

HISTORY NOTES

Jones County History & Heritage, Inc.

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About the Newsletter

This is newsletter #5 in the series on historic communities of Jones County, Georgia. The subject is the county seat of Gray, a proud participant in Georgia's Better Hometown program. This issue will cover Gray's history through 1920, with subsequent years addressed in a second issue.

Gray in its youth was a compact rural village with houses and businesses clustered around the railroad depot and crossing. The open fields surrounding it were planted in cotton, peaches, and other crops. Gray quickly established itself as a friend of progress and was designated county seat in the election of 1905, displacing Clinton.

Much of the early Gray has disappeared, replaced by the sprawl of strip malls, subdivisions, and highways with traffic lights, but enough remains to imagine what it must have been like. This newsletter is intended to help the reader discover the old in the new.

The editor wishes to thank the wonderful people listed on page 4 who so graciously have shared their newspaper clippings, pictures, and remembrances for this issue and the next one. And special thanks to Mary Anne Hamrick who got the ball rolling! ❖

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History of Gray 1886-1920

How Gray came to be

In 1886 the Covington and Macon Railroad Company began building a railroad from Macon to Covington (later Athens). The tracks passed through land owned by Congressman James Henderson Blount, and a depot (the present one) was built near his country home, which stood on the present site of 115 E. Clinton St. Blount (1837-1903) was a prominent lawyer, planter, and politician whose family were early settlers of Jones County. Most notably, he was a U.S. Representative for 20 years (1873-1893) and President Grover Cleveland's commissioner to investigate the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom by American revolutionaries in 1893.

An 1886 railroad survey calls the depot village *Blountston*. Exactly when this changed to Gray is unknown, but by January 1888, the masthead address of *The Headlight*, an early county newspaper, is Gray's *Station*. By April 1888, the name *Gray* appears.

County Ordinary Roland T. Ross suggested this name to honor James Madison Gray (1813-1874), considered the most prominent man in the county of his day. Like Blount, Gray was a respected lawyer, planter, and politician. He was a leading democrat both in the county and state, and active in promoting county advancements. During the Civil War, he outfitted the Gray Infantry, later Co. F 45th Georgia Regiment, and shared the bounties of his large plantation with those in need. He left the bulk of his estate to Mercer University to fund education for the boys of Jones County. *Note: Gray's plantation home was southeast of Gray, at 594 Nathan Roberts Rd. The original house was destroyed by Union forces in 1864. Gray rebuilt after the War. The front two rooms, porch, and steps of the present house were part of this postwar house.*

Gray's transition to county seat (1886-1907)

The 1886 railroad survey shows a small grid of streets around the depot crossroad. Two streets are named: Ross Street (Roland Ross was the county ordinary) and Clinton Avenue. Issues of *The Headlight* published in early 1888 show advertisements for H.A. Morgan's carriage shop and Holsenbeck, Winters & Company general merchandise store, which was bought out by D. D. Holsenbeck later that year. These issues are on microfilm at the Washington Memorial Library in Macon.

A town survey of 1904 shows expansion to Boundary Street on the north, Clinton Avenue east to some point before the present Childs Street, Forest Street to the south, and a small cemetery (Highview Cemetery) to the west. Clinton Avenue is now known as

Jones County History & Heritage, Inc.

(JCHH)

PO Box 2605
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JCHH is a private, non-profit organization formed in 2002 to promote an appreciation of Jones County's historic resources and foster their preservation, restoration, and revitalization.

If you are not currently a member, we invite you to join us by sending a check payable to JCHH to the address above.

Membership levels are:

Individual	\$ 25.00
Family	\$ 35.00
Patron	\$ 75.00
Bronze	\$ 125.00
Silver	\$ 300.00
Gold	\$ 600.00
Platinum	\$1000.00

JCHH Board of Directors

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Publications: Carolyn White Williams' *History of Jones County, Georgia 1807-1907*, with a new index of names, is available for \$75 (or \$80 if shipped). Earl and Beth Colvin's *Fields of Stone: Cemeteries of Jones County, Georgia* is available for \$50 (or \$55 if shipped). Special bicentennial price of \$100 (or \$110 if shipped) for both through 2007. Send mail orders to the address above. Copies also may be purchased at the Jones County Chamber of Commerce in Gray, Georgia.

E. and W. Clinton Street (Gray Hwy). Portions of the other streets remain.

Many of the first settlers came from Clinton, the county seat until 1905. Some of the earliest families were the Mortons, Stewarts, Comers, Bonners, Glawsons, Greens, Turners, Ethridges, Johnsons, Goddards, Pattersons, Braggs, Morgans, Blounts, Bushes, and Roberts.

The first publisher of *The Jones County News (News)*, Mark Greene, was a colorful and opinionated promoter of Gray and the Victorian ideals of progress, civic pride and responsibility, and high moral standards. His early newspapers provide a lively view of life in the growing town, and they are fascinating to read. Issues for 1895-1924 are on microfilm at Washington Memorial Library in Macon. *Note: Mark Greene's home and office stood near the SW corner of W. Clinton and Madison streets.*

In its early years, lots in Gray had space for barns and livestock. An early house and lot that reflect the rural nature of that era lies on the outskirts of town at 157 Rt. 129N (Eatonton Hwy). T.S. Bush built this house in 1895, and later it was sold to the Cecil Roberts family. In the year the house was built, the *News* reports that the cattle drive to Macon had passed through Gray. Another item of interest states that the weather had been sufficiently cold for hog killing in Gray.

The most important topic of 1895, though, was the location of the county seat. The old county seat of Clinton was in decline, with no railroad access, a condemned courthouse, and a substandard jail. Besides Gray, the railroad towns of Bradley and James were proposed for county seat. However, the *News* notes, "There is one town in Jones that don't want the courthouse. Haddock Station is satisfied with the progress she is making and don't want to be bothered with a sheriff, jail and an addition to her legal fraternity. Happy Haddock!"

In 1896, the *News* reports that Col. James Blount will clear his pine orchard near the depot and divide the land into lots for sale. A store of this era was W.E. Morgan's General Merchandise, which stood on the present site of Gray Drug at 126 W. Clinton St. A photo of this store shows the name *W.E. Morgan* painted over another name, faintly visible. It possibly could be *D. D.*

Holsenbeck and thus would be the store of 1888 referred to on p. 1.

In 1897, several houses were to be erected, tramps were a nuisance around the depot, and Gray's first school was built near the intersection of the present Childs and Morton streets (building later destroyed). In 1899, *Sunny Home*, the residence of Francis M. Stewart, Sr., was built on the outskirts of town (the house, which stood on the site of Five Oaks Shoppes at 197 W. Clinton St, burned in 1945. Charlie Washburn built the present house.)

In 1900, an election to move the county seat from Clinton failed by two votes (359 to 361). In 1905, another election was held. Mark Greene writes in the *News* just prior to the election, "If all is guided by the light of reason and sound judgment the setting of next Tuesday's sun will mark a new era, and be but the beginning of a

brighter and more prosperous dawn for the people of Jones.” The citizens overwhelmingly voted (1289 to 51) to move the courthouse to Gray, which had the advantages of a central location, railroad accessibility, and eagerness for growth.

The courthouse and a jail were erected in 1905 on land that had been owned by Judge Richard H. Johnson. The law office to the left of the courthouse at 116 S. Jefferson St. was Judge Johnson’s and later his son’s, Judge Holmes Johnson. Guy Anderson, whose law office was across the street, bought the office for his son, Pierce Anderson, attorney for the City of Gray for many years. The current owner, attorney Bert King, intends to apply for inclusion of the building in the National Register of Historic Places.

Gray prospered as the new county seat. In 1905, the Bank of Gray was established as a branch of the Jones County Bank of Haddock. The bank was chartered under new ownership in 1909. D.V. Childs, Sr., a director under the new charter, eventually assumed ownership and shepherded the bank through the Depression with the aid of President Roosevelt’s Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The Bank of Gray stood in the same general area (103 Atlanta Rd) until its recent move to 282 W. Clinton Street. The original poured vault is still in place in the small building to the right of 103 Atlanta Hwy. Though the bank is now part of Security Bank, several members of the Childs family are officers.

By 1907, Gray had grown enough to build a new two-room schoolhouse on a lot donated by the Gray Land and Improvement Company (Civic Center area, 161 West Clinton St.). The previous year, the Gray Village Improvement Club had formed for the “betterment of ourselves, our children, our homes, schools, and village.” One of their first projects was to plant shade trees on the new school lot and to show moving pictures at the courthouse to benefit the new school.

In 1907, the Baptist Church was completed on the site of the present church (134 W. Clinton St.). The first church was a white frame building, which burned in 1943. Also, construction began on the Methodist Church, a wood frame building, on land donated by Annie Griswold Johnson. It was replaced in 1915 by the present church on the same site (118 S. Jefferson St).

In 1907, the *News* reports that lumber for two houses had arrived. One was for Frank S. Johnson, manager of the Planter’s Warehouse (cotton) and county treasurer, and the other was for R. H. Bonner, ordinary for 18 yrs. Only the Bonner house remains at 166 W. Clinton,

across from the Civic Center. Mrs. Bonner and her sister, Miss May Stewart, lived there into the mid-1900s. The Johnson house (recently burned) was to the left of it, and a third house (owned by the Bilderbacks) was to the right.

Two other houses were built in 1907. The house of Rev. E.W. Sammons, county school commissioner from 1902-1924 and a founding member of Gray Baptist Church, is at 128 Rt. 129N (Eatonton Hwy). Judge F. Holmes and Addie Kate Johnson’s house is at 115 E. Clinton St (former site of Col James H. Blount’s country home). This house was known for its beautiful grounds.

Other gleanings from 1907 issues indicate houses owned by Dr. J.W. Anderson, L.C. Morton (lumberyard owner), C.R. Smith, Mrs. J.H. Moring, Richard Brown, and H.C. Souther (corner of Dolly Street and W. Clinton St.; house stood into the 1970s).

Gray prospers (1908-1920)

A 1908 railroad survey map in the archives of the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah identifies various properties along the railroad. On the present Hwy 18 S were Dr. J.W. Anderson’s lot, an African-American Church, the Gray Gin Mill Company, and a brick warehouse (must have been the new Planter’s Warehouse). On the present Cumslo Rd were a railroad cattle chute, the depot, and Bush & Smith warehouse. On the present Atlanta Hwy business strip were Bush & Smith General Merchandise Store (acquired in 1915 by D.V. Childs) which included Ellis Bragg’s beef market and C.W. Bragg’s barbershop, the Bank of Gray, W.E.Morgan’s General Merchandise Store and livery stable, C.R. Smith’s store, and lots owned by T.C. Morton and W.E. Morgan. By 1909, the Gray Drugstore is advertising in the *News*.

In 1910, a much-needed hotel was built by F.H. Houser, a peach buyer from Fort Valley, to accommodate court session and other visitors. The hotel stood into the 1940s on the vacant lot to the left of 147 Madison Ave. Later Mrs. W.E. (Lovie) Morgan ran it with the help of her sister, Queenie Huff.

Around the corner from the hotel site is another early house at 111 Dolly Street. A c. 1910s sketch by Telamon Cuyler of the view from the front door of the courthouse shows this cottage facing Clinton Street (it was moved and turned when the highway was widened) along with several other similar cottages now destroyed. This sketch can be seen at

The D.V. Childs house (134 E. Clinton St.) was built in 1914; it was the first house in Gray to have electricity (Delco generator). The houses opposite and to the side were built earlier. Early owners of these houses were the Mortons at #125, Clem Roberts at #130, and Sam Hungerford at #133.

The population continued to grow, and by 1917, a new 6-room brick schoolhouse and auditorium had been completed on the site of the previous school (Civic Center, 161 W. Clinton St.).

To take us to 1920, here are some newspaper items from the two preceding years. W.H. Mulligan moved into his new brick general merchandise store on the site of his former stand (store stood into the mid 1900s on the site of 127 W. Clinton). A new school truck is picking up children in the outlying area, and the attendance soon will reach 160. Several businesses related to autos and trucks are open: C.R. Bowen's auto shop, Everybody's auto shop, Dixie auto repair, Morgan's auto service (car rental), and the Gray Auto Company (Ford dealer). Chambliss Pharmacy is established, with A. C. Kitchen's barbershop in the same building. A 1919 ad for Bonner & Childs (later D.V. Childs' store) general merchandise says, "There will be money, lots of money, circulating from our wonderful peach crop in Jones so take this hint—come to our 'bargain store' and make your peach money buy your full value." Other stores belong to C.W. Bragg, C.S. Bryant, W.E. Morgan, Smith & Hudson, and Middlebrooks & Morgan. Bonner & Greene have an insurance agency, and Smith, Hudson & Bonner are ginners. ❖

Eula Pitts Morgan

Miss Eula Morgan, Gray's oldest citizen (any other contenders?), will be 100 on New Year's Eve, but it's hard to believe! She is agile and active, warm and vibrant, and brimming with intelligence and curiosity. She cooks and keeps house, is a daily participant at the Senior Center, and a faithful member of St. Paul AME Church. She is much loved by her large family and numerous friends.

Miss Eula and a twin brother, the youngest of 15 children, were born to Gus and Frances Smith Pitts. The family lived on the old David Blount Place, later Bateman Farm, by the present government camp on Cumslo Road. Her parents were charter members of Turner Chapel AME (200 Dolly St), and her father, who was an ordained minister, was a steward there. She attended the school at Turner Chapel as well as Mrs.

Maggie Califf's one-room school (still standing) near St. Paul AME off Lite'N'Tie, just northeast of the intersection of Rt. 129 S.

After her marriage, Miss Eula lived for a time in the old Jacob Hutchings house that stood near here. Jacob Hutchings was the master stonemason responsible for much of the 19th century stonework in the county. A granite marker in his honor stands at the courthouse above the retaining wall granite that he originally had hewn to form the walls of the early 19th century jail in Clinton.

She and her late husband, Claude Morgan, were married for 57 years, and raised two sons, Carlton and Clyde Morgan, both deceased, and a foster daughter, Hazel Pitts. She has 5 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren.

Before she married, Miss Eula cooked for Gray's physician, Dr. J. D. Zachary. Eventually, she began assisting him with deliveries and mother and baby care. She came by it naturally. Her grandmother, Frances Seabrook, had been a midwife, and Miss Eula had accompanied her on her rounds. Also, she was frequently called on to provide medical advice and assistance to members of her community.

She proved so adept that Dr. Zachary asked her to apply for a State midwife license in 1953. The county public health nurse, Mrs. Lillian Young, supervised her training for this. She worked with Dr. Zachary until his retirement, and after that, on her own for 3 years. Later, she provided private nursing to a number of families.

Miss Eula is an inspiration and one of the people who make Gray a Better Hometown! ❖

Newsletter Sources

Thanks to the following for their contributions to this newsletter: *Marguerite Anderson, Bobby Bentley, Bill Bragg, Margaret Brisco, Elaine Childs, Marguerite Childs, Thad Childs, Patsy Childs, Kema Clark, Pat Daniels, Max Davis, Cecil Ethridge, Charles Farrar, Alice Golson, Mary Anne Hamrick, Danny Greene, the late Louise Kelley, Bert King, Harriet Madison, Eula Morgan, Berta Morton, Beebe Parker, Ruth Grier, Frank Stewart, Sally Wicker.*

References

Colvin, Earl and Beth. *Fields of Stone: Cemeteries of Jones County, Georgia*, Milledgeville GA. 2004.
Williams, Carolyn White. *History of Jones County Georgia*. Macon GA, 1957.

Websites and newspapers acknowledged in text.