Probably)
1889-1894?	Mrs. Missouri A Miller Wall	61 W Railroad St (Possibly)
1894?-1901?	Mrs. Missouri A Miller Wall	At some point, possibly due to the fire in 1894, the post office was relocated to 40 Payne St. The location is confirmed by the 1902 map.
1901-1915	Mrs. John M Anthony (link)	73 W Railroad St
1915-??	H O Crittenden	43 W Railroad St
1934-1996	Various, including Sadie Weathers Crittenden Sutton for 18 years.	75 W Railroad St



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Schools

The citizens of Shellman showed an early commitment to education, and its schools have enjoyed an excellent reputation over the years.

Rehoboth Academy (1845-1873)-Rehoboth Academy was built by T N McWilliams in 1845. It became a well-regarded boarding school that drew students from around SW Georgia. The last session was held in 1873. See Rehoboth (US Highway 82) for more details.

Shellman's First School (1873-1885)-In 1873, a two-story building was erected on the north boundary of the RR reserve; it was the first public building in what would later become Shellman. The 2nd floor held a Masonic Hall; the 1st floor was used as a school. As the town grew, so did the school. In 1881, the school became a high school (see advertisement at right). By 1885, the school had outgrown this building, and a new building was erected on E Ward St. See 47 Park Ave for more details.

Ward High School.

THE THIRD YEAR of the above School, located at Ward Station, Ga., will begin on

Monday, January 1, 1883.

Thirty-eight weeks constitute the year; six months the first term

Health of location unsurpassed. Discipline best.

Instruction thorough in all branches taught in high schools generally.

Terms moderate.

dec15-1m J. G. DEAN, Principal.

Shellman Institute (First location, 1885-1900)-In 1885, the citizens of the new town of Ward organized a new school on E Ward St. The cost was \$800; it was raised by public subscription. Major W F Shellman

SHELLMAN INSTITUTE.

Located at Shellman, (formerly Ward) Ga., thoroughly prepares boys and girls for any class in college. The location is peculiarly healthful. The Tuition is about half what other Institutions of similar grade charge. Good board can be had at from Six to Ten Dollars per month. The School has been recently fitted up with all the modern comforts and conveniences necessary. Parties who board their children here can rest assured that the surroundings will all tend to refine and elevate. For full particulars, address

G. E. GRUBBS, PRESIDENT,
SHELLMAN, GA.

dec17-1f

contributed \$100; the town was named for him. The first President was Professor C E Grubbs, serving from 1885-1891. Grubbs introduced a novel, subscription-based funding model which avoided a school tax ([link](#)). The ad at left was published in December, 1885 as the school was about to begin its first term. See 229 E Ward St for more details.

Shellman Institute (Second location, 1901-1958)-A new, two-story building was erected in 1901 on College St for an 11-grade school. In 1909, Shellman formed a Board of Education, which took over the school. In 1921, a major renovation took place, including steam heat, brick veneer, and a new room ([link](#)). In 1929, the schools in eastern Randolph County were consolidated under the county system. A new high school was built on Pecan St. Elementary grades continued here until 1958, when they also transferred to Pecan St. See 50 College St for more details.

Shellman High School (1930-1963)-In 1929, the schools in eastern Randolph County were consolidated under the county. At the time, Shellman operated an 11-grade school at 50 College St. A new high school was built at 185 Pecan St in 1930 ([link](#)). The new building had "nine classrooms, study hall, library, laboratory, and offices." The high school was opened for the 1930-31 school year. The elementary grades moved here in 1958. In 1963, the high school was consolidated with Cuthbert High School to form Randolph County High School, located in Cuthbert. This building then housed an elementary school for a few years. The original school was destroyed by fire, and replaced in 1980. The new building later



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housed Randolph Southern School and the SW Georgia STEM Academy. See 185 Pecan St for more details.

Pleasant Grove School (1870s)- In 1868, the Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church built a log church “*down on the swamp now called Egypt*”. This was probably along the Ichaway-Notchaway Creek east of Magnolia Lake. When the log church was replaced by a new sanctuary, probably in the 1870s, the log church was used for a time as a school. Sallie Johnson was teacher, the first African-American teacher in Shellman. See 116 Pine St for more details.

Douglass Academy (by 1880 until around 1953)-The Frederick Douglass School for African-American students was in operation by 1880. No early deeds have been located; the school was likely built on land owned by the Crittenden family. The first superintendent is thought to have been J P Vandergriff, who lived across the street (60 John Smith St). The school was replaced by a new school on Carver St around 1953. It was still standing in 1959, but has since been demolished. See 61 John Smith St for more details.

Benevolence Baptist Institute (Circa 1902 until around 1937)-This school for African-American students is documented only by deeds. The lot was purchased in 1902. We know of the Institute because it is referenced in deeds for nearby properties over the years. The lot was sold in 1937. Refer to 2588 Fountain Bridge Rd for more details.

Water, Sewer, and Power

In 1900, the Town of Shellman purchased a small tract at 76 Payne St for “*locating and boring an artesian well and water tower*”. The well was drilled in 1900 ([link](#)), and a water tower was built in 1902 ([link](#)).

The lot was expanded in 1906 and 1909. The 1909 deed reveals that an electric light plant was already in operation on the lot. A photo of Shellman’s park circa 1910 shows the tip of the water tower, extending above the Methodist Church across the street from the bandstand. None of these structures is still standing.



In 1926, the City began transitioning the operation of its utilities to the South Georgia Power Co. (later Georgia Power Co.), and in 1946 completed the transfer of all operations except the well. See 76 Payne St for more details.

In 1913, the Town began planning for a sanitary sewer system ([link](#)). In January, 1914, voters approved a bond issue ([link](#)), and construction soon began ([link](#)).



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Shellman Volunteer Fire Department

Fires were an ever-present danger in the early days of Shellman. Steam-driven mills and gins compounded the risk from the fireplaces and kitchens of residences, and the buildings were closer to one another as the town grew. Cotton warehouses were particular risks; when the Farmers Warehouse burned in 1915, flames could be seen from Dawson and Cuthbert ([link](#)).

Fighting fires was a community effort. A newspaper account of a fire at the Phelps & Dean mill in 1882 reported, "*in a shorter time than it takes to tell it, almost every citizen of the place was at the scene with buckets of water and other apparatus with which to allay the flames, and by quick and considerate efforts they succeeded in quenching them before much serious damage was done.*" ([link](#)).

By 1906, a volunteer fire company had been organized ([link](#)). In 1908, the city erected a fire alarm tower on the RR right-of-way, at the corner of Payne St and W Railroad St. A newspaper article from 1921 (at right, [link](#)) describes in some detail the response of the department to a fire on Phelps St.

Motor-driven fire trucks first appeared in the larger towns around 1910. Dawson purchased an "auto fire truck" in 1912. It is not known when Shellman purchased its first fire truck. When they did, they would have needed a fire house. The first known fire house was the building at 73 W Railroad St, which was being leased by the city for use as a city hall and fire department by 1937. They purchased the building to use as a "fire house" in 1944. In 2010, the fire house was relocated to 103 W Railroad St. See 73 W Railroad St for more information.

The Efficient Fire Department of Shellman

Speaking of efficiency, well the Shellman fire department is full of it when it comes to prompt calls. Thursday morning a general alarm was turned in from Phelps street. As the alarm was given the fire whistle at the power plant began its shrill blasts, the fire bells of the city began their doleful sound and everything was off for a run in answer to the call of distress.

Five Points in Atlanta has nothing on Shellman when it comes to traffic when such an occasion as this arises. After a speedy maneuver the department reached the scene of the disaster. The entire building had been consumed by the flames before the department reached the scene of the fire. It is not known as to the exact extent of the loss. No other buildings were damaged by the fire. There has been much improvement in the fire fighting facilities of Shellman during the past few months.

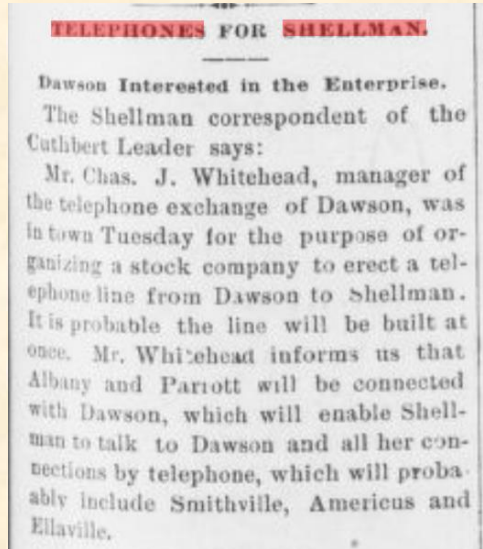
Only a few months ago two beautiful homes were lost on account of the steam being allowed to get too low during the day. When this happens in case of a fire it is impossible to raise the proper amount of steam to operate the pumps. In this way there is no water pressure and without pressure it is impossible to fight fire with water. Several new water hose have been added and here's hoping that we will receive the same amount of speedy service from the fire department during the future as was demonstrated at the fire of last Thursday.



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Telephone Service

Georgia's first telephone exchange was built in Atlanta in 1879. Telephone service spread across Georgia fairly rapidly. Towns built local exchanges which were not initially connected to other towns. Shellman likely had a few telephones in a local exchange by 1895 when plans were made for the first long-distance line connecting Shellman and Dawson (at right, [link](#)). It is not known if the line was built. In 1902, F H Davis of Cuthbert received permission to build a line connecting Dawson, Shellman, and Cuthbert ([link](#)). Davis owned the Shellman exchange in 1903 ([link](#)).



The telephone industry gradually consolidated into ever-larger companies because of the capital investment needed to build a network and keep it up to date. In 1909, the Cotton Belt Telephone Co. was organized with headquarters in Cuthbert. Dr. J G Dean, a native of Shellman by then living in Dawson, was President. C J O'Farrell, Jr., a Chicago-based employee of the American Electric Telephone Co., was manager. Cotton Belt purchased local exchanges in this area and modernized them; they also connected the local exchanges with new long-distance lines ([link](#)).

DAWSON, GA.—Telephone exchanges at Cuthbert, Fort Gaines, Edison and Shellman have recently been purchased by Dr. J. G. Dean for approximately \$30,000, including long-distance lines between all of the towns named. A number of improvements will be made. Doctor Dean formerly owned the Georgia-Alabama Telephone system, which he disposed of. The property is the largest in southeast Georgia. L.

Hugh Payne was manager of the Shellman exchange ([link](#)); the switchboard was located at 290 Buford St.

Cotton Belt was trouble-plagued from the beginning. In 1910, there was such an outcry over high rates that T R Arthur led a group of Shellman citizens in forming the Shellman Telephone Co. ([link](#)). It does not appear that the company ever began operations.

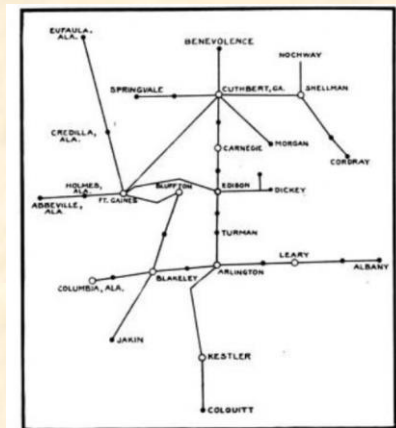


Diagram Showing Extent of Cotton Belt Company's System.

Later Cotton Belt issued bonds to raise funds to purchase more telephone exchanges, and was unable to pay the interest. The map at left shows the company's network in 1912 ([link](#)), when the company was placed in receivership ([link](#)), and in 1914 was purchased at public auction by the First State Bank of Dawson ([link](#)). The Southern Telephone Co. was the organized to take over the Cotton Belt network ([link](#), Deed Book/MM/462).

The Southern Telephone Co. was later absorbed into the Georgia Continental Telephone Co., which in 1957 was purchased by General Telephone Company of the South ([link](#)).