

HISTORY NOTES

Jones County History & Heritage, Inc.

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About the Newsletter

This begins a twice-yearly series of newsletters featuring the historic communities of Jones County. It seems fitting to look first at Round Oak, home of Carolyn White Williams (Miss Carrie), whose *History of Jones County, Georgia* so well portrays early life in these settlements.

The Round Oak area is particularly rich in history, and it is a key site on two new state historic driving tours. The first is the recently approved Route 11 Historic Ocmulgee-Piedmont Scenic Byway (Gray to Round Oak to Juliette). Early in 2004, the Jones County/Gray Chamber of Commerce will begin forming a task force of local citizens to develop a corridor management plan for the route. If you would like to participate, contact the Chamber at 986-1123.

A second driving tour is the Georgia Civil War Heritage Trail, March to The Sea, which includes Battle of Sunshine Church sites in Round Oak. Other tour sites are Old Clinton and the Battle of Griswoldville battlefield. The Chamber expects to have brochures available around the end of the year.

This newsletter also features a moving tribute to the late Willie Pearl Turk Morgan Kinslow of Haddock, who will be much missed by her family and friends. The author of the tribute, Sylvia Ryce Cornell, will be a regular contributor of articles on the county's African-American history in future newsletters.

Hope you'll enjoy the newsletter and the driving tour on p. 4. You'll surely be delighted by Round Oak's newest attraction, "Miss Lillie Gordon's Store," which residents have transformed into a charming and informative visitor and history center.

A second newsletter featuring the Round Oak community will be published in the spring.

A History of Round Oak

Round Oak is located in north central Jones County on Route 11 (Monticello Hwy), about 10 miles north of Gray and 5 miles south of the Jasper County line. It sits at the highest point in the county, in a land of rolling hills and steep valleys, open pastures and forests. Nearby are the beautiful, protected lands of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, including the 35,000-acre Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge.

According to resident Ronnie Crutchfield, Round Oak was a pioneer settlement of the newly formed Jones County in 1807. It was first called Sylvania, and later became known as Round Oak, for a huge old oak tree that Indians gathered round for their pow-wows. During the Battle of Sunshine Church, a Confederate cannon was positioned under this historic oak.

The settlement was on the Hillsboro-to-Clinton road, a former Creek Indian trail. Today Route 11 follows the same general path through Round Oak. During the 1800s, the countryside was dotted with other settlements, many small farms, and a few plantations. Sugar Hill, Fiddler's Rest, Cornucopia, Caney Creek, and Tranquilla are some of these long-vanished early settlements.

Around 1885, the town became a whistle stop along the newly completed Macon-Monticello railroad line. The railroad constructed a water tank under the oak, and leaks from the tank had killed the oak by 1895. The tank was moved to Hillsboro in 1907.

The railroad and a strong, cotton-based economy brought growth and prosperity to Round Oak through the first two decades of the 20th century. A remembrance of those times is the grand county agricultural fair that was held there in 1900, under the sponsorship of the Grain Growers Club. Prizes were awarded in numerous categories such as canning, needlework, horticulture, and livestock. There was a cow-milking contest and horse-riding competitions. Former Civil War Governor Joe Brown and Senators Clay and Guerry were featured speakers.

The town was thriving in those days, with various stores, a cotton warehouse, and large stables where

Continued on p. 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 Battle of Sunshine Church
- 3 The Jackson Sisters / Newsletter Sources
- 4 Driving Tour
- 5 Tribute to Willie Pearl Kinslow

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

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

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

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mules, wagons, and farm implements were sold. Around 1903, a fire destroyed all but one store, and several stores were rebuilt. The Woodmen of the World Camp 358 was established around 1907, drawing members from all over the county. This still-active fraternal organization provides life insurance and other benefits to its members.

The present Sunshine Church II was built in 1875, and a school was constructed on its grounds in 1880. This school burned in 1910, and was replaced in 1912 with a two-story school for 4 teachers and 125 pupils. In 1923, the school was demolished for safety reasons. Some of the material was used in construction of a new grammar school and auditorium, which was used until 1946. After that time, children attended school in Gray. This school has since been renovated as a home.

The Depression years of the 1930s were lean ones. The boll weevil had destroyed the cotton industry, and the land had become worn-out and eroded from intense cultivation. In the late 30s and early 40s, the Federal government purchased thousands of acres of abandoned farmland from nearby farmers for the national forest and wildlife management system. Many farmers moved away to work in manufacturing towns and cities.

Since that time, peach and lumber industries have come and gone in Round Oak, several beautiful old homes have burned, and the school and businesses have closed. Today Round Oak is a close-knit and caring residential community whose inhabitants are mostly descendants of the early families of the area. A famous resident of recent times is the late R&B singer, Otis Redding. His widow, Zelda, and children still make their home on Otis Redding Road outside of Round Oak.

For more details about Round Oak historical sites and their locations in the Round Oak area, please see the driving tour on p. 4.

Battle of Sunshine Church

On Wednesday, July 27, 1864, with Union forces occupying Atlanta, Union Major General George Stoneman launched the attack on Middle Georgia known as Stoneman's Raid. His intention was to destroy railroad lines and liberate imprisoned Union soldiers at Macon and Andersonville. Advancing down the Monticello-Hillsboro Rd (now Route 11) towards Clinton and Macon, Stoneman's cavalry looted and destroyed as they went. Detachments destroyed rail facilities at McIntyre, Gordon, Toombsboro, and boxcars at Griswoldville.

On Saturday, July 30, Stoneman was repulsed at Macon, and the demoralized troops retreated towards Hillsboro and Atlanta. After skirmishing at Clinton, they began a difficult night march along the Clinton-Hillsboro Road, enduring attacks until after midnight. On Sunday morning, July 31, the exhausted soldiers passed the small log Sunshine Church (south of Round Oak), where they encountered three well-prepared brigades of Confederates commanded by Brigadier General Alfred Iverson, a native of Clinton. A Confederate battery occupied the center of the road, with log and fence rail barricades curving to the sides. Mounted fighting was impossible because of the steep hills, deep ravines, and dense undergrowth, and so the Unions soldiers were forced to advance on foot.

The battle continued, with steady shelling from the Confederates. When a squadron of Rebel soldiers attacked from the rear, most of the Raiders fled, leaving Stoneman defenseless. Later, the defeated Stoneman was taken to the nearby home of Joseph White, where he formally surrendered.

Ironically, Stoneman was imprisoned at Camp Oglethorpe in Macon, the very place he had set out to liberate a few days before. Four months later, the right wing of Sherman's March to the Sea swept through the area, this time burning Sunshine Church as they passed and liberating the captives at Camp Oglethorpe.

The Jackson Sisters

Julia, Bettie, Lucy, Margie, Sally, and Cynthia

The lives of the Jackson sisters span almost a century between 1847 (when the first was born) and 1940 (when the last one died). The six sisters were the daughters of Margie and Lewis Jackson, who farmed 300 acres north of Round Oak/Juliette Road near the Sugar Hill settlement. This land is now part of Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge.

Their father died during the Civil War, leaving his widow and young daughters to face Stoneman's Raiders alone when they galloped into their yard in July 1864. After killing the fowl and loosing the horses, the Raiders departed, sparing them and the house.

Thus begins the tale of the industrious and self-sufficient Jackson girls, who never married, and who farmed with virtually no help for the rest of their long lives. When their mother died in 1871, concerned relatives offered to raise the younger ones. In 1969, Susan Myrick interviewed the five remaining sisters for *The Macon Telegraph*. The elderly Bettie, the second-oldest sister, was quoted as saying,

After she died, there wuz some claim we couldn't stay here, just us five female girls with no man person. They wuz some talk about taking the youngest ones and I told 'em they warn't a going to do it. Ma gave me that baby (pointing to the white-haired 73-year-old Marjie), and I warn't a going to give her up.

The eldest sister, Julia, acted as farm manager, while Bettie was in charge of cooking over the open hearth, gardening, and the chickens. In the growing season, all but Bettie worked in the fields, plowing with a mule, planting, hoeing, and harvesting. Bettie called them to the table by blowing an ancient hunting horn.

The sisters were superb weavers, quilters, knitters, and seamstresses. During the winter, they carded, spun, and wove their own cotton and wool into 30-yard bolts. For dye, they used black walnut, red oak bark, and other

herbs. They continued this tradition long after others had turned to commercial dyes and store-bought clothing.

All the sisters prepared for the hereafter by making burial gowns of black homespun with white cuffs and collar. Sally was the first to use hers. In 1916, she was crushed by a falling tree while cutting firewood. Julia died in 1923 at age 84, and Lucy and Margie followed shortly after. Betty lived a few more years, leaving Cynthia, who died in 1940.

Cynthia left her estate to a neighbor, Rufus Garland, in appreciation for the assistance he had given the sisters in their last years. The sisters are buried in the old family cemetery on what is now Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge land. For more information about the gravesite, see the "Jackson Girls Cemetery" listing on the web at www.friendsofcems.org/Jones. To see a picture of the sisters, visit Round Oak's visitor and history center.

The remarkable sisters are still remembered in the county. As small girls in Hillsboro, Nell King and Berta Morton recall them driving into town in their wagon, sitting upright in straight chairs and wearing outdated long dresses and bonnets. Nell, whose mother was their first cousin, commented that the sisters were hard workers, just like all the Jacksons. The county is blessed today with many industrious Jackson descendants, including Nell.

Newsletter Sources

Thanks to the following residents and friends of Round Oak for so kindly providing information: Bill Bragg, Earl Colvin, Ronnie Crutchfield, Carol (Hadaway) Dumas, Mary Ann Hamrick, Nell (Wynans) King Tiffany Moody, Berta Morton, Mary (Russell) Musselman, Dooley and Pete (McElbeney) Tillman, Charlotte (Crutchfield) Wilson

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Round Oak Driving Tour: Civil War and Village Sites

To get the most from the tour, please read the newsletter before you begin. Tour time: 1½ - 2 hours

1. At railroad tracks in Gray, take Rt 11 North (Monticello Hwy) through Bradley and Wayside.
2. Just past Mile Marker 18, turn right on Otis Redding Road and proceed east about 1 mile to Big O Ranch, family compound of the late R & B singer, Otis Redding. It is marked by a sign and white fencing.
3. Across from Big O Ranch (on left), is the c. 1810 Cabaniss-Hunt house, screened by bushes and trees. *This house, known as "Elmcroft," was the Civil War home of Jesse and Betty Hunt. After the Battle of Sunshine Church, Betty Hunt nursed the wounded Union soldiers, who deemed her "The Angel of Sunshine Church." Following the war, some of the soldiers moved to Jones County, and attempted to gain Federal restitution for the Hunt's losses. One served as a pallbearer at her funeral in 1901.*

Return to Rt 11, and continue north (right turn). Within the next mile, look for "The Stoneman Raid" State Historic Marker on the left. There is room to pull off and read it on your return trip. The Battle of Sunshine Church was fought north of here in the steep hills and ravines to either side of Route 11, as far as Round Oak. *Samuel Gordon owned this land at that time; his descendants still live in the area. The exact location of Sunshine Church (a log chapel also used as a field school) is unknown. It served as a hospital for the wounded Union soldiers, as did the nearby Frank Hascoll house (no longer standing). Many soldiers lie buried in these hills, and various war items have been found here over the years.*

During the battle, a young discharged Rebel soldier named Joe Funderburke unsuccessfully attempted to cross the enemy line disguised in his mother's dress. A descendant, Dooley Tillman, remembers his grandmother telling this story: The Yankees penned up Joe, with the intention of executing him at sunrise. During the night, he escaped and remained hidden up in erosion-exposed tree roots overhanging a ravine, until the end of the battle.

4. As you continue into Round Oak, you will pass Pippin Rd (on left). Confederate earthworks were constructed at this intersection at the time of the battle.
5. At the railroad crossing, pull off to the right, in front of the brick store. Across the highway (on left) is Round Oak's visitor and history center, "Miss Lillie Gordon's store, circa 1925"—there is room to park in front. *The center is a community service project of Master Gardeners Mary Musselman and Ronnie Crutchfield, with permission of storeowners Travis and Pat Jackson. Many other community members and friends have donated time, labor, knowledge, and materials. It is a*

point of departure for a self-tour of the village. Take some time to study the map showing sites of both existing and previous structures, look at the picture display on the porch, and browse through the notebook of historical information (under the pictures, to the right). Please sign the guest register (inside a box attached to the map stand).

Following are selected points of interest:

- Woodmen of the World Lodge 358, a 2-story white building opposite the visitors' center, across the tracks. *Lodge members still hold monthly meetings here. Dances were held upstairs during the 1920.*
 - 2138 Old Hwy 11 (cross tracks, turn right). *This residence was the last school at Round Oak, in use until 1946.*
 - The c. 1880 Sunshine Church II, on a hill southwest of the visitor's center (marked by a State Historic Marker and sign). *Descendants of many of the early settlers are buried here. Concrete stumps mark graves of Woodmen of the World members. Twenty-five years after the Battle of Sunshine Church, Sunshine Church II invited a disabled Union veteran to preach a guest sermon here—he had been hospitalized at the original Sunshine Church. After the service, he found several bullets and minie balls under the church, where he said some of the heaviest fighting had taken place.*
 - 2089 Monticello Hwy (Rt 11), south of Sunshine Church II. Look behind the house for the old depot, now a barn. *Mr. Thomas King purchased the depot at public auction and moved it to this site from the railroad crossing. Dr. and Mrs. Benjamin O'Kelley were early residents of this house. During remodeling, the Kings removed the porches that had surrounded the house.*
6. After touring Round Oak, continue north on Hwy 11 about 2.4 miles to see the White family cemetery.
 - *As you pass Juliette Road, notice the fire watchtower to the left, one of only a few remaining in the state.*
 - *About 100 yards north of Juliette Rd (to left) is about where the Joseph White house was located; it was a hospital for Union soldiers following the battle, and where Gen. Stoneman was taken after defeat.*
 - *A short distance north, on right at railroad crossing, is White Chapel AME, 2370 Old Hwy 11, organized in 1883. They are celebrating their 120th anniversary this year.*
 7. About a half mile after Mile 22 is the entrance (on left) to the White cemetery, crossed by a white-covered chain. Pull in and walk a short distance to the quarried granite enclosure, typical of other early cemeteries in Jones County. The oldest marked grave (for infant Thomas White) is dated 1815.