



# THE TOWNS HISTORIAN

*The NEWSLETTER of the TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

VOL. 1 ISSUE 1

MARCH 2017

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



*Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw officially turning over the Old Rock Jail to the Towns County Historical Society. Jan. 27, 2017*

## 2017 OFFICERS

Sandra Green  
*President*

Nancy Cody  
*Vice President*

Betty Phillips  
*Secretary*

Frances Shook  
*Treasurer*

Ina Knozesky  
*Membership Secretary*



## HISTORIANS

Jerry A. Taylor  
*County Historian*

Jason Lee Edwards  
*Deputy Historian*



Mary Ann McCall Miller  
*Webmaster/Graphic Designer*

## FROM THE PRESIDENT...

By Sandra B. Green

The historical society has a lot of new and exciting projects for 2017. This quarterly newsletter is just one of them! The restoration of the Old Rock Jail (ORJ) is going to be a major undertaking this year as well as in years to come. We need to have the building completely rewired, painted, and the floor refinished first and then comes the fun part, what to display in it! Follow our progress on our website [townscountyhistory.org](http://townscountyhistory.org). We already have offers coming in of items that were connected to the jail's history.

Thanks to our vice-president, Nancy Cody, we have interesting programs scheduled for the coming months, many featuring local members telling their stories. In addition, later in the year, there will be a program on Shape Note Singing.

The historical society attendance is increasing each month as people are learning about us. We encourage everyone to come to our meetings whether you have been here months, years, or generations! It is a great way to meet people from many different backgrounds. We welcome everyone who is interested in preserving or finding out about the history of our area. If you are unable to attend, but would like to support our organization, we welcome your membership also.

If you have an idea that you think would make a great program, please let us know. That's how we have come up with some of our most popular programs in the past!

We hope you have enjoyed our first quarterly newsletter. Let us know how we can improve and what sort of articles you would enjoy reading in future

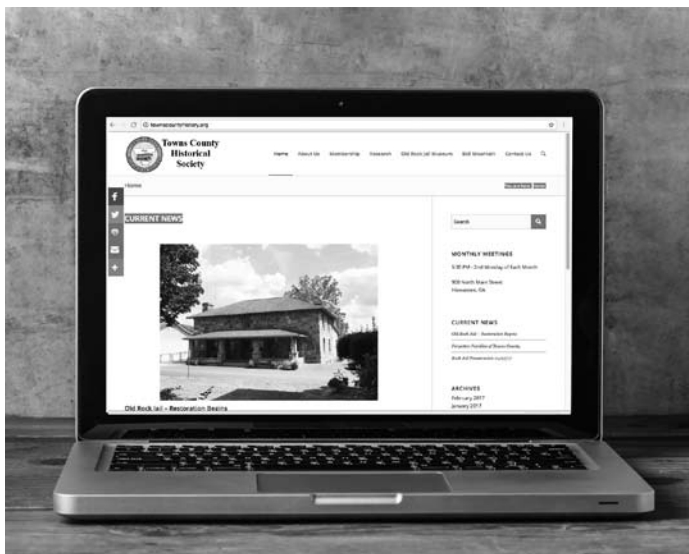
## ORAL HISTORY NEWS



Manita Berrong (left) and Margaret Dendy (right)

Nancy Cody and Annette Cooke have recently resumed recording interviews for our oral history project. The following is an update on their activities:

What a joy to recently interview Manita Jenkins Berrong and her childhood friend, Margaret Byrd Dendy to have them share memories of growing up in Jacksonville just outside Young Harris in Towns County. As you can see, they have aged gracefully. We want to find out their secrets. They are in good health and remain active; attending church, concerts at Berrong Music Hall and Margaret walks at the Foster Park gym. They are well known as they have worked with the public for many years. Manita owned and operated a beauty shop in Hiawassee for over 30 years. Margaret worked at YHC in the business office and then at Towns County Schools for 33 years. They both continued to work until their late 70s. These friendly, fun ladies summed up their lives up with one word.... WONDERFUL!!



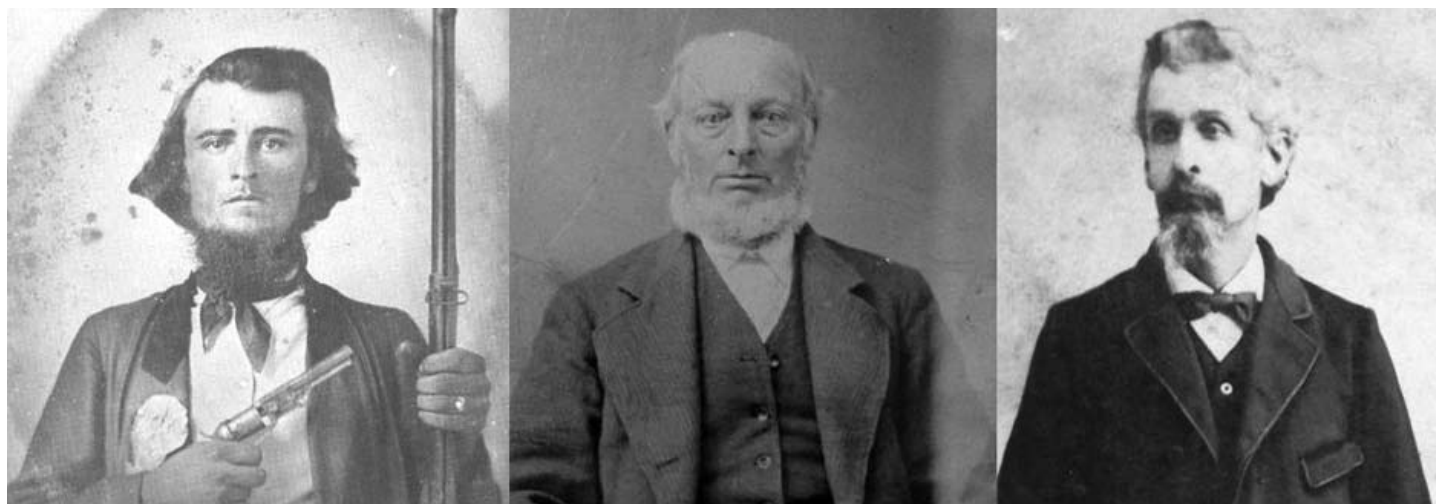
## townscountyhistory.org

Check out our website [townscountyhistory.org](http://townscountyhistory.org). We've got lots of information and photos of people in military service in WWI and WWII as well as historic churches of the county. There's a slide show tracking progress on the Old Rock Jail. We will post more pictures as we continue the journey toward making the museum a reality!

The website will be updated periodically so make sure you get in the habit of checking it out.

# The Russell Family of Cedar Cliff

By Jason Lee Edwards, Deputy Historian



*(L to R): Albert B. Russell (1836-1915), John Russell (1803-188), Andrew D. Russell (1843-1907)*

Considering that Heather Russell Barrera will be our featured speaker at our March meeting, it seems appropriate to share some information concerning the first Russells to live in what is now Towns County. John Russell and Nancy Dickey are common direct ancestors of Heather, our Secretary Betty Phillips, and myself as well as many others in the community. I am looking forward to our meeting, and I strongly encourage anyone with heirloom seeds to bring them to swap with others.

John Russell was born May 20, 1803, in Rutherford County, North Carolina, to George Russell and Rhoda Reavis. When he was a young man, his parents moved to Missouri, but he stayed behind and managed his father's farm. On June 18, 1827, he married Nancy Dickey, daughter of George Dickey and Hannah Taylor. She was born January 18, 1804, in Rutherford County, North Carolina. The Russells and Dickeys both moved to the far western portion of North Carolina prior to 1830.

In the early 1830s, John Russell purchased 480 acres in Rabun County, Georgia, still shown on maps as Russell Mountain. The family lived there for several years before moving to what would become the Cedar Cliff community in Towns County, Georgia. He owned 310 acres of good bottom land on the south side of the Hiawassee River that he purchased from Rev. Elijah Kimsey. Almost all of his property is now under Lake Chatuge. In the late 1850s, John Russell was one of the men involved in trying to get an extension of the railroad to Hiawassee. They were able to secure a charter in 1857, but the railroad ultimately failed.

Nancy Dickey Russell died August 22, 1859, in Towns County, Georgia. She is buried in the Russell family cemetery. John Russell died April 5, 1883, in Towns County,

Georgia, and rests next to his wife. They had three sons, George, Albert, and Andrew who fought in the Civil War and their letters back home give wonderful insight into Civil War era Towns County.

The children of John Russell and Nancy Dickey were: (1) George Wherry Russell was born April 29, 1829, in Macon County, North Carolina. He died January 23, 1864, at Rock Island prison camp in Illinois. (2) Amanda Jane "Mandy" Russell was born September 11, 1830, in Macon County, North Carolina. She died January 4, 1904, in Towns County, Georgia. She married George M. Wood who died in the Civil War. She later married George W. Brown. (3) Hannah Adaline Russell was born March 10, 1832, in Rabun County, Georgia. She died October 4, 1910, in White County, Georgia. She married J. C. B. Craven. (4) Martha A. Russell was born May 9, 1834, in Rabun County, Georgia. She died April 5, 1861. She married George M. Wood. After her death, he married her sister Amanda. (5) Albert Burton "Bert" Russell was born July 19, 1836, in Rabun County, Georgia. He died October 22, 1915, in Cobb County, Georgia. He married Martha Brown. (6) Arminta Matilda Russell was born April 13, 1838, in Rabun County, Georgia. She died January 14, 1851, in Union (Later Towns) County, Georgia. (7) John Harrison Russell was born October 2, 1839, in Rabun County, Georgia. He died May 15, 1881, in Henry County, Missouri. He married Artemisia "Artie" Bridges. (8) Andrew Doriah "Andy" Russell was born August 26, 1843, in Rabun County, Georgia. He died April 6, 1907, in Towns County, Georgia. He married Nancy Triphenia "Phenia" Stroud. (9) Myrah Louisa Russell was born May 26, 1845, in Rabun County, Georgia. She died February 16, 1893, in Towns County, Georgia. She married Josiah T. Kimsey.

# DONATIONS

*A hearty thanks to the following for recent donations*

**Mary Ann Koos** for a **spinning wheel and reel**  
**Patsy Efrd and Peggy Norton** for 1943, 1944, 1945 bound volumes of The Towns County Herald  
**Bob Cloer** for recent **monetary donation** as well as the **antique Cloer family cookstove**  
**Maggie Oliver** for **1939 bound volume of The Town County Herald**  
**Barry Berrong** for the **Adler reed organ**  
**Roger Dyer** for the old **Hiawassee post office sorting table**  
**Jerry Kennedy** for his great grandmother **Nancy Taylor's loom**  
**H. C. Hoodenpyle family** for the **1956 stage curtain from the old Hiawassee Elementary School** and the **Frank Abernathy advertising mirror**  
**Van Burns** for the **carpentry tools** and **blacksmith tools** of his grandfather, Mr. W. G. Burns  
**Lonnie Nichols** for **assorted items** from the Nichols family  
**Laverne Shook** for a collection of **old songbooks**  
**Violet Brown** for **blanket from original jail**  
**Betty Phillips** for **chairs** from the original Mountain Regional Library  
**Senior Citizens** for the **memory quilts**  
**Betsy Stoinoff** for **display cabinets and lapidary equipment**  
**Enchanted Valley Squares** for the **banners**

## HEARTHSTONES VOL. 2 UPDATE

Jerry Taylor would like to thank everyone for their patience as he continues to prepare Vol. 2 for the publisher. He plans to have the manuscript submitted by the end of May and the books should be available by the fall. This has been a mammoth undertaking, and he appreciates all who have submitted stories for this endeavor.



## Mark Your Calendar

Nancy Cody announces upcoming programs....

March 13 – Heather Barrera will be speaking about the importance of saving seeds, living off the land, and her family's roots in the area.

April 10 – Bill Cody will bring back memories of an earlier era when people took their corn to the mill to be ground into meal for cornbread, and made hominy on an open fire. Bill loves the old-time ways and is trying to keep these two alive. He has a 1940s grist mill where he continues to grind corn for himself and others. He also makes and sells old-time hominy.

May 8 – Dr. Wm. Lanier Nicholson will be speaking on the history of medicine in Towns County as well as sharing stories about his many years as a medical professional in the area.

June 12 - Daren "Bear" Osborn will be speaking about the history of the Osborn Family who were among the earliest settlers of what is now Towns County, Georgia.

# Finding the Forgotten: The African American Families of Towns County

(From the Towns County Herald)

*By Lily Avery*

In honor of Black History Month, the Towns County Historical Society paid tribute to the regions rich culture of black families that once lived in the county and surrounding areas. "Finding the Forgotten: The African American Families of Towns County," was the name of the well-attended program held on Monday, Feb. 13.

More than 100 history enthusiasts from Towns County, Union County and neighboring North Carolina towns Hayesville, Murphy and Franklin gathered together last week to learn about the lesser-known history of black families in Northeast Georgia.

Special guest Annie Lloyd of Hayesville, NC, began the evening with a performance of the "Star-Spangled Banner" before society member Jason Edwards dove into the history he spent months researching, beginning in 1799.

"The black community in Towns County existed until the early 1910s," said Edwards. "It was a vibrant, vital part of the community and went a long way to make us what we are today, even if we don't know that.

"When you do historical research, and I'm guilty of it too, you tend to think of names on papers as just names on papers, but that's not the case. These were real people who lived and loved and worked and died and were missed.

"It just happens that over time this community, with a few notable exceptions and stories passed down, slowly forgot that there used to be a fairly sizeable African American community in Towns County."

According to Edwards, through the act of legislature, the slaves of Ezekiel Hudnall were freed in 1799. These slaves included a family, Bridget Walters and her children. At that time, Hudnall lived in Augusta. Daniel, a son of Hudnall and Bridget, married a white woman named Francis Sexton. During this time, all free blacks had to pay a tax of \$5, which was significantly more than the \$0.25 tax required of white men.

One of Daniel's daughters, Lucinderella, married a man named Newton Coker, who was the son of a black man and a white woman. The couple moved to Towns County in the 1850s.

During the Creek War in 1836, Newt was in South Georgia building cabinets at a fort when the camp was attacked, so, he took up a gun. For the last 30 years of his life, Newt tried unsuccessfully to receive a pension. At the time he picked up the gun, he was not allowed to be in the army and therefore was legally restricted from receiving funds for his service in the war.

"When the Cokers came to Towns County, they had to have a guardian," said Edwards. "Their guardian was S.Y. Jameson. In 1861, Georgia succeeded from the Union and one of the concerns that the state fathers had was what about the freed black people that were around.

"One of the senators proposed a bill that gave free blacks 90 days to get out of the state of Georgia or to pick an owner. Now, you'll notice, Mr. Jameson was in the senate as well and he offered up that Newt Coker and his wife be excluded."

The senate accepted Jameson's proposal, however, the proposed legislation never came to fruition.

Newt later became a well-respected doctor within the community, so much so that he was even allowed to treat white patients throughout the area. Newt died on November 16, 1906. He and his wife were buried at Pleasant Hill.

Edwards went on to share historical accounts of other black families in the region and the interesting lives they once lived, such as the Baltimore and Coffee family. These stories are only a small glimpse into the countless people who resided and thrived in the area until the 1910s.

"I'm often uncomfortable with the language, of saying owner and slave, and often want to water it down," said Edwards. "But I'm concerned that if you water it down, it takes away the sting.

"These were real people that somebody else thought they owned, like you would own a kitchen table. It's bizarre to me and I hope it's not something we ever forget."





By Donna Howell

GALILEO stands for Georgia Library Learning Online, an initiative of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. GALILEO is an online library portal to authoritative, subscription-only information that isn't available through free search engines or Web directories. Participating institutions may access over 100 databases indexing thousands of periodicals and scholarly journals. Over 10,000 journal titles are provided in full-text. Other resources include encyclopedias, business directories, and government publications. Of course, those of most interest to the Historical Society include HeritageQuest Online, Ancestry Library Edition, and the Digital Library of Georgia. For more information, visit the GALILEO page at [www.galileo.usg.edu](http://www.galileo.usg.edu). Just remember that you will only be able to access some of the databases by logging into your PINES account, with a password from your local public library, or inside a GALILEO participating institution – like Mountain Regional Library System. That is why it is so important that the Old Rock Jail Museum has been awarded Book Deposit status from the library system. Visitors to the museum research room will have access to all the GALILEO resources.



## Old Rock Jail Restoration Report

It has been a busy month at the Old Rock Jail. Following the transfer of the building to the Historical Society, we began the process of preparing it to be used as a museum and research center. The first step was to remove as much of the modern interior additions as was practical. This included the removal of a drop ceiling in the downstairs that revealed a wonderfully preserved cement ceiling that has the appearance of wood from the forms used. Behind the sheetrock walls we found the original painted stone walls, and under the carpet was the original tongue-and-groove flooring in fair shape. We have a long way to go, but once the work is complete, the Old Rock Jail will be an asset to both the Historical Society and Towns County in general.



# Reflections on Mountain Life

By Madge Dayton Oswald

My Grandparents were not originally from Towns County. My mom was their oldest child, born in 1918. They originally lived on Bearmeat Road near where Cameron Dayton now lives but beside the road. That house sold in 1978 when my grandmother passed.

My grandfather had a severe hump back and I don't know why, whether by birth or accident. He was like all the other farmers of that time. He had a few head of cattle, a couple of hogs, a corn field, vegetable garden, a smokehouse and a root cellar for cooling and a spring house for keeping the milk.

He built that log home in the early twenties. He cut trees for logs. If you look behind the overgrowth, there are whitish marble rocks that support the porch. He hauled them from Murphy with mules and wagon. The trip was too long to make in a day so he slept under the wagon by the river. Before road improvements, the road to Murphy was narrow and very curvy. It followed the river with just a few feet of space, just enough to pull off a wagon.

I remember my mom telling me the story when we went to Murphy for shoes about 1960. There were large trees and I could imagine the mules and wagon and my grandpa sleeping there.

Anyway, this picture has taken me way back in time. My interesting story follows, if my memory doesn't take a side trip.

My grandfather was a moonshiner. He did not make the product but supplied the materials for another man in the community to make. Of course, they needed a secret place to keep stock. If you go into the barn, in the left corner is a feed room. The barn is built against a rock wall. You will see one rock securely cemented in. That was where they kept the goodies. Last time I was there the trapdoor was still outside the barn. They just backed the truck up, lifted the door and stashed the jars. When my grandfather passed about 1958, my grandmother had the pit filled with dirt and the rock cemented.

Now before anybody starts making harsh judgments, remember they were not selling to aliens or strangers, they were selling to their neighbors. When a hardwork-

ing man needed a pint, there was no ABC store and no Kroger selling beer.

The driveway up to the house was loose gravel. When a vehicle came up, they heard it immediately and could get rid of or hide the stuff. Ed Barnard was sheriff and knew everybody that made and sold liquor. Unless you were blatantly advertising what you were doing, he had a blind eye. If everybody dragged out their family skeletons, you would see that many, many people supplemented their farming income. None of these people were getting rich, just keeping from starving.

Our family has an original receipt from my grandfather's purchase of sugar and copper. He had to go to Murphy for this. I don't know if this was to keep his activities secret or if they were unavailable in Hiawasse.

Another topic, the Lower Hightower School was on that property. There is a flat area to the left of the house. It was a three-room school, outdoor toilets and a pump for water. The big boys split wood in the cloak room. That's what they called it but I only saw it used for wood. If you were lucky enough to sit by the stove, you were toasty but the far corners were cold. No janitor came in early to start a fire. I can hear the windows rattle and feel the wind under the door to this day. Miss Lougene Rice taught grades 1-2. There were never enough reading books for everybody to have the same book and you did not get your own book. Everybody took turns. She had individual students come up and read to her and placed a marker where you stopped. Same for math.

We sat in the old fashioned desks. The seat of one had the desktop of the person behind. If you wiggled, they could not write. We were so crowded before Macedonia opened that we had to sit two to a desk. I had to share with my sister who had polio and wore a leg brace. That thing was cold if she got near me. Of course, we almost entirely wore dresses.

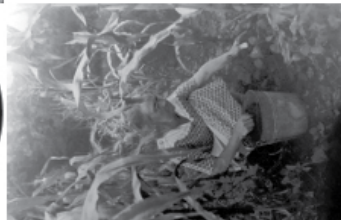
I love Towns County and the people from long ago. My mother was an amazing woman. I could write pages and pages about her inner strength. So many of the mountain women will never have their story told. I tell all my daughters and nieces that they come from "strong mountain women." I am so proud of my heritage.





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

## MARCH MEETING - PROGRAM



The Towns County Historical Society  
Presents

### "Living off the Land"

March 13, 2017  
5:30 PM

Heather Russell Barrera will be speaking about the importance of saving seeds, living off the land, and her family's roots in the area.

We will also have a seed-swap, so bring your heirloom seeds to share.

It's almost planting time!

900 N. Main St. Hiawassee

