



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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900 North Main St.
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The Historical Society Has Grown By Leaps and Bounds

by Sandra Green, President



2018 OFFICERS

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Vice President

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Mary Ann McCall Miller
Membership Secretary

HISTORIANS

Jerry A. Taylor
County Historian

Jason Lee Edwards
Deputy Historian

Mary Ann McCall Miller
Webmaster/Graphic Designer

The last half of 2018 had lots of great monthly programs! It started in July with the annual program honoring our veterans. Betty Phillips did a wonderful job putting that together as she always does. It is the only program that is not on the second Monday of the month. Lunch was provided, as well as guest speakers, and certificates to all veterans. This was all planned and paid for by Betty. She was assisted by members of her sorority, members of the Friendship Baptist Church youth group and others. She's already planning for 2019!

In August we had a float in the Georgia Mountain Fair parade for the first time. Membership Secretary Mary Ann Miller designed and ordered all the materials for the float. Dr. & Mrs. Lanier Nicholson provided the trailer on which it was built. Mark Nicholson donated the lumber and built the frame. It was assembled with much blood, sweat, and laughter by the officers and other volunteers! Roger Dyer, Polly Royster, and Jerry Taylor (while playing a pump organ), dressed in old timey costumes, rode on the float. Scott Royster, with his big hemi truck, pulled the float! We hope this is the beginning of many years being in the GMF parade.

The Historical Society had an exhibit, created by Betty Phillips, at the Georgia Mountain Fair. Thanks to her, we won a \$50 blue ribbon! She set up the same exhibit at the Fall Festival in October for another prize & ribbon!

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The Historical Society Has Grown By Leaps and Bounds (continued from pg. 1)



The program for August drew the biggest crowd yet for the Historical Society. "My Roots in Tate City" featured Ralph Nichols telling about his childhood visits to his grandparents who lived in that isolated part of Towns County. Our monthly program for September was "Tales of Old Young Harris" featuring County Historian Jerry Taylor talking about the history of that part of the county.

In October Roger Dyer and Daren "Bear" Osborn told us about the History of Macedonia Baptist Church. The program featured a power point presentation with many historic photos of the church.

The first season of the Old Rock Jail Museum was a success. We had over 400 visitors sign the guest book by the time we closed for the year. That included all those from our grand opening in April through when we closed for the season at the end of October. Thanks to all who volunteered to host and give tours of the jail. Those that volunteered their time include Doug Nicholson, Joan Crothers, Dr. and Mrs. Lanier Nicholson, Vicki Kimball, Winston Farmer, Nancy Cody, Annette Cook, Laverne Shook, Margaret Shook, Roger Dyer and others.

We closed the ORJ Museum with a bang. We had a free Haunted Jail event in conjunction with the trick or treat on the square sponsored by the City of Hiawassee. Nancy Cody & Mary Ann Miller were in charge of the decorating and costumes. It was so successful that we finally had to close the doors while we still had people waiting to get in! Thanks to Roger Dyer, Nancy Cody, Annette Cook, Scott & Polly Royster and son, Lisa Taylor, Tyler and Darren Osborn, Mary Ann Miller and others for participating!

November featured County Historian Jerry Taylor telling us of the "Life and Times of the Hiawassee Academy." The academy was established in 1887 and existed until 1930 when it was replaced by Towns County High School. Jerry did the program while dressed as and from the point of view of F. C. "Ferd" McConnell who was one of the founders of Hiawassee Academy!

In December we closed out the year with a repeat visit by Ralph Nichols. Only this time he brought along his band to sing and play for us. We had a wonderful evening of traditional gospel as well as sing along Christmas carols with a little Blue Christmas thrown in! John Cochran joined Ralph and the band for a couple of songs. We had wonderful refreshments provided by members after the program. What better way to finish 2018 than with fellowship and food.

As you can tell, we have been busy at the Historical Society. Thanks to everyone that has made 2018 such an exciting year. I hope you'll continue to come and join us in bringing Towns County History to life!

Research Center

By Jason Lee Edwards, Deputy County Historian



Since taking over stewardship of the Old Rock Jail, we have intended that part of the space be a research center where those who are researching their families and the history of the area can have access to all of our records in one place. The first phase was to transform the Old Rock Jail into a museum space, and, through the hard work of many, that has become a reality. The next phase will be to focus on the research center, and I am happy to report that planning has begun in earnest. It may come as a surprise to learn that the historical society already has many records in its care. Thanks to a gift from the Mountain Regional Library, we have virtually all of the pre-1900 records of Towns, Union, and Fannin Counties on microfilm. We also have many original tax records and miscellaneous court records that have never been microfilmed. The research center will also feature computers so that we can access online databases such as Ancestry and Galileo. Among the records that might be the most useful to researchers are:

Tax Records – The largest collection of original records that we have in our collection are the tax records for Towns County from about 1865 to 1940, with some gaps. We also have tax records of Union County on microfilm from 1849, 1850, 1851, and 1855. These records include what became Towns County in 1856. Essentially, the books are organized by year and militia district and contain lists of property owners, how many acres they owned, and the numbers of the land lots. Some have other information including how many dogs each person had. They also list all of the men between twenty-one and sixty-five who had to pay a poll tax. These records are invaluable for locating your ancestor in a specific militia district and starting you on your journey into other relevant records.

Microfilm County Records – While we have many records for Union and Fannin Counties, I will focus on those from Towns. In this collection, we have all of the deeds from before 1900, marriages before 1900, estate records through the early 1900s, birth and death registers before 1950, Confederate pension applications, and many other miscellaneous records. These are the types of records that allow a person to flesh out their ancestors. In them, you can learn where exactly they lived, what they owned, when they died, details about their service history, and much more.

Newspapers – The Towns County Herald was started in 1928, and we have microfilm copies of most of the years between 1928 and 1970, with some gaps. We also have many original papers, especially from the 1970s to the 2000s. We also have, either in original or copies, several issues of pre 1928 papers for Hiawassee and Young Harris. These newspapers can give insight into the daily lives of our ancestors as well as providing birth announcements, wedding announcements, and obituaries.

These are just a few of the types of records that we hold in



our collection. As we progress in the planning stages, we will create a proper catalogue of what we have on hand and what can be accessed through internet databases. I look forward to sharing the progress with you as we make the dream of a research center a reality.

The Tate in Tate City By Jerry A. Taylor, County Historian

You may remember Mr. Ralph Nichols' recent interesting program about growing up in Tate City, but have you ever wondered who the Tate was in Tate City?

A little research reveals that he was Henry Connor "Hal" Tate who was born October 8, 1854, in Memphis, Tennessee, to Samuel Tate and Mary Augusta Carnes. His father, Samuel Tate, was the founder and president of the old Memphis & Charleston Railroad, the first line that entered Memphis.

Hal Tate was married to Byrd "Birdie" Warder on April 10, 1894, in Chicago, Illinois. She was born to William H. Warder and Mary Johnston on August 30, 1870, in Chicago. She graduated from the Cook county Normal School in Chicago and taught school for many years. Together, they traveled to the mountains of Towns County, Georgia, where he established a corundum mining operation that operated for several years. In a history of the Warder family, written in the 1920s, Birdie recalled that she often accompanied her husband "while superintending his construction work, sharing his life in camp on the outskirts of civilization, the novelty and adventure of which she greatly enjoyed."



*Henry Connor Tate
(1854-1920)
Elmwood Cemetery
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee*

By 1910, Hal and Birdie Tate had moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where he was engaged as a Railroad Contractor. By 1920, he had returned to Memphis, Tennessee, where he was a well known Railroad construction man and gravel contractor and Birdie was a school teacher. Hal Tate died November 30, 1920, in Memphis. Birdie Warder Tate died there on March 12, 1936. They had no children and are buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Memphis, Tennessee.

Residents of Tate City from the 1900 Census

Tate, Howell C. & Byrd	mining superintendent	King, Augustus	carpenter
Tate, Warder Frederic	bookkeeper	Hogsed, George	carpenter
Hogsed, Julia	keeping boarding house	McClour, Elmer	carpenter
Hogsed, Ada	school teacher	Edwards, Jenkins	laborer
Hyatt, Mount	railroad engineer	Singleton, Benjamin	laborer
Fain, Simpson	blacksmith	Singleton, Bascombe	laborer
Burch, Martine	sawmill engineer	Willis, Franklin	laborer
Justice, Curtis	sawmill engineer	Abernathy, Clayton	laborer
Welch, Frank	Supt. of Livery Stable	Kinsland, Cash	laborer
Swangum, Joseph	teamster	Mills, Samuel	laborer
Newton, John	teamster	Rudeseal, Ira	laborer
Smith, Hardy	teamster	King, Polk	laborer
Stalcup, Jesse B.	machinist	Whitmire, Charley	farm laborer
Edwards, Benjamin	carpenter	Gordon, Thomas	farm laborer
Gibson, Samuel	carpenter		

The Fourth Annual “Heritage Day and Honoring all Military by Betty Phillips

The fourth annual “Heritage Day and Honoring all Military Veterans “ was held on Saturday, July 14, 2018 at 11:00 pm. This ceremony was founded by secretary, Betty Phillips and her late husband Dr. Richard A. Schmidtke to honor all veterans who served their country. Betty is the daughter of a WWII Army veteran and widow of a WWII Army veteran (Special Engineer Detachment) Los Almos, N.M.

Sandra Green, President opened the ceremony and welcomed everyone. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by the National Anthem sung by Karli Cheeks (granddaughter of Vice President, Nancy Cody) and Doug Nicholson gave the invocation. Towns County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales expressed their gratitude to the veterans and their families. Commissioner Bradshaw stated his father-in-law was killed in Vietnam therefore his wife never knew her dad and now he has a son stationed at the Ft. Benning Army Base Columbus, Ga.

Before introducing the speakers, I (Betty) stated that I had visited the Towns County Veterans Park and counted over 1300 names. Those veterans who paid the ultimate price have their own monument, picture and plaque. (World War I - 8, WWII-13)

The guest speakers were WWII veterans -James Richard (Dick) Lewis 96, and Fronz Goring, 97. Mr. Lewis reminisced of his childhood and his love for aeronautics. He served as a naval mechanic during WWII and re-enlisted and served in the U.S. Air Force during Korean War. He stated he had served under four Commanders-in-

Chiefs: President F.D. Roosevelt, Harry Thurman, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon. “ If the current Commander-in-Chief asked me to join the fight, I’d carry it to the gates of hell for him.” Lewis stated.



WWII Veteran Fronz Goring

Towns County’s oldest WWII Army veteran, Fronz Goring recalled how he met his wife, Mason L. Goring, who was serving in the military. They met on Thanksgiving Day in 1945, married January 13, 1946 and spent 61 years together. Her name was placed on the local veteran’s wall in 2006. Fronz joked, “Right now I’m stationed at Brass-town Manor Resort.

A video clip from Channel 46 was shown of U.S Marine Zell Bryan Miller’s funeral at Young Harris College March 26, 2018 which included WWII Navy Veteran Bud Johnson.

All veterans in attendance were recognized and given a certificate of appreciation by the Friendship Baptist Young Group under the leadership of Megan Phillips Eyrich. Alpha Delta Kappa Sorority (Beta Delta) sisters helped with the sack lunches and made sure everyone received a Chic-Fil-A sandwich, Chips, Cookies and a soft drink or water. Betty expressed her appreciation on behalf of the Historical Executive Board to the the Alpha Delta Kappa sisters, Friendship Youth Group, and others for helping make the Heritage Day for honoring our true heroes (those who paid the ultimate price)and veterans who have served or still serving our country a success. Next year’s date Saturday July 19, 2019.



*WWII Veteran
Richard “Dick” Lewis*



WWII Veteran Fronz Goring, Megan P. Eyrich, Emily Phillips, WWII veteran Dick Lewis, Brooke and Brie Chastain, Megan, Heather, Nathan and Pastor Chad Plemmons.

Hiawassee Academy Presentation

(Taken from Mark Smith's article for the Towns County Herald)



Hiawassee Academy 1905

Jerry Taylor presented the story of Hiawassee Academy at the Historical Society's November meeting.

For his presentation, Taylor dressed in the garb of the day and delivered a first-person accounting of Rev. Fernando Coello McConnell, who founded Hiawassee Academy in 1887.

Known as "Ferd" to his friends, Rev. McConnell was a legend to the mountain folks, a favorite son. He loved the place of his roots, and the people loved him.

His memory is carried on throughout regionally with the namesake McConnell Memorial Baptist church in Hiawassee and the Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, among other locations across the country.

After graduating from the Hicks Academy in Hayesville, NC, McConnell went on to attend and graduate from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Kentucky, and Mercer University in Georgia.

McConnell conceived of Hiawassee Academy and classes began in the spring of 1887 under the sponsorship of the Baptist denomination.

Joining him in the endeavor, George W. Truett assumed charge of the school at just 19 years of age, as the first principal. The leadership of the early period of the school consisted of such renowned Mercer graduates as George W. Truett, T. W. Kelley, John G. Harrison, Y. W. Jones and A. B. Greene.

Classes met in the Towns County Courthouse, which at the time stood on the square, and in the old Masonic Lodge, which stood on what is now Mr. J. L. Hooper Jr.'s residential lot, until a building could be erected. Classes also began meeting in the old Baptist Church in order to accommodate the expanding enrollment.

Though Rev. McConnell pastored other churches around the country most of the time, he returned every summer to Hiawassee to conduct a Bible Institute for preachers and laymen, and to check up on the Hiawassee Academy.

In his report on Christian Education to the Georgia Baptist Convention meeting in 1888, Rev. McConnell called on Truett to speak about his work at the Hiawassee Academy. The response was overwhelmingly positive and immediate, and a great amount of financial support was given and more pledged, assuring the future of Hiawassee Academy.

Over the next few decades, Hiawassee Academy grew dramatically in both enrollment and stature and became a junior college.

Rev. McConnell's connectedness in the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, and always having the best interest of Hiawassee and Hiawassee Academy, resulted in the Home Mission Board assuming control of the school in 1922.

And all went well until August 1928, when it was discovered that the treasurer of the Home Mission Board, Clinton S. Starnes, had embezzled over \$900,000 from the treasury.

The loss of so much money broke the back of the Home Mission Board, which controlled several schools, including Hiawassee Academy. It also broke the heart of Rev. McConnell, and he passed away about four months later.

The result of the disaster was that the Home Mission Board had to close the mountain mission schools, and the last students to graduate from the Hiawassee Academy belonged to the Class of 1930.

Rev. Alexander Carswell negotiated the sale of the academy and property to Towns County Board of Education, and it has been Towns County High School, a public school, ever since.



Hiawassee Junior College 1922

Leather Britches Recipe by Nancy Cody

Wash and drain a batch of firm green beans. Remove ends and strings. Using a large darning needle with heavy white thread, push needle through the pod near the middle, pushing each along the thread so they are about 1 inch apart. Fill thread from knot to needle. Hang up the string beans by one end in a warm, well ventilated place to dry, but not in direct sunlight. Let them remain hanging until the beans become dry. They will shrivel and change color. When they get dry, store in a paper bag until ready to use.

To cook leather britches beans as the pioneers did, cover with water and soak overnight. Drain, then add fresh water and parboil slowly for 30 minutes. Drain Again. Add fresh water and cook slowly with a ham hock or salt pork until tender. If salt pork is not used, add salt to taste.



DONATIONS

JULY - DECEMBER

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

Joseph and Elizabeth Ruf

Old Rock Jail

Joy and Tom Lockman

Old Rock Jail

Norma Jean Stewart

*In Honor of
Bob Stewart*

Jerry Taylor

*In Memory of
Ronnie Clampitt*

Ann and Frank Ababessa

In Memory of Richard Schmihdtke

Linda and Ervin Chastain

*In Memory of
Jay Chastain*

Winston and Diris Farmer

Old Rock Jail

Scott and Shirley Drummond

Old Rock Jail





Towns County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1182
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TOWNS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
presents

TOWNS COUNTY PLACE NAMES PART II

BY JERRY TAYLOR

A collage of historical images arranged in a shape resembling the state of Georgia. The collage includes various scenes: a river with a bridge, a large building, a group of people, a landscape with mountains, and several individual portraits of men and women in historical attire.

February 11, 2019 5:30 pm

900 North Main Street
Hiawassee, Georgia