



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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Hiawassee, Georgia
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AN EXCITING TIME FOR THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY!

The September quarter has been a busy time for us. In July, Betty Phillips was in charge of the Heritage Day & Honoring Our Veterans activities. She did an outstanding job with the program, even exceeding previous years! Veterans in attendance were recognized and honored for their service. Betty's already planning next year's program.

The August program featured Hilda Thomason telling us about the history of the Georgia Mountain Fair. She also talked about the exciting plans for future events at the fair grounds and music hall. This is a great venue for attracting tourists to our area!

Our September program was delayed a week because of Hurricane Irma. Our speaker was Michael Nichols from Sylva, NC speaking about Shape Note Singing. He not only gave us the history of the style but we also learned by doing! It's always a fun program when the audience gets to participate.

Lots of work has been done on the Old Rock Jail this quarter. Thanks to Cecil Shook and the detainees for painting the interior walls & ceiling. Coker Custom Floors did a magnificent job repairing and refinishing the floor. You will get to see first-hand what we have accomplished when you attend our Pickin' On the Porch concert featuring John Cochran and the Cowhands on October 7th at 6:00 pm! It's outside so dress warm & bring a chair.

Allen Saylor has recently been doing some repairs on the old Presley Post Office historic building that is just across the parking lot from the Old Rock Jail. That building will also be open for viewing the evening of Pickin' On the Porch.

So, as you can see it's a happening time at the Towns County Historical Society! Come join us for our exciting programs in the coming months. Credit goes to vice president Nancy Cody for coming up with unique programs each month. October will feature Jason & Jerry bringing our local history alive. November will feature Virginia Dyer Palmer talking about growing up on the river! Our Christmas program is always fun. You'll just have to attend to see what we come up with this year!

Sandra B. Green, President

2017 OFFICERS

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Jerry A. Taylor
County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian



Mary Ann McCall Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

SAGA THE OF THE OLD PRESLEY POST OFFICE

By Sandra B. Green



The Presley community, which encompassed roughly the area of Lower Hightower, Fodder Creek, Macedonia, and Hiawassee River, once had it's own post office. It started in a bedroom of William Presley's home when he was appointed postmaster in June 1899. He was succeeded by his son, Julious Presley, in December 1900. He held the position until 1904 when Allen Adams was appointed postmaster. At that time, the post office was relocated to Adams Store at the corner of SR75 and Streak Hill Rd. Following the death of Allen Adams in 1928, his son, Chelsie, assumed the duties of postmaster. In 1932 Chelsie's brother, Cecil, was appointed postmaster. Cecil was not interested in running a store as well as the post office so he had a small building constructed next door to house the post office. The building remained in use at that location until 1960 when the government officially closed it and established Presley as a rural route. Cecil became a mail carrier for the Hiawassee post office until his retirement in 1963. After the building was no longer used as a post office, it was moved to the property of Minnie Woods near the corner of SR75 and Cynth Creek Road. When that property was sold, the new owners moved the building to a corner of the property. It sat, abandoned, until it was donated to the Towns County Historical Society and relocated in 2009 to it's present location next to the courthouse in Hiawassee.

The move was a monumental undertaking! It was accomplished with the support and encouragement of County Commissioner, Bill Kendall who grew up in the Fodder Creek community. He recalled, as a child, walking to the Macedonia school across from the Presley post office.

The Towns County Historical Society in conjunction with BRMEMC, GDOT, and Clyde Shook with the men from the county road crew made it happen. Many others in the community, including Stanley Wood, who was a descendant of William Presley, the first postmaster, were part of the move and restoration. It took Allen Saylor & Dan Simpson of the historical society many hours of labor to stabilize the building for it's journey. Once it was in place next to the courthouse, they used lumber from the historic McKinney Feed Store and Lon Berrong's 150 year old barn to replace missing boards and flooring.

We are grateful to all those in the historical society who worked so hard to preserve this part of Towns County history. Now the Old Presley Post Office is joined by the Old Rock Jail Museum for people to enjoy and learn about our heritage.

This article was written based on information published in the Towns County Herald and from a monograph written by D. Dale Hughes for the Towns Co Historical Society.

Isabel Hall - Beloved Teacher

By Nancy Cody



Isabel Denton graduated from the Hiawassee Academy in 1925 and began teaching school that fall. She taught at six different schools for a total of forty-three years. The last thirty-two years of her teaching were in the Hiawassee Elementary School where she taught basically third grade. She taught three years at Robertstown School in White County, five years at Sharon School in Forsyth County, and one year each at Mount Zion, Upper Hightower, and Lower Bell Creek. Isabel went to Young Harris College for two years, then Piedmont College, receiving her degree in 1952. She retired from teaching 4 June 1968.

Isabel was born 28 April 1906 in Towns County, Georgia, the daughter of Robert McMillian Denton and Dora Magnolia "Maggie" Rogers Denton. Her siblings were Frank Denton, Dora L. Denton (died an infant) and James Young Denton.

Isabel recalled a favorite storytelling she heard her parents tell that happened before she was born. Her parents were newlyweds at the time. They attended church at Lower Hightower Baptist Church. One Sunday while they were at church, lightning struck in the churchyard killing a horse and knocking everyone in the congregation off their seats. Isabel's father was taken unconscious to a nearby house where he remained for a week before the doctor would allow him to be moved. They seldom missed a service after that and were devoted Christians.

Isabel married 29 June 1947 in Towns County, Georgia to William Leonard Hall. Leonard had two sons by his first wife who were grown by the time he and Isabel married. Isabel always treated the grandchildren as though they were hers and they all loved her dearly.

Isabel attended church for as long as she could remember. She was saved during revival in March 1921. She was a very dedicated to and active in her home church of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church. She was a member of WMU (Women's Missionary Union) for over fifty years. In 1949-50 she was GA (Girls Auxiliary) leader. She taught children in Sunday school for several years and in 1960 she served on the Pulpit Committee.

Isabel faithfully and effectively served the Hiawassee Baptist Association in a variety of positions. She became involved in the association in 1937 when she started writing the report on BYPU (Baptist Young People Union). She continued writing reports until 1967. In 1940 she was named Associational Director of Church Training. She served in this capacity for twenty-five years. She was also in charge of all the planning for "M" night each year. She worked closely with fourteen churches in the Association. She visited those fourteen churches at least three times a year and helped many of them start a church training program. Her work with church training was exceptional, and her name became almost synonymous with the organization in Towns County. In addition to serving as Training Union Director, she was Associational Treasurer.

On August 30, 1971, a group of Retired Teachers met at Friendship Community Clubhouse and organized a Retired Teachers Unit. Isabel Hall was elected president of this unit.

Isabel passed from this life to her heavenly home 31 October 2002 at the age of ninety-six. She is buried beside the love of her life, Leonard Hall, at Osborn Cemetery, Hiawassee, Georgia.

When Atlanta TV Came To The Mountains

By Mary Ann McCall Miller

Back in the early 1970s , television reception in the North Georgia Mountains was sketchy to say the least. Most people in secluded areas , where the mountains blocked reception were lucky to get two channels out of Chattanooga. My dad, Mac McCall who was a radio engineer, saw that there was definite need for better reception and the possibility of getting the three Atlanta stations.

Mac had the idea of having a relay tower to bounce the signal from Atlanta up to a high mountain then down into the Towns County valley. After some research and a small grant he was able to secure a location and the equipment needed to make this vision a reality. The location for the tower and a building to house the equipment to run the relay was on the Mountain right next to Bell Mountain. The location is now home to several cell towers. In those days, the road to the Bell was a 4x4 challenge. Mac had an old army Jeep he bought from Lake Hogsed that we named "Sherman" because we swore General Sherman came south in it! The old Jeep would usually get in him up and down the mountain. He hauled block to make the small building and the pieces of the tower and equipment up to the location and cleared a road that was a straight shot to the right from the left elbow turn to go up to the Bell.

As mentioned earlier, there was grant money to buy equipment but Mac's time was all volunteered. He spent countless hours installing the equipment and the tower but the end result was rewarding! We had 3 television stations out of Atlanta! That might seem laughable in this day and time with cable and satellite TV but to the people of rural Towns County it was a marvelous wonder! We FINALLY could get news that pertained to Georgia not to Tennessee and we had the 3 major national networks, NBC, ABC and CBS.

Of course, the TV relay did not always work right and when a storm came up, it sometimes knocked out the reception. When that happened our telephone started ringing! Sometimes it would happen at night and my dad along with my mother and I would pile in the Jeep in a thunderstorm and go up to the mountain to turn the relay station back on! A few times, it would rain so hard that the road would be too washed out to get up there. My dad, being the diligent person that he was, would always try to find a way up there!

The little block building had a lock on the door to keep vandals out but that did not keep wildlife out! On numerous occasions, he would open up the door to see a rattlesnake skin hanging on the equipment and he did kill a few snakes around the outside.

Later on in the 1970's, my dad along with Clay Dotson brought the same type of relay system to the Young Harris valley. The tower and building sat near the roadside on Young Harris Mountain. The little building is still there.

I have many fond memories of our trips to the "Tower" as he called it. Many times after making his repairs, we would ride on up to the Bell where I was allowed to be a mountain goat and add to my rock collection.

It was much simpler time and place back 40 years ago on that mountain but I would not trade it for the world. Time spent with my parents then was a treasure. I wonder today, what my dad would think of the paved road now in place. I can hear him say "Well, that's progress!"

GLIMPSES INTO THE PAST

BIRTHDAY PARTY

Little Emma Louise Dyer, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Dyer, who celebrated her first birthday Sunday, January 4th, just couldn't understand why she should blow out the pretty candles on her cake, but with the assistance of Phillip Mayes, a little cousin, who was as thrilled over the occasion as Emma Louise, they finally put the thing out. Others present were Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Rogers the grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. H. P. Mayes and Patsy, Mr. and Mrs. Glen Rogers and Gene, Mr. and Mrs. Ray Hedden, Mr. and Mrs. Harry England, Clifford Rogers, Merrel Berrong and Max England.

All present enjoyed the day even though it was disagreeable outside.

Ross Brown: Mountain Character *By Jason Lee Edwards*



Jay Ross Brown was born August 1, 1909, on Fodder Creek in Towns County, Georgia. He would later recount that the house in which he was born was a small shack that had such a heavy mortgage that the roof sagged. In actuality, he was born in a two-story house that had been built by his grandfather, George Washington Brown, around the time of the Civil War. In many of the interviews Ross Brown gave late in life, he took on the persona of a bumbling mountain man with poor and uneducated parents. In reality, his parents were successful people who had attained as much education as possible in the region. His father, Lona Cicero Brown, had been born in 1867 in the same house in which Ross would be born some fifty years later. As a young man, he attended the Hiawassee Academy and took some agricultural courses through The University of Georgia. Emma Miles Brown, his mother, was a native of White County, Georgia, where she had attended the Mossy Creek Academy and later graduated from what is now Piedmont College. During the 1890s, she taught at several schools in the area and also had a millinery shop on the square in Cleveland, Georgia. After marrying in 1898, Ross Brown's parents moved into the family home on Fodder Creek where they ran a thriving sawmill and gristmill. When Ross Brown was one year old, his father began construction on a three-story house in the town of Hiawassee, Georgia. This house still stands and with its twelve rooms and running water, it was a far cry from the shack that Ross would later describe as his childhood home. It was in his father's fine new home that Ross would learn how to play the fiddle.

As is often the case with oral history, especially when given by a natural storyteller, there is a kernel of truth buried inside a mound of invention. This is certainly the case with the various stories that Ross Brown told about how he came to learn to play the fiddle. In one oft told version, his sister Viola had just graduated from Young Harris College and was teaching school at Mount Zion on the Hiawassee River. She was boarding with the England family and was trying to learn to play the fiddle herself. The Englands, tired of listening to her feeble attempts, put soap on the bow so that the fiddle would remain silent. Viola took the seemingly defective fiddle to her parent's house, where her young brother Ross still lived, and he decided to learn himself. In another version of how he decided to play the fiddle, Ross told that there was a big sow that his father allowed to sleep under the house.

According to Ross, "She'd scratch her back against the floor joists [and] strike a tune somewhere between 'Amazing Grace' and 'Shout Lula.'" Regardless of the veracity of the tales, Ross did learn to play the fiddle at age twelve. His teacher was an old blind fiddle player from the community locally called Uncle Joe Swanson. At the time that he began to teach Ross, Uncle Joe Swanson was sixty years old, and he passed on many songs that he had grown up with to Ross. Among the songs that Ross learned from Uncle Joe Swanson are three songs, "Snowbird," "General Lee's Surrender," and "Sweet Marie," that are not known from any other source. Fortunately, Ross was recorded playing all of these songs allowing them to be passed down to the modern day.

Ross also used his abilities to hand down tall tales framed around his music. On one occasion, when asked if music ran in his family, Ross replied "that his family's talent for music never went beyond his great-grandfather's knocking his front teeth out in an attempt to play the" jaw harp. Using his music and his humor in tandem was a constant with Ross. In an interview with Art Rosenbaum in 1986, Ross paused mid song to tell a story about his fictional great-uncle who fought in the Civil War. According to Ross, his uncle was newlywed at the time of the Civil War and loved to play the song "Home Sweet Home" for his pretty young bride. After going off and fighting in the war for three years, the uncle returned to his little mountain cabin and saw that his wife was out working in the garden. He decided to slip into the cabin, retrieve his fiddle, and serenade her with "Home Sweet Home." However, when he went in the house, he noticed a crib in the corner with a six-month old baby inside, so he decided he would play "Who's Been Here Since I've Been Gone."

In another interview, however, Ross Brown deftly managed to blend his music, apple growing, and penchant for telling humorous stories. As he was taking his fiddle from its case to be recorded by Steven Harvey, a mountain music enthusiast, Ross began talking "about a scheme he has for selling apple brandy." He said that he had too many apples that particular year, and he was considering going in to the brandy business. He told that "they used to make it up there on Hog Creek," and would pass it around while making music. According to Ross, "there'd be a hundred and fifty songs to the gallon." For anyone interested in studying the sometimes peculiar humor of the mountain region, the various interviews with Ross Brown are a treasure-trove of information.

Although he showed an early interest in the fiddle and mountain music, once he married, Ross focused on his family and career in plumbing and electric. By 1960, however, he had taken up the fiddle once more, and was involved with establishing the Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee. He became a regular at the fair, but he also performed at various festivals including the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC, and the National Folk Festival in Wolf Trap, Virginia. He was also a regular at musical events at Berea College and the John C. Campbell Folk School. His prowess as a mountain fiddler gained Ross international attention, and he was sent by the Public Broadcasting System to Ireland and Scotland where he played at the Edinburgh International Festival. Ross, along with other musicians from Towns County, Georgia, also played at the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, and the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. Through these events outside of the Southern Appalachians, Ross Brown was able to expose a large number of people to traditional mountain musical styles and songs in a way that they may not have otherwise experienced.

Ross Brown died May 7, 2001, and is buried in Osborn Cemetery next to his wife of fifty-five years, Gertrude Cunningham Brown. They were the parents of James Elliott "Jimmy" Brown and Susan Brown Colvard. Through his use of music and storytelling, as well as being a resource for information about mountain ways, Ross Brown was able to preserve a small portion of the mountain culture of the early 1900s so that those living today, and generations yet to be born, can have some insight into what it was like in the Appalachian Mountains in bygone days.

ORAL HISTORIES



BOB CLOER



BUD JOHNSON



KENNETH MOODY



TODD & HELEN KIMSEY

Just an example of the many oral history interviews that Nancy Cody and Annette Cook have done during the September quarter. All of these oral histories are for sale on DVD through the historical society.

DONATIONS TO THE OLD ROCK JAIL MUSEUM



Ann and Frank Abadessa
In memory of Richard Schmidtke
 Nancy & Bill Cody
In memory of Richard Schmidtke
 Wm. Ronald Gibson
In memory of Noble & Bonnie Gibson
 Gregg & Renee Murphy
In memory of Pauline Taylor Funderburk
 Jerry & Glenda Kendall
In memory of Velma Ree Kendall
 Ina Kozesky
In honor of Sandra Green
 Beverly Messer
In memory of Richard Schmidtke
 William & Mary Nicholson
In memory of Ray & Margie Nicholson

Elizabeth Phillips
In memory of Richard Schmidtke
 Jim & Trish Reynolds
Our Veterans
 Chris & Jamila Russo
In memory of Theodore & Alma Russo
 Jerry Taylor
In memory of Richard Schmidtke
 Jason Edwards
In memory of Richard Schmidtke
 Sid Turner
In memory of Nell Berrong Turner
 Bob Cloer
 Richard Schmidtke & Betty Phillips
 Bud Dyer
 Dr. & Mrs. Lanier Nicholson

WHO WERE THE FIRST OFFICERS OF TOWNS COUNTY?

By Jerry A. Taylor, County Historian

Towns County was created by Act of March 6, 1856 from Rabun and Union Counties. It was named for George Washington Towns, Governor of Georgia from 1847-1851. Gov. Towns was born in Wilkes County, May 4, 1801. He was a merchant, lawyer, legislator, state senator, and congressman. He died in 1854.

First officers of Towns County, commissioned April 21, 1856, were: Andrew J. Burch, Sheriff; Martin L. Burch, Clerk Superior Court; James H. Moore, Clerk Inferior Court; Milton E. Brown, Tax Receiver; George M. Denton, Tax Collector; Robert S. Patton, Coroner; James B. Alston, Surveyor; John W. Holmes, Ordinary.

Andrew J. Burch was born in 1830 in Rabun County, GA. He died in 1911 in Haywood County, NC, and is buried in Morning Star Methodist Church Cemetery.

Martin L. Burch was born in 1814 in Pendleton District, SC. He died in 1877 and is buried in the Old Burch Cemetery located on an island in Lake Chatuge near the recreation beach. Some of his descendants remaining in Towns County today are the Mary Jane Corn Henson family and the John Truman Holmes family.

James H. Moore was born in 1833 in Macon County, NC. By 1880, he had moved to Clay County, NC. Some of his descendants living in Towns County today are the Myrtle Rogers family and Victor Moore family.

Milton E. Brown was born in 1815 in Laurens District, SC. He died in 1884 and is buried in Ivy Mount Cemetery. His only child to stay in the area was A. Jackson Brown who lived at Pine Log.

George M. Denton was born in 1813 in Haywood County, NC. He died after 1870 and is buried in Upper Hightower Church Cemetery. He has several descendants living in Towns County today.

Robert S. Patton was born in 1820 in Buncombe County, NC. He died after 1890 and is probably buried in Old Brasstown Cemetery. His known descendants living in Towns County today are from the family Laura and Prior Nelson Ingram.

James B. Alston was born in 1809 in Halifax County, NC. He died in 1898 and is buried in Mt. Zion Cemetery on The River. He has no known descendants living in Towns County today.

John W. Holmes was born in 1821 in Franklin County, GA. He died in 1883 and is buried in Macedonia Cemetery. Several of his descendants still reside in Towns County.

THANK YOU TO LOCAL BUSINESSES!

The historical society would like to thank the following people or businesses for providing goods or services free or at a reduced rate for the renovation of the Old Rock Jail.

- Allen Disposal (dumpster service)
- Ronnie Stroud (builder)
- Danny Hyatt (plumber)
- Mark Nicholson (carpenter)
- Glass Doctor (replace broken windows)
- Chris Turpin (electrical work)
- Superior Paint, Royce Dillard (paint & sprayer)
- Gerdes Custom Cabinets (planing & staining beadboard for bathroom)
- Coker Custom Flooring (repair and refinish floors)

Our apologies if we left anyone out. Let us know and we will include your name in the next quarterly newsletter!



Towns County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1182
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THE TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Presents
**"PICKIN' ON THE PORCH"
AT THE OLD ROCK JAIL**
Featuring
**JOHN COCHRAN
AND THE COWHANDS**

**SATURDAY
OCTOBER 7, 2017
6:00 PM**

**FREE ADMISSION
OUTSIDE
BRING A CHAIR**