

# Jackson County Historical Society News

VOLUME TWENTY THREE, NUMBER THREE

MAY 2016



*Chain gang working on Jackson County roads, circa 1920. photograph by Cicero Simmons*

The Jackson County Historical Society will meet, Sunday, May 15, 2016, at 2:30 p.m. at the Historic Courthouse, 85 Washington St, Jefferson, GA 30549. The speaker will be Bud Aiken, past president of the Union County Historical Society and former Department of Transportation engineer. His program will be on early roads in Northeast Georgia.

*Jackson County Historical Society*

*P.O. Box 1234, Commerce, Georgia 30529*

*(706) 207-6889*

## Newsletter

Jackson County Historical Society dues run from September to September and can be mailed to:

Jackson County Historical Society  
P. O. Box 1234, Commerce, GA 30529:

Individual –\$15, Family –\$25, LIFE members –\$100

## JCHS Officers 2015-2016

President:	Shirley Wilson
Vice-President:	Marie Parks
Recording Secretary:	Boniface McDaniel
Treasurer:	Tommy Benton
Directors:	James Mathis Jerry Legg
Past Presidents:	the late, Joyce Ethridge the late, Ann A. Jarrett the late, Richard Chambers the late, Jean H. Booth Betty Ann Mathis James Mathis Ralph Freeman Carol Tanner Marie Parks Tina Harris Charlotte Mealor Caine Campbell

*excerpt from the Jackson County Board of Commissioners meeting, April 18, 2016*

The Historical Society of Jackson County will be the official custodian of the archives located in the Jackson County Historic Courthouse.

*The Jackson County Archives and Welcome Center is located in the Historic Courthouse. Early tax digest, civil docket, superior court minutes, individual court files, mortgage records, photographs and family files can be viewed with assistance of volunteers. Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri 10-3 or call 706-387-7684 for an appointment historic.committee@jacksoncountygov.com*

Sale items supporting the Jackson County Historical Society and Archives:

*"Jackson Co. Superior Court Conveyances 1802-1803-\$25".*

*"1890 Jackson Co. Line Map" towns & homeplaces - \$5.*

*"Civilian Conservation Core: Depression to WWII" - \$10.*

*Courthouse print 8x10 - \$20*

*Personalized Brick - \$50.*

*"Portraits of a Southern Place" - \$25.00.*

The Historical Society's collection in the Heritage Room of the Commerce Public Library contains research books on North Georgia counties, the Carolinas, Alabama, Virginia, and various other states. Surname books, family files, Wills, Bible records, court records, deed records, cemetery records, obituaries, church histories, community histories, soldier records and published books on Georgia counties.

A new microfilm scanner is available for the census, newspapers, Confederate pension records and various films. It has the capabilities to send images as an e-mail and copy to a flash drive.

An index of the collection and past newsletters from 1997-2015 can be viewed and the newsletters text is searchable on the library website:

<http://prlib.org/our-libraries/commerce-public-library/>

*The Heritage Room at the Commerce Public Library*

*1344 South Broad Street, Commerce, GA 30529*

*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 10 am - 6 pm*

*Thursday 10:00 am - 8:00 pm*

*Friday 10:00 am - 5:00 pm*

*Saturday 10:00 am - 4:00 pm*

[www.facebook.com/jacksoncountyhistoricalsocietyofga](http://www.facebook.com/jacksoncountyhistoricalsocietyofga)

## Georgia Roads, by Shirley Wilson

There were three types of country roads: Bad, impossible and worse. In the winter, there were deep ruts, mud and washed out holes. Should an automobile be in the community and parts were needed for the neighbor's car, they were borrowed. A prime example would be the car tag, as not everyone could afford a tag. In hot dry August, the dust would cover all and vision was limited. There was no air conditioning. Folks were good to give others a ride, if they needed a lift. The car would be packed and the neighbor simply stepped upon the "running board" and visited with the occupants until they arrived at their destination. The biggest concern was a blowout. In this event, the driver fixed his own tire. There were tire pumps, patching material, wrenches, jacks in the trunk. There were no rest stops, no places for food or water. Gasoline was ten cents a gallon and only increased to eighteen cents a gallon in 1961.

The Old Federal Road was the first road through North Georgia. The federal government was in contact with the Cherokee Indians as early as 1805 concerning this road. It began in the Indian town of Echota called Ross Landing, lost now near Chattanooga, TN. The road came south through the towns of Fairmont and Cartersville; east to Dawson and Forsyth counties, touching Hall, then the towns of Jefferson, Athens and Augusta. The mail was carried on this road, as well as stage coaches, military, and thousands of pioneers. Farmers used the road to bring produce from northern counties south.

In 1864, Mrs. Emma Hockenhull McClure, married to Robert Newton McClure from Gainesville, used part of the Old Federal Road in her travel to see her sister, Ellen Hockenhull Hayes, in Cleveland, TN. The Federal Army had ravaged the Hayes' farm and home searching for food and supplies. Emma rode to Tennessee on a horse, side-saddle, accompanied by a companion. There were many problems on the trip. Marauding bands would murder, plunder and steal captives from the frontier settlers. Emma would travel off to the side of the road, trying to hide as much as possible. She found her sister destitute and left her supplies before returning to Gainesville. In later years, Emma's daughter, Bula married F. C. Roberts and settled in Jefferson.

Early important trails that became roads included the Unicoi, which crossed the Unaka Mountains and entered North Georgia at Tallulah Falls, Track Rock Gap and Wolf Pen Gap.

*excerpt from "History of Harmony Grove" by T. C. Hardman*

### Road Repair

One of the major activities of the Board of Trade was to raise funds by volunteer subscriptions to provide topsoil, mules and wagons for hauling materials, and pay for labor to assist the county commissioners in keeping the dirt roads passable. In those days roads were worked twice a year by the county authorities but the result was highly unsatisfactory and help given by the Board of Trade was in pressing need.

*excerpt from the Georgia Archives newsletter, March 2016*

### The State of Georgia Department of Transportation is celebrating its one hundredth anniversary this year

The General Assembly authorized the establishment of the Highway Department in 1916.

In response to the 1916 federal act providing aid for road building, the Georgia General Assembly authorized the establishment of the Highway Department of Georgia.

For the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the Legislature authorized numerous attempts to build internal improvements to get Georgia products to market. Initial efforts ranged from improving river navigation or building canals to incorporating railroads across the state. In 1816, laws were passed to allow monopoly toll roads or turnpikes made of planks or gravel. Few were completed. In 1836, work began on a state-owned railroad, the Western and Atlantic, running from what became Atlanta to Chattanooga. The W&A was not completed until the Tunnell at Tunnel Hill opened in 1849. Georgia's infrastructure paid off in setting up routes through Georgia as the best way to get products from the Tennessee Valley region to the coast.

The Constitution of 1877 limited public debt and public aid to private interests. It did not keep the state from supplying prison labor to companies, including railroads, mines, brick making or agriculture. Throughout the nineteenth century road building and maintenance was controlled by counties: first by the Inferior court sitting for County Purposes and later by the Ordinary or County Commissioners. Adult males had to work a certain number of days in their area each year or pay a fee. As the century drew to a close, counties increasingly began to rely on local misdemeanor convicts to perform the

heavy labor on the roads. Most counties had no equipment other than shovels, a road plow, and an occasional mule-drawn grader or scoop. Roads, except in cities, remained dirt or gravel.

The end of the convict lease system in 1908 increased the number of convicts available for the Prison Commission to distribute across the state to build and maintain roads, and the number of miles of graded roads began to grow quickly. The state began licensing vehicles in 1910 and later provided that a portion of the registration fee would go into a road fund to assist the counties.

When the federal act of 1916 authorized funds to states with a highway department, Georgia was ready with an abundance of convict labor and chain gangs became a common sight all over Georgia until 1940's. The role of convict labor was clear in the 1916 Georgia legislation

which appointed all three members of the Prison Commission, the State Geologist, and two engineering professors to serve as the State Highway Department.

In 1919, the General Assembly created a new highway board composed of 3 members appointed by the Governor. In 1921, the state instituted a 1 cent gasoline tax which was increased to 3 cents in 1923, 4 cents in 1927 and 6 cents in 1929. In 1926 the voters approved an amendment to the 1877 Constitution allowing the state to levy a tax to construct and maintain highways. Beginning in 1920, the Department produced annual maps of the state system of highways. County highway maps were produced beginning in 1930. Between 1939 and 1942 The WPA spent over \$14 million helping Georgia build bridges and roads.

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