



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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Jerry Taylor
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County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian



Mary Ann McCall Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

President's Message by Sandra Green



The Historical Society closed out 2019 with a great fourth quarter! The guest speaker in October was Rev. Dr. John Kay telling us about the history of Young Harris College. November's program featured Buzz Tatham sharing letters, pictures and stories about his dad's military experience during WWII. We finished in December with group trivia lead by Jason Edwards, ably assisted by Jake Bradshaw and Jerry Taylor! Jason's questions were specifically about Towns County history and/or Christmas! We completed the evening with fellowship and an incredible array of refreshments provided by those attending. Speaking of refreshments, I would be remiss if I didn't thank Janice Cochran, Carol Gibson and Frances Dyer, our Refreshment Committee. They've done a fantastic job coordinating the food and arranging the refreshment table each month this year.

Beloved, long-time historical society member Ina Kozesky passed away this year. In October we presented a plaque and Georgia flag in her memory to her family for display in our meeting room. John Cochran and the Cowhands were scheduled to perform at the ORJ in October but, due to inclement weather, their performance was moved to our meeting room.

In the spirit of Christmas, we made one needy family's celebration a little brighter this year. Due to the generosity of our members, we were able to provide toys and clothes for the three children as well as gift certificates for food for the family. Thanks to Tyler Osborn it was all handled anonymously through the school.

Election of officers for the Historical Society was held at our December meeting. All officers were unanimously reelected for another term. We appreciate your support and look forward to the upcoming year. We ask for your input and suggestions for making 2020 even better!

Rebirth of Hiawassee by Tyler Osborn

When traveling down Main Street in Hiawassee, you may notice two brick buildings that appear to have been abandoned. These buildings are some of the last historic buildings left in Hiawassee. Estimated to have been built sometime in the 1930s or 1940s, their history is much like them, forgotten. I have researched and asked around for pictures of these buildings, but to no avail. It has been estimated that the buildings have been empty for twenty plus years. The buildings were most recently used for storage. One formerly housed the Delco Company, a seamstress shop, and City Hall for a time.

Recently, Mayor Ordiales announced that the City had contracted with the owner, Dan Paris, to purchase the buildings. When I talked to Mayor Ordiales, she assured me that the City is working hard to save the buildings and to keep them away from the wrecking ball. The buildings have been cleaned out. Mainly, all that was left was boxes of old paperwork and files from the Hiawassee Hardware which used the buildings as storage. As far as repairs, the bones are still in good shape; however, the roof will need to be repaired, along with complete interior renovations to bring everything up to code. The City, along with the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), hopes to restore the buildings to useful retail spaces in order to promote new businesses in Hiawassee. The DDA is applying for grants in order to help fund the renovations, which may take up to a year or more to receive. The process has started; however, it will be a slow one in the beginning.



Many have voiced their opinion on what should go into the buildings, at the request of the City, on their Facebook page. The ideas included a coffee shop, pool hall, book store, clothing store, etc. While the City currently does not know what will soon be housed in the buildings, they are sure it will be beneficial to the town. After the remodel is complete, the City will turn the buildings over to the DDA to find suitable tenants for the space. The City does hope to keep ownership of the buildings so that they can control the rent. Mayor Ordiales explained that this would be to keep rent down for start-up businesses so that they can get their roots down here. Once they are grounded, they can stay in the spot or they can move to a bigger location, making room for another new business in the shops, all while generating income for the City and DDA. Outside of one of the buildings is the perfect spot for outdoor dining. This same building also has room behind it that can have a deck built to accommodate more space. Parking seems to be the biggest question in the plan. As we all know, when the City of Hiawassee began planning many years ago, they envisioned lots, or squares, that would house businesses. However, one issue they did not have then was parking, as cars were not common in the area. For now, the City Square is the best option for parking as it can hold up to 80 vehicles, and is a short half block walk to the buildings.

The Historical Society would like to thank the City of Hiawassee, Downtown Development Authority, Mayor Liz Ordiales, and Dan Paris for working together to save these buildings as part of our local history. We may not know all of the history of these buildings, but thanks to those who worked together to save them, we can ensure that they have a future in our little 'Lake and Mountain Paradise' home.

Stitches in The Fabric of Time by Jake Bradshaw

The act of piecing together bits of fabric has been around for thousands of years. Early sewing often had a utilitarian purpose: whether it was a blanket or a garment, it was to protect the body from the elements. Many people's ancestors in the United States often passed down the tradition of quilt-making as a means of protection. Early on in American history, large single pieces of fabric were sewn together and embroidered. As time continued, some people began making elaborate patterns on their quilts while some sewed scraps of fabric together that they already had. My great-grandmother, Jessie Tatham Bradshaw, who was a native to Towns County, Georgia, taught me how to quilt when I was a child. Although she was mostly blind, she could run her fingers over the fabric and feel if the stitches were too large or irregular. During the summers I stayed with her, and we spent the days sitting and talking on the porch as I quilted with a hoop that she had given me. In thinking about these memories, I have realized that the practice of quilting, although originally utilitarian, must also be a social one. As Jessie and I sat, we'd talk about all manner of subjects, from her telling me, 'we didn't have a Great Depression here, we were just poor' or when we would discuss the 'Wheel of Fortune' TV show that came on at 7 p.m. every weeknight. Although Jessie was not quilting with me, there are years of photos capturing her, her sisters, and friends making quilts at the old quilting cabin at the Georgia Mountain Fair. I can only imagine the conversations they must have had while making quilts – town gossip, obituaries in the newspaper that week, what they had for dinner the night before, reminiscing over distant memories. Jessie and her ancestors had to make quilts to survive the cold winters – however, I am certain that they, along with many of your own families also used the quilt-making time to bond with their families and friends. Due to my connection to Jessie, I became interested in collecting antique quilts. Often times they are damaged, and you can see the handiwork of the maker on the inside – how they attached the fabric together, whether they used cotton or old blankets as batting. It makes one wonder, who made it? Why did they make it? When did they make it? What did they talk about when they made it? In myriad ways, quilts would be a historian's treasure – could you imagine the stories a quilt could tell if they could speak? In one sense, it would be a historical treasure trove, but I also can't help but laugh and think that if quilts could talk, there might be a lot of people in trouble!



Alabama's Teddy Gentry Has Ties To Towns County!

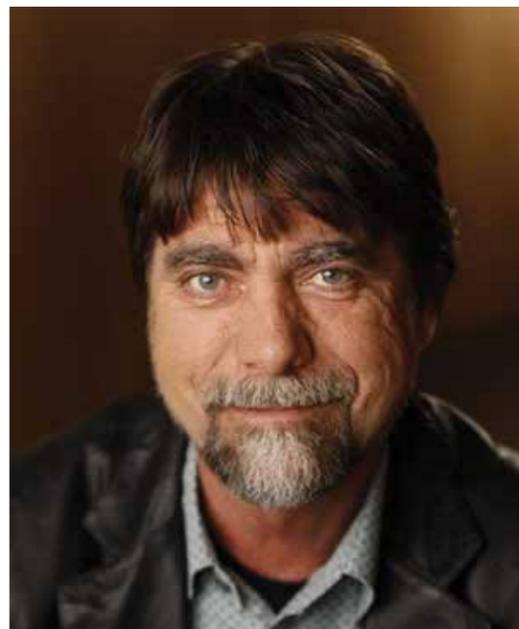
by Jerry Kendall

The Alabama Band from Fort Payne, Alabama, is known and loved by millions of folks around the globe but it is likely that many folks in Towns County have no idea of kinship with original member Teddy Gentry who has been with the group for all of the years it has been in existence back to 1969 but not well known for several years until gradually gaining prominence beginning in the mid to late 1970s.

The first Towns County Eller connection as direct ancestors of Teddy Gentry came about when Joseph and Mariah Hedden Eller moved from Rabun County to the Upper Hightower area in the early 1840s. Joe and Mariah were the parents of eighteen children born between 1826 and 1850. Their eleventh child was George Henry Eller, born in 1842. He married Rachel Lavinia Brown and they had seven children with the third being Elisha Hedden Eller who was born in Towns County in 1867.

By 1870, the George Henry Eller family had moved to Habersham County and they eventually moved to the Fort Payne, Alabama, area. Elisha Hedden Eller married Julia Brickley and they had seven children with the fifth being Burt F. Eller who was born in 1900. Burt married Ollie Owens in DeKalb County, Alabama, about 1920 and they had seven children with Bertha Jean Eller being the seventh born in 1934.

Teddy Gentry was born to Bertha Jean Eller and James Gentry in 1952. At an early age, Teddy and his mother moved to nearby Lookout Mountain to live



with his beloved grandfather Burt, who he affectionately called Paw Paw, on a sixty acre cotton farm. Teddy eventually purchased the home from his Paw Paw who passed away in 1995 at age ninety-four, where he and his wife Linda still live. They have two children and five grandchildren.

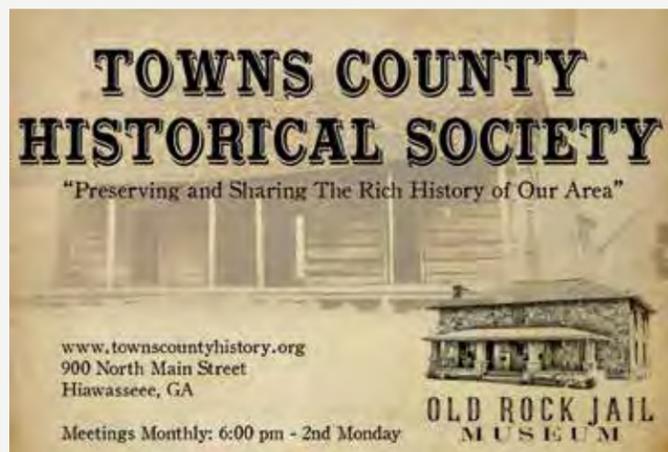
(Note: Eller descendants are encouraged to be in touch with Steve Eller who is in the process of updating "Descendants of John Jacob Eller" which was published in 1998 by Ed Eller of Dalton, Georgia. Steve can be contacted by phone at 706-318-7826 or by email at ellerpop1@yahoo.com. Many local folks will recall Lake Eller who was Steve's uncle.)

Membership Dues

This is just a friendly reminder that you 2020 membership dues are due. Our society relies on membership dues and donations for funding.

We also welcome new members! If you have friends or family who you think would enjoy our learning more about our county, bring them to the next meeting.!

Membership forms can be downloaded from our website: townscountyhistory.org



Historical Society Receives Surprising Gift

By Jerry A. Taylor

Helen M. Martin, of Gainesville, Georgia, recently gifted the Towns County Historical Society with an interesting old ledger book from the formative days of the county.

In her own words, Ms. Martin stated that, "the old ledger book was found in the possession of Miss Mary Mauldin of Clarkesville by Mr. Hugo Martin when the Mauldin estate was being settled some years ago. My sister, Willa Martin, and I have kept it from being destroyed. Recently, in conversation with my friend, Cheryl Hamby Williams, who grew up in Blairsville, she mentioned that she would contact Towns County historian Jerry Taylor to see if the historical society there might be interested in receiving the book."

Mary Mauldin (1904-1990) was the daughter of Oscar McClain England Mauldin and Margaret Rebecca Niebuhr. Oscar Mauldin was the son of Alexander McClain Mauldin and Mary Caroline England, original settlers of Towns County who were among those involved in the educational and political affairs of the county. Oscar M. Mauldin moved to Clarkesville in the 1890s where he married and raised his family. Undoubtedly, he took the old ledger book with him when he moved, and it has been out of Towns County ever since.

The ledger contains the records of the first Towns County Board of Education from May 8, 1860 to January 4, 1864. The first entry begins, "The Inferior Court and Ordinary met in the court house in Hiwassee the 9 day of May 1860 for the purpose of arranging the board of education for said county. Present were M. L. Burch, Richard Edmondson, Edward Rogers, and Christian Martin, Justices of the Inferior Court and John W. Holmes, Ordinary, and upon motion elected Samuel Y. Jameson the seventh person to fill out the board. The board then chose S. Y. Jameson chairman and Martin L. Burch secretary."

Continuing the letter from Ms. Martin, who pointed out that had she been teaching at the time, she would have made eight cents a day, "It is my hope that the people of Towns County will treasure this original documentation of their school system. There are many family names and individuals documented in this book. The fun part to me is the fact that it was utilized for purposes in addition to the recording of such an important event in the life and history of Towns County."

In cooperation with the Col. William Candler Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution and their efforts to promote education and historic preservation, the old ledger book was digitized, and copies shared with the state and national archives. The original book is now returned to Towns County after over one hundred years where it will become a part of the historical society's archives. The Towns County Historical Society gratefully acknowledges and honors this gift of historic preservation from Helen M. Martin, local Gainesville historian, and Mary Penny Walker, Regent of the Col. William Candler Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution



The Old Rock Jail Came Back to Life in 2019!

by Sandra Green

They say that cats have nine lives. Well, the ORJ has had at least three! For forty years it was a jail & home to the sheriffs and their families. For the next forty years it was used as county office space. When the Towns County Historical Society took it over in 2016, it started on the third phase of life. After a lot of hard work, we finally have a museum to show what life was probably like when it was used as a jail. We also have space to display donations of historic artifacts and memorabilia from Towns County. It is an ever changing place as more and more people share their family treasures for others to enjoy and learn from and enjoy. The historical society hopes the museum continues to grow as the years go by.

The ORJ Museum has really been rocking this past year! We reopened in April and have hosted visitors from 23 towns in Georgia, 11 states and 3 foreign countries during the season.

A Pickin' On the Porch concert in early October featured Towns County's own Debra Lynn Rodriguez. Another "POP" concert, featuring Historical Society member John Cochran and the Cowhands, scheduled for the ORJ, was held in our meeting room due to inclement weather.

Halloween was time for the Haunted Jail, which we did in conjunction with the City of Hiawassee's trick or treat on the square. Tyler Osborn (secretary) & Mary Ann Miller (membership secretary) were in charge of the Haunting. They were assisted by David Weber, drama professor from Young Harris College, along with students from YHC. Towns County High School's Future Business Leaders of America members and their teachers, Mrs. Melissa McConnell and Mrs. Ruth Taylor also participated.

On behalf of the Historical Society, Tyler & Mary Ann entered the "Squarecrow" contest as part of the October exhibit held on the Hiawassee Square. Their slogan was "Cultivating our History".

December 7th was the ORJ Christmas open house, with special guest-Santa Claus. The open house featured old fashioned Christmas decorations, hot chocolate, apple cider & cookies. But, best of all, kids had their picture taken with Santa! That concluded 2019 at the ORJ Museum. I'd like to thank our officers, Jerry, Tyler, Frances and Mary Ann and everyone else that helped make the year so successful for us. We hope you'll agree that 2019 was a Rockin' year for the ORJ Museum! We can't wait to see what 2020 will bring.



Old Home Places by Bruce Roberts

I spend a lot of time exploring in the woods and photographing the various subjects I come across. Depending on the season, I might be looking for rare wildflowers, obscure waterfalls, native American sites, old ruins, or who knows what. During the cooler months when the leaves are off the trees, one of my favorite activities is looking for old home sites, or more specifically, old stone chimneys.

Most of my exploring takes place on what is now National Forest land. Occasionally I might stumble onto an old home site while looking for something else, but usually some research ahead of time is required. Looking at the early maps of a given area, I'll note the building locations. I then transcribe those locations onto a current map in my GPS app. Sometimes this is easier said than done, depending on the accuracy, level of detail, and scale of the early map.



A unique springhead, lined with stone almost 5 feet high

After that, it's time for "boots on the ground". Often, just reaching the site is a trial. If I'm lucky, there might be the remains of an old settlers road, but even if found, those can be an impenetrable mess of laurel or rhododendron. In many cases, later logging roads and skid trails have obscured the original paths, and those, too, are often so grown up now that they can be difficult to follow.

Once in the tentative area, it's time to look at the surrounding topography. A house site back then obviously needed a relatively flat area (unlike the steep slopes on which we see some modern homes built), and most sites will be near a creek/branch or a spring. Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule; I know of one place high up in a gap that requires a walk of several hundred yards down an old path to reach the nearest spring head. Those folks got a lot of exercise hauling water!

Other signs of a past home site include old stone walls or terraces, foundation stones, un-natural ground features, stone-lined spring heads, and non-native plantings. Some homes had a cellar hole dug under the house. Over time, I've noticed that many of these old sites have a certain "feel" to them, and I can often discern the location as I approach, even while still a distance away.

The locations of some of these old places often amaze me. I have found two different house sites between 3200-3300 feet elevation. While climbing up to these areas, I was thinking "There's no way in the world that anyone lived up here back then!". But sure enough, there were the foundations and chimneys of the old homes from the 1800s. It must have been tough to eke out a living in some of these spots. Unfortunately, many of the early settlers weren't lucky enough to have drawn a nice low-land riverside lot in the early land lotteries!

Many of these properties were bought by speculators and timber companies at rock-bottom prices in the late 1800s and early 1900s. After the passing of the Weeks Act in 1911, the Forest Service purchased much of that land, and more. Once the Forest Service bought the land, any remaining old homes weren't long for this world. The houses and any out buildings were soon burned or torn down. In early years, the chimneys were sometimes left standing, but in more recent times, they too were knocked down.

For that reason (in addition to the passage of over a century), nothing remains of the old chimneys but a pile of stone at over 90% of the home sites I've visited. Many of these stone piles would not even be recognizable as a former chimney to the casual observer, while others still have some small amount of structure remaining at the base.

At perhaps 5-6% of the sites, enough of the lower chimney/firebox remains that it can be easily recognizable as a chimney. At only about 1-2% of sites does an actual chimney remain, maybe not complete, but with most of the structure remaining.

Most old chimneys were built at the end of a house, and had one firebox/fireplace. In more elaborate structures, the chimney was built into the interior of the house, and had two fireboxes, on opposite sides of the chimney. Still larger structures had two chimneys, facing each other, at either end of the home. I have found one location where the double chimneys were 40 feet apart, and recently, another where they measured 50 feet apart. Now those were some big homes! What's more, both are in locations that would be considered "out in the middle of nowhere".

If any of y'all know of any old chimneys in the woods, please let me know. If I haven't already been there, I would love to photograph them!

Old Smyrna Church by Steve Eller



Old Smyrna Church Foundation - Charlie's Creek Road

I wish I knew more about the Old Smyrna Church and Cemetery. The church was located on Charlie's Creek Road in Eastern Towns County, Georgia. It sat on the left side of the road going east from the Hiawassee side. There is a turn out there now just before you get to Charlie's Creek. If you look close on the right side area of the turnout, you can still see rock pillars of the old church. Old Smyrna Cemetery is located up on the mountain behind where the church was located. Flat Branch runs into Charlie's Creek just below the cemetery. This is a record of what I know about the church and cemetery.

I can't find any information as to when the church was established. The first recorded cemetery memorial was Jacob Eller in January of 1881. Jacob was the son of William Riley Eller and grandson of Hardy "Hard" Washington Eller (my great grandfather). Hardy Washington Eller was laid to rest at Old Smyrna in April of 1908. Hardy also had a grandson (Homer Welborn) buried close to his memorial. Hardy's daughter (Maggie Jane) married William H. Welborn and their first-born son died in 1903. William and Maggie later moved to Banks County, Georgia. Other memorials included Harrison and Lexie Garrett, who died as babies. James B Godard, who as his headstone reads, "left this world by being murdered". Tillman C. Justice shot James in the face with a shotgun. Justice thought Godard reported his still and took his life. Justice was hanged on the square in Hiawassee, Georgia on November 18th, 1887. Arthur and Early Nicholson also died as babies. Mary Lucinda Frances Whitmire Rogers was also buried at Old Smyrna along with some of her children. Mary Rogers had grand children that married heavily into the Eller Family.

I have heard people call the cemetery different names. It has been referred to as Old Smyrna, Smyrna, Flat Branch and Hard Eller Place. The early families that attended this church were local Upper Hightower/Titus community folks. This included family names such as: Barrett, Davenport, Eller, Garrett, Nichols, Nicholson, Parker, Ramey, Shook and Waters. Most of these folks were or soon would be related by marriage.

Evidence has been uncovered that the Old Smyrna Church moved to Tate City, Georgia in September of 1893 and became the Tallulah Mountain Church. This location may have been at the old community center that later burned. Some of the first moderators noted were, Rev. John Franklin Eller, D. Ramey, John Barrett, Jonathan Nicholson, D.J. Ledford, and Rev. Elisha Hedden Eller.

We did discover that a Davis Family from Toccoa, Georgia sold the surrounding land to the US Forest Service in 1933. The deed did state that the land that the church sat on and the cemetery were not included in the sale. We were told by the forest service that we could clean up and clear off the cemetery. In 2019, some of the family wanted to visit the cemetery and see what condition it was in. The cemetery was all grown over and mountain laurel was everywhere. We conducted our first workday in November and cleared off the bottom section. The upper section will be cleared during our next workday.

Towns County Historical Society
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DONATIONS

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2019

Thank you to the following people for their generous donations to the historical society:

Jerry Taylor
Donation for Haunted Jail

Dr. Jounida Bradley
In Honor of Our Officers and The
Outstanding Job They Do

Deborah Reynolds
In Honor of Jerry Taylor

Kathy & James McAteer
In Memory of Warren Paul Berrong

Bob Cloer
In Memory of Wiley and Bessie Cloer
In Honor of Towns County
Historical Society