

Monroeville, Alabama

At first glance Monroeville, Alabama, seems like any other small Southern town. Quaint, quiet, a throwback to time. But a closer look reveals an off-the-beaten-path corner of the country with an intense literary history and pride.

a newly opened Capote exhibit is beginning to attract a fair number of people on its own.

"There are a lot of people who feel they

with his family here until the end."

As is the case with many small towns, sometimes the best

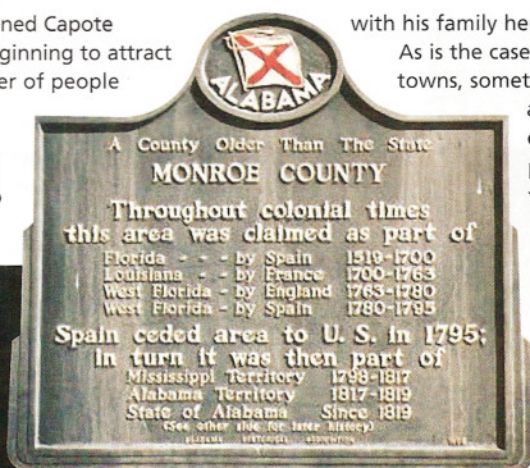
accounts of the past come from the people who live there. Clark's mother went to school with Lee and knew the famous hometown heroes.

"Mama said they were way above the rest of us," Clark tells.

"In this little town in the '30s, it's just

amazing they had each other to talk to and bounce things off of—and both have said that in interviews. This little backwater town sort of drove them into their imaginations."

Email mchm@frontiernet.net or call 251-575-7433 for more information about the Monroe County Heritage Museums or the sold-out *To Kill a Mockingbird* performances put on at Monroeville's old Courthouse each spring.



can understand more about a writer's books by going to see his hometown," says Clark. "We have seen it all these years with Harper Lee. Occasionally during these years, people have found

Monroeville to see Truman's roots. But now we have a lot more [people coming just for Capote]. I think that it is his literary output really that keeps his name current."

The spark for the Capote exhibit came when the *In Cold Blood* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* author's cousin donated to the museum a scrapbook rich with Capote's letters, postcards, and other memorabilia. Among the treasures now housed at the museum are one of Capote's typewriters, some of his books, and rare family photos.

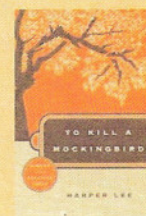
"In one letter, he talks about that, yes, Nelle [Harper Lee] has written a book and, yes, it will be good," Clark paraphrases. "Everyone stops to look at that. There is also a thick collection of postcards mailed to Truman's favorite aunt, Mary Ida [Faulk Carter], from all around the world. Some are from Russia [a trip he documents in] *The Muses Are Heard*. They tie things Truman did later in life to his life here. He remained close

Truman Capote and Harper Lee both lived here as children and the sights, sounds, and characters of the southwestern Alabama town are evident in the works of these famed American writers and childhood friends. It's a fact that draws some 30,000 visitors each year—about the combined population of the town and surrounding county—and has captured the imagination of many a reader.

"When you are here, you get a feel for that two-block neighborhood that Harper Lee writes about," says Jane Ellen Clark, Monroe County Heritage Museums director. "You also get a feel for Truman's early works that were set here. People get out and just walk the streets of this little town."

In addition to exploring Monroeville on foot, Capote and Lee fans can view exhibits devoted to the writers at the Monroe County Heritage Museums. For years, the museum's *To Kill a Mockingbird* offerings have been the big draw, but

book RECOMMENDATIONS



To Kill a Mockingbird
by Harper Lee (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

The only book by this Pulitzer Prize-winning author who sometimes comes back to Monroeville to visit family. The character of Dill is said to be modeled after Lee's childhood friend Capote.

Truman Capote's works that were inspired by his Alabama childhood:
A Christmas Memory
The Thanksgiving Visitor
The Grass Harp

Visit monroecountyal.com/heritage.html or frontiernet.net/~mchm for additional details. —Beth Kanter

OLD MONROE COUNTY COURTHOUSE