



# THE TOWNS HISTORIAN

The NEWSLETTER of the TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



VOL. 4 ISSUE 1

[www.townscountyhistory.org](http://www.townscountyhistory.org)

FALL 2020

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

## 2020 A Year Like No Other

by Sandra Green, President



Who would have ever dreamed that our March 10th meeting would be our last for the year?! This year will go down in history as one of a kind. At least, I hope it's one of a kind! Since the decision was made recently, after a discussion with Commissioner Bradshaw, that the rest of the monthly meetings would be cancelled, we thought we could at least put together a newsletter highlighting some of the things that have happened since March.

I guess it would be more accurate to highlight the things that haven't happened since March. Jerry had several great guest speakers already lined up. Hopefully, we will still be able to have them next year. Betty Phillips wasn't able to have her Salute to our Veterans program in July. I'm sure that was a bitter disappointment to her since it is something dear to her heart. There was no Georgia Mountain Fair so there was no historical society float in the parade. We had already started planning our exhibit at the GMF exhibit hall, so that was put on hold. Of course, we won't be having a Haunted Jail at the ORJ this year even though it was a big hit for the past two years. As of right now, we still plan to have an Old-fashioned Christmas at the ORJ in conjunction with the Light Up Hiawassee event on December 5th, but that is subject to change based on the status of COVID-19 and the plans the city has. We haven't put out a newsletter this year. We just kept waiting, thinking things would get back to 'normal'.

On a more positive note, after a very slow beginning, the number of visitors to the ORJ Museum has picked up in the last few weeks. We've acquired another antique display cabinet and there is a new exhibit of milk glass decorative items donated by Diris Thomas Farmer. An American Flag has been placed in the military room of the ORJ in memory of J.C. Berrong and the plaque that was presented to Chris Phillips at our March meeting in honor of the very generous contribution and years of service by Richie Schmidke and Betty Phillips to the historical society is mounted at the entrance to the military room at the ORJ.

The painting that Marty Hayden kindly donated to the historical society will be on display at the ORJ until we resume monthly meetings. It will be displayed in our meeting room once things are 'back to normal'.

*continued on page 2*

### 2019 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*

## 2020 A Year Like No Other *continued from page 1*

The officers are reaching out to members on social media with information, short videos, and previously recorded DVDs that might be of interest. We also hope this newsletter helps keep more people connected to the historical society until the time we can once again meet in person.

Because of the pandemic, we are unable to hold election of officers as spelled out in our bylaws. After weighing our options and discussing with Commissioner Bradshaw, the decision was made to do what most closely adheres to what is in the bylaws. I will appoint a committee in December to select a slate of officers. Members will be notified of the names of those serving on the committee via social media and mail. The slate of officers will be presented by the

committee at the January 2021 monthly meeting and voting will follow at the February 2021 monthly meeting. This follows most nearly the guidelines in the bylaws. In the event that we are still unable to have monthly meetings starting in January, the nomination and election will be carried out when we do resume meetings.

Since we only held three meetings in 2020, if you are a paid member, your membership will carry over until the end of 2021!

I have missed the programs and fellowship this year and look forward to a better year in 2021. Stay safe and see you soon!

### **RESOLUTION IN HONOR OF BETTY PHILLIPS AND IN MEMORY OF DR. RICHARD ALLEN SCHMIDTKE BY TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXECUTIVE BOARD**

WHEREAS Betty Phillips is a lifetime member of the historical society who has provided immeasurable support to the organization, and  
WHEREAS Dr. Richard Allen Schmidtke held advanced degrees in mechanical engineering, and  
WHEREAS he served his country with distinction during World War II, namely, as staff sergeant in the U.S. Army, in the Manhattan Project as a nineteen-year-old who helped with the design of the "Fat Man" Nagasaki bomb, and other notable projects, and  
WHEREAS he retired to the north Georgia mountains and adopted Towns County as his home, and  
WHEREAS he married Towns County native, Betty Phillips, and became a life member of the Towns County Historical Society, and  
WHEREAS by their anonymous generosity they supported the historical society and the Old Rock Jail museum, and  
WHEREAS Dr. Schmidtke passed away on March 27, 2017,  
THEREFORE we, the executive board of Towns County Historical Society, honor Betty Phillips and the memory of Dr. Schmidtke on the anniversary of his passing by acknowledging the identity of our anonymous benefactors, this ninth day of March, 2020.

Sandra Green: President  
Jerry Taylor: Vice-president  
Tyler Osborn: Secretary  
Frances Shook: Treasurer  
Mary Ann Miller: Membership Secretary

In Appreciation of  
Dr. Richard Allen Schmidtke and Betty Phillips  
For their generous support of  
The Towns County Historical Society  
And  
Old Rock Jail Museum

# A Look Into The Not-So-Distant Past by Jerry A. Taylor



This is my grandfather for whom I was named, JEREMIAH MARTIN TAYLOR (1876-1928), son of Harvey Pinson Taylor and Nancy Matilda Bryan of Owl Creek. He married Rosa Jane Nicholson in 1899 and they made their home on Fodder Creek. He was a traveling singing school teacher, nurseryman (Enotah Orchard), and farmer.

The times that we are now living in with sheltering in place, masks, social distancing, and many other precautions bring to mind that this sort of thing was not a rare occurrence in the not-so-distant past. Quarantines, closing traffic at the county line, and prohibiting public gatherings during epidemics of measles and other contagious diseases were how county officials dealt with the problem.

On June 20, 1928, Jeremiah M. Taylor died of a stroke. He was prepared for burial by Luther, John, and Arvel Hooper. The casket was homemade and trimmed in black. An epidemic of measles having broken out previously at Luther Melton's funeral at which Jeremiah sang, the community was quarantined; therefore, public gatherings, including funerals, were forbidden. His oldest son Homer walked to town to get Rev. Buice to come to the house to conduct a private family funeral. There on the porch, the little family gathered to say their goodbyes.

Afterwards, the Masons carried his body to Enotah Cemetery where he was laid to rest.

That story always made me so sad, especially to think how many funerals he played and sang for and he never got the benefit of a funeral for himself, and no music either.

Young Harris News – Dec. 10, 1914

**Smallpox Quarantine Notice.**

To whom it may concern:

The mayor and council have this day quarantined the town of Young Harris against people coming into Young Harris from Blairsville on account of smallpox, which is now in Blairsville, Union county. Any one violating the quarantine regulation will be subject to the penalties of the law. This December 3, 1914.

J. W. Hughes, Mayor.

March 12, 1896

**NORTH CAROLINA SHUT OUT.**

**The Ordinary of Towns County Shuts Out the Tarheels.**

Young Harris, Ga., March 11.—(Special.)—Hon. J. T. Kimsey, ordinary of Towns county, has declared a quarantine against North Carolina. His proclamation says:

"I have this day quarantined against North Carolina and all south of the Blue Ridge on account of smallpox. Any person, citizens or persons through North Carolina are forbidden to pass into Towns county, Georgia, and also all persons now south of the Blue Ridge are forbidden to pass into Towns county. All citizens and persons now in Towns county are forbidden to pass into either of the above mentioned territories and return to Towns county. Any person violating this order will be arrested and confined in some place which shall be designated by me."



# Native American Bowl Quarry At Young Harris Bypass

by Bruce Roberts

Here is an update on the activity at the Native American soapstone bowl quarry that has been affected by the Hwy 515 bypass in Young Harris... You may recall that an archaeological team headed by New South Associates was under contract from Georgia DOT to perform data recovery and additional investigations at the site.

The team began their work around Thanksgiving 2019, with a planned ECD of the end of February 2020. Abnormally wet weather over the winter extended that schedule, but due to the Covid-19 shutdown in March, the team had to pack up and close up shop. Unfortunately, this meant that the planned on-site Public Information Day(s), which I had mentioned at an earlier TCHS meeting, had to be cancelled also.

The principal investigators are currently working on completion of their final report, but I can relay a few of the interesting finds that were made during their excavations and site work.

As one would expect, a number of additional soapstone boulders were excavated which contained bowl preforms and bowl removal scars. These boulders had been either buried or hidden by vegetation during the early Preliminary Surveys. A number of soapstone bowls, bowl fragments, and detached bowl preforms were also found during the excavations.

Several tools used in the process of manufacturing the soapstone bowls were also recovered. One example recovered was this grooved axe-hammer stone:



A more unusual find was discovered on one of the quarried boulders. While recording several bowl preforms late one afternoon, a worker noticed what appeared to be a faint hand print in the rock, revealed only by the late afternoon sunlight. Subsequent evaluation revealed that this faded carving in the rock was indeed a hand print. It has been so worn by centuries of weathering that it is difficult to make out with either the naked eye or a camera, but using side lighting, I was able to make a fairly decent image that the team used in their report:



One important data gathering activity that was planned was a recreation of the bowl manufacturing process, to be carried out by a member of one of the local tribes, using period tools and techniques. The initial attempt was performed on a boulder which had an original bowl preform attached. After 20 hours (!) of work, the artisan unfortunately hit a zone of hard rock on the boulder, and after injuring his hand, halted work on this bowl. (see photo below) It is thought that perhaps the hard rock was a reason why the original bowl preform on this boulder was never completed. Another boulder was subsequently chosen for the recreation of the process, and two bowl preforms were eventually produced from the softer rock.



One other item that we had talked about with the DOT last year was the possibility of getting one of the quarried boulders that would be impacted by the road moved to a location in the county, with interpretation panels added for education. I have not been able to get an update on that request at this time.

FYI - Brian Snyder, the lead archaeologist on the team, has offered to give us a presentation on the work and findings at this site, once the TCHS is able to have regular meetings again.

# John Jacob Eller Descendants By Steve Eller

Steve Eller, a Towns County descendant and now a resident of Cherokee County, North Carolina, is involved in a major effort to update a massive 1998 book entitled John Jacob Eller and His Descendants. There will be a drop by (with social distancing practices) event to help gather extended John Jacob Eller Descendant information on Friday, November 6th. It will be held at the Towns County Historical Society Meeting Room in the old recreation building near the Anderson Bridge near Hiawassee starting at 10 am and going until 5:30 pm.

If you are an Eller Descendant and drop by to review/update your families information, you will receive a ticket for a drawing at the end of the day. We will be giving away a \$100 gift card and two \$25 gift cards. Most of the Ellers in the area were from the John Jacob Eller Line.

If you are an Allen, Anderson, Arrowood, Barrett, Berrong, Bradshaw, , Brown, Burch, Burrell, Chastain, Cook, Dayton, Denton, Garrett, Hedden, Hooper, Hunnicutt,, Hunter, Kimsey, Ledford, Maney, McKinney, McNabb, Moss, Nichols, Nicholson, Owenby, Parker, Parton, Shook, Sprinkles, Taylor, Walls, Wood/Woods, Young, or Youngblood (and many others), there is a good chance you may be an Eller Descendant. Most every cemetery in Rabun County and Towns County, Georgia, and Clay County, North Carolina with extensions into Union and Cherokee Counties as well have Eller Descendant Memorials.

Please drop by and talk with us even if you don't know of Eller ancestry but have had family members living in the area for many years as there are many other families who fit this category. We look forward to seeing you there.

The Old Smyrna Cemetery Workdays for this fall are Saturday November 14th and Saturday December 5th. I have ordered the new headstone for Hardy Washington Eller and Joseph Jacob Eller. I don't think they will be ready until after Christmas. I do have a graveyard sign that needs to be installed. We will need gravel, 4x4 treated posts, bags of cement, chain saws and heavy duty weed eaters. Please let me know if you can provide any of the materials. As you know, we will need 4 wheel drive vehicles to get to the cemetery and carry the materials in. We will meet at the Upper Hightower Baptist Church Parking lot at 9 AM. I sure appreciate any help that anyone could provide...materials and muscle.

Is there something you always wanted to know about Towns County or Towns County history but didn't know who to ask or were afraid to ask? Our historian, Jerry Taylor is a wealth of knowledge and he'd be happy to answer your question! Who knows, your questions may be the next historical society meeting program! Submit questions to Jerry at [Br68630582@yahoo.com](mailto:Br68630582@yahoo.com) or 706-994-0218.

## And We Think We Have It Rough... By Tyler Osborn



With everything going on this year, it has taken time for us time to adjust to this 'new normal.' From closures, cancelled meetings and events, and wearing a mask, it can become stressful and frustrating. But imagine if our lock down prevented us from leaving the county altogether! Well, that did happen at one point. A newspaper article, shared by Jason Lee Edwards on Hearthstones of Home – Towns County, Georgia, History Facebook page, talks about how the small pox infection spread through the county forcing the residents on complete lockdown.

The article reads "Hiawassee, GA., February 18 – (SPECIAL) - The ordinary of Towns County has placed guards at the county lines at most of the roads leading into Towns County, with orders to not allow any person to pass into the county districts likely to be infected with smallpox. A young man named Ledford, from Clay County, NC, passed through this county several days ago infected with the disease. He had spent the night at Searight's in Habersham County, the place where three of the family have smallpox. A few days after his arrival home he developed a case of smallpox, and many persons called to see him before it was learned what the disease was."

So while we continue to adjust to this 'new normal', remember this is not a new dilemma for us 'mountain folk.' Over the years, our ancestors have had to quarantine, wear masks, and miss events to protect themselves from diseases, such as small pox or the flu, in order to survive. This was even depicted in the movie 'I'd Climb the Highest Mountain,' which contains a story line of how the flu epidemic affected the mountain communities in the early 1900s. One day, when our descendants look back on this time, I hope they learn just how strong we truly are and use that to face whatever battles they may be facing, just like we use the wisdom of our ancestors to get through this. Remember, stay safe, be smart, and we will get through this together!



# MY CENSUS ADVENTURE *by Jerry Taylor*



My introduction to the census occurred when Hiawasse postmaster, Mr. M. A. Burns hired me, at the age of 13, to copy the 1860, 1870, and 1880 census records of Towns County. As postmaster, he received much correspondence from family historians across the country inquiring about their Towns County heritage, and, as a family historian himself, he wanted to be able to answer those letters with correct information. That experience working for Mr. Burns proved invaluable to me later on, as I seriously began to climb my own family tree and delve into Towns County history.

The decennial census is simply an enumeration of the population, beginning in 1790, provided for in the Constitution. Its main purpose is to determine the appropriation of representatives by state in the House of Representatives. It is also important to the states and local communities because it affects how federal funding comes to our states and communities for a multitude of purposes. Information is used for statistical purposes only and no information of a private or confidential nature is released to the National Archives until seventy-two years have passed.

Censuses are nothing new under the sun. The most famous one that you are probably familiar with is referenced with these words... "And it came to pass ... that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled..."

Prior to the removal of the Cherokees from Georgia, the state took a special census in 1834 of in-movers into the affected region. At that time, our area was Union County, which stretched from Morganton to Upper Hightower. Nine hundred three white people were

enumerated. Some of the names of the very earliest residents of our Towns County area included, among others, Grady, Spivey, Denton, Chastain, Crow, Lloyd, Brown, Visage, Eller, Smith, Self, England, Carroll, and Allen.

The first census of Towns County was in 1860 showing a population of 2,459. Our population on the last census, in 2010, was 10,471. Statistics show that we are well at the top of the state for population over 65 and that, for census purposes, our residences are well over 50% vacant, with residents living elsewhere on Census Day, April 1, and the houses being only for occasional, recreational, or vacation use.

I worked in the 2010 census when we used pencil and paper as contrasted to 2020 when we were issued "hand-held electronic devices."

As for my experience, I can agree wholeheartedly with Anne Frank that "In spite of everything, I still believe people are good at heart." People were nice, kind, friendly, and welcoming to the point that I was often offered refreshment, with cake and lemonade being the most popular offering.

My nagging question after visiting throughout the northeast Georgia area is, "Why would anybody build a million-dollar house on a remote mountain top with no safe turnaround and accessible only by a \$1.98 driveway?!"

My advice to you during the next census is that you make sure you answer promptly or stay home and answer the doorknocker personally. For, if you are away, the census taker may have to search for a proxy. And let me tell you, proxies tell all, even if it is not asked! So, there, you are warned.

The biggest problem that I found regarding dogs was that they could not control their licker. However, during a visit in Ivy Log, I encountered a dog that wanted a new chew toy – yes, yours truly! I escaped without incident but for the rest of my journey on the census trail, I was ever cognizant of the whereabouts of the dog and never tempted fate.

Occasionally, my group would meet together for lunch and share war stories. My favorite was Berta's story. Her address led her to a gated community. Explaining her purpose and gaining admittance, she discovered that it was a clothing optional community. As we anxiously awaited the rest of the story, Berta explained that she went straight to the office, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and got the bare facts.

So, my census adventure is winding to a halt even as we speak. I have enjoyed it tremendously, made new friends, and most of all have seen lots of beautiful scenery in the mountain and lake area of extreme northeast Georgia that I would not otherwise have ever visited.

# TREASURER'S REPORT

## March 2020

Beginning Balance	\$6,256.58
Credits	\$ 20.00
Debits	\$ 100.38
Ending Balance	\$6,176.22

## April 2020

Beginning Balance	\$6,176.22
Credits	\$ 5.00
Debits	\$ 45.50
Ending Balance	\$6,135.72

## May 2020

Beginning Balance	\$6,135.72
Credits	\$ 85.00
Debits	\$ 134.81
Ending Balance	\$6,085.91

## June 2020

Beginning Balance	\$6,085.91
Credits	\$ 300.00
Debits	\$ .00
Ending Balance	\$6,385.91

## July 2020

Beginning Balance	\$6,085.91
Credits	\$ 15.00
Debits	\$ .00
Ending Balance	\$6,400.91

## Cookie Brownies

Growing up, my aunt Shirley Hunter always made cookie brownies as a treat. Even in adult hood, my cousins & I still ask her to make these. - Tyler Osborn

2 1/4 cup self rising flour  
2 sticks softened Land O Lakes Butter  
3/4 C sugar (less to cut sweetness)  
3/4 C Brown Sugar (less to cut sweetness)  
2 Eggs, beaten  
1 Tsp Vanilla  
12 oz. semi sweet chocolate chips

Pre heat oven to 375 F. Cream butter & sugar. Mix in eggs & vanilla. Add to flour and mix until combined. Pour in a greased 15x10 pan and spread evenly. Turn oven to 350 & bake for 10 minutes. After 10 minutes, shake pan to help even batter more. Bake another 10 minutes. Remove from oven, cover with dish cloth and let cool completely. Once cool, remove from pan & store in airtight container or bag.



## With Deepest Sympathy

THE TOWNS COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS  
WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS THEIR  
SINCERE CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILIES OF  
THESE MEMBER WE HAVE LOST.

J. C. Berrong  
Bill Cody  
Opal Walls  
Kerry Wilson



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

# DONATIONS

JANUARY - OCTOBER

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

Ron and Carol Gibson

Bob Cloer

Deborah Reynolds

*In Honor of Jerry Taylor*

Pete and Jounida Bradley

*In Honor of Donna Howell*

Winston and Diris Farmer

Bud Dyer

Al Burrell

John and Janice Cochran

Mattie Botting

Jerry Taylor

*In Memory of Bill Cody*

*In Memory of Opal Walls*

*In Memory of Kerry Wilson*

*In Memory of Jameson McGill*

Frances Shook

*In Memory of Bill Cody*

*In Memory of Opal Walls*