



Gwinnett Heritage

Winter 2024

A Quarterly Publication

Vol. 53 No.4



Dacula: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

&



The Rich History of Gwinnett's Parks



Toasting a Successful 2024 Elisha Winn Fair

A Word from the President



As the end of my term approaches, I want to say how grateful I am to each and every one of you who welcomed me as President two years ago and who have been so supportive as I have learned details about the Gwinnett Historical Society that can only be discovered from being actively involved. Your kindness was much appreciated.

I am in awe of those of you who have been active GHS members and leaders not just for years, but for decades. You have been in the thick of trying to hold onto at least portions of our Gwinnett heritage even as we have seen tremendous changes in the county. Your alert persistence has yielded results as you raised issues with decision makers and helped formulate compromises. You have also nurtured the organization's reputation as a repository for historical artifacts and documents, as well as a keeper of information not easily found elsewhere. Thank you for your dedication to the mission of the Society.



I know that you will welcome our incoming President, Jason West, just as warmly as you did me. In the meantime, let me tell you a little about him.

Jason is a South Carolina native who had the good sense to fall for Angie Richardson, a young lady from Gwinnett County, on the campus of Presbyterian College during the time both of them studied there. We are fortunate that Angie brought Jason to Gwinnett, and the couple chose it as the place to call home.

Jason's college studies will give you a clear indication of what his true interests are. He graduated with honors from Presbyterian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in both history and political science and then obtained his Master of Education degree with a concentration in secondary social studies from Converse College. He began his career as a social studies/history teacher, working with middle school age children and also served

as a school administrator. Further evidence of the importance he places on education is the fact that he was elected to a term on the Kershaw County School Board in South Carolina at the age of 19. (Note: 19 is the correct figure, not a misprint!)

Ultimately, Jason's path led him to take a position with Gwinnett County Government where he says he found the best job in the world. Initially, he was part of the staff at the Gwinnett Environmental and Heritage Center,

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The W.T. "Dr. Will" Hinton homeplace, built in 1905, now houses The Brunch Apothecary in Dacula. (Source of photo: Bethany Nash.)

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Gwinnett's only covered outdoor roller hockey rink featured at Pinckneyville Park. (Source of photo: Gwinnett County Community Services.)

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Joyce Goodbread as a schoolmarm in one-room school house on Winn property during 2024 Elisha Winn Fair. (Source of photo: Beverly Paff.)

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This issue of Gwinnett Heritage

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Don't miss an issue of *Gwinnett Heritage*. Notify the GHS office of change of email address and other contact information.

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Top: Dacula's historic downtown. (Source of photo: Bethany Nash.)

Left: Playground at J.B. Williams Park in Lilburn. (Source of photo: Gwinnett County Community Services.)

Right: High tea in the Elisha Winn House at the 2024 Elisha Winn Fair, presented by the Atlanta History dancers. (Source of photo: Diane McCormic.)

About Us

Our Purpose

Gwinnett Historical Society collects and preserves the history and genealogy of Gwinnett County, Georgia and the records of the early settlers of the county, including the churches, schools, organizations and other institutions.

2023–2024 Officers

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I hope all our readers enjoy learning a bit more about Dacula's history and what life here in Gwinnett was like in earlier times.

Along the CSX rail line, formerly the Seaboard Coastline, sits the town of Dacula (pronounced duh-Q-la). The Seaboard Coastline was formed in 1967 by the combination of the Seaboard Air Line and the Atlantic Coastline. Dacula is located in eastern Gwinnett County, with U.S. Route 29 Business/Georgia State

Dacula: Honoring Our Past. Building Our Future.

by Ann Mitchell, Dacula City Council Member

Dacula High School football stadium. (Source of photo: Bethany Nash.)

Editor's Note: This article about the City of Dacula continues our series on the cities located in Gwinnett County. Dacula is special to me since I consider it my hometown; even though I live outside its boundaries, I attended Dacula schools and my home address has been a Dacula one over my entire life. I appreciate so much the time that Ann Mitchell, who currently serves as a Council Member for Dacula, spent compiling information and writing this article about Dacula's history, its present and aspirations for its future.

Reading Council Member Mitchell's article was a trip down memory lane for me since it mentions events and people that are such a part of my life. You can be sure that any longtime resident of the Dacula area who lived there in 1966 can tell you where he/she was when the dynamite truck exploded. We are proud of Dacula's musical heritage, especially our local celebrities, The Skillet Lickers bluegrass band. And, almost every member of the community can tell you that the school's colors are blue and gold.

Route 8 (Winder Highway) serving as the main road through the center of town. Business 29/SR 8 leads west six miles to Lawrenceville, the county seat, and east 11 miles to Winder. U.S. Route 29 (University Parkway) is a four-lane divided highway that skirts Dacula to the south, with access from Harbins Road. University Parkway leads east 34 miles to Athens and west 12 miles to Interstate 85, with the City of Atlanta an additional 25 miles to the southwest.

According to the United States Census Bureau, Dacula has a total area of 5.0 square miles, of which 0.031 square miles, or 0.59%, is water. However, the Dacula 30019 ZIP code goes well beyond the city limits, resulting in mail delivery through the Dacula Post Office as far north as the unincorporated community of Hamilton Mill and south to the Walton County line.

Early Days

Dacula began as a settlement called Chinquepin [sic] Grove that was generally located near the present site of the intersection of Dacula and Fence roads. In 1850, a post office began in the office of Dr. S. H. Freeman and according to available post office records, postmasters and post offices were established at Chincapin [sic] Grove until 1892. Approximately 400 people were served.



1865 Gwinnett Map showing Chinquepin [sic] Grove.

In February of 1892, an application was filed by John W. Freeman to establish a post office at the temporary settlement of Hoke, Georgia. "Hoke" was the name given to the settlement by railroad workmen. Following instructions in the application, Mr. Freeman requested that mail should be delivered twice a week and indicated there were 25 inhabitants in the village with the proposed post office to serve about 200 people.

The timing of the application followed the opening of the new railroad section from South Carolina into North Georgia built by the Georgia, Carolina and Northern Railway, which later merged into the Seaboard Air Line Railway. The aim of this expansion was to reach Atlanta, but legal proceedings in 1892 stopped the rail line a few miles short of its goal. Fortunately for the future of Dacula and much of Gwinnett County, the new railroad traversed the entire county and provided the impetus for the formation of not just Dacula, but several other Gwinnett towns as well.

No official records have been found that indicate why the name of Hoke was not given to the town. Most likely, "Hoke" was rejected because it was too similar to the name of a town in another part of the state. According to lore and for reasons only he knew, Mr. Freeman reportedly scrambled the letters of the words of Decatur and Atlanta, and the United States Post Office accepted the name of Dacula. An article published in *The Atlanta Journal* on May 3, 1892 refers to the community by its new name. This article reported on a trip taken by rail from Decatur to Elberton and provides a brief description of the growing area near the Dacula station on the railroad.

At Dacula, the next station, we passed a construction train. There was a construction at Atlanta, and as Dacula is just thirty miles from Atlanta some idea can be formed as to the amount of work now being done to put the new road in first-class shape. Dacula is a brand new village, but evidently has a prosperous future. Every house there, and there is about two dozen, have been built recently and others are being erected.

Excerpt from article about a trip on the new railroad. (Source of article: *The Atlanta Journal*, May 3, 1892.)

Although Dacula was not officially incorporated until 1905, evidence from an article in *The News-Herald* publication in early 1899 reveals that businesses were flourishing in the town, so the subject of incorporation began to be discussed by two or three residents. Even before incorporation, steps were taken to organize the business of the community. On July 28, 1899, the State of Georgia deeded Land Lot 301 in 1564 District G.M. and the 5th Land District for the sum of \$12 as Court House Lot. By September of 1899 the Dacula courthouse had been erected. The deed was formally sealed and recorded on February 4, 1901.

Farming was the most prominent occupation of Dacula's residents in early years, and cotton was ginned and shipped from the town. Many other businesses flourished including clothing, shoe, grocery and general merchandise stores.

By 1903, an article in *The News-Herald* touted that Dacula was enjoying "Great Prosperity," claiming Dacula was "one of the best markets and largest towns on the Seaboard Railroad." At the time, 4,000 bales of cotton had been sold in the previous year. There existed over five mercantile businesses, a feed and seed warehouse, a flour and meal mill, a blacksmith shop, two doctors' offices, one Baptist Church, one Methodist Church, one public school, an almost complete furniture factory and a well-run train depot. One of the doctors, Dr. W. T. Hinton, was recognized as a leading physician in Gwinnett County.

From 1899 until 1905, citizens were realizing the importance of protecting their thriving lifestyle in Dacula, and incorporating the town became a more and more common topic of discussion, though not without controversy. Many citizens felt that if the town became "official" it would hurt business. At any rate, a vote was held, and incorporation proceedings began. Oddly enough, some of those who were pushing for incorporation felt so pressured that they did not even vote.

The initiation of legal steps to incorporate led to the granting of a charter to the new town of Dacula in June 1905. The July 16, 1905 edition of *The Atlanta Constitution* reported that legislation to incorporate the town of Dacula had been filed at the State level by Legislators Nix and Wilson from Gwinnett. The first officers of the town were the Mayor: Dr. S. L. Hinton and Councilmen: A. J. Wilson, S. E. Pharr, N. G. Pharr, S. C. Mauldin and J. W. McMillan.

By 1907, Dacula was indeed considered thriving. The main evidence of this fact is that the Seaboard Air Line Railroad put in a second wide track. Two mail routes were in action and Dacula was considered the best market for cotton, corn, chickens and eggs. Nearly every needed trade was represented in the town by this time. Dacula even had seven young residents attending college, two of whom were women.



Downtown Dacula in 1912 filled with farmers during cotton harvest time.

Also moving the town forward was the Dacula Banking Company, which opened its doors in September 1909 with 27 stockholders and initial capital of \$25,000. By the end of the first day of business, deposits totaled \$21,000, just a little under the initial stock amount. The bank was successful until cotton prices dropped low; in 1926 the Directors met to liquidate the bank, and its assets were transferred to First National Bank of Lawrenceville. The last meeting recorded for the bank was in January 1929.

Educational Progress

A small two-story building erected on land donated by Dr. S.H. Freeman in 1892 became the first Dacula School. The school was located at 192 W. Dacula Road.



Dacula School in 1904.

A new brick building was built in 1910 for educating students in grades one through ten. Dacula's academic progress and its students were the pride of local officials for many years.

In 1931, a new grammar school building was added. The elementary grades achieved standardization, and the high school became accredited for the first time. During the 1930s,

Dacula's campus grew and the school was recognized as a leader in academics, athletics and vocations. A gymnasium, vocational building, lunchroom, canning plant and garage were added during this time. Dacula was renowned for its basketball teams, with Dacula High School winning the 1938 State Basketball Championship.

In 1944, sadly both school buildings were destroyed by fire. Dacula students were able to continue lessons in temporary classrooms in the remaining buildings on campus. In 1947, a new building opened that was funded by the rallying of community support, donations from prominent residents and federal help from Senator Richard B. Russell.

In the 1950s, there was a movement to consolidate schools in Gwinnett County, with a plan to reduce the number of high schools considerably. The Dacula community, however, was so determined to maintain its school identity that a court battle was fought and won to stop Dacula being consolidated with Central Gwinnett High, one of the four high schools for white students proposed in Gwinnett County. According to the history of Dacula schools shown on the website for Dacula Elementary School, the victory caused Dacula to be recognized from the 1950s and into the 1990s merely as a "closed and sleepy little community nestled in the northeast corner of progressive Gwinnett County."

Educational buildings at Dacula did increase and improve during this time but much slower than other parts of the county. A wing was built in 1960 and additional classrooms, labs, a library and office space added in 1964. Dacula High School became a separate facility in 1974, leaving grades one through seven in the Dacula Road campus that had previously housed all grades. The elementary and middle schools shared the same address until the single structure of Dacula Elementary was built at 2500 Fence Road and the school property at 137 Dacula Road was renovated and improved for use solely by Dacula Middle School.

As Dacula has grown, the town continues to boast about excellent classroom teachers, support staff and administrative leaders. Dacula schools proudly promote community with their motto, "One Family, One Dacula" that originated out of a number of student tragedies that happened during the school year in 2015. Dacula's school colors of blue and gold, along with the Dacula Falcon that serves as school mascot, show pride throughout the school cluster. Over the years, Dacula has achieved many athletic championships including football and basketball. In addition, Dacula schools have successfully competed for decades in academic, musical and cultural endeavors.

Religious Heritage

Religion has always been a strong influence for individuals and groups in Dacula. Several churches, mostly all affiliated with Protestant denominations, were formed as Dacula was growing. The majority of these churches continue today.

Dacula United Methodist Church, dating back to 1837, is the earliest formed church on record in the area that currently lies within the boundaries of the City of Dacula. This church is now located on Fence Road near the present-day Kroger® Shopping Center.

One of the largest Southern Baptist churches in the region, Hebron Baptist Church was founded in 1842. The congregation is still going strong after 182 years. There is now also a school, Hebron Christian Academy, associated with the church. Because the church and its property take up a large tract of land in the city limits, people have jokingly called it "the church that ate Dacula."

Christ the King Church, formerly known as Apalachee Baptist Church, is located on Rabbit Hill Road in proximity to the city's boundary. This church has called Dacula home for over 150 years and is a thriving congregation today.

Down Yonder – Dacula's Rich Musical Heritage



Roba Stanley.

Not many towns can "toot their own horn" about having such a rich musical history as Dacula can.

Roba Stanley, the first woman to record solo country songs, was born in 1908 in Dacula. She was recognized by the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1983. Roba recorded over nine songs in 1924 at the age of 16 including *Devilish*

Mary and Mr. Chicken. Roba's family donated her guitar to the Gwinnett History Museum, which is housed within the Lawrenceville Female Seminary, where it remains on display for all to



Fiddling John Carson (left) and Gid Tanner (right).

see. Roba's heritage continued as her nephew, Fleet Stanley, played with the famous Skillet Lickers bluegrass band until his death in 2021.

The Skillet Lickers Band carries Dacula's fame far and wide. The band was formed by James Gideon Tanner almost a century ago. Known as "Gid" by everyone, he was born in Walton County in 1885 but moved to Dacula with his wife Alice in 1923. They purchased a farm on what is now Auburn Road. Members of the Tanner family still reside there today. Gid played fiddle and won a fiddling contest held in Atlanta in 1927. He is credited with writing the song *Down Yonder* which is a very recognizable tune and a staple of many bluegrass artists.

While still in high school at Dacula, Gid's son Gordon traveled with his father and two other

musicians, Riley Puckett and Ted Hawkins, to San Antonio, Texas where he played lead fiddle on *Down Yonder* which sold one million copies. The City of Dacula honored Gid with a granite monument when the new city hall was built in 2007. The great legacy of the Skillet Lickers continues today as Gordon's son Phil and grandson Russ currently lead the Skillet Lickers band. They frequently perform at local events and around the country.



The Skillet Lickers performing in 2024. (Source of photo: The Skillet Lickers.)

Notoriety, Good and Bad

Several things have put Dacula "on the map" throughout the years. In 1927, oil found in a well bolstered a lot of excitement. Once a geologist examined the oil source, he deemed it almost pure gasoline, even though the owner of the fuel station approximately 40 feet away emphatically denied that his gasoline tank was leaking. The geologist made an official report that the substance was definitely gas seeping into the well.

A few other news stories have given Dacula notoriety over the years including the double homicide of Jim Bennefield and his son John in 1927. Jim and John Bennefield were horrifically murdered at their rented farm just outside the jurisdiction of Dacula. The residents of Dacula and the Ku Klux Klan put up reward money for the capture of the slayer(s).

Sam Gower, Joe Price and LeGrand Sikes were captured and eventually convicted of each having a part in the crime. Sam Gower was sentenced to death in the electric chair for the murder of Mr. Bennefield and his son. Joe Price

and LeGrand Sikes were given lesser sentences for turning state's evidence. Sam Gower was executed in the electric chair at Milledgeville on July 13, 1928; he is buried in the Ebenezer Baptist Church Cemetery in the Harbins community. According to statements from the trial, the entire crime was related to Mr. Gower's belief that Mr. Bennefield reported to officials that Mr. Gower was running an illegal liquor still.

Also, a well-known resident, Jack A. Barber, was killed by a train in front of his home in 1928, and a dynamite truck exploded in the town in 1966, with the blast destroying the truck, killing the driver and damaging several homes. The explosion was heard and felt throughout downtown Dacula.

Today, Dacula is well-known for the Dacula Memorial Day Parade. Founded by Marvin Atherton in 1994, the parade was created for the purpose of giving true meaning to the Memorial Day holiday. You can hear a pin drop during a portion of the parade when hundreds of parade participants honor fallen military heroes with a solemn



Participants in the Fallen Heroes Display that is an integral part of the Dacula Memorial Parade. (Source of photo: Dacula Mayor Trey King.)

tribute by displaying their names on rows of signs. As displayed on its website, the mission of the parade has always been "To promote patriotism and encourage area citizens and businesses to participate in a celebration of our country's freedom on Memorial Day by honoring all those who have served their country and paid the ultimate price for our freedom." Thousands flock to Dacula on Memorial Day to see the parade and honor fallen soldiers. This is THE day that individuals from many parts of the southeastern region unite in solidarity in Dacula to honor those who have made our freedom possible.

Government

Dacula has had 20 mayors since its inception. The first mayor was Dr. S. L. Hinton. The mayor serving the longest was James (Jimmy) Wilbanks who served 24 years in total. Mayor Wilbanks, a native of Dacula, was very personable and had a good reputation for being fully invested in serving his community. The entire Dacula community and beyond mourned when he passed away in 2018. State legislation was passed in 2019 to name the intersection of Dacula Road and SR 8 in memory of his legacy; additionally, a stretch of SR 316 bears his name. Even after his death, Mayor Wilbanks continued to serve the community by bequeathing funds from his estate to be used for beautification of his beloved Dacula.

Currently, Hugh D. King, III (Trey) is mayor and is in his second term. Mayor King shares the same personable demeanor and focus on public service as Mayor Wilbanks demonstrated.

Present Day

In the last 15 years, Dacula has been listed as one of the fastest growing towns and most desirable in which to live in the state of Georgia. This year Dacula earned the title of "sixth safest" city in the nation by SmartAsset of New York, New York.

People wish to live in Dacula because, even as its population grows, local officials continue to maintain a conservative growth viewpoint. Developers are continually challenged with making their property fit within specific ordinances that keep the small-town feel. The Dacula City Council recently adopted a new logo and tagline that embodies that idea. The tagline is "Honoring our past. Building our future." This slogan showcases what Mayor Trey King calls, "a unique small-town experience and sense of community that Dacula residents have grown to love. Dacula's city leadership is committed to maintaining its hometown feel and sense of southern hospitality while providing excellent development opportunities for sensible growth."

As one aspect of the quality of life in Dacula, the city is very proud of its parks, Maple Creek Park on McMillan Road and Olde Mill Park in the historic downtown area. Maple Creek Park recently received a playground renovation including adult exercise stations. It also boasts a disc golf course.



Olde Mill Park in downtown Dacula. (Source of photo: Dacula Mayor Trey King.)

Dacula residents have joined together several times through the years to ensure that Dacula receives all the services that other cities in Gwinnett County claim. Dacula Park's initial land and athletic fields were established in the late 1960s/early 1970s by a group of interested private individuals who formed the Dacula Athletic Association, Inc. and raised funds to buy land. Then they built the fields primarily with pure sweat equity. Later in the 1970s, voters in the Dacula militia district voted to participate in the early formation of the Gwinnett County Recreation District and to pay an extra property tax to build and operate park facilities. The privately owned Dacula Park was transferred to Gwinnett County and improvements began shortly thereafter.

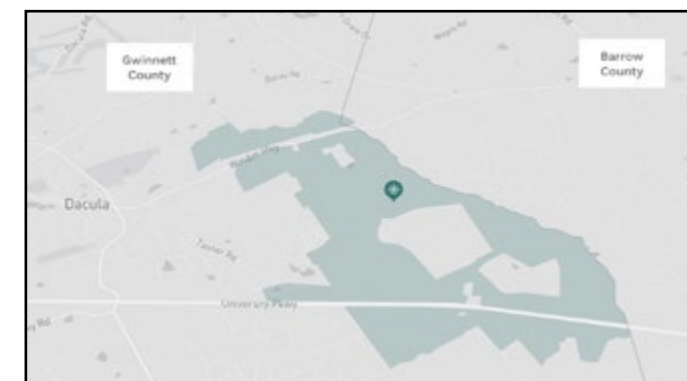
In 2006, years of advocating for a public library in Dacula paid off when Gwinnett County built its 13th public library branch next to Dacula Park. Proceeds from the special purpose local option sales tax (SPLOST) approved by Gwinnett County voters in November 2000 were the primary source of funding for construction of the library. Voters in Dacula helped pass the referendum for the SPLOST.



Dacula Library. (Source of photo: Gwinnett County Public Library System.)

Rowen

On the northeast to southeast city border of Dacula sits Rowen, a 2,000-acre concept described by its developers as a "nonprofit-led knowledge community" that sits midway between Atlanta and Athens. Rowen is slated to be a work, live and play community seeking to bring together researchers, academic institutions, entrepreneurs and others to expand the state's research and innovation resources. With economic development and academic partners including Georgia Power and Georgia Tech, Rowen will create an estimated 80,000 jobs at full build out, advancing innovation across agriculture, medicine and the environment.



Area map of Rowen. (Source of image: Rowen Foundation.)

Rowen is planned to provide for a variety of different types of uses that cater to varying needs, including: 1) Rowen Village with mixed uses and many social amenities, 2) medium density sites, 3) low density sites, and 4) open space including a trail system that is open to the public.



Concept drawing for Rowen that visualizes how Rowen Village, the mixed use section, might appear. (Source of image: Rowen Foundation.)



Concept drawing that shows potential placement of facilities across the rest of Rowen beyond Rowen Village. (Source of image: Rowen Foundation.)

gia's Innovation Crescent, more growth in both population and business is projected over the next few decades. However, Dacula's leadership is committed to ensuring that Dacula retains its small-town charm even as the community welcomes new residents and businesses. ✨



1930s Dacula scene looking from historic downtown across railroad tracks and Winder Hwy.



Dacula scene in 2024 with the same orientation as the 1930s scene. (Source of photo: City of Dacula.)

(Source of all images and photos not otherwise noted: "History of Dacula, GA" by Jerri Amelia Stanley.)

Information Sources:

- "History of Dacula, GA" by Jerri Amelia Stanley ©2005.
- Faith Webb from Gwinnett County Public School History on [Mission, Vision, History / Dacula ES History \(gcpks12.org\)](https://www.gwinnettschools.org/mission-vision-history/dacula-es-history).
- "366 Facts About Gwinnett County" by Elliott Brack © 2023 Gwinnett Forum.
- Rowen website www.rowenlife.com.
- City of Dacula www.daculaga.gov.
- Charlotte Nash, former Gwinnett County Commission Chairman.
- U.S. Census 2020.

Onward into the Future

Dacula's population has grown from 6,800 to almost 8,000 since the 2020 Census. Dacula is poised to usher in the future with meaningful development of a new municipal complex, outdoor amphitheater for community and civic events, green space and a public parking deck. These planned improvements will aid in linking old town Dacula with other parts of town that currently host the highest levels of activity. The city council has just approved an Overlay District that will assist in guiding the redevelopment of the old downtown and facilitate quality developments that will not only keep the quaint southern charm of Dacula, but also incorporate more modern concepts.

With the city's enviable location halfway between Atlanta and Athens in the center of Geor-



Celebrating the History of Gwinnett's Award-Winning Parks System

By Cammie Mansfield, Interpretive Resources Project Coordinator, Gwinnett Community Services

Serenity at Alexander Park in the midst of busy Gwinnett.

Editor's Note: Gwinnett County has a great parks system, but it did not happen quickly or easily. This article tracks the system's history and shares some of the important milestones.

Gwinnett County Cultural and Historic Interpretive Resources recently concluded a temporary exhibit displayed across 16 county-owned properties, including the Gwinnett Historic Courthouse, in celebration of National Park and Recreation Month. The exhibit highlighted the rich history of eight of the parks managed by the Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Division: Alex-

ander Park, Bay Creek Park, Best Friend Park, Bogan Park, Little Mulberry Park, Lucky Shoals Park, Ronald Reagan Park, Simpsonwood Park and the forthcoming Beaver Ruin Wetland Park.

This second annual exhibit aimed to increase awareness of Gwinnett's 51 parks and encourage residents to explore their historical significance.

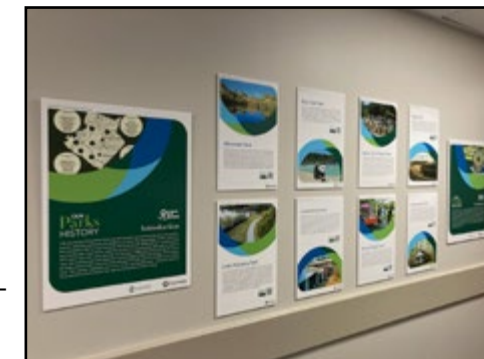


Exhibit panels mounted at county office buildings, recreation centers at 11 county parks, the Gwinnett Environmental and Heritage Center and the Gwinnett Historic Courthouse.

The Beginning

The origins of Gwinnett County's park system can be traced back to 1971, when the Pinckneyville Militia District voted in favor of the first special tax district in Gwinnett for the acquisition, development and operations of public parks. Prior to this event, parks and recreation facilities

and programs in Gwinnett were primarily provided by cities, churches and private organizations. However, the growth in Gwinnett's population during the 1960s from 43,541 to 72,349 and changing expectations of county residents created growing demand for parks and recreation opportunities.

Even before 1971, parks and recreation services were on the minds of county leaders, with a comprehensive needs assessment for parks and recreation prepared in the mid-1960s. Among the recommendations of this study was that Gwinnett County should consider the acquisition of thousands of acres of property to be used for parks prior to losing that acreage to development. The estimated cost to acquire the acreage was placed at about \$2.5 million, which sounds like quite a bargain to us today. However, land prices in Gwinnett were very different then, and the funding capacity of the county was tiny in comparison to its current financial means. In the 1960s, the entire annual budget of the county was less than \$3.0 million. Needless to say, the county made no progress in acquiring parkland during this time period.

A major restructuring of Gwinnett County government in the late 1960s set the stage for the election of new individuals. These newly elected commissioners who took office on January 1, 1969 recognized that the growing Gwinnett community needed improved facilities and programs in many areas such as water and sewer, roads, fire, police, and parks and recreation. In 1970, the Gwinnett Commission called a referendum to authorize the issuance of bonds for fire protection, for roads and for a new jail. The bonds for fire protection were intended to establish countywide fire protection services. This bond referendum, which was held on July 29 that year, failed miserably, with only the Pinckneyville Militia District, located in western Gwinnett, voting in favor of the fire services bonds.

Efforts led by Ray Gunnin, the district commissioner who represented the Pinckneyville area, resulted in Gwinnett approaching service improvements on a militia district by militia district

basis. (Note: While militia districts were originally established as a means to organize militia for defense purposes during Georgia's early years, they have also served as a convenient way to segment counties related to record-keeping and elections.) The thought was that areas of the county where there was more support for service improvements could move ahead without being hampered by opposition elsewhere in the county. For a militia district to receive improved services, the voters in that militia district had to vote in favor of the special services district and the imposition of a dedicated property tax millage to pay for the services.

In November 1970, voters in the Pinckneyville Militia District approved a special fire services district and an associated property tax millage rate increase. While there was already State law covering special service districts for fire services, that was not the case with recreation. Again, Commissioner Gunnin took the lead in pressing for Legislative action to allow a separate vote by the Pinckneyville Militia District for recreation services. Once legislation was passed, a referendum was put to Pinckneyville voters; on May 20, 1971, they voted to approve a recreation services district with a millage rate to provide funding for it.

Launch of Gwinnett Recreation District #1 – Pinckneyville Militia District

As a result of the successful vote within the Pinckneyville Militia District, dedicated property tax revenues were available for parks and recreation for the first time in the history of Gwinnett County. These revenues, coupled with a substantial Land and Water Conservation Fund



Pinckneyville Militia District, designated as Militia District #406, includes the City of Norcross and surrounding area. (Source of image: Georgia USGenWeb Archives.)

grant, funded the initial development of Best Friend Park on property donated by the Southern Railway Co. This park, which represented the beginning of Gwinnett's modern park system, was named for the Southern Railway's famed Best Friend locomotive.

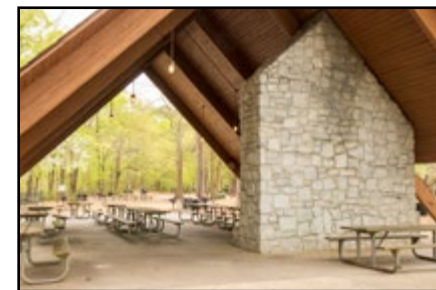
Once the site was donated and funds secured, Gwinnett County moved quickly to solicit and accept bids for the construction of the park. According to a report published in *The Atlanta Constitution*, a groundbreaking was scheduled for Saturday, October 21, 1972.



County moving to award bid for construction of Best Friend Park. (Source of article: *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1972.)

The initial phase of development of Best Friend Park included lighted athletic fields, tennis courts, a pool and bathhouse, comfort stations and a concession building.

Jones Bridge Park was also created with funds generated by the Pinckneyville Recreation District, officially known as Gwinnett County Recreation District #1. A recreational gem on the banks of the Chattahoochee River, Jones Bridge Park's name comes from the 1904 bridge that originally existed on the property. The initial 20 acres of land for the park was purchased by Gwinnett County in 1974, with another



Pavilion at Jones Bridge Park, which is located on the banks of the Chattahoochee River.

10 acres being acquired the following year. Today, the park has numerous amenities, including picnic pavilions, a playground, soccer fields and beautiful views of the Chattahoochee River.

In addition to Jones Bridge Park, Gwinnett County now has three others located along the Chattahoochee River. All of these except Simpsonwood accommodate river access beyond just viewing the river. Holcomb Bridge Park and Simpsonwood Park are in the Peachtree Corners area as is Jones Bridge. Simpsonwood is a large park of almost 223 acres with a unique background; it was acquired in 2015 after serving as a conference center for the United Methodist Church. Settles Bridge Park is upstream in northern Gwinnett and was created through the joint efforts of the county, the National Parks Service and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. While Gwinnett County owns about 218 acres, the portion owned by the Federal government brings the park's total acreage to well over 300 acres.

Push for Countywide Recreation Services in 1970s

Even as the recreation services for the Pinckneyville Militia District were launched, efforts were underway to build support for a countywide parks and recreation program. Based on the number of newspaper articles about this topic, it must have been important to many in the community. Public hearings were held in multiple locations across the county in 1971, with the objective of convincing the Board of Commissioners to include funding in the 1972 county budget to assess recreation needs throughout Gwinnett County and identify options for addressing these.

An article published in *The Atlanta Journal* on December 22, 1971 reports that supporters of countywide recreation services spoke during the budget hearing held by the Board of Commissioners at its meeting the previous day. One of the speakers presented a petition which over 1,000 residents of northern

GWINNETT RECREATION SESSION DUE

The lack of public recreation areas in Gwinnett County will be the topic of an open hearing at 3 p.m. Sept. 19 in the Lawrenceville City Hall. The hearing, part of a series being presented by the Gwinnett County Community Council, is "the beginning of a countywide coordinated effort to accelerate the establishment of recreation facilities and programs," in Gwinnett, said council president Jim Hedrick. A panel of public officials and recreation specialists will present a brief program and answer questions on recreation from residents at the hearing, Hedrick added.

Notice of first of several public hearings on recreation in Gwinnett held in Fall 1971. (Source of article: *The Atlanta Journal*, September 10, 1971.)

Gwinnett had signed. Their specific request was for the commissioners to include about \$10,000 in the 1972 county budget to fund a comprehensive study of recreation needs in Gwinnett.

When the Board of Commissioners adopted the 1972 county budget, the requested funding was included. From a July article in *The Atlanta Journal*, we know that a planning firm had been retained to perform the study.

Gwinnett Seeks Recreation Plan

A county which boasts more than 72,000 residents has no parks and recreation program for its citizens.

According to Maurice Robbins, Director of the Planning and Zoning Department, Gwinnett County is presently involved in a study of need for such a department. The State Planning Department made a study for the county, followed by consideration by the Gwinnett Board of Commissioners.

The commission voted to expend \$10,000 to make a recreational study of what facilities are needed and what land is available.

Robbins said public meetings would be held to inform the public, as well as to find out what the citizens want. The study presently underway by a professional planning firm should be finalized in no more than six months, he said.

In the meantime, the only county-wide program available for the children is sponsored by the Gwinnett County Economic Opportunity Atlanta office in Lawrenceville.

THE EOA has sponsored a two-month recreation program financed by the communities where the playgrounds are located. They are operated by EOA staff members and members of the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC).

Article related to study of Gwinnett's recreation needs that was underway in July 1972. (Source of article: *The Atlanta Journal*, July 26, 1972.)

The study of recreation needs was completed in



Map from 1973 draft Gwinnett County Recreation Master Plan that shows locations and proposed amenities at some of the earliest parks developed in Gwinnett.

1973 and resulted in a draft master plan for Gwinnett County recreation. While the master plan was never officially adopted and countywide recreation services were not initiated in the 1970s, the work done on this master plan laid the foundation for expansion of the parks and recreation system and served as a guide for the growth of the burgeoning park system.

Expansion of Recreation District to Four Other Militia Districts

Once appropriate authorizing legislation was in place, the voters in four additional militia districts (MDs) approved joining the Recreation District and paying the associated property tax millage. These are listed below by date of the successful referendum for each:

- May 4, 1976 – Duluth (MD#1263) and Garners (MD#1578 – Mountain Park),
- October 4, 1977 – Dacula (MD#1564) and
- November 4, 1979 – Suwanee (MD#1604).

The property taxes generated by the recreation millage soon allowed the establishment of parks in all the militia districts where voters had approved it. Within a decade after the successful referendum in the Pinckneyville Militia District, some of the county's earliest public parks were constructed. These included Best Friend Park, Jones Bridge Park, Mountain Park Park and Shorty Howell Park, with George Pierce Park following a few years later.

In the case of Dacula Park, the initial land acquisition and development predated the vote to join the Gwinnett Recreation District; a group of private citizens who decided to create recreation opportunities for youth in the Dacula area raised funds to buy a site and then built athletic fields through sweat equity. After voters in the Dacula Militia District approved joining the Recreation District, the property was transferred to Gwinnett County, and improved facilities and amenities were added.



Today's Dacula Park includes a pond-side picnic area. (Source of photo: Bethany Nash.)

A significant milestone related to Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation occurred in 1975 when a local bill passed by the Georgia Legislature created the Gwinnett County Recreation Authority. Not only was this new legal entity charged with serving as an advisory board for Gwinnett Parks and Recreation, it also was authorized to serve as a financing mechanism for capital projects related to parks and recreation. It facilitated bank loans for some early park development projects and later issued revenue bonds in the late 1980s and early 1990s after the Recreation District expanded countywide.

Gwinnett County also sought ways to offer at least some recreation services countywide. One of these involved partnering with the Gwinnett School System. Under an agreement between the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners and the Gwinnett County Board of Education, school lands would be used to provide ball fields, tennis courts and neighborhood playgrounds.

Growing Pressure in 1980s for Expansion of Recreation Services

Despite the strides made within the militia districts that had elected to pay additional taxes for improved parks and recreation services, the demand for these services outstripped the county's ability to satisfy the needs. Even as new parks were developed and opened in the 1970s, the county's population more than doubled from 72,000 to 167,000. And, the growth only intensified in the 1980s, with Gwinnett being the fastest growing large county in the U.S. for three years running. Additionally, residents in the 75 percent of the county not included in the existing Recreation District became more and more dissatisfied with the lack of parks in their areas.

The 1984 elections brought three new members to the Board of Commissioners, and upon taking office at

the beginning of 1985, these new commissioners quickly moved to address a number of pressing needs. Having served previously on the Gwinnett Recreation Authority, one of the newly elected commissioners, Mike Berg, served as a particular champion for parks and recreation. While parks and recreation improvements were not the very first focus of their efforts, county leadership signaled its interest through the development in 1985 of a countywide recreation master plan which was officially adopted by the Board of Commissioners and Recreation Authority in February 1986.

Later in 1986, the Board of Commissioners called a referendum for November of that year, which in essence, authorized a countywide Recreation District and up to one mill in property tax to be collected in the district. This kept the Recreation District and special millage rate in place for those militia districts that had already voted in favor of the arrangement, while adding all the remaining militia districts to the new countywide Recreation District. It is noteworthy that a group of interested residents formed a nonprofit corporation, Gwinnett for Quality Parks and Recreation Inc., to advocate for the passage of the referendum and raised about \$30,000 for this purpose. The referendum passed, with 30,691 (59.21%) in favor and 21,147 (40.79%) against the measure.

Countywide Recreation District

With the passage of the 1986 referendum and the expansion of the Recreation District to encompass the entire county, the responsibility of the Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Department also expanded to include the entire county as of January 1, 1987. In conjunction with an overall restructuring of county departments and functions in 1988, Parks and Recreation became part of the Department of Human Services, now known as the Department of Community Services.

County	1980 pop.	1985 pop.	Growth
Gwinnett (Atlanta)	166,815	253,000	51.7%
Fort Bend (Houston)	130,962	188,200	43.7%
Williamson (Austin)	76,521	106,300	38.9%
Collin (Dallas)	144,576	196,900	36.2%
Collier (Naples, Fla.)	85,971	116,900	36.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Gwinnett County identified by Census Bureau as the fastest growing county in the U.S. in 1985. (Source of chart: *The Atlanta Journal*, July 3, 1986.)

The additional funding available once the Recreation District included the entire county provided the means to repay several series of revenue bonds issued by the Recreation Authority in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The bond funding gave a jumpstart to the acquisition and development of a number of additional parks in the county, such as Lucky Shoals Park, Bethesda Park, Collins Hill Park and Lenora Park, as well as enabling the expansion and improvement of existing parks. Bonds also provided funding for the purchase of the privately owned Springbrook Golf Course in 1988.

The new countywide Recreation District funded improvements and additional amenities at Tribble Mill Park. This large passive park with two fishing lakes was initially created in the first half of the 1980s through a combination of funding from the Soil Conservation Service, USDA and the county general fund.

Additional properties were acquired through private donations and lease arrangements with local municipalities. In 1990, the Vines Botanical Garden, including 90 acres of property and a 22,000 square foot mansion, was donated to the county by its private owners, Charles and Myrna



A lakeside view at Vines Park.

Adams. The property had an estimated value of \$3.9 million and was named in honor of Mrs. Adams' father, O.O. Vines.

The City of Lawrenceville took advantage of the county's offer to assume operations and maintenance of the parks of any city in Gwinnett interested in such an arrangement. As a result, Gwinnett County took over the operation of Lawrenceville's Rhodes Jordan Park in 1992 through a long-term lease arrangement that included a commitment from the county to expand and improve the park on par with other county parks.

A master plan for Rhodes Jordan Park was developed in 1993; the map shown below presents the improvements that

were planned for the park. Notice the absence of the Community Recreation Center and Family Aquatics Center that were constructed in 2001 north of the planned tennis complex.



Plan for Rhodes Jordan Park as shown in 1993 Master Plan.

In the late 1990s, the park system expanded significantly with the acquisition of new parklands, guided by an updated Master Plan initiated in 1996. This plan included objectives to build community centers and aquatic centers in many parks, as well as a Greenway Plan to connect parks with neighborhoods and schools. The county's first indoor aquatic center opened at Bogan Park in 1997.



Construction of indoor pool at Bogan Park in 1997, the first pool in the county to be enclosed in a permanent structure.

Impact of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) Funding

For the first time, parks and recreation projects were included as a purpose for the 1997 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). The approval of this SPLOST by voters in November 1996 generated \$60 million to fund the development of many of the county's parks. Recognition for the Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Di-

vision followed, with its being named the Georgia Recreation and Park Association's District 7 Agency of the Year in 2000.

The inclusion of parks and recreation projects in the 1997 SPLOST program was a major turning point for the development of parks and recreation facilities in Gwinnett. Beginning with the 1997 SPLOST, funding for parks and recreation capital projects has been a part of each SPLOST program since then. As a result of positive votes for multiple SPLOST referenda over the years, in excess of \$700.0 million of funding has been made available for parks and recreation projects. The latest SPLOST program is expected to provide an additional \$108.0 million to be utilized for parks and recreation capital needs. Voter support of SPLOST referenda has been the most important factor in parks development in recent history.



Participants enjoying a basketball game at the George Pierce Park gym, one of many such facilities at county parks.

Based on demand from its residents, Gwinnett County initially focused on active recreation facilities in the development of its parks. There was immense pressure for the County to provide athletic fields, pools, gymnasiums and playgrounds. However, as more and more active recreation facilities were available, priorities changed.

Addressing Need for Greenspace and Passive Recreation

Beginning in the mid-1990s, public demand for passive recreation and greenspace began to surface through requests from individuals and

groups. Results of public surveys of Gwinnett residents regarding recreation services in the county brought the need for open space, trails and other passive recreation facilities into clearer focus as more and more respondents ranked these as their number one priority.



Beautiful, peaceful creek in Harbins Park.

With a portion of the SPLOST funding allocated to parks and recreation, Gwinnett launched efforts to acquire acreage specifically intended for use as greenspace and passive recreation. The County also took advantage of State funding through the Georgia Greenspace Program. Multiple properties were acquired across the county, including the following:

- Harbins Park – At over 1900 acres in size, it is the largest Gwinnett County Park. While there are a football complex and a baseball/softball complex here, these are located away from the majority of the acreage, which is reserved for activities like hiking, mountain biking, horseback trail riding, picnicking and just enjoying the outdoors.
- Little Mulberry Park – This park, with 890 acres, is the second largest Gwinnett County Park. It is devoted to the preservation of a unique geographic area of Gwinnett with flora not usually found in Gwinnett and rock structures of Native American origin. Trails allow visitors to explore the park in a manner that protects its special characteristics.
- Tribble Mill Park – An additional 50 acres were purchased and added to the existing park, bringing its total acreage to over 710 acres. This park is dedicated to open space and passive recreation.
- Yellow River Park – With 691 acres, this park is also focused on open space and passive recreation.

- Palm Creek Property – This property, which contains about 295 acres, was acquired for a future open space park but has not been developed yet.
- Settles Bridge Park – As previously described, the County owns 218 acres here, with the total area of the park exceeding 300 acres.
- DeShong Park – This park contains 208 acres, with the majority of the park dedicated to open space and passive recreation.
- McDaniel Farm Park – This 128-acre property was purchased not only to provide open space in a highly developed area of the County, but its acquisition from the family who had owned and farmed it for well over a century allowed the County to preserve the farm as an example of what much of Gwinnett was like in earlier times.
- Other - There are a number of other parks not listed here individually that emphasize passive recreation.

In all, over 5000 acres of the property held by the Gwinnett County Parks System is dedicated to open space and passive recreation uses. Conservation easements have been placed on about 75 percent of the open space acreage to protect these resources for the future.

Expansion of Gwinnett Park System Since 2000 and Recognition of its Excellence

As Gwinnett County's population surpassed half a million by the turn of the millennium, the park system continued to expand. In the early 2000s, the county purchased the property for Harbins Park, as noted above, the largest in the county. During the mid-2000s, the Environmental and Heritage Center was planned and constructed adjacent to the F. Wayne Hill Water Resources Center and then opened to the public. In addition to the new parks it developed, the County also brought two existing parks into the county parks system. One of these was purchased from the South Gwinnett Athletic Association while the other one, Lions Club Park, was leased to the county for 40 years by the City of Lilburn.

With funding from SPLOST, additional parks were renovated, enhanced and expanded. Notable

additions included the county's first outdoor skating rink at Pinckneyville Park in 2002 and the first dog park at Ronald Reagan Park in 2004. The instant popularity of this first dog park demonstrated the need for these facilities, leading the county to provide them in parks across the entire county.



2023 Pet Paw-ty event at Ronald Reagan Park celebrating the park's furry friends.

The division received national recognition in 2008 when Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation was awarded the Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management by the National Recreation and Park Association and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, recognizing it as the best parks and recreation agency in the United States. Since Gwinnett is categorized as a large agency, it competed against the largest parks systems across the country. Gwinnett has been a finalist for this award several times, including this year.



Gwinnett County Recreation Authority Chair, Lois Allen (right), and Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation Director, Sharon Plunkett (left), accepting the 2008 NRPA Gold Medal Award.

The Gwinnett Parks System has continued to grow and improve as new parks have been added to the inventory over the last 15 years even as existing parks have been expanded and enhanced with additional amenities. Most

of the new parks have been constructed from scratch on land purchased by the county. However, E.E. Robinson Park was purchased from the City of Sugar Hill in 2014, and the county later added more acreage to the original park, built new facilities and renovated or replaced the existing ones.

More Improvements to Come

With the \$108 million in funding for parks and recreation facilities included in the most recently approved 2023 SPLOST, the county has the ability to continue to develop new parks and refresh and update existing ones. Once again, Gwinnett voters are making a positive difference in the county parks.

Looking back to the beginning of the county-wide Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation system in 1987, it is hard to believe the transformation that has occurred. At that time, Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation managed 12 park sites and 1,500 acres of land. Today, the system has grown to oversee more than 10,000 acres of land and 51 parks. With the anticipated openings of the new Beaver Run Wetland Park next year and Discovery Park in 2026, the total number of parks managed by Gwinnett County will increase to 53. We encourage residents to visit their favorite parks and reflect on the more than 50 years of visionary planning and public support that shaped Gwinnett County's award-winning park system.

For more information, go to the Parks section of the Gwinnett County website: <https://www.gwinnettcounty.com/departments/Community-Services/ParksandRecreation>. *

(Source of all photos and images, unless otherwise noted: Gwinnett County Community Services.)



Children escaping the summer heat by playing in the splashy interactive fountain, one of the many improvements added by Gwinnett County at E.E. Robinson Park.

Information Sources

- Gwinnett County records and staff knowledge.
- Grant Guess, Gwinnett County retiree with decades of management service with Gwinnett Parks and Recreation.
- Charlotte Nash, Gwinnett County retiree with 28 years of service at staff level, a term as a member of the Gwinnett Recreation Authority and a decade as Commission Chairman.



Participants at the 2024 Elisha Winn Fair. (Source of photo: Diane McCormic.)

2024 Elisha Winn Fair: Celebrating 45 Years of Community Support

From Reports by GHS Members

This year's Elisha Winn Fair was dedicated to the many Gwinnett community members who have supported the Gwinnett Historical Society (GHS) in its efforts to save, restore and maintain the Elisha Winn House over the decades. The tradition of holding this fair is decades long, with the first one being held in 1979. The fair was intended to be a day of fun, food and frolic that

also had a serious purpose. A notice of the fair published in *The Macon News* on September 16, 1979 shared that purpose: to raise funds to restore the Elisha Winn House.

Back in 1978, the property on which

the Elisha Winn House sits was up for sale, and the dilapidated state of the house meant it would likely be demolished. However, a determined group of GHS members had another outcome in mind. They began negotiating for the purchase of the house, along with three acres of property, and several of them ultimately provided personal guarantees for a bank loan in order to close on the purchase.

Gwinnett County purchased the property from GHS a few months later, allowing the bank loan to be extinguished, but the house desperately needed to be stabilized and restored. The county leased the Winn property back to GHS in exchange for the commitment to ensure the restoration and maintenance of the house. The Elisha Winn Fair was born from one idea for raising needed funds to care for the Elisha Winn house.

Notice that the first fair was called the Elisha Winn Fair of 1812, in a nod to the year in which the house is believed to have been constructed. Within a few years, though, the name had been changed by dropping the year, becoming simply the Elisha Winn Fair.

From a photo published by *The Atlanta Journal*, it is clear that both the Elisha Winn House and the fair were different in 1812 than they are now.



Exhibits at 1812 Elisha Winn Fair. (Source of photo: *The Atlanta Journal*, October 5, 1812.)

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Elisha Winn Fair over the last 45 years and how critical community support has been to its success. The Winn Fair has been the main fundraising activity for all the work that has been



Elisha Winn House as it appears today. (Source of photo: Bethany Nash.)

done on the Winn House over that time period. With the efforts of scores of GHS volunteers and the support of more community members than can be counted, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised and applied to restoring the Winn House to the beautiful house we see today.

Individuals and families were invited to visit the 2024 Elisha Winn Fair and join the celebration with no admission fee as a way of saying



Vendor displays throughout Winn property. (Source of photo: Jim Baughman.)

thanks for all the support the fair has received over the years. We had beautiful weather, great attendance and perhaps a record number of vendors who participated this year. Despite eliminating admission fees, the 2024 Elisha Winn Fair was a financial success, generating a net profit of over \$5,000. The higher level of sponsorships and donations for the fair this year, the larger number of vendors and the reduction in some expenses helped ensure a nice addition to the Winn Property account.

Of course, the real success of the fair can best be measured by how much the attendees and

participants enjoyed the broad range of activities we were able to offer this year, with the help of many organizations and individuals. We were pleased to have the Atlanta History Dancers, who were a big hit last year, join us again this year.

In addition to their dance performance, this year the Atlanta History dancers treated fair attendees to a reenactment of a Regency period high tea in the dining room of the Winn House.

Tours of the Elisha Winn House, likely the oldest house in Metro Atlanta, were a highlight of the fair for both first time and repeat visitors. The house is furnished with period furniture, and docents were available to lead tours and provide information. Demonstrations inside the house of old time skills like weaving gave folks a chance to learn a bit about how much work it took in the past to have the essentials.

Outside the house, there were many other exhibits and demonstrations to enjoy. These included the War of 1812 Reenac-

tion. Wayne Stancel, Fort Daniel Foundation Director and GHS member, sharing information about musket from earlier times. (Source of photo: Beverly Paff.)



Atlanta History dancers performing at 2024 Elisha Winn Fair. (Source of photo: Diane McCormic.)



GHS volunteer Carol Adams using an old loom to weave cloth while GHS member Tiffany Porter works in the kitchen of the Elisha Winn House. (Source of photo: Diane McCormic.)



Wayne Stancel, Fort Daniel Foundation Director and GHS member, sharing information about musket from earlier times. (Source of photo: Beverly Paff.)



tors from nearby Fort Daniel. This group is a perennial favorite at the Winn Fair as they share skills that were critical in the early 1800s, like using and maintaining firearms.

Jim Baughman brought a very well organized display of railroad memorabilia, which was located in the plaza just outside the barn. He was also on hand to answer questions and share information based on his wide knowledge of the subject.

A portion of the display of railroad memorabilia provided by Jim Baughman. (Source of photo: Jim Baughman.)



In conjunction with viewing the railroad memorabilia, it was easy to take a look at the many different types of farm tools and implements presented in the barn and around it.

We are always excited to have members of the Elisha Winn Chapter, Children of the American Revolution (C.A.R.) join us at the Elisha Winn Fair. It is fun to see them in period costumes and demonstrating tasks that were common assignments for children in

earlier times.

Several other history-focused Gwinnett organizations helped bring history to life for fair attendees. In the historic one-room schoolhouse, Joyce Goodbread, a member of the Philadelphia Winn DAR Chapter, played the role of schoolmarm and taught lessons as they might have been taught a century ago.

Members of the Button Gwinnett SAR Chapter returned to the fair this year with their traveling trunk presentation and provided lessons about

the Revolutionary War that featured show-and-tell demonstrations of facets of life and the war during that time. The presenters were all in authentic military dress from Revolutionary times.

Members of the Philadelphia Winn DAR Chapter were at the fair with free books at the Librarian Corner. The Librarian Corner is one way the chapter members actively encourage children to read as part of the DAR's promotion of literacy.

One very special part of the Elisha Winn Fair this year was the "Playing in the Past" activities presented by our wonderful partners at Gwinnett County Community Services. From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday of the fair, Community Services staff were on site with a host of games and recreational activities that were popular in the past. Kids of all ages were welcome to give these a try to get a sense of how playtime in the past differed from today.

There were plenty of other activities to entertain and engage participants too, including live music, interesting exhibits, unique vendor offerings, activities



Tom Jacques, Button Gwinnett SAR Chapter member, sharing lessons about the American Revolutionary War. (Source of photo: Beverly Paff.)



Books from which children could choose one to take home, courtesy of the Philadelphia Winn DAR Chapter. (Source of photo: Beverly Paff.)



One of the many children's activities sponsored by Gwinnett County Community Services. (Source of photo: Beverly Paff.)

at the period garden and demonstrations of everyday skills from the past that seem foreign to many of us now. And, if anyone felt the need for a bit of peace and quiet, a stroll down the nature trail to the creek and rock shelter was a good choice.

Then, the grand finale of the fair was the drawing for the quilt near the end of the second day. For just a \$1 ticket, the winner took home a beautiful, one-of-a-kind quilt. Betty Warbington, who has been instrumental for many years in the success of the Winn Fair, provides a summary of the 2024 quilt raffle below.

"It is my opinion the 2024 Winn Fair Quilt is one of the most beautiful quilts we have ever raffled at the fair over many years. The lucky winner this year was a Gwinnett Historical Society member who was actually



Lori Anderson (left) with Betty Warbington (right) and the beautiful "Stars over Gwinnett" quilt she took home from the 2024 Elisha Winn Fair. (Source of photo: Betty Warbington.)

volunteering as a docent inside the historic Elisha Winn house when her name was drawn from the hundreds of entries received this year. Lori Anderson from Suwanee, Georgia was pleasantly surprised to learn she had won the lovely 2024 handmade quilt!

This year's quilt was called Stars Over Gwinnett and was made by Candy Hardy of Lawrenceville, Georgia. The winner does not have to be present to win the quilt. So, it was very nice to see the big smile on Lori's face when the quilt was presented to her on the porch of the Winn House. The quilt drawing concluded the very successful 2024 Elisha Winn Fair!

While the 2024 Elisha Winn Fair has come and gone, the dates are already set for the 2025 fair. Mark your calendars now for Saturday, October 4 and Sunday, October 5---see you then! *

Membership Renewal Reminder



Reminder! Membership renewal for 2025 is due January 1. Renewing on time will ensure that you do not miss an issue of the Gwinnett Heritage and that you will continue to

have uninterrupted access to the Members Only section of the Gwinnett Historical Society website. Additionally, you will continue to receive important communications sent to members, such as meeting notices.



And as a **special bonus** for current members who renew by January 1, 2025, your name will be entered in a drawing for your choice from a one-of-a-kind basket of goodies! So don't delay---renew your membership today.

You may now pay securely online by going to www.gwinnetths.org and following these steps:

1. Click on **MEMBERSHIP**.
2. Click on **JOIN OR RENEW NOW**.
3. If you don't have a PayPal account, you can enter your credit card information.

You may also renew your membership by sending your check to:

Gwinnett Historical Society
P.O. Box 261
Lawrenceville, GA 30046

We appreciate your timely membership renewal! *

Cemetery Symbolism

By Bobbie Wilson Tkacik

As you walk through cemeteries exploring, looking for family names and noting all the epitaphs, you will surely notice the architecture and design of some of the tombstones. The older they are, the more likely you are to see all sorts of decorations carved into or attached to the stones. While entire books have been written about cemetery art and symbols, this article should serve as a primer for starting to recognize some of the common types of symbols and variations of them.

When looking at a stone you may see several different symbols. Here is a quick, but by no way complete, glossary to get you started.

- Tree stump or broken branches – A life cut short.
- Birds, especially doves – Purity, innocence or peace; often used on a child's grave.
- Chains that are separated – A break in the family; a missing member (link).
- Lamb – Meekness or innocence.
- Angels – Grief; if pointing to heaven, rejoicing.
- Finger pointing up – Soul has gone to heaven.
- Handshake – God's welcome to heaven; if the deceased was married, may see different clothing on each wrist that denotes gender.
- Candle – Life.
- Clock – March of time.
- Wheat – Long fruitful life.
- Draped urn – Represents separation between the living and dead; shroud protects the soul.

- Open gates – Symbol for passage into heaven.

There are pages and pages of different symbols used to convey meanings in cemeteries. If you are interested in learning more, I recommend two books that are excellent sources of additional information. Both "Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography" by Douglas Keister and "Tombstones of Your Ancestors" by Louis S. Schafer provide extensive lists of symbols used in cemeteries along with more detailed explanations of them, certainly much more complete than one article can present.



Wilson family memorial in Bear Creek Cemetery in Pennsylvania.



Another example of a draped urn.



Lion of Atlanta Monument in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta prior to its removal in 2021.

Now, let's look at some examples and determine what the symbols mean. The first symbol to consider is the use of a draped urn. I found a great example of this symbol at Bear Creek Cemetery in Pennsylvania where there is a tall monument topped with a draped urn that is a memorial for members of my Wilson family who are buried there.

A Greek symbol of mourning, the urn denotes that the body is a vessel for the soul. The draped urn symbolizes the separation between the living and the dead, with the drape providing protection for the soul after it has left the body.

Perhaps you saw the famous monument in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta known as the Lion of Atlanta prior to its removal by the City of Atlanta in 2021. The Lion of Atlanta was dedicated to the more than 3000 unknown Confederate soldiers buried in Oakland Cemetery. The monument was based on one of Switzerland's most famous monuments,

The Lion of Lucerne, which was created to commemorate the more than 600 Swiss Guards killed during the storming of Tuileries Palace during the French Revolution. Swiss Guards were employed by the King of France to protect his family and him. In the case of the Lion of Atlanta, the lion is crying and lying atop a Confederate flag and a musket. Look closely and you may be able to see a tear on the lion's cheek. Both monuments mourn the loss of lives in pursuit of lost causes.



Gravestone in Nesbit Cemetery in Gwinnett County.

appears to have a broken wing. Gazing at this grave conjures up many images of the child's short life and is a very sad experience indeed for the viewer.



Headstone in Friendship Baptist Cemetery in Gwinnett County.

A gravestone from the Nesbit Cemetery right here in Gwinnett County incorporates multiple symbols. This gravestone is for Nellie, the daughter of E.A. and C. Nesbit. There is a tree cut down along with several cut off branches indicating a life cut short. And the dove, which stands for innocence and purity and is often utilized on a child's grave, is dead, indicating a sudden death. Additionally, the dove

A headstone for a grave in the Friendship Baptist Cemetery in Gwinnett County shows the index finger pointing upward. This indicates that the soul of the deceased is in Heaven. Two fingers would indicate that the deceased was a member of the clergy.

A headstone found in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery illustrates symbolism used to identify that the

deceased was Jewish. The Star of David at the top center denotes this.



Headstone in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta with Star of David.

A headstone found at the grave of my fourth great grandmother, Barbara Stuart, in the Stuart Family Cemetery in Clear Creek, Kentucky has several symbols on it. First and foremost is the "curtain" that is sometimes referred to as a veil. The use of the curtain symbolizes the passage from one type of existence to another and is to act as protection. In the center of the upper stone is a link from a chain holding the open ends of another link. The broken link indicates a death in the family and a life cut short. Barbara was the first of Peter Stuart's three wives so she did indeed die young. You can use the history you know of a person's life to help decipher the symbolism of his/her gravestone.



Headstone of Barbara Stuart, author's fourth great grandmother.

Another headstone found in the Stuart Family Cemetery in Kentucky provides an example of a common symbol that is typically associated with the tombs of a married couple. The handshake represents one person leaving to be welcomed into Heaven while the other is left behind. You can look at the cuffs showing the clothing of the hands to determine male and female if the stone is in good shape.



Headstone showing handshake symbol.



A pretty little lamb symbol is used on the headstone at the grave of a little girl in Martin's Chapel Cemetery Gwinnett County. There is also a calla lily across the bottom, which represents beauty.

Headstone at grave of little girl in Martin's Chapel Cemetery, Gwinnett County.

Angels are a very popular symbol on headstones. Here are two beautiful examples of the use of angels on headstones. The first one is at a grave in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta and appears to be pointing up to Heaven.



Headstone at grave in Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta.

The other example of the use of angels as symbols on headstones comes from Friendship Baptist Cemetery in Gwinnett County. In this case, the angel is dropping flowers on the grave which means mourning and grief.



Headstone at grave in Friendship Baptist Cemetery in Gwinnett County.

Hopefully this brief description of gravestone symbolism will alert you to the meaning of a few common symbols and help you understand their significance. As you explore, you will see symbols that are not mentioned here and others that are a variation on those described in this article. Check out the recommended books to learn more. If you have old family graves, look closely at the headstones for symbols that may give you insights into the lives of those buried there. *

(Source of all photos: Bobbie Tkacik.)



Volunteer Work Day at Elisha Winn Property

By Charlotte Nash

Taking a break at the refreshment station. (Source of photo: Peggie Johnson.)

On Saturday, November 16 we welcomed a group of county staff members and community volunteers to the Elisha Winn property to tackle some of the outdoor tasks that are inherently part of keeping the grounds of this historic property in good shape. We made sure to have snacks, coffee and other beverages waiting for these folks who were generously giving up several hours on a Saturday to help.



Nature Trail at Winn Property. (Source of photo: Michael Nash.)

The volunteer work day at the Elisha Winn property was organized by Nathan Griswell, Volunteer Resources Coordinator for Gwinnett Community Services - Parks and Recreation.

Betty Warbington, Winn House Chair, contacted the county a while back to request some help with issues, including trail erosion and replacement of some old benches located along the nature trail.

Nathan recruited a scout working on projects to attain Eagle Scout designation to take on the bench replacement earlier this year. Folks using the trail now have new benches for sitting to rest or just enjoy the nature trail and forest area.

Then county staff made plans for a work day at the Winn property that involved community volunteers. The work day was initially scheduled earlier but other work demands



Section of nature trail with new bench provided through Eagle Scout project. (Source of photo: Michael Nash.)

and then more recently, Hurricane Helene interfered. However, Nathan and his team were determined to make it to the Winn property to get the work done. And, November 16 was the day!

While a few GHS members worked in the period garden and yard near the house, Nathan led the county staff and nine community volunteers to complete several tasks. The main project for the day was to address some areas of heavy soil erosion around three drainage pipes. First step was to clear out the old sediment and rock before grading the landscape and placing a pallet of large river rock around the outlets. The rock is intended to help slow water down as it exits the pipes and to reduce the washout effect and resulting erosion.

The second project was working below the retaining wall of the small paved parking lot to remove pine saplings and invasive Himalayan blackberry brambles. The rapidly growing pines would soon block views of the native forest on the site if not removed while the invasive Himalayan blackberry plants can easily outgrow native pollinator species if left unchecked. Volunteers pulled all of the saplings and briars across about 2,800 square feet of area to give the native flora a better chance to thrive and also improve the aesthetics of the site.

You may be curious about how volunteers from across the community get involved with activities like the work day at the Winn property. Gwinnett County has a robust, well-organized volunteer program that has been operating for years, and Community Services, including Parks and Recreation, is one of the most active participants in it, welcoming volunteers to be part of the department's activities and projects.

The volunteer opportunities within Parks and Recreation can include everything from assisting with the Summer Meals program and summer camps for kids to assisting with athletic tournaments or bingo nights at the recreation centers to helping put on large festivals for the public. As Nathan describes it, the Volunteer Resources team that he leads, focuses specifically on volunteer outdoor projects that aid the wildlife and native habitat within county parks. Working with Nathan and his staff, volunteers should be prepared to get their hands dirty and connect with the outdoors by cleaning playgrounds, spreading mulch, removing litter, clearing invasive plant species, installing plants and more.

For anyone who is interested in getting involved in volunteer work within the county parks or



Volunteers clearing pine saplings and invasive species. (Source of photo: Michael Nash.)

other areas of county government, go to the Volunteer Gwinnett section on the County website at <https://www.gwinnettcounty.com/departments/communityservices/volunteergwinnett>.

Volunteer opportunities across county government are posted here. You can create your own user profile, sign up for volunteer activities that interest you and track your volunteer hours at any county event regardless of which department or division sponsors it. Parks

and Recreation posts its opportunities that are available to the public on this volunteer portal, but you can also reach the Volunteer Resources group at VolunteerInParks@GwinnettCounty.com if you are part of a company, faith-based organization, scout troop, youth club or similar group that is looking to set up a private service opportunity to make an impact in the parks.

Nathan also shared about other ways beyond volunteer work days that he and his team seek to engage the broad Gwinnett community with outdoor experiences. This includes everything from birding and night hikes to nature-based art

programs to family fishing derbies and campouts in the parks during various times of the year. These programs can mostly be found by registering at GwinnettParks.com. Nathan sums up Gwinnett Parks and Recreation's philosophy this way, "We believe that nature is for everybody, and that all are welcome in our parks!"

GHS truly appreciates the volunteers and county staff who spent time and energy at the Elisha Winn property and the chance to share with

them a bit about the significant role in Gwinnett history this property played. Also, a special thank you to Betty Warbington for being on site early to prepare for the work day. In addition, thanks to Betty, Beverly Paff, Peggie Johnson and Frances Johnson for providing refreshments and being there to make the volunteers feel welcome. And, finally, thank you to Betty, Beverly, Frances and Michael Nash for working in the garden and yards. ✨

Continued from page 2

which focuses on science and history educational enrichment. However, as usually happens with great professionals like Jason, he was given broader responsibilities. He currently serves as the Deputy Division Director for Collaboration in Gwinnett County's Department of Community Services. In that role, he manages the county's Building Brains Anywhere initiative, which provides a focus on early learning and out of school time experiences such as afterschool, summer camp and history/science related field trips to the Gwinnett Environmental and Heritage Center and the county's historic sites.

Jason and his team are recognized at the local, state and national levels as innovators who are leading the way in finding new ways to engage children in educational activities and cultivate excitement about learning. He has been personally recognized as a Distinguished Professional Administrator by the Georgia Recreation and Park Association. Jason is also active in several community organizations in Gwinnett.

On a personal level, Jason and Angie, who is a proud graduate of Presbyterian College too, are members of Lawrenceville First United Methodist Church and have two adult children. Anna

Claire is also a proud graduate of Presbyterian College and a laboratory scientist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources while Walker is a senior at Mercer University majoring in Music Education. The family, including its newest member, a beautiful 8-month-old Boykin Spaniel named Cooper, makes its home in Dacula. All the family (except for Cooper) are members of the Gwinnett Historical Society. In fact, Angie, Anna Claire and Walker are recognized as Silver Level members of Gwinnett's First Families.

Please join me in welcoming Jason to his role as President. Be sure to take the time to say hello to him at upcoming GHS meetings and events.

Charlotte Nash

Spotlight on GHS Members

Ave atque vale, or, Hail! And, err, Farewell?

By Chris Locke

Editor's Note: From time to time, we select GHS members to highlight. For this edition of the Gwinnett Heritage, we asked Christopher and Melinda Locke to allow us to share a bit about their backgrounds and their interest in GHS. Christopher, or Chris as he prefers to be known, recently stepped into the role of Membership Committee Chair. He and his wife Melinda relocated to Gwinnett County this year as they entered retirement. For Melinda, the move was a homecoming since she is a native of Gwinnett County with deep roots here. We are fortunate that the couple's interest in history and genealogy led them to decide they wanted to be active in the Gwinnett Historical Society. Now, enjoy hearing from them directly.



Chris and Melinda Locke. (Source of photo: U.S. Department of Defense.)

The U.S. military community has a tradition that honors service members that are leaving an organization while concurrently welcoming new arrivals. There are three key points to the tradition: 1) build organizational continuity and esprit de corps, 2) welcome and include new members in the history and traditions of the organization, 3) and, equally important, to say thank-you to members that are departing. These are known as Hail and Farewell ceremonies.

Effective this past GHS Executive Council meeting I was seated as the chair of the GHS Membership Committee. To introduce myself to the membership I was asked to write a bit about myself, my spouse and why I held my hand up. After thinking about this missive for several days, I cannot write the piece without first standing up and giving a loud shout-out to Priscilla Failmezger. So, this note is really a Hail and Farewell message.

Priscilla prepared the way for this change. She conveyed her decision to leadership, sought her replacement, prepared an in-depth transition book and spent several hours training me. That spirit of leadership, preparation and giving is a hallmark for her. I am honored to learn about her, her family, her story and her interests in history. She has set a high standard in this position during

her tenure as chair. Thank you for all you have done, Priscilla. The Historical Society has benefited so much.

Best of all, Priscilla also agreed to stay on the membership committee going forward. Therefore, there is no farewell this time. Instead, GHS will become more resilient and capable going forward by adding strength and depth to its Membership function. We all benefit from Priscilla's generosity with her time.

As for me: I go by Chris, I recently retired from 46 years of federal service, effectively all in the Department of Defense, some on active duty in the U.S. Army, the rest as a civilian. Melinda and I met in Germany when we were both on active duty in the U.S. Army back during the Cold War. We married in Lawrenceville, at Hopewell Christian Church after we were both back in civilian life. We went on to spend about 15 years abroad on long-term assignments. We returned to the USA in 2000.

In 2015, I was gifted an on-line genealogy account by my eldest son (we have two young men). This set the stage for my now significant interest in history and genealogy research. It turns out my paternal grandmother made sure

we all knew that we descended from Governor William Bradford, of Mayflower fame. However, that linkage was never proven to the Mayflower Society in Massachusetts. I decided to compose and file that proof in her honor many years after she passed.

Composing the proof was hard work. However, I do have favorite stories. One is about an ancestor's body that went missing from a cemetery in California. It was crazy working that one out. You asked what is a cemetery probe? [Take a look at this picture!](#) Come visit and I'll tell you the rest of the story. Anyway, along the way, I came to realize additional Pilgrim lines existed in my family. I eventually proved lineages to the families of Pilgrims William White and Stephen Hopkins as well. My father is certain the William White connection was not known by my grandparents.

For me, that trip through the past was a remarkable experience. For example, given Stephen Hopkins' story, have you ever considered how many frequent sailings mileage points he built up? I wonder if he received compensation for being marooned in Bermuda when his ship to Jamestown [sank on his first voyage to North America](#)? Would you have boarded the Mayflower after such an experience? Learning these stories shifted my perspective and made me think through migration patterns and family practices and faiths at a much larger time-scale. I was hooked. Ever since, I have volunteered as a chapter historian for the Mayflower society. I really like helping others prove their lineages and to reconnect to what might be faded or lost family stories. I imagine what I went through is perhaps like those explorations by GHS First Family applicants.

Melinda, who was born and raised in Gwinnett County, went through the GHS First Families process last year. Her Peevy family research builds on the efforts of Donn Peevy and Mary Frazier Long, both of whom were GHS volunteers. Melinda received her First Families certificates last December.

Melinda and I want to give back to Gwinnett, now that we are living in the county. One joint

undertaking we plan to give is that during these next years we will do our best to track back to the original Peevy/Peevey/Peavy/Peavey/Pavey to come to Georgia. The current thinking is that the original immigrant ancestor may have been one John Pavey who arrived in Savannah under the aegis of the Oglethorpe expedition. However, proving that may require a great deal of research and some luck with the surviving records sets.

So, I'll close with two topics. The first is a call to arms for the Peevy/Peavy and allied families of Gwinnett County and elsewhere. Let's nail down more of that family history for posterity. Mary Frazier Long and Donn Peevy did a good job, but, as is always true in genealogy, so much more needs to be done. Melinda and I would love to hear from you and band together on that project.

The second is another call to arms for current or prospective members of the Gwinnett Historical Society. If you have a historical project in mind that you want to develop, please know I am happy to share what I know about the resources, organizations and methods that can help you achieve your goals for a trip through family or local history. I am getting stronger at Georgia history. For example, John Peavy, winner of a Gwinnett County, District 5 (Harbin's) land lot through the 1820 Land lottery as a Revolutionary Soldier also clearly won a second lot in Carroll County via the 1827 lottery, land he never saw due to death. I believe the fact he won twice might not be widely known in Peevy family circles. It also offers a potential analytic path to link elements of that family with the next generation by way of estate actions recorded outside of Gwinnett County. If we can prove that this soldier was the father of John J. Peavy, the First Families ancestor Melinda shares with Donn and Mary, we then have the opportunity to go to SAR/DAR and ask both organizations to evaluate, integrate and recognize that revolutionary war patriot.

Obviously, step one in all cases is to visit with GHS, and working through me and Priscilla, join the organization. Then we can help lay out

research ideas or involve other GHS experts as appropriate.

As for the Peevy project, Melinda and I plan to include a number of visits to Savannah. I LOVE those praline pecans and walking in Forsyth

Park, not to mention visits to the beautiful homes in the historic district.

Non Sibi ✨

December General Membership/Annual Meeting

We hope that you will join us for our General Membership/Annual Meeting and an evening of celebration on **Monday, December 9, 2024**. We will gather at 6:30 for snacks and fellowship and then open the business meeting at 7 p.m.

During the business meeting, we will reflect on the accomplishments of 2024 and also install officers and trustees for the 2025 – 2026 term, as listed below:

President – Jason West.
Vice President – Beverly Paff.
Recording Secretary – Diane McCormic.
Corresponding Secretary – Sandy Lee.
Treasurer – Richard Lux.
Assistant Treasurer – Betty Warbington.
Trustees – Kathryn Baskin, Brandon Hembree and Charlotte Nash.

Immediately following the business meeting, we will recognize the large number of members who have achieved First Families designation in 2024. Additionally, we will present our annual awards to members who have been particularly instrumental in the work of GHS this year.

The schedule for the evening is shown below.

6:30 p.m. – 7 p.m. Bring a snack for our celebration gathering.

7 p.m. Business Meeting

7:30 p.m. First Families Recognition Ceremony and Presentation of Annual Awards

The meeting will be held at **Rhodes Jordan Park Community Center**. The Park entrance is at 100 East Crogan Street, Lawrenceville, GA 30046. Once you are in the Park, follow the signs to the Community Center. You should be able to enter the meeting room directly through the outside doors to it.

Hope to see you on Monday, December 9. ✨

Recap of September 2024 General Membership Meeting

Our September 2024 general membership meeting was held on Monday, September 16, and we had a good crowd assembled at the Rhodes Jordan Park Community Center that evening. After enjoying a time to socialize over some delicious goodies that members brought to share, we held a short business meeting. Discussion of final plans for the 2024 Elisha Winn Fair was a major topic during the business session.

Then it was time for the program, which was presented by Vice President Gregory Bailey who stepped in at the last minute to replace the panel of genealogists from the Atlanta History Center originally scheduled as speakers for this meeting. Unfortunately, some employees of the Center were exposed to a highly contagious virus, and our speakers were advised to quarantine in order to avoid spreading the virus.

While the originally planned program would certainly have been interesting, Vice President Bailey ensured we had a great program. His topic was “The Impact and Influence of the African American Church in the Life and Legacy of Gwinnett County, GA.” He provided attendees with information about African American churches in Gwinnett specifically, as well as putting the Gwinnett experience into a broader context.

We learned about the early formation of plantation missions, also known as “slave churches,” which were typically authorized in some manner by plantation owners. African American churches became a place of support and dignity for the enslaved, giving them a place where members could be themselves, reinforce their humanity and share hopes for a better life. However, enslaved persons had to be careful in their gatherings, even for church purposes, since those enslaving them controlled so much of their lives and held the power of life and death over them. To protect the safety of participants, African American church members created a veil

of secrecy that involved the use of code words, symbols, signals and music to maintain the sanctity of services and the messages shared.

The first known African American Church in Gwinnett County was organized in the 1830s on the Carroll Plantation in what is now the Lilburn area. A meeting house for this church was built in 1834. This church, which we know in the present as Salem Missionary Baptist Church, is a thriving institution today. The congregation is proud of its history and celebrates its legacy through the museum that is located in the church’s complex.

After Emancipation, the African American church became the center of the community not only for worship, but also for schools, social events, political gatherings and benevolence. It was the organizing point for fraternal orders and social advancement organizations. Some Gwinnett examples include the Loving Aid Society, the Home Mission Lodge and the United Ebony Society of Gwinnett County, Inc.

Post Emancipation, education was a major focus within the African American community, and churches were very much involved in the drive to open education to everyone. Vice President Bailey provided an excellent timeline and summary for the development of public/church schools that served African American children in Gwinnett.

Looking beyond Gwinnett’s boundaries, we also explored timelines for early African American churches across Georgia. It creates a sense of pride to see that Salem Missionary Baptist Church in Lilburn was one of these very early churches. Moving back to Gwinnett County, we took a deeper look at the full list of historic African American churches across Gwinnett communities, as well as a few of the early leaders in some of these churches. Tracking the history of Salem Missionary Baptist Church in detail out-

lined the many hurdles and challenges that its members have overcome time and time again to become the thriving church it is today.

After wrapping up his presentation, Vice President Bailey was generous with his time and

Recap of November General Membership Meeting

Gwinnett Historical Society held its November general membership meeting on Monday, November 18, with a very good turnout. As usual, members and guests had a chance to socialize while enjoying snacks and beverages that our members brought to share.

During the business meeting, the membership handled a very important action item---the election of officers for the 2025 – 2026 term. Diane McCormic, Chair of the Nominating Committee, presented the recommended slate of officers, as previously approved by the Executive Council. The proposed slate was also distributed to all members with the notice of the November 18 meeting. Members in attendance at the meeting were given an opportunity to make nominations from the floor, but none were submitted, and the recommended slate was elected by unanimous vote.

The following individuals were elected to serve for 2025 – 2026:

President – Jason West
Vice President – Beverly Paff
Recording Secretary – Diane McCormic
Treasurer – Richard Lux
Corresponding Secretary – Sandy Lee

In addition, as provided by the Society's bylaws, the following individuals were appointed by action of the Executive Council to serve during 2025 – 2026:

Assistant Treasurer – Betty Warbington
Trustees – Kathryn Baskin, Brandon Hembree
Charlotte Nash

knowledge as he answered questions and provided additional information in response to queries from the audience. ✨

After the business meeting, Vice President Gregory Bailey introduced our speaker, Michael N. Henderson, Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy retired, who describes himself as author, lecturer and family history researcher. Mr. Henderson took us on quite a journey as he described his trek through family history and the many twists and turns he experienced as he followed the paper trail all the way back to French and Spanish colonial Louisiana.

Based on the results of his extensive research into his own family history, he was inducted into the Georgia Society of Sons of the American Revolution in 2010, becoming the first African American member of that organization. He is an active member of the Button Gwinnett Chapter, GSSAR, serving as President in 2012.

His book, "GOT PROOF! My Genealogical Journey Through the Use of Documentation," not only provides his personal story of discovering his varied and rich family history, it also takes readers on a trip through the complex social structure of French and Spanish Louisiana. Using his story, Mr. Henderson shares insight regarding the role that forbidden relationships had in the evolution of the unique Louisiana Creole culture.

We very much appreciate Mr. Henderson and his wife joining us at our November meeting and sharing his inspiring story that illustrates the critical role of persistence in successful genealogical research. We are lucky that the couple chose to settle in Gwinnett County. ✨

Special Holiday Offer

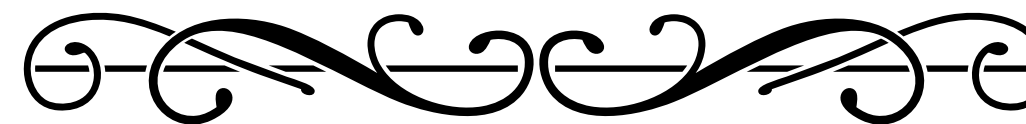
Need a holiday gift for a family member or a friend who is interested in Gwinnett history and the families who made it? Or maybe you need a good resource for your own research about Gwinnett County and its families. If so, we have a deal just for you!

We are offering special pricing through the end of the year on one of our signature books, "Gwinnett County, Georgia: Families, 1818-2005." This book is a massive hard-back volume with almost 1,000 pages of the histories of 461 Gwinnett families, including in some cases a few photos. The individuals who prepared and submitted the family histories are noted in the book as well; these were typically members of the family whose history was submitted or they were connected to the family in some way.



The book has a full index by name of 39,439 individuals mentioned in the book and page(s) where the person's name is listed; this index covers almost 200 pages by itself. This makes it easy to determine if the person you are seeking is included anywhere in the book. It also allows you to quickly see other individuals with the same surname.

Normally, this book sells for \$40.00 but right now and through the end of 2024, we are offering a half-price special so you can purchase it for \$20.00. To order the book, see the GHS website at <https://www.gwinnetths.org/publications> for instructions or call the GHS office at 770-822-5174. The cost of mailing is extra, so if you are local in Gwinnett, you may want to come by the Historical Society Office in person to pick up a copy and save the mailing cost. ✨



Committees

Chairs

African American History: Bernice Bailey

Archives: Frances H. Johnson

Cemeteries: Bobbie Wilson Tkacik

First Families: Peggie Johnson

Communications: Donna Peeples

Genealogy: Peggie Johnson

Historian: Hugh McMillian

IT/Website: TBA

Library: Richard Lux

Membership: Chris Locke

Newsletter: TBA

Preservation: Diane McCormic

Publications: TBA

Winn Property: Betty Warbington

Reports from Chairs

Archives

In addition to the digitizing project that has been an ongoing project in 2024, the Archives area has also processed a number of new donations. Some of the interesting accessions are listed below:

2024-001 Tapp Funeral Home Records – Contents of two file cabinets and four record storage boxes.

2024-002 Quilt, Bicentennial 1976 77" by 102" in good condition; donated by Lucy McDaniel Baldwin.

2024-003 Gwinnett Water Department Setup/ Corley, Minor Collection.

2024-004 Huff Collection; records combined.

2024-005 Mall of Georgia 1999 article included in Magazine/Simon Properties.

2024-006 Norcross High School 1952, 53, 54 on CD, Charles H. Brand 1861-1933 information,

Mark Waits Estate Settlement, re: Ferry on Chattahoochee.

2024-007 Winn deed/Jackson County 1811 Deed Book, Elisha Winn – Matthew James.

2024-008 Flynt, Larry case GDN newspaper coverage, Feb.28, 1978.

2024-009 Mason-Pruitt political cartoon, framed (misplaced).

2024-010 Checkbook 1911-1914 Brand Banking Company, owner unknown.

2024-011 Norcross Post Office correspondence 1871-1947, re: leases.

2024-012 Jackson Academy photo, from ca. 1909-1910, Gwinnett Federal Times, Sept. 1978.

2024-013 Photo found in basement of courthouse; torn, with part missing; transferred to photos collection.

2024-014 Books previously held in fireproof safe; transferred to storage box; list available.

2024-015 Island Ford Baptist Church Historic Documents 1832-1917, with inventory; John Bagby genealogy papers. Digitized documents found at <https://dig.usg.edu/collection/ifbc-usdar>.

2024-016 Suwanee First Methodist 1880-2015 with inventory.

2024-017 Mower, vintage 1934 push lawnmower, cotton/wool cards (good condition); used by Clardy family while living in Alabama; stored at Winn House and barn.

2024-018 Maney Collection with miscellaneous article ca. 1883-1986; includes Gwinnett Homemakers Council photos and articles; Cotton Bowl pennants (Fuller-Ward).

Cemeteries

Tales from the Tombstones

If you travel toward Loganville from Snellville on Hwy. 78, you will find the Jacobs Family Cemetery about three miles northwest of the City of Loganville on what was once Jacobs family land. It is located at the top of a small hill in front of a shopping center on the left side of the highway. Elisha Jacobs, who was born around 1766 and was the ancestor of all of the Jacobs family members who settled in the area, followed his son Thomas to the Loganville vicinity around 1841.



Headstone of John T. Jacobs in the Jacobs Family Cemetery. (Source of photo: Bobbie Tkacik.)

This Jacobs cemetery is the final resting place of both W.G. Jacobs (1820-1893), a brother of Thomas Jacobs, and John T. Jacobs (1846-1864) who was the son of Thomas and Mary Jacobs.

There are a few stones in the cemetery that are not legible and also possibly some unmarked graves. The website Find a Grave shows 13 graves in the cemetery including a Jacobs daughter named Lucinda and her small child; Lucinda was married to a man with the surname Baggett.

Sadly, early in the beginning of the 21st century, development activities resulted in the conversion of farmland on Hwy. 78 to commercial usage. There were queries and requests to move the Jacobs Family Cemetery to the back of the property or elsewhere.

Thank goodness, reason prevailed and the cemetery was saved by leaving it buffered by lots of granite. As noted earlier, the cemetery sits on a slight hill, with the commercially developed area at the level of the highway. It's really a beautiful place and certainly not a detriment to the businesses there as you can see from the photo shared here.



Entrance to Jacobs Family Cemetery. (Source of photo: Bobbie Tkacik.)

It has been a busy fall as individuals who have been working to achieve First Families designation faced a deadline of October 1 for submission of all necessary documentation in order to qualify this year. We are pleased to announce that we have a large number who have met the requirements and will be officially recognized at the December GHS meeting. Many have qualified at the Gold level (direct ancestor in Gwinnett by 1820), with the remainder meeting the requirements for the Silver level (direct ancestor in Gwinnett by 1850).

While we added a Bronze level this year, based on having a direct ancestor in Gwinnett by 1880, we did not have anyone submit for this level in 2024. However, we intend to actively promote the Bronze level and its requirements in 2025, with the intent of creating interest among individuals whose families settled in Gwinnett during the thirty years from 1851 to 1880. If you or someone you know falls within this category, feel free to reach out to us at the GHS Office for more detailed information on the First Families Program and the process for qualifying.

Membership

The transition of duties from former Membership Chair, Priscilla Failmezger, to new Membership Chair, Chris Locke, has been completed. However, Priscilla will continue to serve as a member of the Membership Committee. New Chair has begun the process of assessing current practices and identifying potential improvements, with an eye to the future.

A recent analysis of membership records revealed some interesting information, including types of memberships for which dues were paid from July through November and the composition of our current members as of the end of November.

Statistics for Payment of Membership Dues 7/1/24 to 11/1/2024

- Family Memberships – 5
- Individual Memberships – 21
- Lifetime Memberships – 2
- Student Memberships – 3

Total Memberships for which Dues Paid during Period – 31

Statistics for Current Members

Active members with Up-to-date Dues – 331

- Individual – 180
- Lifetime – 69
- Family – 53
- Student – 14
- Institution – 4
- Complimentary – 11

Inactive members – Over 1,000

(Note: Inactive members include former members from many years who have not paid current dues but to our knowledge are not deceased.)

Poole Mountain Update

Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) conducted two previous digs along the ruins of an old mill (9GW722) referred to as the “Paul Site” on March 18, 2023 and October 29, 2023. (See *Gwinnett Heritage* Summer 2023 and Winter 2023 issues for reports on these digs.) GARS had planned to return to the Paul’s property the following month of November 2023, but the dig unfortunately had to be postponed. The Paul’s have since sold their home, but luckily not before GARS was able to do a return visit on September 22, 2024.



GARS members conducted a unit excavation of the subterranean wall at the mill site. (Source of photo: Lindsay Paul.)

The Poole Mountain area has numerous rock mounds that may have some connection to Native American culture. No development permits have yet been granted. Gwinnett County received the initial archaeological report in June 2024 and is currently awaiting a review from a second archaeological firm.

Mink Livsey Road Development Update

The development on the old McCurdy property that was nestled between No Business and Do Little Creeks is being delayed until a permit under Section 404, Clean Water Act, is issued by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The property was known for its Mason Mill ruins, Weaver Family Cemetery and several archaeological rock piles that may have had Native American origin. It is possible that a Section 106, National Historic Preservation Act consultation, may also be in the works. (See *Gwinnett Heritage*, Fall 2024 for more information on this proposed development.)

Queries

George High (Centerville) called: I have a home on 4108 Anderson-Livsey Lane near the “Promised Land”. The home was built in 1894. I have traced its history back to 1919 when it was owned by E. P. Mason. The Masons may have got it from the Maguire’s [owners of the Promised Land plantation]. I bought the property from David Mason. David Mason owned the Mason Garden Center and used the house as part of the operation after SR 124 was moved. The Garden Center is no longer in operation but I still use the well and sell water to people who come by. We are open 2-6 pm M-F. Pat Mason (David’s widow) knew the history. My questions are these: Is this home significant enough to restore or should I just tear it down? Are there grants available?

Diane McCormic, Preservation Committee Chair, replied: The best resource that I can direct you to is the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) website:

<https://www.dca.ga.gov/georgia-historic-preservation-division/national-register-research-survey/national-register-0> If your goal is to place your home on the National Register for Historic Place (NRHP), the first step in the process will be determining whether your property is even eligible. To assist you in determining eligibility based on historic significance and integrity, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) encourages you to send preliminary information to its office. A sample preliminary eligibility application can be viewed on the Georgia DCA website. The SHPO National Register staff will review the preliminary information and give you guidance on the next step in the process.

As far as financial assistance, the Georgia DCA has listed various Tax Incentives and Grants on its website:

<https://www.dca.ga.gov/georgia-historic-preservation-division/tax-incentives-grants#:~:text=Georgia%20Heritage%20Grant%20Program%20%2D%20Offers,National%20Register%20Deligible%20historic%20properties.>

Certainly, the home has local historical significance from its connection to two prominent Gwinnett families: The Maguire's and the Mason's. Here at the GHS office, I was able to discern that the property was indeed part of the original Promised Land plantation. Plantation owner, Thomas Maguire, deeded 120 acres to his son, James H. C., in 1873. James then deeded it to his brother-in-law, Americus M. Minor and his sister, Sarah, in 1887. The Minor's then deeded the land to Early J. Mason in 1890. The land, although decreasing in acreage, remained in the Mason family until your purchase in 2013.



1894 home located at 4108 Anderson-Livsey Road. (Source of photo: Diane McCormic.)

Winn Property

We worked in September to prepare the Winn House and property for the Elisha Winn Fair so that it was in good shape for the festivities and all was set for participants and vendors. Beverly Paff and a few other GHS members focused attention on the garden in advance of the Winn Fair too. Then, of course, cleanup afterwards had to be done.

We hosted a group of volunteers and county staff on November 16 for a work day focusing on a couple of areas of the grounds. More information about this work day is provided in a separate article. We are very appreciative of the efforts of this group and the results of their time at the property.

Finally, we have been adjusting the cameras at the Winn property to ensure that they are functioning properly and are set up to give the most useful views. Additionally, we have winterized the water pipes at the house in preparation for colder weather.

Sympathy

Charles William Ashworth

January 9, 1939 – August 24, 2024

Charles William Ashworth, age 85, passed away Saturday, August 24, 2024 at home surrounded by his loving family.



Charles was born January 9, 1939 to Leroy and Mae Jo Ashworth of Dacula, GA and was the oldest of three sons. He learned early the importance of hard work from the time he spent with his father working on their family farm as well as delivering newspapers by horseback during his youth. As a teenager he would hitchhike to the Button Gwinnett Hotel in Lawrenceville where he worked at the grill and later lived so he could attend Central Gwinnett High School. It was in high school that he met the love of his life and future wife, Martha Ezzard. They were high school sweethearts and married for 60 years.

Charles and Martha went on to have two daughters, Karen and Julie, and providing for his family became Charles' lifelong passion. His strong work ethic that started as a child carried throughout his life. From 1956 to 1959 he served in the Air National Guard at Dobbins AFB in Marietta, GA, and while getting his BBA degree in marketing from Georgia State University, he worked at John Jarrells men's clothing store and C&S Bank. After graduating college, he was employed by Standard Oil and later owned and operated a consignee location for Texaco. He was also part owner of Northside Office Supply and Southern Office Sales. Charles even dabbled for a time in politics when he served as the Gwinnett County Commission Chairman from 1981 to 1984. But, the bulk of his work and for the last 40 years, he owned Charles Ashworth Real Estate where he worked in commercial real estate and development. It was here that he made a mark for himself; staying true to his strong work ethic and treating others fairly was at the crux of everything he stood for.

Charles was a generous man with a quiet faith. He was a big supporter of the underdog consistently helping out those in need. Though he came from humble means, he always felt he had everything he needed and was at his happiest when he brought joy to others. He was well known for his love of a good joke, a harmless prank, and delighted when anyone would make him laugh.

Outside of work, Charles cherished spending time with his family and friends. From the early neighborhood gatherings and dinner parties with their lifelong friends in Forest Hills, to golf trips with his buddies in Sapphire Valley, NC, and numerous beach trips to St. Simons and Sea Island, GA where he loved to go crabbing and fishing, his life was filled with joyful memories. As his wife Martha got into the travel business, they enjoyed traveling to Europe and particularly parts of Italy which became some of Charles' most beloved and fondest memories.

In his late years, he found great joy spending time with his family and grandchildren in his home in Highlands, NC which he built and treasured deeply. He enjoyed reading mysteries, listening to country music, and working with his hands. There was rarely anything he could not build or fix.

As the Parkinson's began to set in, Charles learned the graceful task of leaning on others for help. Not something that he was used to doing, but he did so with dignity and humor and was forever grateful to all of his caregivers for their love and support.

Charles is survived by his loving wife Martha Ezzard Ashworth, his two daughters Karen Lambert of Cumming, GA and Julie Adams (Chris) of Charlotte, NC, and his grandchildren Jack and Sam Lambert and Emma and Claire Adams, his brothers Gerald Ashworth of Stone Mountain, GA and Lonnie Ashworth of Winder, GA as well as many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his parents.

Funeral services will be held at Lawrenceville First United Methodist Church on Friday, August 30, 2024 at 11am. In lieu of flowers, please make donations to Lawrenceville First United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 2127, Lawrenceville, GA 30046 or The Parkinson's Foundation, 5757 Waterford District Drive, Suite 310, Miami, FL 33126.

Arrangements will be handled by Wages & Sons Funeral Home, 1031 Lawrenceville Hwy, Lawrenceville, GA 30046.

Published by Gwinnett Daily Post from Aug. 28 to Aug. 29, 2024.

(Source of obituary and photo: Wages & Sons Funeral Home.)



Bill Fortune

Jan 15, 1936 - Aug 22, 2024

Bill Fortune, age 88, of Marietta, GA formerly of Lawrenceville, GA and former Mayor of Lawrenceville, passed away on Thursday, August 22, 2024.

A Graveside Service honoring the life of Bill will be held on Saturday, August 24, 2024, at 1:00PM at Shadowlawn Cemetery with Dr. Lamar Holley officiating. In lieu of flowers the family requests memorial donations be made to First Baptist Church of Lawrenceville.

Condolences may be sent or viewed at www.wagesfuneralhome.com. Tom M. Wages Funeral Service, 120 Scenic Hwy., Lawrenceville, GA 30046 (770-963-2411) – Lawrenceville Chapel has been entrusted with the arrangements.

(Source of obituary and photo: Tom M. Wages Funeral Service.)

Calendar of Events

Unless announced otherwise, all General Membership Meetings and the Annual Meeting held at Rhodes Jordan Park Community Center
100 East Crogan St., Lawrenceville

January

January 27, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.
General Membership Meeting

March

March 17, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.
General Membership Meeting

May

May 19, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.
General Membership Meeting

July

July 21, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.
General Membership Meeting

September

September 15, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.
General Membership Meeting

October

October 4 & 5, 2025
46th Elisha Winn Fair
908 Dacula Rd., Dacula

October 18, 2025
17th Annual Frontier Faire
Fort Daniel Archaeological Site
2505 Braselton Hwy./GA 124,
Buford

November

November 17, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.
General Membership Meeting

December

December 15, 2025 • 6:30 p.m.
Annual Meeting
& Christmas Party

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