



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.

P.O. Box 1182
900 North Main St.
Hiawassee, Georgia
(706) 781-8611

Will Life Ever Get Back to Normal? by Sandra Green, President



Well, maybe. Twenty-twenty-one ended on an uplifting note for the historical society, with Rev. John Kay reading from his brother, Terry Kay's, book, "To Whom the Angel Spoke," at our December monthly meeting! It was a perfect ending to a tumultuous year. It almost seemed like old times with everyone mingling while enjoying the Christmas goodies that were brought to share. I hope the meeting was a sign that 2022 will be the year that we put COVID behind us. I know that VP Jerry Taylor is already busy coming up with ideas for future programs.

The upcoming months will likely be a time of transition for us. Commissioner Bradshaw and the county government will be relocating to the old rec. center in early 2022 and will be using our computer room and archive room as well as the rest of the rec. center. It hasn't been determined whether they will also need our meeting room. He has assured us that, if that is necessary, we'll be able to continue using the civic center or Foster Park. We'll keep the members updated as we learn more.

The election of historical society officers for 2022 was also held at our December meeting. All of the incumbent officers were once again elected to their positions. We would like to thank everyone for their support and look forward to serving you this year! We hope to come up with some projects that would get more members involved. One idea involves cleanup of the graves on Cemetery Island. More to come! If you have any other suggestions, speak up!

Thanks again for your support. Stay safe, stay healthy, and let's have a great year!

2022 OFFICERS

Sandra Green
President

Jerry Taylor
Vice President

Tyler Osborn
Secretary

Frances Shook
Treasurer

Mary Ann McCall Miller
Membership Secretary

HISTORIANS

Jerry A. Taylor
County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian

Mary Ann McCall Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

The Chatuge Fish and Game Club

By Bruce Roberts

A couple of years ago, I was exploring the upper reaches of the Hiwassee River, along the route of the old Unicoi Turnpike. I was looking for several old home sites that showed on the historic maps, hoping to find a nice stone chimney to photograph.

I hadn't gone very far before I encountered a steep rise in the terrain. It didn't look natural, and after climbing to the top, it appeared to be an old earthen dam. It was covered with trees and blended in with the rest of the woods. There was water behind it, and among the trees that were growing in the water, I noticed a small concrete structure. A closer look revealed what looked like a drop inlet riser (spillway inlet) for a pond.



Pond 1, showing drop inlet riser

Going back further up slope, I came to a second dam, also partially filled with water, and another drop inlet riser. Continuing my exploration, I found a total of four ponds lined up one after the other, each enclosed by earthen dams. One pond was almost full, two were partially filled, and one was completely dry.

These ponds didn't show on any of the historic topo maps and I had no idea what they had been used for. I asked Jerry Taylor, who didn't know either. Jerry asked one of his former students who was from the area, and the mystery was solved! It turns out that they were fish raising ponds from about 1950. To the best of the former student's recollection, either GA- DNR or the USFS had a sort of fish hatchery operation up there. His parents were actually caretakers here for two years (ca 1950-1951).



Pond 4, now dry. Post for nesting box, with drop inlet riser and dam at rear

Additional research revealed a more complete story. Decades ago, a friend who is retired from the Forest Service had rescued some old documents from the trash. Among them were several papers related to this project.

One memorandum is a USFS report of a meeting held in the summer of 1947 between the newly formed "Chatuge Fish & Game Club" and several other interested parties. The purpose of the meeting was to "discuss the ways and means of developing a fish rearing station on the head of the Hiwassee (sic) River," on USFS land. Interestingly, among the 15 folks in attendance were two representatives from Charlie Elliott's office. Some of you may recall Charlie Elliott as Georgia's legendary dean of southern outdoor writers.

The memo continues: "... a certain group of sportsmen and business men in Towns County are interested in providing better fishing as one means of increasing the recreational value of this particular section" The new club proposed to "construct 8 to 10 bass rearing ponds, and living accommodations for a caretaker or warden."

A USFS Special Use Permit was approved in August 1948. Apparently only the four ponds currently visible were ever constructed.



1949 Postcard (courtesy Eileen Hedden)

By 1956, the ponds had been abandoned. A USFS memorandum from April of that year states "This area is still in a terrible mess. The present tenant, Jim Garrett, has moved away and there are no fish in the pools. I strongly recommend that the use be cancelled, and that the shanties now located on the property be moved or destroyed."

As a point of historical interest, one of the referenced "shanties" was eventually moved and improved as a residence that now sits along the present day Unicoi Turnpike (GA 17/75) here in Towns County.

For additional photos and documents of the ponds, see my webpage at: <https://www.be-roberts.com/se/odds/ponds/ponds1.htm>

Olds Smyrna Cemetery Access Road Project

by Steve Eller



The Eller Family Association has started an effort to repair the access road to the Old Smyrna Cemetery. This cemetery is located off Charlie's Creek Road in Eastern Towns County. Volunteers have been working to clear the cemetery of brush and small trees for several years now. During this time, jeeps and other 4-wheel drive vehicles have made the road a mud hole in several places. The land surrounding the cemetery belongs to the USFS. A deed was found at the USFS Office in Gainesville, Georgia. It was sold to the forest service in 1931 by relatives of Hardy Washington Eller. The cemetery and land where the Old Smyrna Church sat were not included in the sale. The church site property was later sold to the forest service by Neal Pruitt from Toccoa, Georgia. Several new headstones have been purchased and need to be installed. We can't install them because of the access road condition.



We have submitted a land use request to the USFS. This will allow us to repair and maintain the cemetery access road. We also have asked the forest service to install a gate to keep jeeps and other vehicles from tearing up the road. The USFS was contacted to see if they would help repair the road. At first, they agreed to this request and then declined to answer any emails on the subject. A contractor and local residents have been contacted to help repair the road. We have several quotes and a proposal from a licensed contractor.

This is where we could really use your help. The cemetery does not only contain Eller Family Memorials such as Hardy Washington Eller, it also is connected with Towns County History. James B. Godard was also buried at this remote cemetery. JB was killed in 1887 by Tilman Justice who was hanged in Hiwassee. We have started an Old Smyrna Cemetery Access Road Project Fund on Facebook. Anyone wishing to donate can do so through the Facebook fund or send the donation to the address below.



If you would like to know more about Old Smyrna Cemetery, there are several websites that have information. Visit the Find A Grave website @ findagrave.com or the Eller Family Association Website @ ellerfamilyassociation.com. Search for the cemetery name once you are on the website.

Over the past several years of serving in the historical society, I have had the pleasure of working with my fellow officers and members of the historical society in events that have helped promote our organization through the community. While we have become known for our Haunted House at the Old Rock Jail and Christmas at the Old Rock Jail, we have also participated in the Squarecrow Invasion on the Hiawassee Square, float entries in the GA Mountain Fair Parade, hosting a booth at Hiawassee's Trick-or-Treat event, Pickin' on the Porch, and supporting a family at Christmas. We have even had the opportunity to partner with students at both Young Harris College and Towns County High School to make these events possible.



These events, which could not have happened without the support and volunteers of our organization and community, have shown to be a great way to open our organization to the public in hopes of promoting our mission to 'preserve Towns County's history!' I will never forget the first Christmas at the Old Rock Jail event, when someone from our community, who grew up here and had lived here their entire life, came up to me amazed and praising the efforts of the Historical Society for preserving the ORJ, not knowing it had been turned into a museum several years prior. In fact, this is a comment I hear often, both from those who grew up here and those who have moved here. These comments alone are enough to solidify that what we do DOES make a difference in our community. It would be hard to estimate how

many people we have reached through these events, but I would easily say it is in the thousands, reaching from small children to adults! To all who have supported and volunteered, on behalf of the society officers, I say thank you! Without your support, we would be nowhere near where we are today. I look forward to the future events that we will have where we can continue to spread our mission throughout the community and preserve our history for future generations. As always, if you are interested in helping with any projects or events that we do, please reach out to an officer, we are always looking for volunteers to help with our mission. "Alone, we can do so little; Together, we can do so much" – Helen Keller

COMM
INVOLV
Together we can

By Tyler





**UNITY
EMENT**
achieve anything!

r Osborn



TOWNS COUNTY TRIVIA

Q. When was Towns County created?

Q. What was the first vehicular traffic route through Towns County which connected East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and North Georgia?

Q. By what name was the original Towns County Hospital known?

Q. This 33-acre woodland garden paradise in Towns County is the largest collection of rhododendrons in the southeast.

Q. What year was Lake Chatuge completed and inundated?

Q. In 1900, Rev. Lundy Harris and wife Cora Harris were living in Young Harris. He was pastor of the Towns County Methodist Circuit. Later, Cora Harris wrote a book based on their ministry entitled "A Circuit Rider's Wife." What famous film made in 1950 in north Georgia was based on this book?

Q. Who came to Towns County selling electrical appliances even before the lake? His ad was "You marry the girl, she trusted you, so will we. Feather your nest with a little down."

Q. Who was the first sheriff to live in the Old Rock Jail in 1936?

Q. Which sheriff, who lost his life in the line of duty, was the last sheriff to live in the Old Rock Jail?

Q. What Cherokee word is the traditional name for Brasstown Bald Mtn.?

Q. What Cherokee word was "corrupted" into Hightower?

Q. Designated as the official state drama, this play was located in Towns County during its short life?

Q. Which Towns County resident's tireless efforts vastly extended TV reception into the local area?

Q. Which U.S. president actually, in person, visited Towns County on fishing trips and attended services at Macedonia Church with his secret service agents?

Q. What was mined atop Bell Mountain?

Q. Born in Towns County in 1895, Tassie Kelley Cannon holds what politically significant record for Georgia (in 1931)?

Q. What Gilmer County insurance salesman is credited with the idea of originating the Georgia Mtn. Fair?

Q. What American businessman served as director of the Office of Management and Budget under President Jimmy Carter in 1977. He spent much of his childhood in Young Harris where his father was president of the college.

Q. What was the original name for Bald Mtn. Park? It was changed when a lawsuit was threatened by a TV show.

Q. What kind of mine was operated on Sunnyside as the Ivy Mount Mining Company?

Q. The son of the U.S. Attorney General during the Grant administration, this man moved his family to Fodder Creek sometime in the 1910s which he used as a base for his operation of buying up land for the National Forest.

Q. What business did C. L. Young bring to Towns County that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s?

Q. Begun in 1950, this enterprise was the first organized effort to attract tourists/visitors to Towns County?

Q. With the exception of the Tate City area (Tallulah River), all the water in Towns County empties out into what major body of water?

Q. What Towns County man is perhaps the best known "icon" of the Georgia Mountain Fair music shows?

Q. This Towns Countian became the first County Extension agent, later State Director of the Georgia Agricultural Extension Service, was the co-founder of the Rock Eagle 4-H Center?

Q. This nostalgic business in Hiawassee still operates in the building from the 1940s, including the original historic cash register?

Q. What event in 1956 was probably the largest gathering of people in Towns County to date?

Q. Who was Towns County's youngest sheriff?

Q. Until 2010 when it was closed, this business had the claim as the oldest business in Towns County?

Q. What was the name of the first car dealership in Towns County?

Q. What 2012 movie, starring Clint Eastwood, is about an aging baseball scout whose daughter joins him on a scouting trip? It was partly filmed in Young Harris and surrounding areas.

THE “GOOD OLE DAYS” WEREN’T SO GOOD IN TOWNS COUNTY!

Here are excerpts from a 1917 state review of Towns County Schools!

There are nineteen public common schools in the county limited to only seven grades. The equipment consists, **at best**, of a few homemade desks and many “long benches”, inferior and insufficient blackboards, a small map of Georgia furnished by the State Dept of Agriculture, and very rarely anything else. A considerable number of the little children were **without text books**.

Good services can not be expected at the salaries paid the teachers. The maximum teacher’s salary is one hundred fifty dollars per year.

The new jail recently built cost more than the value of all the school houses in the county Which is more important?”

If you would like to learn more about what Towns County Schools were like in 1917 (including photos of the schools), you may purchase the booklet for \$8 from the historical society.




PINE GROVE SCHOOL.

Teacher: Miss Ora Nicholson, Hiawassee, Ga.

Location: One and half miles to Upper Hightower; two and half miles to Lower Hightower.

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR 2022 DUES?



Have you paid your 2022 Towns County Historical Society Membership dues? If not...what are you waiting on?! Just send your check for \$15 for an individual member or \$20 for a household or even a lifetime membership of \$250!

Send your check to: Towns County Historical Society
PO Box 1182
Hiawassee, GA 30546



Towns County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1182
900 North Main St.
Hiawassee, Georgia 30546

DONATIONS

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

Winston and Dirs Farmer
In Honor of Towns County Historical Society Officers
In Honor of the Old Rock Jail
In Memory of J.C. Berrong

Frances Shook
In Memory of Steve Howell

Curtis Walls and Robin Webb
In Honor of Jerry Taylor
Historical Society/Old Rock Jail

Ron and Carol Gibson
In Memory of J.C. Berrong, Bill Cody, and
Steve Howell

David and Pat Kerr
In Memory of Steve Howell

Jerry Taylor
In Memory of Marion Kenney

Jay Clappitt and Family
In Honor of Towns County Historical Society

Maddie Botting
In Honor of Towns County Historical Society
To Help With Special Projects

Lenny and Laurie Flohr
In Honor of Jerry Taylor