

Sidetracked: Travels Across the Undiscovered South

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Knoxville, Georgia

Knoxville, Georgia was a booming town at one time. The original courthouse was built but it burned and was rebuilt — so this is the 1852 courthouse. The courthouse was used up until 2002. There were several lawyers in Knoxville. This is the county seat although we're not incorporated. We're probably the only county seat in Georgia that's in an unincorporated town. There was a store over there and a newspaper office. There was a hotel right over there and we have the old jail not far from here. This was on a stagecoach route. There were a couple of stagecoach stops. They would stop and change horses and everything.

They had some amazing cases at this courthouse. There was one case; in fact, we're hoping to present a play about it this fall. It was about two families that lived here. There was a man who ran a liquor store south of

town and these guys wanted to go in but he wouldn't let them because the store was closed. So they set fire to it. And he died in the fire, so there was a big long case about that. One of the families was a prominent in the area. It was a bad case. We're trying very hard to put this courthouse back as near as it was in 1852. All the wiring has been removed. The walls are just like they were. But, it takes money. Being a rural county, it's hard. We've tried to apply for various grants but none have the right fit. Right now, they say there's no more *bricks and mortar* grants available.

I think the history in the courthouse has waned. My generation's interest is still there but the younger generation — they like new and fast and they like to read things on apps. I think one of the things I try to get across to the younger people is that once these treasures are gone, they're gone forever. They're not bringing it back. If this courthouse falls down, it's gone forever. That's what I like to convey to the young people. These things need to be preserved so you can tell your children and they can see that here.

For a while there was a big joke — you ask young children, "Where do eggs come from?" And, they answer, "Kroger grocery store." You need to convey to them that they can see exactly how people have evolved from working on the farm. People had big families back then because they needed them to work on the farms. They need to understand that what you have today is because of the people back before made it possible. They made their tools; they made things faster and better and more economical.

We're famous for a lot of pottery here. Alkaline clay. During the War Between the States — Sherman never came through here, thank goodness or we probably wouldn't have this building. The potters around here were exempt from the War because they were asked to make vessels and containers for the soldiers. They had to store food and everything they could use. So they were exempt in this area for that reason. They were steadily trying to make pots with bigger mouths. They would take what they used to call potato jugs, the ones with a bigger mouth on them, to store other things in them — things the military would use.

And of course we have John Pemberton — the inventor of Coca-Cola, who lived here.

