



THE TOWNS HISTORIAN

The NEWSLETTER of the TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Towns County Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich history of our area. We meet the second Monday of each month at 900 N. Main St., Hiawassee, GA.

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(706) 781-8611



2017 OFFICERS

Sandra Green
President

Nancy Cody
Vice President

Betty Phillips
Secretary

Frances Shook
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Ina Konzesky
Membership Secretary

HISTORIANS

Jerry A. Taylor
County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian

Mary Ann McCall Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

WE'RE MAKING TOWNS COUNTY HISTORY COME ALIVE!

This has been a year of achievement and growth for the historical society. We currently have eighty members, many of which are new. Much of our growth can be attributed to the variety of interesting programs planned by vice president Nancy Cody. All of the officers work as a team to make our meetings welcoming and fun.

October was the one year anniversary of the dedication of the Bell Mountain County Park and Historical Site. It has exceeded all expectations for the number of visitors and has become a favorite destination for local residents and for those with out-of-town visitors. As seen on Facebook, many beautiful and creative photos have been taken of the view from the summit. The Towns County Historical Society is honored to be "Keepers of the Mountain".

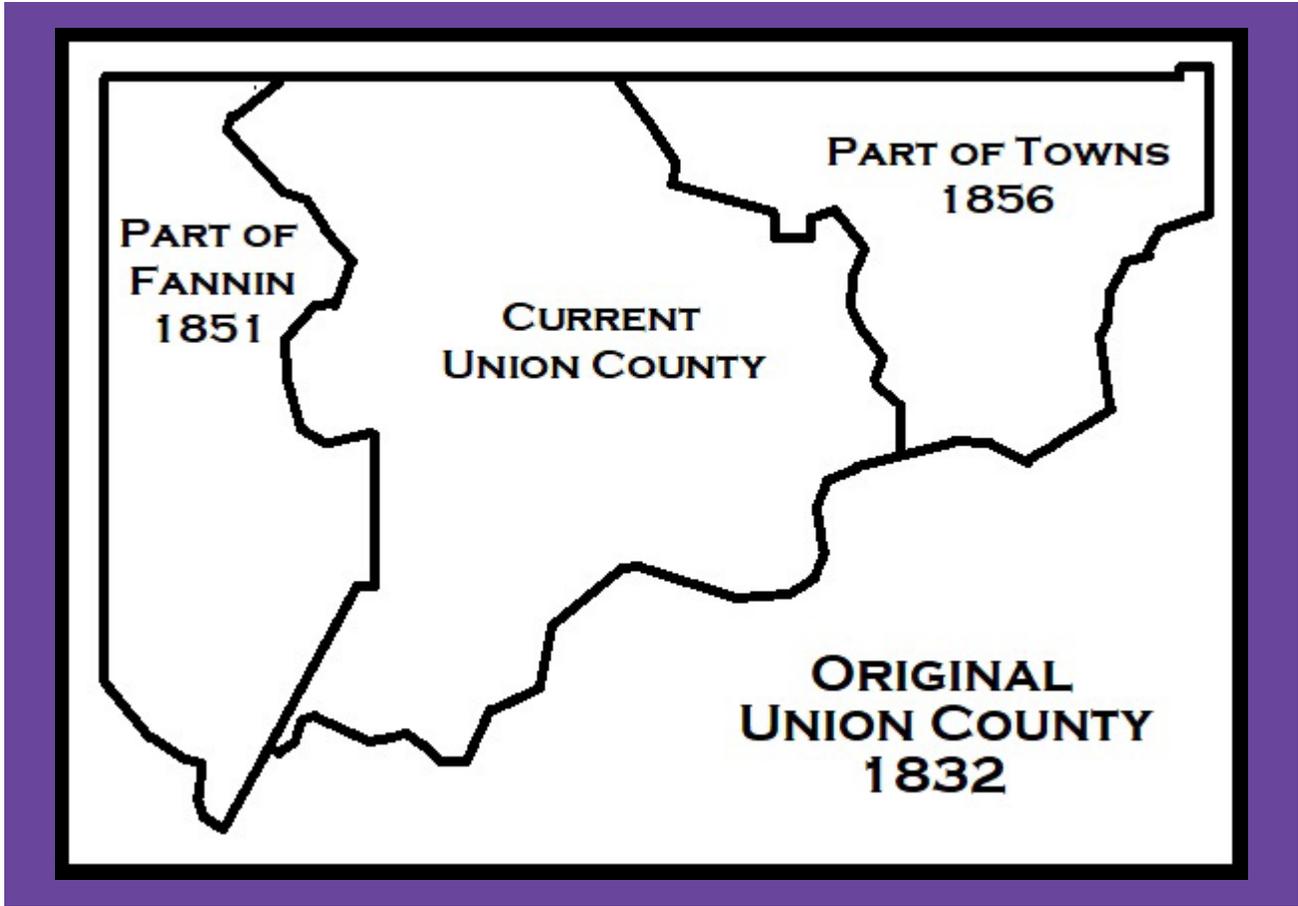
January 2018 will be the one year anniversary of the Historical Society officially taking possession of the Old Rock Jail. Much has been accomplished in restoring it to its original 1936 appearance. We had our first public event, Pickin' on the Porch, in October. Hopefully, it was only the first of many future performances! We plan to have the jail ready to open as a museum sometime in the late spring. We welcome donations of old photographs and items of historical interest connected to Towns County. If anyone has photos of any of the sheriffs (preferably in uniform) who were in office during the years (1936-1977) it served as the jail, we would be very interested in obtaining copies for display. We already have several 1930s kitchen and living room items thanks to the generosity of our members.

Please join us for our monthly meetings on the second Monday of each month at 5:30 at the old rec center, 900 N. Main St., Hiawassee.

Sandra Green, President

Happy Birthday Union County

By Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy County Historian



By the time you read this, our neighboring county of Union will have turned 185 years old. That may seem interesting to us in Towns County, but not necessarily relevant to our interests. However, it can be seen as the birthday of our “mother” as Towns County was created primarily from Union County in 1856. The story actually begins with our “grandmother.” In December of 1831 the Georgia Legislature created the original Cherokee County from the land that had been taken from the Cherokee. This original county, our “grandmother,” was massive. It stretched, generally, from the Chattahoochee River to the Alabama state line, up to Tennessee, and then back east to what was then the Rabun County line in the Upper Hightower/Tate City area. Old Cherokee County, our “grandmother,” only existed for a year before she was divided into ten counties by the Georgia Legislature. The new counties of Forsyth, Lumpkin, Cobb, Cherokee, Gilmer, Cass (now Bartow), Murray, Floyd, Paulding, and Union (our “mother”) were created on December 3, 1832. The boundaries of Union County, at that time, were defined as being “the seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth, and so much of the sixth and eleventh districts of the first section, as lies north of the mountains.” In layman’s terms, Union County stretched from about Morganton in what is now Fannin County to Dick’s Gap on the Rabun County line. This means that original Union County contained about half of what is now Fannin and almost all of what is now Towns (with the exception of the Tate City area that was annexed to Towns from Rabun). The first elections were held at the home of Isaac N. Greer. Eventually, Blairsville was settled and became the county seat of original Union County. This meant that people from Morganton to Dick’s Gap had to travel there to record deeds, get marriage licenses, serve as jurors, and generally conduct county business. In 1854, a large western chunk was cut off of Union and added to a part of Gilmer to create Fannin County. Then, on May 6, 1856, Towns County was created from the eastern part of the original Union County. This left, with a few minor changes over the years, the county lines about like they are today. We will celebrate our 162nd birthday in May, but we should not forget to also wish our “mother” a Happy 185th Birthday!

Jessie Bradshaw

By Jake Bennett Bradshaw



Although I grew up about an hour away from Towns County in Ellijay, Georgia, I fondly remember the times my mother brought my brother and me to Crooked Creek to visit our great-grandmother. We did not call her 'granny' or 'grandma' but rather 'Jessie' because she had joked to her grandchildren that she wasn't old enough to be a grandmother. Born Jessie Eleanora Tatham in North Carolina on August 4, 1913, to William Charles "Charlie" Tatham and Lola Vesta Gribble, she was one of the most strong, independent, and bold women I

have ever encountered. She lived alone in a little house from the 1970s that she bought when she separated from my great-grandfather, Neal Bradshaw, however, before she left she resolved a long running difference of opinion they had about how many trees, shrubs & flowers were too many by chopping down much of what she had planted! Once she moved into the little single-wide trailer, on land she inherited from her mom & dad, she began altering the house and land to reflect her truly unique personality. As I remember, the inside of the house was well-kept with dozens of owl figurines and mod avocado green, burnt orange, and chocolate brown doilies. On the end table, next to her brown velour arm chair, she kept a jar of soft peppermint stick candy which she would take the lid off of, and, rattling the confection around in the faces of her many visitors, would state, 'you ought to eat something or you'll shrivel up and blow away!' On the surfaces that were not covered in knick-knacks sat framed photographs of her beloved family. Her yard reflected her green thumb and was much like the house: organized yet cluttered in a beautiful arrangement. In the front, there were rows and rows of all varieties of daylilies as well as her giant fuchsia rhododendron bushes. Going up the driveway were blueberry bushes taller than her house. Next to the kitchen window, a crepe myrtle's towering and twisting arms shaded her whiskey barrel goldfish 'pond' whilst patches of foxgloves crowded the borders of the backyard. During our summer visits, we often left Jessie's house with the trunk of our car packed full of daylilies, hostas, and red-hot pokers, all of which she would help us dig up.

Sometime in my early teenage years, she moved in with my Aunt Sandra Bradshaw Green into the house Jessie and Neal had built on Bradshaw Road in Hiawassee. Since I was older, I began staying with them for long periods during my summer breaks from school, and when I drove up for the first time by myself, when I got my driver's license, Jessie bought me a set of tires for my car. I have always been fascinated with history and antiques, and I would walk the shores of Lake Chatuge looking for lost antique treasures, my mind filled with Jessie's stories of finding rubies and star-sapphires in the red clay. However, I would take breaks from these excursions and would make my way back up to the house where Jessie was sitting on the porch eyeing me from afar with her heavy, giant, black metal binoculars. We would sit on the porch in the humid Georgia air, and I would ask questions about her life in Towns County. One time I asked her what life was like in Hia-

wassee and Young Harris during the Great Depression. She responded with 'there wasn't a great depression here, that's just always how things and people around here were.' However, these chats were not limited to the porch. Often times, the stories she told materialized in antique family heirlooms in the house. One such item was the antique Victrola. She told me how her father had ordered the record player from Sears and had made its shipping crate into her hope chest in the upstairs of the house. Another item she liked to talk about was the enamel topped Hoosier cabinet that she had bought from a peddler in the 1930s. The peddler, in an attempt to show how strong and sturdy the cabinet was, took out one of the cabinet's drawers and stomped on the back of it with his booted foot, leaving a muddy footprint. When Jessie told me about this in the early 2000s, she dragged out the drawer to reveal that the footprint of the peddler was still there some 80-odd-years later.

One summer, she taught me some basic southern granny skills: quilting and fried apple pie making. I remember sitting on the front porch with my quilting hoop whilst she taught me the proper way to make a stitch. Although her sight had deteriorated significantly by this point, she felt the stitches in the cloth and told me I needed to make the stitches smaller (she was an expert at this and had quilted for years at home and at the Georgia Mountain Fair where she won numerous prizes for her work). That same summer, I asked her how she made such incredible fried apple pies for so many years. She immediately told my great-aunt Sandra to lay out her frozen dried apples because 'Jacob wants to know how to make my pies.' Though my aunt Sandra did all of the tedious work that went into the pies, Jessie was proud that she could teach me something.

Not long after I graduated high school in 2012, Jessie moved to the Towns County Nursing home where she thrived. She was happy to be around people as she had always been a sort of social butterfly. She would attend almost every social event from weekly church programs to Ice-Cream Socials and loved them, though she was sometimes sassy to the nurses and physical therapists. When I visited her at the nursing home, I would play the piano in the dining room for Jessie and the other residents during lunch hour, and she'd proudly let everyone at her lunch table know that I was 'her great-grandson'.

In June of 2014, Jessie passed away at the age of 100 in Hiawassee. Though her death was not easy to deal with, I often think back to the memories I have with her and laugh at her matter-of-fact attitude and outlook on life; she never let anything hold her back. One of my memories that particularly illustrate this was her constant desire to always go fishing at the dock on Bradshaw Road. At nearly 100 years old, this woman sat with her fishing pole caught the largest bream than I have ever seen and would quickly fill up a pan. Jessie taught me so much more than making pies and quilting, she taught me, by example, that one can be a serious, independent, and strong-willed person and at the same time exude humility and kindness, and of course, fun!



Remember When?

By Mary Ann McCall Miller



My parents moved to Hiwassee in 1963 from Dalton where I was born. I was a mere 2 years old. Hiwassee is the only place I remember and will always call home.

I attended kindergarten in the upper level of Hiwassee Elementary and Nina Sue Tipton was my teacher and the next year became my first grade teacher. She was the only teacher that gave me a spanking for riding a boy piggy-back around the teacher's desk and unplugged the clock. Of course, someone told on us!

Growing up in Hiwassee, I remember the sense of belonging. There weren't that many people in the county back then. I also learned at an early age that you did not gossip because the person in question was probably related to whom your were talking to even if they didn't speak to each other.

I remember calling all the local stores by the name of the owner. There was Hoodenpyle's, Ernest's, Presley's, Nugee's, Charles', Linda's and many others. When we went in those businesses, they called by your name. My parents owned the local laundromat and I believe it was the first Laundromat in the town. Many times while my parents were busy cleaning and doing repairs, I would sneak off to Ernest and Claudine's to check out the latest toys...or I'd go a few doors down to visit Mr. Hoodenpyle at the Hiwassee Market.

There was no McDonald's or Dairy Queen back then. All the restaurants were locally owned. We usually ate at Gippy's

(another first name business) on Sunday after church. Of course you would know every family eating there. I remember "Miss Debbie", who was the sweet waitress. I can still remember eating Gippy's delicious fried chicken!

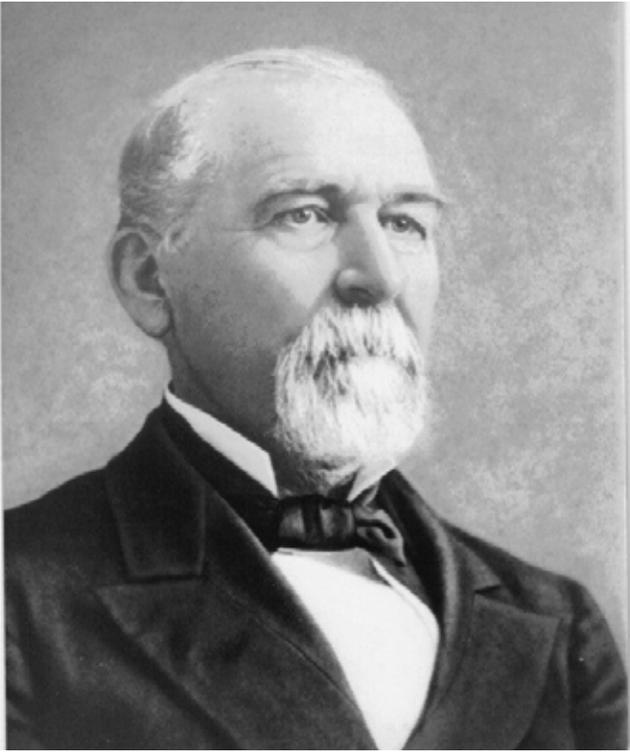
I recall the first day of school in the 3rd grade. The elementary school had been divided up and I went Macedonia Elementary. Mr. Hooper, the principal came and got me and told me I was to be in another teacher's room. Little did I know that Lucille Wood had called up my mother and asked who my teacher was and when she found out, she called Mr. Hooper and told that I was to be moved to another teacher's room. I look back and realize there were a lot of people looking out for me.

My dad repaired the 3-way radios for the sheriff's department. I was home from college one summer and was late for a dress rehearsal for a play in Hayesville. So I had a "lead foot." The deputy followed me over the North Carolina line and stopped me and just gave me a warning but when I got home, my parents knew all about my speeding.

I moved back to the area in July of 2016 after 32 years. A lot has changed ...many people I knew back then have moved and many of the older folks have passed on. I see empty stores that tug at my heartstrings...remembering a simpler time. Then I see the mountains that fill my soul every day I see them. They remain steadfast but always changing in their beauty. I do still see people I have known most of my life, and then I realize, I am home where I belong.

Who Was Young Harris?

by Jerry A. Taylor, County Historian



Young Loftin Gerdine Harris (1812 – 1894) was an American lawyer, businessman, politician, judge, and philanthropist. He is best known as the early benefactor of Young Harris College, after whom the school was named.

The son of Walton Harris and Virginia Beverly Bilups, Harris was born in Elbert County, Georgia, where he received his primary education. Later, he attended the University of Georgia.

Harris was admitted to the Georgia Bar in 1834 and began his law practice in Elberton, Georgia, where he was quite successful and represented Elbert County in the state legislature. Harris married Susan Beverly Allen in 1835, and they soon moved to Athens where he became well known and was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives from Clarke County. He was also a delegate to the 1865 convention that drafted the 1868 Constitution of Georgia. Harris was one of a group of Athens businessmen who founded the profitable Southern Mutual Fire Insurance Company in 1847. He was initially named Secretary and Principal Director where he proved his financial skill by smart management of the company's assets. Harris was company president from 1866 until his death, and the business became one of the largest in the southeast United States.

In Athens, the Harrises joined the First Methodist Church, an event that changed their lives and the lives of countless others who benefited from their generosity. Harris became a devout member, served as Sunday school superintendent for many years, and supported Methodism throughout the state. His income from Southern Mutual, legal work, and judge's salary was substantial. He used his wealth to make numerous contributions to small churches, helped build parsonages, and supported the Young Men's Christian Association. Harris served as a member of the Board of Trustees for Emory College and donated two buildings: the Marvin Dormitory and the President's Home. The Harris-Allen Library was established at Elberton, Georgia, in his wife's honor.

After hearing positive things about the mountain Methodist mission school that had been established in Brasstown Valley in the 1880s to provide rural Appalachian Mountain children with an opportunity for an education, Harris began to support the school with financial assistance. He funded the construction of the campus and then continued to contribute several thousand dollars each year. The school's name was changed in 1888 to Young Harris Institute in honor of his strong financial support. Subsequently, the U.S. postal department established Young Harris Post Office, and the name of the community soon became known as Young Harris in honor of Mr. Harris.

Mr. Harris' wife, Susan B. Harris, died on May 18, 1889, after contracting a severe cold during a picnic. To honor her memory, Young Harris funded construction in 1892 of the Susan B. Harris Memorial Chapel on the campus. The brick structure contains a bell tower and was home to the local Methodist congregation until a new facility was built in 1949. It is the oldest building on the YHC campus and is still used for chapel services, lectures, concerts, and homecoming.

Provision for the school was included in Harris' will, even though he never saw the campus. Arguably, Harris' most lasting and significant achievements were his donations to the little mountain school in Brasstown Valley. An article in the Athens newspaper on May 1, 1894, stated: "Gifts to the school by Judge Harris, at times when they were most needed, established an institution that has shed abroad the light of religion and education and has given to the State of Georgia and to the world a priceless heritage of education and refinement nowhere exceeded. From the halls of Young Harris College, scores of youths have gone forth blessing his name, and their lives have brought honor to their state and country."

ORAL HISTORIES



ALICE HICKS CUNNINGHAM



FRED & IVA LEE THOMAS SIMS



STELLA MAE HILTON BERRONG



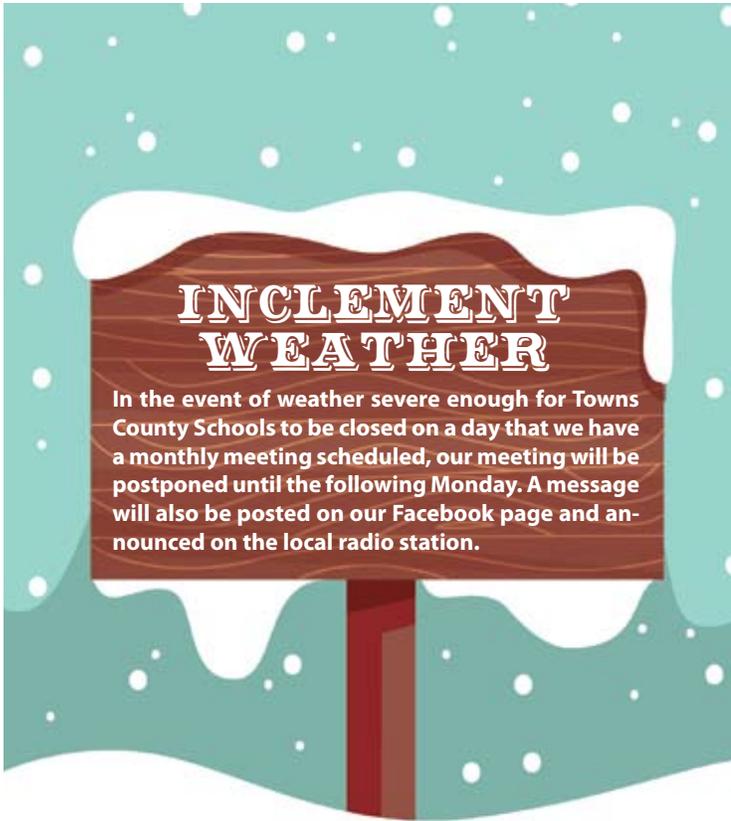
JOHN & JANICE COCHRAN

These are the some of the oral history interviews that Nancy Cody and Annette Cook have done during the past quarter. All of these oral histories are for sale on DVD through the historical society.



CAMILLA SIMS HOGSED





DONATIONS

Richard and Marcia Aunspaugh
In memory of Ernie Seckinger

Bud and Rosemary Branson
Old Rock Jail Restoration

Cliff and Lori Bradshaw
Old Rock Jail

Bob Cloer
In memory of Wiley Cloer Family

Bud Dyer
In Memory of Ernie Seckinger

Tracey Langley
in memory of Henry Edge Sanders.

HNTB Corporation
In Memory of Ernie Seckinger

Charles and Faye Nicholson
Old Rock Jail Restoration

Shirley Norwood
In Memory of Wiley Cloer Family

Ed and Patty Reed
In Memory of Ernie Seckinger

Bob and Norma Jean Stewart
In Honor of Jerry Taylor



Wayde Nicholson, an employee of Towns county, enjoying his break, relaxing in the swing located in front of the Historic Presley Post Office Building! Wayde is the son of the late Leonard W. and Bertha Underwood Nicholson and the husband of Jewel Taylor Nicholson. He retired from Ford Motor Company and lived in Hapeville before moving back to Towns County. He's been employed by the county since 1998.



**Towns County Historical Society
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