

Jackson County Historical Society News

VOLUME FIFTEEN, NUMBER THREE

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Photograph of the Stapler homeplace in Nicholson, circa 1910. From left: Henry Coleman, John Stapler, Arthur Stapler, Johnnie Coleman, Ed Dailey, Euela Coleman Dailey, Thema Dailey, Jessie Coleman, Thomas Jefferson Stapler, Ella Stapler Coleman, J.H. Dailey, Tim Stapler, Novie Coleman, Myrt Coleman, Claude Coleman, Grover Coleman.

The Jackson County Historical Society will meet on April 20 at 2:30 p.m., at the home of Onelia Wallace, 428 Old Kings Bridge Road, Nicholson, GA. After a program by Randy Fleeman, members will walk or ride to the Stapler Cemetery. The house pictured above is to the left of Mrs. Wallace's home, the cemetery road is to the right.

Directions: Take highway 441 south of Nicholson. The second road on the right, after Benton Elementary School, is Old Kings Bridge Road, take a right, travel to a pink brick house with a circular driveway, on the right.

Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234, Commerce, Georgia 30529

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Newsletter

The Jackson County Historical Society News is published quarterly and mailed before the next meeting. Back issues can be obtained for \$3.50 each plus postage. Some of the past newsletters can be viewed online at: rootsweb.com/~gajackso/

Dues for 2007–2008 year

The dues year runs from July to July. Checks can be mailed to:

Jackson County Historical Society
P. O. Box 1234, Commerce, GA 30529:
Individual –\$15
Family –\$25
LIFE member –\$100

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In Memory

Jean Booth died February 3, 2008. After a funeral at Commerce Presbyterian Church, her remains lie at Apple Valley Cemetery. We all knew and loved her as a driving force behind the Historical Society, always ready to pursue a mystery yet to be solved in a genealogy or historical event of Jackson County's past. She is survived by her sons, William, Alex, John, Joe and several grandchildren. She is always with us.



Photograph of Laura Ethelyn Massey Stapler

Obituaries

excerpt from Jackson Herald August 26, 1892

On Thursday night, the 18th instance, the pure spirit of MRS. ETHEL STAPLER, wife of Dr. Joe Stapler, winged its flight to the bright realms above. This truly excellent and lovable lady was beloved by all who knew her, and her untimely demise has cast a gloom over our entire community. May the scarce three-week-old babe she left behind be spared to grow to womanhood, a comforter to the now deeply grief stricken husband. We tender our disconsolate friend and relatives of the deceased our profound and sincere condolences in their bereavement.

excerpt from the Jackson Herald March 9, 1894

The judges' stand in the court house and the door of the Sheriff's office are draped in mourning this week because of the death of Deputy Sheriff JOHN F. COLEMAN of Newtown district, who departed this life last Thursday evening of pneumonia and was buried at the Stapler burying ground on last Saturday. Too unwell to be here during court, yet John Coleman firmly believed that duty called him here, and here he remained, doing everything that developed on him. He remained until court adjourned, when he said, "I must go home, for I am sick." He left Jefferson never more to see it. His form will never be seen in the court house again. John Coleman was about

thirty-eight years old, was born in Newtown district, and grew up to be a man on the same grounds where he was born. Arriving at manhood, he was married to Miss Stapler, daughter of Squire Jeff Stapler, and they lived happily together. Five little children blessed their union, one of whom is a little infant about five or six weeks old. He was a farmer, and was always characterized for obedience to one of the commands of the Holy Book, which says, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." He never ran for office except for Deputy Sheriff, with our present Sheriff, B. H. Collier, and both were elected. John Coleman made a faithful officer, fearlessly doing his duty regardless of all consequences to himself. His place as deputy is hard to fill, but a successor will be appointed in a few days.

excerpt from Jackson Herald November 27 1913

One of Jackson county's oldest most highly respected and honored citizens, MR. F. J. STAPLER, passed away at his home in Newtown district on Monday, and was buried at the family burial ground at the Murry old homestead.

The funeral obsequies were held at the home, and conducted by Rev. H. E. Hardman, after which the body was interred by the Masons.

Squire Stapler, was nearly 87 years old. For nearly fifty years he served Newtown district as Justice of the Peace.

For almost the same length of time he had been a member of Unity Lodge, No. 36 F & A. M. of which his father was a charter member.

Only a few years ago he became a member of the church; uniting with the Baptist denomination and he was one of the most faithful members of the church and a most consecrated Christian.

He leaves five sons, W. J., Alabama; T. T., A. H., J. O., Jackson County, and Dr. Joe of Greensboro; and two daughters, Mrs. J. F. Coleman and Mrs. S. A. Coleman, both of whose husbands departed this life several years ago. Mrs. Stapler has been dead for several years.

Squire Stapler was one of nature's noblemen. He was one of this county's best citizens and numbered his friends by the hundreds.

excerpt from Jackson Herald November 6 1919

MISS THELMA DAILEY, the twelve-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. N. E. Dailey, or Nicholson died Friday afternoon, at two o'clock, at the family residence in that city. The funeral was held Sunday at the noon hour at the Nicholson Baptist church, internment taking place at the Stapler's burying ground.

The deceased is survived by her father and mother and five brothers, Messr. J. H., Thomas, Coleman, Belmus and Lewis Dailey, all of Nicholson.



photograph of John, Arthur, Joe and Tim Stapler

excerpt from the Jackson Herald, March 23, 1892

Clipping from the New York Sun:

At 8 o'clock last evening a man wearing a hat and cowhide boots, into which his trousers were tucked, crossed on the Desbrosses Street ferry from Jersey City, and accosting a hackman, asked where he could see the "High Constable," as he wanted to give himself up for murder. The hackman directed him to Leonard Street Station, where he was taken in charge by Detective Michael Dunn. He gave his name as Joseph Alexander Farmer, and said that he was a native of Jackson County, Ga, where he had committed a murder in May 1st of last year. His victim, he said, was a boy named R. Drake. He had been arrested for the murder by Sheriff B. H. Collier, and while Deputy Sheriff John Suddeth was conveying him to the county jail, he made his escape and his family provided him with funds, with which he had been traveling all over the country, but his conscience has lately troubled him so much that he decided to surrender himself.

Detective Dunn took Farmer to Police Headquarters, where he was locked up. On his person was found \$60. in cash, besides a huge revolver nearly a foot and a half long. He says that Sheriff Collier and his deputy know all about the murder.

The man will be detained at Police Headquarters pending an investigation of his story. He does not seem to be seeking free transportation back to Dixie.

Sheriff Collier received a telegram Monday from New York saying that a Jackson county murderer, named Farmer, had surrendered himself to the officials of that city. Sheriff Collier then sent for a photograph, but they did not have one so his description was sent by another telegram Monday night. This, together with the above from the New York Sun, satisfied the Sheriff that the man who surrendered himself was really Farmer, and Mr. Collier has now gone after the escaped murderer.

It would probably be of interest to the people to capitulate the circumstances of the murderous tragedy.

James A. Farmer and Ira Drake were neighbor boys, living near the town of Nicholson, in this county. They had played together when children, attended the same school and went to the same churches. As they grew up to be young men the same warm friendship that had existed between them as children seemed to attend them in a more advanced age.

It was one Sunday night in last May. It was clear and bright, not a cloud hid the faces of the myriad of stars

which were peeping out from behind the curtain of the spacious firmament. The moon shone bright. It was just such a time for neighborhood gatherings. There was a singing at Royston schoolhouse on that night, and James Farmer was there; so was Ira Drake. About 10 o'clock the singing dismissed, and the crowd started towards home. Farmer accompanied a young lady home, and Drake went along, either with Farmer and the young lady, or was not far behind. That was the last time any one ever saw Drake alive. The next day he was found dead, with two bullet holes in his back, on the Block Bridge Road.

The next day, when James awoke, his dear old father was standing by his bedside with the tears streaming out of his eyes down his furrowed cheek, and told his son that he was accused of murdering Ira Drake. It was a trying hour with that poor father, who had worked and labored and suffered to rear his boy, and then, just as he arrived at an age of usefulness, to find him accused of the atrocious murder of his neighbor companion. After breakfast Farmer went to work, but soon the sheriff arrived and placed Farmer under arrest. The deputy sheriff started toward Jefferson with him, but stopped at his home to procure him some clothing. While the deputy sheriff remained in the buggy, Farmer, with two other men, went into the house. Farmer stepped into the adjoining room to get his clothing, but ran out at the back door and made his escape. Since then he has been rambling over the world until last Saturday, when he gave himself up to the officers of New York, as explained in the above clipping from the New York Sun. The sheriff will arrive here with the prisoner the first of next week.

excerpt from the Jackson Herald April 1, 1892

SAFE IN JAIL, Sheriff Collier returns with

James Alexander Farmer, the man accused of killing Ira Drake, is behind the granite walls of Jackson county jail.

He was brought here last Wednesday from New York by Sheriff Benjamin Howell Collier.

Sheriff Collier left Jefferson last Wednesday morning on the G. J. & S. Railroad for Atlanta, where he went to get the requisition papers from Governor Northern for his New York prisoner.

From some little defect in his papers he carried from here, Governor Northern did not grant them until Thursday morning. While this was being done Chief Connolly gave the sheriff a letter of introduction to Inspector Barnes of New York City.

The Sheriff left Atlanta at 1:35 o'clock on last Thursday and landed in the great metropolis on Friday, just before the hands of the great metropolitan clock pointed to the hour of 4. From New York City he went straight to Albany, the capitol of New York, to get Governor Flower to sign the requisition papers. When he landed at the capitol he went straight way to the executive mansion, Governor Flower was seen and the papers signed and Mr. Collier returned to New York City Saturday about noon. But his prisoner could not be delivered over until Monday.

During the intermission Ben took in the sights of the greatest American City. He saw trains flying in the air, the great wharf, and ten thousand other things. The police spared neither time nor expense in making the great sheriff of the great county of Jackson enjoy his stay, and he brings back flattering reports of New York's municipal government.

On Monday morning, Farmer was delivered over to the sheriff to bring back to this county. While the courts were doing this a reporter of the New York Sun was standing near, noticed the Sheriff and heard what he said when he and Farmer met. He also took his picture and Farmer's, and a handsome likeness of both can be found in Tuesday's Sun. When Ben and Farmer met they gave each other a hearty grasp, and expressed themselves as being glad to see each other.

They left Monday evening and reached Gainesville about 10 o'clock Tuesday night. Had the train been on time they would have reached Gainesville in time to take the train for Jefferson. Every one was on the lookout for them Wednesday night, but Ben got in a flank movement in the shape of a big surprise by landing his prisoner in jail Wednesday about noon, having come from Gainesville by means of private conveyance. Ben slipped into our office about 2 o'clock on that day, slapped us on the back and said: "Hello, I am back safe, sound, and with my prisoner." He told us of the many wonderful things he had seen, which we would publish had we the space.

As we were anxious to see the prisoner, we gathered ourself up and started toward the jail as soon as the sheriff had made his exit from our office.

On making inquiry, after our arrival at the granite prison, as to the whereabouts of Farmer, a voice answered: "Here I am." Stepping up to a grate, we looked through and saw a slender boy, weighing about 130 pounds, about 5 feet 8 inches in height and fair complexion, with large blue eyes, a lean face, with a two week's growth of beard,

and sandy hair. Farmer had an exceedingly careless look, but at the same time he was good natured, and answered all questions put to him with alacrity. He has a short, light mustache, which he pulled with his left hand while being interrogated. After telling him who we were and our business, and at the same time cautioning him not to talk too much, we asked:

"Farmer, from what place did you go to New York?"

"I went from Jersey City to New York, on Saturday was a week, and gave myself up to the officers that night. I went from Pennsylvania to Jersey City."

"How much money did you have?"

"Just exactly \$67.85."

We then asked Farmer why he did not come and give himself up here, as he had plenty of money to do so. We also told him that was something people in this county could not understand.

Farmer then looked down, and putting his left foot before his right and leaning against the wall, said, in very deliberate way:

"No sir, none of my folks did know nothing about it. I just got tired rambling over the world, and knowed I was innocent of the crime for which I am charged, and I determined to come back here and set myself right before my people."

We then asked this question: "Farmer, if you are an innocent man, why did you run?"

"Well, I will just tell you," quickly answered. "I am nothing but a boy, and was just scared so I didn't know what to do. I just abhorred the idea of coming to jail. I did not know whether I could have give bond or not and I didn't want to be put in Jail. I had knowed I could have give bond, I never would have run. Then again over at the trial everybody told me I had better run. You know yourself when nearly everybody wants you to do a thing, it's hard to keep from it. But I wouldn't 'er run no how if I had knowed I could have give bond and kept myself out of jail. "

We then asked him if the story of his escape as appeared in the Herald last week was substantially correct and he answered that it was.

"Farmer, you say you did not kill Ira Drake?"

"No, Sir"

"Do you know who did?"

"No, Sir, I can't tell who did."

"How is it, that you are charged with the murder?"

"I'll have to go back to the trial to tell you that," he an-

swered. "It was on Sunday. Bob Farmer, my brother, and Monroe Hawks had been drunk all that day. On Sunday night we all went over to Mr. Sam Suddeth's to a singing. I went with Miss Fannie Bullock, who lived at Mr. Frank McElhannon's, and Luke Esters went with Miss Dora, Mr. McElhannon's daughter. We went home with them about 10 o'clock, and after reaching there talked with these young ladies for some little time at the door steps. Leaving the house we went down to the road about fifty or a hundred yards and met up with my two brothers, John Archer, Monroe Hawks and Herbert Chandler. I had not been with them long before we heard a pistol fire. The boys said that Drake had just passed by while I was talking at the door steps. We all parted in about five minutes after we heard the pistol. John Archer went back to Mr. Frank McElhannon's where he lived, the others went away, and I went home and went to bed. Next morning my father carried my sister to Athens and I went to hoeing cotton. About 12 o'clock he got back and told me that Ira Drake had been found dead with one bullet hole in his back and another in his head. On Tuesday the inquest was held at Suddeth's spring. There were just lots of folks there. Several had been on the stand, but when it came Monroe Hawks' time he swore that he knew who did it, and said it was Zan Farmer. Monroe Hawks is the very man who swore I did it, and they started to put me in jail. I have come back home to prove myself clear of this terrible crime of which I am charged. I am innocent, and I did not intend to be running away from the law when I had done nothing to run for, and I don't propose to have such a black crime hanging over the family.

"You think, then, that you will be acquitted, do you?"

"Yes, Sir," he answered. "I wish you would put a piece in your paper," he continued, "and say that all that was in the Sun and Constitution is not so. They had me saying things I never did say."

"We promised to comply with his request, bade him adieu and took our departure.

There is but one strange thing connected with the sheriff going after his prisoner, and that is this: Ben wanted a new hat. He tried all over Jefferson, Gainesville and Atlanta to find one to suit him, that was large enough, but not a single hat could he find, even in the Gate City, whose dimensions were large enough to cover Ben's cranium, and he had to wear that same old white hat among the millionaires of the Empire State of the Union.

excerpt from the Jackson Herald July 13, 1892

JAIL DELIVERY

Last Saturday morning, just after 3 o'clock, eleven of the eighteen prisoners confined in the jail of this county broke out and escaped. Seven of the number have been captured, but the following named are still at large: Will Johnson, the murderer; Barney Starks, Will Williams all negroes, and John Roberts, a white man.

For some time a few of the accused have been making efforts for their freedom, but when the subject was mentioned to outsiders they laughed at the idea, for no one ever dreamed that a prisoner could break out of Jackson county's substantial rock jail, unless it was through the door, but the prisoners came face to face with the five rock walls surrounding them, and they were victorious.

Here is how it was done. A person in jail stands on a rock floor more than two feet thick, has a rock ceiling over his head and rock walls surrounding him. The outer walls are made of stones several feet high, two feet thick, set up on their ends, resting on and perpendicular with the floor. These rocks are set up about six inches apart, thereby leaving a space for the purpose of ventilating the jail. Between these large upright stones grates are fitted in. They are fastened both above and below. Holes are drilled at the bottom and top, and they are fastened by means of strong iron rods. These iron pins or rods hold the perpendicular stones to their places. The question was how could those rods be cut in two and the rock loosened. This was a debatable question with the prisoners, and is still a mystery to the people. Some of the prisoners say, that it was sawed with a razor, others say they were furnished a saw, while a few of them say they don't know what kind of instruments were used. But it is very evident that they were furnished with something. Their first step was to remove the cement from the bottom of one of the upright stones, so as to let it down just a little. This being accomplished, there was space enough at the top to run their saw in between the rocks and saw the iron rod in two, which held the upright rock in its position. The prisoners had been working at this for more than a month.

Two prisoners by the name of Fulcher and John Roberts wrote the Sheriff a note stating that some of the prisoners were trying to break out of jail. The Sheriff came up on Barney Starks, Will Goss and Will Williams trying to make their escape. He at once locked the cell door where they were trying to remove the rock and carried them to

other cells. This cell was not used for a long while, and they all desisted in their efforts to escape.

After awhile the Sheriff had so many prisoners that he was compelled to use it for some of them to sleep in at night, thinking, as everybody else thought, that no one could escape.

Friday night Sheriff Collier told all of the prisoners to get in their cells. The doors are locked from the outside by means of a lever. This time, as the lever banged down, a coat was put in the way, so that the doors were not locked, but only appeared like they were. When the Sheriff had retired the prisoners could then come from their respective ceells and have access to the room from whence they were going to make their escape.

After the Sheriff began the use of the cell again some of the prisoners renewed their efforts to remove that upright stone. Fearing that Farmer would again reveal their plot, Will Williams and Barney Starks went to him and said if he told anything on them that they intended to kill him while he slept. So he was afraid to say anything this time, and the prisoners continued their work of cutting the rod. By the night when they escaped the connecting rods had already been severed. The grates between the rocks were then removed and when this was done the rock, by means of the strength of nine or ten men hold of a strong lever, was pushed to one side and a space large enough for a man to escape was there opened. Barney Starks, the leader of the desparate crew, crawled through the opening, first. Will Goss then tried it and got fastened between the rocks. So eager were the others to get out that they all used their combined strength and pushed him through anyway. After his escape then came the negro Will Williams, and then others followed until eleven had made their exit through the newly-made door. By this time some of the other prisoners awoke. Cicero Kellogg, a one-eyed darkey, put in jail for shooting at another, said to Zan Farmer: "De prisoners have all done gone, Mr. Farmer." Farmer and Fulcher then jumped up from their bunks, and, on investigation, found what the negro said to be partly true. Fulcher said he believed he would go out and tell Mr. Collier, but as he was in the act of going through the opening Farmer caught him by the foot and pulled him back and told Cicero Kellogg to go. Cicero went out and knocked at the sheriff's door and informed him that eleven prisoners had escaped. Ben asked him when they had escaped and how, and Cicero replied, "About fifteen minutes ago," and carried him

around the jail and showed him how the rock had been moved and a way of escape made. the negro then drew up a bucket of fresh water, took a drink and then went back into the jail, while Mr. Collier started out in search of the escaped prisoners.

The town was aroused, and men went in all directions hoping to find a trace of the escaped prisoners. One was caught and brought in early in the morning and another was caught in the afternoon. Sunday morning Barne Eley went out to feed and as he passed his gin house he thought he heard someone snoring. He slipped up the steps and looked in and there were two white men and one negro. He slipped back to his house, summoned help and went back to the gin house and arrested the slumberers, carried them to his house, gave them breakfast and brought them to Jefferson and turned them over.

On Sunday night Louis Johnson, a negro who has been living on Captain Deadwyler's place returned and surrendered. He said he just went up home to see his wife, and that he never did intend to runaway.

Seven of the escaped are now back in jail, where they will probably remain till court disposes of them, while four are still uncaptured, but every effort is being made to catch them.

*excerpts from The Early History of Nicholson, Ga
by Richard J. Chambers 1987*

Nicholson was originally named Cooper in honor of the Willis Cooper farm just below present day Nicholson. The people of Cooper, desiring a railroad depot, informed President J. Nicholson "that they would name the town after him if he would make a fuel stop in Cooper so they could sell their wood to the railroad" the fuel stop was created, and the name changed occurred in 1876.

The town was mostly a farming section with the big landowners being the Cooper, David, Hood, Smith, McElhannon, Howington, and Stapler farms. The town was incorporated on August 22, 1907 with C. H. Smith elected as the first mayor. A courthouse was built with the first floor used for court and the second floor for the Masonic Lodge and Odd Fellows Hall. Timothy T. Stapler built the courthouse and it was located behind the Stapler home on Broad Street. The courthouse was eventually torn down.

Prior to 1936, five small schools were in existence in the Nicholson area: Center, New Harmony, Nicholson, Antioch and Hood's Academy. The school at Nicholson

had three rooms and three teachers. In 1936, Nicholson voted on bonds for a new consolidated school.

Dr. Washington Lafayette Hood was the town's only doctor from the late 1800's until he died in 1908. His office was located behind the Baptist Church on Mulberry Street, serving as the town's hospital as well as doctor and dentist office.

Dr. Joseph Stapler, Dr. Lamertine G. Hardman, and Dr. W. B. Hardman interned under Dr. Hood. Young doctors did internships with an older, practicing physician rather than in a hospital.

At one time, Dr. Hood practiced medicine in Florida. He named his son, Andrew Okee Honchee Hood, after an Indian chief who was his friend and patient in Florida. Dr. Hood purchased chemicals and mixed his own medicine as a patient needed the prescription. In 1899, his son Willis lived upstairs and met a tragic death when he tried to mix medicine for himself. The story reveals that Willis had a headache, went into his father's office, and by the time Dr. Hood found Willis it was too late to save his life.

Dr. Hood was pulling a man's tooth on the porch of his office in 1908 when he suffered a heart attack and died. After his death, his son Andrew Okee kept Dr. Hood's

dentistry tools and pulled teeth for the poorer families.

The oldest Church in the area is Antioch United Methodist, established in 1799. Nicholson Baptist was constituted in 1909, Nicholson Holiness was built in 1921, Nicholson Pentecostal Fire Baptized Holiness Church was incorporated in 1918, Nicholson United Methodist began Sunday School in 1933 and began building a church in 1956.



Photograph of Okie Hood with automobile, 1914. Okie worked as a traveling salesman for Watkins Products before being elected tax receiver in 1929.

Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234 Commerce, Georgia 30529