



# The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

## Twentieth Century in Review: History Highlights by Decade, Part One

### 1901 to 1910

**A**t the turn of the twentieth century, Rabun County remained largely isolated from the outside world. This would change with the extension of the Tallulah Falls Railroad to Tiger (1903), Clayton (1904) and Dillard (1906). As early as 1903, one prescient writer noted that the railroad would provide "...a practically new country which is rich in every resource, and the opportunities offered homeseekers...are numberless and without parallel."



The Tallulah Falls Railroad was extended to Clayton in June of 1904. The locomotive stopped just south of town for a commemorative photo.

The most immediate realization of this prediction was the exploitation of the county's timber resources. Now that lumber products could be transported to outside markets with greater efficiency, businessmen began purchasing more and more family

owned forest land. In turn, many of these families moved away, accounting for a decline in the county's population from 6,285 in 1900 to 5,562 in 1910.

At the same time lumber and families were moving out of the county, the railroad was moving tourists into the county, all of whom needed lodging, meals and entertainment. Entrepreneurs responded by opening additional hotels and boarding houses. By 1927, Clayton alone boasted at least 23 such establishments. Today, we can trace the origin of local bed and breakfast inns, campgrounds, rental cabins, and recreational businesses back to this first influx of tourists.

Accompanying these changes were a number of civic advances. No doubt foreseeing the economic opportunities that would accompany the arrival of the railroad, a group of citizens organized the county's first bank, the Bank of Clayton, in 1904. The bank opened with a capital stock of \$15,000.

The arrival of the railroad also provided a more efficient means of getting mail into the county. This in turn facilitated the beginning of rural mail delivery in 1909. Families now had regular access to national and international news.

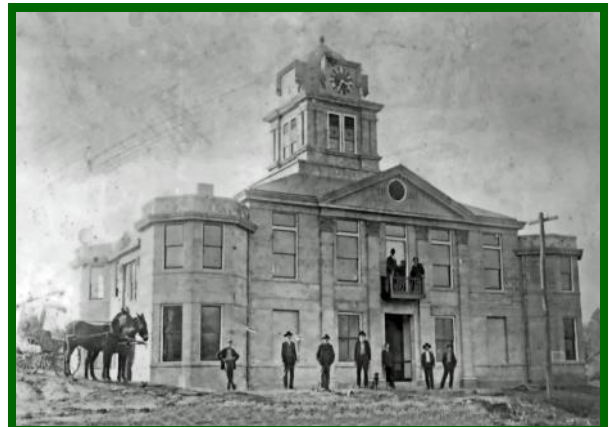
As Rabun began to open along a number of fronts, it is likely community leaders saw the need to protect local interests. This may explain why Tiger, Dillard, Mountain City, and



Gennett Lumber Company purchased thousands of acres along the Chattooga River in 1903. Logs were floated downriver to a sawmill.

Clayton requested and received from the state charters of incorporation in 1904, 1906, 1907 and 1909, respectively.

Two other noteworthy civic advances occurred between 1901 and 1910. First, a new stone courthouse opened in 1908, occupying the same location as the current courthouse. Second, educational opportunities in the county expanded with the opening of Rabun Gap Nacoochee School in



The 1908 courthouse replaced one that had stood in Court-house Square at the intersection of Main and Savannah Streets.

## 1911 to 1920

By the beginning of this decade, the destructive logging practices of the timber industry were threatening forests, wildlife and streams, all of which were the cornerstones of Rabun's fledgling tourist industry. Fortunately, in 1911 Congress passed the Weeks Act, allowing the newly created U.S. Forest Service to purchase cut-over forest land for restoration and conservation. In Rabun County, purchases were made at \$7 per acre. This proved a good investment for the county's future. Today, approximately 60% percent of land in Rabun lies within the Chattahoochee National Forest and three state parks. These tourist-friendly resources represent what one business magazine called the county's "...biggest and best asset - (its) lush and natural beauty..."

Also in 1911, Georgia Power began to construct the Tallulah Falls Dam. Over the following decade the company would construct a total of four dams in Rabun, along with their accompanying lakes and hydroelectric plants. Today, many businesses cater to local citizens, vacationers and home owners who are drawn to the lakes and their tributaries.



The City of Clayton operated its own school system in this school building on Pickett Hill. When the county organized a high school, the city system was abolished.

Another contemporary vacation attraction began to take shape during the 1910s with the opening of Camp Dixie for Boys (1914), Camp Dixie for Girls (1919), and Laurel Falls Camp for Girls (1920). In the years to come, over a dozen camps would open, some catering to children and others to families. Many campers returned year after year, some eventually building vacation or retirement homes.

Educational advances during the 1910s included Rabun becoming the first county in the Georgia Mountains to support its public schools through local taxation (1913). Also in 1913, the Logan E. Bleckley Memorial Institute (a boarding school) opened just east of Clayton and, in 1920, the county's first public high school was established on Pickett Hill.

Perhaps due to all the above, by 1920 the county's population had

## 1921 to 1930

risen to 5,746.

A 1926 *Clayton Tribune* headline told the story of the 1920s: "A Building Boom Hits Clayton." During this year alone, a hundred business and residence lots in downtown Clayton were offered for sale.

A sampling of buildings completed during the 1920s included those now occupied by Clayton Pharmacy (originally a Chevrolet dealership), White Birch Inn (originally, T. E. Roane's telephone exchange office), and Prater's Main Street Books (originally, Derrick's Gas Station).



This 1928 photo looking south on Main Street in Clayton shows newly paved streets, new sidewalks and streetlights.

Of equal importance, in 1927 work began on paving the county's main highway (US 441). By 1928, Clayton's Main Street was paved, along with Savannah Street down to the train depot (now the site of Keller's Furniture). The completion of sidewalks followed in 1929, as did the announcement that Warwoman Road would be completed, connecting Clayton to a National Highway in the eastern part of the county.

On September 6, 1929 between 2,500 and 3,000 people crowded downtown for the "opening of the white way." This meant that streetlights now stretched along Main Street from the Methodist Church northward two blocks.

In keeping with the above infrastructure upgrades, in 1925 the Clayton School System was replaced with a new county system. The school on Pickett Hill was sold to the newly formed County Board of Education and eventually demolished. In 1926, classes began at a new school which had been built at the intersection of Savannah and Hiawassee Streets.

By the end of the roaring twenties, the future indeed looked bright for Rabun County. By 1930, its population had risen to 6,331. And, in Clayton alone, the 1929 summer tourist trade accounted for a quarter million dollars.



## 1931 to 1940

The gains that had been made during the Roaring Twenties, particularly in the construction of downtown Clayton's business district, came to a screeching halt in the 1930s. The county population had risen by 10% from 1920, and in spite of poor economic conditions continued to rise significantly through the thirties, from 6,331 in 1930 to 7,821 in 1940. Efforts to ameliorate economic conditions by President Roosevelt's New Deal programs would give Rabun infrastructure improvements that would last for decades.

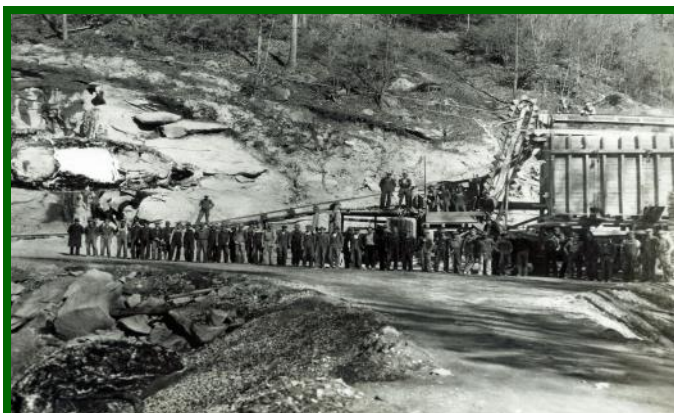
The Works Projects Administration (WPA) provided desperately needed jobs for Rabun County men and women, approximately 300, according to county CEO Frank Smith. WPA construction projects included four schools, two high school gymnasiums, the community center called the Rock House, two canning plants, and the swimming and golf facilities at Rabun Country Club.

Rabun County men also were put to work in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) doing reforestation on mountainsides logged since the early years of the century. The Warwoman Dell camp opened in 1934 and three others would follow at Lake Rabun, Coleman River and near Lake Burton.

By the 1930s some Rabun County school children were being transported to school in private vehicles contracted to haul students, where previously everyone was required

to walk. In the 1920s, the average Georgia student attended school for only 120 days. In 1937, the state began to require a seven month school term. By the thirties, some of the smaller schools in Rabun County also began to be consolidated.

Although non-taxed liquor had always been produced in Rabun County, the 1930s saw a heyday for moonshiners. National Prohibition had only increased the demand for black-market liquor. Corn could help feed families when made into bread and by feeding their livestock. Corn



This photo shows a rock quarry used by the Civilian Conservation Corps for road building. The CCC men in Rabun built 148 miles of new roads and maintained many more. circa 1935

could also be turned into a rare cash crop by converting it into moonshine. In many cases in Rabun County, moonshiners were simply trying to feed their families in hard times. During this era, the sheriff was paid

## 1941 to 1950

\$10 for breaking up a still and \$40 to \$60 for catching the operator.

In the December 11, 1941 edition of *The Clayton Tribune*, President Roosevelt's address to Congress asking for a declaration of war on

Japan was printed in its entirety. By December 18, Rabun County had set up a Red Cross War Fund Campaign. War Bond drives were headed by Dr. J.C. Dover, and Mrs. Dover served as Production Chairman of the Red Cross sewing room, sewing garments for war-relief families.

In January of 1942, a tire rationing board was appointed, and in August citizens began gathering scrap metal for the war effort. Shoe rationing began in Rabun in 1943, along with the rationing of other commodities like sugar, coffee, butter and gasoline. The year 1943 also saw practice air raid drills in Clayton under the direction of Roscoe Nicholson, Chief Air Raid Warden.

When the fighting men returned to the home front in the second half of the decade, modernization in Rabun County picked up steam. The 1950 census showed 542 farms now had electricity, a tremendous increase from 304 farms just five years earlier. Veterans started new businesses as the postwar economy boomed. New car

dealerships and gas stations flourished on Clayton's Main Street, as improvement in highway transportation also meant the death of passenger trains on the Tallulah Falls Railroad. Tourism was again big business in Rabun County as cars, tires and gasoline were once again abundant.

Even Rabun County schools saw transportation change radically. The county purchased fourteen school buses in 1948, while the rest of the system's 1,000 students were still being hauled by private contractors. In 1940, the state also began to require a nine-month school year, the same requirement as seventy-four

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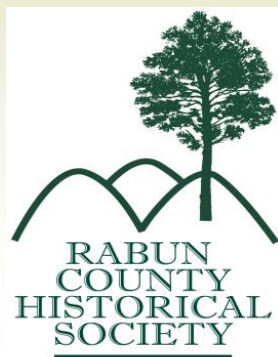
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- Please visit our museum and research library on Mondays and Fridays from 10:00 until 2:00 and on Wednesdays from 12:30 until 4:30.
- Group tours by appointment



Dan Hayes of Tallulah Falls is restoring the 1880 Moss House, built by Rufus Moss, who was instrumental in bringing the Tallulah Falls Railroad to Rabun County in 1882. A new bronze historical marker is now on display outside the house.



*We would like to express our deepest gratitude to members Clifford and Jackie Bell of Sky Valley and Sandersville, Georgia for a very generous donation that will help the Rabun County Historical Society fulfill our mission of promoting knowledge and understanding of Rabun County's origins.*