



Towns County Historical Society
Keeping Towns County History Alive

ANNUAL REPORT

Preserving the past, engaging the present, and building a legacy for the future of Towns County.

2025



Reporting on activities and accomplishments from calendar year 2025

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members and Friends,

As I reflect on the past year, I am reminded of how much can be accomplished when a community works together to preserve and share its history. In 2025, the Towns County Historical Society continued its mission through programs, exhibits, and events that connected people with our county's rich heritage. From welcoming visitors at the Presley Post Office to expanding and organizing our archival collections, each effort was made possible through your continued support and dedication.

This year, the Society focused on four major priorities, all of which were successfully completed. First, we undertook the work necessary to reopen the Old Rock Jail in time for its 90th anniversary next year, including the renovation of an archive room to better protect and share historical materials. Second, we completed improvements to enhance the safety and usability of the Presley Post Office for both visitors and volunteers. Third, we continued our Swappin' Stories project to collect oral histories of our county and its people. Finally, we continued steady progress on the restoration of the Berrong-Oakley House. Thanks to the generosity of our members, volunteers, and community partners, meaningful progress was made on each of these projects. Additional details are outlined later in this report.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without your involvement. Whether you volunteered your time, provided financial support, or helped share our stories within the community, your contributions strengthen the work of the Society. Together, we are ensuring that the history and traditions of Towns County are preserved and remain relevant for future generations.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for your continued support. I look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

With gratitude,



Tyler Osborn, President
Towns County Historical Society



OUR MISSION & VALUES

MISSION: The mission of the Society is to protect, preserve, and promote the Appalachian and Native American history, heritage, and culture of Towns County, Georgia, and the surrounding region through education, preservation, and community engagement.

VALUES: The Society is committed to preservation by safeguarding historic buildings, sites, documents, artifacts, and cultural resources that reflect the heritage of Towns County and the surrounding Appalachian region. We value education and believe in making history accessible through programs, events, exhibits, and publications that inform and engage the public. We practice responsible stewardship by carefully collecting, organizing, and maintaining historical materials and archives to ensure their long-term protection and availability for research. Community engagement is central to our work, and we value partnerships and public participation that strengthen awareness, appreciation, and pride in local history and culture. We also uphold a deep respect for cultural heritage, honoring the Appalachian and Native American histories that have shaped the region and preserving them with care, accuracy, and integrity.

VISION: We envision a community where the history and culture of Towns County are understood, valued, and preserved for future generations, and where residents and visitors alike are engaged with the stories, places, and traditions that shape our region.

2025 RESULTS & METRICS

These efforts expanded public access to local history while preserving key cultural resources for future generations.

MEMBERS: **98**

PROGRAMS PRESENTED: **27**

TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS DONATED: **1,811**

AVERAGE PROGRAM ATTENDANCE: **75**

ITEMS DIGITIZED: **115**

ORAL HISTORIES RECORDED: **15**

TO DATE BERRONG-OAKLEY RESTORATION FUNDS RAISED: **\$80,000**

SITES ACTIVELY MAINTAINED: **3**



PROGRAMS

This year, we implemented a diverse array of programs centered on our local history and its preservation. These initiatives garnered significant interest, with an average attendance of 70 members and community participants. Furthermore, we extended our outreach by presenting these programs beyond our society, engaging with local groups and organizations in the community. These programs increased public awareness of Towns County history and helped connect residents with primary sources, oral histories, and preservation efforts.

- Shirley Miller – Memories of Living & Working in Towns County
- Exploring our Local Mining History: Part 2 – Everything but Gold
- Towns County History in Stitches
- History of the Georgia Mountain Fair
- Men to Match the Mountains
- Sons of the American Revolution – The Traveling Trunk
- Benjamin Taylor: Towns County's Poet, Historian, Humorist, & Commentator
- History of Bald Mountain Park
- We Remember Them: Remembering the Veterans from Towns County who Lost Their Lives in Service
- An Appalachian Christmas



VOLUNTEER REPORT

Volunteers remain at the heart of the Towns County Historical Society's work. In 2025, community members contributed their time and talents as hosts, researchers, archivists, and groundskeepers at our sites. From welcoming guests to assisting with preservation projects and fundraising events, their service made it possible to protect and share the rich history of Towns County. The dedication of our volunteers ensures that our programs, exhibits, and restoration projects continue to thrive.

- Hosting the 3rd Annual NE GA Historical Societies & Museums Meeting
- Swappin' Stories
- Fundraising Projects
- Hosting Presley Post Office
- Booths at Georgia Mountain Fair
- Letters to Santa @ Presley Post Office & Old Schoolhouse
- Preservation & Maintenance of Sites
- Meeting Preparation & Execution
- External Programs & Attendance

TOTAL HOURS DONATED: 1,811



BERRONG-OAKLEY HOUSE

Work is progressing on the Berrong-Oakley House. This year, our focus shifted to securing a project manager to oversee and begin the restorations of the historic home. Mr. Cary Sellers of the Atlanta area has been hired to oversee and begin work on the project. Mr. Sellers has an extensive background in home construction as well as historic home restoration. In partnership with the MBRA, the restoration work officially began in October and is steadily moving forward. We are planning for the **exterior restorations** to be completed by the end of 2026. We have successfully raised **\$80,000** through community donations and support for this project.

Once complete, the Berrong-Oakley House will serve as a community gathering space, education site, and cornerstone for heritage tourism in Hiawassee and Towns County.

For more information on this project and to donate, please visit townscountyhistory.org/boh.



PRESLEY POST OFFICE

Our cherished Presley Post Office, the society's inaugural restoration project, has enjoyed another bustling year at the fair. In honor of the fair's 75th anniversary, we dedicated some much-needed care to the building to preserve its exterior while enhancing accessibility and safety for our guests and volunteers. Several pieces of siding were replaced, and a fresh coat of paint was applied to protect the surface. Additionally, a new stairway with handrails and a landing was added to improve visitor safety. These efforts ensure that the Post Office remains a welcoming space for all.

Not only did we welcome visitors from coast to coast this year, but we also welcomed visitors from countries such as Colombia, Brazil, and Germany! In addition to that, we also helped over 650 letters make their way to the North Pole during the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights event!



OLD ROCK JAIL

The Old Rock Jail has been a major focus this year as we work towards its reopening in time for the building's 90th anniversary in 2026. We successfully replaced the failing HVAC system, with support from the County. This new system is more energy-efficient for the historic structure and has significantly improved air circulation on the second floor, aiding in the preservation of artifacts located there, as well as the building as a whole.

However, shortly after this upgrade, the main water line supplying the building burst. Thanks to the City of Hiawasse's efforts, they replaced their section of the corroded galvanized pipe. Unfortunately, the increased pressure caused issues on our side of the pipe, leading to leaks outside the building. After several unsuccessful repairs, we decided to replace the entire plumbing system on our side. This also necessitated replacing the restroom floor, as we had to cut an access hole to reach the plumbing.

In addition, we have been diligently renovating the annex room at the back of the building to serve as our archives room. This new space will allow us to relocate the records currently stored at the Old Rock Jail, making them more publicly accessible. This project was made possible through the generosity of an anonymous donor.

Lastly, our flower beds surrounding the building received a much-needed facelift. These beds serve as an exhibit to showcase various types of native flora that thrive in our area. The old wooden edging had rotted and posed a danger on the roadway, so it has been removed and replaced with pressure-treated edging, which will be stained next spring. Next Spring, we will revitalize the beds and bring them back to life, following the construction work that has been happening.



PRESERVATION

SWAPPIN' STORIES

The second year for our digital archiving event, this collaboration project between the society, the Linguistic Justice Collaborative, Mercer University, and Kennesaw State University allowed us to collect our history and save it for future generations. In total, over 2 weekends, thanks to our volunteers, we were able to collect the following to archive for the future:

- Over 115 items scanned and digitized for long-term preservation
- 15 Oral History recordings

These materials will be preserved digitally and made accessible to researchers and the public as cataloging is completed. Last year's collection is available on our website - townscountyhistory.org

In addition to this, volunteers from Mercer University spent their spring break with us cleaning and organizing many of our old records. These efforts support long-term access to Towns County's history for both the public and future researchers.

PARTNERSHIPS

This year, we have been honored to have partnered with several local and state organizations to preserve our local history. These partnerships have built a stronger connection for our community and our shared history.

- Macedonia Baptist Church - Old Macedonia Cemetery
- GA State DOT - Young Harris Bypass Artifact Preservation Protection
- City of Young Harris - 130th Birthday Celebration



A GRAVE AFFAIR

A fundraiser as remarkable as this certainly deserves its own highlight. This year, we revived “A Grave Affair” to generate funds and raise awareness for the Berrong-Oakley House Restoration Project. The fundraising committee was presented this idea at the end of September and successfully executed the event by November. We managed to raise **\$5,000** for the restoration efforts, not counting the awareness and donations received afterward.

The venue, *Osborn Cemetery*, was selected due to its significance as the resting place of the Berrong-Oakley Family, allowing us to share their story. Visitors enjoyed a clear view of the house from the cemetery, which made it easy to point out during the event.

This achievement would not have been possible without our dedicated fundraising committee—Laurie Flohr, Mary Ann Miller, and Marcia Mauldin—along with our fantastic actors and volunteers from both the Society and the Peacock Play House.

If you missed the event or would like to relive the experience, you can purchase a digital video at townscountyhistory.org/graveaffair.

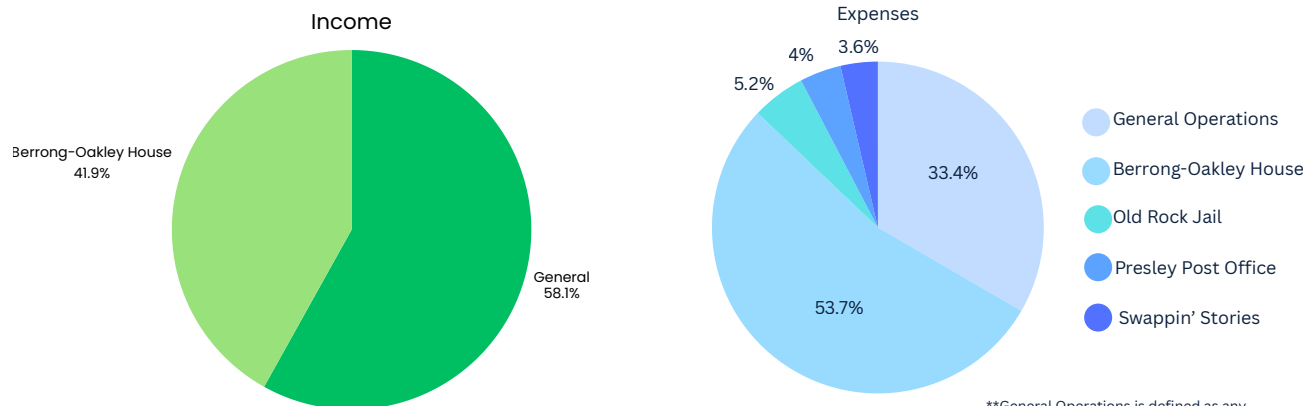


OPERATIONS

Financial support plays a critical role in allowing the Towns County Historical Society to carry out its mission. During the past year, the Society received monetary donations from members, sponsors, grants, and community supporters, with funds directed toward preservation projects, educational programming, site operations, and archival care. Careful budgeting and board oversight ensured that resources were used responsibly and in alignment with the Society's mission.

The Society remains in good financial standing, closing the year with a positive balance across General Operating, Old Rock Jail Operations, Berrong-Oakley House Restoration, and savings. This financial stability reflects sound financial management by the Board of Directors and positions the Society to sustain ongoing programs, address emerging needs, and plan thoughtfully for future preservation efforts.

This work is made possible through the continued support of our members, community partners, volunteers, and donors. Their generosity allows the Society to reinvest in programs and projects that preserve Towns County's history, improve public access to historic resources, and provide meaningful educational opportunities. Through this shared commitment, we are able to steward resources wisely while strengthening the long-term sustainability of the organization and its mission.



**General Operations is defined as any expense that did not have devoted funds. These items included, but are not limited to, monthly programs, booths, marketing, archival, etc.



LOOKING AHEAD

As we move into the coming year, the Towns County Historical Society remains focused on strengthening public access to our shared history while continuing the careful stewardship of our historic sites and collections. One of our primary goals is the reopening of the Old Rock Jail in conjunction of its 90th anniversary. With major infrastructure improvements now complete, the Society will turn its attention to final preparations that will allow visitors to once again engage with this important landmark and its stories.

Restoration work will continue at the Berrong-Oakley House, with a continued focus on restoration and fundraising efforts. In the year ahead, our focus will remain on exterior restoration and preservation work, supported by ongoing fundraising and community partnerships. This project represents a long-term investment in the county's heritage and will serve as a cornerstone for future educational programming and community use.

The Presley Post Office will remain a vital part of our public outreach. Building on recent improvements, the Society will continue to maintain and enhance the site to ensure it remains a safe, welcoming, and engaging experience for visitors and volunteers alike. Its presence at community events continues to be an important way we connect the public with Towns County history.

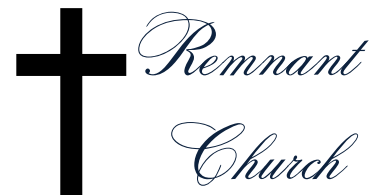
Our digital preservation efforts through Swappin' Stories will also continue in the year ahead. By collecting oral histories and digitizing historical materials, we are ensuring that personal stories and community records are preserved for future generations and made more accessible to researchers and the public.

Finally, the Society remains committed to providing meaningful historical education through programs, exhibits, partnerships, and community engagement. By combining preservation work with educational opportunities, we will continue to share the stories of Towns County in ways that inform, inspire, and connect our community to its past.



SPONSORS

Our community's generous support is vital to our society. We would be remiss not to express our heartfelt gratitude to those who have kindly contributed, whether through financial assistance or in-kind donations, throughout the year.



We are incredibly grateful to the numerous individuals who have generously contributed to our organization.

