Ordinaries and Commissioners of Towns County, GA

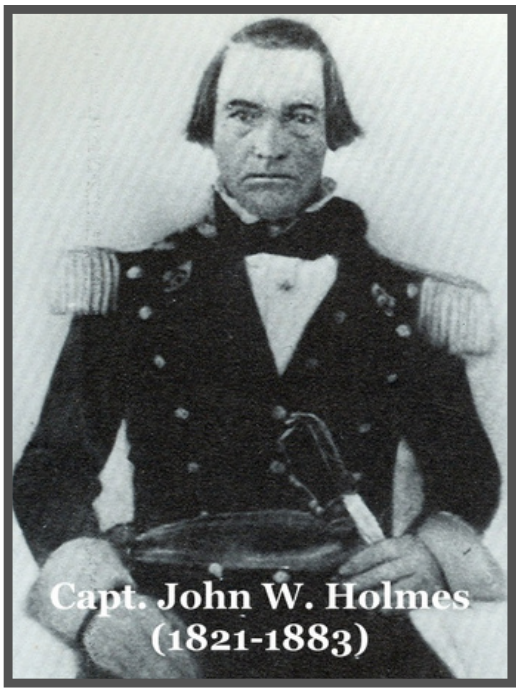
1856-2026

Prepared by Jerry A. Taylor and Towns County Historical Society

Towns County Historical Society
Keeping Towns County History Alive

Capt. John W. Holmes

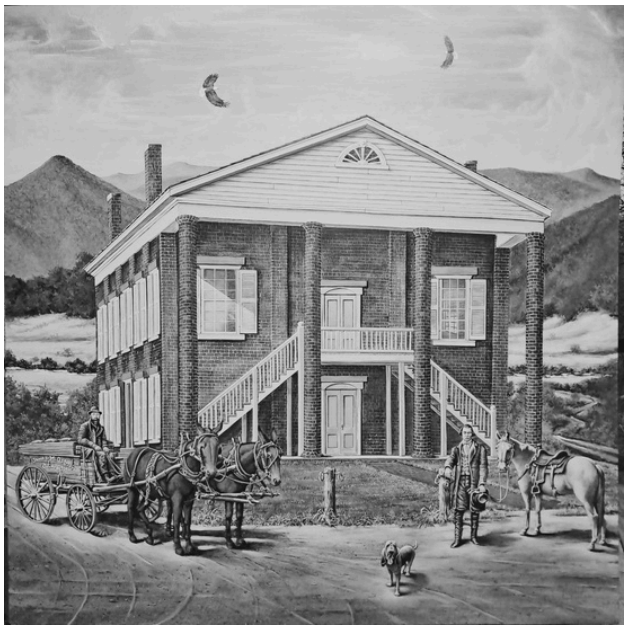
John W. Holmes, the first Ordinary of Towns County, was born in 1821 in Georgia and spent his early years in Habersham County before moving to what would become Towns County in the late 1840s. He initially lived with the S. Y. Jameson family in the Macedonia community, where he operated a mercantile. On April 24, 1851, he was commissioned as a Major in the Georgia Militia and later served as a Colonel, including a six-month posting along the coast. On January 27, 1853, he married Harriett C. Murphy, daughter of Joseph D. and Hannah M. Murphy, in Habersham County. The couple traveled over the Unicoi Turnpike to the Hiawassee Valley, where they became among the early settlers of the newly formed county. Holmes, a merchant and agent for the Ivy Mount Mining Company, was elected Ordinary in 1856 and again in 1860. In 1857, he also served as a commissioner of the short-lived Hiwassee Railroad Company.
During the Civil War, Holmes actively supported the Confederate cause, corresponding with Governor Joseph E. Brown to request arms and supplies for local volunteers, emphasizing the readiness of the "mountain boys" to serve. In 1862, he organized a company in Towns County and was elected Captain of Company G, 65th Georgia Infantry. His unit was often assigned to local duties, including apprehending deserters, and later served in Tennessee and Mississippi, with its last recorded presence in Tupelo in January 1865. After the war, Holmes returned home to farming and public life. In 1877, he was again elected Ordinary and served an additional term. He was also a charter member of Unicoy Lodge No. 267, F.&A.M., organized in 1868, and remained active until the lodge closed in 1881.
Harriett Murphy Holmes died on November 23, 1876, and John W. Holmes died on July 20, 1883. Both are buried in Macedonia Cemetery. They had three children: Samuel Augustus Holmes (born November 23, 1852), who married Emily H. Beach and moved to Texas; Amalou T. "Pink" Holmes (born 1854), who married Dr. W. H. McClure and moved to Westminster, South Carolina; and John William Holmes (born June 6, 1863), who married Martha E. Burch and later Ellen Stroud Wilson. Of these, the descendants of John William Holmes remain in Towns County today.



Martin Luther Burch

Martin Luther Burch, born in 1814 in South Carolina, was one of the early public officials of Towns County. In 1822, he moved with members of the extended Burch family to Rabun County, Georgia, where he later married Elizabeth Davis on December 10, 1840. He was the son of John Burch, whose father, Henry Burch, was from Pendleton District, South Carolina, and Mary Pinson, daughter of Joseph Pinson, a Revolutionary War soldier who died in Rabun County. Burch held several important roles in local government over the course of his life. He served as the first Clerk of Superior Court when Towns County was created in 1856, as well as Justice of the Inferior Court, Justice of the Peace, and previously as a Deputy Clerk when the area was still part of Union County. During the Civil War era, he served as Ordinary of Towns County from 1863 to 1868.

Burch died in 1877, and his wife Elizabeth passed away in 1898. They are buried in the Old Burch Cemetery, located on an island in what is now Lake Chatuge. Together, they had nine children. Luther Henry Burch (1841–1910) moved to Athens, Georgia, where he became a merchant. William T. Burch (1843–1863) served in Company A of the 6th Georgia Cavalry, Confederate States Army, and died during the war in Loudon County, Tennessee. John Bunyan Burch (1845–1929) served in Company L of the 10th Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.A.) and later worked as a policeman in Athens before moving to Spartanburg, South Carolina. Joseph Lewellyn Burch (1848–1913) and James M. Burch (1851–1900) both moved to Athens, where they worked as a merchant and carpenter, respectively. Rufus Pinson Burch (1855–1900) remained in Towns County and continued the family's involvement in public service, serving as sheriff and later as a U.S. Representative. Cicero Bartlett Burch (1856–1937) moved to Rabun County, where he became a general merchant. Mary Jane Burch (1860–1883) married Theodore Wellington Gibson of Hiawassee and died following the birth of their daughter Mollie, who later married Frank Corn. Martha E. Burch (1864–1903) married John Wm. Holmes, a farmer and U.S. Revenue Officer, and their descendants continue to reside in the area.



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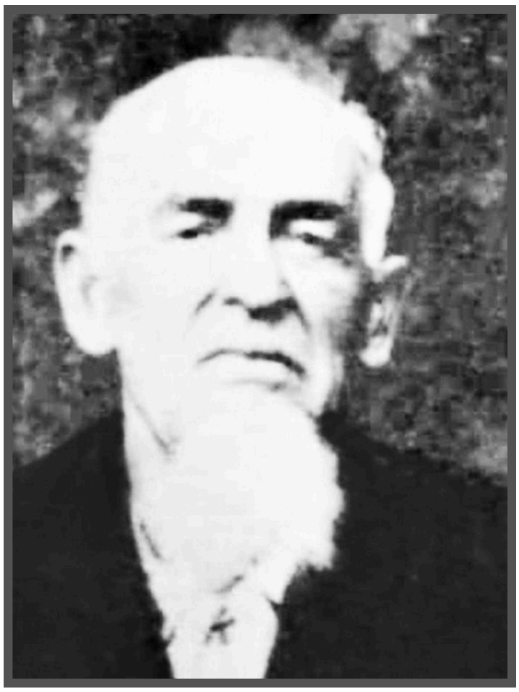
James White

JJames White was born around 1812 in North Carolina and had moved to Union County, Georgia, by January 12, 1841, when he married Nancy Burke, daughter of Benjamin Burke and Elizabeth Nicholson. Shortly after their marriage, the couple relocated to Newton County, Georgia, where they were recorded in the 1850 census alongside other members of the White family, likely relatives. By 1860, they had returned to Towns County, where White later entered public service. He was elected Ordinary in 1869 and served until 1873, during the period of Congressional Reconstruction in Georgia, when political authority shifted and many former Confederates were restricted from holding office. A Republican, White was able to serve during this time due to his political alignment and affiliations.

By trade, White was both a shoemaker and a farmer, and he was an active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Northern Methodist). He lived out the remainder of his life in Towns County, where he died in the 1890s. His wife Nancy lived into the 1910s, and both are buried in Burch Cemetery.

James White and Nancy Burke had eight children. Louisa Arminta White (1843–1926) moved to Blount County, Tennessee, where she married George W. McClure. Breuner Reno White (1844–1917) married Mary Matilda Cathey and remained in Towns County. Runa Means White (1847–1931) also settled in Blount County, Tennessee, where he married Sarah Elizabeth Lane. Leonidas O."Lonnie"White (1850–1905) moved to Pickens County, South Carolina, and married Martha Jane Wike. Mary Winston White (1852–1931) married Henry Hardin Burch and lived on Bell Creek in Towns County. Sarah White (born 1855) died before 1870. Henry D. C. White (born 1858) was living after 1870, though little additional information is recorded. John Luther White (1866–1936) married first Jane Oakes and later Sarah Caroline"Carrie"Hooper, and he has several descendants still living in the local area.

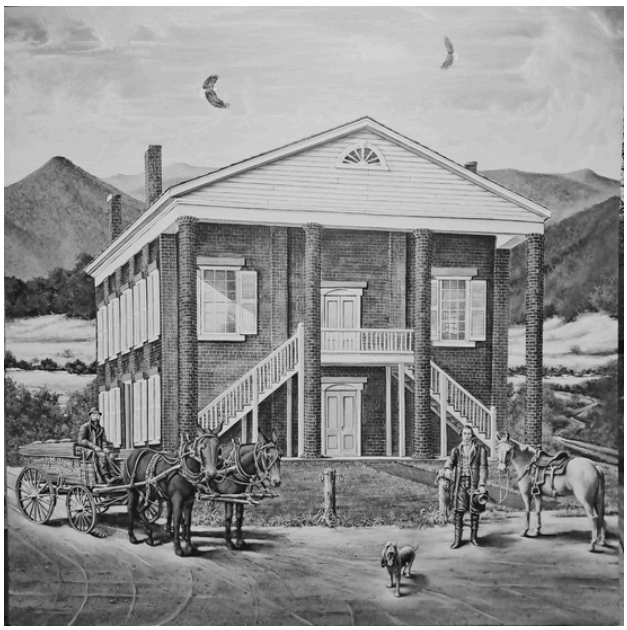


John David Howard

John David Howard was born on October 7, 1812, in Lincoln County, North Carolina. As a young man, he moved to Macon County, North Carolina, where he married Anna M. Setzer in 1838. The couple lived in several communities, including Hayesville, Cleveland, Nantahala, and Hiawassee. During the Civil War, Howard served in Company L of the 12th Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.A.). He later took the amnesty oath on August 19, 1865, and was described as a man of dark complexion with dark hair and blue eyes, standing five feet eight inches tall, and working by trade as a mechanic. Throughout his life, he supported his family through farming and skilled work repairing and building wagons.

Howard's time in public office came during the period of Congressional Reconstruction in Georgia, when political authority shifted and many former Confederates were restricted from holding office. Because of his service in the United States Army, his oath of allegiance, and his affiliation with the Republican Party, he was eligible to run for office and was elected Ordinary of Towns County in 1873. He served until his resignation in November 1875, after which he returned to Nantahala in Macon County, North Carolina. He died there on June 12, 1885. His wife, Anna, passed away on June 15, 1887, and both are buried in Valley Town Cemetery in Andrews, Cherokee County, North Carolina.

John David Howard and Anna M. Setzer had nine children. Their son Calvin Thomas Howard (1839–1863) married Margaret Jane Brock and was killed at the Battle of Chickamauga. Susan E. Howard (1841–1907) married David Roe, who died during the Civil War, leaving her a widow in the local area. Martha Ann Howard (1843–1937) married Thomas Lunsford and remained in Macon County, North Carolina. Joseph Christopher Howard (1846–1912) married Mary Lavina Owen of Towns County and lived in Nantahala, with descendants later returning to Towns County. John Baxter Howard (1848–after 1874) married Nancy Jane Self and moved to Cherokee County, Alabama. Amy Mercilla Howard (1850–1937) married Thompson Henson Allen and moved to Habersham County, Georgia. William Hannibal Howard (1852–1920) married Mary Adeline Self and later settled in Oklahoma. George M. Howard (1854–after 1880) married Martha J. Garrison and died in Cherokee County, North Carolina. David Franklin Howard (1859–1944) married Sarah Jane Barnes and is buried in Cherokee County, North Carolina.



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Rev. Elisha Hedden, Jr.

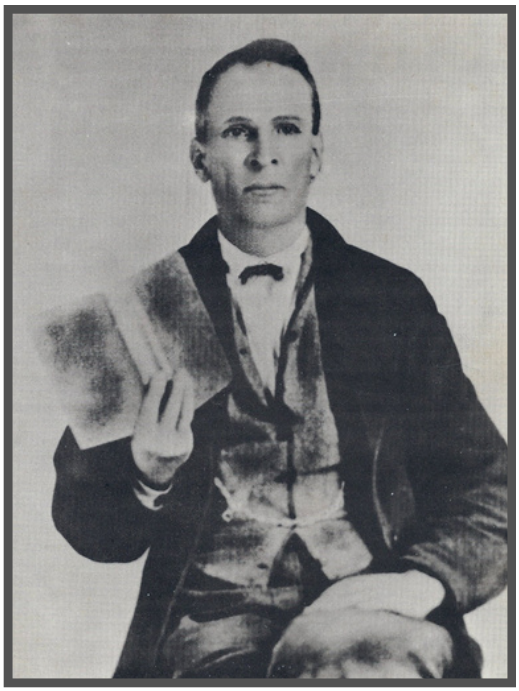
Elisha Hedden, Jr., son of Elisha Hedden, Sr., and Elizabeth Pinson, was born on February 2, 1814, in Spartanburg County, South Carolina. Following his father's death in 1820, his mother remarried William Visage, and around 1823 the family moved to Rabun County, Georgia, where Hedden spent his youth. After uniting with the church and beginning to speak publicly, he came under the influence of Rev. Humphrey Posey, who encouraged him to further his education. In 1836, he entered Penfield (now Mercer University) with his brother Jeffrey, where he prepared for a life in ministry. He was ordained in 1839 at Antioch Church in Habersham County and soon began a long career preaching across north Georgia and western North Carolina, ultimately serving in the ministry for approximately sixty years.

On July 19, 1838, he married Juanita Caroline Butt, daughter of John Butt II and Sarah Smithers. The couple initially lived near Blairsville in Union County before relocating around 1851 to Cherokee County, North Carolina. After 1860, they returned to Georgia and settled in Hiawassee, where Hedden would spend the remainder of his life. His ministry was supported at times by Rev. B. M. Sanders and later through appointments from both the Georgia Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, allowing him to serve as a missionary throughout the mountain region. He was deeply involved in Baptist organizational life, serving as a delegate, clerk, moderator, and long-time representative to the state convention for the Hiawassee Association, helping shape its development over several decades.

In addition to his religious work, Hedden also participated in civic affairs. He represented Union County in the Georgia House of Representatives in 1847, served as chaplain of the 30th Georgia Cavalry Battalion during the Civil War, and later held the office of Ordinary of Towns County from 1875 to 1877. He was a charter member of Allegheny Lodge No. 114, F.&A.M., in Union County and later of Unicoy Lodge No. 259 in Hiawassee, remaining an active Mason throughout his life. Widely respected for his leadership and service, Hedden was regarded as one of the most influential religious figures in the region.

Rev. Elisha Hedden passed away on August 23, 1900, after a long life of service. His funeral was conducted by Rev. Alfred Corn, assisted by Revs. Frank Lloyd and J. J. Kimsey, and he was buried with Masonic honors beside his wife in Osborn Cemetery in Hiawassee.

He and Juanita had ten children: Jeffery Allen Hedden (1839–1883), who married Cynthia Adeline Gray; John B. Hedden (1840–1903), who married Camelia A. Leatherwood; Sophronia J. Hedden (1842–1892), who married Robert Henry Logan and later Daniel Walker; Samantha Adeline Hedden (1846–1936), who married Rev. John Tyler Platt; William Worth "Bud" Hedden (1848–1944), who married Nancy M. Sutton and remained in Hiawassee; Almeda Hedden (1852–1928), who married Robert Smith Kerlee; Sarah Hedden (1853–1935), who married William Taylor Parker; Martha C. Hedden (1856–unknown), who married Rev. Howell Cobb Standridge; Elisha Dean Hedden (1858–1940), who married Ireland Ann Texas Ledford; and Warne Ketron Hedden (1861–1941), who remained in Towns County and served in several public roles. Many of their descendants continued to live in and remain connected to the area.



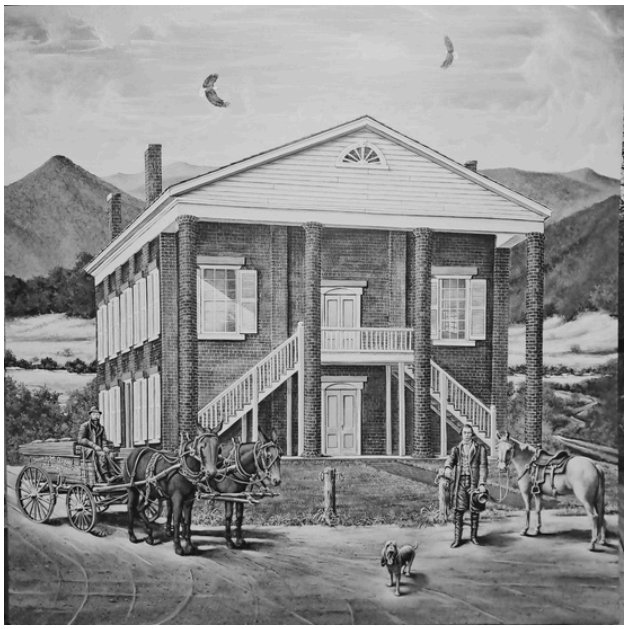
William Glenn Blackwell

William Glenn Blackwell, son of Sterling Willis Blackwell and Lucy Jenny Seay, was born on December 17, 1842, in Spartanburg County, South Carolina. During the 1840s, his family moved to Hall County, Georgia, where he spent his early years. On June 9, 1863, he enlisted in Company F of the 4th Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.A.) and was described as being five feet six and a half inches tall, with blue eyes, a fair complexion, and light hair.

In February 1870, he married Adeline Cynthia Kimsey, daughter of Thomas Morris Kimsey and Emmeline Stover of Habersham County, Georgia. Soon after their marriage, the couple moved to Towns County and settled in Hiawassee. They were among the charter members of Hiawassee Baptist Church (now McConnell Memorial) in July 1882. By profession, Blackwell was a lawyer and became an important figure in the local legal system. He was elected Ordinary of Towns County and served from January 1881 until January 1889. During his career, he also participated in notable legal cases, including serving on the defense team in the 1887 trial of Tilmon C. Justice, one of the most significant cases in the county's history.

In the mid-1890s, Blackwell and his family moved to McMinn County, Tennessee, where he later served as a Baptist minister. In the early 1900s, most of the family relocated to Texas, with the exception of two daughters who remained in Tennessee. Blackwell died on August 26, 1904, in Fannin County, Texas, and was buried in Leonard Cemetery. His wife, Adeline, later returned to McMinn County, Tennessee, where she lived with her daughter Ida Cagle until her death on May 12, 1913; she is buried in Cochran Cemetery in Englewood.

William and Adeline Blackwell had six children, all born in Hiawassee: Albert Theodore Blackwell (1871–after 1900), who worked as a telegraph operator in Tennessee; Ida Lenora Blackwell (1874–1962), who married Robert Newton Cagle; Sterling Thomas Blackwell (1875–1947), who married Jane Estelle Felmet and lived in Texas; Ada Lucy Blackwell (1878–1919), who married Robert Franklin Barnett; Era Dora Blackwell (1880–1956), who married first Mr. White and later William Lowry Glasscoe; and Arling John Blackwell (1883–1919), who married Lola Milborn. Today, there are no known direct descendants of William Glenn Blackwell and Adeline Cynthia Kimsey remaining in Towns County.



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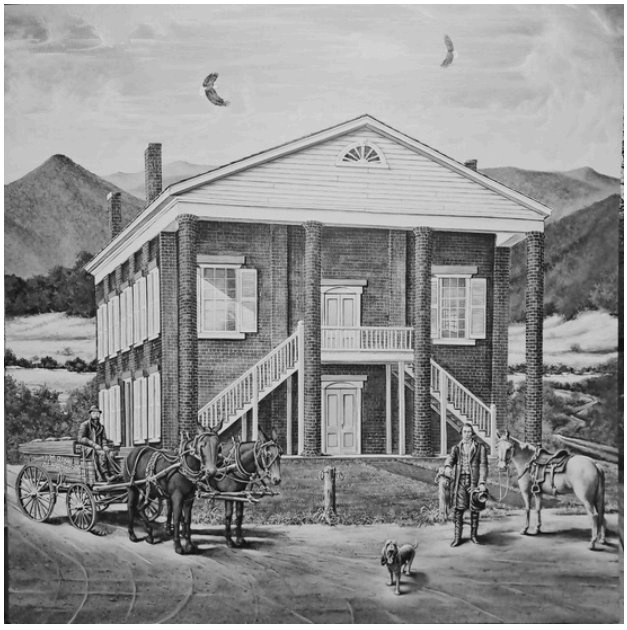
Marcus Llewellyn Kimsey

Marcus Llewellyn Kimsey, son of David Kimsey and Sarah Ann Burch, was born on May 27, 1849, in what was then Union County, Georgia. He married Emiline Medaris on November 27, 1865, in Towns County; she was the daughter of William H. Medaris and Bathsheba Puett. Emiline died on September 17, 1876, and was buried in Old Brasstown Baptist Church Cemetery. He married second Nancy Elizabeth Patton in 1876, daughter of Robert Sinclair Patton and Nancy Hubbard Crawford; she died in 1883 and was also buried at Old Brasstown. On September 16, 1885, he married his third wife, Minerva Queen, in Clay County, North Carolina; she was the daughter of John Queen and Catherine Lowery.

Kimsey lived most of his early life in the Brasstown community, where he farmed and was a member of Old Brasstown Baptist Church. In 1889, after being elected Ordinary of Towns County, he moved his family to Hiawassee to be closer to the courthouse and to provide better educational opportunities for his children through proximity to Hiawassee Academy. He served as Ordinary until 1893. Shortly after 1900, the family relocated to Gainesville, Georgia, where Kimsey operated a blacksmith repair shop and later a grocery store. He died in Gainesville on December 12, 1920, and was buried in Alta Vista Cemetery. His wife Minerva later died in an automobile accident on October 21, 1935.

Marcus L. Kimsey fathered sixteen children, all born in Towns County, through his three marriages. His children included John Sherman Kimsey (1866–1946), who married Ida America Crawford; James David Kimsey Sr. (1868–1955), who married Nancy Rosa Hyde; William Wilkerson Kimsey (1871–1963), who married Caroline Elizabeth Bell; Henry Lewellyn Kimsey (1874–1968), an educator and later newspaper publisher in Texas; Mary A. "Mollie" Kimsey (1878–1964), who married David E. Johnson; Minerva Lou Kimsey (1881–1930), who married Lemuel Faris Roberts; Robert Luther Kimsey (1882–1930), a Rome city policeman who died in the line of duty; Joseph Roscoe Kimsey (1886–1948), a Gainesville city policeman; Ettie Mae Kimsey (1888–1974), who married William Speer Cantrell; Grace Belle Kimsey (1889–1919), who married Charles Simpson; Fernando "Ferd" Kimsey (1890–1959), a telegraph operator for Western Union; Fred Green Kimsey (1893–1947), a Gainesville merchant; Delia Pearl Kimsey (1895–1966), who married Eugene Bagwell Sr.; Marcus Lafayette Kimsey (1897–1976), who worked for Western Union; Sarah Catherine "Kate" Kimsey (1899–1995), who married Elbert Wilson Sr.; and Ernest Waldo Kimsey (1901), who died in infancy. Many of his descendants later settled in other parts of Georgia, Texas, and beyond, though several family lines remain connected to Towns County.



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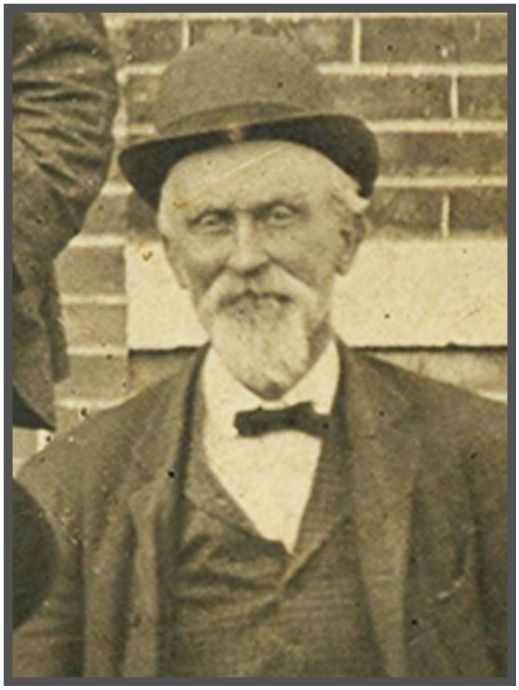
Josiah Turner Kimsey

Josiah Turner Kimsey, son of Rev. Elijah Kimsey and Sarah Bryson, was born on April 15, 1844, in what was then Union County, Georgia, and grew up in the Friendship community. During the Civil War, he enlisted on May 12, 1862, in Company A of the 6th Georgia Cavalry. He later deserted on December 14, 1863, and on April 11, 1864, took the Oath of Allegiance to the United States in Chattanooga. He was described as being five feet ten inches tall, with a light complexion, brown hair, and blue eyes. During this period, he married Mirah Louisa Russell, daughter of John Russell and Nancy Dickey of the Cedar Cliff community. The couple briefly lived in Kentucky before returning to Towns County after the war.

Kimsey worked as a stock dealer and merchant and also operated a hotel in Hiawassee. He became active in local politics, representing Towns County in the Georgia General Assembly in 1877 and later serving as Ordinary from 1893 to 1900. During his time in office, he provided leadership for the construction of a new courthouse, completed at the turn of the twentieth century. Following the death of his first wife, Mirah, on February 16, 1893, he married Selinda Caroline Brown on January 1, 1895. Kimsey died on July 5, 1911, in Atlanta, and his body was returned to Towns County for burial beside Mirah in Russell Cemetery on Cedar Cliff.

Josiah T. Kimsey and Mirah Louisa Russell had nine children: Rev. Robert Andrew Kimsey (1864–1948), a Baptist minister who married Lavina Ardella Jane Wood; John Edgar Kimsey (1867–1902); Rena Theodocia “Docia” Kimsey (1868–1941), who married merchant John Virgil Twiggs; Lillie May Kimsey (1872–1957), who married Atticus Haygood Gay; Amanda Sophronia Kimsey (1874–1950); Phenia Magnolia “Nola” Kimsey (1877–1918), who married Rezin T. Williams; Josiah Paul Kimsey (1879–1919), a schoolteacher who later served as principal of the Romblon School in the Philippine Islands before his death shortly after returning to the United States; an infant child (1882); and Dr. Frank Jefferson Kimsey (1885–1962), a dentist who married Olive Christine Berrong. Many of their descendants remain connected to the region today.



Cicero Corinthians Burch

Cicero C. Burch, son of Duquesne “Tess” Burch and Melvina A. Wike, was born on March 26, 1869, in Towns County, Georgia. He spent his life in the county and was baptized on November 25, 1923, at Hiawassee Baptist Church. On April 5, 1896, he married Lillie Nicholson, daughter of John Thomas Nicholson and Martha A. Rogers. Lillie was born on December 23, 1877, in Towns County and passed away on January 16, 1959. Both Cicero and Lillie are buried in Burch Cemetery in the Sunnyside community.

The Burch family lived on Sunnyside, in the area now associated with the Windjammer, where they farmed for a living. Cicero also served his community in public office, being elected Ordinary in 1900 and serving a four-year term in the newly completed courthouse just off the town square.

Cicero and Lillie had one son, Dean Duquesne Burch, born November 2, 1908, in Towns County. He married Carrie Odessa Tatham on April 11, 1930, and remained in the county until his death on August 8, 1971; both are buried in Burch Cemetery. Dean and Carrie had two children, Winford Wright Burch (1931–1994) and Shelva Jean Burch (1939–2005), who, along with their mother, are buried in Spokane County, Washington. Today, only a few distant descendants of Cicero C. Burch remain, and no known photograph of him has been located.

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John M. Johnson

John M. Johnson, son of George Walton Johnson and Frances Ann Johnson, was born on March 5, 1870, in Towns County. He was educated at Young Harris College and pursued a career in law. On June 13, 1897, he married Hettie Burch, daughter of Rufus Pinson Burch and Louvania P. Kilpatrick. The couple made their home in Hiawassee at the corner of Main and Bell Streets, at the site now occupied by Eller's Service Center, where they also operated the local post office during Johnson's time as postmaster.

Johnson began his service as Towns County Ordinary on October 17, 1904, and remained in office until December 1922, making him the longest-serving Ordinary in the county's history. During his tenure, he worked to improve infrastructure and transportation, particularly advocating for better roads. In 1909, he was elected president of the Good Roads Committee, which sought to connect Blue Ridge and Clayton through Union and Towns counties, helping reduce the region's isolation. In 1919, he also supported the proposed Nacoochee-Hiawassee Railroad over Unicoi Gap to improve access to southern markets. Locally, his leadership contributed to the construction of the 1915 jail on River Street and the Burch and Hedden steel bridges spanning the Hiawassee River.

Following the tragic drowning of his wife, Hettie, in the Hiawassee mill pond on April 13, 1919, Johnson relocated to Atlanta to continue his legal career. He became active in Republican politics at both the local and state levels and was frequently a candidate for the U.S. Congress from north Georgia. In 1922, he was appointed United States District Attorney. Two years later, he married Minnie Lucille Minter of Monticello, Georgia, who was among the first female assistant district attorneys in the region; together, they were likely the only married couple serving as assistant district attorneys in the same office at that time. In 1934, Johnson moved his practice to Gainesville for twelve years before returning to Atlanta as a partner in the firm of Clint W. Hager and J. Frank Kemp.

Johnson died on August 23, 1954, as the result of an automobile accident in Hiawassee. His funeral was held at McConnell Memorial Church, and he was buried in Osborn Cemetery. He and his first wife, Hettie, had six children: Fleta Johnson (1898–1900); Ralph Johnson (1900–1941), who worked as a deputy U.S. marshal and later in road construction; Ruth Johnson (1900–1990), who managed an employment agency in Atlanta; Jay M. Johnson (1903–1956); Horace Leo Johnson (1905–1972), who worked in railroad auditing and later became president of United Distributing Company; and Frances Louise Johnson (1907–1996), who married first Lewis Elmore Peterson and later William O. Patterson.

Warne Ketron Hedden

Warne Ketron Hedden, son of Rev. Elisha Hedden and Juanita Caroline Butt, was born on February 27, 1861, in Clay County, North Carolina, during the early days of the Civil War. He moved to Towns County with his family around the age of eight and was educated in the local common schools before attending Hicks Academy in Hayesville and the Peabody School in Hiawassee. Known throughout his life as “the Judge,” Hedden built a long and varied public career, holding multiple offices over several decades. He was first elected Justice of the Peace in 1885, then County Treasurer in 1893, followed by three terms as Clerk of Superior Court beginning in 1898. In December 1922, he was selected to fill the unexpired term of Ordinary following the resignation of Col. John M. Johnson. Afterward, he continued serving the public as Justice of the Peace, Notary Public, and later as Registrar of Vital Statistics.

Hedden spent much of his early life farming before purchasing the Hooper Hotel in the 1920s at the corner of Main and River Streets, which he operated until it was destroyed by fire in 1933. Over the years, he became known for his deep involvement in legal and civic matters, reportedly drafting more deeds, handling more legal documents, and officiating more marriages than nearly anyone else in the county. Though not formally trained as a lawyer, he was widely respected for his understanding of common law and was often sought as a trusted advisor. Beyond his public duties, he was known for his storytelling, humor, and broad knowledge of history and current events, making him a well-known and approachable figure in the community.

He was active in civic life, including membership in the Masonic Order and the International Order of Odd Fellows, and supported community and church efforts even though he was not a formal member of a congregation. A strong advocate for improved infrastructure, Hedden played a role in promoting better roads in the region. In 1923, during his time in office, the Nacoochee-Hiawassee Road Association was organized to support development of a highway connecting White County to Hiawassee over Unicoi Gap. The following year, he helped host the Hiawassee Highway Meeting at Hiawassee Junior College, which drew approximately 2,500 attendees and included addresses by Hedden and J. Miles Berrong.

A committed Democrat, Hedden was repeatedly elected to positions of public trust and ultimately devoted approximately forty-five years to public service in Towns County. He passed away on November 26, 1941, and funeral services were held at McConnell Memorial Church before his burial in Osborn Cemetery.

Hedden was married twice. With his first wife, Texie Anna Ledford, he had three children: Fred Cleveland Hedden (1884–1969), who married Margaret Pearl Dyer; Juanita Caroline Hedden (1887–1968), who married Arthur Monroe Gibson; and an infant son who died in 1889. With his second wife, Violet Virginia Hooper, he had five children: Ed Hedden (1893–1976), who married Ellen Belle Stroud; Frank Bryan Hedden (1896–1986); Troy Jennings Hedden (1900–1972), who married Ruth Glover Stroud; Willie Ray Hedden (1906–1983), who married Susie Louise Rogers; and Maye Hedden (1908–2007), who married Henry Arvil Berrong.

Dr. John David Kelsey Rice

Dr. John David Kelsey Rice, son of James Marion Rice and Sophronia Elvira Bennett, was born on March 4, 1875, in Haywood County, North Carolina. In the mid-1890s, his family moved to the Lower Hightower community in Towns County. He was educated at Hiawassee Academy before enrolling in the Atlanta College of Physicians and Surgeons, where he graduated in 1900. He began his medical career in Homer, Banks County, Georgia. After a two-year correspondence, he married Belle Penland, daughter of James Hannibal Penland and Frances Elizabeth Johnson of Tusquittee, on December 29, 1904, and the couple made their home in Homer.

In 1916, Dr. Rice returned to Towns County, settling in Hiawassee where he continued his medical practice. He entered public service in 1924 when he was elected Ordinary, serving one term. Later, on August 7, 1944, when the Towns County Hospital Authority was established under Ordinary Harry England, Rice was appointed to the board and served as its vice president alongside Mrs. Maggie C. Berrong.

Dr. and Mrs. Rice had three children: Mary Lee Rice (1905–1909), who died in childhood; Frances Elmira Rice (1908–1996), who married William Ernest Twiggs; and Ella Lougene Rice (1916–1984), who became an elementary school teacher in Towns County. Dr. Rice passed away on January 23, 1948, in Towns County, with his death attributed to complications related to obesity and asthma. He is buried with his family in the Lower Hightower Baptist Church Cemetery.

Dr. James Franklin Johnson

Dr. James Franklin Johnson, son of William Manson Johnson and Mary Louranie Wood, was born on July 4, 1867, and grew up in the Woods Grove community. He was educated in the county's common schools before graduating from Hiawassee Academy and pursuing medical studies in Augusta, where he earned his M.D. degree. He also attended Atlanta Medical College. Though he did not actively seek public office, he was twice chosen to represent Towns County in the state legislature. In addition to his medical practice, he served as president of the Bank of Hiawassee and remained closely involved in local education, particularly the high school, where he served for many years as a trustee.

On March 24, 1892, Dr. Johnson married Ella Russell, daughter of Andrew Doriah Russell and Nancy Triphenia Stroud of Cedar Cliff. They made their home in Hiawassee, where he practiced medicine and became known as a steady and dependable figure in the community. Although quiet in nature, he was widely regarded as an active and useful citizen. In 1928, he was elected Ordinary and served two terms. He was also a member of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church and an active Mason, serving several terms as Worshipful Master of Unicoy Lodge No. 259, F.&A.M.

Dr. Johnson passed away on March 3, 1947, and is buried with his family in Osborn Cemetery. He and his wife had four children: Irene Johnson (1892–1893) and Stella Johnson (1894–1894), both buried in Woods Grove Cemetery; Eva Pauline Johnson (1894–1990), who married Leonard Furr McConnell and was well known as a high school teacher and librarian; and Uel Montine Johnson (1899–1979), who married first Charles Spurgeon Loden and later L. V. Olson.

Dr. Robert Turner Coleman

Dr. Robert Turner Coleman, son of William Henry Coleman and Celina Adeline Rogers, was born on December 16, 1871, in Clay County, North Carolina. He grew up in Hayesville and received his early education in the local public schools before earning an A.B. degree from Young Harris College in 1897. He continued his medical training at Augusta Medical College and completed his studies at Grant University in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he received his M.D. degree in 1901. Coleman established himself as a respected physician, practicing for nine years in Clay County before relocating to Young Harris, where he continued in general practice and also served as physician for Young Harris College.

In addition to his medical work, Coleman was recognized as a capable educator and served as Towns County Superintendent of Schools from 1916 to 1932. During his tenure, he encouraged communities to construct dedicated school buildings rather than relying on church spaces for instruction and worked to improve educational standards through his involvement with the Georgia Association of Educators. He remained active in the life of Young Harris College, including its alumni association, and was a member of Young Harris Methodist Church, where he served as a Steward for many years. He was also involved in political affairs as a member of the Republican Party at both the local and state levels.

Dr. Coleman passed away on May 16, 1946, and was buried in the family plot at Old Union Cemetery. He was married three times. With his first wife, Emma Kansas Lovin (1873–1906), he had one daughter, Willie Lois Coleman (1904–1982), who married Harold Jackson Griffies. With his second wife, Elva Passmore (1873–1925), he had three children: Wilma Coleman (1908–1987), who married McAllen Calhoun Myers and later became an English teacher at Young Harris College; Robert M. Coleman (1912–1914); and Olin Coleman (1915–1939), who served as a principal and coach before his death in an automobile accident near Hawkinsville, Georgia. With his third wife, Bonnie M. Kirby (1903–2000), he had one daughter, Bobbie Jean Coleman (1931–2023), who married Rev. Marcus R. Martin, remembered locally for his service as pastor of Hiawassee Methodist Church.

Harry Edgar England

Harry Edgar England, the oldest son of Edgar N. England and Belle Jarrett, was born on August 12, 1897, and was raised in the Hiawassee River community of Towns County. He was educated at Hiawassee Academy and the A. & M. Institute at Clarkesville and went on to work as a livestock dealer while also dedicating much of his life to public service. On June 23, 1932, he married Elaine Rogers, daughter of Elbert H. Rogers and Olia Presley. Though they had no children of their own, they remained close to their nieces and nephews.

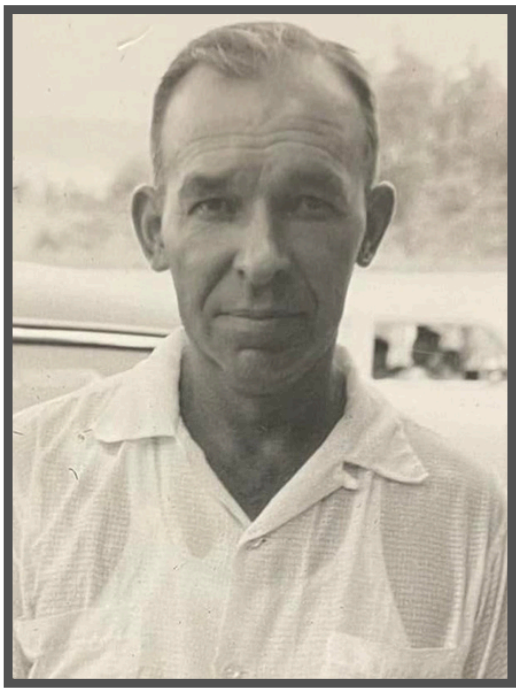
Elected in 1930, England became the first Democratic sheriff to serve Towns County in twenty-five years. During his tenure, a new jail was constructed with assistance from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The grand jury specified a two-story stone structure similar to that in Union County, complete with living quarters for the jailer and family. Completed in 1936, the jail also became the England home, with Elaine taking on responsibility for preparing meals for inmates. England served as sheriff until 1940, when he was elected Ordinary, a position he held for twelve years.

Following his retirement, his health declined, but he remained active in livestock work and continued helping others in the community. England was deeply involved in civic and church life, serving as a Steward in the Methodist Church and as Mayor of Hiawassee. He was a charter member of the Lions Club and remained active on its Board of Directors until his death. He was also a member of Unicoy Lodge No. 259, F.&A.M., and the Order of Eastern Star. In addition, he served on the Governor's staff for many years, receiving appointments from Herman Talmadge and M. E. Thompson. England passed away on January 12, 1956, and was laid to rest in Mt. Zion Cemetery along the Hiawassee River, where generations of his family are also buried.

Claude Adolphus Swanson

Claude Adolphus Swanson, son of Adolphus Lenore Swanson and Fannie Mae Parker, was born on March 1, 1906. He grew up in the Woods Grove community, where he attended elementary school before continuing his education at Hiawassee Academy, where he played on the school's first basketball team. On November 25, 1939, he married Eunice Mathis, daughter of John Emory Mathis and Anna Roxie Cloer. The couple lived in the home of Claude's parents, where they cared for them in their later years while maintaining the family farm in Woods Grove.

During World War II, Swanson served in the U.S. Army after enlisting at Fort McPherson on October 27, 1943. Following his military service, he entered public office and served as Towns County Ordinary from 1953 to 1960. Swanson passed away on August 31, 1986, and he and his wife Eunice are buried in Woods Grove Cemetery. Though they had no children, they were well known and respected by a wide circle of relatives, friends, and neighbors.



Ray Emmett Taylor

Ray Emmett Taylor, son of Eugene William Taylor and Carrie Ada Burch, was born on July 20, 1921. He grew up in the Owl Creek community, attended Mountain Scene School, and later graduated from Towns County High School. On December 29, 1942, he enlisted in the armed forces at Fort McPherson, and shortly after, on January 4, 1943, he married Lougene Dills, daughter of Garner Dills and Betty Cleo Ledford. Following his military service, the couple moved to Richlands in Tazewell County, Virginia, where Ray worked as a welder in the strip coal mines before eventually returning home to Hiawassee.

Back in Towns County, Taylor founded Taylor Construction Company and soon became involved in public service. In 1960, he was elected Ordinary and served two terms from 1961 to 1968. During his administration, the county saw significant development, most notably the construction of a new modern courthouse in 1964 at a total cost of $283,000, with 67 percent funded through the federal ARA Program and 33 percent by the county. Taylor emphasized that Towns County would not be left behind or diminished, but instead would move forward through cooperation and shared effort among its leaders.

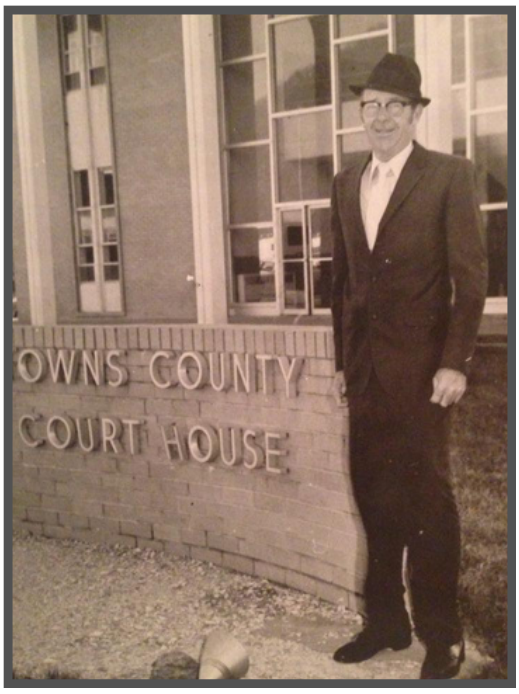
The year 1964 marked a period of progress for the county, with multiple projects underway or completed, including the new Hiawassee post office, Hiawassee Hardware, a $500,000 Fine Arts Building at Young Harris College, the Young Harris post office, and the fire tower and visitor center on Brasstown Bald. Taylor passed away on May 24, 2001, and he and his wife Lougene are buried in Osborn Cemetery. They had two children, Terry Emmett Taylor and his wife Mary, and Cheryl Anita Taylor and her husband Alvin Gibson, both of whom are well known in the community.

Charles DuPree “C.D.” Corn, Jr.

Charles DuPree “C.D.” Corn, Jr., son of Charles DuPree Corn, Sr. and Lydia Clara Dyer, was born on August 18, 1912. He grew up in Brasstown Valley, where he attended elementary school and later graduated from Young Harris Academy. As the only son in his family, he was deeply involved in farm work from an early age, a way of life that continued throughout his years as he raised chickens, operated a dairy farm, and managed beef cattle operations prior to entering public service. In the 1940s, he and his wife Winnie built a brick home and expanded their farm at the site now occupied by Equani Spa at Brasstown Valley Resort in Young Harris.

In addition to farming, Corn was also a merchant. He and Winnie operated a general store in Young Harris on the site of the old Young Harris Motel, and they were among the original founders of the motel. He was active in civic affairs, serving on the board of Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation and at one time as its chairman. Corn was elected Ordinary in 1968 and served two terms from 1969 to 1976. During his time in office, he established the Towns County Health Department and Recreation Department and played a role in preserving the character of Brasstown Valley by selling his farm property for the development of Brasstown Valley Resort, helping prevent more scattered and unplanned development in the area.

Corn was first married to Robbie Brown, daughter of Joseph Reuben Brown and Margaret Emma Spiva; she died in childbirth along with their infant son. He later married Winnie Miles, daughter of John Walker Miles and Mary Lou Perry. Their children were Mary Carolyn Corn (deceased), who married Dallas Eugene Dockery; Lydia Evelyn Corn (deceased), who married George Edward Shropshire; Margaret Alice Corn, who married first Don Henry Reaves and later Johnny Eugene Weathersby; and Eddy Alvin Corn, who married Georgia Alice Bass and became a local attorney. C.D. Corn passed away on April 25, 1999, and was buried in Old Union Cemetery among many of his family members, including his ancestor, Rev. Alfred Corn, a pioneer settler of Brasstown Valley.



Reuben Walter Walls

Reuben Walter Walls, son of Jesse Homer Wall and Carrie McFall, was born on November 5, 1926. He grew up on the family farm in the Hiawassee River community and was educated in the local schools. Following the death of his father, Reuben and his sister Velva continued operating the farm while caring for their mother. Building on his agricultural upbringing, he expanded the family operation to include both poultry and cattle. He married Jeanette Barrett, daughter of James Henry Barrett and Ida Marinda Benefield, and together they had four children: Rex Walter, David James (deceased), Janice Elaine, and Mark Anthony.

Walls was active in county government for nearly twenty years, serving as Tax Collector from 1965 to 1976 before being elected Ordinary, a position he held from 1977 to 1983. In addition to his public service, he was involved in several civic organizations, including the Towns County Lions Club and Unicoy Lodge No. 259, F.&A.M. He passed away on March 13, 1992, and was laid to rest in Mt. Zion Cemetery, where three generations of his family are also buried.

Virginia Ruth Howard Cunningham

Virginia Ruth Howard, daughter of Henry Robert Howard and Bertha Lenora Thomas, was born on February 22, 1931, in the Tesnatee district of White County, Georgia. On May 27, 1950, she married Harold Charles Cunningham and moved to Hiawassee, where they raised their family, which included Shelley Ruth, Cheryl Ann, Harold Charles Jr., Holly Gale, and Sylvia Kaye. In 1976, she was elected Clerk of Superior Court, becoming the first and only woman to hold that position in Towns County history, and she served until 1983. Her time in office coincided with a period of rapid growth in the county. Between 1970 and 1980, the population rose to 5,638—an increase of more than 1,000 residents—and Towns County experienced the highest rate of in-migration in Georgia. As a result, the workload in the Clerk's office increased significantly, particularly in recording real estate transactions. In an interview with The Atlanta Journal in the summer of 1983, Cunningham noted that the time required for these transactions had nearly doubled. In 1973, $3.2 million in real estate changed hands in the county, while in just the first half of 1983, that figure had already reached $5.6 million.
In 1983, she was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Ordinary, becoming the first and only female Ordinary in Towns County history.

Truman Barrett

Truman Barrett, son of Avery Barrett and Ola Shook, was born on January 26, 1941, and grew up in the Hog Creek community. He married Wanda Atha, and together they had two daughters, Amber and Rinday. In 1984, Barrett was elected Ordinary, becoming the last to hold that office in Towns County. The following year, in 1985, he was elected as the county's first sole commissioner, marking a transition in the county's system of government.

Upon taking office, Barrett was immediately confronted with the challenges of a rapidly growing population, particularly as development increased following the 1970s. He worked to balance growth with environmental protection, recognizing the need for new approaches to land use. In a March 1986 interview with The Atlanta Journal, he recalled how a heavy downpour early in his tenure washed out a road and isolated ten homes in a newly developed subdivision. This event underscored for him that the era of minimal oversight in land development had passed, leading him to become the first local official to actively enforce development regulations in the county.

During his time in office, Barrett played a key role in several major initiatives. He co-sponsored the Mountain Protection Act with Zell Miller, supported the expansion of the hospital and construction of a new nursing home, and helped establish the county's 911 emergency system, including the naming of rural roads. He also organized a countywide volunteer fire department and enacted the county's first subdivision regulations, laying the groundwork for managing growth and public safety in Towns County.

JOHN HARMON/Staff

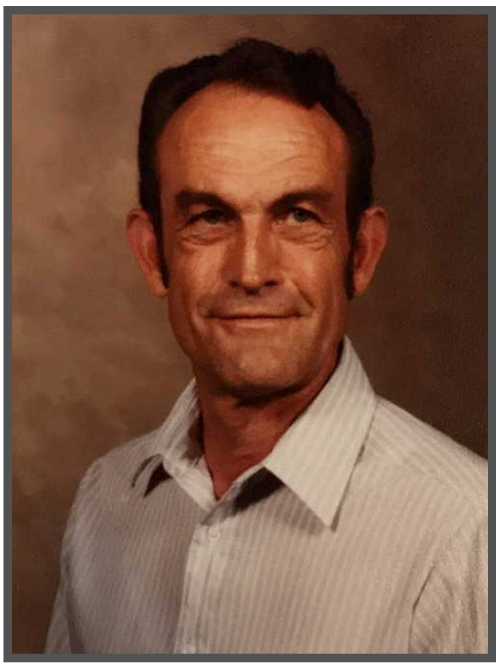
VISITING SUBDIVISION: Towns Commissioner Truman Barrett works at preparing his county for the growing number of retirees flocking to the area while protecting the scenery that keeps them coming.

Joel Jackson Dayton

Joel Jackson Dayton, son of Marvin Cline Dayton and Ruth Catherine Moss, was born on September 12, 1935, in the Scataway community, where he was raised and attended school. He was first married to Maxine Roach, who passed away at the age of twenty-four; they had one daughter, Rebecca, who later married Faron King. He later married Susie Bell Youngblood, and they had one son, Cameron, who married Patty Sue Shook. Dayton began his career working as an orderly at Towns County Hospital before joining Brumby Knitting Mills in 1956, where he quickly advanced to manager. In 1968, he purchased the company from Edward Brumby, who retained his Murphy, North Carolina division. The company produced white T-shirts for the U.S. military, but following the end of the Vietnam War in 1973, demand declined. Adapting to changing trends, the company shifted to producing colored T-shirts, maintaining employment for three men full-time and approximately forty-five women. During the late 1950s and 1960s, the factory also provided one of the first opportunities for local women to work outside the home, contributing income to their households.

Following the signing of the Mexican Trade Agreement by Jimmy Carter in 1979, many small manufacturing operations began relocating to areas with lower labor costs, leading to widespread closures across North Georgia, Western North Carolina, and Eastern Tennessee. Rather than relocate, Dayton sold his company in 1986 to another investor, allowing employees to retain their jobs. The building was later sold to Blue Ridge EMC and incorporated into their operations. After retiring from manufacturing, Dayton entered public service and was elected Commissioner in 1988. During his seventeen-year tenure, he led or supported numerous initiatives, including establishing the Chamber of Commerce and securing its current building, creating the Towns County Tourism Board, constructing the Health Department and 911 Center, relocating county tax offices to reduce courthouse overcrowding, building a new jail, developing the Industrial Park, expanding fire department facilities, and helping establish the Towns-Union Humane Society alongside Commissioner Glen Gooch. He also worked with Blue Ridge EMC to bring fiber optic internet to the county, supported construction of a daycare center, and facilitated the sale of the struggling Towns County Hospital to Union General to preserve local healthcare services.

Additional efforts included working with the TVA and the Tourism Board to extend lake-level maintenance for greater recreational use, and partnering with the Tourism Board and Richard Pellam to add heating and air conditioning to Anderson Music Hall, enabling year-round use. Many of these projects were funded through state block grants, and a Special Local Option Sales Tax enabled construction of a $1 million recreation facility in 1996. Under Dayton's leadership, Towns County maintained the lowest millage rate in the state, remained debt-free, and built substantial cash reserves. Despite rapid population growth increasing demands on county services, Dayton managed steady budget growth while maintaining fiscal responsibility. After seventeen years of service, he passed away in office on May 14, 2005, and was laid to rest in Macedonia Cemetery. In recognition of his contributions, several county departments—including the Building Department, Health Department, food pantry, Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, Child Development Center, Emergency Management Department, and 911 Mapping Services—are located on Jack Dayton Circle.



Wayne Henry Garrett

Wayne Henry Garrett, son of Henry Alexander Garrett and Margie Hollifield, was born on November 10, 1934, in the Bell Creek community, where he was raised. He later served in the United States Army. He married Ruby Lee Souther, and together they had two children, Jana and Christopher. In 1984, Garrett was elected Towns County Probate Judge and served in that role until 2007. During his tenure, he also briefly filled the position of commissioner in 2005 until a special election could be held to fill the vacancy.

Bill P. Kendall

Bill P. Kendall, son of Paul Kendall and Lena Sutton, was born on April 4, 1937, at the old Kendall homeplace on Sunnyside, now known as Beach Cove. As a young child, he walked nearly three miles to attend Macedonia Elementary School, a two-teacher school serving seven grades, where one of his teachers was Stella Owenby. In 1943, the school consolidated with Hiawassee Elementary School, located in a wooden building on the site of the present-day Tax Commissioner's Office. That same year marked the beginning of school transportation in Towns County, with Cecil Sanders serving as the first bus driver. Kendall graduated from Towns County High School in 1955, attended Young Harris College, and later earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Piedmont College. He continued his education with graduate studies at Georgia Southern College and completed a master's degree in school administration at Western Carolina University.

Kendall began his career in education in 1960, teaching and coaching at Fannin County Elementary School. From 1961 to 1966, he taught physical education in Towns County, served as athletic director, and coached basketball and baseball. In September 1966, he was elected Towns County School Superintendent, a position he held until 1992. One of his most significant accomplishments during that time was overseeing the construction of a comprehensive school complex that brought all grades, kindergarten through twelfth, together on a single campus.

After more than a decade of retirement, Kendall returned to public service and was elected Towns County Commissioner in 2005, serving until 2016. During his tenure, he helped lead the development of several community projects, including the Towns County Beach and Playground, the Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park, the Senior Center, Bell Mountain County Park, and the Old Rock Jail Museum and Research Center. Altogether, his career in public service to Towns County spanned nearly forty years.

Kendall married Mary Jean Parker of Union County, and they have two children: William Gary Kendall, a local surveyor, and Pamela Jean Kendall, a local attorney, who is married to Shannon A. Floyd, a local teacher.

Clifford Benjamin Bradshaw, Jr.

Clifford B. Bradshaw, Jr., son of Clifford B. Bradshaw, Sr. and Darlene Olson Bradshaw, began his term as Towns County Commissioner in 2017. During his tenure, he has focused on strengthening county infrastructure, utilizing SPLOST funds to address aging facilities, including a complete renovation and expansion of the courthouse. He has also emphasized improvements in recreation and public services, supporting a range of community-oriented projects such as enhancements to the Towns County Beach, including the addition of a splash pad. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bradshaw led the county through a period of uncertainty while maintaining fiscal responsibility, ensuring that essential services continued without placing undue financial strain on the county.