

Jackson County Historical Society News

VOLUME SEVENTEEN, NUMBER ONE

OCTOBER 2009



Crossroads School House and Church, 1913

The Jackson County Historical Society will meet at Nicholson Community Center on Sunday, October 18 at 2:30 p.m. There will be a program on the Cross Roads Community with a ramble to the cemetery and school site. Refreshments will be served.

Directions: From Athens, take Highway 441 North to Nicholson, turn right, travel to the Community Center on the left at 129 Lakeview Dr.

Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234, Commerce, Georgia 30529

(706) 335-5946

Newsletter

The Jackson County Historical Society News is published quarterly and mailed before the next meeting. Back issues can be obtained for \$3.00 each plus postage. Some of the past newsletters can be viewed online at: rootsweb.com/~gajackso/

The Historical Society's collection of books, files and research materials are housed in the Heritage Room of the Commerce Public Library.

Queries will be published in the next issue. Please send by December 15, 2009.

Dues for 2009–2010 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

JCHS Officers 2009-2010

President:	Caine Campbell
Vice-President:	Shirley Wilson
Recording Secretary:	Doris Lord
Corresponding Secretary:	Boniface McDaniel
Treasurer:	Tommy Benton
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Newsletter Editor:	Tina Harris

The Georgia Historical Records Advisory Board

has selected the Jackson County Historical Society to receive an award for Excellence in Archival Program Development. The Board is proud to recognize the work of the Society's Historic Courthouse Document Recovery Project which has recovered thousands of historical documents dating back to 1796. They and their guests are invited to the Awards Ceremony at the Georgia Archives in Morrow on October 5, 2009. The ceremony will include a reception from 5:00 to 5:30 p.m., the awards presentation from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., followed by a tour of the Georgia Archives.

Cross Roads Historic District

By David Ramsey and Gregory Mathis Yearby

The Cross Roads Historic District in Nicholson, Georgia includes the Cross Roads Negro School, the Cross Roads Colored Methodist Church site, and the Cross Roads Cemetery. The schoolhouse and the cemetery still exist. The church was destroyed during the 1950's. It was situated on the main road a short distance from the school, and several elders in Nicholson remember the church and its Sunday evening services. There was a choir at the church, and the choir often sang at nearby church services as well as in the home church. Ruth Wilbanks, age 89, a local citizen of Nicholson, remembers that one of the church members did laundry for her family. Because of that association, she and a friend sometimes were invited to Sunday dinners at the church. This was unusual at the time, and she remembers that she considered it to be quite an occasion and the opportunity for *some of the best food I ever ate*.

The exact date of the construction of the church and school is not known. The school is listed in 1881 as *Cross Roads Negro School* in a book about the history of Jackson County, Georgia, written by Frary Elrod. The school was built first because it was used both as a school and church for awhile. However, it is thought that both were built shortly after the Civil War, since cemetery burials began about that time. The cemetery lot was sold to families by Billups Phinizy, a wealthy Athens Insurance Executive who owned land throughout North Georgia. It is thought that the land for the church and school was granted by his wife, Nellie, who obtained the property in

a divorce settlement with Mr. Phinizy.

The Cross Roads Historic District was a small African American village that served as the center of everyday life for Black citizens around Nicholson. Most of the inhabitants of the village worked in the cotton fields that existed as far as the eye could see at that time, when *cotton was king*. Some, however, engaged in various trades. One resident had a shop in Commerce and made harnesses for horses. Another was a shoemaker. He distinguished himself by being the only person who could make shoes for a white resident who had club feet. Some did house-keeping and odd jobs. Some taught the children who attended the Cross Roads School.

It was rare for children in the 19th century to attend much school, even less so for Black children. School usually consisted of a few hours a day for a few months of the year. Of course, white and black schools were separate, and black schools were expected to teach industrial work (*work with hands*). Most of the County's meager education budget was spent on supporting white schools and white teachers. Around the turn of the 20th century, Jackson County began to pay more attention to the education of Black citizens. Using money from donations by the Jeannes Fund, *also known as the Rural Negro School Fund*, the County hired a Supervisor for the Black schools. This Supervisor assisted Black teachers with curriculum and teaching aids for children attending the Black schools. Many of the Jeannes Supervisors had education beyond high school, and were able to help Black teachers develop a much stronger educational curriculum than the traditional view of industrial training.

A 1915 *Educational Survey of Jackson County, Georgia* by M. L. Duggan for the County School Superintendent lists Cross Roads School as one of fifteen Negro schools in the County. He notes that there are *7 grades, 68 pupils, a comfortable, clean, and well kept house, but no industrial work*. The teacher is listed as P. A. Sargent. Research from the 1910 Census reveals that Pleas A. Sargent, age 21, lived in Harrisburg District, near Nicholson. He was a single Black male who was able to read, write, and had attended school during the previous year. While everyone else in the family is listed as *farm laborer*, his occupation is listed as *none*. It is thought that at the time of the census he was being prepared to teach at Cross Roads School.

Research on the cemetery site reveals that some of those buried there are former slaves, veterans of the

First and Second World Wars, and full-blood Cherokee who married Black citizens attending the church. Note: this part of Jackson County was once part of the Cherokee Nation. Cherokee once had villages on the nearby streams.

There are few burials at the cemetery now. Most of the former residents have moved away. They were an integral part of the life and the economy of Nicholson and the surrounding area during the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century. After the cotton crops failed due to the boll weevil, and the mills began to disappear, many Black citizens in the South migrated to the more industrial North to find work. This is also true for many of the Cross Roads community residents. Their descendants can now be found in Ohio, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. However, some remained nearby. One, a beloved member of the community called *Uncle Alb*, was Albert Daniel. He served as custodian of the nearby Benton Elementary School in Nicholson until his death. He and his wife are buried in the Cross Roads Cemetery, as is his father-in-law, who was born into slavery. Another descendent, Gregory Mathis Yearby, is retired and



Frank Derrocotte — died July 11, 1908

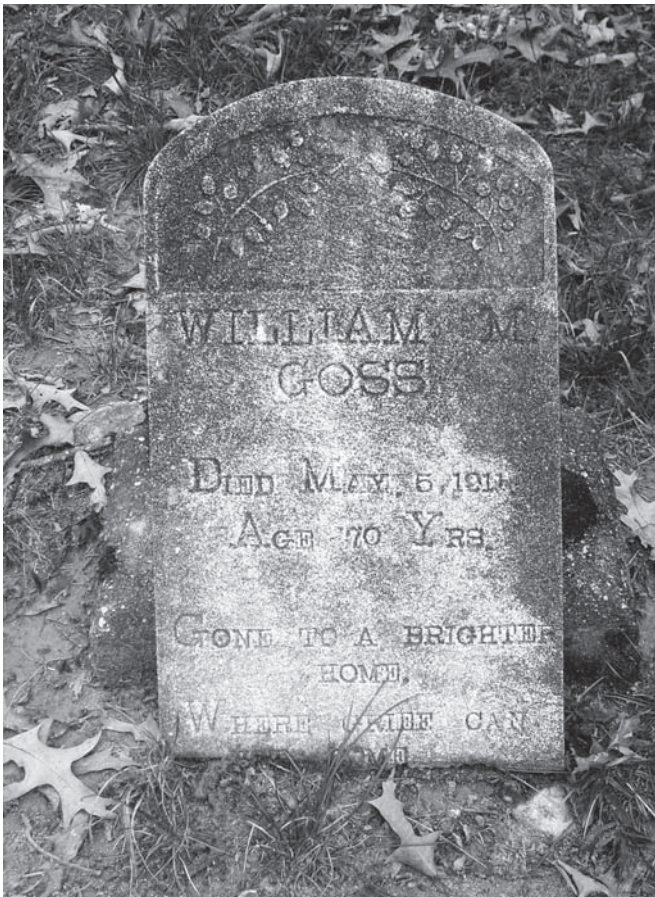
lives in Buford. He still visits the cemetery and has been very helpful in our research about those buried there, and he has been helpful with details about the church and school history.

The City of Nicholson hopes to remember these unique residents and the history of this village, to restore and preserve the schoolhouse, and to construct a Heritage Center on the site. Our history and the contributions of those before us should be celebrated, never forgotten. We are in the process of securing funds to place the Cross Roads Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

Cross Roads Cemetery

W. Williams - 1934
 Susie Hargrove - April 12, 1886-May 30, 1948
 Willie A. Jones - died April 14, 1930
 Charlie Hargrove - January 22, 1907-September 1, 1929
 William W. Flood; Bakers & Cooks School - June 8, 1928
 Macie Williams - February 7, 1874-January 4, 1922
 Sara Ann Jackson - died 1939, age 99 years
 Grover C. Stapler - December 25, 1886-Nov. 7, 1974
 his wife Cornelia - March 4, 1884 - August 3, 1925
 Georeldine Sims - September 14, 1903 - January 14, 1925
 Cathel Mae Harris - May 28, 1925 - July 13, 1945
 R. Lee Mathis Sr. - 1901-1942
 Ruby H. Mathis - 1901- 1939
 Carl E. Mathis - 1900-1947
 Eugene Mathis - 1881-1965
 Sarah Jones - died 1934
 Albert H. Daniel - 1882-1957
 Kinnie C. Daniel - 1882-1972
 Mary Lue Harris - December 26, 1894-April 2, 1924
 ? Chandler - died October 1942 age 69
 George Chandler - 1844-1930
 wife Judy C. Smith - October 4, 1848-December 22, 1913
 Lola Jon - March 6, 1875-November 30, 1906
 Ronnie Brown - July 23, 1880-June, 1918
 Maggie Chandler - died March 21, 1931, age 54 years
 Epsy Goss - September 1, 1870-March 6, 1907
 William M. Goss - died May 5, 1911, age 70 years
 Bill Goss
(excerpt from The Jackson Herald October 18, 1886-Bill Goss, cold, got his hand and arm badly lacerated in Mr. Charles H. Smith's Gin the other day.)
 Victoria, wife of Garrison Rucker-died Oct.3,1901 age 35
 Clarisie Jane,wife of C.R. Oliver-May10,1865-Oct.9, 1905

Ottie O. Daniel - 1903-1904
 Vailzie Jackson - July 15, 188?-September 6, 1892
 Infant of Young & Ola Chandler - September 12, 1897-
 December 8, 1897
 Grover, son of L.C.& Mattie Chandler - January 18, 1892-
 August 22, 1892
 Pearl, daughter of Wallace & Manda Jones - died May,
 1890, age 13 years
 Manda, wife of Wallace Jones - March 1853-1892
 Enoch Hargrove - May 6, 1910-November 16, 1912
 Andrew, son of Wallace & Manda Jones died September
 1894, age 15
 Annie, daug of W.M. & S.J. Arnold - April 7, 1905-July
 20, 1905
 Eliza Arnold - died November 20, 1900, age 44 years
 Jethra, son of young & Ola Chandler - September 28,
 1898-March 15, 1899
 William, son of Young & Ola Chandler - November 26,
 1900-April 6, 1901
 Mattie C. F., daughter of E. A. & C. L. Allison - July 17,
 1904-April 29, 1905
 Rubey Chandler - August 8, 1901- January 22, 1902
 Jessielen C., daughter of Rev A. C. & Sallie Cheerless -
 May 31, 1904-May 17, 1906
 Frank, son of , Miles & Eveline Derricotte - died July 11,
 1906, age about 25 years (I. O. of St. Luke)
*(The Independent Order of St. Luke was a fraternal burial soci-
 ety established in 1867 in Baltimore. The society administered to
 the sick and aged, promoted humanitarian causes and encour-
 aged individual self-help and integrity.)*
 Miles Derricotte - died May 17, 1918
 Everline Derricotte - died July 26, 1931
 A. L. Derricott - died February 2, 1936
 Charlie L. Palmer - died December 2, 1946
 Merie Palmer - December 13, 1937
 J. B. Derricotte - Died February 23, 1932
 Mary Hemphill - June 10, 1871-September 1, 1941
 Infant of Mattie B. Eberheart - b&d November 18, 1911
 Irene Parks - died April 17, 1952, age 57 years
 Lessie Eberhart - died January 2, 1968
 Millie Mathis
 Elbert Mathis - 1860-1947
 Dell Jones - died May 8, 1942, age 76 years
 James Robert Smith - died July 1931, age 36 years 11 mos



William Goss- died May 5, 1911

Notes from interviews about the Cross Roads Historic District, Nicholson, Georgia

Ruth Wilbanks, age 89, of Nicholson recalls the Cross Roads Methodist Church, which was standing when she was a girl. She recalls that it was a *shotgun* building with windows on both sides, a stove, and a steeple. The church was painted white and situated right on the edge of the road. Ruth and her girlfriend were sometimes invited to the church for Sunday dinner by Estelle Sims, a church member who did the laundry for her family. Estelle's mother and father, *Geraldine and Hubert*, are buried in the Cross Roads Cemetery. Ruth recalls a Sunday evening in 1935 when she and her friend were invited to attend a service at the church. This was considered a very unusual thing at the time. After the service she ate dinner with the church members and had *some of the best fried chicken I ever ate*.

Bobby Crawford, age 75, lives at the end of Cedar Drive in Nicholson. He remembers the Cross Roads Methodist Church and the Cross Roads schoolhouse from the early 1940's because he passed by them nearly every day on his way to the old Benton school where he studied. He would walk along the tracks with the teacher and some of the students until they parted, each going to their respective schools. He recalls that the teacher was Mr. Robinson, and that he was tall and slim with a strong, deep voice.

Gregory Mathis Yearby now lives in Gainesville, but many of his relatives are buried in Cross Roads Cemetery. Mr. Yearby's grandmother and grandfather are both full blood Cherokee and are buried in the cemetery. Several other Native American relatives of Mr. Yearby are also buried in the cemetery. His great uncle, Usell Mathis, owned a shop in Commerce during the 1940's where he made harnesses, shoed horses, and even made specialized shoes for some of the residents. Mr. Hoyt Borders, one of the residents with a club foot, could only be fitted with shoes made by Usell.

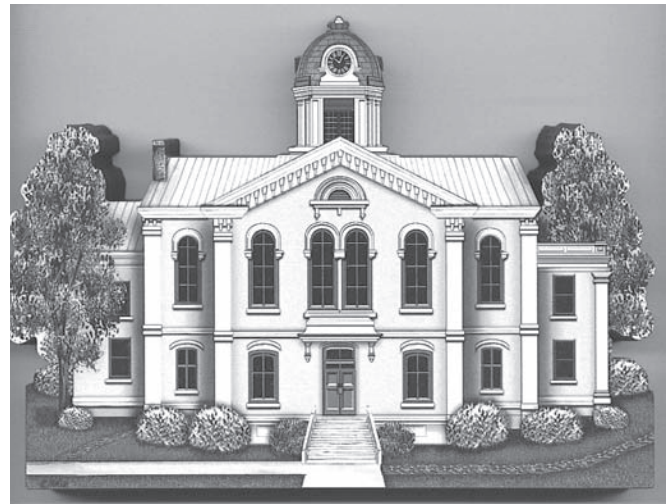
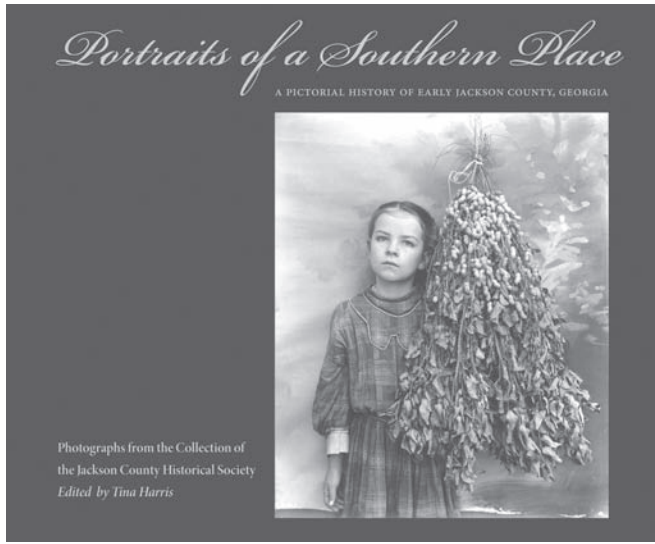
A well known resident of Nicholson was Albert, *Uncle Alb*, Daniel. He was a veteran of World War I. He was the caretaker at Benton Elementary school for many years, and was well liked by everyone. He and his wife, Ninnie, lived close to the school. Ninnie's father, George W. Chandler, was born into slavery but was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation and worked at several jobs in the Nicholson area. He left the area for a short time but then returned and lived with Uncle Alb and Ninnie until his death in 1930 at the age of 86. He is buried in Cross Roads Cemetery, and so are Uncle Alb and Ninnie Daniel.

Plans for a Cross Roads Historic District

Georgia Transmission was planning to put a substation on the Cross Roads site. However, several citizens realized the importance of preserving this history and have been working with the City of Nicholson to make the site a historical heritage center. Hopefully, by the time of the meeting we will hear if the property has been turned over to the city and how the plans are progressing on the renovation.

Portraits of a Southern Place

This is a reprint in paperback of our 2007 hardback publication. The price of \$25.00 includes tax. Checks and money orders can be made to The Jackson County Historical Society. The book is available in Jackson County at special locations or send a check to JCHS, P. O. Box 1234, Commerce, GA 30529, Shipping cost is \$3.00 per book. Call Tina for special deliveries (706)207-6889 or tina313@mindspring.com



Jackson County Historic Courthouse Replica

The Jackson County Historical Society is selling an architectural replica of the Jackson County Historic Courthouse with proceeds going to the restoration project. Replica's can be purchased at Genuine Jefferson on Washington Street, Jefferson. For more information call Charlotte Mealor at 706-757-2471 or cmealor@uga.edu.

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