



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 the Towns County Civic Center

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President's Message By Tyler Osborn, President



How is the year already halfway over? I hope everyone is having a good summer and staying cool so far! We have been staying busy, busy, busy – but it is all in the goal of preserving our history, culture, and heritage!

In May, the new roof on the Berrong-Oakley House was finally installed! This was nothing short of a learning experience for all of us, but we are proud of how it turned out and can now start seeing glimpses of the final product. Our preservationist, Paul Simo, also came up to our June Meeting and talked about how to use the Dept. of Interior Guidelines for preserving older homes. At the same time the roof was going on, the Historic Presley Post Office was moved from the Courthouse Square to the Pioneer Village at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

June was a crazy month as it seemed we had a lot going on. The biggest was our Swappin' Stories digitization event. There will be more details on that inside the edition, but I will go ahead and tell you it was a huge success and preserving history of our county for the future generations! We were also at the Made in Georgia Festival the same week as the digitization event, selling burger and hotdog plates to raise money for the BOH restoration. Thanks to an anonymous donor who donated to cover the supplies needed, we started off the event already 'in the green' and raised \$1,800 over the 2 days!

The courthouse has also moved back home following the renovations. We commend Commissioner Bradshaw for being the first Commissioner in our county's history to save a courthouse rather than tear it down and replace it – we know future generations will thank him too. We will soon be moving back to our regular meeting room at the Old Rec Center. We are also working with him to find a suitable space to host the historic archives in our possession and be able to re-open the Old Rock Jail, hopefully by next Spring.

The past few months would not have been possible without our amazing members and volunteers! We could not achieve our goals without you and know that we appreciate everything you do for the society!

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County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian



Mary Ann Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

Berrong-Oakley House Update

by Tyler Osborn



We have a roof! This was a learning curve for us, but the end result was worth it! We want to give a special thanks to the City of Hiawassee for supporting this part of the project! It took a crew of 10 approximately two full days working sunup to sundown to complete the roof. Even better, we were blessed that the majority of the original decking showed no signs of rot, only a small portion on the porch had to be repaired. The new roof cover has a high-quality ice and water shield between the decking and shingles that will continue to protect it, as well as high quality shingles that mimic a slate roof, appropriate for the time period the house was built since we do not know what was originally there.

The next steps of the restoration will be the exterior of the house. We will need to work on repairing some of the trim and siding that has become damaged over the years due to the overgrowth and lack of water control on the house.

Once this is done, we can install gutters to control the water and move it away from the house. Then we will move on to the window and porch repairs.

At the time of this writing, we have raised just over \$55K of our \$200K goal! Keep in mind, we have only been fundraising for a year and already a ¼ of the way there, which is a huge accomplishment on our part! We want to thank everyone who has donated and helped spread the word of the great work we are doing to preserve and save this piece of our local history.

Just as a reminder, if you are interested in donating towards the restoration, you can do so at www.bit.ly/berrongoakley. Naming opportunities start at \$250 and are available at www.bit.ly/bohnaming. You can also mail a donation to PO Box 1182, Hiawassee, GA 30546.



Dr. Charles Nicholson
Honored as
Lake Chatuge Rotary Club
Citizen of the Year

Preserving History: Towns County's First Traveling Post Office

by Tyler Osborn & Jerry Taylor



In the archives of Towns County history, few landmarks encapsulate the spirit of community resilience quite like the Presley Post Office. Not so long ago, Towns County had small communities that had their own post office. One of these communities was just on the outskirts of Hiawassee. This is the story of that post office, who manned it, and how the community has come together multiple times to save this small post office for future generations!

The story of the Presley Post Office began over a century ago when William J. Presley assumed the position of postmaster on June 20th, 1899. Housed initially within the confines of Presley's residence, the post office would next move to the Adams' Family store, a cornerstone of the community situated at the intersection of State Road 75 and Streak Hill Road. The Adams' family house still stands here today. Cecil Adams became Postmaster on February 27, 1932. following his brother Chelsie, who, following the death of their father Allen, became acting postmaster on May 9th, 1928, and finally postmaster on May 28th, 1928. When Cecil became postmaster, he was uninterested in running a store with the post office, so he constructed a small one-room post office building in 1932. Through the stewardship of the Adams family, the post office flourished, becoming an integral part of the community's fabric. However, economic shifts and administrative decisions saw its closure during the Eisenhower administration, and, on October 31st, 1960, mail services were transferred to Hiawassee.

Yet, the spirit of the Presley Post Office refused to fade into obscurity. Sometime after the consolidation of rural post offices into the Hiawassee Post Office, the building was moved to the property of Minnie Woods on Cynths Creek Road. Again, it was moved close by to the property of Mr. Clayton Brooks of Atlanta on Cynths Creek Road to be restored; however, it sat here for decades, becoming entangled in brush and vines

and almost lost to time. In a tale of grassroots activism, community advocates rallied to its defense when the threat of demolition loomed large in 2010 due to the plans to widen the Cynths Creek Bridge. Led by figures like Allen Saylor, Dan Simpson, Herman & Harry Woods, former Commissioner Bill Kendall, and other community members preservation efforts gained momentum, culminating in the post office's relocation to the courthouse precinct. It was moved again to 'the island' where it stood beside the courthouse for fourteen years and was completely restored to its original 1932 appearance. In fact, the historical society would even use the building as part of their Halloween festivities during "Trick-or-Treat" on the square and open it up for tours when they were giving tours at the Old Rock Jail.

Over the next fourteen years, the post office stood as a testament to resilience, its walls echoing with tales of bygone eras. However, as Towns County grew, the need for space around the courthouse became apparent. In a collaborative effort of Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, the Towns County Historical Society, and the Georgia Mountain Fair led to the decision to move the historic building to the Pioneer Village.

Now located within the Georgia Mountain Fair, the Presley Post Office stands as a living testament to the strong spirit of preservation. With its doors ready to be opened to visitors from far and wide, it offers a glimpse into a bygone era, reminding all who pass through of the rich tapestry of Towns County's heritage.

As we reflect on its storied journey, spanning five locations over 92 years, the Presley Post Office emerges as a symbol of resilience and community solidarity. To the tireless efforts of Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Towns County Road Department, BRMEMC, and the Georgia Mountain Fair, we extend our deepest gratitude for ensuring that this historic landmark continues to inspire and educate for generations to come. As the 2024 Georgia Mountain Fair is around the corner, we invite everyone to pay homage to this cherished relic of our past, standing tall amidst the landscape of our collective memory.



Swappin' Stories Digitization Event

by Tyler Osborn

The Swappin' Stories - Digitization Event was a HUGE success! I will be completely honest, it was one of those things I knew we needed to do, but I was unsure of how we would ever accomplish it, but then again, God has a way of making things happen!

Last December, I ran into Lindsey Walker, and we were talking about the society and she asked if there was a way to access our archives - either online or a location - for a project she was working on. I explained that the majority of what we have is not digitized and we do not have a research center, although it is a dream of ours to one day have. Several months later, I receive a phone call from Lindsey that she & Presley Dyer had met Dr. Leah Panther, Mercer University, at a conference while giving a talk on Appalachian culture. Although Lindsey's nametag had Texas Woman's University on it, she explained she was from North Georgia and Dr. Panther told her she had been looking for a group to work with in the Appalachian Communities to learn more about the history and culture of the region, along with a group she leads called the Linguistics Justice Collaborative. With Presley Dyer being a librarian at Georgia Tech, they brought in Kerri Abernathy, a teacher at Towns County Schools, Kim Eccles, Director of Swilley Graduate & Professional Library, Caitlin Hochuli, Learning & Outreach Specialists at the Science Gallery - Atlanta, Dr. Tamra Livingston, Executive Director of Museums, Archives, & Rare Books at Kennesaw State University. And as they say, the rest is history.

The materials scanned were from the private collections of our community members and will be used for preservation for future generations, public education (such as society meetings), and school curriculum education. In fact, Kerri and Dr. Panther worked to fit the material collected where it will meet the state's education requirements while still teaching students in our local school system about local history!

Over the course of the 4 days of research, 2 days were spent for public digitization (for a total of 12 hours) and 2 days of local research, site visits, and oral interviews. Overall, 25 community members participated in the event, providing items for historical documentation via digitization, audio, or video recording.

Of the items digitized 21 was photos, 445 was documents, and 2 items were donated directly to the society. There were also 18 oral histories, 10 folklore stories, and 30 community stories (relating to physical locations) recorded during the event. Of this, multiple never before seen photographs of people, locations, and documents thought to be lost to time were rediscovered.

After everything is finalized, a copy will be kept within our archives and a copy will be placed on the Kennesaw State University server for safe keeping, as well as allow the public to access for research and education.

If you missed out on this event, the group is already wanting to do another event next summer, so be sure to watch for that info...this is only just the beginning!

A special thanks to those who supported the project: Volunteers of the Towns County Historical Society & Linguistic Justice Collaborative, Mercer University, McConnell Memorial Baptist Church, Kennesaw State University, Mountain Graphics, Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce.



Crash of the UC-64 Norseman

by Bruce Roberts

On a cold morning in January 2018, I decided to climb the mountain behind our house and hike along the High Ridge of the western side of the Southern Nantahala Wilderness Area. After a long climb, nearing the top of the mountain, I noticed a couple of pieces of sheet metal half covered in the leaves. Looking around, I spied a large metal frame above me on the slope. Climbing up for a closer look, I found a rusted structure made from welded tubing, in more or less a long tapered rectangular shape, just over 30 feet long.



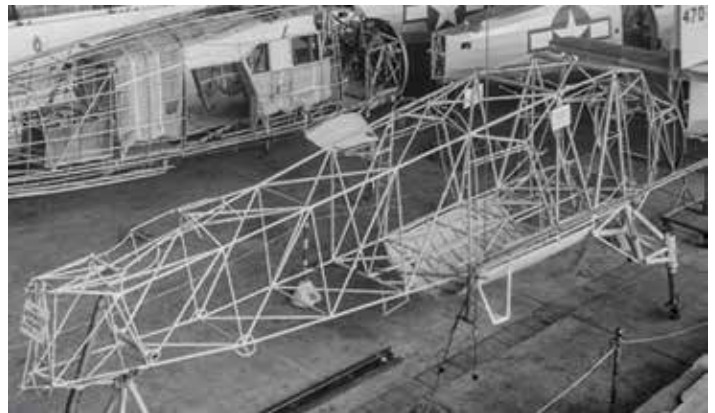
Structure of welded tubing

At first I could not imagine what it might be. All that came to mind was an old radio or communications tower, but this wasn't at the high point of a mountain. Perhaps it had been in the process of being moved by a helicopter and the cables had broken? I had no idea. After looking around some more and photographing the wreckage, I soon got on with my hike.

That evening, I posted a few photos online, and some friends made a few suggestions. Then one of my old co-workers said "Probably not, but it looks almost like the frame of a WWII glider that we saw in Europe." Well, I worked at Lockheed for 35 years, but it never crossed my mind that this might be an aircraft. Modern planes aren't built of welded tubes, and their structure looks nothing like what I had seen. But I got searching the internet, and this frame started looking more and more like a 1930s era aircraft. Reviewing my photos, a windshield frame and cockpit were recognizable, as well as the wing strut attach points and other structural components.

Posting the photos in some online aviation groups, the aircraft was soon identified as a Canadian-built Noorduyn UC-64 Norseman, the same aircraft that bandleader Glenn Miller disappeared in while flying over the English Channel in December 1944. A single-engine bush plane first introduced in 1935, the Norseman remained in production for almost 25 years, with over 900 made, 749 of them ordered by the US military for use during WWII.

The Norseman was a high-wing braced monoplane with an all-welded steel tubing fuselage. Attached wood stringers carried a fabric skin, although the aircraft was aluminum-clad from the cockpit forward and along the belly. Its



UC-64 Fuselage frame at Noorduyn factory

wing edges, with steel tubing flaps and ailerons. The landing gear were fitted to fuselage stubs; the tail strut could be fitted with a wheel or tail skid. By the time I found the plane, there were no remains of any skin fabric or wood, except for a tiny piece of wood remaining at the tail.

I started searching civil and military air records for some record of the crash, but couldn't find anything. The crash was pre-FAA, so the CAB (Civilian Aeronautics Board) had responsibility for aircraft accident investigations, but there was no record of this incident. I reviewed available issues of the weekly Towns County Herald, archived at the Towns Co. courthouse and Young Harris College, from the late 1940s to mid 1950s, but found no mentions of the crash. Noorduyn kept a history of every ship by serial number, but unfortunately those records weren't maintained for former USAF aircraft once they were surplus to civilian entities after the war.



UC-64 Norseman

In early 2018, I briefly spoke about the crash at one of our TCHS meetings. That brought a few recollections to light. But all of the information gathered was either from local folks who had heard about the crash, or from those that heard details from relatives or another third party. I have not come across anyone who personally witnessed or was old enough to clearly remember the events well enough to provide important details. Several folks who may have been able to provide information have passed on in recent years.

There are conflicting details in the various stories that I've been told, including date of the incident, aircraft ownership, fate of the pilot(s), etc. Following are examples of what I've been told:

"Sometime in the early 1950s, T.J. Crane, who lived off Bell Creek, heard an airplane crash up on the nearby mountain. He told folks, but no one else had heard anything, and no action was taken. Sometime later, word arrived about a missing aircraft. Two men were in town investigating; they were put in touch with Mr. Crane, who led them up the mountain, where they eventually located the crash. The pilot was found dead in the aircraft. Sometime later, R.L. Anderson, a logger from nearby Shooting Creek (later of Scataway Rd), traveled up the mountain with horses and a logging sled to salvage the engine (and possibly other major components which are no longer at the crash site)."

Two folks I spoke with maintain that the crash occurred in the late '40s. Another, also living off Bell Creek, was born in 1949, and stated that it happened when he was a young boy of about 7, placing the date in the mid '50s.

I have heard three different versions of the pilot's fate - 1) as stated above, the pilot (or 2 pilots in another recollection) was killed in the crash; 2) Jimmy Davenport stated that a rumor at the time was that the pilot had ejected from the aircraft and survived; 3) per Dion Eller, Ed Berrong was told by the Andersons that two men had survived the crash and made their way down Bell Creek to safety. This version of the story was essentially corroborated by Morris Phillips, who also recalled the date as being in the late 1940s. I can't remember if Morris mentioned two men or just the one pilot.

I talked with one fellow who had visited the site sometime in the late '50s/early '60s; at that time you could still drive part way up to the site from the NC side. At the time of his visit, the aircraft was half burned, but much of the wood & fabric remained, although in deteriorating condition. The salvage operation previously mentioned had already occurred. It was unknown if the fire was from the crash or a later forest fire in the area. He said that at one time, a couple of smaller components from the plane had been salvaged and were at a former auto garage on Old 64 in Shooting Creek. I also spoke with R.L. Anderson's son, but he couldn't recall anything beyond what I had already learned.

Morris Phillips told us that the previously mentioned salvaged engine was stored for years at the old Hiawassee High School. I sure would like to know what happened to it! That engine could help identify the aircraft. Serial number tags were placed in only a few locations on these planes, including the engine and cockpit firewall.

I made four more visits to the crash site that winter, hoping to find any parts that might ID this particular aircraft. Finding a copy of the aircraft Parts Catalog online was a tremendous help in identifying the various pieces buried around the site. Besides the fuselage frame, few major components of the aircraft remain. One wing must have been salvaged, because I only found the metal wing trusses from one side. The frame of the vertical stabilizer (tail) is still there, but no landing gear, wing struts, firewall, cockpit panels or other large pieces.



Vertical Stabilizer frame, with page from the Parts Catalog

I thought I might be onto something when I found the aircraft's main fire extinguisher bottle. These are serialized, and have service dates stamped onto the cylinder. But a serial number doesn't help without having the ship's records, and it's unknown if the dates on the bottle are of "last service" or "next service due".



Pilot's seat

I have found and photographically documented a great number of components from this aircraft, but am still no closer to identifying such details as who owned the plane, exactly when the incident occurred, exactly what happened, etc. I'm still amazed that there seems to be no written record of the incident, in either aviation records or the local newspaper. After all, it's not like an airplane crash is an everyday occurrence in our community! The incident has been discussed several times at TCHS meetings, but no new information has turned up. I'm hoping that maybe this article might stir up something new, before the last folks with a first-hand memory of the crash are gone.

The newsletter format prevents showing more than a few photos. For anyone interested in additional photos (lots of them!) and information from the crash site, you can visit my website pages at: <https://www.be-roberts.com/se/snant/nors-index.htm> (Due to formatting, the website is best viewed on a large screen instead of a phone.)



Towns County Historical Society
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DONATIONS

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

Lake Chatuge Rotary Club

*Berrong-Oakley House
Front Garden Naming*

Jerry Taylor

*In Memory of Carrie Phillips and Ruby
Rhinehardt*

Anonymous

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