
Jackson County Historical Society News

VOLUME TWENTY TWO, NUMBER FOUR

SEPTEMBER 2015



Gazebo at Willoughby Park

The Jackson County Historical Society will meet September 10, 6:00 p.m. at Willoughby Park, 338 Clayton Street, Commerce, Georgia 30529. A hot Dog picnic will be served to members and perspective members who are interested in joining the Historical Society.

Directions: Take I85 to GA98S-Maysville Rd, travel to Washington St and turn right, .03 miles, turn left on Jefferson St, travel .03 miles to Willoughby Park on the right.

Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234, Commerce, Georgia 30529

(706) 207-6889

Heritage Room at the Commerce Public Library

1344 South Broad Street, Commerce, GA 30529

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 10:00 am – 6:00 pm

Thursday 10:00 am – 8:00 pm

Friday 10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Saturday 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

for assistance call Tina Harris - 706-207-6889

tina313@mindspring.com

LIKE us on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/jacksoncountyhistoricalsocietyofga

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 in the southeast. 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.

While visiting the collection you will also have access to use Ancestry.com on the libraries free Galileo account.

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/>



Heritage Room at Commerce Public Library

WHAT HAPPENED FIRST? in Commerce, Georgia
excerpts from History of Harmony Grove-Commerce by Thomas Colquitt Hardman

The area was inhabited by Native Americans thousands of years before people, mainly Revolutionary soldiers from the Virginias and Carolinas, began settlements. They first settled in Jackson County in 1784 at Groaning Rock on Little Sandy Creek, situated about 2 miles southwest of present day Commerce. William Dunson and George Wilson established homes and a fort was constructed on Sandy Creek. During this time the Native Americans were still hunting this area and wolves were reported to be a danger. Groaning Rock community had a population of 46 in 1796 when the county was formed.

The first name for the community was Harmony Grove. The community originated near Pittman's Bridge on the east side of the Oconee River. The post office was established there in 1825. Russell Jones was the first postmaster and boarded girls attending the Harmony Grove Female Academy whose charter was granted in Dec 1824.

Hardy Minish was one of the first settlers to the area near present day Commerce at Willoughby Park. Minish District was named for him. The area is on a ridge of a water shed that flows in two directions feeding many springs and ponds. The first building was a log home built by Eli Shankle around 1809. He and his wife Rebecca Hargroves settled near the Shankle Branch living under a brush arbor until the house was completed.

The original roads through the town of Harmony Grove were the Athens -Clarksville Road, Jefferson Road, Jefferson- Carnesville Road and Nowhere-Sandy Cross Road.

AGRICULTURE

The main agriculture was cotton, corn, wheat, oats, hay, potatoes and sorghum. After the Civil War, many citizens kept flocks of sheep. The sheep were not pastured and had ear clippings to identify their owners. They were raised for wool and sheared in April and August. In early years all the agriculture was used locally.

In the 1880's, Stark and Harber Oil Mill and Ginney, Peeler and Lovin Saw Mill and Cotton Gin and Commerce Fertilizer Company were in operation.

The first dairy was Bermuda Dairy, established in

1890 by W. L. Williamson. They provided local milk and shipped butter to Atlanta. They had 50-60 cows and produced 300-500 pounds of butter annually.

The cotton market began to grow around 1880. The largest receipts between 1883 and 1900 were about 23,000 bales for one season. Cotton was transported on flat cars and the sparks from the wood burner engine could cause a fire. Anyone could ride for free if they helped to keep the cotton from catching fire by dosing it with buckets of water. The boll weevil destroyed many crops in 1921 reducing production to 7000 bales. Production returned to normal after 1925.

Peaches and apples became a crop for local consumption and commercial production began around 1919.

BUSINESS

Beginning in the mid 1800's, mountaineers drove stock of cattle, hogs, sheep and turkeys to market from the Carolina and Georgia mountains through Harmony Grove. They would camp in covered wagons in the woods along their route to Athens and Augusta to sell their stock and produce. They traded for clothing, shoes and other necessities. On their return they would purchase heavy goods in Harmony Grove such as plows and stoves.

The first industry was R. A. Eckles Wagon factory. He used 14-16 coats of varnish on his wagons and buggies, making his the most durable on the market.

W. T. Stapler invented a plow stock and cultivator in the 1870's. The iron brace foot stock was manufactured in a shop near the railroad. He would ship a thousand or more in a season to South Carolina and local sales.

The first business was a store run by S. M. Shankle and Dr. L. B. J. Hardman around 1848. The sidewalks were laid with plank floors in front of the stores until the brick stores were built.

Dr. W. B. J. Hardman was the first physician to come to Harmony Grove in 1848. He had diplomas from Georgia Medical College, Augusta, and Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia. The Hardman Sanatorium was erected in 1899 by his son, Dr. L. G. Hardman with 30 room capacity. It was managed by Dr. L. G. Hardman and Dr. Nelms. The name was changed to the Commerce Hospital in 1946 under the management of Dr. G. O. Castellaw.

The first brick building in Harmony Grove was Ike Wilbanks' small store in 1879. In 1882, W.B.J. Hardman

built a brick hardware store and adjoining drug store.

In the 1880's, an African-American named Elbert Mathis had a harness shop in the rear of R. L. Hardman's Hardware store. He had a harness and shoe repair business in several locations and was known as a champion grain cradler (harvester of grain with a scythe).

Barbering in the 1880's was shared at the L. G. Hardman drug store where the men would cut each others hair. As the town grew, African-American Barbers set up the first shops as a business.

The Northeastern Hotel was opened in 1870 and operated by Solomon Seegar and his wife Calline. In 1880, L. G. Hardman erected a hotel on his home lot and in 1886 the Central Hotel was built by R. A. Eckles. In 1891 the Alhambra Hotel was erected by H. O. Williford, the name was changed to the Commerce Hotel. It later burned in 1914. There were also several boarding houses in town. The Jennie Butler House, Mrs. W. A. Dale house and Mrs. Jesse Smith's house.

In 1875, the Northeastern Railroad was organized to run from Lula to Athens through Harmony Grove. The first train ran through Harmony Grove in June, 1876. The railroad was a large factor in the growth and development of town. Harmony Grove became one of the leading distributing centers of Northeast Georgia. It built up trade from the surrounding counties and its freight receipts exceeded those of any other town of its size on the Southern Railroad.

The Northeast Georgia Progress was the first newspaper. It was edited by Malcom Stafford in 1881, and was printed in a two room building on the Jesse Wood lot on the north side of State Street.

The town of Harmony Grove incorporated in 1884. The charter was unique in the state for the provision that the Mayor and Council could never have the power to license the sale of alcoholic liquors.

The Harmony Grove Telephone Company was organized in October 1895. The first line was Harmony Grove to Jefferson. The next line was to Homer.

The first bank was the Northeastern Banking Company organized in 1892, with C. J. Hood as the cashier and L. G. Hardman as president.

In 1890, Dr. Lemuel J. Sharp perfected a formula for curing scabies and marketed it under the name *Parasiticide*. It was fast acting and provided immediate relief for sufferers. His brother, B. B. Sharp, went on the road as a travelling salesman in Georgia, the Carolinas and

Tennessee. The name of the formula changed to *Siticide* and stocks were sold in the business where it was sold throughout the Midwest and Eastern states.

Harmony Grove Mills was organized in 1893 with 60 40" looms and expanded to 583 looms by 1948. There were originally 28 employees. In 1948, there were 513 people employed.

The Commerce Overall Company started in 1917 by Fred E. Durst of Winder. They adopted the overall brand "Gander Brand". It employed 35 people. It grew steadily in spite of the depression of 1921. Blue Bell Manufacturing bought the company, in 1934. The clothing produced in the Commerce Plant was blanket-lined coats and cossack jackets and grew to 430 employees.

Mr. Durst started Commerce Manufacturing for overalls (trousers with a front flap over the chest held up by straps over the shoulders) in 1938 with 117 employees and grew to 800 employees by 1940. The garment industry was important in the economic life of Commerce for many years.

STATE GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATION

Dr Lamartine Griffin Hardman served as a member of the State House of Representatives from 1902-1907 and in the State Senate from 1908-1910. He was elected Governor in 1927 and served two terms from 1927-1931.

A TOWN BECOMES A CITY

In 1904, the name of the town was changed to Commerce to reflect prosperity.

Hood-Quillian Park, on the north of town, was donated to the city in 1904 by C.J. Hood and J. T. Quillan. In 1949, the American Legion and the V.F.W. built a lodge on the property, which is now used by the Commerce Recreation department. Today it has ball parks and a swimming pool. Willoughby Park was donated by the C. W. Hood estate in 1910.

In 1906, the first electric lights were contracted for the Harmony Grove Mill. The Mill had the street franchise to install lines and sell current to the town.

A bucket brigade used the public well to extinguish fires in the early days. After the installation of city water and the purchase of a fire truck in 1907, the fire department was organized.

A bond passed in 1913 to pave the side walks and streets were paved in 1927.

RECREATION

Baseball became popular around 1875. Match games were played on Saturday. No masks, gloves or mitts were used. By 1919, the Northeast Georgia Baseball League was formed. Making up teams from Commerce, Cornelia, Buford, Gainesville, Royston and Lavonia. The players were hired by the month. Usual attendance was 800-1200.

The C.T. Barber Brass Band was formed in the 1890's by the Barber family. Clinton, the father; sons: Fred, Theo, Dave, Rob, Calvin, Howard and Talmadge; daughters: Marian, Estelle and Belle. They played at celebration, commencements and parades. Clinton Barber was a teacher and leader of a large concert band in Atlanta during concert season.

The Mozart Bryant Circle fostered light operas, plays and authors in the 1880's - 1990's at the Opera House later called the Eli-day building.

CHURCHES

The first churches were small and disbanded after the Civil War. The Methodist church which had been called Sandy Level and located near Hardman's peach shed, moved in 1874 to it's present location on Cherry Street.

Harmony Grove Baptist was constituted in 1874 and is now called First Baptist Church of Commerce, located on South Elm St. The Harmony Grove Baptist church donated their building. It was moved to Madison Street while the Harmony Grove Baptist built their brick building in 1896.

The Madison Street Baptist Church was constituted in 1895 under the leadership of Rev H. E. Hardman. The Madison Street Church was to give religious facilities to the workers of Harmony Grove Mill and local residents.

The Presbyterians first met in a log cabin on Homer St in 1882 led by Rev R. W. Milner and Rev Groves Cartledge. A brick church was built in 1912 on Cherry Street Later a church was built on Lakeview Drive.

John Williford, John Pittman and Johnson Sanders sold lots on Homer Rd and houses were built in the 1880's. This area, where several African- American families lived, became known as Johnstown. John Williford donated the lot for the Baptist Church and Pastorium in 1880, now called Mt Calvary Baptist Church. The Johntown M.E. Church was established

in 1871, and today is called Warren Chapel. Johntown C.M.E was established in 1899, demolished in a storm and rebuilt in 1918 as Mt. Pleasant C.M.E.

SCHOOLS

In the 1840's, there were schools located in various locations and supported by private tuition. The first school of a larger size was on the property that is now the First Commerce Baptist Church. G. J. N. Wilson was the first teacher and was followed by R. S. Cheney. A two story wooden building was erected in 1874 with the Masonic lodge meeting place on the second story. A brick building was erected in 1888 and burned in 1895. The second building was built in 1895 and burned in 1903.

The African-American school building was on the north side of Homer Street in 1902. In 1920, money from the Rosenwald Fund was donated to build a new school further back from the street. It was a two room building and two more rooms were added to it in 1937. Rev. J. H. Allen was the first principal from 1902 until 1921. In 1969, African-American students were integrated into the three school systems.

NOTED AUTHOR

Olive Ann Burns was born in 1924 and grew up in her father, William Arnold Burns, hometown of Commerce, Georgia. After an education at Mercer College in Macon and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she graduated with a journalism degree in 1946 and was hired as a staff writer for the Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine (later Atlanta Journal Magazine). She wrote *Cold Sassy Tree* about a town in 1906, using her father's recollections of characters and life from Commerce Georgia.

LIBRARY

The Study Club of Commerce, with special attention from Mrs. Emma Hardman, created a library in a room of City Hall. It was run by Miss Claire Alexander. In 1965, the Commerce Woman's Club gave it's home to the library and in 1968, the building was razed and a 4000 square foot library was built with Paden Hendricks as Director.

We have recently lost two of our most beloved members and historians. Our thoughts and prayers go out to their loved ones and they will be greatly missed.

RALPH FREEMAN, JR., age 99 of Hoschton passed away Tuesday, July 7, 2015. Mr. Freeman was born March 7, 1916 in Hoschton, Jackson County, GA. He was the son of Ralph Freeman, MD and Bertha Naomi Hosch Freeman. Ralph, Jr. married Grace Margenice Evans on August 4, 1939. Ralph, Jr. grew up in Hoschton, GA, the town founded by his grandfather and grand-uncles. After attending school in Hoschton, Ralph graduated from Tech High, Atlanta, GA in 1933 and later attended Georgia Institute of Technology as well as North Georgia College. Three days before his twenty-third birthday he was elected Mayor of Hoschton and served as councilman several times over the years. He was appointed by the Hoschton City Council to the Historic Commission. He served as Chairman of the Jackson Co. Agricultural Committee and the Jackson County Historical Society and was past president of that society. As a member of Rockwell Masonic Lodge #191, Hoschton, GA, among his positions he served as Worshipful Master. Ralph worked for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service planning the land cover to keep the land from eroding for what later became Ft. Yargo State Park in Barrow County, GA. He produced farm crops for the military during World War II. He was an organizer for Farm Bureau in Jackson County.

MRS. CAROLDENE BLACKSTOCK MCEVER, age 87 of Talmo, Georgia who entered into rest Tuesday, August 18, 2015. Mrs. McEver was born in Jefferson, Georgia the daughter of the late Tom and Rena Hooper Blackstock, was a graduate of Martin Institute and Athens Business School, served as a Director of the Jackson County Department of Family and Childrens Services for thirty-five years, a board member of the Jackson County Historical Society, was a member of the Talmo Baptist Church where she taught Pre-School Sunday School for thirty years and was very active in the community where she and her family lived.

Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234 Commerce, Georgia 30529

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.

Sale items supporting the Jackson County Historical Society and Archives

Portraits of a Southern Place – price of \$25.00 includes tax.
Shipping with domestic carrier is an additional \$3.00.

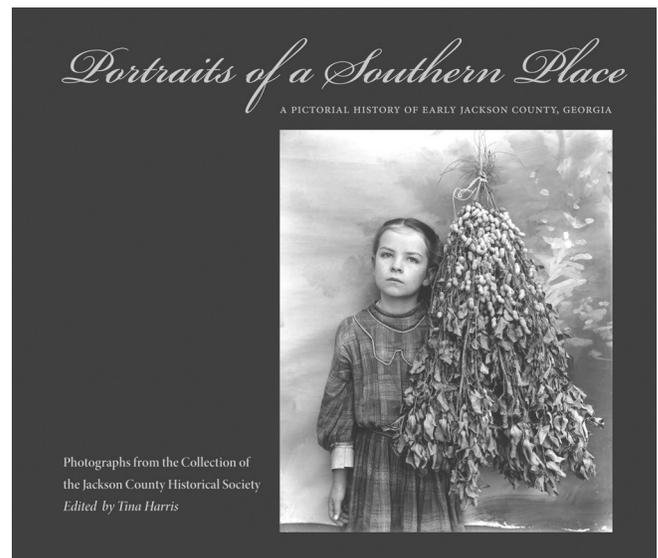
Jackson Co. Superior Court Conveyances 1802-1803 –\$25.

1890 Jackson Co. Line Map with towns & homeplaces –\$5.

Civilian Conservation Core: Depression to WWII – \$10.

Courthouse print 8x10 – \$20

Personalized Brick – \$50.



257 early Jackson County photographs covering 100 years of history. Includes an index, organized by surnames, to benefit genealogy researchers. This is a reprint in paperback of our 2007 publication.