



THE TOWNS HISTORIAN

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The NEWSLETTER of the TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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www.townscountyhistory.org

FIRST QUARTER 2025

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 the Towns County Civic Center

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

Spring is Almost Here! By Tyler Osborn, President



We have some great programs planned for this year, and I hope you will all be able to come out and enjoy them. Our county will also be celebrating two historical anniversaries – Young Harris is celebrating their 130th anniversary this year and has been collecting stories and photographs. If you have any to share, please contact their city hall. The Georgia Mountain Fair will also be celebrating its 75th anniversary this year and will have some great things planned for that as well – including an update to the fair’s history book, which we will hear more about at an upcoming meeting.

Thanks to a generous donation by Sybil Plott Blackstock, we raffled off a copy of Jerry Taylor’s book, *Hearthstones of Home: Foundations of Towns County, GA*, and raised \$600 for the Berrong-Oakley House Restoration. As of right now, our fundraising goals for the house are at \$65,000! This is a huge accomplishment. We are also currently in the bidding process to hopefully soon start work on the exterior of the building.

As always, we are looking for volunteers who can help with fundraising, events planning, hosting the Presley Post Office, and any other creative ideas you can think of! If you are interested and can help, please feel free to contact me!

I look forward to everything this year has to offer us and know we will make great strides towards keeping Towns County History alive!

2025 OFFICERS

Tyler Osborn
President

Jerry Taylor
Vice-President

Brandi Cox
Secretary

Patti Wilson
Treasurer

Ginger Rogers
Membership Secretary



HISTORIANS

Jerry Taylor
County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian



Mary Ann Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

Berrong-Oakley House Update

by Tyler Osborn



Photo by Doug Greene

Winter has been cold – especially at the Berrong Oakley House! We are thrilled to share that our fundraising efforts for the Berrong-Oakley House have officially surpassed \$65,000! This is a significant milestone for our society, and it wouldn't have been possible without the dedication and generosity of our members, donors, and community supporters. Your commitment to preserving this historic landmark is truly making a difference!

To continue building on this momentum, we have a few exciting fundraising opportunities available:

- Brick by Brick: Leave a lasting legacy by purchasing a personalized brick paver for \$250. Whether in your name or in memory of a loved one, these bricks will form a beautiful pathway around the house. Your contribution not only covers the cost of the brick but also helps fund the restoration efforts. If every member of the society purchased

one brick, we would be just shy of reaching the half-way point of our goal!

- Vacation for a Cause – In partnership with Miller Mountain Management, a portion of vacation rental bookings will be donated directly to the Berrong-Oakley House restoration fund. If you have friends or family planning a visit to Towns County, this is a great way for them to experience our beautiful mountains while also supporting the preservation of local history. This might even be the perfect opportunity to plan your next family reunion and bring everyone back home! You can visit them online at millermountainmanagement.myportfolio.com or their Facebook page, Miller Mountain Management to learn more!

Every donation, big or small, brings us one step closer to restoring and preserving the Berrong-Oakley House for generations to come. Thank you for your continued support!

Abe and Mary Hooper, The Last Negro Family to Live in Towns County

by Jason L. Edwards



Abraham "Abe" Hooper was born in January 1857 in Georgia. His marriage records state that his father was Anthony Clark and his mother's name was either Julia or Nelia. In 1870 and 1880, he was living with the Levi Hooper family on Lower Hightower in Towns County, Georgia.

On March 27, 1887, he married Margaret Williams in Clay County, North Carolina. Her parents were Dennis and Brunetta Williams. She must have died shortly after their marriage as he married Mary Jones on November 19, 1888, also in Clay County, North Carolina. She was born May 1868 in North Carolina to Malinda Jones. Her father seems to have been a Herbert.

In the early 1880s, he moved to Clay County, North Carolina. In about 1896, the Abe Hooper family moved back to Towns County, Georgia. Abe farmed on the Ed and Belle England place in the Hiawassee River community and his wife worked at the Hooper Hotel. In about 1909, his daughter, Ida, had been at the black school on Owl Creek when a big storm came up. The teacher released the students so they could get home before the river rose too high. While crossing a swinging bridge, Ida fell in and was swept away by the current. She was found several days later near the Cynth's Creek Bridge. Abe Hooper said that he didn't want to live where there was so much sadness for him, and he moved his family back to Clay County, North Carolina.

Mary Jones Hooper died May 16, 1940, in Clay County, North Carolina. Abe Hooper only outlived her by a month. He died on June 18, 1940, in Clay County, North Carolina. They both died of tuberculosis and are buried at the Herbert Cemetery, Hayesville, Clay County, North Carolina.

Children of Abraham Hooper and Mary Jones:

1. Thornton Hooper was born in April 1889 in Clay County, North Carolina. He died after 1900.
2. Samuel J. Hooper was born February 2, 1890, in Clay County, North Carolina. He died May 11, 1918, of pneumonia at Camp Jackson, South Carolina. He was a soldier in WWI and is buried at the Herbert Cemetery, Clay County, North Carolina.
3. Myrtle Hooper was born December 19, 1892, in Clay County, North Carolina. She married James Simmons. She died September 23, 1921, in Clay County, North Carolina. She is buried at the Herbert Cemetery, Clay County, North Carolina.
4. Ida Hooper was born in December 1895 in Clay County, North Carolina. She died about 1909 in Towns County, Georgia.
5. Marvin Hooper was born May 3, 1897, in Towns County, Georgia. He married Mamie Olive. She died after 1940. He married Nellie Celia Turner on October 17, 1946, in Wood County, Ohio.
6. Louisa "Lucy" Hooper was born March 20, 1898, in Towns County, Georgia. She married Wesley Mauldin on October 8, 1916, in Clay County, North Carolina. She died April 20, 1925, in Clay County, North Carolina. She is buried at the Herbert Cemetery, Clay County, North Carolina.
7. Addie Ethel Hooper was born May 27, 1901, in Towns County, Georgia. She married #1 James Corn, #2 Andrew Lowery, and #3 Vernon buck Harris. She died December 15, 1964, in Clay County, North Carolina. She is buried at the Herbert Cemetery, Clay County, North Carolina.

Last Summer, the Towns County Historical Society and the Linguistics Justice Collaborative had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Montree McCarter for her 100th Birthday. The following article was published in the Towns County Herald as part of the interview. Mrs. Montree passed away on March 3, 2025. The Historical Society would like to extend our condolences to the family and thank them for helping coordinate the interview that helped continue telling the story of Towns County History.

Celebrating a Century of Life: Montree McCarter's 100-Year Journey

By: Dr. Leah Panther, Tyler Osborn, Caitlin Hochuli

TOWNS COUNTY, GA – "I'm still hangin' around," said Montree McCarter with a smile. "The good Lord left me here for some reason!" As she celebrates her 100th birthday in August, Montree reflected on her century-long journey during an interview with the Towns County Historical Society.

On a warm June morning, Montree shared her life story, starting from her birth in Titus, Georgia, in 1924, to Millard Dover and Sarah Jane (Eller) Dover. Growing up in Lower Hightower, Montree's childhood was far different from that of today's children in Towns County. Alongside her three brothers—Warden, Boyd, and Avery—and older sister, Christeel, she worked hard on the family farm, cultivating corn, sugar cane, and tending a large garden. She vividly recalls canning, drying, and pickling food and performing regular chores to care for the horses and cows.

One particularly difficult year stands out in her memory. Her father succumbed to the flu and pneumonia, and in the same year, her 11-year-old sister died from appendicitis. Despite these hardships, Montree's mother remarried George Taylor, and the family welcomed two half-siblings, Mildred and Johnny.

Montree began her education in Lower Hightower's one-room schoolhouse near Bear Meat Road. She fondly remembers her teacher, Mr. Kimsey, saying, "I learned more there than I did in high school!" The transition to a larger, modern schoolhouse in Hiawassee was significant, but Montree still cherished her early schooling experiences, including carrying wood to heat the school. She would have to walk about a mile on a gravel road from Swallows Creek to the main highway to catch a bus for high school. She reflected on how everyone thought it was terrible she had to be so far from the highway, but now it's a mark of pride: everyone wants to live out in the hills. But back then, "you just lived where you could".

Graduating with 21 classmates in 1941, Montree quipped, "Didn't care too much for any subjects," but quickly corrected herself, "No, I liked them all, really!" Her childhood highlight was playing with her best friend, Mary Lou, in Swallows Creek, despite her mother's concerns about the cold water. A harrowing

experience at a mill along Swallows Creek solidified Montree's decision never to learn to swim, "I didn't want my head dunked under no more!"

Community gatherings and church homecomings were central to Montree's youth. Every fourth Sunday in May, her local church held a celebration, and similar events rotated among regional churches throughout the summer. She recalls traveling in a large wagon, likening it to a modern city bus. Later in life during an ambulance ride to Gainesville the memory resurfaced. As she was jostled in the ambulance she recalled, "I just felt like I was in a wagon!"

Montree recalls one community dance she actually attended and was quite taken with the big dish of candy laid out for guests to eat while music was played by local musicians on a banjo and guitar. People were trying to get her to dance and she "couldn't get their feet off the floor" even as her brother tried to teach her but, "I never could do none of that dancing stuff".

Regardless of her dance attendance, there was still a strong sense of community. Montree explained, "If you went to the fair, you knew everyone there" because in that era, "you knew all your neighbors and you'd go sit on their porches and talk".

One of the big topics on the porches throughout the county was the new lake being built. Montree recalled Mr. Stroud, the original land owner for where she lives now, including land that was taken by the lake, and the sadness that "the lake got the best land in the county," which had been such good land for growing, "it took a lot of the land away from people".

After high school, Montree ventured to Canton, Ohio, with a cousin to find work during the Great Depression, making parts for airplanes. Returning home, Montree married in 1947. They bought a small home and land, where she still resides today. The house, made of solid oak, has been updated over the years. Montree and her family lived without electricity for about a decade, using lamps and a cook stove until power was installed in 1957. Her



*Montree with her great and great-great-grandchildren.
Photo Courtesy: Hannah Garrison.*

two children, Nioka and Terry, are her greatest pride and blessings.

Montree's career included an eleven-year stint as a nurse. She initially worked in a nursing home but transitioned to personal care due to a back injury. Despite her professional endeavors, Montree's favorite role was as a housewife, caring for her home, garden, and cows.

The end of World War II marked the beginning of Montree's married life. Her three brothers served in the army, with her youngest brother narrowly surviving a bomb blast. Her eldest brother worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps Camp, building roads in Towns County. She remembers the biggest trees being felled, but more clearly are the memories of the County giving away trees to plant including several seedlings that have become large white pines that still tower over her property.

Montree shared various stories of "chinky pin trees", selling wild chestnuts, and a tornado in Gainesville that left people "hanging off of trees", but one story she enjoyed sharing was about her first car: a 1952 Oldsmobile, which she taught herself to drive. She laughed about nearly hitting Paul Rogers' car and figuring out how to push-start the car without her husband's help by parking it on a hill.

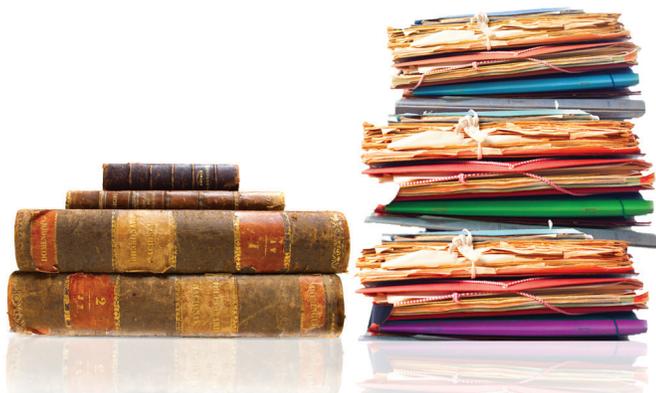
As she concluded her interview, Montree emphasized her love for her family and offered advice for future generations: "Serve the Lord, keep in church, and serve the Lord. That's the most important thing."

Montree McCarter's life is a testament to resilience, community, and faith, marking a century of rich memories and experiences in Towns County. Montree celebrates her 100th birthday on August 18th and the Towns County Historical Society would like to wish her a Happy Birthday and thank her for helping preserve her memories of Towns County!

This interview was completed as part of a collaborative effort between the Towns County Historical Society and The Linguistic Justice Collaborative. If you or someone you know would be willing to participate in an oral interview to help document our county's history and tell your story, please contact us at townscountyhistory@gmail.com or (706) 994-2426. The Towns County Historical Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit dedicated to preserving the history, culture, and heritage of Towns County. More info can be found at www.townscountyhistory.org.

Preserving History: A Spring Break of Service

by Tyler Osborn



In early March, members of the *Swappin' Stories* team kicked off their Spring Break by dedicating their first weekend to lending us a hand! Dr. Leah Panther, Presley Dyer, and Caitlin Hochuli spent a weekend at the Old Rock Jail, carefully working through some of our archives—some dating back to 1866—cleaning and archiving these invaluable records.

As many of you know, our archives have been housed in the Old Rock Jail since mid-2022, when the courthouse was temporarily relocated to the old Rec Center for renovations.

Once the courthouse reopened, we were able to reclaim our meeting space, but another community organization needed the room that once stored our archives. As a result, they have remained in the Old Rock Jail while we search for a suitable, climate-controlled space. Unfortunately, the historic nature of the jail means it experiences drastic temperature fluctuations, causing damage from time, weather, and the general environment, which is taking its toll on these delicate records.

We are actively working with Commissioner Bradshaw to secure a proper archival space, but until then, the Old Rock Jail remains our only option. This presents a difficult trade-off—storing the archives there means the building cannot be open for tours.

Thanks to the dedication of the *Swappin' Stories* team, progress was made in preserving these documents. They spent the weekend cleaning, cataloging, and organizing materials, taking great care to protect our county's irreplaceable history. Additionally, thanks to generous donations from our supporters, we were able to purchase essential preservation supplies, including rags, gloves, HEPA filters, archival boxes, and masks. While this is not a permanent solution, it will help slow the degradation process and buy us valuable time until a long-term storage space can be secured.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS!

April 14
Celebrating 75 years of the Georgia Mountain Fair by Vonda Morton, historian and author.

May 12
Shirley Miller shares memories of living and working in Towns County

June 9
Bobby Dillinger shares information on Brass-town Bald Mountain

July
Vacation

August 11
Traveling Trunk program presented by Sid Turner and Sons of the American Revolution

September 8
Jerry Taylor will present "Ben Taylor, Towns County's 'Poet Laureat'"

October 13
Rosemary Royston will discuss the future plans of Young Harris

November 10
Jason Edwards, Towns County's deputy historian, will present "What Might Have Been: The Failed Enterprises of Towns County"

December 8
Christmas program



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RECENT DONATIONS TO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By: Jerry Taylor

A special thanks to everyone who has supported us by donating to the society. We apologize if we left anyone off the list!

Carol Simpson donated a copy of "Hearthstones," the pictorial history, and the cemetery index from her late husband's collection

Suzanne Wagner donated a copy of the history of William Holland School of Lapidary Arts located in Young Harris as well as some family memorabilia consisting of World War II ration stamps.

William Watson donated a piece of the hanging rope used for the execution of Tilmon Justice for the murder of James B. Godard in 1887. It had been passed down from James M. Watson to George Newton Watson to Frank Watson to William.

Syble Plott Blackstock donated a copy of "Hearthstones" in memory of Wren Stanley Melton for a raffle to benefit the Berrong-Oakley House. She has previously donated many items to the Old Rock Jail

museum and the Berrong-Oakley House. We raised \$600 on the raffle of the book for the restoration of the house.

Joe Ruf donated some antique items belonging to his family, including small kitchen appliances like a toaster.

Daren Osborn donated a set of commemorative plates depicting the last two Mt. Zion Baptist Church buildings.

Elaina Turpin donated items belonging to the late Harry England, including his original Sheriff's badge and original cell keys to the Old Rock Jail!

Virginia Palmer donated items from the Hiawassee Watershed Coalition.



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

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

DONATIONS

2024

Mary Ann Miller

Berrong-Oakley House

Jerry Taylor

In Memory of Betty Bledsoe

W. Gimer

Berrong-Oakley House

Lisa Hulsey

*Berrong-Oakley House Brick Paver
 in Memory of Dr. & Mrs. W.D. Andrews*

Joe & Liz Ruf

Berrong-Oakley House

Rodney Parker

Berrong-Oakley House

Georgia Mountain Fair

Berrong-Oakley House

Cayce Friedly

Towns County Historical Society

Presley Dyer

Berrong-Oakley House

Towns County Historical Society

Anonymous

Berrong-Oakley House

Jerry Taylor

Towns County Historical Society

Marilyn Kaiser

Towns County Historical Society

Tracey Langley

Berrong-Oakley House

2025

Paul Thompson

Berrong-Oakley House

Pete & Jounida

Towns County Historical Society

Patricia Hunt

Towns County Historical Society

Viola Waldroup

Berrong-Oakley House

Jerry Taylor

Towns County Historical Society

Dr. & Mrs. Lanier Nicholson

Towns County Historical Society

Steve and Jan Eller

Towns County Historical Society

in Memory of J.C. Berrong

Berrong-Oakley House Brick

Winston & Diris Farmer