

## New York Times Visits Fairhope

The *Sunday Times* travel section on March 27th featured an "Alabama ramble, with porches and parks," through our favorite town on Mobile Bay. Writer Scott Norville, whose vision of Alabama had been "tainted by the Gothic glasses" of Truman Capote's descriptions, was pleasantly surprised by Fairhope, "an immaculate village full of tidy cafes and smiling shopkeepers." Norville was enchanted by the ambience of the town, with its "gaily-painted Victorian cottages bordered by camellia bushes and vines of multi-colored wisteria," and especially by the duck crossing signs posted at a waterfront park.

The article notes one fact that is, unfortunately, all too rare in today's economy: that

Fairhope's downtown is thriving. Gone are the farm-supply and dry goods stores. In their place is an array of specialty shops, antique stores and restaurants serving fresh flounder and soft-shell crab from the bay. The bookstores are filled with signed copies of books by some of the nearly two dozen authors — Fannie Flagg, Judith Richards and Terry Cline, among them — who have homes in the area. Gallery windows display the works of local artists.

There are three paragraphs on Fairhope's history as a single tax colony founded by followers of Henry George (although George is less-than-accurately referred to as a "Philadelphia journalist"). It is noted that the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation still owns about 9,000 acres, leasing land out to homeowners and businesses and charging rent in lieu of conventional taxes. "The practice," writes Norville, "...was intended to check land speculation."

And so it has. It might have been instructive for Mr. Norville to make the connection between Fairhope's vibrantly healthy local economy and its public revenue system. There are conflicts over land policy in today's Fairhope, mostly stemming from disputes over the administration of the town's growth past the corporation's original holdings (and the speculative gains to be had therefrom). Nevertheless, land speculation has been prohibited for a century from the heart of Fairhope, Alabama, and the result makes for tasty travel-section fare.