



# ETOWAH VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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

Volume 59, April 2006

P.O. Box 1886, Cartersville, GA 30120

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## INVENTORY ADVISORY GROUP MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNTY

For the past eighteen months, the Etowah Valley Historical Society, in cooperation with other community groups and historical organizations in Bartow County, completed a survey of the approximately 1290 historic resources identified in the 1991 historic resources survey. Based on the 2005 updated survey findings, the Advisory Board submitted the following recommendations to Bartow County to incorporate in the public input phase of the Comprehensive Planning Process. Our goal is to support and encourage a comprehensive planning framework that combines the benefits of preservation with our other community planning objectives.

1. The Inventory of Historic Sites Planning Advisory Board and Community Volunteers identified 33 community historic sites at risk in Bartow County. EVHS commends the County for its past commitment to rehabilitating historic buildings. We hope this list provides the foundation for establishing additional preservation priorities.
2. There are more than 1,000 recorded Archaeological sites within the boundaries of Bartow County (including municipalities). The location of many of the prehistoric and historic Native American sites is confidential information known only to professional archaeologists, since they are the individuals currently authorized to access the Georgia State Archaeological Site Files located at the University of Georgia. We recommend Bartow County continue dialogue with Dr. David Crass, State Archaeologist, to explore how this information can be provided to selected Bartow County representatives via the Natural, Archaeological, and Historic GIS. Local access to this confidential information would help Bartow County protect sites from unintended destruction due to development initiatives.

*...continued on page 2*

## McELREATH'S TO HOST MAY DINNER MEETING

The next dinner meeting of the Etowah Valley Historical Society will be hosted by Jane and James McElreath at their home at 371 Old Alabama Road, Cartersville, Georgia. The meeting is scheduled for the evening of Saturday, May 6.

EVHS members and guest will have the opportunity to visit the 1930 era buildings which have been constructed on the property, including a barber shop, a diner, a general store and a tobacco shop.



*The Tall Pine diner is one of four buildings in the 1930s village being constructed by Jane and James McElreath on their property on Old Alabama Road.*



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## INVENTORY ADVISORY GROUP *(continued)*

In the Etowah Valley Historic District, Bartow County has an MOU with Native American Nations that require an archaeological survey prior to developing a site. This MOU does not have any jurisdiction with the municipalities. We recommend that the municipalities be encouraged to honor the MOU and include an archeological survey on the check list a developer completes prior to approval of a project within the jurisdiction.

3. Bartow County has an extensive historic marker system, the majority of sites are associated with the Civil War. We recommend Bartow County review with EVHS and other historical organizations this list of historic markers and incorporate markers for selected sites identified on the 2005 survey including sites that are no longer in existence.
4. Cemeteries are considered to be a cultural resource under Georgia law and thereby eligible for designation as archaeological sites. There are at least 135 documented and recorded cemeteries within Bartow County (including municipalities). These cemeteries have been included as a layer in the Bartow County GIS. We recommend Bartow County continue to work with EVHS and others to document additional cemeteries, and as they are located, record them on the GIS.
5. This Inventory Project provides basic information on Bartow County's historic, architectural and cultural resources as well as those sites considered to be at risk. We have not defined what action Bartow County should consider to protect and promote its historic resources. Defining a Bartow County Historic Preservation "Road Map" was beyond the scope of the Inventory Project. We recommend Bartow County establish a county-wide Historic Committee with representatives from the individual municipalities and historic organizations to guide the development of a Bartow County Preservation Plan. The plan could have the following three components:
  - a. Educational and promotion strategies to increase public awareness of properties and structures in Bartow County that are significant from an architectural, historical or archaeological perspective.
  - b. Legal strategies including National Register of Historic Places workshops, protecting resources a historical marker program, coordinating zoning and historic preservation, etc.
  - c. Funding strategies that include tax exemption programs, private revolving funds and historic building tax exemptions. It is important to educate the public about exemptions currently available as well as additional exemptions worth exploring through the legislative process.

This inclusive process would provide a unique opportunity for those organizations and individuals interested in historic preservation to cooperate with government officials in developing a unified vision for a county-wide historic preservation "road map". The planning process would lay the groundwork necessary today to save historic resources tomorrow. A county-wide Preservation Plan can promote the preservation and appreciation of

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## INVENTORY ADVISORY GROUP *(continued)*

Bartow County's architectural and cultural historic resources through education, advocacy and committed action, thereby creating economic value while simultaneously developing a stronger sense of community.

In the coming months, copies of the Final Inventory Report will be given to each city in Bartow County. The Final Report can also be reviewed at the EVHS office in the Gold Domed Courthouse as well as the Cartersville Library.



## ADDITIONAL MONUMENTS SOUGHT FOR PASS

The two monuments now located at the Allatoona Pass battlefield may be joined by others if the current efforts now underway are successful.

Eleven states had regiments take part on Oct. 4, 1864. Nearly 1/3 of those who participated were listed as wounded, missing or killed at the conclusion of the action. Gary Wehner, who played a major role in having the Texas and Missouri monuments erected at their locations, is now leading the effort to have more states take part.

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# THE LEGEND OF CHAIN GANG HILL

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Cartersville's "Little Alcatraz" was only in operation for a relatively short time (about two years) and was probably not even the worst chain gang camp in Bartow County (one in White was said to have had even worse conditions), but it produced very bad publicity nationwide for Cartersville.

Joe Head, a Cartersville native, presented the legend of Chain Gang Hill at the January meeting of EVHS to a large group. Head stated that the history of chain gangs as a penal system in the United States dates back to Philadelphia immediately following the Revolutionary War and that Georgia had been found as a penal colony.

After the Civil War, criminals were leased by the state to work as laborers on private and public projects. In 1908, this system evolved Georgia into prison farms. Bartow County was granted approval in 1942 to have a camp moved from Dallas to Cartersville. The site of the camp was south of Cartersville near Ladd's Mountain. At that time, Route 113 ran around the hill to the southwest. The camp was between the present locations of the ACE Hardware store and the parking lot for the Shaw plant.

By 1943, the Georgia system was under investigation by the governor, Ellis Arnell. The November 1943 issue of Life magazine contained an article on the evils of the chain gang system, which featured the local site and contained nearly a dozen pictures.

About 1945, Bartow County's Chain Gang Hill was fully decommissioned and the barracks became makeshift apartments. On Labor Day, September 6, 1954, a young Joe Head was taking a nap in one of those apartments, which was being rented by his grandparents, when a stove in the apartment on the opposite side exploded and the resulting fire completely destroyed the old work camp. The remaining buildings were destroyed in the 1960's and Chain Gang Hill became history.



*EVHS president, Ed Hill and Joe Head, speaker at the January meeting, exchange gifts. Head was presented with a copy of the recently reprinted book of poetry by John Ridge and Head presented to EVHS a copy of his pamphlet, *The Legend of Chain Gang Hill*.*

# UNIQUE & HISTORIC "GRAVEL" HOUSE

MAY 17, 1936

BY LULIE PITTS

The town of Adairsville was originally located 2 miles north of its present site. The octagon house site was the location of the Battle of Adairsville, *May 17, 1864*.

EIGHTY YEARS AGO, a unique residence, the first of its kind in north Georgia, was erected by Mr. Robert C. Saxon (1821-1908), on his estate two miles north of Adairsville on the present Dixie Highway, in Gordon County.

Mr. Saxon, a native of Laurens, S.C., moved to Gordon County in 1850, the year the county was created from Floyd and Cass (now Bartow). At first he occupied one of the Indian log cabins abandoned by the Cherokees a dozen years before when they were deported from this region; later, he erected a small frame dwelling. Slaves tilled the almost virgin soil which yielded abundant harvest, and the young planter succeeded from the beginning. Continued prosperity and a growing family prompted Mr. Saxon to lay plans for more commodious living quarters. A concrete house, or "gravel" house as it was then called, begun in 1856 and completed the next year, was the outcome.

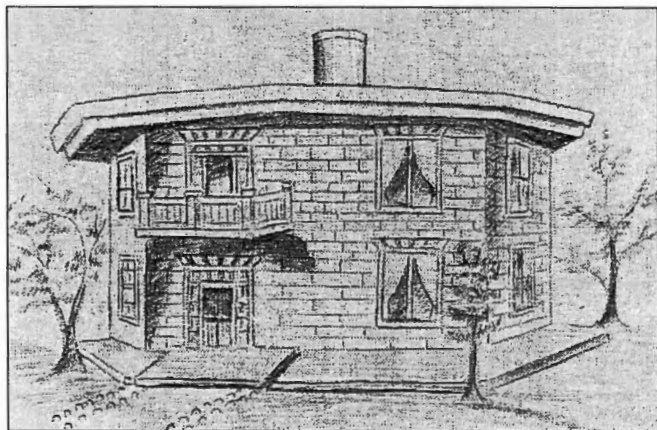
The prevalent impression of southern mansions in the ante-bellum period is featured by brick or wooden structures adorned with white, fluted columns, and flanked by tall chimneys clinging to the outer walls. Moreover, one vision the spacious interiors, separated into wide, cool hallways and airy rooms of large dimensions and lofty ceilings of the time. Magnolia-scented breezes and the songs of mocking birds help to complete the alluring image.

But there is another side to the picture. In summer the rollerless, unscreened windows, potential purveyors of unlimited supplies of air and sunshine, had to be kept closely shuttered and darkened in order to exclude the hordes of flies and other insect pests by day and the swarms of moths glow of many candles. During the winter season it

was a man-sized job to tend the home fires. There was no central heating unit, hence, because of the usually large families and the inevitable quota of guest that southern hospitality invited, glowing logs gleamed from every fireplace, the popping embers creating a fire peculiarly serious in view of the absence of fire-fighting apparatus. Perhaps the desire to combat a contingency of this kind inspired Mr. Saxon to experiment in the construction of his new home with then novel, unflammable building material.

"My father drew the architectural plans himself," said Miss Manie Saxon, speaking of the "gravel" house, as it was sometimes called, "skilled laborers were employed, and, after many months, the job representing so much thought and labor, was completed. It was a beautiful structure of octagonal design, two stories, each showing the same floor plan - that of four large rooms supplied with double windows and four small, triangular rooms arranged to preserve the octagonal contour. These latter served as front and rear entrances, butler's pantries, and stairway landings. The concrete walls were a foot or more in thickness. The chimney, which was located in the center of the house, contained eight fireplaces, one for each living room, and" Miss Saxon chuckled, "they never smoked!"

For two years this dream house of Mr. Saxon's sheltered a large and happy family. The gray of the pseudo-stone walls blending with the greens of



*Drawing of the "Gravel" House in Gordon County  
from the Atlanta Journal May 17, 1936*

grass and foliage, the gagged paths, the background or virgin forest, appealed strongly to their sense of beauty; passerby paused to wonder and admire, guest were welcomed, friends and neighbors enjoyed the cordial hospitality, and life flowed smoothly.

Unfortunately, there were no schools in the sparsely settled neighborhood, and Mr. Saxon, who was an ardent advocate of education - later in life serving Bartow County as school commissioner for twelve years - left his Gordon County home and plantation in charge of a caretaker and moved his family to nearby Cassville, in Bartow County, so that his children might attend the town's fine academies, male and female, both of which, by the way, were burned by Yankee soldiers in the sixties.

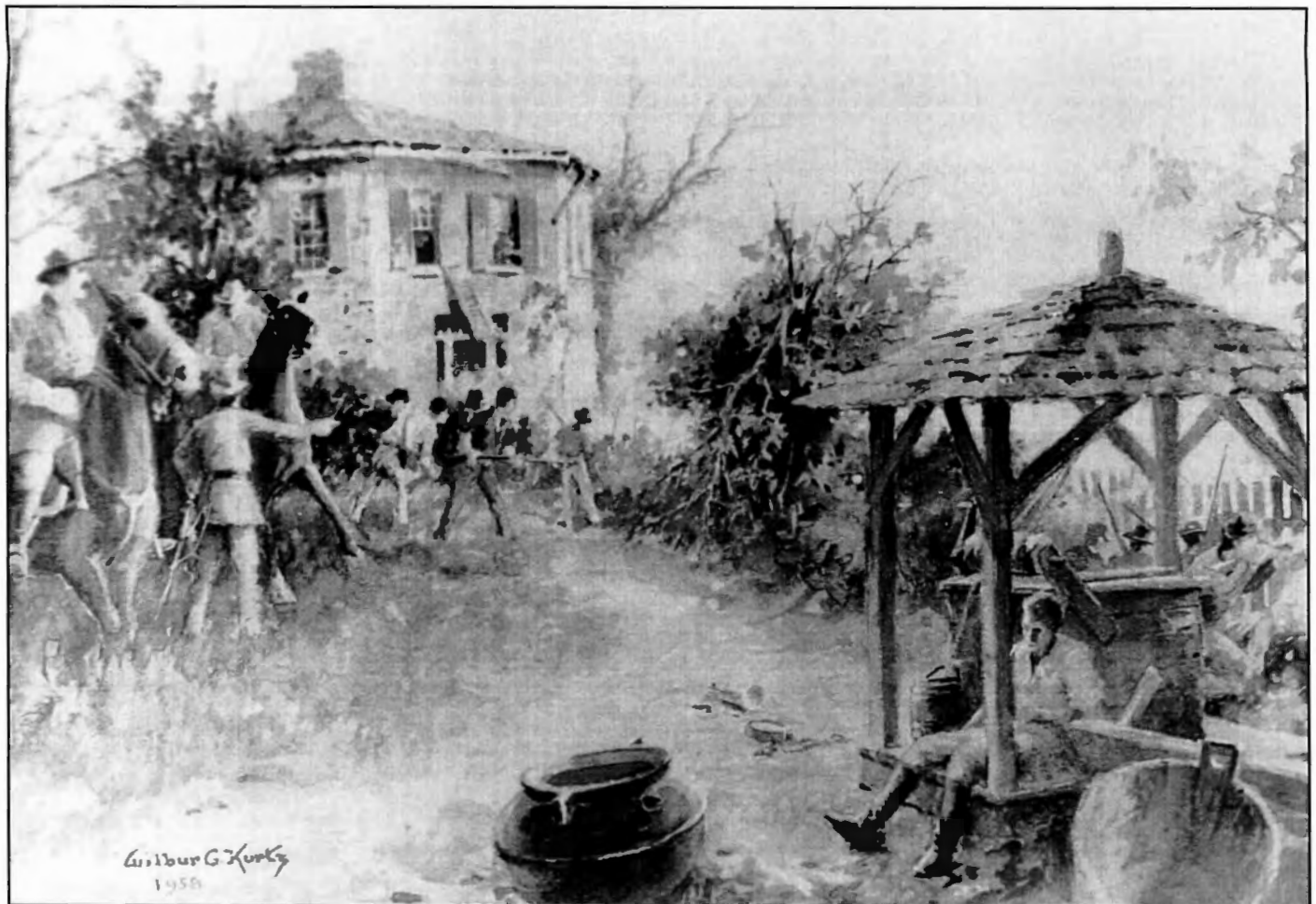
When the War Between the States was declared in 1861, Mr. Saxon lost no time in joining the Confederacy. He served in various official capacities - as adjutant, quartermaster of General Lucius Gartrell's brigade, captain of a company he had assembled for the Georgia Reserves, lieutenant colonel, etc., and at all times, with the spirit of true

comradeship, he was courteous and helpful to the soldiers under his command. The northern invaders overran north Georgia, and Mrs. Saxon and children fled in terror to south Georgia, taking with them the slaves and necessary equipment.

The octagon house, situated on the direct line of Sherman's march to the sea, was used as a fort. On May 17, 1864, it was the scene of a sharp skirmish between northern and southern forces, causing much loss of life. The concrete walls, designed for permanency only a few years before, were crushed to pieces by the enemy's artillery, and incendiarism took toll of all inflammable material. Nothing was left but ruins. If recent plans of the United Daughters for the Confederacy are carried out successfully, a marker will be erected soon on this historic site.

Mr. Saxon was twice married; first, to Miss Elizabeth Whitaker. Nine children - seven daughters and two sons - grew to maturity, but only four are now living.

*Printed from Atlanta Journal May 17, 1936*



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# *Confederate Veteran*

APRIL, 1902 VOL. X NO. 4

## BATTLE NEAR ADAIRSVILLE

J. R. Watkins writes of how the First Tennessee held the old Octagon House near Adairsville, May 17, 1864:

We had gotten to Adairsville, the army had gone into camp, and were drawing rations. All at once we saw our cavalry thundering along the road at full retreat and firing back towards their rear. An order came for us to go forward and occupy an old octagon house in our front.

The Federals were advancing - were even then nearing the octagon house. The race commenced as to which would reach the house first. We succeeded and a part of our command was sent to occupy and hold an old barn across the road. But soon we made the dust fly while running for dear life to the house. We barely got in when we found the Federals had nearly surrounded it, in the yard and garden on the opposite side. The balls were flying through the glass in the windows and flattening themselves against the opposite wall, when some fellow hallowed out "Boys, this is nothing but a lath and plaster house," and we should have had a regular stampede had it not been for Col. H. R. Field, who seized a musket and threatened to shoot the first man that would try to get out of the house. The exterior of the house was stone.

We soon found out, however, that the wall were solid brick, so ran to the windows, upstairs and down stairs, and then opened a musketry fire upon our assailants. The shot and shell would scream through the windows, while the plastering would fall down upon the floor, and the solid shot from their cannon would penetrate the walls with a terrible unearthly jar as if ten thousand earthquakes had come together and threatened to grind the old house into powder. At length a shell loaded with shrapnel burst and exploded in the room right in our very midst. When the smoke slightly cleared we saw eight men in that little band weltering in their life blood, and many others wounded. In other rooms similar scenes were being enacted. Thirty-four corpses in that old building were weltering in their own blood. In the meantime the Federals had set fire to the stable and barn which lit up the darkness of night, and we could see dark shadows of blue coats in the bright glare of the burning barn. It being night, the bright blazes and flashes from our

own and the Federal guns, looked like a hot blast furnace at midnight.

When we first got into the house the walls were white and decorated with beautiful pictures, and lace curtains and sofas, settee and piano, and other things pertaining to a luxurious home. When we came out, shattered wrecks of every kind of furniture were scattered all over the floors, and the walls looked like an old and dilapidated wall begrimed with smoke and soot, the curtains all torn down and trodden under foot and bloody.

After fighting for some time we found that nearly all of our cartridges had been shot away; Col. Field called for volunteers to go back to the main line for cartridges. There was but one way open through the fiery circle to the Confederate supply wagon, and to pass thither and return seemed impossible. When Col. Field called for volunteers, there was a moment pause, while the cheeks of even those brave men who had fought a hundred battles, paled at the thought of the desperate venture - but Charley Ewin and Lieut. Joe Carney stepped from the ranks and offered to go.

We got out of the back window and started, when Col. Field said: "Hold a minute, boys, I'll divide the fire with you." We had to run the gauntlet of that circle of fire while the balls plowed up the ground all around us, ripping it up with tremendous and unearthly thud. We got to the ammunition train, and each of us got as many cartridges as we could carry and started back; two of us got back, but one fell back just as he threw the cartridges in the window, saying, "here, boys," and then fell back a livid corpse. Meantime Col. Field stood with folded arms and looked on, exposed to the fire of ten thousand muskets as he divided the fire with us.

The Federals in the meantime, after having made charge after charge, finally reached the house. Then was enacted a scene of blood and carnage and death almost without a parallel in the history of the war. Having surrounded the house, they demanded our surrender, which Col. Field refused; then they attempted to take it by storm, but we had fought and held our position so long that we had lost all consciousness of fear, and every man determined to die before he would consent to surrender. Our blood was up and we held the house.

# NOMINEES SOUGHT

Each year, the Etowah Valley Historical Society presents their most prestigious award, The Lifetime Achievement Award, to a deserving person who, for at least twenty years, has represented the society's mission of "promoting and enhancing awareness of the heritage and traditions of Bartow County".

The nominee may be either female or male and need not be a member of the Etowah Valley Historical Society.

Previous winners of the award have been:

Mary Ellen Taff  
Martha Mullinax  
Lizette Entwisle  
Dr. Susie Wheeler

Nominations should be made in writing, and submitted to:

The Board of Directors  
Etowah Valley Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1886  
Cartersville, Georgia 30120

Deadline for nominations will be noon  
May 9, 2006

The winner will be announced at the annual meeting of the Society in October.



*Sal Amico discusses events of World War II with Hillard Wilson after Amico's talk to EVHS on Thursday, March 23rd.*



*J.B. Tate speaks at Cooper's Furnace to attendees at the Hills of Iron event sponsored by Red Top and EVHS on March 18th.*



*A Friends of Red Top volunteer speaks to a group of Hills of Iron spectators at the Stamp Creek Iron Mine.*

## FREEMAN FAMILY REUNION

The descendants of James and Venni Freeman will meet at the Lock and Dam Park located on the Coosa River outside of Rome.

Web site: [www.vicfreeman.com/reunion](http://www.vicfreeman.com/reunion)

## EVHS LIBRARY

Twenty seven old Bartow County official records have been added to the EVHS files. The records expand the extensive collection available to the public for genealogical research.

## CONFEDERATE VETERANS

The Civil War ended in the Spring of 1865. Sixty eight and a half years later, the 1934 Bartow County Tax rolls listed 4 ex-Confederate soldiers, H. M. England, Elisha F. Herndon, R. B. Puckett and C.C. Tomlinson, as still residing in Bartow County. The county was also home to 23 widows of ex-Confederate veterans.

The numbers were decreasing. Only two years earlier, the tax rolls of 1932 listed 11 veterans and 29 widows.



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