



ETOWAH VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*Promoting and enhancing the awareness and preservation of
the heritage and traditions of Bartow County*

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Phone: 770-606-8862

The Legend of Chain Gang Hill

*A childhood memory reignites
interest in Bartow's forgotten
Chain Gang Camp*

By Joe F. Head

Often family stories and legends fascinate children about the "old days." They are spellbound with stories about ghosts, myths, and fairy tales. One such family story kindled keen interest in my daughter, Meredith, about a handmade quilt and her dad when he was a 5-year-old eyewitness to the day Chain Gang Hill burned. The story of the fire that destroyed the old work camp also inspired her to ask other more responsible questions about her grandparents and why Chain Gang Hill existed.

Oral history and a few blurred clippings from community newspapers give scant evidence of a rapidly fading chapter of Bartow County. Georgia's prison farms operated at least twice in Bartow from the 1930s until the mid 1940s. Only brief local records remain as a legacy to a forgotten time. However, southern folklore and the entertainment industry have immortalized the chain gang with movies such as "Cool Hand Luke," starring Paul Newman, and songs like "Chain Gang," by Sam Cooke.

The origin of chain gangs can be traced to various forms of slavery in almost every culture. The slave industry thrived in North America for two centuries before it was extinguished by the Civil War. Men and women were captured from native lands, chained, and shipped for sale to wealthy individuals in the new world. They were put in irons and sold off slave ships in chains to a life of bondage and hard labor. Plantation masters used chains to confine and transport slaves.

The first use of the chain gang as a penal system in the United States was in Philadelphia following the Revolutionary War. One end of a chain was attached to a cannon ball or wagon wheel and the other was shackled to a prisoner's ankle. The prisoner was staked out on the town



Nicknamed "Little Alcatraz" and made infamous in a Life Magazine exposé, the Bartow Prison Camp operated for less than two years before being shut down. Photo from Life Magazine.

square for public viewing or stationed to a task of hard labor.

Following the Civil War, the southern prison system was left in shambles. As order was restored, criminals were leased to work in the fields, mines, railroads, and public projects. Former Governor Joseph Brown leased over 300

*(See **Chain Gang**, continued on page 4)*

EVHS member and genealogist

Lisa Ellis

will present a program on

"The Colonial States of America"

**Thursday, February 8th
7 p.m. in the EVHS office.**

Bring a guest and join us.

**Presented by the
Family Tree Climbers**



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The EVHS office and research facilities are located in the 1903 courthouse at 115 West Cherokee Avenue in downtown Cartersville.

Visit EVHS online at www.evhsonline.org

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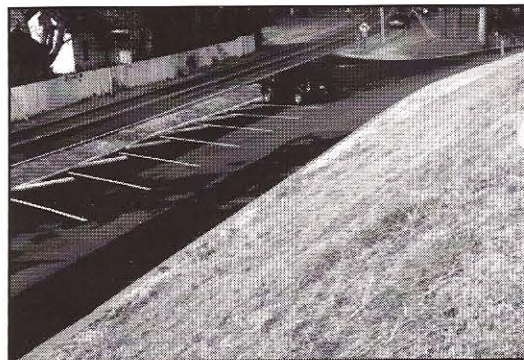
A New Look at the Pass

Report By Guy Parmenter

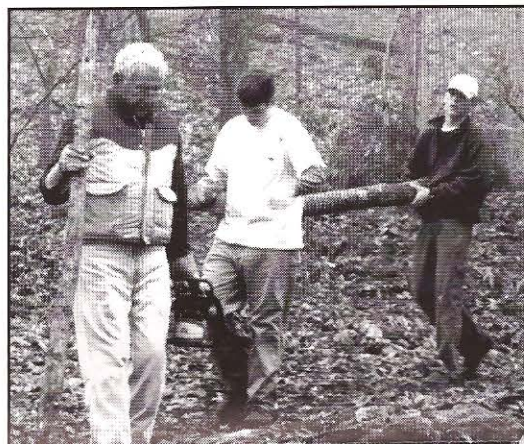
If you have not visited the Allatoona Battlefield recently, go now! The site has never looked better. Our new parking facilities and the manicured landscape present an unforgettable impression as you arrive at one of the most historic and pristine sites in Georgia.

Among those helping to beautify and improve the Pass are local youth. Two Eagle Scout projects have just recently been completed. Clay Howell, son of EVHS members Harvey and Sandy Howell, widened the lower portion of the trail to the Star Fort. In addition, approximately twenty cross tie steps were placed to eliminate the slippery slopes. Jeffrey Foster, son of Ken and Jennifer Foster, widened and leveled the upper portion of the Star Fort trail using a dump truck load of mulch. Andrew Parmenter, son of EVHS President Guy and Linda Parmenter, is also working at the Pass helping to construct a trail near the Eastern Redoubt. EVHS congratulates each of these boys from Troop 1040 who will soon join the ranks of the Eagle Scouts.

EVHS is also grateful to David Grabensteder, Corps of Engineers Resource Manager at Lake Allatoona, and to Clarence Brown, Bartow County Commissioner. Their joint cooperation has made many new improvements at the pass a reality.



The new parking facilities at Allatoona Pass Battlefield are a welcome invitation for motorists visiting the historic battlefield.



Allatoona Committee co-chairman Ed Hill helps move trees with Andrew Parmenter and Silas Sutton.



Above, Silas Sutton and Andrew Parmenter load the family SUV with numerous trees and limbs that have fallen around the battlefield. The hardwoods make excellent trail liners and are quite abundant after heavy storms. Those shown are destined for a new trail currently under construction a few feet north of the trenches surrounding the Eastern Redoubt. This new trail is an approved Eagle Scout project for Andrew, son of EVHS President Guy and Linda Parmenter.

Dr. and Mrs. Charles Lee Ellis, Sr.

By Lisa N. Ellis, Granddaughter

Charles Lee Ellis was born to Robert Howard Anderson Ellis in 1888 near Adairsville, Georgia. His older brothers and sisters had been born in Murray County, but R. H. A. Ellis decided to raise peaches, and Bartow County was suited for that. R. H. A. had been fairly successful and gave all his many children land, except Charles, who wanted to be a doctor.

Charles Ellis attended Cunningham School in Adairsville, then went on to Reinhart. After Reinhart he was accepted into the Atlanta Medical College (later Emory). His wife, Leila Lou Annis Bryan, was born in Gilmer County to James and Linda Bryan, who moved to Adairsville before the turn of the century. Leila barely remembered moving in a covered wagon. Charles and Leila married September 1, 1912, with him having three more years of school. He graduated in June 1915, and he moved from Adairsville to Kingston to practice. They lived there in an apartment, having Charles Lee Ellis, Jr. in 1916. Then Dr. Ellis was drafted into the Army during WWI, and was stationed at Camp Johnson near Jacksonville, Florida. He never went overseas. They returned to Kingston after the war, and had Evelyn in 1920, and Bryan in 1923.

They bought a drugstore which Leila ran while Charles "doctored" people. He first made house calls in a horse and buggy, graduating to a Model T Ford. He always owned a Ford and it was always black. He also had a Delco battery before Kingston had electricity, and used it for an old radio. The drugstore and the house had a telephone, one of the first in Kingston. If anyone had to use it and the store was closed they had to get Charles or Leila.

While Leila was Baptist and belonged to the local church, Charles was a lifelong member of the Christian Church in Adairsville. Not that he got to go much; on the weekend people came into town to "get doctored." On Sunday everyone went to get ice cream at the drugstore between Sunday School and Church. It was not a big store, being the old bank that failed and was turned into the drugstore. But it had a fountain with little tables and chairs.



Then there were the housecalls. One night a teenager came to get him and said, "Pa's sick." Dr. Ellis told him to go on and he would be there directly. When he went to where he thought it was, it was the wrong "Pa."

Dr. Ellis was the only one who could milk the cow, so she got used to being milked whenever she could instead of on a regular basis.

Dr. Ellis also had a temper. There was a man using "rude language" outside the store and would not stop. Since ladies were present he picked up a pipe and hit him. Then he had to "doctor" him. He was on retainer to the L&N railroad to doctor their employees. He had a pass on the railroad and Charles Jr. used it to get to school in Rome. He would get paid in things other than money, such as food, quilts, animals, and labor. He

moved outside of town in 1940 to a rock house that he had built using some of this labor. The most expensive thing he bought for the house was the hardware, at \$1500. The timber on the land was cut down and exchanged for finished wood. The rocks, of course, came from the land also. The house is still being lived in by two of his granddaughters, Lynn and Lisa Ellis.

After WWII, he started slowing down, trying to get women to go to the hospital to have their babies. He died in 1961 in the Veterans' Home. Leila Ellis still opened the store until she had a stroke in 1968, dying in 1970. She was known for sitting in the front window of the store and doing handiwork. She was a woman ahead of her time, a business woman who took care of the books and kept the store. They were an asset to their community, with he being on the Board of Health and a Mayor of Kingston before he moved out of the city limits. She was a member of the Kingston Woman's History Club. ☺

Lisa Ellis is a member of the Etowah Valley Historical Society and Kingston Women's History Club, a Daughters of the American Revolution librarian, a United Daughters of the Confederacy historian, and president-elect of the Cassville Heritage Association.

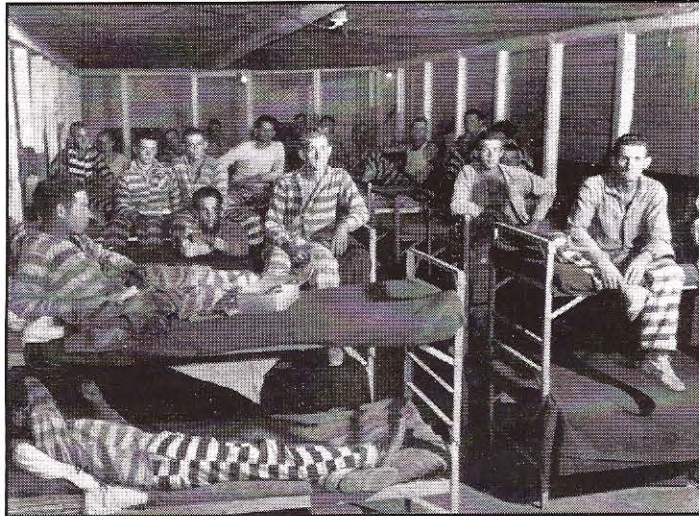
prisoners for 8 cents each a day. The convict lease system was so successful that the need for penitentiaries was almost non-existent.

Thus the dilemma of operating tax supported state prisons was solved by transforming state prisons into leased chain gang labor for private profit. Flexible chains permitted mobility for hard labor. Lodging, meals, confinement, and security rested with the lessee. This proved to be a powerful force to deal with post Civil War issues and rising labor costs. African Americans were most often sentenced to the chain gangs; whites were not included until about 1910.

The convict lease system was not universally applauded, however. A growing number of reformers, including Bartow County's William and Rebecca Latimer Felton, campaigned against convict leasing, and in 1908 the state outlawed the practice. But what replaced convict leasing was not much better; with the introduction of "prison farms," the state itself, rather than private businesses, benefited from convict labor.

Georgia's chain gang has a dark history. It included a reputation of harsh treatment, investigations, ruthless guards, bureaucratic corruption, and attention in the national media. A 1930s book and movie, *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang*, by Robert Burns, brought national attention to the Georgia penal system and eventually helped to bring reform by Governor Ellis Arnall.

The competition to gain legislative approval and funding for a work camp was highly prized by local politicians. It meant that road improvements would be made for the community. Once a project was finished in one county, another district wooed the legislature and State Highway Department to move the work camp to its location for a



Prisoners in the camp worked up to fourteen hours before retiring to small, cramped barracks. Photo from Life Magazine.

missioner, announced that the purpose of the camp was to complete work on several roads, including the Rockmart-Tailorsville road, the Dallas road, and the Rome and Canton roads.

The final site selected was property belonging to Mr. Herman W. Leake, a prominent land owner and mule dealer of the time. According to records in the county tax office, this site was within land lots 593 and 560 near Pettit's Creek and in view of Ladd's Lime Stone Company. Today the site can be marked to the right (west) of the ACE Hardware store on the south side of the road and Shaw Industry plant number 13 parking lot on the north side of Highway 113, Rockmart Road.

(It is important to understand that the Rockmart Road, Highway 113 as we know it today, was not constructed over the hill at this time. Originally, if headed west, the road swung southwest behind the hill and crossed the old Pettit's Creek iron bridge, rejoining 113 in front of Ladd's Farm Supply. The road was not built over the hill until after WWII.)

Construction began on the prison camp in late January and was planned for completion by the end of February. An initial U-shaped compound was constructed on the Ladd's side of the Rockmart Highway. It was followed by a similar, single, row of small cell type



Warden Arthur W. Clay was the focus of an investigation that looked into the mistreatment of prisoners at the Bartow Prison Camp in 1943. Photo from Life Magazine.

rooms across the road about 50 yards apart. These were meager dwellings of drafty wood frame construction, encompassed by a gated fence and barb wire, and overlooked by a guard tower which stood to the right of the main barracks. They were built with a temporary objective and equipped with bunk beds, wood burning potbelly stoves, and minimal electricity for lighting.

According to Ray Thacker, Grand Oaks, local folks referred to these as the convict barracks. The barracks to the south (ACE Hardware) may have been used to isolate disorderly convicts, while the main barracks on the Ladd side housed the well behaved. About 100 convicts and 20 guards were transferred from the Dallas camp. Some convicts were "trusties" and had the run of the camp because of good behavior.

Work was long and hard, frequently ranging to 14 hours per day. Crews were transported to work sites and endured a day of breaking rocks, shoveling dirt, and clearing brush. Convicts wore striped uniforms and ate a diet of boiled beans, cornbread, onions, cold fish, and water. They were hobbled together by chains, often chanted while they worked, and were required to bow in the presence of the camp boss or captain. They removed hats and could not look a guard or camp captain in the eye when conversing.

Before the camp was constructed, it had already gained the nickname of "Little Alcatraz." By 1943, it was under state investigation for brutally treating inmates. Conditions and treatment became so abusive that prisoners would self-inflict wounds to avoid work details. Convicts testified of being whipped by guards with a rubber hose. The camp was briefly closed down for inquiries after several breakouts and other abuses were disclosed.

A legislative committee recommended the removal of Warden Arthur Clay on charges of brutality. Mr. O.O. Stringer was named the temporary warden. Clay was later reinstated by Governor Arnall after the Prison Board found insufficient evidence to justify removal. In November 1943, *Life Magazine* did a story on the convict camps in Georgia and showcased Bartow's notorious Chain Gang Hill.

People in Cartersville and surrounding communities were fearful of the convicts and the impending threat of escapes. The general public had little compassion for convict suffering and asked few questions about how they were treated. The camp was in view of the Rockmart Highway and locals would drive around the compound with an un-

easiness. Citizens held a poor opinion of the convicts and would often not speak of the camp.

Mrs. Evelyn Rampley Bartlett, granddaughter of O. C. Rampley, Deputy Warden, can remember, as a 12 year old, visiting her grandfather at the camp. She was instructed not to speak to the inmates. She remembers that the warden had a small one-room office at the base of the guard tower with a bed and wood-burning stove. She remembers the bloodhounds were penned inside the outer fence to the rear of the main barracks in a small shelter. On occasion, she climbed up to the watchtower and looked down on the camp. She recalls seeing the guards carrying shotguns and rifles.

As the investigations continued, Marvin Griffin, then on the review board, would often inspect the camp and stay overnight with the Rampleys. Prison reform eventually abolished the Georgia chain gang system due to cruelty exposed by the press. In October of 1943, the warden was instructed to transfer the inmates to Tattnall County and close the camp by January 1, 1944. For some time the State Highway Department used the vacant site to park heavy equipment.

Times were difficult and housing was not plentiful in Bartow. People rented rooms, stayed with relatives, and lived wherever they could. Bartow's Chain Gang Hill was decommissioned by 1944. As time passed, the barracks were occupied by tenants who likely paid rent



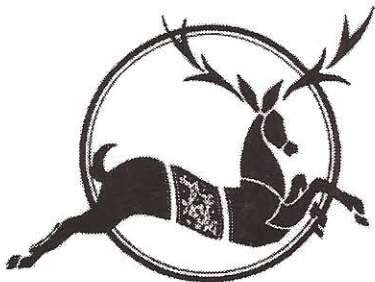
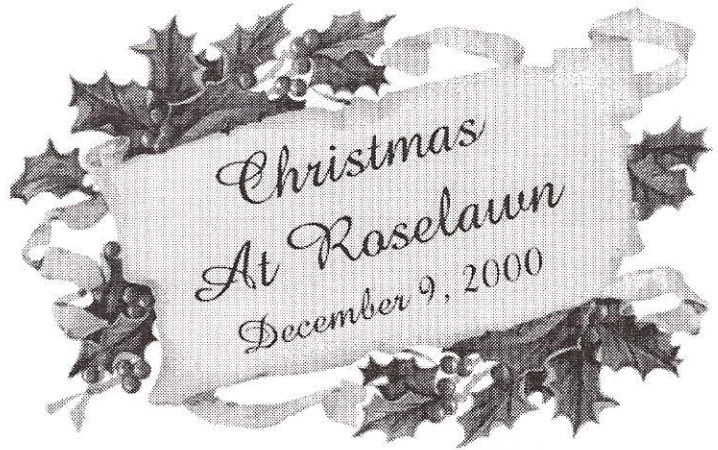
In this 1953 photograph, the author poses with his mother, Leecy Head, in front of the renovated camp barracks. The cabin in the immediate background is the same one pictured in the photograph on page 1. Photo by Beverly H. Moore.

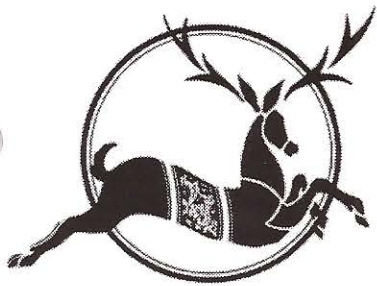
to the Leake family. Tenants made personal improvements and lived in the makeshift apartments. Mrs. Sara Munn and the First Presbyterian Church of Cartersville established an outreach Sunday School Ministry at the barracks for children who lived there. Little attention was given to the site from the time it was abandoned until the day it was destroyed. Long time Bartow residents recall passing it on the Rockmart highway and have some knowledge of its history, but not much detail.

As a young boy of five, I can remember visiting with my grandparents, who lived in the apartments at Chain Gang Hill. My grandparents, Jeff and Augustus Bell Head, lived there for several years. They were a cute couple, humble, full of humor, but poor, with few material possessions. Granddad was a mechanic for the State Highway Department and grandmother was a traditional wife who never learned to drive and was heavily involved with the Methodist church.

When facing the main barracks on the Ladd's Moun-

(Continued on page 10)





EVHS Celebrates an Old-Fashioned Christmas

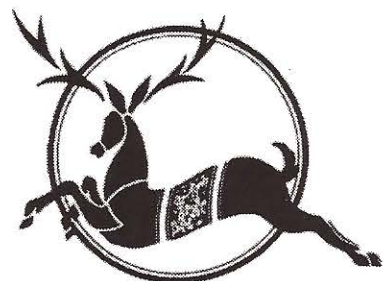
It is perhaps one of the most anticipated events of the year – the Etowah Valley Historical Society's annual holiday gala, Christmas at Roselawn. The former home of evangelist Sam Jones is always at its loveliest during the Christmas season, and has long been the traditional setting for the society's holiday celebration, held this year on December 9th. Decked out in its finest seasonal attire, the grand and stately turn-of-the-century Victorian welcomed guests in the spirit of Christmas Past with two Christmas trees and period decorations provided by Edward M. Home. Seasonal music performed on the piano by Sonya Rice set a playful mood and lifted the already lofty spirits of happy party-goers as they arrived. The buffet dinner, spanning the length of Roselawn's front hall, was provided by Charlotte Monroe and Unique Caterers, and was truly a feast, with some new dishes and some old familiar favorites.

The evening's entertainment was provided by The Porch Pickers, a mountain music group featuring Paul Pitts on mandolin and Merle King on guitar. Accompanying the duo was special guest David Powell, who lent his rich voice and beautiful mandolin to the wonderful mix of folk music and Christmas carols. From the front porch to the parlor, the simple songs with traditional arrangements complemented the old-fashioned Christmas experience, as did the delightful display of a "limberjack," a wooden puppet used as a percussion instrument. More information about The Porch Pickers can be obtained by visiting their website at <http://kachina.kennesaw.edu/~mking/music/pp/>

With one of our most successful years behind us, and another great year to look forward to, EVHS wishes its members a wonderful and prosperous New Year! ☺



Happy New Year 2001
from EVHS!



Cemetery Preservation

Preliminary Investigation of 19th Century Leak Family Cemetery Complete



The gravesite of Armistead Leak, vandalized since it was surveyed in February 2000, illustrates the importance of the need to protect and preserve the numerous family cemeteries dotting Bartow County's landscape and increasingly exposed to growing development.

EVHS Cemetery Preservation Committee Chairperson Carl Etheridge has been knee-deep in vines and vinca this past year doing a preliminary investigation of Leak Cemetery, located off West Avenue. The cemetery has been abandoned for some time, and is located on land now owned by C. W. "Sonny" Jackson. Mr. Jackson has plans to develop the property, but before he can do that, the cemetery must first be formally examined and the graves removed. Carl's investigation was initiated when Leak family descendant Robert Milam of Rochester, Minnesota, contacted him in February 2000 and requested the study, which includes assessment of the abandoned Leak cemetery and several of the Leak plots at Oak Hill Cemetery, where the former graves will be moved.

The Leaks were one of Cartersville's prominent pioneer families. John and Sally came first, in the early 1840s, from Laurens, South Carolina. They prospered, "acquiring much of the property upon which the city of Cartersville developed," according to Lucy Cunyus's *History of Bartow County, Formerly Cass*. John Leak gave the land for the graveyard at Ebenezer Methodist Church, which became the city cemetery, Oak Hill. Among their children were Dr. William Wesley Leak and Sallie Smith, wife of Samuel H. Smith, founder and editor of *The Cartersville Express* from 1858 until his death in 1873. Interestingly, it was Samuel Smith who vigorously led the campaign to adopt and develop Oak Hill into Cartersville's city cemetery through editorials published in the *Express*.

Later in the 1840s, two of John Leak's brothers and a sister followed from South Carolina. One brother, Armistead, arrived with his wife Mary Hannah and their seven children. One of the seven was John Simmons Leak,

who married Elizabeth, the daughter of Thomas and Louisa Brandon (one of Stilesboro's founding families). According to Cunyus, "there was only one child" born to John Simmons and Elizabeth Brandon Leak, but there was at least one other, an unnamed infant, buried at the Leak Family cemetery on what was then called the Stilesboro-Euharle Road. "Budded on earth to bloom in heaven," says the tombstone of the baby that linked the prominent Stilesboro and Cartersville families.

The Leak Cemetery contains the graves of Armistead (1790-1860) and Mary Hannah Leak (1800-1882), their unnamed grandchild (no dates given), and between two and four additional people in unmarked graves. (Armistead's name is misspelled "Armstard" on Mary's tombstone.) With the preliminary investigation complete, Carl's important work paves the way for professional archaeologists to certify the burials so they can be relocated, probably to one of the family plots in Oak Hill. Carl has assayed four of the Leak plots on the west side of Oak Hill (near Ebenezer) and found ample space for the reinterments. Unfortunately, the infant Leak will not be reinterred with his parents, John and Elizabeth, who are buried in their own family plot on the east side of Oak Hill, across from the Feltons.

The report, prepared by Carl and entitled "Preliminary Investigation of the Leak Cemetery and Plots 30, 31, 38, & 39 Section 6 of Oak Hill Cemetery," was published in November and is available for viewing in the EVHS office.

The EVHS Cemetery Preservation Committee strives to insure the preservation of abandoned cemeteries and to update Bartow County Land Use Maps to insure that all known cemeteries and burials are listed. To this end, the committee coordinates with the Bartow County Building Permits and Inspections Office. ☺



Headstone of the infant child of John & Elizabeth Leak.

Committee Chairs
Share your committee news with members.

Contact the Newsletter editors at
770-606-8494
or email
parkerhome@mindspring.com

Native American Genealogy

Membership Meeting January 11, 2001

EVHS was pleased to welcome popular speaker Earl Albertson and his guests to its first membership meeting of the year. The special program, presented by the Family Tree Climbers, attracted about fifty members to the meeting room of the Cartersville branch of the Bartow County Library despite a cold rain.

A Native American historian, Mr. Albertson has served as mayor pro-tem of Douglasville, Georgia, where he lives, and has been a member of the city council there for eleven years. A self-professed "member of everything," including Daughters of the American Revolution (honorary), Mr. Albertson recommends joining organizations as a way of maintaining contacts and gaining access to historical materials.

Mr. Albertson's expertise comes after thirteen years of researching his Native American ancestry, which includes ties to the Cherokee, Fox, and Sauk tribes. During that span of time he has found fourteen sets of grandparents, collected nineteen massive scrapbooks of documentation, and amassed 9,300 photographs from eighty-seven families—and that's just on his side of the family. Mr. Albertson is also researching his wife's heritage.

While tracing his ancestry back to 1657, Mr. Albertson discovered ancestors (Huskey and Ogle) who had come from South Carolina to settle in Gatlinburg, Tennessee in 1804. "Gatlinburg was just Indian trails at that time, and my seventh great grandparents built the first house there," he said. As a result of his discovery, Mr. Albertson was honored with a certificate recognizing him as a member of the First Families of Tennessee.

The highlight of the evening came when Mr. Albertson and his guests, granddaughter Sharon Albertson (10) and friend JoAnna Booth (12), entertained the audience with songs, "Amazing Grace" and "I'll Fly Away," sung in the Cherokee language followed by a soulful rendition of "Dixie" played on the violin by Ms. Booth. ☺



Native American historian Earl Albertson discussed methods for obtaining ancestral information and where to find historical and genealogical records and documents. Accompanying Albertson were his granddaughter Sharon Albertson (left) and JoAnna Booth, who played the violin and wooden spoons while performing songs in Cherokee. Mr. Albertson played the dulcimer.

Preservation Committee Reports Historic Districts Might Be On The Way

During the membership meeting on January 11, the Preservation Committee reported that the proposed preservation ordinance is scheduled to come before the Cartersville City Council for vote in February. The ordinance follows months of work by preservation historian Jeff Drobney and Kennesaw State University interns Lisa Crawford and Sally Loy to establish boundaries for possible historic districts. More than 500 historic sites (homes and buildings) were surveyed and documented on Cartersville's west side and more than 200 in Atco.

A town hall meeting is scheduled for early February, and EVHS members are encouraged to lend their support through attendance. If approved, the preservation ordinance will allow for a commission to establish historic districts and set up design guidelines which will serve to protect the historical integrity of these neighborhoods. Anyone may apply for a seat on the review commission.

For ten years the Preservation Committee has worked diligently to pave the way for the establishment of historic districts. The "Historic Awareness Sign Program" begun in 1992 was one of many early efforts that has since proved successful. EVHS members and the community are encouraged to watch for local news reports of the proposed historic ordinance as it nears fruition. ☺

(Chain Gang, continued from page 5)

tain side, they lived to the left in the front quarters. I can recall warm memories of sitting in grandma Augustus's lap, captured by her stories, and eating wonderful meals at her table. On some occasions I would spend the entire day there and can recall that a passing car offered the hope of a friendly visitor to break the boredom. Perhaps one of the most memorable and frequent sensations was the sudden blasting that would rumble from Ladd's Mountain. Another was the sound of trains passing on the Seaboard railway between the barracks and Ladd's Mountain.

My grandparents lived in a unit that consisted of about three finished rooms. Rather than sheet rock, I can remember that the walls and ceiling were covered with corrugated cardboard tacked up using RC bottle caps for reinforcement. The floor was partially covered with linoleum and bare planks also showed through in places with cracks that exposed Georgia red clay below. There were few electrical outlets. Overhead lights were suspended on electrical cords and naked bulbs on a pull chain. My grandparents heated with kerosene and wood stoves. Their apartment had been partitioned to include one of the bathroom units that served the convicts. The concrete bath had two toilets and one community shower that was equipped with four shower heads. Grandmother kept a chicken coop just out her back door and down the bank. I really enjoyed meeting relatives there on Sunday afternoons. My country cousins such as Ray Thacker, Mary Jo, and Harold Brock would gather there for holiday meals or just to visit.

One of my older cousins, James Bouck from Illinois, visited our grandparents every summer from the age of seven until he was sixteen. Jim remembers the camp vividly. According to his account, there were five buildings and one guard tower. If facing the U-shaped compound, two smaller dwellings were to the right. One likely housed equipment. The smallest was the warden's office. Another small house also existed to the west of the U-shaped barracks, down the bank and slightly to the rear near the chicken coop. Jim recalls these structures were uninhabitable or were filled with storage.

It was a warm Labor Day Monday afternoon on September 6, 1954 at about 3:00. I was taking my midday nap on the bed in the front room that also served as a family living space. I was resting on a bed that was covered with a handmade quilt. A picture of some biblical scene was mounted on the wall above the bed. A radio, used to listen to the Grand Ole Opry, was on a large table nearby where granddad kept important papers and his time piece.

An enormous explosion woke me from my sleep. I knew it was not a blast from Ladd's Mountain as it was too loud and too close. I bounced off the bed and was instantly grabbed by my mother. We went outside to see smoke and fire bellowing from the apartment on the opposite side. People were screaming and running from the fire. Debris seemed to be still falling from the air. Flames began to

burst through the broken glass windows and leaped to the rooftop. My mother left me with my grandmother and ran across the road to call the fire department.

There was little anyone could do. In just a few minutes my sister, Beverly, who had been competing in the Miss Aquarama Beauty Pageant at the Allatoona Dam, arrived to pick us up at 3:00. She called my father and grandfather. My grandparents tried to contain the fire with a garden hose, but it was too fierce. We stood at a



Renovation turned prison camp barracks into comfortable homes, as this 1953 photograph of the Head family, gathered around the kitchen table, will attest. Photo by Beverly H. Moore.

safe distance in the dirt parking area next to the road. Mother held my hand. I saw people crying and shouting. Emotions ran high, confusion was everywhere. Things popped and crackled, we could feel the intense heat, walls collapsed, cars were moved to safety, people ran in and out of the rooms trying to save items. Tenants were throwing things out the windows and doors. The blaze traveled quickly around the U-shaped roof and consumed the barracks in about forty five minutes.

My grandparents had the most time of all, as their apartment was the last to burn. But even with those extra minutes they were able to save just a few pieces of furniture, clothes, quilts and crockery. Precious items such as the family Bible, photos and family savings were all lost that day.

According to an account of the disaster in the *Tribune News* printed on September 9, 1954, the fire department arrived shortly after the call was received. Fire Chief John



Author Joe Head with daughter Meredith, whose curiosity prompted the author to take up his pen; and the heirloom star quilt that started it all.

Cagle said it was too far gone by the time they got there. The paper stated that the fire was caused by an oil-burning stove that had exploded. The article heading read, "Fire destroys old work camp: many homeless." The barracks across the road fell into complete ruins and were razed in the 1960s.

Some three or four years later, grandmother said that I could select (for my wedding present) one of her

quilts. I could only imagine she had salvaged these from the fire. I chose the one made of a star pattern that reminded me of the blaze. She was then in her 70s and said she would not be at my wedding, but wanted me to have something personal from her and granddad. I received my first wedding present before I was 10 years old. That quilt has kept me warm, covered me when I was sick, carried me through my college days and now rests on a special rack in our bedroom quietly reminding me of my grandparents and the fire at Chain Gang Hill. Someday it will be a present to my daughter to help keep her family warm and perhaps inspire bedtime stories about the old days.

A half-century later, the legend of Chain Gang Hill still survives among deeply rooted Bartow families. However, the day it burned has left me with a tender legacy to share with family and friends that is very different from the dark side of Georgia's Chain Gang history. ☹



The author dedicates this article to the memory of Meredith's great grandparents, Jeff and Augustus Mae Head. Photo by Charles Head.

TE 21 Grant Awarded Allatoona Battlefield the Winner

The Allatoona Battlefield project will receive assistance from the Georgia Department of Transportation in the form of a \$40,000 Transportation Enhancement Grant (TE, 21). These funds will be well received according to Allatoona Committee co-chairman, Guy Parmenter. "Our society has dedicated over 6 years to the preservation of this site and with these funds, we can continue to further interpret more of the battlefield."

EVHS is extremely thankful to Bartow County and Commissioner Clarence Brown, the Georgia Civil War Commission and the 40,000 member Civil War Preservation Trust which is generously providing the 20% cash match. More information will be forthcoming in the near future. ☹

2001 Tour of Homes Planning Underway

Report By Tricia Simmons

The Preservation Committee of EVHS is busy formulating plans for the "Come Harvest Our History" Tour of Historic Homes, which will be held the first weekend in November. With the Preservation Ordinance pending in Cartersville City Council, the committee has chosen to promote and emphasize one of Cartersville's historically designated neighborhoods, Olde Town!

Olde Town includes that area of the city composed of Etowah Drive east to South Avenue from Leake Street south to West Avenue and a little beyond. Many homes in this area were built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The area has experienced significant restoration in the last several years. The neighborhood has a homeowners' association that is actively promoting the continuation of residential areas in downtown Cartersville in order to maintain the city's high quality of life.

The Preservation Committee, functioning as the steering committee for this event, has acquired the services of Olde Town's neighborhood association's president Linda Denham as the co-chairman of this event. Even though the tour will not occur until November, the committee has already received commitments from four local businesses to be sponsors for the tour.

Mark your calendars for the first weekend in November and volunteer or say, "YES!" when you are called upon to assist in this educational and public awareness event. This is the only fundraising activity of the Etowah Valley Historical Society. The success of this tour is instrumental in meeting our goal to preserve Cartersville as a wonderful place to live. ☹

Mark Your Calendar

February 8, Thursday
Family Tree Climbers
7:00 p.m. EVHS Office

February 15, Thursday
Membership Meeting
7:00 p.m. Bartow County Library

March 8, Thursday
Family Tree Climbers
7:00 p.m. EVHS Office

March 15, Thursday
Civil War Round Table
7:00 p.m. Bartow County Library

April 19, Thursday
Membership Meeting
7:00 p.m. Bartow County Library



Don McKee will be the featured speaker at the EVHS Membership Meeting Thursday, February 15. McKee is the author of The Iron Man of Georgia: Mark Anthony Cooper.

EVHS Welcomes New Members

Harvey & Sandy Howell, Cartersville
Stan Moseley, Marietta
Darla McAfee, Cartersville
Arnold & Ann Tillman, Cartersville
Susan Trammell & Scott Bell, Cartersville

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Invite Your Neighbors, Friends & Family to Join EVHS

Help celebrate and preserve the history, heritage, and traditions of Bartow County by spreading the word.

Call 770-606-8862
or email evhs@evhsonline.org
and we'll get an invitation in the mail.

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Donald Johnson and Catherine Stubbs Harper.

Etowah Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 1886
Cartersville, Georgia 30120
www.evhsonline.org

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