



THE TOWNS HISTORIAN



The NEWSLETTER of the TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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www.townscountyhistory.org

FEBRUARY 2023

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
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Hiawassee, Georgia
(706) 781-8611

A New Year, A New Beginning by Tyler Osborn, President



You may have noticed it has been a while since you received one of our newsletters. You may also realize the person writing this front-page article is not the same as it has been in years past. And you would be right on both.

2022 was another busy year for the historical society. As soon as we were able to 'return to normal' following the pandemic, we hit the ground running with various projects. Our biggest being the clean-up of Old Burch Cemetery (or Cemetery Island). This was a huge undertaking which is laid out in more detail later in this issue.

In addition to this, the courthouse has temporarily moved to the old Rec Center, which was home to the historical society. Because of this, We had to pack up and temporarily relocate all of our belongings, documents, and archives to the Old Rock Jail. Since the ORJ is currently housing our archives and in the middle of a construction zone, we have decided to temporarily close it due to the safety of our visitors. Finally, at the December meeting, a partially new slate of officers was elected to lead the Historical Society. Former officers Sandra & Frances had decided to retire after many years of service to our society and were honored at the January Meeting with a much-deserved lifetime membership, along with Sandra being named as the Sheriff of the Old Rock Jail. Jerry (Vice-President) and Mary Ann (Membership Secretary) were re-elected to their roles, in addition to Brandi Cox (Secretary), Patti Wilson (Treasurer) & myself (President). I am excited to lead this organization with my fellow officers and I know we will make a great team!

We are already off to a great start planning programs for 2023, one of which is a Birthday Celebration for Towns County in March. As always, if anyone has any ideas for programs or newsletter articles, please let us know! We are always looking for fresh ideas to help preserve and promote the history of our county! We hope you can join us at our monthly meeting on the 2nd Monday of each month at 6PM. Location varies at this time, so check our website or Facebook for more information on that.

2023 OFFICERS

Tyler Osborn
President

Jerry Taylor
Vice-President

Brandi Cox
Secretary

Patti Wilson
Treasurer

Mary Ann Miller
Membership Secretary



HISTORIANS

Jerry Taylor
County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian



Mary Ann Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

Meet the New Officers!

Brandi Cox

Brandi graduated from TCCS 1992, YHC 1995 (AS), Kennesaw State University 1998 (BA). She returned to the mountains in 2019, after residing in the Charleston, SC area. Brandi & her husband - Jody, live in Blairsville with a cute character of a cat named Bubby. They're looking forward to adding a new dog, after losing their sweet Miss Molly last year to cancer.

Brandi is the owner/operator of Aunt Pearl's Porch after learning the 4th generation recipes from her talented Mom, Deborah Reynolds.

Brandi enjoys playing golf, sewing projects, making jewelry, watching movies on the big screen & enjoying the multitude of magnificent beauty that our area has to offer.

Not only does Brandi have a generational history to these beautiful mountains but a deep love for preserving our area treasures.



Patti Dills Wilson

Patti was born and reared here in Hiawassee. Her parents were Eunice Hooper Dills and Elden Dills. She grew up on her beloved Bugscuffle Road and attended Towns County Comprehensive School. Upon graduating in 1979, she enrolled in Young Harris College. After graduating from there, she finalized her BBA degree at University of Georgia.

In 1983, she married Kerry L. Wilson, a local Pharmacist. They had a son in 1985, Edward Montgomery Wilson. Kerry and she opened The Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy in 1995. The pharmacy eventually became Chatuge Pharmacy. They continued in this endeavor until his untimely death in 2020. In addition, they began The Remnant Church in Hiawassee of which she is the Speaker. Patti enjoys outdoor activities, home improvement and family time. She is looking forward to serving the TCHS and our community.

History of Retreat on The Lake By Chad Shultz



Like most things, our little motel has a history. This history starts on January 5, 2023. Well, maybe we should say that's where this story starts... This is when we met Gale Stanley and learned more about this Hiawassee, Georgia, downtown gem. Gale's great great grandfather was involved in building the Craftsman style home on Rice Street in 1925. This home is still standing today and may possibly become part of the Retreat on the Lake "footprint" of places to stay on the property. (More on that another time.)

The Rice Street house, (now known as Rice Street Retreat) was eventually sold to a gentleman named Ray Hedden who eventually built the motel in 1958. The original motel was block construction, one story and a total of six rooms, with an office. Later additions were added to the second floor, so the entire first floor is part of the original motel. It was believed to have been originally named the "Hedden Motel".

In the 1960s the "Hedden Motel" was sold to Gale Stanley's father, Fred Rhinehardt, and was renamed to the "Blue Mist Motel" by Fred's wife Hazel. Fred Rhinehardt also happened to be the owner of Chatuge Motors, at the time, which had been located near Hiawassee Hardware. Hiawassee Hardware has since expanded to take over the Chatuge Motors property. Nightly rates for a stay at the "Blue Mist" ran about ten dollars (\$10), per room, per night. Mr. Rhinehardt added a second floor, private residence, to the motel in the late 1960s. (Evidence of this space was uncovered during the 2022/2023 renovations and was published on the Motel's Facebook feed on Tuesday January 3rd, 2023. In the photo, the original first story roofline was evident and the exterior wall of that first addition could be seen above that roof line. The exterior paneling was still painted the blue color the "Blue Mist" was known for.) This addition was initially meant to be a personal residence for the Rhinehardts.

In the late 1960s, according to Gale, Mr. & Mrs. Rhinehardt got into a tiff over Fred's purchase of the Rice Street house, apparently without the knowledge of Hazel. Gale received a concerning call from her mother, where Hazel expressed her discontent with the recent purchase. Gale drove to Hiawassee to try to help ease the situation. After the long day, the drive and the whirlwind of thinking her parents were possibly beyond reconciliation, unbeknownst to Gale, she became a successful family mediator, ultimately resolving the tiff by making bacon and eggs for everyone, so they could at least disagree on a full stomach. That did the trick, and the Rhinehardts agreed the purchase of the Rice Street home was not such a bad idea after all. Initially, Hazel never had the desire to move into the Rice Street house. However, in 1972, Fred Rhinehardt suffered a heart attack in the private upstairs

residence, eventually passing away. Shortly afterward, Hazel wound up selling the motel to the Donald & Darlene Mull and moving into the Rice Street home, which she ultimately admitted to Gale, was the best purchase decision Fred ever made. Hazel wound up loving that home. This sale of the "Blue Mist Motel" occurred in the early 1970s.

In the late 1970s, the Mulls added the remainder of the second floor to the hotel and changed the private residence into motel rooms. In total, four more rooms were added and the private residence was converted into three separate rooms, now giving the motel a total of 13 rooms with an office. For much of the time, Darlene's mother, Cordie Woods, ran the motel for the family. (On a curious side note: Darlene Mull and Gale Stanley are cousins.) After Cordie Woods passed away, the daily operation fell back to Donald & Darlene, until Mr. Mull passed away in 2017. The Mulls owned the motel, nearly 40 years, running it as the "Mull's Motel", until early 2020, when the COVID pandemic hit. The motel sat vacant for about two years, with one failed attempt to lease the operations to an individual, until North Georgia Premium Properties, LLC acquired the motel in November of 2022 and began renovations.

During their ownership, the Mulls received many famous guests. Most of these guests were musical artists or other performers who came to town to perform at the Anderson Music Hall. An example of one of those guests was Sammy Kershaw, which came to light from a Facebook follower. The photo he signed and left with the Mulls is posted on our Facebook Timeline. The "Mull's Motel" was even mentioned in the book "A walk in the Woods" by Bill Bryson, 1998.

Many changes are being made to the motel during the current renovation and upgrade of 2022/2023 by North Georgia Premium Properties, LLC. The facade of the motel is being left mostly intact and true to its original history, as NGPP received it, however all of the interior spaces are planned to be fully upgraded to be "premium affordable" accommodations in Hiawassee, Georgia. At the time of this writing, the motel is one of only three hotel/motels in the city limits of Hiawassee, Georgia and the only one with direct lake access to Lake Chatuge, including a dock. Expansion plans are in development for the west side of the property, which overlooks the lake. The property is planned to be more than just a place to stay, but rather a place to relax and enjoy the four-season activities Hiawassee, Georgia has to offer. Hopefully, "Retreat on the Lake" will continue to bring years of pride and enjoyment to Hiawassee, GA and those who visit.

Marking the Graves on Cemetery Island

by Jerry Taylor

A few months back, Sandra Green, president of the Towns County Historical Society, led an expedition, with the able assistance of Jesse Cook, to the old Burch Cemetery located on an island in Lake Chatuge for the purpose of clearing off debris and tidying up the existing gravesites. The cemetery, containing over 300 graves, had been relocated to Sunnyside Road in 1941 when the TVA created Lake Chatuge; however, thirty-one graves were left behind at the request of the families. Those graves would not be inundated, but isolated as the lake level rose.

The majority of the graves left behind were marked only with fieldstones and no type of identification. Armed with the TVA plat of the cemetery made at the time of the relocation, Jerry Taylor and Bruce Roberts successfully located and flagged all the remaining graves.



Pleased with the results of their workday, President Green was not content to leave and let the gravesites sink into oblivion again. She launched a project to mark the graves with granite markers. Jerry Taylor determined that fourteen of the graves were already marked with substantial monuments and that seventeen markers would be needed for those marked only by fieldstones. A source was found to supply granite markers 16x8x5 at a cost of about \$125.00 each and

work was begun to make the tombstones. Donations to fund the project were received in short order. To President Green's credit, the project was completed by the end of the year.

The graves identified and marked as follows:

Willie Mae Barrett (1911-1918) and Robert Victor Barrett (1927), children of James Virgil Barrett and Martha Etta Kirby

Martin Luther Burch (1814-1877) and his wife Elizabeth Davis (1820-1898), pioneer settlers of Towns County

Madenia Chastain (1896-1900), Homer Chastain (1895-1900), and Infant Chastain (1902), children of William Thomas Chastain and Rebecca Elvira Cloer

Infant Gregory (1936), child of Samuel Lane Gregory and Lena Wood

Three Kimsey infants (1916), (1917), and (1919), children of Luther Carl Kimsey and Hattie Caroline Howell

Infant Twiggs (1896), child of Julius Goodman Twiggs and Dora Bowen

Mijiman Gettys (1829-1872), his wife Nancy Kimsey (1837-1893), and their children Pinckney (1858-1880), William (1871-1880), and Henry (1868).

Thanks to the support and labor provided by Jesse Cook, Gordy Jones, Michael Courey, and other members of the Mountain Beautification and Revitalization Association, a set of rock steps now makes accessibility to the cemetery easier when the lake level is low.



THE HOG CREEK CORUNDUM MINE

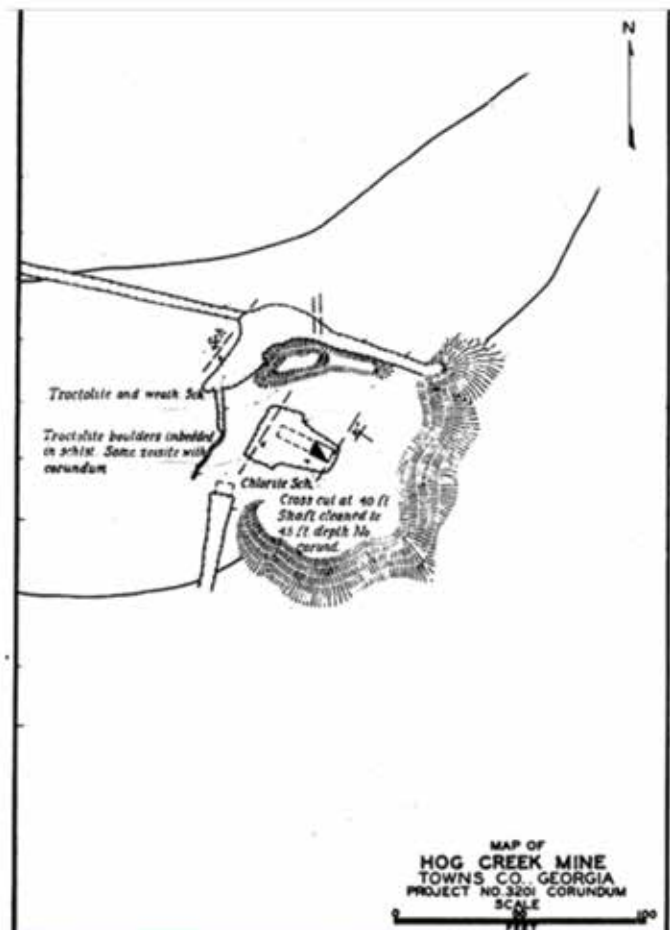
by Bruce Roberts

The old Hog Creek Corundum Mine is one of several corundum (ruby & sapphire) mines that were operated in our area in the 1800s, other major ones being the Bell Creek Mine (filled in), Behr Mine (covered by the lake), and Track Rock Mine (destroyed when road was re-routed).

William R. McConnell originally prospected this property in 1890. The mine consisted of a 190-foot-long trench, two pits, a short-inclined shaft, and a vertical shaft at least 50 feet deep.

During WWII, the mine was among numerous corundum deposits investigated by the Bureau of Mines to develop domestic reserves of that critical mineral. Their initial examination showed that the workings were caved in. The BoM cleaned out the pits, cleared the vertical shaft to a depth of 45 feet (without reaching bottom), and cleared a cross-shaft at the 40-foot level.

75 years later, the mine is again caved in, even more than when the Bureau of Mines first saw it in the 1940s. (Note - mine is on private property.)



A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOWNS COUNTY

By Jerry Taylor

Once upon a time, way back in the 1900s, I attended the presentation of "The Reach of Song," Georgia's official state historical drama.

It was based on the life of our local poet Byron Herbert Reece, including a healthy dose of Appalachian life and culture.

During the play I heard one of the characters, Larry, say, "Most important thing is to know where you came from. If you don't know where you came from, it's going to be twice as hard to get to where you're going."

Well, that's what I am supposed to speak to you about tonight - where did we come from?

The part of Georgia that we live in falls in the 1/3 of Georgia lying north and west of the Chattahoochee River, which was the boundary of the Cherokee Nation. It includes Gainesville, Marietta, Carrollton, Rome, and all parts in between.

The Cherokees lived here relatively unmolested until the discovery of gold in the 1820s at which time our ancestors living on the frontier of NC and SC and beyond, raced into the Cherokee country (illegally, I might add) to get rich quick.

A popular little ditty that made it to top ten on the charts and was sung by our ancestors contained the words...

All I ask in this creation

Is a pretty little wife

and a big plantation

Way up yonder in the Cherokee Nation

The president of the time, Andrew Jackson, being commander-in-chief, sent in the U.S. Army to relocate the Cherokees to the West, which by their idea, was the land of evil spirits. In other words, they were given a free trip to Hell under armed escort.

Georgia surveyed the Cherokee land and divided it into 160 ac lots which were disposed of by lottery. So, when you go home tonight, drag out your property deed. You will see that it denotes your land as falling in Section #, District #, and Lot#. That is referring to the original survey of the Cherokee territory.

Now, the Cherokees are gone like the buffalo and the elk which roamed our mountain valleys. They have disappeared like the passenger pigeons which once darkened the sky. Like Wayah, the wolf, and like the chestnut trees, the Cherokees are no longer found in the mountains of Georgia. Now, only the names remain - Bear Meat, Enotah, Chatuge, Hiawassee, Unicoy, Foder, Hightower (Etowah).

So, the land was divided into large counties. Here, Union County, was created in 1832. It began up on Upper Hightower near Dick's Gap and continued on to Morganton,

just outside Blue Ridge, with the county seat being Blairsville.

This continued until 1856 when the population west of Brasstown Creek, including 4 lots in Rabun County petitioned to be their own county so they could get to a courthouse, do their legal business, like paying taxes, voting, etc. and get back home before dark so you could do the farm chores like milking and putting the animals to bed while there was still daylight.

So, Towns County was created in 1856 with Hiawassee named as county seat.

It was named for Gov. George Washington Towns who served as governor from 1847 until 1851.

He served in the Georgia General Assembly for a number of years and in the US House of Reps where he favored the Removal of the Cherokees.

served in the GA House of Reps 1829-1830

served in the GA Senate 1832-1834

served in the US House of Reps 1837-1839 and 1846 where he favored removal of Cherokees

served as governor of GA 1847-1851 worked to complete the W & A Railroad promoted public education "so that GA might boast no illiterate"

wrote the inscription "The Constitution as it is, the Union as it was" for the GA stone in the Washington Monument a gentleman, a regular "Lord Chesterfield"

Following the late great unpleasantness, otherwise known as the Uncivil War (my name for it), came the

1870s - during which time many residents migrated to the West -generally, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado for farming and mining, followed by the

1880s - 1900s - during which time the logging and timber industry moved in, buying up homesteads on the mountains and offering employment, bringing CASH to the local economy. Among them were companies from the North with names like VOGEL from Milwaukee, WI., the

1880s - saw the need for higher educational opportunities in the mountains fulfilled by the establishment of Hiawassee Academy by the Baptists and Young Harris College by the Methodist Church. The

1900s - saw another migration pattern out of the area. With the withdrawal of the timber companies from the area, many residents followed the logging interests away to Florida where the Everglades were being logged, and others migrated to Washington and Oregon for employment.

Still others were leaving for Gainesville, Asheville, Chattanooga, Atlanta, etc. to fulfill the need of cheap labor in the factories

there. One factory, Chicopee near Gainesville, was from Massachusetts and another one, New Holland, was from Holland, Michigan.

Cabbage Town in Atlanta was so named because so many of the poor mountain people resided there, that the scent of boiling cabbage permeated the air. Meanwhile, the

1930s - era ushered in FDR's New Deal program providing job opportunities for the building of roads, bridges, schools, even our own ORJ, and employment with the CCC. All this brought cash to the local economy. However, the most drastic change to Towns County came in the

1940s - with the TVA constructing Lake Chatuge in 1941-2. That and the War caused another migration of population away from the county, mostly for employment as far away as Detroit, Michigan; Canton and Akron in Ohio; and even as close as Marietta, Georgia, where many local women got jobs as "Rosie the Riveter!" working at the Bell Bummer Plant. Also, during the

1940s - 1960s - many people made a good living by chicken farming. It was a cash income and could be performed on poor land, mountain sides, and did not require intensive manual labor. With the

1950s+ - came the age of tourism, so much that we have become a retirement destination - as many of you know from personal experience.

Now that we know where we came from, this brings us to today -

What is our future?

We have a small school population
We have an aging population
Nursing home and assisted living needs are ever increasing

Good jobs are not available for our bright graduates who might would desire to remain in the mountains

We have an increase of folks from the city moving here, bringing their children, and working from home on the internet

Businesses are having difficulty finding workers

Retirement facilities and retirement homes are increasing

And, of course, tourism has been a mainstay for the last 100 years.

By one standard (property evaluation) we are one of the richest counties in Georgia,

But by another standard (income), we are one of the poorest counties in Georgia.

What will we do? Where will we go?

Ask someone else, I do not know!

(This it was my speech delivered recently at the Towns County Homeowner's Association meeting).

Grandmother's Apron

It was wonderful for drying children's tears,
and on occasion was even used for cleaning out dirty ears.

From the chicken coop, the apron was used for carrying eggs,
fussy chicks, and sometimes half-hatched eggs
to be finished in the warming oven.

When company came, those aprons
were ideal hiding places for shy kids.

And when the weather was cold, she wrapped it around her
arms.

Those big old aprons wiped many a perspiring brow,
bent over the hot wood stove.

Chips and kindling wood were brought
into the kitchen in that apron.

From the garden, it carried all sorts of vegetables
After the peas had been shelled, it carried out the hulls.

In the fall, the apron was used to bring in
apples that had fallen from the trees.

When unexpected company drove up the road, it was surpris-
ing how much furniture that
old apron could dust in a matter of seconds.

When dinner was ready, she walked out onto the porch,
waved her apron, and the men folk knew
it was time to come in from the fields to dinner.

It will be a long time before someone invents something that
will replace that 'old-time apron'
that served so many purposes.

REMEMBER:

Moms and Grandmas used to
set hot baked apple pies on the window sill to cool.

Her granddaughters set theirs on the window sill to thaw.

They would go crazy now trying to figure out how many
germs were on that apron.

I don't think I ever caught anything
from an apron except love

Author Unknown

DONATIONS

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

2022

Jim and Trish Reynolds
Cemetery Island

Cliff Bradshaw
Cemetery Island

Jounida and Peter Bradley
Cemetery Island

Al Burrell
Cemetery Island

Cayce Friedly
Cemetery Island

Marcia Ann Twiggs
Cemetery Island

Dr. Lanier and Freddie Nicholson
Cemetery Island

2023

Ron Gibson
In Memory of Bobby Ervin & Tommy Phillips

Brian and Mildred Underwood
In Honor Towns County Historical Society

Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church
Faye Hogg Circle
Cemetery Island

Marty Hayden

Patti Brownlee

Towns County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1182
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Hiawassee, Georgia 30546



Membership Form

Date: _____

New Member _____ Renewing Member _____

Yearly: Individual (\$15) _____ Yearly: Household (\$20) _____ Life: Individual (\$250) _____

I would like to make an additional contribution to:

Towns County Historical Society or The Old Rock Jail - in the amount of \$ _____

In honor of: _____

In memory of: _____

Member Name(s): _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone Number: _____ E-mail Address: _____

Please send in this form with your check made payable to:
Towns County Historical Society.
PO Box 1182, Hiawassee, GA 30546.
Be sure to check out our website: www.townscountyhistory.org.