Through a Glass, Darkly: The Changing Past of Coffee County, Georgia

Jonathan Hepworth
Clemson University, jhepwor@g.clemson.edu

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THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY:
THE CHANGING PAST OF
COFFEE COUNTY, GEORGIA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

By
Jonathan David Hepworth
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Accepted by:
Dr. Rod Andrew, Jr., Committee Chair
Dr. Paul Christopher Anderson
Dr. H. Roger Grant
ABSTRACT

In 1954, Coffee County, Georgia, commemorated its centennial with a massive celebration that essentially shut down the county seat of Douglas for a week. Parades, fireworks, speeches, and above all a large-scale historical pageant, the “Centurama,” were components of the celebration. The history celebrated in 1954, however, did not necessarily match up with Coffee County’s actual history. This thesis examines the history of Coffee County and its changing nature, looking at politics, economics, and culture. It finds that historical “memory” is not always planned out by society’s elites, but can change as the result of politics, demographic shifts, and commercial gain. The 1954 celebration is placed in a larger context since the 1950s saw a historical pageant fad during the tense first years of the Cold War. Communities that hired Ohio-based John B. Rogers Producing Company to run their centennial celebrations received a pre-fabricated history to celebrate that did not always match their actual history. At the end, the thesis deals with the consequences of the white majority’s ignorance of the history of their African-American neighbors and addresses the impact of desegregation on the white and black communities of Coffee County. Historical memory is therefore organic and drifts along the currents found in society.
DEDICATION

To Tara Helena Williams, Virginia Hepworth Gold, and Amy Carruth Hepworth.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks goes to my committee chair, Dr. Rod Andrew, Jr., who not only was part of the committee that brought me to Clemson, but who has taught me the better part of what I know of southern history. His patience, forthrightness, and encouragement have been above and beyond the call of duty. Dr. Paul Christopher Anderson has been an excellent Graduate Advisor, and I owe him thanks for encouraging me to pursue what really interested me. His words of advice have proven valuable and his assistance during desperate times has kept me going through many difficulties. Dr. H. Roger Grant has taught me many things about the community I thought I knew, and has given me a new appreciation for individual communities and how to view them in the larger context—especially if on a rail line.

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Braunscheidel, Melissa Collum, Parissa D’Jangi, Madeleine Forrest, Matthew D. Hintz, Phillip Mullinnix, S. Michael Powers, Samantha Schmidt, Leslie Whitmire, and Adam Zucconi. I have also benefitted from professors not at Clemson, most notably John C. Inscoe at the University of Georgia, who was kind enough to listen to some of my ideas over lunch.

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On a more personal note, I wish to thank the family of William and Tracy Smith of Ambrose, Georgia, for opening their home to me whenever I was in Coffee County for research. Their daughter, Jessi, told me that if I wrote a history of Coffee County, she would be willing to read it. I hope she approves. I also thank my many other friends in Coffee County, including the Mizell family who pitched in a welcome meal.

I certainly could not have succeeded in my venture without the aid of my Father, Karl C. Hepworth, my Mother and Stepfather, Susan and John Stacey, my parents-in-law, Brent and LaJean Carruth, and my siblings-in-law, Nathan and Celeste Carruth. My life would be much more unpleasant without the smiles and love of my son, Joshua David Hepworth, who was born during the making of this thesis.
I dedicate this thesis to three incredible women. Tara Helena Williams introduced me to Clemson and was a solid help during my first semester here. Thank you, Helena, for making me a Tiger. Virginia Hepworth Gold, my Great-Aunt, helped connect me with my own past and always encouraged me in this endeavor. She passed away in November, 2012, and I dedicate a part of this to her. Above all, I dedicate this thesis to the woman who has worked harder than anyone to make this thesis possible: my dear wife, Amy Carruth Hepworth. I am grateful that she decided to marry me my first semester at Clemson, and she has supported me in every way possible. I love you, Amy.
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INTRODUCTION: PATTERNS

A frosty dawn greeted the 39,000 residents of Coffee County, Georgia on the morning of Monday, 9 February 2004. Most paid no special attention to the day, other than the fact that it was the beginning of a new work week. In the county seat of Douglas, many stopped at Holt’s Bakery for a breakfast special of cheese grits, while others preferred to eat at Bobby’s (across from the courthouse) for a biscuit. Of course, few people had the time and money to stop somewhere for breakfast; many more set about the various chores of farm life, went to work at the giant Wal-Mart Distribution center, or hurried off to classes at South Georgia College. As they day dragged on, students who did not want to eat at the college’s cafeteria had plenty of options—just across the street was a relatively new (and very popular) Zaxby’s, as was the very popular (and relatively old) Dairy Queen.\(^1\)

Up the street from the Dairy Queen, ice cream was also served this Monday—at the county offices. The frozen treats were part of a paid cake and ice cream party for county employees to commemorate Coffee County’s 150th anniversary. If anyone else noticed that 9 February 2004 was Coffee’s sesquicentennial year, it was not recorded by the city’s two newspapers. The *Coffee County News* said nothing about any kind of anniversary, although one of its February issues listed events at Douglas’s Heritage Station Museum for African-American History month.\(^2\) The *Douglas Enterprise* said a little more. The week before Coffee’s sesquicentennial day, the newspaper ran a page of

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\(^1\) U.S. Department of Commerce, *Climatological Data, Georgia* 108, No. 2 (February 2004), 20; the various eateries mentioned here were in operation when the author lived in Douglas in 2003, and are still in operation as of this writing (2012).

old photographs of Douglas. The newspaper also mentioned the cake and ice cream party by county employees in its next issue. Otherwise, it too, was silent.³

This did not mean that the anniversary was completely forgotten. Historically-minded citizens of Coffee County did not forget the significance of the year, but the general attitude of most was ignorance. The residents of Coffee could hardly be blamed, however, as 2004 was already proving to be busy and controversial. As the Iraq War entered its second year, debates over the policies of President George W. Bush filled the airwaves. Not only would Coffee’s voters choose a president in November, but they would also vote on a measure to amend Georgia’s constitution to define marriage as being between one man and one woman. Another issue, this one to be decided during the Presidential Primary in March, was a referendum concerning which flag would represent the State of Georgia.⁴

History in Shades of Gray

Few issues related to Georgia’s history had been as emotionally charged as the “flag flaps” that blew across the state between 2001 and 2004. In 1956, Georgia adopted a flag that consisted of the state seal situated to the left of the Confederate Battle Flag, with its blue X of thirteen white stars on a field of red. While visually stunning, the 1956 flag rankled many African-Americans who viewed the Confederacy’s slave society with disdain. In the 1980s and 1990s, the state’s black citizens sought to change the flag, and in 2001 their hopes were fulfilled: Governor Roy Barnes carefully and quickly executed

³ The Douglas Enterprise, 8 and 11 February 2004.
legislation that lowered the 1956 flag and replaced it with a flag that featured the state’s seal on a field of blue with three historical Georgia flags on a ribbon along the bottom.  

Supporters of the 1956 flag were outraged, and in the 2002 election, they helped send Republican Sonny Perdue to the governor’s office—the first Republican to hold the office since Reconstruction in the 1860s. Perdue did little to help the true believers of the 1956 flag, however, as a third flag rose over Georgia in 2003. This flag featured three bars of red and white with the state’s coat of arms on a square of blue and encircled by thirteen stars. While the 2003 flag looked like a simplified U.S. flag, it also resembled the First National Flag of the Confederacy, the so-called “Stars and Bars.” In spite of the clear resemblance to the first Confederate flag, the 2003 Georgia flag was tolerable enough for most Georgians, many of whom were tired over the constant debates over the state’s flag. The 2004 referendum ignored the 1956 flag and allowed voters to choose between the 2001 and 2003 Georgia flags; the latter won overwhelmingly.

In Coffee County, only ten percent of voters showed up to decide the issue, and those who did favored the 2003 flag by wide margins. Others in the county (and throughout Georgia) continued to fly the 1956 flag over their own property. While the Confederate Battle Flag was now banished from flying over state and county offices, it reappeared in dozens of other places, including on clothing. The South Georgia Outdoors & More store, located on US 441 in Douglas, sold clothing made by Dixie Outfitters, a

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6 Ibid., 262-263.
company that creatively emblazoned the flag on t-shirts and other apparel. Nor was the flag the only expression of Confederate pride in Coffee County; on the courthouse grounds at the city’s center stood a monument to soldiers of the Confederacy. At its top a soldier in gray stood sentinel, forever gazing north for the approach of the enemy. Flags might come and go, but monuments like this one transcended time and politics.

**What’s In a Name?**

The city that the soldier stood above, Douglas, also appeared to exemplify the Confederate spirit by its very name. If the South had left the Union to stop the “damn Yankee” President Abraham Lincoln from interfering with states’ rights, then “Douglasites” could be proud that their city was named after an opponent of Lincoln: Stephen A. Douglas. According to promotional literature (and the same story appears in other publications, including the New Georgia Encyclopedia’s entry on Coffee County), “Douglas was established in 1858 and became the county seat. The town was named for Abraham Lincoln’s opponent, the Honorable Stephen A. Douglas. At the time the two were candidates for the Presidency of the United States.” This is an intriguing story, not least in that there was no presidential election in 1858. Recent presidential campaigns have stretched over two years prior to the election, but in the min-nineteenth century,

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9 “Douglasite” was frequently used in the early twentieth century to refer to residents of the city, see example in Douglas Enterprise, 16 July 1910.
candidates were nominated by convention just months before the election. The sequence of events as described in this story simply could not have happened.

A different version of how Douglas received its name appeared in *The New Georgia Guide* in 1996. Contributor William Hedgepeth said this about the namesakes for the county and city: “In the courthouse are pictures of Gen. John Coffee, an Indian fighter and hero of the Creek War, and Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, who was popular, during the time this town was founded, for his debates with Abraham Lincoln.”

While the debates between Lincoln and Douglas did occur in 1858, they did not make Douglas popular in the South. In a debate at Freeport, Illinois, Douglas appealed to his northern constituents by suggesting that slavery could be terminated in U.S. territories by refusing to enact fugitive slave laws, thereby making slaves too dangerous an investment. The end result of the debates, according to William Freehling, was that “Douglas became, in most southern eyes, as much an abolitionist as Lincoln, but more despicably disguised.”

Douglas, then, lost the trust of most southerners in 1858, and he never regained it—not even in Coffee County, which voted against him in the Presidential election two years later. This second story also fails to explain how Coffee’s seat got its name.

Part of the confusion that surrounds the origins of Douglas (the city) lies in faulty dates; the courthouse settlement of Coffee County had actually received its name as early as 1855, as demonstrated by an advertisement for lands to be sold “before the court house...“

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door in Douglass, Coffee county,” that appeared in the 4 December 1855 *Macon Telegraph*.\(^{14}\) Clearly the name (if not the spelling) of Coffee’s courthouse city had been decided long before Stephen A. Douglas opposed Lincoln in any debate or any election.


Although no documentary source has been found, tradition holds that the place was named Douglas in honor and support of Stephen A. Douglas who introduced the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in January 1854. This law would permit new states to decide whether they permitted or rejected slavery in their territory. He was a very popular figure to members of the Georgia Legislature when they met in 1854.\(^{15}\)

This explanation holds up—Coffee County was created in 1854, and the same legislature that created the county passed a resolution honoring Stephen A. Douglas for his role in the Kansas-Nebraska Act that same year.\(^{16}\) Evidence clearly points to Coffee’s seat being established between February, 1854 and December, 1855, long before the populace of South Georgia had heard of an obscure Illinois politician named Lincoln.

Then how and when did Lincoln enter the story of Douglas, Georgia?

**“Dynamic Douglas”**

To spill so much ink over how a city in southern Georgia got its name may appear petty or pedantic, but there is more to the story than simple confusion over the origins of a name. Somewhere, at some point, Stephen A. Douglas’s opposition to Lincoln became more important to the people of Coffee County than his efforts behind the Kansas-

\(^{14}\) *Macon Telegraph*, 4 December 1855 (4th page, 2nd column, under “Administrator’s sale” by Peter H. Coffee), viewable online at http://telegraph.galileo.usg.edu/telegraph/search.


Nebraska Act. The tradition that Coffee’s seat was named for him remained the same, but the reason behind that tradition shifted. Recent historians have devoted increasing attention to the concept of “memory,” defined as how individuals and communities remember and interact with the past. The past itself is unalterable, but the associations that are attached to it are grounded in the ever-changing present. As the present changes, “memory” of the past drifts with it.

Another example from Coffee’s history demonstrates this drift in memory. In introducing Douglas in *The New Georgia Guide*, Hedgepeth recorded:

> Here in “dynamic Douglas,” county seat of the almost equally dynamic Coffee County, they’ve got the industrial development game honed down to a fine tooth. Those here would have you know that the first settlers came into these parts around 1854 from the Carolinas and Virginia and immediately set about farming the land while energetically building churches, schools, stores, and commercial institutions—and their descendants are still at it! [emphasis in original]^{17}

While Douglas was indeed a prosperous city in 1996, it had not always been that way. Those familiar with the city’s past could express surprise at the rapid growth of Douglas in the 1980s and 1990s, as Trowell did at the start of his history: “Despite inaccessibility, lack of capital, bitter political squabbles, racial tensions, inclement weather, and periodic outbursts of lawlessness and violence, the little village grew into a town and then a city during the 1890s. How did this come to be?”^{18}

The prosperity then present in the mid-1990s had shaped people’s perception of the past. According to this view, not only was Douglas a dynamic, forward-moving city in 1996, it had always been that way—all the way back to 1854. As Trowell observed,

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^{17} Hedgepeth, “The Heart of Georgia,” 455.
however, the actual past was one of constant setbacks. Douglas suffered the problems listed above, and did not become more than a village until the 1890s. Reading the present into the past is not unique to Coffee County, but this county will be the focus here.

It should not be concluded that historians have all the answers. Those who work with the past are not immune to making assumptions, and Coffee County has been an occasional victim of such. Reading through the scholarly literature that mentions it, Coffee County appears to take on numerous (and sometimes contradictory) visages: the county was anti-Confederate yet enlisted more of its men to fight for the Confederacy than many “pro-Confederate” counties; Coffee lynched nine people, yet witnessed the first successful prosecution of a lynch mob in Georgia; African-American farmers were trapped in brutal peonage in Coffee, yet the county built one of the state’s first modern African-American schools; the county supported race-baiting Governor Eugene Talmadge when he sought to reestablish the whites-only Democratic Primary, yet the county opposed massive resistance laws that would close down Georgia’s school system if just one school integrated. The list might go on, but it can be said that Coffee County

19 David Williams, Teresa Crisp Williams, and David Carlson, Plain Folk in a Rich Man’s War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 176-177; Mark V. Wetherington, Plain Folk’s Fight: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Piney Woods Georgia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 319.
has appeared progressive and reactionary, prosperous and poor. Then which one is the real Coffee County?

The reality is that all of the statements have truth, but they lack vital context. Coffee County has never been a vicious, racist hive of anti-black depravity as might be inferred by readers of histories that relate one or two incidents that took place in the county, but focus elsewhere. Nor has Coffee County always been in the vanguard of progress and enlightenment as its boosters would like to claim. The history of Coffee County is complex and multi-faceted; much more than a two-dimensional picture of constant progress or constant backwardness, but a three-dimensional landscape that may never fully be explored.

“Through A Glass, Darkly”

Fifty years before the lackluster Monday morning of Coffee’s sesquicentennial, the county prepared for a week of celebrations to commemorate its centennial. This celebration featured more than cake and ice cream, but included parades, speeches, music, dances, fireworks, and an elaborate pageant. This celebration was not an objective look at Coffee’s history, however, but was very much influenced by the politics and culture of the time. As such, the celebration and its accompanying pageant are useful starting points to measure how much historical memory drifted during Coffee County’s first century of existence.

Chapter one will give an overview of Coffee’s political history, and show how its factions revealed the need for a history that could unite the county. Yet history divided as often as it united the people of Coffee County. One faction preferred to view the county’s
History as being a story of consistent and constant progress. As chapter two reveals, however, the economic history of the county was often at odds with those who favored a “progressive” view of history. Another faction wanted a history that celebrated Coffee’s “pioneers,” but as chapter three concludes, this celebration of the first settlers and religion was as much tied to progress as it was to the pioneers.

The fourth chapter then discusses the celebration itself. The pageant that celebrated the history of Coffee County was actually one among many produced by an Ohio-based company during the 1950s. As such, many of the scenes of the pageant ignored or misrepresented the long and complex history of the county. Its most glaring failure, however, was the complete absence of Coffee’s African-American population, all the more glaring when the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation the week after Coffee’s festivities. The fifth chapter considers the role of African-Americans in the county’s history before summarizing the battles over integration that transformed Coffee County in the aftermath of Brown v. Board of Education.

This thesis takes its title from a phrase in the King James Translation of Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, a familiar verse to Coffee’s many Christians: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” In ironic ways, Coffee’s residents viewed their past imperfectly through many different mirrors in 1954, only to come face to face with difficulties that were rooted in the past the very next week. History and memory turn on ironies such as this.

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23 1 Cor. 13:12; the verse was quoted by Ruby Tanner, a Coffee County resident of Broxton, Ruby Tanner, “The Dark Side,” in Sandra Tanner Moody, comp., Ruby’s Ramblings (Hazlehurst, GA: Magnolia Lane Publishing, 2004), 10.
CHAPTER ONE: POLITICS

As the first day of 1954 dawned, the citizens of Coffee County were optimistic. Editorial in both the *Coffee County Progress* and the *Douglas Enterprise* recalled the grand developments of 1953: construction of homes, college buildings, and a hospital; favorable prices for most farmers’ crops; and above all, an end to the fighting in Korea. Other events were less positive: a destructive fire, a tornado, and two deadly car wrecks marred a generally good year. Both papers predicted a greater year ahead, but in different ways. The *Progress* encouraged Coffee’s citizens to keep a cleaner city, invite new industry, build more buildings, and “Work together...for a better city and county.” The *Enterprise* gave no such pep talk for 1954, but felt that “the new year will usher in even better things for the people of this community.” The newspaper suggested that poultry had the potential to be more profitable than cotton and tobacco, two of Coffee’s leading crops. Looking forward into 1954, the newspaper also anticipated the coming excitement of elections as politicians prepared their campaigns.¹

The *Enterprise* was correct in anticipating campaign season since Coffee County (and South Georgia in general) was influential in state politics. The sitting governor, Herman Talmadge, was born in neighboring Telfair County, just across the Ocmulgee River on Coffee’s northern end.² The sitting Lieutenant Governor, S. Marvin Griffin, hailed from Bainbridge in Georgia’s southwest corner and had cultivated many friends

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¹ “Goodbye To 1953 And Hello 1954,” *Coffee County Progress*, 31 December 1953; “Exit the Old—Ring in a Brand New Year,” “Poultry Industry has Possibilities in Coffee,” and “The New Year is a Political One,” in *Douglas Enterprise*, 31 December 1953.

while campaigning in Coffee County.³ In the legislature, Coffee was one of just 38 counties (among Georgia’s 159) permitted to send two representatives to the General Assembly. This representation also secured Coffee four county unit votes in Democratic primaries, making it a prize for any aspiring politician.⁴ In the state Senate, Coffee could only field a candidate every third election as the seat rotated among the 46th District’s two other counties of Bacon and Pierce. While 1954 was not Coffee’s year to put forward a candidate, its electorate comprised forty-five percent of the registered voters in the district, making Coffee’s support crucial in deciding whatever candidate was nominated.⁵

While Coffee County could have exercised a strong voice in the affairs of Georgia, it often was unable. For its first century of existence, Coffee was divided—its large territory and widespread population led to factionalism. Factions changed in composition and in issues over the century, but they never left the county’s politics. In Coffee’s first fifty years, battles between factions occasionally lead to violence, but

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³ Coffee folder, Lt. Gov. Marvin Griffin County Political Files (1948-50, 1953), General Correspondence Files, Administrative Services, Georgia Office of Lieutenant Governor, Record Group [hereafter abbreviated as RG] 5-1-1, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.
⁴ Bryan, Register 1953-1954, 315-316, 623-625. Describing Georgia’s system of representation: “The House of Representatives is composed of 205 members...the 8 largest counties...have three members each, the 30 next largest counties have two members each, and the 121 remaining counties have one representative each. Regardless of population, every county has at least one member, so territory is emphasized in apportionment of members.” Cullen B. Gosnell and C. David Anderson, The Government and Administration of Georgia (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1956), 48. The county unit system, used in Democratic Party primaries for state-wide officers (including governor and U.S. Senator), was based on Georgia’s system of representation. Counties that sent three representatives to the legislature got six unit votes, those who sent two got four unit votes, and counties with one representative got two unit votes. A candidate only needed to win a plurality of a county’s electorate to get all of that county’s unit votes. As a result, small, rural counties could easily elect a governor without the support of a single urban county. For some of the consequences of this system in the 1940s, see Patrick Novotny, This Georgia Rising: Education, Civil Rights, and the Politics of Change in Georgia in the 1940s (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 10-26; and Gosnell and Anderson, Government and Administration, 41-42.
⁵ Bryan, Register 1953-1954, 289; 1954 column from “Number Registered Voters by Years” in Total Numbers of Registered Voters and Racial Breakdown Files, Elections Division, Georgia Office of Secretary of State, RG 2-2-25-10, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.
divisions mellowed in the following thirty years. This was due partly to writers James M. Freeman, a journalist, and Warren P. Ward, a judge. Both deftly used the county’s history to forge unity while sidestepping divisive issues. Yet Freeman and Ward disagreed as well, and their battles over history reflected political battles fought in previous years. As Ward died in 1936, a new decade of division was beginning. The policies of Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge (father of Herman) shattered previous factions and divided Coffee into explosive pro-Talmadge and anti-Talmadge factions. Yet Coffee could not afford division as rapid changes swept Georgia following the Second World War, and as the centennial year dawned, those in charge of the celebration hoped to unite the county again. An examination of Coffee’s battles over politics and history explains why the organizers faced no easy task.

**Formations and Divisions**

The vast county of Coffee legally came into existence on 9 February 1854 as Georgia’s eleventh largest. The legislature did not create the new county in a vacuum, however, as the vast Wiregrass region—an area of poor soil and pine forests—had drawn settlers for over a generation.\(^6\) Four counties gave up territory for Coffee, and the largest contributor was Telfair County which gave up 734 square miles—slightly more than half its territory.\(^7\) Telfair’s population loss was minor by comparison as less than a third of its

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\(^6\) Definitions of “wiregrass Georgia” are nebulous, although Coffee County fits in almost all of them. The region was characterized by vast pine forests and an undergrowth of wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*). The soil, especially in Georgia’s southeast, was poorer, so plantation agriculture failed to take hold and the region was dominated by whites. See *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Wiregrass Georgia,” by Mark V. Wetherington, accessed 27 October 2012, http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2631; and Jerrilyn McGregory, *Wiregrass Country* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 3-38.  
population lived in the two districts given to Coffee County. The 1850 Census recorded 940 people residing in militia districts 437 and 748 of Telfair.\textsuperscript{8} Their isolation was broken by only two roads: the Coffee Road (named for Telfair resident John Coffee, who later gave his name to the county) and the Blackshear Road.\textsuperscript{9} Of the two trans-Ocmulgee districts, 437 bordered the south bank of the river allowing it easier access to markets downstream and proximity to the courthouse at Jacksonville. The population of district 748, which lay deeper in the backwoods, was aloof of markets and politics. Many sought self-sufficiency, believed in the Primitive Baptist doctrine of predestination, and were suspicious of governmental power, especially when exercised by outsiders.

This suspicion remained when the populations of districts 437 and 748 found themselves in the core of the newly established Coffee County. The first elections for county officers were held at the farm of Daniel Lott, who was asked to donate land for a courthouse. Lott refused, saying he had moved to where he was to get away from the law, not bring it to his doorstep.\textsuperscript{10} Afterward, James Pearson, another backwoods farmer, volunteered a well-drained site near the center of district 748 and the county secured it for a courthouse. Before the end of 1855, the courthouse settlement was being called “Douglass,” reportedly after Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas who had sponsored the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. This act opened the new territories of Kansas and

\textsuperscript{8} [Handwritten] pages 743-753, 785, 787-790, Districts 437 and 748, Telfair County, Georgia, Census of Free Population, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, roll 65), Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29; Districts 437 and 748, Telfair County, Georgia, Census of Slave Population, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, roll 95), Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29; both digitized by Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center and uploaded 31 July 2010 to Internet Archive at: http://archive.org/details/7thcensus0065unix (free) and http://archive.org/details/7thcensus0095unit (slave).

\textsuperscript{9} Map, John H. Goff, “Georgia Early Roads and Trails Circa 1730-1850,” (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Transportation and Surveyor General, Georgia Secretary of State, n.d.).

\textsuperscript{10} Trowell, “Douglas Before Memory,” 7.
Nebraska to slavery if the territorial population agreed. This concept of allowing local citizens to decide the fate of their community, “popular sovereignty,” found favor among the liberty-minded people of the new county.¹¹

Not everyone in the new county came from Telfair; portions of Coffee’s new citizenry came from Clinch, Irwin, and Ware Counties.¹² The added population and extra territory necessitated four new militia districts for Coffee County over four years; by 1860 Coffee had six: two in the north, two in the south, and two in the center.¹³ The northern districts bordered the Ocmulgee River and thus benefitted from fertile soil and access to the river’s steamboats. These advantages in fertility and transportation aided the expansion of plantation agriculture and slavery; by 1860 the two districts together accounted for less than one-third of Coffee’s white population, but held two-thirds of the county’s slaves.¹⁴ Slavery was less important in Coffee’s central and southern districts, and the four districts together held two-thirds of the white population while just a third of Coffee’s slaves.¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., 7-8. See also Macon Telegraph, 4 December 1855.
¹³ Executive Volume, Militia District Books, General Administrative Records, Surveyor General, RG 3-1-59, Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.
¹⁵ Executive Volume, Militia District Books, Georgia Archives. Georgia Militia Districts were numbered according to their order of creation and 437 (created in 1819) and 748 (created in 1829) were originally part of Telfair. District 1026 presents a curious case since that number was reached in 1848 and the county of origin, Cherokee, is nowhere near Coffee. Records indicate districts numbered 1126 and 1127 were formed for Coffee in 1854, but at some point the former was abolished. It seems likely, however, that 1126 was transformed into 1026 by clerical error, resulting in two districts with the same number.
As tensions between northern free states and southern slave states climaxed between 1859 and 1861, Coffee County itself was divided: a slavery-dominated northern third, and a white-dominated two-thirds. While Coffee’s central and southern districts felt less attachment to slavery, they nevertheless opposed abolition, fearing that freed slaves would overwhelm the backwoods.16 These fears were manifest in the county’s 1860 vote for president: two-thirds of Coffee’s voters chose the Southern Democratic candidate, Stephen Breckinridge. The Northern Democratic candidate, Stephen A. Douglas, only received ten percent from the county whose capital bore his name. The rest of the votes went to the moderate Constitutional Union party and its candidate, John Bell. No one in Coffee County voted for Lincoln.17

Lincoln, however, was elected, and southerners questioned whether a president who had won on an anti-slavery platform and without a single southern vote could protect the South’s slave interests. On 2 January 1861, Georgians voted again, this time to send delegates to a convention on whether Georgia should leave the Union. At least sixty percent of Coffee’s voters opposed delegates advocating immediate secession, opting instead for “cooperationists.” This group represented a variety of different opinions; some wanted to maintain the Union at all costs while others supported secession if it was done in cooperation with other states.18 At the convention at the state capitol in Milledgeville, Coffee County’s delegates, Rowan Pafford and J. H. Frier, both opposed secession to the

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16 Wetherington, *Plain Folk’s Fight*, 45-80.
last. Once secession was accomplished, however, Pafford and Frier voted to ratify the
Confederate Constitution as Georgia entered the Confederate States of America.19

Once war erupted between the Union and the Confederacy, most people in Coffee
County came together to support the war effort. An analysis by Mark V. Wetherington
suggests that 89 percent of Coffee’s white men between the ages of 18 and 40 enlisted to
fight for the Confederacy.20 This was a high percentage even for counties that strongly
supported secession, so why did so many enlist from Coffee? It is impossible to know the
motivations of each individual, but many feared the destruction that would arrive by
invasion and the overthrow of the old social order (which included black slavery).21

As the war lengthened from months to years, families bereft of their able-bodied
men faced hard times. Many remained loyal to the Confederate cause, especially in
Coffee’s northern districts, but dissatisfaction boiled in the backwoods. Those who had
enlisted to protect their homes and families increasingly wondered if the state or the
Confederacy could protect them, especially as the two governments took more and gave
back less.22 During the war’s final year as Sherman marched through northern and central
Georgia, many deserted or hid from the draft. Confederate officials sought to get the men
back, and a “separate civil war” ignited within Coffee County.23

19 Journal of the Public and Secret Proceedings of the Convention of the People of Georgia Held in
Milledgeville and Savannah in 1861Together With the Ordinances Adopted (1861; Documenting the
American South, University Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999), 4, 35-39, 187-
20 Wetherington, Plain Folk’s Fight, 319, see note 10.
21 Ibid., 81-84, 104, 133.
22 Ibid., 126-129, 149, 196-197, 201-207.
23 Ibid, 214-226, 230; the phrase “separate civil war” is taken from the title of Jonathan Dean Sarris, A
Separate Civil War: Communities in Conflict in the Mountain South (Charlottesville: University of Virginia
Press, 2006), where Sarris discusses battles between Unionists and Confederates in mountain Georgia.
The details of this inner conflict are murky at best due to a lack of contemporary sources. Many stories circulated later, but pinning down the particulars is difficult. The attitude held by South Georgia’s “plain folk” toward the Confederacy is a matter of fierce debate among historians, many who use the same sources to construct very different arguments. One amused historian recently quipped: “Will the real Georgia plain folk please stand up?” This study will not attempt to pick out the “real plain folk,” but will ask a different question: Why was this conflict all but forgotten?

It would first appear that such a catastrophe could not be forgotten, especially since theft, murder, and summary justice between anti-Confederate and pro-Confederate guerillas were alarmingly common. Anti- Confederates even symbolically dug a grave for a man charged with arresting deserters. Yet less than fifty years later a Confederate

24 The main contenders are Mark V. Wetherington and David Williams. Wetherington argues that the “plain folk” of Georgia’s wiregrass were actively secessionist and supported the war from the beginning. Racial fear overcame class conflict, and Wetherington provides evidence showing that plain folk had many ties (familial and otherwise) to the planter aristocracy. While admitting that anti-Confederate rebellions broke out in places like Coffee County, he places the source of this conflict with overwhelming localism—when the war entered Georgia, many decided that protecting home and family was more important than protecting the state or the Confederacy. This led to attempts by the Confederate government to recapture deserters and draft evaders, leading to anti-Confederate activity. After the war, anti- Confederates fell in with their former enemies to prevent black suffrage. On the other side, Williams has written three books and many articles on division within the Confederacy, but the most pertinent here is David Williams, Teresa Crisp Williams, and David Carlson, Plain Folk in a Rich Man’s War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002). In this book, Williams et al. argues that Georgia’s plain folk clearly discerned that slaveholders were behind the war, and that in some cases class conflict trumped racial fears. Georgia’s plain folk opposed secession, but once war began, moved to support it. After a series of blunders on the part of slaveholding elites, desperate poor whites rose up in rebellion against the Confederacy, effectively dooming the slaveholding republic. Williams uses the anti-Confederate battles in Coffee County to aid his overall thesis. While both works have their merits, Wetherington’s Plain Folk’s Fight provides greater nuance and detail for Coffee County, making it on balance a more reliable work to consult on Coffee.


26 Warren P. Ward, Ward’s History of Coffee County (Atlanta: Foote and Davies, 1930; Reprint, Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 2001), 141-143. The grave-digging threat was mentioned in a poem by William “Bill” Wall, and this poem was cited by both Wetherington, Plain Folk’s Fight, 214-215, 223-226; and Williams, Plain Folk in Rich Man’s War, 176-177.
monument graced the courthouse square in Douglas and the myth of the “Lost Cause” dominated Coffee. What became of the anti-Confederate faction? Other communities that experienced “inner civil wars” (including Wiregrass Mississippi, the North Georgia mountains, and locations in North Carolina) remained divided in culture and politics for decades to come.27 How and why did the anti-Confederates disappear from the story of Coffee County?

Migrations and Transformations

Coffee County was fortunate enough to escape the destruction caused by Sherman’s March, which passed some eighty miles to the north. Detachments from James H. Wilson’s raid (which captured Confederate President Jefferson Davis in neighboring Irwin County) came much closer, however. According to official maps, the raiders never set foot anywhere in Coffee, except around Spalding on the Coffee-Irwin line.28 A story emerged by 1930, however, that suggested otherwise: “It is said a troop of Yankees rode several days coming to Douglas, Georgia. When they reached here, it is said they walked out in the middle of the streets and looked north and east and south and west, and not a man was in sight, and they said in wonder and astonishment, ‘Is this Douglas?’ ‘Are you sure this is Douglas?’”29 While this humorous tale says more about the deterioration wartime Douglas suffered than Yankee invasion, a second story places Coffee in Sherman’s

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27 See Sarris, A Separate Civil War; Victoria E. Bynum, The Free State of Jones: Mississippi’s Longest Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) and The Long Shadow of the Civil War: Southern Dissent and Its Legacies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); and John C. Inscoe, Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); the “inner civil wars” phrase is taken from Williams, Plain Folk in Rich Man’s War, 151.


29 Ward, Coffee County, 299.
path. Two women, Sarah “Sallie” Ward and her sister Rebecca Hilliard Boyles, apparently had a brush with northern avarice:

When Sherman’s troops marched through Georgia near the end of the Civil War, they appropriated everything to eat they could find. Word reached Grandma Becky and Great-aunt Sallie that the Yankees were coming fast, so they began to hide food. They cut down all their meat in the smokehouse and hid it above the ceiling in the house. The soldiers came and searched everywhere. When they came into the house, Grandma saw that the brine from the salt meat was dripping through cracks in the ceiling. This quick-witted woman walked over and stood under the drops, letting them come down into her hair, while the Yankees searched the house. They never found the meat.\textsuperscript{30}

It is highly improbable that any soldier under Sherman’s command wandered over eighty miles from the line of march to seek out meat. Even Wilson’s raiders were unlikely to have ridden miles into the backwoods of Coffee for a quick meal. What, then, can be made of this story?

The two women probably did have to hide their meat late in the war, but not from Union soldiers. Both women were Confederate supporters, and Sarah Ward’s husband had died in Virginia. Their attachment to the Confederacy surely made them the target of Coffee’s anti-Confederate partisans. If this was the case, though, why did the story become one of marauding Yankees instead of envious neighbors? The transition took place in the forty years following the Civil War as Coffee suffered a different kind of invasion. Heavy migration into the county and the political instability it caused transformed the county’s history. Former pro-Confederate and anti-Confederate factions were obliterated in the challenges presented by this new invasion.

\textsuperscript{30} Allie Waters Cassell, \textit{Wiregrass Allie: A Link in the Chain} (New York: Vantage Press, 1991), 56. Another version is presented in Gaskin Avenue Book Committee, \textit{From Graveyard Road to Silk Stocking Row} (Douglas, GA: Gaskin Avenue Committee, 2010), 196-197. This version omits Rebecca Boyles and has Sarah Ward as the one who let the brine drip on her head, but the soldiers are still Sherman’s.
Prior to the Civil War, Coffee’s population had been distributed fairly evenly across the county. Dividing the county into thirds, the northern districts held a little bit more than a third of Coffee’s population while the central and southern districts both held a little less. By 1870, this situation had changed—Coffee’s northern districts dropped to just 27% of the population, while the central districts increased to 36% and the southern districts to 37%. The abolition of slavery hit the northern districts hardest, since many ex-slaves left their former plantations either due to violence or opportunity. Despite the sharp decline for northern Coffee, all three regions remained fairly even.  

This was not the case by 1880. Coffee’s southern districts dominated with 43% of the county’s residents. The north had also expanded to 32% of the population, while the center districts’ share of the populace dropped to less than a quarter. The explosive growth of the north and south was led by railroads and timber cutting (discussed in greater depth in chapter 2). The Macon and Brunswick Railroad crossed only the northeastern tip of Coffee, but drew people towards it and the newly established railroad town of Hazlehurst, just across the Appling County line. To the south, the Brunswick and Albany Railroad cut much deeper into Coffee. Two towns, Pearson and Willacoochee, sprang up and became the dominant settlements of the southern districts. Central Coffee had neither railroads nor access to a navigable river, and the county courthouse at Douglas was the only fixture that kept the settlement alive. 

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With the centrifugal force of the railroads flinging people toward either end of the county, Douglas was viewed as irrelevant by Coffee’s new residents. Attempts to move the courthouse or split the county began in 1874. The legislature created the new county of Nicholls out of eastern Coffee and moved the courthouse of the rump Coffee County to Kirkland, a town on the Brunswick and Albany Railroad west of Pearson. Georgia Governor James M. Smith vetoed the measure, however, and Coffee remained intact with Douglas as county seat. The problem of the inaccessible courthouse did not go away, however, and Pearson residents tried to move it to their town in 1887.

By 1890, half of Coffee’s residents lived in the county’s three southern districts (a third district was established in 1882 to handle the growing population). The two northern districts held just 28% of the population and the two central districts’ share of Coffee’s residents (including Douglas) dropped to just 22%. This influx of new people also altered the county’s political patterns. Democratic supremacy had lasted through Reconstruction when former anti-Confederate and pro-Confederate factions defended white control over the county from radical Republicans. Many of the new residents who entered Coffee also belonged to the Democratic Party, but it was Democracy of a different kind: business-oriented, urban, and industrial. Coffee’s farmers, who were being pushed out of power, decided to push back.

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33 “Georgia Legislature,” Atlanta Constitution, 24 February 1874; “Good For the Veto!” Columbus Sunday Enquirer, 1 March 1874.
36 Wetherington, Plain Folk’s Fight, 161-193.
Four years passed between the Presidential election in 1892 and 1896, but a small revolution in county politics occurred between the two: in 1892, nearly three-quarters of Coffee’s population voted for Democrat Grover Cleveland, while another 19% voted for Populist candidate James Weaver. Only 8% voted Republican. Four years later, however, Republican William McKinley won Coffee County with two-thirds of its voters while the Populist candidate for Congress received 60% of Coffee’s votes. Locally, Populists swept Democrats out of county offices. What had changed?

The seeds of political instability lay in Coffee’s rapidly changing demographics. Migration into the county made a minority of Coffee-born residents. Most that arrived between 1880 and 1900 were from other counties in Georgia and the Carolinas. The county’s African-American population also rocketed upward from just over twenty percent in 1880 to thirty-seven percent in 1890 and almost forty-one percent in 1900. Many recent migrants to Coffee (white and black) hailed from North Carolina and worked in the turpentine business. As the economy sank into depression in 1893, the

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already large number of Coffee residents on the road to poverty fell off an economic cliff.

All of these factors combined to produce strange alliances in the following elections.41

Across the American southeast, farmers crushed by falling prices and growing
debt flocked into Farmers Alliances. When it became clear by 1892 that their demands
were being ignored by the Democratic leadership, many joined the newly-formed
People’s Party. A local branch of the party was formed in Coffee in 1892, but Populists
received less than a fifth of the county’s votes. By 1894, the party had pushed that
number past 35% in the election for Georgia’s legislature, but still fell short of electing
any candidates.42 Two years later, however, Populists gained control of the county by
fusing (or cooperating) with the county’s small Republican Party.

Trying to figure out who voted for the Populist ticket is not possible due to
scattered and incomplete records.43 There are some intriguing clues, however, both in
contemporary accounts and later recollections. Coffee’s Populist Party came late on the
scene—for Georgia. The high-tide for most Georgia Populists was between 1894 and
1896, after which the fortunes of the party quickly dwindled.44 In Coffee County,
however, the Populists dominated between 1896 and 1898. The late emergence of Coffee
Populists, their practice of fusion with Republicans, and their loss of power in 1898

42 Ibid.; Alex Matthews Arnett, The Populist Movement in Georgia: A View of the “Agrarian
Crusade” in the Light of Solid-South Politics (New York: Columbia University via Longmans, Green &
Co., 1922), map facing page 184.
43 Ayers, Promise of the New South, 278, discusses the fruitless attempts by historians to figure out
who voted for the Populists in 1892, all without success.
University Press, 1984), 102-123, 140-161.
closely parallels the fortunes of North Carolina’s Populists.\textsuperscript{45} Add to that the large number of North Carolina émigrés who made the county their home by 1900. In what has to be one of Populism’s more bizarre chapters, the political battles in Coffee were a strange brew of Georgia and North Carolina politics.

In 1895, a small lumber-carrying railroad was completed to Douglas, boosting the settlement’s economy and revitalizing central Coffee County. Douglas incorporated as a city the same year, but not without a political fight between the early settlers and the so-called “Tarheel” faction. This faction was composed of North Carolinians who had also made Douglas their home and contributed to the railroad. A compromise was made wherein Calvin A. Ward, a native-born Coffee citizen, became the first mayor while Tarheels took over as Chief of Police and among the five city aldermen.\textsuperscript{46} Similar forces were at work the following year.

Ambitious white North Carolinians probably sought power in 1896 via the well-established but struggling Populist Party. They united with many poor whites who had flocked to the county’s Farmers Alliances in previous years and who formed the earliest core of the third party.\textsuperscript{47} The Tarheels also acquired the support of Coffee’s booming African-American population, many of whom were from North Carolina and were under the employ of Carolinian turpentine interests.\textsuperscript{48} Whether by consent or coercion, African-Americans agreed to vote the Populist ticket, but extracted a promise that the Populists would vote for the Republican Presidential candidate. Many Populists, fuming over their

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\textsuperscript{45} Ayers, \textit{Promise of the New South}, 298-304.
\textsuperscript{46} Gaskin Ave., \textit{Graveyard Road to Silk Stocking Row}, 9.
\textsuperscript{48} Thomas, “McCranie’s Turpentine Still,” 5.
\end{flushright}
botched fusion with the Democrats earlier in the year, readily agreed. To further secure their chances of winning, the Tarheels nominated men who were generally popular in Coffee County, but which had lost the Democratic primary.

Voting began the morning of Wednesday, 7 October 1896. Fearing violence at the polls, many Populists guarded their African-American supporters with guns, causing the Democratic *Douglas Breeze* to complain, “which by the way was in open violation of the State law.” Voting lasted through the afternoon and passed without actual violence, but the atmosphere remained tense. In Willacoochee district, Democrats apparently made a successful attempt to bribe some African-Americans to vote the Democratic ticket. A Willacoochee resident later claimed that elections at the turn of the century had degenerated in to a contest of “who could round up and poll the greatest number of negro votes.” Whatever tactics the Populists used and whatever countermeasures the Democrats used, it became apparent by Thursday evening that Populists had swept Coffee County. Five of the county’s seven militia districts went to the People’s Party, which won about sixty percent of Coffee’s votes. Outraged Democrats cried foul, but as the *Douglas Breeze* recorded: “The pops do not deny that they stuffed the ballot box, but they say they had votes enough to do it without any one man putting in more than one ballot.”

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52 Mrs. J.E. Gaskins, “Early History of Willacoochee,” written 10 November 1949 and mailed to the Coffee County Centennial Committee 5 April 1954 by the McCranie Brothers Timber Company, in “Centennial” file, Coffee County files, Genealogical Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
54 “Election Notes,” *Douglas Breeze*, 9 October 1896.
The coalition began to falter, however, as fissures between white and black, Georgian and North Carolinian, Populist and Republican, began to deepen. The Democrats, having suffered humiliation at the polls, fought back. In 1898 the Populists and Republicans opted to work together again, and Democrats pounced, declaring that such fusion would lead to “negro rule” and painting lurid descriptions of North Carolina’s bi-racial government. The tactic worked as other Georgia Populists (including Tom Watson) refused to campaign in Coffee County, and several wiregrass Populists deserted the party. The election was tense with both sides running close together. Before all the votes could be counted, however, the courthouse at Douglas burned—some suspected arson. While several records were saved, the election returns were disputed. Democrats quickly seized power. As the Populist-Republican government of North Carolina also fell in the 1898 general election, jubilant Democrats paraded by torchlight through Douglas with a banner that exclaimed: “North Carolina and Coffee County Redeemed.”

Even though Coffee’s Democrats “redeemed” their county in 1898, they had not united it. Although the coalition of Populists and Republicans never again fused together as they had in 1896 and 1898, they occasionally cooperated with each other. The 1900 election was quieter than the previous two, but still featured razor-thin races for county offices. Democrats won most, while the Populists failed to demonstrate the same strength as in past elections. Perhaps in protest, the Populists likely threw their votes to the

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58 “State and County Election,” *Douglas Breeze*, 6 October 1900.
Republicans in the Presidential election one month later, and William McKinley carried Coffee by sixty percent. Viewing McKinley’s victory with dismay, the new editor of the *Douglas Breeze*, James M. Freeman, determined to end the divisions between Democrats and Populists.

**James M. Freeman and Confederate Consensus**

James M. “Uncle Jim” Freeman was born around 1849 in southwestern Georgia. He was orphaned by the age of five, and little is written about his early life, although he did join the Confederate Army at a very young age. After the war, Freeman turned to printing, working first in Albany, and then in Coffee County at Pearson. After working for the *Coffee County Gazette*, Freeman moved to Waycross and published the *Waycross Headlight*. While working in Waycross and Pearson, Freeman visited Douglas and eventually determined to move there. In 1898, he returned to Coffee County to take over the *Douglas Breeze*, which had recently acquired the Populist *Douglas Leader*, and immediately set about healing divisions between Populists and Democrats:

> In our newspaper venture we have been selected by the former owners of the Breeze and the Leader as the best man to conduct a newspaper that would tend to cement the two political factions of the county because of our known desire to give all men justice, and accord to every man the privilege of thinking as they please politically and religiously...We shall have no abuse, no mud slinging, no contentions or controversies by correspondents. In this way, brothers, let us live and pull for each other’s mutual and general good, build up our country, improve

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60 The *Douglas Breeze* has no surviving newspapers from November, 1900, but this statement is inferred from Freeman’s “Our Local Affairs,” *Douglas Breeze*, 6 October 1900: “Mr. Brantley said last Monday that Coffee county should repent in sack-cloth and ashes for having helped to elect McKinley four years ago. We hope she will show her repentance by an overwhelming majority against him.”
61 “Uncle Jim Freeman Laid to Final Rest Monday Morning,” *Coffee County Progress*, 4 February 1926.
our town, serve God, live and die together and go down to our graves united and contented.62

By working to “cement the two political factions” of Coffee—the Populists and Democrats—Freeman necessarily excluded a third: the Republicans, most of whom were African-American. The unity which Freeman proclaimed was a white unity, and as Georgia moved toward disenfranchising its black voters, Freeman’s attempts to unite white voters proved successful—in 1904, Coffee County Populists and Democrats officially reunited on the platform of white-only elections.63

Factions between Populists and Democrats had ended, but the problem of centrifugal Coffee County remained. In 1905, as Georgia created several new counties (including one centered on Hazlehurst), rival cities to Douglas soon pressed for new counties as Broxton, Nicholls, Pearson, and Willacoochee all sought to become county seats. Freeman first blasted these ideas as insanity, declaring that the space separating each town from Douglas was simply too small to fit another county.64 His crusade to prevent new counties was placed on hold, however, as Freeman battled journalistic challenges of his own. Financial difficulties forced the Breeze to merge with its rival, the Coffee County Gazette, and the two combined to form the Douglas Enterprise. The new paper changed ownership many times, but Freeman not only continued on as printer, he also stubbornly held onto editorial control of the Enterprise until a more assertive owner, William R. Frier, took over.65

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62 “The Breeze and Coffee County,” Douglas Breeze, 6 May 1899.
64 “The New County Movement,” Douglas Breeze, 22 April 1905.
65 Douglas Enterprise, 7 October 1905, 21 December 1907, 8 February 1908, 20 March 1909.
Although Frier held editorial control over the *Enterprise*, he shared Freeman’s vision of a united, white, and prosperous Coffee County. The two engineered a plan to solidify unity between Douglas and its rival towns while selling newspapers: Frier sent Freeman to every locale within Coffee County to collect subscription fees and write promotional articles about each community within the county. Starting at Nicholls, Freeman praised the small railroad stop as being so prosperous it needed two banks, while emphasizing that one of them was a Douglas-based bank. The articles that followed on Broxton, Willacoochee, Ambrose, Bushnell, Pearson, Kirkland, McDonald, and other towns sought to eliminate intra-county competition by praising each community as contributing to Coffee County in its own unique way. More importantly to Frier, however, the *Douglas Enterprise* solidified its grip as the county’s main newspaper by gaining subscriptions and correspondents in every corner of Coffee.

After a second round of articles on each of Coffee’s towns, Freeman focused his attention on history. While Freeman demonstrated in previous articles that history was a story of progress, there were some instances where he felt differently, especially in matters of race. He longed for the “Good Old Slavery Days,” and suggested that African-Americans had been better off in chains. Once while visiting Albany, Freeman came across an aged African-American couple who had once been slaves of his father. While he waxed eloquent about these “faithful friends,” who longed to be back on “de ole plantashum,” their progeny received no such accolades. Of the couple’s two sons, one had been elected to the Reconstruction Legislature as a Republican while the other was

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67 *Douglas Enterprise*, 10 April 1909 through 29 May 1909.
killed in a robbery attempt. Freeman made no distinction between the thief and the politician, though, declaring that the robber’s “spirit [went] where bad niggers go. The other brother, you remember, went to the legislature. Which went to the best place?” In Freeman’s mind, the only good African-American was one who submitted to whites; those who aspired to political office were common criminals, or worse.

If Freeman viewed the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War was an era of misrule by black criminals, then the four years of the Confederacy were a noble struggle. Although Freeman admitted that life during the war had been difficult, he never failed to honor the Confederate regime or pay tribute to its veterans, even as he praised the progress of the present. In this, Freeman was part of a growing trend within Coffee County to honor the Confederacy while praising the South’s progress within the United States. A visitor to Douglas in 1899 commented that a local preacher giving a sermon “could be heard singing about how he helped to kill the ‘Yankees’; the next instant he would be [delivering] a [Fourth] of July Oration.” In 1911—fifty years after the Civil War had ignited—the residents of Coffee County raised a monument to Confederate soldiers on the grounds of the courthouse in Douglas, completing the county’s move into

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69 J. M. Freeman, “Making Salt During War,” Douglas Enterprise, 7 January 1911; also Douglas Breeze, 1 July 1905; a number of stories that Freeman covered concerning the Confederacy can be found in Catherine Fussell Wells, Confederate Notes from The Douglas Breeze/The Douglas Enterprise, Coffee County, Georgia, 1895-1911 (Valdosta, GA: Wells Gen-Search, 2002), especially since Freeman was editor of the Breeze for six of the ten years covered by Wells, and edited the Enterprise for another three.
“Lost Cause” mythology. Anti-Confederates were nowhere to be found in anything that Freeman wrote—why?

While Freeman did not singlehandedly erase the anti-Confederate faction from the story of Coffee, he was part of a trend that destroyed the tradition of dissent. Freeman was born and raised in southwestern Georgia—an area part of the “Black Belt” where slaves outnumbered free whites prior to the Civil War, and where freed African-Americans held the majority during Reconstruction. The southwestern Black Belt had strongly supported secession (more than the southeastern Wiregrass), and had a long tradition of white political unity in opposition to the black majority. As the Wiregrass became more desirable for settlement for white and black alike, many moved from the Black Belt into Coffee, carrying their attitudes on politics, race, and history with them. Freeman was able to articulate a history than rang true to Coffee’s substantial Black Belt transplants—a history where white unity would bring progress, a progress that had been interrupted only by the loss of the Confederacy and the imposition of black rule during Reconstruction.

**Warren P. Ward and Pioneer Individuals**

The progressive, whites-only history presented by Freeman did not appeal to everyone, and the opposition found its most eloquent advocate in Warren Preston Ward. Born in 1861 in Coffee County to John Franklin Ward and Sarah Ann Hilliard Ward, Warren grew up without his father who had died near Fredericksburg, Virginia. Some of

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73 Wetherington, *New South Comes to Wiregrass*, xix-xx.
his earliest memories were of his widowed mother spinning yarn and praying for the protection of her three sons as opposing factions battled across Coffee County. After the war, the family survived as Sarah kept up the small farm and sang about Virginia. Warren grew to love Virginia, and attended college in the Old Dominion State. Before returning to Coffee County, Warren collected a small amount of Virginia soil at his mother’s request and presented it to her. When his mother died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, Warren buried the Virginia soil with his mother whose grave was emblazoned with a Confederate flag. The Ward family lived daily with the loss of the Confederacy.

Warren Ward met Annie Canova while living in Pearson, and after a careful courtship, the two wed in 1884. The Wards moved back and forth across southern Georgia and northern Florida before settling down in Douglas where they built a house in 1899. Ward’s main interest was law, but he also favored journalism. His first taste of the newspaper business was the Pearson-based *Coffee County Gazette* which he purchased from William Parker in 1883. One of Parker’s associates was James M. Freeman, who probably continued to work for Ward when he moved the newspaper to Waycross a year later and renamed it the *Waycross Headlight*.

Ward and Freeman did not see eye to eye on every issue, however, and the breach between the two became open warfare when both returned to Coffee and Ward resurrected the *Coffee County Gazette* to compete with Freeman’s *Douglas Breeze*. A particularly revealing dispute between the two arose in 1904 on the subject of lynching.

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74 Gaskin Ave., *Graveyard Road to Silk Stocking Row*, 195-198, 206-209.
75 Ibid., 209-211.
Freeman’s *Breeze* opposed lynching except in the cases of rape or arson. This disturbed Ward, a lawyer, who believed that only the law should execute justice. He hit back in the *Gazette*, “[This] is very dangerous doctrine, but fortunately it does not come from a very dangerous source. The old man [Freeman] seems to be proud of the little notoriety he has made by his bold stand against the laws of our land.” Freeman soon responded in kind, declaring that “the talented editor” of the *Coffee County Gazette* was “always anxious to pick up any straw that can be used against us, in any way, to ridicule or injure us.”

The situation intensified later that year when Ward became a candidate for county ordinary, a judge that dealt with estates, pensions, and marriage licenses. Freeman threw the entire support of the *Breeze* behind Thomas Young, the incumbent and fellow Confederate veteran. Ward won the election, however, and began his nearly thirty-year service as ordinary in spite of Freeman’s attempts to unseat him.

Ward disagreed with Freeman on many issues, not least of which was history. Ward was native to Coffee County, and although he lived and traveled widely in his younger years, he never cut ties with his home. Rather than being interested in the progress and development of the county, Ward was interested in what the county had been before it was transformed. While ordinary, he kept a scrapbook of items of interest and occasionally wrote reminiscences outside his legal work. His attention to the daily life and family stories of old Coffee would serve him well when a unique series of events propelled him to write a history of the county.

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77 *Douglas Breeze*, 6 August 1904.
78 *Douglas Breeze*, 17 September 1904; *Douglas Enterprise*, 22-29 February, 4 April 1908.
79 Ward, *Coffee County*, Title Page, iii, xiii-xiv, 92, 97, 99, 104, 108, 123, 154, 158, etc.
In 1929, the Georgia Legislature passed a resolution that called on the Grand Juries of each county to appoint an official county historian. The county historian’s task was to compile and write a history of their county and present it to the Georgia Department of Archives and History by February, 1933, the date of Georgia’s bicentennial.  

This was a bold resolution, especially in the face of an accelerating depression. Nevertheless, most of Georgia’s (then) 161 counties succeeded in appointing an official historian. Only twenty counties pitched in any money for the histories, however, and many went uncompleted.  

As the disappointed appointees of Jasper County wrote, “All that we ever got in the way of encouragement was some family history sent us to be placed in the book of history, but no suggestion of financial aid. We could not go on this.” Other historians finished their work but failed to get it published. With no promises of financial backing, just eleven histories had been completed and published by the start of 1933. A total of twenty-eight official histories had been adopted or published by 1937 while another twenty manuscript histories had been sent to the Georgia Archives. Eighty-two other counties reporting having official historians, but only a handful of these were completed prior to the Second World War.  

Viewed in this context, Ward’s History of Coffee County stands as an impressive success in spite of difficulties inherent in the Georgia County Histories program. Published in 1930, it was one of the earliest official histories published, partly due to the

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80 Ward, Coffee County, 1-2.  
81 Ruth Blair, Georgia’s Official Register 1931 (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Archives and History, 1931), 541-544.  
82 A. S. Thurman to Ruth Blair, 25 February 1931, in Jasper County—History, File II, Public Reference Service, Georgia Archives Collection, RG 4-2-46, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.  
83 Mrs. J. E. Hayes, Georgia’s Official Register 1933-1935-1937 (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Archives and History, [1937]), 530-533.
county contributing $500 for its publication.\footnote{Blair, \textit{Georgia’s Official Register 1931}, 544.} No funds were appropriated for writing, however, and the speed that Ward assembled it testifies to his efficiency. \textit{Ward’s History} is not in strict chronological order, but moves from subject to subject—almost a scrapbook of county history. A number of entries are taken from Ward’s personal scrapbooks, and are listed with their date of origin.

Ward had his biases in his \textit{History of Coffee County}, but he did make every effort to include as many different groups as possible. After quoting the legal documents that formed Coffee County and listing its first officers, Ward devoted ten pages to the Creek Indians before moving on to the earliest white families. After several vignettes on early settlers, Ward described many old country churches (while carefully leaving out town churches) before discussing the Civil War and its impact on the county. While Ward paid tribute to the Confederacy’s soldiers and women, he also suggested that the war had divided people within the county. For the first time in many years, Ward had resurrected the existence of the anti-Confederate faction in Coffee. After the section on the Civil War, the history moves forward to the coming of railroads and new people into the county. Ward gave brief sketches of new settlers, industries, agricultural developments, and discussed some of Coffee’s flora and fauna. Near the end, Ward summed up the condition of the county in 1930, declaring it to be “God’s Country.”\footnote{Ward, \textit{Coffee County}, Title Page, 296.}

In keeping with its scrapbook-like quality, Ward offered space for contributions to the county’s history, and the most notable contributor was Mrs. Lon Dickey. Two of the three sections contributed by Mrs. Dickey focus on Coffee County’s Ocmulgee River
section, and discuss the steamboats and plantations that characterized that section.\textsuperscript{86}

\textit{Ward’s History} showed quite clearly that Coffee was not a monolith, but populated by diverse families, industries, races, religions, and individuals. Ward still wrote with an eye toward county unity, but he readily acknowledged people’s differences while trying to be fair to all—even to James M. Freeman, who received a kind (if patronizing) sketch.\textsuperscript{87} African-Americans also appeared, even if Ward approached them condescendingly.\textsuperscript{88}

The most poignant parts of the history, however, are autobiographical. Ward invested himself in the history of the county, discussing the experiences of his ancestors and himself.\textsuperscript{89} While \textit{Ward’s History} is more than an autobiography, it demonstrates better than many that history is not simply the experience of governments, industries, or organizations, but the story of people. While Ward tended to focus on pioneers as Freeman focused on progress, Ward’s breakthrough was in seeing individuals and not just competing groups. It was this insight that has given \textit{Ward’s History} its long shelf life.

Reception of the history was generally positive. The state historian, Ruth Blair, praised the work, eliciting a gracious response from Ward.\textsuperscript{90} Reactions across the state were also positive, and the history was referenced by many later historians, probably due to Ward’s attention to stories and culture besides facts, dates, and prominent citizens.\textsuperscript{91}

Reaction within Coffee County was mixed; the history had its opponents and may have

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 157-158.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 221-227.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 55-59, 72-77, 128-132, 136-143, 166-167.
\textsuperscript{90} Warren P. Ward to Ruth Blair, 24 January 1931, in Coffee Co.—History, File II, Public Reference Service, Georgia Archives Collection, RG 4-2-46, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.
\textsuperscript{91} Beyond histories specifically concerning Coffee County and the Civil War, Ward has been quoted in Frank Owsley, \textit{Plain Folk of the Old South} (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1949), 118, 125; Wetherington, \textit{Wiregrass Georgia}, 6; and John G. Crowley, \textit{Primitive Baptists of the Wiregrass South, 1815 to Present} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 94.
opened up Ward for political challengers. In 1932, Coffee County residents fired Warren P. Ward as county ordinary, a position he had held continuously since 1904.92

With his main source of income gone, Ward eventually made some money by writing a regular column for the *Coffee County Progress*. Most of his columns dealt with history, and some discussed the anti-Confederate faction more explicitly than his history.93 Although some columns focused on current events, Ward’s column stuck with historical items, some of which were pulled directly from his county history. The column ran regularly in the *Progress* until Ward’s death in 1936.94 As Ward passed away, new political divisions were forming across Coffee County, but they no longer fell along the lines of geography or party. These new factions tended to separate town and countryside, and began with controversy over one man: Eugene Talmadge.

**New Divisions and New Challenges**

The 1930s and 1940s saw the most turbulence in Georgia politics since the passing of the Populists. The key difference this time was that divisions were fought within the Democratic Party and centered on personalities. Eugene Talmadge made a name for himself first as agricultural commissioner and then as governor. While Talmadge strong-armed opponents and used paramilitary force to accomplish his goals, he appealed to many farmers in Georgia who worked as hard as ever but fell short every year. The Great Depression sparked an enormous amount of discontent in politics and Talmadge found no shortage of enemies to fight. After being elected to a third term, he

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92 *Coffee County Progress*, 25 February 1932. Of the three candidates for ordinary, Ward got the least number of votes and only won a plurality in the West Green District.

93 *Coffee County Progress*, 24 May 1934, 6 June 1935, 17 October 1935.

94 *Coffee County Progress*, 10 December 1936.
purged the University System of Georgia of professors whom he charged were elitist and promoted racial equality. When Talmadge also released members of the Board of Regents who opposed him, the University of Georgia lost accreditation. The growing anti-Talmadge faction accused “Gene” of being another dictator and called on Georgians to stop him.  

Between the troubles with the university system and Talmadge’s other controversies, anti-Talmadge candidate Ellis Arnall was elected governor in 1942. One county that went for Arnall was Coffee, but the only district that Arnall won was Douglas—the site of South Georgia College. All of Coffee’s rural districts voted overwhelmingly for “Gene.” Arnall’s record during his four years as governor included reform of Georgia’s brutal penal system and extension of the vote to 18-year olds. His term was plagued with some controversy, however, when the Supreme Court struck down the white-only primary which had formed the basis of white unity in the county and state for forty years. Arnall was also not allowed to serve two consecutive terms according to Georgia law, a restriction that did not apply to Eugene Talmadge, who threw his hat into the 1946 race for governor.

Talmadge ran a blatantly white supremacist campaign, declaring that he would restore the white primary and prevent African-Americans from voting. He also distanced himself from his previous austerity, pledging more government services than the Arnall

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96 *Coffee County Progress*, 10 September 1942.
administration. Within Coffee County, returning servicemen formed a group to support Talmadge, and ex-GIs were among his strongest supporters. In the charged political climate, African-Americans were purged from Coffee’s voter lists, preventing them from participating in the election. The election was plagued by other irregularities; a tabulation of how Coffee’s districts voted was not available until a week after the election, a surprise considering that Talmadge (supposedly) won all of them by large majorities.

Talmadge died before taking office, however, and three men claimed to be the rightful governor, including Eugene’s son Herman. When Georgia’s Supreme Court decided that the man elected Lieutenant Governor, M. E. Thompson, should act as governor until an election could be called, Herman withdrew. In 1948, however, Herman campaigned against Thompson, beginning his campaign at the new Douglas Airport. Two months later, Talmadge won Coffee County without the extreme irregularities that had characterized the previous election. Divisions remained in Coffee County, but the Talmadge faction carefully courted support among all groups, except African-Americans. In 1953, Talmadge was invited to dedicate the new Coffee County hospital in Douglas, and by Coffee’s centennial year, he was supported by most of the county’s politicians.

As Coffee County’s centennial year began, political unity within the county now looked possible for the first time since Eugene Talmadge stepped into Georgia politics. When it came to history, however, divisions remained. Two strains of thinking about the

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98 Coffee County Progress, 4-11 July 1946.
100 Coffee County Progress, 18-25 July 1946.
101 Coffee County Progress, 8 July 1948.
102 Coffee County Progress, 9 September 1948.
103 Coffee County Progress, 15 October 1953.
past were typical: one viewed Coffee’s history as an upward assent of progress, while the other view praised individual pioneers. The planners of Coffee’s centennial celebration had a difficult task—which view of Coffee’s history should be celebrated? Or was it indeed possible to serve two masters?
CHAPTER TWO: PROGRESSIVES

As Coffee County prepared to celebrate its centennial, an advertisement in the Progress urged caution: “Memories are tricky things. We always remember the best of the ‘good old days’ and forget the worst.” Not surprisingly, the organization behind the advertisement was the Satilla Rural Electric Membership Incorporation, an organization based in nearby Alma, Georgia. The promoters of rural electrification warned that time had added “nostalgic pleasantness” to memories of life without electricity, but declared that “progress toward [a] better life” had come with the extension of power to the farm. ¹

The idea that the present was an improvement over the past was widely held among many in Coffee County. It could be found in the name of the Coffee County Progress. Souvenir books for the coming centennial celebration encouraged visitors to consider “Progressive Coffee County,” and an industrial promotion booklet published around the same time listed “Some of the Progressive Facts About Douglas and Coffee County.” Even Warren P. Ward, who was ever skeptical about the cult of progress, paid tribute to it in his title page: “A story dealing with the past and present of Coffee County...ending up with the spirit of progress, which is evident in better schools, and a more intelligent civilization.”²

The progressives of Coffee had been part of the county since the late nineteenth century, but it must be understood that their idea of “progress” did not mean left-leaning politics. Indeed, by the early 1960s many counties in Georgia defined “progressivism” as

¹ Advertisement, Coffee County Progress, 29 April 1954.
² Warren P. Ward, Ward’s History of Coffee County (Atlanta: Foote and Davies, 1930; Reprint, Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 2001), Title page.
becoming more prosperous and independent of government aid.\(^3\) While the fear of government aid was not paramount in 1954, those who boosted “Progressive Coffee County” saw a community that was constantly increasing in wealth and jobs with a better life for all concerned. For progressives, the past was a success story where the end was always better than the beginning.

The realities of Coffee’s economic development did not match the rosy history painted by the county’s progressives, however. Politics in the county was violent and unstable—hardly fit for the growth of business. Yet politics was just one of many factors that thwarted the progress of the county. The most lasting of Coffee’s troubles was its isolation—Douglas was over 90 miles from Brunswick, the nearest port, and over 100 miles from Savannah and Atlanta. Douglas was not located on any navigable stream, and the roads that led to it at the time of the Civil War were primitive and poor. Railroads were the obvious solution, but when the rails first arrived, they bypassed Douglas completely. It would take nearly a quarter-century before any railroad serviced the courthouse town, and even then those lines were often in financial trouble.

The railroads sparked numerous changes in the local economy, beginning with a rapid expansion in the timber industry. While this expansion appeared beneficial at first, it eventually proved to be an economic and ecologic disaster. Timber sold at depressed prices while the destruction of Coffee’s forests undermined the county’s small, self-sufficient farmers. With vast acres of cleared land to be had on the cheap, cotton farmers moved into Coffee but were forced to utilize expensive fertilizers to produce a crop. The

roller coaster of cotton prices dragged many into never-ending cycles of debt. As the First World War disrupted cotton prices and the threat of the boll weevil loomed over the county, many turned to growing bright-leaf tobacco. Their hopes of growing a more profitable market crop failed, however, as the weed proved no kinder than the lint.

While the countryside was sliding into tenancy and debt, Douglas experienced a brief boom in the 1920s after securing a place on the Dixie Highway. Relying on the northern tourist migration to Florida, the hospitality industry thrived, but a series of events in 1926, including a lynching, washed away Coffee’s road to progress.

Government intervention in the New Deal and the Second World War produced mixed results at best, but after the war, U.S. 441 was extended into Douglas, reducing the county’s isolation and aiding the growth of industry. By 1954, Coffee County had indeed made progress, but it had never been the constant upward slope as painted by those who subscribed to a “progressive” view of Coffee’s history.

An Inland Island

Of the six counties created by Georgia’s legislature in 1854, Coffee County was by far the largest. Its 1046 square miles was double the size of Charlton, the next largest. Save for Fannin County in Georgia’s mountains, the remaining three counties formed in 1854 (Chattahoochee, Clay, and Calhoun) were all located in southwestern Georgia and were less than 300 square miles—all could have easily fit into Coffee’s territory. The differences in size between these southwestern counties and Coffee lay in the differences of economy and population. Southwestern Georgia was rapidly being absorbed by

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Georgia’s plantation (or black) belt, and the economies of the three were benefitted by a “golden age” in Georgia agriculture. Cotton was king.5

Yet Coffee County refused to be a vassal of the fleece. While the northernmost militia districts fell under the sway of cotton’s kingdom, most of Coffee’s vast territory was covered by pine forests. The soil of these “pine barrens” was too poor to grow cotton profitably and those who did grow it did so as a supplement to other crops. The yeoman farmers of the backwoods prided themselves on being self-sufficient, even though others considered the wiregrass region to be the poorest of Georgia.6

The region was not poor to those who inhabited it, however. Game in forests supplemented a diverse diet, and by practicing “safety-first” agriculture (growing food rather than cash crops), backwoods families eked out a living without needing to trade or bargain unless it was advantageous. This is not to say that Coffee’s population was absolutely cut off from markets and trading, but the isolation of the county limited regular trading. Those who lived on the Ocmulgee could take a steamboat to the coast, but others either had to float down a pole-boat on the Satilla River or hike through miles of poor, barely passable roads to get to markets. Before the Civil War, Coffee County was in the center of a vast inland island—an island isolated from the rest of Georgia by poor transportation and characterized by its absence from the state’s cotton economy.7

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The Civil War disrupted this inland island and seriously impoverished Coffee. Wounded and injured soldiers were less able to take care of their households, and freed slaves represented another loss of labor. The changes wrought by the war, however, did not alter the overall economic pattern of isolated farms amid a vast forest. The war did change the minds of some of the forests’ citizens, though, many of whom had spent four years witnessing the benefits of plantation agriculture and northern industry. Some who returned home vowed to transform their region. Few imagined the speed and extent of the transformation that would overtake wiregrass Georgia.8

**Ticket to Ride**

In 1869, the Brunswick and Albany Railroad finally resumed laying down track. Although the railroad began construction in the antebellum, the B&A had halted during the war, its western terminus languishing 110 miles east of its destination. During the tumult of Reconstruction the railroad secured enough capital to begin again, and in 1871 the line reached Albany.9 The railroad crossed through southern Coffee County, setting in motion many changes in the landscape politically and economically. As people flocked to the railroad towns of Pearson and Willacoochee, the timber industry swarmed around the railroad tracks. Demand for Georgia timber was high as shattered southern cities rebuilt, settlers moved out into the treeless Great Plains, and foreign orders backlogged by the wartime blockade were filled. To meet this demand, trees were first cut near streams and rivers to be floated down to the nearest saw mill or market. The railroad

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altered patterns of timber cutting since it was no longer necessary to have access to a
creek or wait for the water level to rise sufficiently to float timber downstream.\textsuperscript{10} A
deforestation map from the 1880 Census showed the impact of the B&A. Two areas of
Coffee County were colored to indicate major timber clearing: northern Coffee along the
Ocmulgee where timber was floated, and a straight line across southern Coffee—the area
crossed by the Brunswick and Albany Railroad.\textsuperscript{11}

Coffee’s pines also provided sap which was distilled into turpentine. Distilleries
were established in patterns similar to the timber industry: extreme northern Coffee along
the Ocmulgee, and southern Coffee along the railroad. Turpentine work was stigmatized,
however, and most native whites refused to do work they considered only fit for blacks.\textsuperscript{12}
Most still operators were not native to Coffee anyway, having fled North Carolina’s
declining industry. Unable to find many Georgians willing to work at the stills, they
imported hundreds of African-American turpentine workers from their home state. The
effect on the county’s African-American population was dramatic: by 1900, blacks
(including a large number from North Carolina) made up nearly forty-one percent of
Coffee’s population, and made up a majority of people in Pearson and Willacoochee.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Wetherington, \textit{New South Comes to Wiregrass}, 99-107.
\textsuperscript{11} Charles S. Sargent, \textit{Tenth Census: Report on the Forests of North America (Exclusive of Mexico)}
\textsuperscript{12} Wetherington, \textit{New South Comes to Wiregrass}, 116-122.
\textsuperscript{13} All districts, Coffee County, Georgia, Census of Population, Twelfth Census of the United States,
1900 (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623 roll 189), Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29,
digitized by Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center and uploaded 31 May 2010 to Internet Archive at: http://archive.org/details/12thcensusofpopu189unit.
The incredible growth that characterized northern and southern Coffee County skipped the county core around Douglas.\textsuperscript{14} Railroads could clearly make or break a city, and the citizens of Douglas set about getting one. In 1895, workers completed a small lumber-hauling railroad from the B&A station of McDonald’s Mill to Douglas, finally connecting the county seat to the larger rail network. The completion of the McDonald and Douglas railroad baptized Douglas into the era of the New South—the city was literally “born again” as it incorporated within months of the railroad’s arrival.\textsuperscript{15} To the delight of Douglasites, a second railroad, the Waycross Air Line, extended its tracks to the small milling community of Nicholls and eventually to Douglas, reaching the county seat by 1898. The line was later extended to the west, bringing new people and prosperity to the county’s core area.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Disease, Deforestation, Depression}

This rapid growth of towns and industry in Coffee County had a darker side, however. Among the earliest problems was epidemic disease. Prior to the railroads, Coffee’s forests acted as a barrier to travelers and their diseases. With the removal of this barrier, mass infections swept the county. They were aided by the poor sanitation prevalent in Coffee’s booming communities, all of which were inexperienced in dealing with so many people. Livestock roamed the streets freely while manure and garbage piled up near homes and stores.\textsuperscript{17} In Douglas, work began on a sewer in 1905, but ten years later the \textit{Coffee County Progress} could still complain about cattle roaming the city.

\textsuperscript{15} For cities being “born again,” see Wetherington, \textit{New South Comes to Wiregrass}, 45.
\textsuperscript{17} Wetherington, \textit{New South Comes to Wiregrass}, 254-259.
streets. Poor sanitation and health codes would continue to plague both city and county, climaxsed by the 1918 influenza epidemic which savaged even Gaskin Avenue—the best neighborhood in Douglas.

Epidemics would arrive suddenly and leave quickly, but deforestation was a slower-moving catastrophe. The first troubles began in the 1870s when an economic depression lowered timber prices. Those who relied on timber increased their production to keep up. When the market improved in the 1880s, however, smaller operatives had already cut through the most accessible stands and sold the lumber at depressed prices. The only suitable timber remaining was in the backwoods, far from railroads and streams—areas too costly for small entrepreneurs to reach. Large sawmills soon stepped in with steam powered mills and tram roads. Another depression in 1893 eliminated all but the most efficient of them. One such sawmill was the Southern Pine Company at Nicholls in eastern Coffee. In April, 1900, the company cut a record 181,467 feet of lumber in thirteen hours. Such efficiency was good for mills, but bad for the timber supply as a report from 1900 indicated that only a third of Coffee’s forests were left.

Hundreds of cotton farmers from Georgia’s cotton belt moved into Coffee’s deforested areas. Many of these farmers (white and black) hoped to escape the debt and tenancy which plagued most of the old cotton-producing counties. While many succeeded in owning their own farms (by 1900, Coffee had one of the highest farm ownership rates

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18 Trowell, “Douglas Before Memory,” 63; Coffee County Progress, 7 and 28 April 1915.
19 Gaskin Avenue Book Committee, From Graveyard Road to Silk Stocking Row (Douglas, GA: Gaskin Avenue Committee, 2010), 21.
20 Wetherington, New South Comes to Wiregrass, 122-138.
21 Gaskin Ave., Graveyard Road to Silk Stocking Row, 37; Georgia Department of Agriculture, Georgia: Historical and Industrial (Atlanta: Franklin Printing for Geo. W. Harrison, State Printer, 1901), 609.
in Georgia for black or white), the fluctuating nature of cotton prices made escaping debt a slim prospect. Coffee’s growing reliance on cotton and timber harvests tied the county’s economy to an unstable and depressed market. No longer self-sufficient farmers, most of the county’s populace found itself cornered by debt and depression with much of the county’s wealth wasted. Warren P. Ward reflected that deforestation “was indeed a great destruction of the wealth of Coffee County...We have lost the timber and will never see the like again.”

“The Spirit of Progress”

As Coffee County entered its second fifty years, boosters readily claimed that no other county in South Georgia had made as much progress. Impenetrable forests had been crossed, hamlets had grown into towns overnight, and industry had roared among the pines. Yet the very pines that made industry possible were rapidly disappearing. The railroads that crossed the wiregrass were never on a sure financial footing. Towns that had sprung up were under constant threat of disappearing should industry dry up and railroads fail. What could be the solution to these many problems?

The answer given by many was more progress. Yet it was to be a different kind of progress. To the challenge of unstable railroads, these progressives sought for more—Coffee would thus have an adequate railroad if one ever faltered. While the pine forests could not be replaced overnight, progressives felt that the newly cleared fields could support a rich assortment of agricultural products besides cotton. To top it off, Coffee’s

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schoolchildren needed a first-rate education with an emphasis on agricultural subjects. The record of these new progressives was mixed: in transportation and education, they substantially succeeded, but in agriculture, their efforts fell flat.

As the Waycross Air Line railroad reached Douglas in 1898 (days after the courthouse burned), the city’s first railroad, the McDonald and Douglas, closed down, having outlived its main purpose as a lumber road. Its tracks were taken up and Coffee’s seat was once again dependent on a single railroad, an unnerving situation. Plans to expand new rails out to other settlements began the following year. After many challenges, a northern railroad was completed to in 1902, and extended to Barrow’s Bluff on the Ocmulgee two years later. Douglas merchants then pushed southward, aiming first for Willacoochee in southwestern Coffee, and then Nashville, the seat of Berrien County. The name of the railroad went through several transformations, each of them the names of steadily farther cities the railroad was expected to reach. The final product was the Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway. The DA&G, however, had limited resources and could not even provide the citizens of Nashville a proper rail depot.

The position of Douglas changed dramatically in 1906 when Virginian John Skelton Williams bought up several short-line railroads in eastern Georgia. His plan was to connect them into a single railroad stretching from Augusta, Georgia, to Madison, Florida. The Douglas, Augusta & Gulf became the core of the new Georgia & Florida Railway, which selected Douglas to house its shops. The railroad also established a temporary headquarters in Coffee’s seat—an economic windfall for the growing town.

Unfortunately, the railroad was plagued by poor timing, destructive weather, financial insecurity, fierce competition, and relative obscurity. Even with these problems, Coffee’s progressives had been successful in expanding transportation options for Douglas, and the Georgia and Florida Railway proved a valuable asset.\textsuperscript{25}

The year 1906 also marked an advance for education in Coffee County when Douglas was selected as the site of the Eleventh District Agricultural and Mechanical College. The goal was to establish agricultural institutions in each of Georgia’s Congressional districts, and Douglas competed with other towns within the eleventh district. In the end, Coffee donated the most ($52,000, 300 acres, and free light and water to the college for ten years) and Douglas was selected as the site of the new college. Three buildings—a boys’ dormitory, a girls’ dormitory, and an academic building—went up and classes began in 1907. Although billed as a college, the Eleventh District A&M was more of a high school with subjects like agricultural methods and industrial training replacing foreign languages.\textsuperscript{26}

When it came to local public schools, only one was organized after the Civil War, and it was not until the adoption of Georgia’s 1877 Constitution that local school boards were mandated for every county. By the end of the nineteenth century, a multitude of small one-room schools had been established throughout the countryside. As Coffee’s progressives pushed for newer and better schools, they opted for consolidation since equipping one larger school was easier than providing for several.\textsuperscript{27} The process

\textsuperscript{25} Grant, \textit{Rails Through the Wiregrass}, 23-65.
produced some success; an official sent to investigate the condition of Coffee’s schools in 1906 could report that at least one school south of Douglas was “the best equipped rural schoolhouse I have yet seen in South Georgia.”28 The investigator did not see all of Coffee’s schools, however, which numbered fifty-six white and twenty colored in 1908. Schools varied widely according to community mores, resources, and training. Attempts by outsiders to reform conditions were often resisted, since some farmers saw little value in their children attending school while the harvest was tight.29 Despite the opposition, schools consolidation continued.

The most notable failure of Coffee’s progressives at the start of the twentieth century was in agriculture. Georgia and Florida Railway officials promoted the wiregrass, but failed to get farmers to diversity their crops.30 A&M instructors also failed in their goal to diversify Coffee’s crops, and King Cotton tightened his grip over the county during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1880, just as deforestation had begun to make an impact and cleared lands were being opened for farming, only 1,825 acres were devoted to cotton. Ten years later, the number of acres planted in cotton had increased four-fold to 7,357. In 1900 as Douglas experienced rapid growth, the acres in cotton had more than doubled to 18,024. Three years after the Eleventh District A&M had opened its doors, 26,596 acres of cotton were growing in Coffee County with no signs of slowing. As the number of acres growing cotton went up, farm ownership went

30 Grant, Rails Through the Wiregrass, 102-124.
down; low cotton prices forced many into tenancy and debt. In 1890, 88.5% of Coffee’s farmers owned the farm they worked on, but by 1910 only 56.9% were owners.31

This increasing dependence on cotton had a reckoning, however, and it arrived swiftly during the summer of 1914. A large cotton crop had been produced by farmers across the South, and for once a large demand for the fleece produced high prices for cotton. Just as farmers began to hope for extra income, the First World War erupted in Europe and cotton prices crashed. The economic destruction spared no one in Coffee County as business and prosperity came to a screeching halt. The Coffee County Progress, less than a year old, halved the number of pages it ran as advertisers and subscribers could no longer pay up. The newspaper preached strict economy while others frantically cast about for government aid to cotton farmers.32 The situation worsened four years later when the boll weevil arrived in Coffee County, further reducing the chances of cashing-in on cotton. Yet the disruption of the First World War had far greater effect in getting Coffee’s farmers to change their ways. While Coffee County, Alabama, raised a monument to the boll weevil, no such monument challenged the lone Confederate soldier standing sentinel in Douglas.33 A new crop did arrive in Coffee County, Georgia, however, to challenge King Cotton.

Tobacco Roads

Even as the editor of the *Progress* worried about the cotton crisis, some of the first commercial tobacco was being grown at Coffee’s eastern end. In 1913 some South Carolina farmers who had relocated to Nicholls grew tobacco and sold it at market in their home state. The popularity of the crop grew steadily, and by 1916, Nicholls constructed its first tobacco warehouse, one of the first in Georgia. The next year Douglas established its own warehouse and tobacco market, finally beating out Nicholls when the latter’s market collapsed due to competition between the first warehouse and a second warehouse.34 Douglas fared much better and by 1926 possessed four tobacco warehouses and was consistently the largest tobacco market in the state.35 The *Progress* editorialized on tobacco’s advantages: “No criticism can be made of growing cotton...but it is not in a class with tobacco as a safe proposition year in and year out.”36

The early 1920s saw some prosperity come to Coffee County from the growing and marketing of tobacco, but the leaf was not the only engine of prosperity. The other factor leading to the county’s relative prosperity was the growing popularity of automobiles and Coffee’s advantageous position on the first major North-South auto trail: the Dixie Highway. The growing popularity of automobiles (now cheaper due to mass production) accelerated an appeal for better roads. With the construction of the transcontinental Lincoln Highway, entrepreneurs like Carl Fisher and W.S. Gilbreath advocated a good route from north to south, largely to facilitate the arrival of tourists at

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34 Gaskin Ave., *Graveyard Road to Silk Stocking Row*, 24-27.
35 *Coffee County Progress*, 22 July 1926.
36 “Tobacco the Money Crop,” *Coffee County Progress*, 26 August 1926.
resorts in Florida. Businessmen in Douglas realized that the potential for a new highway was marvelous, especially if traffic could be diverted into Coffee County. Douglas businesses began promoting a “shortcut” from Atlanta to Jacksonville, Florida, by travelling from Macon via Fitzgerald, Ocilla, Douglas, and Waycross rather than proceeding south via Tifton, Valdosta, and Madison, Florida.

Competition for the new route was fierce. Valdosta declared that it had no intention of letting the future route go elsewhere, to which the Progress responded: “Well, what is Douglas going to do about it?” As planners of the highway sent out scout cars to determine the best route, county chain gangs accelerated their work on the roads. The “short route” faced not only competition from cities to the west, but also to the east: a route following Milledgeville, Sandersville, Louisville, and Sylvania, to Savannah also competed for the highway, advertising their route as the most historically interesting. The Progress mocked this attempt to appeal to history:

Most tourists coming south do not stop in Jacksonville, but go far into the interior of Florida and it is our belief that they want to reach their destination just as quickly as possible and when they have ridden several hundred miles they do not want to make a careful inspection of a lot of small Georgia towns though they be of ‘historical interest’ to Georgians.

Besides, the Progress wrote, the selection of the “short route” would mean the route would pass through “a progressive county that has made more progress in the last ten years than most sections of Georgia have made since the civil war [sic].”

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38 “Scout Car Will Make Trip Over Highway,” Coffee County Progress, 2 December 1914.
39 Coffee County Progress, 9 December 1914.
40 Coffee County Progress, 23 December 1915.
41 Coffee County Progress, 19 January 1916, first column.
After two scouting trips, a year of indecision, and fierce competition from towns desperate to be on the highway, the Dixie Highway Association decided to not decide: three different routes through southern Georgia were included as part of the Dixie Highway. The eastern route went through Milledgeville and Savannah, the western route went through Americus, Albany, and Thomasville, and the central route took the “short route” through Fitzgerald, Ocilla, Douglas, and Waycross. Finding Douglas on the central route, the *Progress* admitted that it was better to have at least one route of the highway pass through Douglas than no road at all.\(^4^2\)

The multiplicity of routes confused many tourists, however, especially since the road was often re-routed. By 1924, most of the old eastern route became part of the Carolina division, the old central route with Douglas became part of the eastern division, and a rejuvenated route through Tifton and Valdosta became the new central division.\(^4^3\) The road lacked consistency even in Coffee County; east of Douglas the highway variously had destinations of McDonald, Talmo, Nicholls, or Alma before reaching Waycross. The constant reworking of the highway led Douglas businessmen to be ever vigilant of possible changes.\(^4^4\) Even when no clear threat existed to the central route, the *Progress* chastised the people of Douglas for not taking better care of tourists passing through. The newspaper suggested that perhaps more people would pay attention to

\(^{42}\) *Coffee County Progress*, 29 March 1916.


\(^{44}\) *Coffee County Progress*, 23 February 1922.
southern Georgia if they could talk to locals face to face. Otherwise, tourists would simply view the scenery and make their way to Florida without any lasting impression.45

**Allie Waters and the Paradoxes of Progress**

Whether anyone in Douglas took the advice of the *Progress* is impossible to know, but at least one native of Coffee left an account of the bizarre ways progress touched the daily lives of individuals. In 1909, Allie Waters was born in eastern Coffee near Nicholls, just as the lumber and turpentine industries were in decline. Her father, Ezra Waters, worked at a sawmill when she was born, but as the last few timber stands met their demise he turned to sharecropping to support the family. Nicholls was the first part of Coffee to embrace tobacco, and many there hoped to break free of the tightening noose of cotton. As it turned out, tobacco growing was long, hard, and even dangerous during the curing process. Nor were the financial returns as good as hoped—while the Waters never faced starvation, lean times were always in sight.46

Allie attended schools that increased in quality as she grew older, but problems in transportation and attitudes remained. The small, one-room school that Waters attended was inaccessible to many, while others did not think highly of “book ‘larnin,’” and kept their children home. Dropouts were common, but leaving “was not considered a tragedy nor was that person considered doomed.”47 Some of Allie’s better memories came during her time at Nicholls High School. One of her teachers (or “professors”) was Elisha Marion Thompson, who taught history, civics, and business arithmetic before becoming

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45 Coffee County Progress, 12 April 1923.
47 Ibid., 98.
the school principal. He worked hard to improve the school’s miniscule library, and while he encouraged students to take risks, he never tolerated stupidity. During Allie’s final year, a couple of students tried to pull a prank on another student; Thompson found out and announced “that the whole graduating class would get unsigned diplomas. You can bet that everyone walked a virtuous path to graduation, and nothing more came of it.”

While education had its ups and downs, farming was filled with troubles for the Waters. Allie’s mother was a cousin of Warren P. Ward, both descended from the county’s first settlers. Yet the Waters family was among the native families of Coffee plunged into debt and tenancy by the county’s reliance on market crops. They were forced to continuously migrate around eastern Coffee and neighboring Bacon County, and were among the hundreds of tenant farmers whose population was growing at an alarming rate. Even when a good crop came in, markets could easily dampen the mood. While sharecropping on a farm between Nicholls and Alma in eastern Coffee, the Waters collected an excellent amount of tobacco, but the market opened at a dismal price. One night during market time, Allie woke up to find the barn of tobacco going up in flames. She later recalled, “…I somehow came to the conclusion in my own mind that there were lots of suspicious fires and farmers were collecting insurance money for burned barns of tobacco even though they were getting nothing from the tobacco companies.”

After Allie graduated from Nicholls School in 1926, she travelled more widely outside Coffee County as a student and teacher. She briefly returned to Coffee to attend South Georgia College where she was when her father died. After leaving again to teach,

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49 Ibid., 81.
she engaged Russ Cassel, and in 1930 the couple were wed by Warren P. Ward at Ward’s home in Douglas. The Cassels then settled in Northern New Jersey, never to return to Coffee County to live.\(^5^0\) The childhood of Allie Waters Cassel demonstrates that the “progress” Coffee experienced in the 1910s and 1920s was mixed. Tobacco might not have the sudden price swings like cotton, but it was far from the dream crop Ezra Waters had hoped. Increased educational opportunities certainly helped the county, but Coffee’s reliance on agriculture and tourism forced many of its educated population to leave.

**Road to Depression**

The Great Depression did not suddenly come to Coffee County with the Stock Market Crash of 1929, but was rather a lengthy road that more and more of Coffee’s residents found themselves travelling. Among the first to get on were farmers. While tobacco had become a major crop almost overnight, Warren P. Ward wryly observed that “so long as the farmers can grow a half crop of cotton they will continue to grow it.”\(^5^1\) This devotion to cotton remained strong in Coffee, even as it and other counties were plagued by the boll weevil. Tobacco was more profitable, but it too declined as the 1920s concluded. Tenancy in Coffee continued to increase; tenants made up 56.3 percent of farmers in 1920, and although that number dipped to 52.6 percent in 1925, it jumped up to 61 percent by 1930.\(^5^2\)

As the shadow of depression fell across the countryside, Douglas still basked in the sunlight of prosperity, boosted by the Florida tourist trade. Clouds were on the

\(^{50}\) Cassel, *Wiregrass Allie*, 110-170, dust jacket.

\(^{51}\) Ward, *Coffee County*, 249.

horizon, however. The number of named highways in the United States had become unwieldy, and in 1925 state highway officials from around the country began questioning whether a system of numbered routes might be more advantageous than the complex system of named routes. A nationwide system of numbered routes was tentatively planned. North-south roads would receive odd numbers, increasing from east to west, while east-west roads would be even numbered, increasing in value from north to south.53 While the new system had great merit in abolishing the confusion associated with named highways (especially the Dixie Highway), Douglas residents were surely horrified to learn that no “United States Highway” was planned to run through Douglas. The zigzag nature of the Dixie Highway could not hold up under the new system.

Douglas, along with communities nationwide, fought to regain prominence and hoped for a change before the system was approved. The 4 February 1926 issue of the Progress ran a blank front page except for an editorial that urged Coffee’s citizens to “Boom or Bust!” by contributing to a Chamber of Commerce. The response was enthusiastic enough, but bad omens hung in the air. James M. Freeman, Annie Ward (wife of Warren P. Ward), and Calvin A. Ward (first mayor of Douglas) all died in quick succession.54 A pastor at the First Baptist Church warned that the people of Douglas had neglected spirituality.55 The new Chamber of Commerce also appeared worried about this, placing “Spiritual Activity” as the first of eighteen goals in a “five-year” plan to

54 Coffee County Progress, 4 February 1926, 22 April 1926.
55 Coffee County Progress, 14 January 1926.
grow the business activity of the city. The goals were laudable, but would be unraveled in little more than a month by an unfortunate series of events beyond anyone’s control.

On the evening of 29 August 1926, a mob dragged accused murderer Dave Wright from the Coffee County jail, tied him up to a tree near Nicholls, and fired fifty or more shots into him, pulverizing his body from the waist up. Coffee County was no stranger to lynching; eight had perished at the hands of lynch mobs within Coffee since 1880. But the lynching of Dave Wright was different—he was white. No other whites had been lynched in Georgia since Leo Frank, a Jew, had been killed near Atlanta over a decade earlier. While many newspapers in Georgia softly condemned the lynching of African-Americans, the response to the Wright lynching was deafening. Newspapers across Georgia and the country blasted Coffee County as a den of crime and called for the conviction of the guilty parties. The county courts obliged by trying the mob and returning guilty verdicts—the first successful conviction of a lynch mob in Georgia.

It was too late for Coffee’s image, however. The county had long struggled to shed its image of a high-crime county, but even with the quick convictions the Wright lynching seemed to confirm the preconceived notions that many already had about Coffee. The lynching likely scared away tourists, many of whom could no longer feel

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56 Coffee County Progress, 19 August 1926.
57 Coffee County Progress, 2 September 1926.
59 Coffee County Progress, 2-15 September 1926.
60 Brundage, Lynching, 31-32, 95, 241-242. Pages 241-242 give a longer description of the lynching, but unfortunately confuse Douglas (the city) and Douglas County, although Coffee County is mentioned at the beginning. Brundage theorizes that the mob that killed Wright was convicted mainly because it was a disreputable white mob that killed a white man whose crime “had created little sensation in the community.” (p. 241) I argue here that the push for prosecution and conviction resulted from Douglas trying to maintain its image and place on a nationally-known highway.
safe by just being white. The veneer of prosperity brought by the Florida tourist trade began to rub off. Two more calamities finished the job: the collapse of the Florida real estate boom and a massive hurricane that demolished several tourist destinations in Miami and Pensacola.61 The final plan for numbered U.S. Highways was approved less than two months later, and in a most bitter irony, the progress of the nation’s highways left Douglas on an island surrounded by better-organized routes.62 The artificial prosperity that had buoyed the city up was now gone, and the storm of Depression broke upon Coffee’s capital city.

**New Deal, New War, New Direction**

The Depression hit Coffee County hard, but the next thirty years saw a transformation of Coffee’s economy. The first force acting on Coffee was a group of programs and agencies known collectively as the New Deal. The Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration determined that the South was the nation’s “number one economic program,” and in spite of interference from Governor Eugene Talmadge, most New Deal programs were received with enthusiasm (if not success) in Georgia and Coffee County. The National Recovery Agency (NRA) was the first to set up camp in Douglas and sought to stabilize falling prices.63 The Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) set up a camp near Douglas in 1934, and before the year was out the camp had built 250 miles of fire breaks in Coffee County. The CCC also built fire towers so that forest fires (common in

61 Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 108.
62 Weingroff, “From Names to Numbers.”
wiregrass Georgia) could be spotted early and put out. Of far more import to Coffee County’s farmers was the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), which hoped raise the prices of crops by plowing up excess cotton or slaughtering extra livestock. The AAA’s policies failed to produce much success for farmers before the Supreme Court ruled the AAA and NRA unconstitutional in 1935.

Also operating in Coffee County was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which conducted an audit of the county’s financial situation. Much of the report was grim. Coffee’s courthouse, built in 1899, was in disrepair, had offices too small to function well, and lacked overall cleanliness. The county’s roads were in good shape with fifty-two miles of paved roads and about 1500 miles of dirt roads; road building, however, had been very expensive. Nor could Coffee County afford it:

The financial condition of this county is not so good as compared with other counties. They do not have any bonds indebtedness but owe about $90,000 in outstanding warrants. The interest on these warrants runs into several thousand dollars. They are always pressed for funds and have to borrow money whenever they can get it.

While New Deal programs like the WPA were excellent in documenting the conditions of Coffee County, they did little to change them, however. Nor did Federal programs benefit everyone in every area equally; Douglas and Coffee County were not described in the WPA’s guide to Georgia, even though nearby Fitzgerald, Baxley, Tifton,

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64 Coffee County Progress, 25 April 1935.
and Waycross all received attention. Consequently, many in Coffee would look back on the New Deal as an exercise in futility. Ruby Peterson Tanner would recall that the WPA had been "one of the government’s brilliant ideas to furnish work to the unemployed and needy...It was a farce, just about like some of the emergency jobs now being created [1970s], and about as productive."  

While New Deal projects did little to change Coffee in the short term, they made a difference when viewed cumulatively with the effects produced by the Second World War. As the United States began moving toward a defensive posture in 1941, the government moved to establish flight training schools for the Army Air Force. South Georgia College had a small airfield, and after some lobbying and the promise of financial support, Douglas was named one of several flight training schools in the southeast, with the school at Douglas being responsible for the first part of basic flight training. Several pilots trained at the field in Douglas before war’s end, when the school and its buildings reverted to South Georgia College. The small airport was eventually turned over to the city of Douglas.

More importantly was the extension of U.S. highways into Douglas, finally ending the city’s isolation from Federal routes. U.S. 441 was extended into Douglas in 1948 and U.S. 221 was routed through Douglas in 1953. Mechanization in agriculture, coupled with a postwar boom finally brought most Coffee farmers out of the Depression,

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69 *Coffee County Progress*, 6 June 1940, 29 May 1941, 10 July 1941, 2 October 1941.

70 *Coffee County Progress*, 23 September 1948, 19 November 1953.
although many more left agriculture completely. A series of events had worked to the favor of Douglas and Coffee County, and even as the Korean War was being fought, the county invested heavily in building schools and a new hospital. Yet few could forget the nightmare of the Depression, and even as Coffee’s boosters touted progress, the horrid economic downturn that had characterized the years between 1926 and 1945 always lingered in the background.

The latest generation of Coffee’s progressives was determined not to experience a depression again. The solution to prevent another one was, as always, more progress. As Coffee County prepared for its centennial, the progressives of the community prepared to advertise the county like no other time, even if it meant some selective forgetting of past hard times.

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CHAPTER THREE: PIONEERS AND PIETY

Even as many in Coffee County prepared for a celebration of progress in 1954, there remained skeptics. They disagreed with “progressives”—those who believed that life was getting better each and every year. Instead, this opposite group, who could be termed “pioneers,” felt that the present, if anything, was inferior to the past. Progressives might list the accomplishments of Coffee County in prosperity, education, and transportation, but pioneers doubted whether all of these could be called improvements. If the county was now prosperous, it had come at the expense of hard work which the first settlers had learned in the days of their poverty. Coffee’s many schools taught more information, but the pioneers still “knew more about the essentials of life than this generation will ever learn.”¹ Perhaps the county was less isolated, but this only allowed the wealth of the county to be wasted at depressed market prices.²

This debate was not new to Coffee County, nor was it unique. Twenty years previously, a group of southerners at Vanderbilt University, the “Agrarians,” had rebuked the South for selling its agrarian birthright for a mess of industrial pottage.³ In 1950, slightly more than two-thirds of Coffee’s population still lived in the countryside, something that would have warmed the heart of any agrarian or pioneer. There was a dark cloud in the midst of this silver lining, however: Coffee’s urban population expanded

¹ Folks Huxford, Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia, Vol. 1 (Jacksonville, FL: Cooper Press, 1951), iii.
forty-three times faster than the rural population between 1940 and 1950. Nor did all this expansion come from outside Coffee County—descendants of the first settlers were increasingly urban.

What these “pioneers” feared most was not progress in and of itself, but the loss of a method and way of life they thought superior. They also deplored the loss of the individual in a society where class, civic groups, and organizations became the factors people were judged on in place of individual merit and deeds. As Coffee’s population urbanized, the pioneers pushed back, memorializing the county’s past citizens and their way of life. One of Coffee’s expatriates, Folks Huxford, devoted most of his later life to bringing the people of southern Georgia the stories of their ancestors. His series *Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia* benefitted from the growing interest in heritage in the 1950s.

Another concern of the pioneers was that of religion. In their view, progress could not solve all of society’s ills, especially since America’s communist enemies believed in progress as well. The United States had one advantage over the Soviet Union, however: the USSR was atheistic while the US Constitution provided for the “free exercise” of worship. At the beginning of the Cold War, religious revivals swept the nation, and Coffee County was not immune. While pioneers led out in emphasizing the county’s religious heritage, progressives also participated; to them, churches were like any other business or organization that benefitted the progress of the county.

Pioneers and progressives both erred, however, when they thought about the history of religion in Coffee County. While Baptists and Methodists dominated the

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church scene both in 1954 and 1854, there were stark differences in the practice of the two religions on either end of the century. While the 1950s saw a relative unity among differing churches, those same churches had often competed with one another in previous decades. While certain faith groups were viewed more favorably by the 1950s, they had often been shunned in the past. Perhaps most ironic, only a third of Coffee’s first settlers had affiliated with any church (although many more probably believed in God). The greatest growth of churches had actually come in two stages: the period between 1888 and 1908, and just after the Second World War. The greatest increases in Coffee’s churches then came not during the hardships of the pioneer era, but as a result of the chaos and confusion brought about by progress. As this chapter will reveal, the pioneer spirit and spirituality in Coffee County were both transformed by “the spirit of progress.”

**Huxford’s Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia**

“It is encouraging to see a greater interest today than ever before, on the part of the rank and file of our people in the history and genealogy and traditions of our section of the state. This augurs well. May this volume add to this interest!” So wrote Folks Huxford in his introduction to the first volume of his seminal series, *Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia*. Huxford was born in Coffee County in 1893, and lived there until he was nearly thirteen when his parents moved to Homerville in neighboring Clinch County. Huxford made his career serving as a judge, clerk, notary, and church secretary in Clinch

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County, but his experience living in two counties may have caused Huxford to view the settlement of the wiregrass as a regional phenomenon that transcended county lines.\textsuperscript{6}

After publishing a history of his own Clinch County in 1916, he was appointed by the Grand Jury as county historian in 1930 (just as Ward was for Coffee County). A new history was never published, however, although Huxford appears to have sent an updated manuscript history to the Georgia Department of Archives and History.\textsuperscript{7} In the 1940s Huxford was appointed by Brooks County to write a history. Previous attempts had failed since the original appointed historian for Brooks was unable to complete the history. Huxford stepped in and completed a history of the county which was published in 1948.\textsuperscript{8}

In writing history, Huxford paid little attention to overarching themes like progress and change, focusing instead on individual people—where they were born, who they had married, their family connections, some of their major accomplishments, and where they died. These individual histories were more than genealogy, for Huxford tried to capture more than just random details of individual lives. Instead, his goal was to tell the history of the counties he wrote about through individuals.\textsuperscript{9} In this, he was much like Warren P. Ward—a pioneer historian who emphasized individual deeds over group experiences. When Huxford began working on a much larger project that encompassed most of South Georgia, he adhered to his previous patterns.

\textsuperscript{6} Folks Huxford, \textit{History of Clinch County, Georgia} (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke, 1916), 257-258.
\textsuperscript{7} Mrs. J. E. Hays, \textit{Georgia’s Official Register, 1933-1935-1937} (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Archives and History, 1937), 530-533.
\textsuperscript{8} See Folks Huxford, \textit{The History of Brooks County, Georgia- 1858-1948} (Quitman, Georgia: Daughters of the American Revolution, Georgia State Society, Hannah Clarke Chapter, 1948).
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.; Huxford, \textit{Clinch County}, 223-306.
Although the first volume of *Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia* appeared in 1951, Huxford had been at work on the project for many years prior to its publication. His family had strongly discouraged Huxford from the project since his volumes on Clinch and Brooks Counties—although praised by many—had been financial disasters.¹⁰ Nor were finances the only challenge as very few records of pioneer living survived and many of the men (and they were nearly all men) were unable to read or write. Huxford frequently referred to the long process as “digging out” the records, a tiring “labor of love” for him. Yet he took great satisfaction in his work saying, “who would not come to venerate these old pioneers after thirty-five years association with them!”¹¹

Laboring for love was possible, but publishing for love was not. Getting a company to print several hundred pages of individual and family histories was a formidable barrier. Yet Huxford hypothesized that each pioneer he wrote about had at least a thousand descendants, and that at least three of those descendants might be willing to pay an advance subscription for the book. Having decided to rely on subscriptions from those who had ancestors in the first volume, Huxford’s gamble worked: the first volume gathered over 150 subscribers, including 23 from Atkinson and Coffee Counties. Subsequent volumes picked up more subscribers while early volumes went through numerous re-printings over the following decades.¹²

Huxford continued to work on the project, constantly adding corrections and additions to later volumes. He completed seven before he passed away. His associates

took up the remaining material he had gathered and published five more volumes, making a total of twelve. Coffee County was well covered by *Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia* with about 350 of the approximate 4800 sketches across the twelve volumes. Huxford’s series on wiregrass settlers was both symptom and catalyst for an increased awareness of the area’s pioneers. The amazing changes that transformed the region inspired many to fondly look back at the days prior to railroads and industry. In the 1970s, when Coffee managed to get approval for a state park on the road between Douglas and Nicholls, a pioneer-era settlement was built as a living museum of a lost way of life. The wiregrass pioneer response to progress (especially in Coffee County) was long-lasting.

It was also ironic, however. While people like Huxford praised the earliest settlers, they did so in a way only made possible by the fruits of progress. While Ward had relied on personal knowledge and scrapbooks for his information on individuals, Huxford’s research relied heavily on manuscript census returns which had been microfilmed by the National Archives. Extensive microfilming was also done by the Georgia Department of Archives and History, with which Huxford corresponded regularly.

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13 The numbers here are counted from a list of sketches online at: https://huxford.com/Sketch_List_Vol_1-12_List.html.


15 Folks Huxford to Ruth Blair, 18 January 1932,” County Historians Correspondence, Administration, Georgia Archive Collection, RG 4-1-6, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.

modernity to sweep earlier methods of life away. And in the end, he would not have been able to publish his research without a growing middle class of pioneer descendants, all of which had increased in wealth thanks to an ever progressing prosperity in post-Second World War Georgia. Huxford’s work benefitted from the fruits of progress in a strange symbiosis. He remained ever skeptical of modern life, however, writing in 1971 that “‘Perilous days’ are upon us and it looks like they will get worse and worse. So don’t wander away from the old ‘landmarks’ of your fathers!! Live soberly and uprightly, and don’t lose faith in God (which has ‘great recompense of reward’) or in your country for it came into existence by the will of God.”17

Country Religion

Just as Huxford deeply believed that the United States was established by the will of God, even so the wiregrass pioneers, “were all honest, God-fearing, brave, and hard-working.”18 God-fearing did not mean church-attending, however, for only a third of the wiregrass’ first settlers claimed allegiance to any church. Of that third, nearly half were Primitive Baptists, another quarter were Methodists, and the last quarter were Missionary Baptists. The tiny fraction remaining were scattered among various denominations to the point that one historian observes: “Backwoods wiseacres pretended Presbyterians and Episcopalians were some rare ‘varmint’ when asked about them.”19 Warren P. Ward felt no differently—at least as far as Presbyterians and Episcopalians were concerned. Of the twenty-two churches Ward discussed in his History of Coffee County, six were

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17 Huxford, Pioneers, Vol. 6, iv.
18 Huxford, Pioneers, Vol. 1, iii.
Methodist, five were Missionary Baptist, four were Primitive Baptist, four were not identified, two were Latter-day Saint, and one was Catholic.20

While Ward’s choice of churches may seem eclectic, all of them did have something in common: none of them were located within the city of Douglas in 1930. Although Ward was proud to live in Douglas (“no one who lives here has ever been ashamed to say, ‘My home is in Douglas, Georgia.’”21), he felt there was a distinct difference between churches in the town and churches in the countryside. Nor was Ward the only one to observe this distinction; many observers before and after him witnessed a similar divergence between urban and rural churches throughout the South.22 Perhaps Ward, who was a partisan of the pioneer view of Coffee’s history, felt that country churches carried on pioneer traditions and faith better than their urban fellows.

Many country churches were of pioneer origin. While Primitive Baptists dominated the church-going minority in southern Georgia, the area that became Coffee County in 1854 was a pocket of Methodist dominance.23 Those who subscribed to Wesleyan doctrine believed that God had given the option of salvation to each individual, and accordingly, the gospel must be preached to every person. For the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Methodism was primarily a rural, backwoods religion. As such it won

20 Ward, Coffee County, 102-116. Ward repeats Lone Hill Methodist under the title of “Lott Memorial Church,” and also repeats Midway Methodist Church. The two Latter-day Saint churches are both under the section “Mormon Church,” but Ward refers to one near Douglas and another near Axson.
21 Ibid., 301.
23 Coffee County, Georgia, Nonpopulation Census Schedules for Georgia, Social Census, 1860 (National Archives Microfilm Publication T1137 reel 24) Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29, National Archives Southeast Division, Morrow, GA.
many converts in the area that became Coffee County. Yet circuit preachers faced many challenges in the vast and isolated wiregrass, not least of which was uncertainty as to whether a congregation would show up. Shortly after Coffee had been created, a Methodist preacher called on a new church that had been established deep within the county. Upon arriving, the preacher waited all morning and several hours into the afternoon. Seeing no one, he finally left for lunch at a nearby home. He declared to the woman who fed him that the hill where he had intended to preach was the most lonesome he had ever seen. Later on a congregation did gather at the site, and the church became known as Lone Hill Methodist.

Methodists did not have a monopoly on interesting church traditions, as the founding of Rehoboth Primitive Baptist Church demonstrates. According to the story, the church began near the end of the Civil War when Cornelius Buie, a Baptist elder, sought to find a site to build a church. This process was all the more challenging considering Buie was blind. He decided to blow a trumpet and listen for where the sound “located.” He eventually came to a site where “the sound of the trumpet seemed to locate at the same place every time,” and there he called together a group to build a small log church. Ironically, the church moved to a new location in 1915 when the structure became unsuitable, but the miraculous tradition of how the church began continued among its membership.

26 Ibid., 111-112.
While country churches shared some similarities in propagating foundation traditions, the doctrines they taught were anything but similar. Primitive Baptists eschewed evangelism, and to them preaching the gospel was an insult to the authority and power of God. They believed that if God willed someone to be saved, that God’s grace and power were sufficient and no earthly force could change it. They therefore shunned politics as well, being distrustful of man-made institutions. While these doctrines divided the Primitive Baptists from the Methodists, they represented an all-out war with their former fellows, the Missionary Baptists. A bitter split became a wide chasm between the Baptist factions on the eve of the Civil War, all stemming from whether Christ required his servants to fulfill the “Great Commission” to preach the gospel, or whether God alone would choose whom would be saved. The divide was not just doctrinal, however, as planters tended to gather into Missionary Baptist churches while yeoman farmers stuck with Primitive Baptist churches.27

Primitive Baptists were prone to factions among their own ranks, and a particular faction developed under John Vickers and the Hebron Church in Coffee County just after the Civil War. Vickers denounced the “fatalism” of “Hardshell” Baptists who believed that people had no choice over the matter of salvation, declaring that such doctrine was harmful to sinners who were not called upon to repent. Vickers’s doctrine sounded too much like missionary work to most Primitive Baptists and the Hebron Church was cut off from the local association. The dangerous “Vickersite” doctrine was too hard to pronounce, however, so Primitive Baptists condemned John “Jack” Vickers and his

27 Crowley, Primitive Baptists, 1-17, 55-85; also Wetherington, Plain Folk’s Fight, 53-54.
doctrine as “Jackite.” According to John Crowley, the Jackites steadily adopted more and more of the trappings of Missionary Baptists to the point they were Primitive “in nothing but name.” The Hebron Church eventually associated with Independent Baptists.\(^{28}\)

Coffee’s many countryside churches would continue well into the twentieth century, and their concerns centered not in this world, but in the world to come. The Primitive Baptists studiously avoided most politics, whether Confederate, Democrat, or Populist.\(^{29}\) The divisions that most affected country churches were differences in doctrine. While members of country churches respected their neighbors who subscribed to other faiths, the idea of ecumenical cooperation among churches appeared unwise, if not blasphemous. To Ward and others who sat at the table of the pioneers, country churches represented the best of “old time religion” with its heavy reliance on God and not man.

**Town Religion**

Just as Baptists and Methodists dominated the countryside, they also ruled the rapidly growing town of Douglas. While the churches in town shared some of the same doctrine as the churches in the countryside, their aims often diverged. Country churches were often simple in construction and built solely to have a place to worship. Town churches were more ornate and often sought to boost the business and life of the community. In this the Baptists and Methodists were joined by Episcopalians and Presbyterians. All four of these churches were established between 1888 and 1904, and most were populated in large part by recent migrants into Coffee County and Douglas.

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\(^{29}\) Ibid., 86-98, 134.
Town religion was different in character from country religion and focused more on building up a moral town rather than debating arcane points of doctrine.

The large number of Methodists present in Coffee County probably aided the denomination’s early ascent in Douglas; a group of five Methodists began meeting at the log courthouse in 1888, making the church one of the oldest institutions in Douglas still operating. After a new frame courthouse was built across the street, Benajah Peterson bought the old courthouse and deeded it to the growing Methodists. The church continued to expand so the point where it was necessary to obtain new quarters, so Peterson once again stepped in, constructing a new church for the Methodists in 1894 in exchange for the old courthouse. This exchange took place on the eve of the Douglas and McDonald Railroad’s arrival, an event that accelerated the growth of Douglas and the Methodist Church. As the town rapidly expanded, the Methodists saw fit to build a chapel more befitting a rapidly growing town, and in 1906 the church moved into a brick building on East Jackson Street.30

The rule of the Methodists lasted uncontested for five years until a group of Missionary Baptists determined that Douglas should have access to two denominations. Accordingly, plans were drawn up for a Baptist Church, but lack of money hindered the effort. Baptists then considered meeting in the old log courthouse across from Coffee’s frame courthouse, just as the Methodists had. This proved a challenge since the old courthouse was owned by Methodist Benajah Peterson, but when Peterson received the request, he allowed Baptist services to begin meeting in the property. As soon as the

railroad was completed to Douglas, however, the Baptists called for bids for a new church, and it was completed around 1896.31 This church soon became inadequate as well, and like their Methodist neighbors in Douglas, plans for a new church were drawn up and work began in 1903. When the structure was completed in 1907, the Enterprise admiringly noted, “This will make a very handsome church and will be a credit to the town of Douglas, and would be creditable to towns much larger than Douglas.”32

While Methodists and Baptists could be expected to be in Douglas prior to the first railroad’s arrival, two other Protestant denominations came to Douglas only after the new railroad brought in sufficient numbers of “rare varmints”: Episcopalians and Presbyterians. Episcopalians had already been established at the saw mill town of Leighton, located in southern Coffee near the old Brunswick and Albany Railroad. The mill was clearly in decline by 1899, so one of the members suggested to the Fitzgerald-based Reverend J. W. Turner that the meeting site be moved to Douglas. Turner agreed, and that year Episcopalian services began in Douglas at the Methodist Church. Turner’s services were only to be had once a month, however, since no railroad yet connected Fitzgerald and Douglas. This changed in 1901 when the Waycross Air Line Railroad reached Fitzgerald and facilitated easier transportation for Turner. The Episcopalians finished construction of St. Andrew’s Church that same year, and the church would utilize the structure for fifty years.33

31 Thomas Shivers Hubert and Thomas Hubert Frier, At Work Since 1893: The Story of the First Baptist Church, Douglas, Georgia (Tallahassee, FL: Rose Print Company, 1993), 1-2, 7-12; Trowell, “Douglas Before Memory,” 33.
32 Douglas Enterprise, 9 February 1907.
33 “A Centennial History of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Douglas, Georgia, 1899-1999,” in Genealogical Library, Genealogical Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
The Presbyterians were the last of Douglas’s four great Protestant churches to arrive. A group began meeting in 1901 and met in the Baptist Church whenever a reverend from Savannah could visit the congregation. As the number of Presbyterians increased with the growing population of Douglas, a site was purchased in 1902 for new church. The building was finished about two years later, but the congregation remained small until the new Georgia and Florida shops brought in several Presbyterians. Like the Episcopalians, the chapel served the Presbyterians for the next fifty years.  

Douglas thus boasted four Protestant Churches after a decade of incorporation. The frontier nature of the town at the beginning, and the lack of congregants or money later on forced the four churches to work together. Methodists met at the courthouse until a church of their own could be built; Baptists received permission from a Methodist to use the courthouse as well; Episcopalians met in the constructed Methodist Church while Presbyterians received permission to utilize the Baptists’ structure. While all preached different doctrines, they sang the praise of Douglas in common. James M. Freeman, a Baptist, put it best when comparing the growth of Douglas with that of Willacoochee: “Progression follows unity. Douglas citizens may fall out and fight on religion and politics but when the welfare of the town is concerned every fellow throws down malice and spite, puts his shoulder to the wheel and pushes until something is accomplished.”

This ecumenical and booster spirit did not end with the first decade of the twentieth century, but continued across the next several decades. Regular revival meetings were held by the different churches at different times of the year, the most

popular being the Methodists’ camp meeting at Gaskin Springs. In later years, the practice of holding separate revivals shifted, and by the early 1950s many of Douglas’s churches were holding simultaneous revival services. Preachers often took a stand that Douglas would grow and prosper as long as it was a moral city, and while each church sought for its share of the church-attending populace, most of town churches did not care so much whether a person was a Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist, or Presbyterian as long as that person attended a church.

Citizens and Strangers

Not all churches were created equal, however. In 1923, a fiery editorial titled, “It Must Be Expensive to Be a Catholic” appeared in the Coffee County Progress. Having received many Catholic tracts by mail, the editor of the Progress had grown weary:

It must require a vast sum to promote a religion of this kind. Their attitude, assumed is that of the “smitten”, and an appeal is made to correct a great and grave injustice perpetrated upon the Catholic...Notoriety, of course is most desired by them. Each word written, each word spoken, for or against them, they value as an asset—until they are fought openly and fairly. Let us hope that the fight against them will continue...

The editor looked forward to time when a faith would dominate that had “no secret oath and no obligation other than the dictates of our conscience.” Although Catholics were

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39 Editorial, “It Must Be Expensive to Be a Catholic,” Coffee County Progress, 1 February 1923.
relatively few in number in 1923 (the 1926 Census of Religion actually enumerated Coffee’s Catholic population as part of Atkinson County where the church was located), they provoked a reaction from Coffee’s Protestants far in excess of their numbers.40

Catholics had lived within Coffee County for over fifty years when the editorial appeared in the Progress—longer than all other sects except for Baptists and Methodists. Their presence in Douglas, however, was much briefer; the first Catholics arrived near 1898. Catholics came to town the same time that other denominations flocked into Douglas, but with the added handicap that Catholicism fell outside the community’s Protestant consensus. The first decades of the twentieth century, and especially the 1920s were not easy days to be Catholic in the wiregrass South. In Coffee County, however, the Roman Church had an able defender in Coffee’s foremost pioneer historian, Warren P. Ward. In addition, when the church constructed a chapel within the city limits of Douglas, Catholics were steadily incorporated into the town’s cadre of churches, lessening tensions long before the Civil Rights movement led to understanding among white churches.

The first Catholics of Coffee County arrived as Irish railroad workers for the Brunswick and Albany Railroad in 1870. A church was established in the rail town of Willacoochee, and remained the center of Catholicism for Coffee even after Atkinson County was broken off in 1918. The first Catholic to live in Douglas, a Mrs. Creel, moved in around 1898, and the first confession and administration of Communion was

given to her in Douglas the next year. In 1907, Mose and Joseph Hanna, two men of
Lebanese origin and both Catholic, moved to Douglas and soon sent for their families.
The Hanna family thus became the foundation for an expanding Catholic population
inside Douglas.41

Practicing Catholics received no warm welcome from most in Coffee. The 1910s
and 1920s were dangerous times to be Catholic in the wiregrass South. The tendency of
most Catholics (like the Hannas) to be of immigrant origin did not endear them to a
region which boasted of its descent from pure Anglo-Saxon blood. Beyond this, Catholics
looked to Rome—a foreign entity. Arthur Remillard provides some context on anti-
Catholic feeling:

The word “true demarcated both Catholic and Protestant civil religious territories.
A “true” American was either a southern white Protestant or someone who
believed religious tolerance should be extended to Catholics. Of course, “true”
marked boundaries elsewhere on the Wiregrass South’s moral map. Many
southern whites claimed that “true progress” came when redeemer Democrats
secured home rule from “carpetbagger” northerners...Lost Causers wanted to relay
a “true history” of the Confederate past, one that made heroes of wartime leaders
and challenged the idea that slavery was the primary cause of the conflict...in the
Wiregrass South, scores of non-Catholics refused to validate the idea of Catholic
patriotism. While Catholics were small in number, during the 1910s, they became
central to a civil religious discourse that created competing images of the “true
American.”42

When the Ku Klux Klan reorganized in 1915, it did so as an avowedly white,
Protestant organization. By 1924, it was well-established in Coffee County and began a
weekly column in the *Coffee County Progress*. As the first installment declared, the Klan
was not “anti-anything, but pro-American, for American institutions run on American

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41 “Saint Paul Catholic Church, 1938-1988, Douglas, Georgia,” in Coffee County Files, Genealogical
Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
42 Arthur Remillard, *Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction Era*
bases. The Klan’s attempts to paint Catholics as un-American did not convince everyone, however. In 1928, the Democrats nominated Al Smith, a New York Catholic, for President. A number of communities across the country, including many Democratic strongholds, voted against Smith because of his Catholicism. Coffee remained firmly in the Democratic camp, however, giving Smith over sixty percent of the vote.

More importantly, the Catholics had an able defender in Warren P. Ward. Rather than condemn the Catholic Church as the center of anti-Americanism, Ward asserted in his *History of Coffee County* that Catholics were “among the best citizens of Coffee County,” and praised the railroad that had brought the first Catholics. If Ward’s comments on Catholics sounded incredibly accepting in 1930, they did not come as a surprise to those who knew him. Ward’s wife, Annie Canova, had been raised in the staunchly Catholic home of George Paul Canova and Dianna Greene Canova. Warren met Annie when the Canovas were visiting a cousin in Pearson, and figured out ways to sneak messages to her when she returned to school at the St. Joseph Convent in Fernandina, Florida. After a careful courtship, Ward proposed on a train to Annie while she was on her way home to Sanderson, Florida. After marriage, Annie joined the Methodist faith and all of the Ward children were raised as such. It seems likely, however, that Warren P. Ward always carried a soft spot for Catholics.

If close association with Catholics had disarmed any prejudice toward them on the part of Ward, then the construction of a Catholic Church in Douglas had much the same

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effect. On 7 March 1938, Bishop Gerald O’Hara of the Atlanta and Savannah Diocese broke ground for the new St. Paul’s Catholic Church on East Ward Street. After thirty years of having to travel to Fitzgerald or Willacoochee to attend regular services, the Catholics of Douglas were finally able to stay in town. 47 This added visibility aided Catholics, and the boosterish Protestant Churches welcomed the Catholics as a fitting addition to the city’s growing number of churches. By the time of Coffee’s centennial, the Catholic Church regularly appeared in advertisements with Protestant churches, pleading with people to attend a church of their choice. 48 While suspicions between Catholics and Protestants surely remained, it appears that rapprochement between the two groups was well under way before the accelerating Civil Rights movement drew whites of both faiths together. 49

Cumorah’s Lonely Road

Some distance away from Douglas’s town churches, a very different faith flourished in Coffee’s countryside. Three miles from the courthouse, the small Cumorah chapel was best accessed by a trip down U.S. 441, and then a journey down two of the unpaved country roads south of Douglas. Its outward appearance did not distinguish it from the many other country Methodist and Baptist churches that dotted Coffee’s countryside, but the religion that utilized the chapel was worlds apart: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If finding an outpost of Latter-day Saints (often called Mormons) in rural Coffee was strange enough, sixteen miles to the southwest lay another,

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larger congregation: the Utah chapel in Axson. While the town of Axson had become part of Atkinson County in 1918, the congregation began during its time in Coffee County, making the county the site of two Mormon congregations—unheard of even for Fulton County until the 1930s. Coffee County remained the epicenter for Mormonism in southern Georgia for nearly fifty years.\(^50\)

Of all the possible religions to come into Coffee County during the 1890s, few were more improbable than Mormonism. In 1879 a mob had killed a Latter-day Saint missionary and had let his companion off with the warning, “There is no law in Georgia for Mormons, and the Government is against you.” The mob leader spoke the truth as the Federal Government fought polygamy, then openly practiced by Mormons. The national crusade against men taking multiple wives was heartily supported by many southerners who found polygamy immoral and a threat to white female virtue.\(^51\) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints halted polygamous marriages in 1890, but suspicions remained for many. How did a religion so hated become so well-established in Coffee County?

The saga of Latter-day Saints in Coffee County began in Florida with the in-laws of Warren P. Ward. In 1887, three years after Ward had married Annie Canova, Annie’s father, George Paul Canova, converted to Mormonism from Catholicism. Being Catholic could be dangerous enough, but becoming a Mormon was suicidal in the postbellum South. The relative wealth of the Canova family protected them from persecution, but

\(^50\) Atkinson and Coffee County maps and aerial photographs, University of Georgia Map Library. See bibliography for complete listing.

only for a time. In 1898, a so-called “Committee of Eight” sent George a letter, warning him to stop aiding the Mormon missionaries in Sanderson, Florida. Canova refused, and on the evening of 5 June 1898, George was fatally shot in the back while returning from a church meeting.52 Although Canova’s widow Dianna later moved the rest of the family out of Sanderson, she continued to aid Mormon missionaries as they came through. One missionary who visited Sanderson that November was Elder Nephi United States Centennial Jensen, born in 1876 to Danish parents who had immigrated to Utah.53 Jensen wrote about participating in a couple of meetings and a “night...pleasantly passed under the hospitable roof of Sister Canova’s house.”54 At some point in their conversations, Dianna told Jensen about her daughter, Annie Canova Ward, who resided in Douglas with her husband, Warren P Ward.

Jensen did not travel to Coffee County immediately, however, and spent several months on the Florida peninsula near Tampa. In the middle of May, 1899, however, Jensen reversed course and travelled with his companion, J. R. Sellers, northward into Georgia. Jensen’s diary is unclear as to whether he was assigned to Coffee County, or whether preaching there was his own idea. Whatever the reason for travelling there, Jensen and Sellers arrived in Coffee County the evening of 9 June 1899 after nearly a month of walking from Hillsboro County, Florida. One of their constant problems was

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52 Gaskin Ave., Graveyard Road to Silk Stocking Row, 208-209.
finding a place to stay each night, since Jensen and Sellers never had guaranteed lodging.\footnote{20 March-9 June 1899, Nephi Jensen Missionary Diary, Vol. 3, 1899, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Lee Library, BYU.}

Six days after arriving in Coffee County, Jensen determined to visit Warren P. Ward in the hopes of having a discussion, and hopefully a place to stay for the evening. Jensen and Sellers arrived at Ward’s residence at dusk, and after calling at the gate and not being invited in, they asked if they might have a drink of water. At the well a conversation began between Ward and the Mormon missionaries. Jensen wrote: “Mr. Ward soon shewed his colors. From his lips could be heard such expressions as I dont like the ‘Mormon Church.’” Upon being asked why he disliked the church, Ward replied that he did not believe in the Book of Mormon and other books of Latter-day Saint scripture, saying that they were wrong. Jensen disputed this, but Ward soon came up with another objection: “Polygam[y] was the wip with which he now tried to lash us. It is needless to say that he faild. I took up the same wip and lashed our legal friend till he had a sufficincy.” After further discussion, Jensen gave up on “the man of law” and the two missionaries spent the night at a neighboring house.\footnote{Ibid., 15 June 1899.}

If Ward’s reaction towards the Latter-day Saint missionaries was tepid, reactions from other Douglasites were downright volcanic. James M. Freeman launched several editorial broadsides against the Mormon elders in the \textit{Douglas Breeze}, claiming in one that ran on the \textit{Breeze}’s front page: “The United States of America is a great country...But what are we doing with Mormonism in this country?” Relating the progress
scientists had made in overcoming various diseases, Freeman thundered, “But the black pestilence in Utah which is diffusing itself like a consuming cancer through the body social, and the body politic, and sapping the foundations of society—what are we going to do with that?” Judging Utah’s admission to statehood a mistake, Freeman warned that the worst was yet to come now that Mormonism had a base from which to spread:

And yet, while we are standing still, and doing nothing, this Latter Day heresy has an army of missionaries...They are knocking at your doors, or they will be sponging upon your hospitality, claiming to be humble missionaries of the cross...And they come at night to save hotel bills, and get the best opportunity to gain your ear, then they feed you. On the bread of life. Nay, but upon the poison of death. On the sincere milk of God’s pure word? Nay, but on the sincere delusion of a clever, captivating heresy to disarm your prejudice, gain your confidence, and make you friends and converts of Mormonism.57

The feeling between Freeman and Jensen was mutual. Jensen wrote in his diary that he and Sellers visited “the Breeze office, where is published a little blade by a man who is an enemy to God’s grace.” Jensen demanded that Freeman allow the missionaries “space to make a reply to his slimy editorial.” According to Jensen, Freeman shook “as an aspen leaf- hardly knowing what to do or say,” perhaps shocked by the boldness of the two Mormon missionaries. The editor did not promise space for a reply, but agreed to retract any statement of his which was untrue.58 Freeman accordingly repudiated a statement which declared that one of the missionaries had three wives, but reemphasized

57 “Mormorism” [sic]. The Douglas Breeze, 8 July 1899.
58 3 July 1899, Jensen diary Vol. 3. The dates here are rather curious for no editorial against Mormons appears in the Breeze prior to 8 July 1899, but Jensen says he confronted Freeman five days prior. Also, Freeman issued his retraction in the 15 July issue of the Breeze and reported his meeting with the missionaries in that issue, apparently indicating that the meeting took place between the 8th and the 15th of July. Jensen may have erred in giving the date for the conversation, but he mentions an Independence Day celebration in his next entry for 4 July 1899. The exact chronology may never be known.
“The bible speaks of wolves in sheep’s clothing, and the people...are warned against the misleading doctrines and tracts of these mormons.”

In spite of opposition, Jensen and Sellers continued to press forward, talking with people in their homes and asking for permission to speak in established churches. One church where they spoke at a number of times was Mt. Zion Baptist Church in southern Coffee County. At one of their meetings that summer was Joseph A. Adams, who returned home saying that the Mormon elders “were about the smartest preachers he’d ever met.” The success that Jensen and his fellow missionaries had in preaching at Mt. Zion aroused opposition, however, and a group within the church determined to stop it.

The morning of 12 November 1899, Jensen and Ezra Baird were on their way to preach at Mt. Zion Church when they were approached by a vehicle. As Jensen wrote, “A quiet feeling came over me...I had no longer any idea that he was a friend, for the sparkle of his eyes gave expression to the words—‘I hate you.’” The driver asked whether Jensen and Baird were the men who were to preach at Mt. Zion, and upon hearing that they were, told them that they were prohibited from preaching there. Jensen then said that the members of the congregation should decide the issue, whereupon the man grew heated and demanded “us to explain why we were in the South preaching the Gospel—justifying himself in demanding his information by so informing us that the people there had the Bible.” Jensen then accused the driver of not living the teachings of the Bible, and after

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60 Jensen and Sellers were together until early August, 1899 when A. R. Brewer joined Jensen. In October, R. M. Robinson replaced Brewer, and was in turn replaced by Ezra Baird before the end of the month. In mid-November, W. N. Eldredge took over as Jensen’s companion and remained with him until the time Jensen left Douglas in January, 1900. Jensen was therefore the best known of the missionaries. Pages 32-50, Nephi Jensen Diary, Vol. 7, 1898-1900, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Lee Library, BYU.
further argument, the driver continued for Mt. Zion. When Jensen and Baird arrived, the entire congregation was disputing whether the missionaries should be allowed to preach. Finally a prominent member of the church said that such preaching would not hurt the church, and that he wanted to hear the Mormons out. He invited all opposed to leave, and no one did, so Jensen and Baird preached to the congregation.61

In January, 1900, Jensen was moved to Waycross, and then Jacksonville, Florida, as part of a strategy by Southern States Mission President Ben E. Rich to gain more converts in the larger cities.62 Jensen met with greater opposition in Jacksonville, however, being struck down by a man after suggesting that southern women were “not all pure.” Anti-Mormon feeling in Jacksonville increased to the point that Rich moved the Florida conference headquarters from there to Valdosta, Georgia, and send Jensen back to Coffee County.63 Jensen therefore spent his final two months as a missionary in Coffee County, and by the time of his departure a small group had been baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints including Daniel P. Lott, Joseph A. Adams, Richard and Levy Jewell, and all of their families.64

Southerners and Georgians had been baptized as Latter-day Saints before, but those baptized in Coffee County were different. They chose to stay rather than move to Utah or somewhere else, and by so doing they put a face with the faith. In 1907, the resident Latter-day Saints constructed the Cumorah Chapel south of Douglas, and a

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61 12 November 1899, Nephi Jensen Missionary Diary, Vol. 4, 1899-1900, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Lee Library, BYU.
62 January 1900 diary entries, Ben E. Rich Southern States Mission Scrapbook, Accn 38, Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.
63 April-June diary entries, Rich Scrapbook; 6 March 1900, Jensen Diary, Vol. 4.
visiting Nephi Jensen was honored by giving the first sermon there.\footnote{Ibid.} In 1916, Elder James E. Talmage, a Mormon apostle, spoke at the Coffee County Courthouse to great applause.\footnote{“Mormons Hold Services at Cumorah,” \textit{Coffee County Progress}, 31 May 1916.} Several major Latter-day Saint meetings were held at Cumorah or in Axson in the coming years, and by 1930, Warren P. Ward wrote that “Coffee County has been a fruitful field for the Mormon Church, it having grown to a membership of more than seven hundred.”\footnote{Ward, \textit{Coffee County}, 106.} While Ward may have exaggerated the number of Latter-day Saints, he was correct about Coffee County; a survey of church records in Georgia by the Works Progress Administration revealed Mormon congregations at Axson, Douglas, and Willacoochee as well as home meetings in Ambrose, Kirkland, and Nicholls.\footnote{“Latter-day Saints (Mormon),” in WPA, Historical Records Survey, Churches, General, Denominations in 1926 Census of Churches, Church Records Survey, Works Progress Administration, U.S. Government Collection, RG 44-2-15, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.}

Why, then, was Coffee County a fruitful field for the Mormons? While choosing a faith is among the most individual of choices, the composition of the congregation at Douglas and the distribution of Latter-day Saints across Georgia offer some clues, not only concerning the spread of Mormonism, but of the state of religion generally in Coffee County. Many of Coffee’s first Mormons were descendants of pioneer families and had been born and raised in Coffee County. As a tide of migrants flowed into Coffee County, native-born residents found themselves steadily losing control of their community. Few desired to attend town churches which were run by non-natives, and most stayed in the country Methodist or Baptist Churches they had grown up with. Some, however, were intrigued by the Latter-day Saint missionaries who preached to people of all classes and
all social backgrounds (minus African-Americans). Mormons had an easier time talking
to people less secure in their rapidly changing lives. As the WPA survey reveals, most
Mormons were to be found in wiregrass Georgia—the area of the state changing the most
in the two decades after Mormons abandoned polygamy (1890-1910).

The fact that several pioneer families had joined the Latter-day Saints and
considering that his father-in-law had been killed for being a Mormon may have
prompted an attitude change on the part of Warren P. Ward. Possibly thinking of his first
correspondence with Nephi Jensen, he wrote that “Many citizens of the county were excited
over the appearance of the Elders. Some regarded them as messengers from
Heaven...Others regarded them as emissaries of the devil.” He went on to conclude,
however, that “The church and elders have grown more in favor with the people as the
years have gone by.”69 They may have even grown in favor with Ward as he printed a
sermon by Joseph F. Smith, a President of the Latter-day Saints, in Ward’s column in the
Coffee County Progress.70

As Coffee’s centennial approached in 1954, those who favored the “pioneer”
interpretation of the county’s history had cause for hope and pessimism. With Huxford’s
Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia, more people than ever were learning about the lives and
values of Coffee’s first settlers. The county was also experiencing a new religious
awakening. Most of this growth in churches, however, was taking place in the city of
Douglas or other towns in Coffee rather than the countryside. By moving into Douglas,
the Catholics had won for themselves a measure of respectability, but Latter-day Saints,

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69 Ward, Coffee County, 106.
70 Coffee County Progress, 15 November 1934.
although not hated, were still viewed as a peculiar country people. In a bitter irony, the faith that pioneers so often hoped would revive American society had emerged, but it was the progressive variety that had won out. Nevertheless, the celebration to come would manage a strange mix of pioneer and progressive ideas. But they would not originate with Coffee County.
CHAPTER FOUR: PAGEANTS

In 1953, as Coffee County began discussing how to celebrate the county’s centennial, the *Journal of Southern History* published a provocative essay by historian C. Vann Woodward, entitled “The Irony of Southern History.” Surveying the post-Second World War scene, Woodward pondered whether an all-encompassing nationalism would relegate regional history to unimportance. “America,” he continued, “is the all-important subject, and national ideas, national institutions, and national policies are the themes that compel attention.” Woodward then remarked on how other regions in America were allowed to “speak for the nation,” but the South was always thought to be “unique” and outside the American mainstream. He then suggested that the South actually had more in common with other countries across the world, and that the United States was unique in never having faced a lost war, faced submission to an enemy, nor faced the long-term poverty that characterized the South. Borrowing from Arnold J. Toynbee, Woodward postulated that if “history is something unpleasant that happens to other people,” then southerners had indeed had history in their part of the world.¹

Even as Woodward spoke these words at a conference of southern historians, cities and counties throughout the South were celebrating history of another kind. These celebrations spent little time (if any) on submission or poverty, but focused on prosperity and progress, two very un-southern traits if Woodward was to be believed. A closer look at these festivals (and the dramatic pageants that formed their core) reveals that most were not wholly local productions, but relied heavily on an Ohio corporation known

throughout the country for its pageants: the John B. Rogers Producing Company. Rogers-produced pageants were devoted to the American success story, emphasizing both heritage and community progress. Many communities which utilized Rogers productions hoped for a new boost in business, for new community unity, or simply for the free publicity that surrounded each celebration.

Throughout Georgia, counties and cities coming up on important anniversaries hired the Rogers Company to produce lavish historical celebrations. As the post-Second World War economy tended to favor some locations over others, community elites hoped that these celebrations and pageants would bring business their way. Unfortunately, although the company claimed to produce each pageant using local historical data, local history was plugged into a pre-fabricated script which did not allow for much variation. While certain scenes were written specifically for a particular community, pageants across the country looked strangely similar—the pageant that Coffee County held in May, 1954 looked suspiciously like the pageant held for Flora, Illinois that July. In the end, most cities managed to turn a profit or break even on the costs of production, but the expected economic windfall almost never came. Worse, the people of the community often came away knowing less about their history than before.

**John B. Rogers “Centuramas”**

If any one organization has done anything to delineate what aspects of history ought to be celebrated by communities across the United States, that organization has to have been the John B. Rogers Producing Company. Nor has any other organization standardized the celebration of historical anniversaries quite so well. Looking at a variety
of programs from different communities in the 1950s and early 1960s, it becomes possible to discover what a centennial celebration and pageant entailed.

A community would first need to have a significant historical anniversary. Typically, this anniversary was a centennial, especially for communities and counties in the Midwest and Deep South that were established in the 1850s and 1860s. Sesquicentennial celebrations were rarer, but acceptable, as were bicentennials for the few places in the country old enough to celebrate such.² Typically the town or county would form a centennial committee to plan out the celebration. At some point at this stage, a representative from the Rogers Company would either call on the committee or be asked to give an estimate for how much a company-produced celebration and pageant would cost.³ If the cost (typically a few thousand dollars) was approved, then a Rogers Company representative would sign a contract with the centennial committee. Rogers Company pledged to work out the details of the celebration and pageant, write the script, provide historic costumes and scenery, and construct the stage and lighting for the pageant. Rogers company also supplied suggestions for the committee on the celebration and allowed the committee to use items like wooden nickels. The committee in turn was to pay the company, provide historical information about the community, provide cast members for the pageant, supply bands, pianos or organs for the accompanying music, and be responsible for miscellaneous props like guns, horses, oxen, or vehicles.⁴

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² Canonsburg, Pennsylvania as well as Baldwin and Morgan Counties, Georgia, held Sesquicentennial pageants.
³ Charlton County Herald, 16 October 1953, 6 November 1953, 20 November 1953.
⁴ Contract between John B. Rogers Producing Company and Coffee County Centennial Inc., dated 30 September 1953, in Centennial File, Coffee County Genealogical Files, Genealogical Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
Once the contract was approved, work began on when to schedule the week of the celebration. The centennial week did not have to match up with the actual anniversary’s date, but often came weeks or months before or after, as long as it was the same year.5 Once the company representative had consulted with the local committee on a plan of action, the committee gathered various historical facts about the county and turned them over to the representative for script preparation. The committee also demanded that the men of the community start growing beards and fined those who had not purchased a “shaver’s permit.” As the time came closer to the centennial week, beard-growing men were organized into chapters of “brothers of the brush.” Women were asked to stop wearing makeup for the celebration week and wear older fashions, being organized into chapters of “sisters of the swish.”6

Once a script was prepared and the week of the celebration was a month away, a director from the company would arrive at the client city and begin rehearsals with the cast. These would take place at regular intervals until the week itself began.7 While not all centennial weeks started on Sunday, those that did often held a massive all-faith service.8 During the week, residents and visitors were required to buy wooden money

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5 Fannin County Times, 22 April 1954, 8 July 1954.
7 Charlton County Herald, 29 January 1954.
8 “Hart County Centennial Celebration, 1853-1953,” 7, located in “Hart Co—History” folder, File II, Public Reference Service, Georgia Archives Collection, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA; “Kankakee Centennial, 1853-1953,” insert between pages 48-49, digitized by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, online at Internet Archive: http://archive.org/details/kankakeecentenni00kank; “Flora’s Centennial Celebration, 1854-1954,” [27], digitized by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, online
(typically nickels) which would be redeemable for purchases at local stores. On the night of the first pageant performance, a large procession announced the centennial queen, who would be crowned and open the festivities. The pageant would then be performed, and at the end would be a fireworks show.

The pageants depicted local history, but it was a uniform, pre-packaged kind. A brief prologue was followed by a scene depicting generic Indians. Later scenes showed first contact between white settlers and Indians, often involving battles. Gore was kept to a minimum, however, one scene for Coffee’s Centennial showed the Indians give up their fight and leave. After that, a day in the life of the early settlers was depicted.

Soon after the first whites arrived, every pageant paused to pay tribute to the churches of the area. The first settlers were depicted as sitting in a church service (even if church buildings had not been available to the real first settlers). The next handful of scenes varied somewhat in order from community to community, but after the religion scene would follow an episode depicting the early educational opportunities of the county. That would be followed by a scene depicting the arrival of the first railroad or the coming of the Civil War, whichever happened to take place first in the community. These

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9 Rogers and Coffee Centennial Contract, Satilla Regional Library; Charlton County Herald, 5 February 1954.
10 This summary is based on fifteen different programs from seven different states held over the period between 1950-1975. Newspaper descriptions of pageants in Charlton County, Georgia (see Charlton County Herald, 29 January 1954) and Watertown, Wisconsin (see Watertown Daily Times, 28 June 1954, online at Watertown Historical Society website, http://www.watertownhistory.org/Articles/Centurama.htm) also show the same general patterns. See Appendix C for a detailed chart.
11 “Coffee County Centurama, Douglas, Georgia,” script, located in “Centennial” file, Coffee County Genealogy Files, Genealogical Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
episodes were followed by another universal scene: a “Gay 90s” picnic or fair, which featured can-can dancers.

The concluding scenes of the pageant occasionally depicted the First World War with a reading of “In Flanders’ Fields,” but always depicted the 1920s with the dance “The Charleston.” Most productions skipped the Great Depression entirely and the scenes shifted from the Roaring Twenties to the Second World War, usually depicted with the flag raising at Iwo Jima. For the finale, some pageants ended with a procession of all cast members as a tribute to the progress of the community. Others had a more ominous ending, literally going out with a bang as a pyrotechnic simulated an atomic explosion. Scenes unique to a particular community were staged at various points in the pageant, but they only numbered one or two in the entire production.

The pageant would run from four to six showings during the celebration, with performances in the evenings before the night’s fireworks display. When it was over, Rogers company officials took back the costumes and dismantled the sets while a company official would expect the last payment. Merchants who purchased too many wooden nickels would have to hold onto them or sell them to others since the wooden money was non-refundable. Within a week, the community would be back to working regular hours, wearing makeup, and shaving for those who wanted to loose their beard.

Keeping Up With the Centuramas, 1950-1959

Centennial and sesquicentennial pageants exploded across Georgia in the 1950s, especially those produced by the Rogers Company. Thirty-nine of Georgia’s 159 counties

12 Rogers Co. and Coffee Centennial Contract, Satilla Regional Library.
had been formed in the 1850s, and thirty-eight were still around when their centennial years arrived in the 1950s. Another thirteen had been founded between 1800 and 1810, and all of those counties reached their sesquicentennial years in the 1950s. Therefore, fifty-one counties, nearly a third of Georgia’s total, could celebrate a significant historical anniversary just at the time that historical pageants were coming back into vogue. The pressure to hold a centennial celebration of some kind was too strong to ignore.

The decade started out quietly enough. Clinch County, home of Folks Huxford, had been created in 1850 and the historically-minded citizens prepared a celebration. Although the county was created in February, the celebration was first scheduled for April, and then postponed to May. Finally, on 5 May 1950, Clinch celebrated one hundred years with a band concert in the morning, followed by several speeches (including one by Huxford) just before noon. Dinner (or lunch as it is now called) was held on the same grounds of park the band concert and speeches were held. Finally, at 3pm, a parade marched through Homerville, the last scheduled event for Clinch’s centennial celebration. Publicity was good, and the counties of Atkinson, Echols, and Lanier also participated in the celebration. Most everyone seemed satisfied with the program.

Later that year, a much larger celebration took place in Walhalla in neighboring South Carolina. Walhalla had been founded in 1850, and was later designated the county seat of Oconee County when it was formed in 1868. Rather than wait for the Oconee

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Centennial, Walhalla elected to celebrate the city’s centennial and hired the Rogers Company to put together a celebration and a pageant. The lavish “Saga of a People” was performed five times from 7-11 August 1950. It consisted of fourteen scenes between a prologue and the finale, and exhibited the general pattern that the Rogers Company would use to fine effect in later celebrations. After the crowning of a queen in the first performance, the first scene depicted “An Early Indian Village.” Following that was “Spirit of 76,” even though the area had been Cherokee lands until after the American Revolution. The next three scenes depicted people planning the town and a typical afternoon scene around an early house. Scenes six through eight portrayed early worship, the Civil War, and the coming of the railroad, but the following two were unique to Walhalla: a fire in 1898 and the reading of a poem by a local citizen.\(^{15}\)

The pageant soon snapped back into the regular pattern of Rogers pageants as scenes depicting an early school, the “Gay 90s,” and a depiction of Iwo Jima to represent the Second World War followed. The final scene was entitled “The Wheel of Progress,” and reemphasized that while the past had left a “rich heritage,” it was also necessary to “face forward to meet the challenge of a changing world.” The celebration and pageant must have been successful enough since the Rogers Company was hired on again to create an “Oconee Centurama” in 1968.\(^{16}\)

How much an impact Walhalla’s celebration had on Georgia is difficult to determine, but it is clear that nearby Hart County, Georgia, decided to hire the Rogers

\(^{15}\) “Walhalla Centennial Celebration presents the Mammoth Historical Spectacle, ‘The Saga of a People,’” [August, 1950], located in Walhalla Centennial files, Oconee Heritage Center, Walhalla, SC.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., “Oconee County Centennial Committee presents ‘Oconee Centurama,’” [1968], in Oconee Centennial Exhibit and Files, Oconee Heritage Center, Walhalla, SC.
Company to run their centennial in 1953. Their week-long celebration was bigger than Walhalla’s with six pageant performances which took place 1-6 June 1953. The thirteen scene pageant was, as usual, framed by a prologue and finale with a queen’s coronation held on the first performance. There was the dramatic Indian scene followed by the coming of white settlers, and then one scene unique to this pageant: “Legend of Nancy Hart.” The standard scenes of religion, early schools, Civil War, railroads, Gay 90s, Charleston-dancing in the Roaring Twenties, and Second World War all followed. The last scene was a tribute to the youth of Hart County, followed by the finale.17

While the pageant may have been the standard production of the Rogers Company, it and the surrounding celebration received remarkable publicity. Atlanta newspapers picked up on the story, one even running a picture of the Indian dance near the beginning while another article talked about a boy’s feelings toward his mother playing Nancy Hart.18 Not only was the publicity favorable, but Governor Herman Talmadge also visited the celebration as did others, including a large contingent from Athens. Clearly, centennial celebrations and the pageants that went with them could bring favorable publicity and profit to a community. That October, Worth County in southern Georgia also staged a Rogers-produced pageant and centennial celebration.19

Carefully watching the success of the celebrations in Hart and Worth counties were officials from Charlton County, one of six counties created in 1854 (along with

18 Hart County File, Georgiana Vertical Files Collection, Georgia Counties Files, MS 3694, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.
19 Ibid., Charlton County Herald, 30 October 1953.
Coffee). Discussion of a possible centennial had begun in May, 1953, and a debate ensued over how big or small it should be months later.20 Editorials in the *Charlton County Herald* advocated hiring a professional company (read: Rogers Co.) to run the celebration, calling the coming centennial “our big chance.”21 After meeting with Rogers Company officials, the Ohio corporation was hired on and fund raising for the centennial began in December. By the end of the following January, a script had been completed for a twenty-scene pageant using the same general outline. The governor again was invited to open the pageant, which was held the week of 14-20 February 1954.22 “Charltorama” met with great success and was studiously watched by officials from Coffee County, who silently prayed that the coming festivities in Douglas would not be overshadowed.23

Seemingly oblivious to the centennial celebrations in February (for Charlton County) and May (for Coffee County), was Fannin County in northern Georgia. Although the coming date was acknowledged as early as August, 1953, discussion of a celebration did not begin until April, 1954.24 Nothing came of it until July when Fannin officials announced a big centennial week to take place 9-14 August 1954. A pageant was hurriedly written (probably by Rogers Company) and the entire celebration was rolled out with little more than a month to spare.25 Fannin’s actual date of creation was in January,

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20 *Charlton County Herald*, 8 May 1953, 18 September 1953.
21 *Charlton County Herald*, 23 October 1953.
24 *Fannin County Times*, 13 August 1953, 22 April 1954.
but the examples of Charlton and Coffee clearly showed that counties who ignored their
centennial year did so at their economic peril.26

Once the lavish centennial celebration bandwagon got rolling, it was hard to bring
it to a stop. Counties and cities across Georgia staged several centennial or
sesquicentennial celebrations, and a large number contracted with the Rogers Company
to create pageants and manage festivities. In 1957, two counties in northeastern Georgia
had Rogers-run celebrations; Morgan County celebrated its sesquicentennial, and tiny
Glascock County marked its centennial.27 While relatively prosperous Morgan County
could afford the expense of a lavish pageant, Glascock County could not. The pageant
was more of a “last hurrah” for Glascock than “our big chance,” as the county’s
population and industry continued to decline. By the time the Atlanta Constitution ran a
series on “Fading Counties of Georgia” in 1961, the county could no longer fund its own
schools and had given up its turn for a state senate seat to the Richmond County-based
Carl Sanders.28

As the 1950s came to a close, many other counties began to wonder about the
utility of a costly centennial celebration. Brooks County, created in December, 1858,
arrived at its centennial in 1958. At least five years of ambitious and costly productions
came before it, from Hart to Glascock. The ten-member Brooks Centennial Committee
accordingly planned “conferences with professional centennial stagers.” Before meeting

26 Bryan, Georgia’s Register 1953-1954, 563.
27 “Morgan County, Georgia Sesquicentennial,” Georgia Archives; “Centennial of Glascock County
Georgia Archives Collection, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.
28 Reg Murphy and Jim Montgomery, “Glascock Fighting A Losing Battle,” Atlanta Constitution, 16
August 1961.
with representatives from the Rogers Company, however, Brooks officials found out the price tag and balked at the cost. The county eventually held a slightly-less glamorous celebration, but they still borrowed many of the company’s techniques—including forcing men to grow out their beards.29

**Coffee County’s Centennial Celebration**

The celebration that took place in Douglas for Coffee County’s one hundredth year was thus part of a larger and widespread phenomenon. Just as many counties staged centennial celebrations to boost publicity of their communities, many felt that Coffee needed the same. For years the city’s boosters had tried to attract business and tourists, but so often the image of a backward, southern Georgia town had thwarted its promotion. Many might have remembered the Dave Wright lynching debacle where the press had painted Douglas as a town full of savages, never mind that the mob that killed Wright was prosecuted and convicted. For over fifty years the development of Coffee County had encountered disappointment: political factionalism, depressed crop prices, isolation from U.S. highways, tensions between city and countryside, neglect by state and federal officials, and inability to attract successful and stable industries had plagued the county’s growth. Now, however, there was access to federal highways and an airport. Coffee’s growing wealth and political power were making it harder to ignore. A rapprochement between competing factions and communities was taking place. Crop prices were doing better. Coffee’s situation was now looking up. Now was the time to advertise the county to the state and beyond.

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Plans for the centennial celebration began in July, 1953. Schools, civic organizations, and women’s clubs all met to discuss what might be required. A few committees were formed and all prepared for an April celebration. Some might have thought along the lines of the celebration held in nearby Clinch County four years previously. The recent celebrations in Hart County, Worth County, Milledgeville, and Gainesville, Florida, were all much larger, however, and it soon became apparent (if not already known) that the John B. Rogers Producing Company had been behind all of them. Late in September, company officials met with the committees working on Coffee’s centennial. A plan was presented and members of Coffee’s centennial committee probably felt like their counterparts in nearby Charlton County: the centennial celebration would be the county’s “big chance.” The Rogers Company was hired on, and Coffee’s men were soon required to loose their razors.

According to contract, the county needed to provide historical data on Coffee County, as well as work out a time for the celebration. Working out a date was easy and the centennial committee agreed that the celebration should take place in springtime, preferably between Easter and the start of baseball season. Gathering historical data was another matter. Those tasked with gathering the appropriate information waited until late January, 1954, to run a newspaper article asking for stories and other data. This request for information simply copied a questionnaire from the Rogers Company, as evidenced by the fact that some of the questions did not apply to Coffee County:

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30 Coffee County Progress, 23-30 July 1953.
31 “County’s Centennial Committees Make Plans for ’54 Celebration,” Coffee County Progress, 1 October 1953.
REVOLUTION: If territory took part. When and where did battles take place. Reaction of populace to oppression – heroics of people during period. Patriots – what part did people have in the forming of the government of the United States.

WAR BETWEEN STATES: Any [data] regarding this period if war had any effect on county.

GAY 90s: Early fire department – [mode] of living – entertainments, growth of schools, college and churches.

Any outstanding incidents humorous or otherwise you wish to incorporate into scenario. Any person’s history in the county – whether famous to outsiders or not – who has had a hand in guiding the growth of the community...

The territory of Coffee County had not even been part of Georgia during the Revolution, and the question as to whether the “War Between States” had “any effect on county” probably raised a few eyebrows among the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. In spite of this, however, planning moved forward and the Rogers Company soon produced a script for the Coffee County Centurama.

The Centennial Celebration was finally scheduled for early May to coincide with Armed Forces Day. On Sunday, 9 May 1954, the celebration began with a massive interfaith service at South Georgia College’s football field entitled “Faith of Our Fathers,” emphasizing the religious ideals of the first pioneers. The next day was “Pioneer and Statesman Day,” where Lieutenant S. Marvin Griffin gave the keynote address. Also participating in the first day’s festivities was Folks Huxford. He presented and dedicated new portraits of John Coffee and Stephen A. Douglas, both of which were placed in the courthouse. The following days focused on various subjects: Tuesday was Agricultural Day, Wednesday was Youth Day, Thursday was Good Neighbor and County Day. Friday was designated “Negro Day” for the African-American population, and the

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32 “Historical Data Desired For County’s Centennial,” Coffee County Progress, 28 January 1954. Only a few portions of the article are quoted here. The complete list of subjects included: Indians, Early Settlers, Church, Education, Revolution, Industry and Invention, New County, Towns, Wars, War Between States, First Railroad, Famous People, Gay 90’s, and Civic Projects.
celebrations ended on Saturday, 15 May 1954, designated as Veteran’s Day. Each
evening from Monday through Saturday, visitors could witness the lavish pageant:
“Coffee County Centurama.” It is unlikely they would have found much of Coffee
County’s history in the pageant, however.

The Coffee County Centurama

The script that the Rogers Company prepared filled up twenty-seven and a half
sheets of legal paper, and called for four narrators. The beginning of the pageant was a
spectacle of centennial royalty with a coronation taking place during the first
performance. After the pomp was over, red floodlights swept the stage as one narrator
read about the mystery of time before introducing “the man whose skin was likened unto
clay—the Redman!” Thus began a standardized Indian scene, and although the narrators
read off the correct names of the tribes associated with southern Georgia, the script’s
depiction of the Indians better characterized tribes of the Great Plains than the Creeks and
Seminoles who once lived in Coffee’s territory: “Here amidst their tepees and around
their council fires the redmen were happy, paying homage to the Sun god and to his pale
brother the moon, placating the gods of fire, water, and thunder.” The “simple life” of the
Indians was interrupted by whites who provoked “the peaceful redman” until he “became
a wild savage.” After a series of battles with the Indians, the pageant moved forward to
white settlement.33

The first settlers were portrayed as simple, yet courageous and God fearing. The
script showed them cooking, square dancing, and fighting off a group of renegade

33 Coffee County Centurama Script, Centennial File, Coffee County Files, Genealogical Department,
Indians. The next episode saw the pioneers take time to worship at a church where they sang “Holy, Holy, Holy,” accompanied by an organ, and recited the Lord’s Prayer. Declaring that “The settlement of the wilderness was also a religious crusade,” several congregations were then listed including Lone Hill Methodist, Hebron Primitive Baptist, Union Baptist, Nicholls Baptist, First Baptist of West Green, the Catholic Church, and Mormon Missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While all of these churches played a role in Coffee’s history, only a few could really be classified as pioneer-era. The scenes depicting pioneers and religion were so off-base from historical reality that if Coffee’s real Primitive Baptist settlers had lived to see the program, they would have stormed out in offense. Dancing was considered sinful by Primitive Baptists, as was singing hymns with organ accompaniment.34

Subsequent scenes did little better as they portrayed a stagecoach moving along the Coffee Road and a school teacher ready to whip a misbehaving boy. The pageant improved in its portrayal of South Georgia College by showing two men select a site for the school and a number of graduates marching (some of them part of the choir at the college). Once this scene was over, however, the script slipped back to generalization. Those witnessing the pageant would have come away with the belief that Coffee County was covered with plantations, whereas in reality only the northernmost areas along the Ocmulgee had anything substantial. African-American slaves were absent from the plantation scene, which consisted entirely of a house party and dance.35

34 Centurama script, 7-12.
35 Centurama script, 13-20.
For some bizarre reason never explained by the pageant, the Union fell apart in 1861: “A split in our nation’s Union hung like an approaching storm over the prosperity of our county...then suddenly, the storm...broke in all its fury...the southern states seceded from the Union. Soon the Union became disunion. The nation was divided and ready for war.” No mention was made of slavery, nor of state’s rights. All that mattered in the script was that the men who had been dancing at the plantation were to fall in behind a Confederate officer and march off to war.36

One scene that was particularly disconnected from the reality of Coffee’s history was “The Gay 90s.” The decade was characterized as one big Fourth of July picnic with music, two-seater bicycles, Can-Can girls, and the first appearance of automobiles.37 While there were times of leisure for residents of Coffee County in the 1890s, nothing made the decade any happier than others. The grim realities included political turmoil, violence, and economic depression. A better title for the scene would have been one that historian Alex Arnett used when writing about the 1890s in Georgia: “the Heart-Breaking Nineties.”38 By suggesting the decade was one of carefree fun, the Centurama obliterated any understanding of what was arguably one of the most crucial decades in Coffee County’s History.

Scenes depicting the First World War and the 1920s were similarly flat representations of each, even though the reading of the poem “In Flanders Fields” had a touching quality. Charleston dancers quickly broke through the solemnity of the World

36 Ibid., 19-20.
37 Ibid., 23-25.
38 Arnett, Populist Movement in Georgia, 156.
War, though, and the pageant continued to suggest that challenging times were no challenge at all. If the script could be believed, the Great Depression came and went in no time for Coffee’s citizens:

Then came the Wall Street crash, stocks fell lower and lower. Men eagerly watched the tickertape but all the news was bad. Family savings and businesses were wiped out. The county fell into a Depression. Many businesses here in our county were effected [sic] by this, and many families found themselves with almost nothing. Yes, those were dark days. But gradually prosperity returned and time moved onward.39

The Second World War was the best scene of the pageant, but not because of anything incredible in the script which had the actors reenact the raising of the U.S. flag over Iwo Jima, a scene common to most Rogers pageants.40 Instead, this scene was poignant since the actors who raised the flag were real soldiers and the family that listened to the radio announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor was a real family.41

While most of the Coffee County Centurama was two-dimensional and removed from reality, the scene depicting the Second World War was blessed with a kernel of profound truth—that history was made not by savages or superhumans, but by everyday people.

In the final analysis, Coffee County Centurama accomplished its purpose—it entertained people and brought attention to Douglas and Coffee County. It also benefitted hundreds of everyday people who could act on a big stage and have fun without worrying about whether they would mess up their lines. Measured by these goals, the pageant was a stunning success. If the goal had been to make Coffee County residents more aware of their history, however, the pageant largely failed. What people witnessed every evening

39 Centurama script, 26.
40 Ibid., 27.
41 “Coffee County Centennial Celebration 1854-1954, Featuring the ‘Centurama,’” in Centennial File, Coffee County Files, Genealogical Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
between the 10th and 15th of May 1954 was not the history of Coffee County, but a mass-produced mirage of history with details unique to Coffee thrown in.

Some of the earliest historical pageants had been produced as a reaction against modernity, and their producers believed that celebrating the past would foster a renewal of individualism and values in the face of industrial uniformity. By the 1950s, though, the tradition had been turned on its head by the John B. Rogers Producing Company. Mass-produced historical pageants now became forces of modernization instead of reactions against it. Most towns and counties that hired the Rogers Company hoped to see an increase in business activity or snag new industry, especially as each pageant touted the progress of the community. In the end, however, the pageants’ odes to progress made individual communities look much the same.

Flora, Illinois, celebrated its centennial in July, 1954, just two months after Coffee County. Both communities hired the John B. Rogers Company to run the centennial celebration and write the historical pageant. Flora’s pageant had eighteen episodes while Coffee’s had twenty-two, but seven of Flora’s episodes shared the exact same names as those of Coffee’s pageant. In the descriptions of each scene, eleven of the scenes had the same wording as the descriptions to be found on Coffee County’s program with “Flora” in place of “Coffee County.” Another program, this one from Fostoria, Ohio, where the Rogers Company was based, contained an advertisement listing some of the cities utilizing Rogers Production services. Douglas was listed with thirty-six other cities from

43 “Flora’s Centennial Celebration,” digitized by University of Illinois and available online at: http://archive.org/details/florascentennial00flor. See Appendix C for a comparison of the two programs.
all around the country. The Coffee County Centurama was indeed a celebration that had little bearing on what actually happened in Coffee County and why.

**Waiting for Armageddon**

The last day of Coffee’s Centennial week fell on Armed Forces Day, a relatively new holiday for the United States. Selected by President Harry S Truman to be held every third Saturday in May, the holiday was meant to eliminate rivalries between branches of the military. Centennial organizers had partly postponed the week of celebrations to May so the holiday would coincide with the observance of the centennial. Spectators whocame to Douglas on 15 May were not disappointed. In the morning, squadrons of T-33 T-bird and F2H Banshee jets from Moody Air Force Base near Valdosta, Georgia, and Jacksonville, Florida, flew overhead, while the afternoon saw a final parade of floats and tanks.

The day’s keynote speaker was S. Ernest Vandiver, Adjutant General of the Georgia National Guard. Major General Vandiver discussed the progress the guard had made under his direction, and emphasized the benefits of having a unit and future armory stationed at Douglas (which he had obtained for the city after being impressed with their civil defense preparations three years prior). He dedicated a granite memorial to the

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46 “Coffee County Centennial Celebration Featuring the ‘Centurama,’” and “Armed Forces Day Aircraft Schedule, Area VI, 15 May 1954,” both in “Centennial” file, Coffee County Genealogical Files, Genealogical Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
47 Letter from Ernest Vandiver to Editors of Coffee County Progress dated 29 October 1951, published in Coffee County Progress, 15 November 1951. Vandiver compliments Douglas and Coffee County in their attention to Civil Defense preparations, and it is likely he remembered Douglas in selecting new sites for National Guard Armories. For other instances of Adjutant Generals selectively placing National Guard Armories.
soldiers who had served from Coffee County in the two world wars which had been erected on the courthouse square by the Douglas Lions Club. Although the full text of Vandiver’s remarks no longer exists, some of it survives in the monthly magazine then published by Georgia’s National Guard:

Speaking on the theme of preparedness, General Vandiver said we must be prepared both on the offense and the defense. “The price of peace is high, but the price of defeat is higher—much higher,” he said. General Vandiver warned that the next war will bring intercontinental warfare with the atomic bomb and reiterated our determination to be prepared on the home front by cooperating with civil defense agencies and by building more powerful armed services.48

The militaristic tone of the last day’s activities and the warning from Vandiver about atomic warfare—not to mention the simulated atomic explosion at the end of Centurama—were reminders to the citizens of Coffee County that the world yet remained a dangerous place.

In spite of these dangers, however, it was certain that Coffee County (and the South in general) would be among the first to rise to the nation’s defense. As Woodward had continued in his talk, the South’s response “to the slogans of nationalism in recent world crises has often exceeded that of other sections of the country.”49 An entire region, once counted the nation’s most traitorous, was now the home of America’s most patriotic citizens. For most of its history, Coffee County had sought the American dream of prosperity and progress, but so often faced the southern disappointments of “frustration


and failure.” As Coffee’s grand centennial celebration came to an end on 15 May 1954, the residents of Coffee County probably felt that they were at last part of the greater national experience, freed from the troubles and cares of the past.

As Woodward warned, however, a newly powerful America “stands in greater need than she ever did of understanding her own history.” The history presented to the citizens of Coffee County from the 10th to the 15th of May had contained almost as much myth as reality and at a time when Coffee needed more than ever an understanding of its history. In ironic ways that neither Woodward nor Vandiver could have anticipated, Armageddon would indeed come to the South, but not from the Soviet Union.

On Monday, 17 May 1954, reality came calling. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court brought to the attention of the country a problem that, though ignored, would not go away. Nothing in Coffee County would ever be the same.

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50 Ibid., 190.
51 Ibid., 209.
African-Americans have always been part of Coffee County’s history, and there never was a time when they made up less than one of every five residents. Ironically, while African-Americans prompted much day to day discussion, their presence was often absent from written histories of the county. Monday, 17 May 1954, changed all that. It had once been possible to ignore or dismiss African-Americans and the inequities imposed on them by Jim Crow and segregation, but no longer. The Supreme Court’s decision forced white residents of Coffee to come face-to-face with their neighbors and their problems. To many, the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling was unfair, not least because Coffee’s taxpayers had provided a brand-new school for African-Americans on the eve of what many began calling “Black Monday.”

The *Brown* decision threw Georgia into pandemonium, and politicians like Herman Talmadge, Marvin Griffin, and Ernest Vandiver all advocated a plan of “massive resistance” to the Supreme Court ruling. By the end of the 1950s, Georgia law required the shuttering of every public school in the state if one were forced to integrate. While this hard position pleased many whites within the state, a growing number of people rebelled against it. Previous histories of Georgia have placed this moderating force in middle-class Atlanta suburbs, but moderates also prevailed in Coffee County, a fact often lost by its location deep in South Georgia. While many whites in Coffee County remained prejudiced against African-Americans, most were willing to allow some kind of

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integration rather than close every school in the state. In Coffee, education won out over absolute race separation.

Yet the story of African-Americans in Coffee County did not end on a solid note of progress, but an uncertain note of paradox. While Coffee’s whites were not so racist as to desire an absolute closure of schools to prevent integration, they still fought desegregation of the county’s schools by every means possible. Fifteen years would pass before blacks and whites attended an integrated school in Coffee County. Integration also demoted the George Washington Carver High School to Coffee Junior High, destroying a source of pride for many African-Americans. In addition, an urban renewal plan transformed the black neighborhoods of Douglas, but in so doing cleared away the community’s memories with them. At the end, many African-Americans were better off in education and material goods, but impoverished in terms of their history.

**Slavery to Segregation I: Race and Reconstruction**

Most settlers moving into the wilderness of southeastern Georgia did not bring slaves with them. Frontier conditions and slaves made for a poor combination as many escaped into areas still controlled by Creek and Seminole Indians. This situation changed as white settlers pushed native Indians out of Georgia and Florida. A second barrier to slaveholding in wiregrass Georgia was the poor soil, without which plantation agriculture was difficult, if not impossible. Accordingly, the first areas of the lower Ocmulgee basin to have a substantial slave population were farms located along the fertile banks of the river.² The 1850 Census recorded 275 slaves in the two militia districts of Telfair south

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² Wetherington, *Plain Folk’s Fight*, 11-43.
of the Ocmulgee, but the vast majority of these, 239, were in district 437—the district that bordered the river.  

This pattern continued after the creation of Coffee—the slave census of 1860 recorded that twenty-eight masters lived in northern Coffee, twenty-five lived in the central part of the county, and twenty lived in its southern districts. Even though masters lived in all parts of Coffee, most slaves resided in the northern districts as northern Coffee masters held a median of eight slaves, compared to a median of three for the central and southern districts. Northern Coffee masters therefore held the most slaves per capita and stood to lose the most in the event of emancipation. When war did come and the slaves were freed, the resulting changes were most extreme in Coffee’s north.  

After Georgia was first readmitted to the Union as part of President Andrew Johnson’s plan of Reconstruction, the state’s whites quickly passed a series of “black codes” that sharply curtailed the freedoms of the state’s blacks. In response, Congressional Republicans stripped Georgia of statehood and placed it under military occupation. In 1867, elections were called to select delegates for a new constitutional convention in Atlanta. African-Americans were allowed to register to vote while whites who had supported the Confederacy were officially barred from voting rolls. In Coffee County, some 450 men registered to vote, and African-Americans made up one in five of

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3 Districts 437 and 748, Telfair County, Georgia, Census of Slave Population, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, roll 95), Records of the Bureau of the Census, RG 29; digitized by Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center and uploaded 31 July 2010 to Internet Archive at: http://archive.org/details/7thcensus0095unit (slave).  
those registered. The districts where African-Americans comprised the largest percentage of voters were in northern Coffee County where a third of all voters in district 437 were black and forty percent of voters in district 1127 were listed as “Colored.”

African-American voters were not in the majority in Coffee County or any of the surrounding counties, but they did influence who was elected. The delegate representing Clinch, Coffee, and Ware Counties, Peter Bedford, was a white southerner, but nevertheless voted with the radical faction to expand voting rights and freedoms for African-Americans in the state. The constitutional convention in Atlanta represented the high point of radical Republicans in Coffee County, however, and their decline was brought about by a campaign of terrorism by white Democrats. Little documentation survives about conservative terror tactics in Coffee, but census measurements provide a clue as to their effectiveness. In 1860, slaves comprised 46.7 percent of the population of district 1127 where half of the district’s masters had at least thirteen or more slaves. In 1867, African-Americans comprised 40.5 percent of the registered voters in the district, but white terrorism caused many blacks to leave. By the 1870 Census, blacks made up only 18.1 percent of the population in district 1127.

The rapid evacuation of blacks from northern Coffee dramatically shows the risk attached to political participation by African-Americans in the years following the Civil War, but the Ocmulgee River area was not typical of Coffee County as a whole. Most

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6 Volume 3 4646, Coffee Returns of Qualified Voters, 1867, Executive Department, Office of Governor, Record Group 1-1-108, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.
districts within Coffee did not have such a high proportion of blacks, and in some cases may have supported black participation. District 1026 in southern Coffee County had the second-lowest number of slaves in 1860, comprising 11.3 percent of the total population. In 1867, however, blacks registered 23.3 percent of the electorate, and by 1870 African-Americans made up 23.5 percent of the district 1026’s total population. Coffee County was therefore a patchwork of areas, some hostile to blacks while others were indifferent or even benevolent. Even so, African-Americans slowly drained away from Coffee County from the end of the Civil War to 1880. Blacks’ share of Coffee’s total population dropped from 23 percent in 1860 to 21.2 percent in 1870 and a historic low of 20.6 percent by 1880. The experience of most African-Americans in Coffee County’s first thirty years was one of slavery for the first decade, political turmoil in the next, and exodus to greener pastures in the last.9

Slavery to Segregation II: The Crucible of the Color Line

The next thirty years of African-Americans in Coffee County differed greatly from the first thirty. New African-Americans, mostly involved with the turpentine industry, flowed into Coffee County and increased the overall proportion of blacks to whites. The percentage of African-Americans to Coffee’s population jumped up to 37.1 percent in 1890 and leapt to 40.9 percent by 1900. Most of this new generation of African-Americans were born in other parts of Georgia or in the Carolinas, and many had been brought to the county by white turpentine owners. The increase in the county’s black population was mirrored by the equally explosive white settlement, and as

unfamiliar whites came in contact with unfamiliar blacks, racial tensions rose. The thirty
tears between 1884 and 1914 saw five African-Americans lynched in Coffee.10

The color line was not as unforgiving at it might appear, however. All of the
lynch mobs that operated in Coffee County were small affairs, typically consisting of five
or more people, but never any more than fifty. Most of these “private” mobs dispatched
their victims without ceremony—their main intent was to punish real or perceived
crimes, not so much to humiliate or terrorize. Coffee escaped the mass lynch mobs that
often tortured victims and whose violence often spilled beyond the original victim.
Nevertheless, five African-Americans were killed by mob action in Coffee without the
benefit of a trial, and another three would die at the hands of a mob in 1920; the only
consolation blacks could take was that few in Coffee participated in these lynch mobs.11

The largest racial clashes had to do with politics. As white North Carolinians and
Georgians struggled for political power in Coffee County, they sought to win over the
African-American vote. The situation in Willacoochee was especially tense. The
southwestern district of Coffee was a major center for turpentine interests and by 1900
the population was almost half black. This combination would seem to have favored the
Populists who fused with the minimal African-American Republican Party in 1896, but
that year the Democrats carried the Willacoochee District.12 In 1949, a long-time resident
would recall the tensions associated with African-Americans comprising a key voting
bloc at the end of the nineteenth century:

533; Brundage, Lynching in New South, 272-277.
12 See Chapter One.
Willacoochee held the balance of power in Coffee County politics. This was due to the great influx of labor to the large lumber and turpentine industries in the district. By far, the greater number of the population was negroes. It was never a test of ability in a candidate as to who would win, but a matter of who could round up and poll the greatest number of negro votes. Negroes were indifferent, they were among strange people in a strange land. To them, an election was only a gala holiday from work. By sunrise turpentine wagons would pull into town packed with negroes. Later tram engines from the two large lumber mills would pull into town with flatcars a seething mass of humanity – mostly negroes...It would be a day filled with thrills but, strange to say, never any serious trouble. Three days later we would hear from Douglas which candidate had won.13

While whites were divided between Populists and Democrats in the 1890s, it was possible for African-Americans to vote peaceably since they were guarded by white supporters of the party they chose to vote for.14 This did not mean, though, that no violence transpired around election time. As Coffee’s whites united around a white primary, African-American protests against the new system sparked conflicts.

In September, 1904, a group of blacks apparently protested the newly-instituted whites-only Primary in Broxton. The town responded quickly by placing the community under heavy guard and “dispersed all angry gathering crowds and nipped the blossom before it even had time to bloom. The white people of Broxton all stood together, and the trouble is over.”15 The very next week an African-American wrote to the Douglas Breeze, protesting the newspaper’s coverage of the event: “...we doubt the sincerity of the matter, and we believe the origin to be malicious, and came from the source of

13 Mrs. J.E. Gaskins, “Early History of Willacoochee,” written 10 November 1949 and mailed to the Coffee County Centennial Committee 5 April 1954 by the McCranie Brothers Timber Company, in “Centennial” file, Coffee County files, Genealogical Department, Satilla Regional Library, Douglas, GA.
14 See Chapter One.
darkness.” The writer had good reason to doubt reports of the incident at Broxton as they were just one of many feeding white fears in summer and fall of 1904. Rumors of so-called “Before Day” clubs suggested that blacks were organizing to kill prominent whites, and led to the brutal lynching of two at Statesboro. Another African-American writer to the Breeze dismissed such clubs, claiming that “The condition of the negro is bad enough,” and suggesting that whites could rest assured that the rumors were untrue. In the end, many whites did come around to admitting that the rumors were false, but the real incidents sparked by such rumors kept both races on edge.

In 1908 as Georgia prepared to amend the Constitution to disfranchise black voters, the Enterprise reported that Republicans were trying to register black voters to defeat the amendments in the coming election. Whether any African-Americans were able to cast ballot against the amendment is uncertain, but another bizarre incident took place within days of the election when the Pearson Railroad Depot burned down. Several African-American carpenters were hired by the Atlantic Coast Line to rebuild the depot, but they soon received death threats by self-styled “Night Riders” who ordered them to leave Pearson. After printing this story, however, it was the turn of the Enterprise to cast doubt on the veracity of the account: “After an investigation of the above, we find it to be far fetched and in the whole untrue. Coffee county does not contain within her borders

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17 Remillard, Southern Civil Religions, 67-75.
organizations of this character as she has long since passed from this stage of
recklessness.”

Incidents like the troubles at Pearson and Broxton, as well as other clashes like
the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906, convinced many “progressive” whites that the only
solution for racial tensions was separation. African-Americans needed to be eliminated
from the electorate to discourage white factions from seeking their vote; black residences
needed to be carefully separated from white homes; trains needed to have separate
accommodations for whites and blacks, and the list lengthened as the Supreme Court
approved “separate but equal” segregation in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision. As
C. Vann Woodward would later write, southern progressivism was “for whites only.”
Progressives truly believed, however, that eliminating blacks from white society was the
best thing that could be done for everyone involved, an attitude that continued into the
mind-twentieth century. The 1949 account of Willacoochee’s early history ended with an
affirmation of black disfranchisement: “Hoke Smith saw the injustice of such elections
and gave the people of Georgia the White Primary – not because of trouble caused by
negroes voting, but to keep them from being exploited by the white man.”

Slavery to Segregation III: The New Negro

The next thirty years (1914-1944) saw yet another new pattern emerge. Blacks
once more drained away from Coffee County, partly to find employment in the North or

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21 Jack Temple Kirby, Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South
22 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University
in southern cities, partly to escape the tenancy which increased its grip over Coffee County’s farms, and partly to escape persecutions, some of which came from the renewed Ku Klux Klan. Those that remained did not challenge the system of segregation, but they did demand more benefits from white society. An African-American high school was established in Douglas and Coffee’s newspapers began to print more stories on African-Americans besides crime reports and obituaries. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down the white primary in 1944, a ruling that would eventually transform Georgia’s electoral landscape. In spite of this progress, challenges continued to press on Coffee’s black population, whether it was poor living conditions or political demagoguery.

The First World War set in motion a number of events, and among them was a migration of African-Americans out of Coffee County. This was part of a broader movement away from the South as northern industries sought black workers to replace foreign laborers now cut off by the war in Europe. Other factors in the migration involved African-Americans leaving farms for other occupations in cities and towns.24 Between 1920 and 1940, the combined black population of Coffee and Atkinson Counties dropped, but in Douglas the number of African-Americans increased by 400. The blacks who chose to remain in Coffee County were therefore increasingly urban than in previous generations, a trend which continued for the rest of the twentieth century.25

The urban South saw stricter segregation than the countryside where blacks and whites might work adjoining lands. The Negro section of Douglas began along South Gaskin Avenue, separated from the upper-class houses along North Gaskin by the Waycross Air Line Railroad, later absorbed into the Atlanta, Birmingham and Atlantic Railroad. By the 1920s, most of the southeastern quarter of Douglas consisted of African-American residences. The area, derisively referred to as “The Slide” or “Rat Row” by whites, was characterized by crowded conditions and poor structures. In 1925 a fire swept through the black section of Douglas, destroying several blocks. The Progress reported that the fire department took every possible action to save the structures, but that “being so close together nothing but a miracle could have saved them.” The neighborhood was also marred by crime, much of it black on black, but with an occasional white victim. The tobacco warehouses of Douglas bordered “The Slide” and in 1931 a white man from Axson had just left selling his tobacco when he was brutally knifed by a black man on Cherry Street. The gory murder remained large in the minds of many whites, even though African-Americans condemned the act.

Cherry Street was not home to just criminals, however, for in 1923 it became the location for Coffee County’s first African-American high school. Previous to this time, no schools in Coffee provided an education for blacks beyond elementary grades. Funding for white schools was hard enough to secure, and as was generally the case throughout the South, separate black schools were never equal to their white counterparts. In spite of these challenges, the African-American community of Coffee County secured

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26 Coffee County Progress, 28 May 1925.
27 Coffee County Progress, 20 August 1931.
funding from a charitable fund established by Julius Rosenwald of Sears, Roebuck & Co. The Rosenwald fund contributed fifteen percent of the cost of constructing a school for African-Americans provided other sources covered the rest. The end result of the black community’s efforts and white sympathies was the Coffee County Training School which opened in the Fall of 1923.\(^\text{28}\)

Although the training school was a giant leap forward for the African-American community, it rapidly grew inadequate. By 1933, ten years after the school’s opening, the four classrooms, auditorium, and two small classrooms could no longer handle the demand. Elementary grades also met in the school and the first four grades met in double session to save space. The school needed two or three shop rooms for vocational training since vocational work for boys had to be canceled due to lack of space. School superintendents were skeptical about expanding school facilities, however, especially since teachers’ salaries, paid by the charitable Slater Fund, were often overdue.\(^\text{29}\)

Another pillar of black life in Douglas was Gaines Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. The church devoted itself to improving black life in Coffee County along with devotion to God, and the church steadily grew in respectability among whites. Gaines Chapel also hosted many conferences for the AME Church, bringing black business into Douglas and garnering favor among commerce-oriented whites.\(^\text{30}\)

In spite of the strides made by the Coffee Training School and Gaines Chapel AME Church, white perceptions of African-Americans were colored by crime. Few

\(^{28}\) Donald L. Grant, *The Way It Was*, 236; *Coffee County Progress*, 20 September 1923.

\(^{29}\) Mr. E. E. Redcay, Slater Fund 1934-35 Report, Director’s Subject Files, Negro Education Division, Georgia Department of Education, Record Group 12-6-71, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.

\(^{30}\) *Coffee County Progress*, 25 November 1926, 6 October 1932.
newspaper stories about Coffee’s black community during the 1930s mentioned anything else. The constant barrage of crime stories gave many whites the impression that African-Americans were nothing more than a race of criminals. Some opinions began to moderate as the United States entered the Second World War and as the black community raised money for war bonds and as black men joined the service. White businessman C. E. Weir wrote about running into an African-American acquaintance who was wearing a uniform with sergeant’s stripes and being surprised that the man had enlisted.31

African-American education was also on the upswing. During the 1930s, Coffee’s voters elected Allie Waters’s former teacher, Elisha Marion Thompson, to be the Superintendent of Coffee County’s schools. While Thompson certainly did not believe in equality between the races, he did believe in the power of education to lift everyone, black or white. Under his leadership, blacks schools received as much support as he could get predominantly white Coffee County to give them. To facilitate better schools which often lacked libraries and laboratories, Thompson accelerated an ongoing process of consolidation which mirrored similar movements for Coffee’s white schools.32 Thompson also made sure that black students had a chance for recreation as well as learning by sponsoring a black field day at Douglas High School in 1942. Speakers at the occasion included a professor at predominantly black Savannah State College and Thompson himself. The superintendent may also have played a role in renaming the

32 “Reduction of Schools Between 1941-42 & 1949-50, Region 10,” Regional Meetings, GT&EA-1949-1950, Director’s Subject Files- 1923-1944, Negro Education Division, Georgia Department of Education, RG 12-6-71, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.
Coffee Training School as George Washington Carver High School, a move that boosted community pride among the county’s black students.  

While Coffee’s African-American community could be pleased by the recent developments in education, they did little to rock the boat politically. Events beyond their control would soon intervene. In *Smith v. Allwright*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Texas’s white primary unconstitutional. Because Georgia had laws similar to Texas, many expected the white primary’s demise in Georgia as well. The state’s Democratic Party argued that the Supreme Court ruling applied only to Texas, but after a year, Federal Courts had also struck down Georgia’s segregated primary. Governor Ellis Arnall refused to fight the issue, and battle lines were soon drawn by all sides. The final decade of Coffee’s first century would be bumpy for the African-Americans of the county.  

“For now we see through a glass, darkly”  

The ten years between 1944 and 1954 were mixed for African-Americans. The Carver school was substantially rebuilt and became the most modern school in Coffee County. On the other hand, resistance to black voting hardened, and African-American voters were mysteriously purged from the election rolls in Coffee. With the coming of the county’s centennial, blacks were given a day to celebrate, but there was little noted of their contributions to the county’s history outside of “Negro Day.”  

In the 1946 election for governor, Eugene Talmadge made several promises, not least of which was to restore the white primary should he be elected. Talmadge had long

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33 *Coffee County Progress*, 26 March 1942.  
been favored by many in Coffee County, even though his opponent in 1942, Ellis Arnall, had won the county. The 1946 election was plagued by irregularities, including the removal of all African-Americans from the voting registers of Coffee, an occurrence that affected thirty-one other counties.\(^35\) Eugene Talmadge won overwhelmingly, but died before taking office, throwing the state’s politics into chaos before his son, Herman Talmadge, won a special election in 1948. With the Talmadge regime in office again, white supremacy solidified across the state and Herman vowed that no African-Americans would ever attend white schools while he was governor.\(^36\)

Even though white reaction against black political power was overwhelmingly hostile, white attitudes toward black education had mellowed, at least in Coffee County. In the first couple of years of the 1950s, Coffee County citizens elected to merge the Coffee County and Douglas school districts. As part of this merger, two large high schools would be built in Douglas, one for black students and the other for whites. The new African-American high school continued under the name of George Washington Carver.\(^37\) Elisha M. Thompson hoped to avoid integration by making white and black schools truly equal, fearing that mixing whites and blacks in the same classroom would lead to violence.\(^38\) Other whites in Coffee County, however, were beginning to question the very basis of segregation. Clarence E. Weir of Douglas condemned public opinion as being no more enlightened than private opinion multiplied into mob strength. He felt that if people viewed the issues in the context of what was right versus what was wrong,

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\(^35\) Novotny, *This Georgia Rising*, 175-202.
\(^37\) *Coffee County Progress*, 23 April 1953.
\(^38\) Cassel, *Wiregrass Allie*, 96.
people would come around to seeing African-Americans’ struggle for civil rights in a different light.39

During Coffee County’s centennial, African-Americans had some reasons to celebrate—the community had at least given them a day of their own while running a segregated celebration. The Carver High School was more modern and better equipped than the white schools of the county, and Coffee’s Board of Education had decided to build the new Carver building first. Although most blacks lived in poor living conditions, the community was closely knit and boasted strong black churches. Life in a segregated society, however, limited the number of opportunities African-Americans could pursue. Segregation forced whites and blacks to see only distorted versions of the other group, like looking through a mirror. The Brown v. Board of Education decision and its accompanying mandate for integration would finally cause both races to see each other face to face.

“Then that which is in part shall be done away”

Reaction to school integration was volcanic throughout the deep South, and the Governors of Georgia who followed Herman Talmadge advocated a program of “massive resistance” to the Supreme Court’s decision. Marvin Griffin, who had been the first speaker at Coffee County’s centennial, took office in 1955 and supported a plan that would close every school in Georgia should a single school integrate.40 This plan drew cheers from many across the state, including Coffee County, but others felt differently, including C. E. Weir and Elisha M. Thompson. They, and others in Coffee County,

39 Coffee County Progress, 24 June 1948, 16 December 1948.
40 Buchanan, Some Ate My Barbecue, 156-162, 167-169.
worked to change opinions and laws to prevent a total shut-down of Georgia’s public education. Most histories on this issue lay the growth of opposition to massive resistance in Georgia at the feet of suburban whites in the Atlanta area, but the case of Coffee County clearly shows that like-minded people could be found in rural southern Georgia.\footnote{One proponent of the view that suburbanites drove through the demise of massive resistance is Matthew D. Lassiter, \textit{The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 44-93. While white suburbanites clearly led the fight, this view tends to ignore the contributions by Georgia’s rural areas to open schools, even if such areas were the exception.}

Following Griffin, Ernest Vandiver, who also spoke at the Coffee County Centennial, took office as governor in 1959. While he ran on a platform of “no, not one” black student in white schools, he came around to realizing that closing Georgia’s public schools would be disastrous for the state. In 1960 as court-ordered integration prepared to end segregation in Atlanta, Vandiver appointed a commission led by John A. Sibley to tour the state and gage whether Georgians might support a “local option” plan where Georgia’s schools would continue running even if some integrated.\footnote{Harold Paulk Henderson, \textit{Ernest Vandiver: Governor of Georgia} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 81, 107-118.} The hearing for Georgia’s Eighth Congressional District was held at the high school gymnasium in Douglas on Monday, 14 March 1960. Sibley presented those at the meeting with two choices. The first option was to close down every single school if one were forced to desegregate. The second option was to allow local school boards to have the freedom to choose their direction, suggesting that some districts in Georgia would integrate while others would remain segregated.\footnote{Jeff Roche, \textit{Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 124-129.}
At the meeting, twenty-two individuals from Coffee County voiced their opinions at the meeting, more than any other county represented. Five were for segregation at the expense of closing down every school in the state. One of them warned that “if the bright white blood stream is to be reserved [sic] and if the Negro blood stream is to be preserved that you can’t do it by partial integration or any kind of integration...and I don’t believe people will ever vote for that.”44 Another four expressed uncertain or conflicting opinions, or declined to make a choice. Thirteen others voiced opinions generally in favor of the local option, but most were pro-education rather than pro-integration. Four ministers from Douglas spoke, all of them for the first option.45

The most impassioned plea came from Mary George Dean, a college student who favored the second option. She said that while she attended a private college, her brother went to a state college and shutting down the public schools would adversely affect him and many others who sought state-sponsored education. She chastised people for not caring enough whether public education would continue in the state or not. She also voiced confidence in her generation: “I would just like to say that I don’t like all this kick down about the young people going to the dogs and loosing all their ideals because it looks like the young people have about as many ideals left about public free education and the real purpose of democracy and—a lot more of those ideals left than the adults do.”46 Dean was the youngest witness to speak from Coffee County, but her more

44 Georgia General Assembly Committee on Schools, Official Tabulation of Hearings, Volume I, District 8, Douglas, Georgia, 1960, Series 1: Subject Files, John A. Sibley Papers, MSS 437, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL), Emory University. See page 151 for specific quote.
46 Ibid., 152-154.
sympathetic attitudes toward education and dignity for everyone were not unique. The Civil Rights movement would force many to question their attitudes.

Most witnesses at the meeting in Douglas supported the first option, however, and the overall opinion of the Eighth District was segregation at all costs. The Sibley Commission found similar attitudes across Georgia, but recommended that the legislature allow the “local option” for schools. The Vandiver administration thus encouraged the state to rid itself of massive resistance laws, but not before several other crises shook the state. 47 One involved a court order to allow two African-American students, Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter, to register at the University of Georgia. After mob action, a closure of the university, and several legal battles, Holmes and Hunter were finally able to attend classes, although most of their experience was in isolation. One white student from Douglas, Walter Stovall, was an exception—he reached out to Hunter, and after graduation the two moved north and wed. 48

Other Coffee County residents were less willing to have such close contact with African-Americans. Elisha M. Thompson retired in 1963 with the schools still segregated. Resistance to integration would continue until courts forced total desegregation in 1969, fifteen years after the Brown decision. Some parents refused to accept this and began a private school, Coffee Citizens Christian Academy, the same year. With integration, the Carver school was changed to Coffee Junior High School,

47 Roche, Restructured Resistance, 96-157; Henderson, Ernest Vandiver, 118-152.
48 Sokol, There Goes My Everything, 148-163, esp. 162.
serving grades 7-9, and the white Coffee High School received all students, black and
white, for grades 10-12.49

For African-Americans in Douglas, the changes over the fifteen years between the
centennial and the complete integration of Coffee’s schools were dramatic. At the same
time, southeastern Douglas was completely transformed by an urban renewal program
sponsored by the Federal Government. The stated goal was to clear away slums and
improve living conditions for the city’s African-Americans, but new roads and highways
cut through old neighborhoods. As was the case in cities across the South, traditional
landmarks of African-American life disappeared with urban renewal, and the separate
black culture which had once flourished was disrupted. Urban renewal proved to be much
more of a mixed blessing than integration.50

As the 1970s approached, Coffee’s residents—white and black—faced a strange
new world of politics, economics, and culture, with challenges yet to come. Yet the two
were no longer divided by law.

49 Geneva Porter Justice, “From Sparks to Flame: The History of Education in Coffee County,”
50 City of Douglas, Georgia, Looking Over Douglas’ Shoulder As It “…demonstrates how a small
community (less than 25,000) can successfully fulfill all requirements of the Workable Program within a
relatively short period of time,” (Douglas, GA: City of Douglas, Georgia, 1957, Revised 1966); Coffee
County Progress, 8 September 1955, 1 March 1956, 31 May 1956, 18 April 1957; Brundage, The Southern
Past, 227-269.
CONCLUSION: POSSIBILITIES

In 1966, Linda Kay Moore and Mary Duncan, both high school students at Coffee County High School, sought to correct a minor oversight from twelve years before. As part of Coffee’s centennial celebration, portraits of John Coffee and Stephen A. Douglas had been commissioned for the courthouse in Douglas. Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Rogers, owners of a photography studio in Douglas (not to be confused with the John B. Rogers Company), were to produce the portraits. Elisha M. Thompson was able to obtain a picture from which to base the portrait of Douglas quite easily, but none of Coffee could be found in the county that bore his name. Eventually, Thompson and Rogers found a portrait of Coffee in Athens, Georgia, and photographed the painting which was in the possession of Mrs. E. B. Brashwell, a granddaughter of Coffee.¹ The paintings were successfully produced and hung in the courthouse, but no one had thought to include name tags for the paintings.

Moore and Duncan wanted to correct this oversight, and during 1966 they researched the lives of both men and created name tags for both. The tag for Coffee read:

General John Coffee  
of Jacksonville, Georgia  
Planter – Indian Fighter –  
Congressman  
Our county was named for him

The one for Douglas read:

Honorable Stephen A. Douglas  
Senator from Illinois  
And Political Opponent of

Abraham Lincoln
Our county seat was named for him

The accompanying article that appeared in the *Douglas Enterprise* discussed the history of the two men, noting that Douglas had advocated the principal of “popular sovereignty,” but had antagonized the South with his stance at the debate in Freeport, Illinois. Moore and Duncan emphasized that Douglas had first become a friend of Lincoln after moving to Springfield, and that after Lincoln’s election, Douglas opposed secession and pledged his support to the new president.²

History and memory turn on little ironies, and Coffee County has had its share. In later years, many would come to believe that Douglas city received its name because Stephen A. Douglas had opposed Lincoln, but this is untrue. The timing does not work for that explanation, since Douglas had received its name as a settlement long before Lincoln and Douglas debated or ran for president. It appears that confusion over how Douglas received its name began in 1966. Moore and Duncan knew that Douglas was not favored by many in the South from 1858 onward, but they also realized that the Illinois Senator’s debates with and presidential campaign against Lincoln were important parts of Douglas’s biography. They decided to state such in the name plaque, but future visitors to Coffee’s courthouse would not see the distinction. They saw that Douglas was an opponent of Lincoln and that the county seat was named after him; they therefore supposed that Coffee’s seat had been a tribute to Douglas *because* he had battled the Confederacy’s old nemesis, Abraham Lincoln.

Memories of history in Coffee County were thus subject to any number of influences, some small, some large. Demographics, politics, economics, culture, religion, commercialization, and even small misinterpretations of name plaques had drastic impacts on how Coffee County residents viewed their past. While some historians suggest that elites make historical memory, they are in reality one voice among many. Historical memory is as fluid and organic as the society that produces it, and changes as the society changes. The challenge of history is to find out where collective memory of the past has drifted, and ask why it has reached its current destination.
APPENDIX A: POPULATION TRENDS FOR GREATER COFFEE COUNTY

Table A1: Total Population for Greater Coffee County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Greater Coffee County</th>
<th>Northern Coffee County</th>
<th>Central Coffee County</th>
<th>Southern Coffee County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>2882</td>
<td>1144</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>3192</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>1197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>5070</td>
<td>1619</td>
<td>1251</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>10,483</td>
<td>2977</td>
<td>2304</td>
<td>5202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>16,169</td>
<td>3998</td>
<td>5804</td>
<td>6367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>23,407</td>
<td>5565</td>
<td>10,169</td>
<td>7673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>28,163</td>
<td>5994</td>
<td>14,513</td>
<td>7656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>28,618</td>
<td>6785</td>
<td>14,939</td>
<td>6894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>30,697</td>
<td>7158</td>
<td>16,446</td>
<td>7093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>33,230</td>
<td>6634</td>
<td>19,234</td>
<td>7362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>29,867</td>
<td>6260</td>
<td>17,419</td>
<td>6188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>30,162</td>
<td>5431</td>
<td>18,852</td>
<td>5879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>34,503</td>
<td>6189</td>
<td>22,173</td>
<td>6141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>37,262</td>
<td>6308</td>
<td>24,741</td>
<td>6213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>46,415</td>
<td>7428</td>
<td>31,378</td>
<td>7609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>52,376</td>
<td>8117</td>
<td>35,884</td>
<td>8375</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Greater Coffee County is defined here as encompassing Georgia Militia Districts 437, 748, 1026, 1127, 1130, 1170, 1353, 1556, 1620, 1622, and 1804. From 1960, it is defined as the following Census County Divisions in Georgia: Ambrose, Axson, Broxton, Denton, Douglas, Nicholls, Pearson, West Green, and Willacoochee. For 1850 only, Greater Coffee County includes districts 437 and 748 of Telfair County. Northern Coffee County is defined as district 437 of Telfair County for 1850 only; districts 437 and 1127 of Coffee County from 1860-1900; districts 437 and 1127 of Coffee County with 1620 and 1622 of Jeff Davis County from 1910-1950; and CCDs Broxton and West Green of Coffee County with Denton of Jeff Davis County from 1960-2010. Central Coffee County is defined as district 748 of Telfair County for 1850 only; districts 748 and 1170 of Coffee County from 1860-1890; districts 748, 1170, and 1556 of Coffee County for 1900-1920; districts 748, 1170, 1556, and 1804 of Coffee County for 1930-1950; and CCDs Ambrose, Douglas, and Nicholls of Coffee County from 1960-2010. Southern Coffee County is defined as districts 1026 and 1130 of Coffee County for 1860-1880; districts 1026, 1130, and 1353 of Coffee County for 1890-1910; districts 1026, 1130, and 1353 of Atkinson County for 1920-1950; and CCDs Axson, Pearson, and Willacoochee of Atkinson County for 1960-2010.
Table A2: Black and White Population for Greater Coffee County, Excluding All Other Races

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Greater Coffee County</th>
<th>Northern Coffee County</th>
<th>Central Coffee County</th>
<th>Southern Coffee County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850—Free</td>
<td>664</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850—Slave</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860—Free</td>
<td>2219</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860—Slave</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870—White</td>
<td>2514</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>1005</td>
<td>868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870—Black</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880—White</td>
<td>4029</td>
<td>1163</td>
<td>1120</td>
<td>1746*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880—Black</td>
<td>1044</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>457*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890—White</td>
<td>6592</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890—Black</td>
<td>3887</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900—White</td>
<td>9564</td>
<td>2239</td>
<td>3657</td>
<td>3668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900—Black</td>
<td>6610</td>
<td>1764</td>
<td>2147</td>
<td>2699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910—White</td>
<td>15166</td>
<td>3532</td>
<td>6717</td>
<td>4917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910—Black</td>
<td>8220</td>
<td>2034</td>
<td>3429</td>
<td>2757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920—White</td>
<td>19,215</td>
<td>4154</td>
<td>9876</td>
<td>5185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920—Black</td>
<td>8952</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>4641</td>
<td>2471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930—White</td>
<td>20,860</td>
<td>5018</td>
<td>10,910</td>
<td>4932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930—Black</td>
<td>7757</td>
<td>1767</td>
<td>4028</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940—White</td>
<td>23,137</td>
<td>5622</td>
<td>12,093</td>
<td>5422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940—Black</td>
<td>7560</td>
<td>1536</td>
<td>4353</td>
<td>1671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950—White</td>
<td>23889</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>18173</td>
<td>5716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950—Black</td>
<td>7431</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5786</td>
<td>1645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960—White</td>
<td>21,712</td>
<td>4566</td>
<td>12,735</td>
<td>4411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960—Black</td>
<td>8141</td>
<td>1689</td>
<td>4675</td>
<td>1777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970—White</td>
<td>22,054</td>
<td>4034</td>
<td>14,022</td>
<td>3998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970—Black</td>
<td>8076</td>
<td>1396</td>
<td>4801</td>
<td>1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980—White</td>
<td>25,604</td>
<td>4825</td>
<td>16,341</td>
<td>4438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980—Black</td>
<td>8767</td>
<td>1354</td>
<td>5722</td>
<td>1691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990—White</td>
<td>27,254</td>
<td>5092</td>
<td>17,735</td>
<td>4427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990—Black</td>
<td>9341</td>
<td>1136</td>
<td>6547</td>
<td>1658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000—White</td>
<td>31,841</td>
<td>6011</td>
<td>20,748</td>
<td>5082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000—Black</td>
<td>11,294</td>
<td>1112</td>
<td>8690</td>
<td>1492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010—White</td>
<td>34,029</td>
<td>6658</td>
<td>22,158</td>
<td>5213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010—Black</td>
<td>12,868</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>10,473</td>
<td>1453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A3: Percent African-Americans in Greater Coffee County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Greater Coffee County</th>
<th>Northern Coffee County</th>
<th>Central Coffee County</th>
<th>Southern Coffee County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCES: See Manuscript History listing and Government Documents section in the Bibliography.
APPENDIX B: THE MILITIA DISTRICTS OF COFFEE COUNTY

Table B1: Order of Creation and Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Created</th>
<th>Original County</th>
<th>Other Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>437</td>
<td>Pickren, now West Green</td>
<td>Ca. 1819</td>
<td>Telfair</td>
<td>Part of Coffee in 1854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>748</td>
<td>Courthouse, now Douglas</td>
<td>Ca. 1829</td>
<td>Telfair</td>
<td>Part of Coffee in 1854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1026</td>
<td>Roberts, now Willacoochee</td>
<td>Ca. 1848</td>
<td>Cherokee, Fulton, Dekalb</td>
<td>Now in Atkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1126</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1 Sep 1854</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Abolished, probably confused with 1026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1127</td>
<td>Curry’s, then Wooten, now Broxton</td>
<td>10 Oct 1854</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1130</td>
<td>Mill’s, now Pearson</td>
<td>February 1855</td>
<td>Fannin and Coffee</td>
<td>Two created at same time, now part of Atkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1170</td>
<td>Tanner’s, now Nicholls</td>
<td>27 Apr 1858</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1353</td>
<td>McDonald’s, now Axson</td>
<td>1 May 1882</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Now part of Atkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1556</td>
<td>Philip’s Mill, then Bushnell, now Ambrose</td>
<td>30 Mar 1897</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1620</td>
<td>Whitehead</td>
<td>9 Feb 1906</td>
<td>Jeff Davis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1622</td>
<td>Ocmulgee</td>
<td>9 Feb 1906</td>
<td>Jeff Davis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1713</td>
<td>Mora</td>
<td>12 Dec 1912</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Abolished ca. 1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Bridgetown</td>
<td>Mid. 1920s</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Executive Volume, Militia District Books, General Administrative Records, Surveyor General, Record Group 003-01-059, Georgia Archives, Morrow, GA.

Map B1: Coffee County Militia Districts, 1850-1880
Map B2: Coffee County Militia Districts, 1890-1920

1890

1900

1910

1920
Map B3: Coffee County Militia Districts and Census Divisions, 1930-1960
APPENDIX C: THE CENTURAMA PAGEANT

Table C1: Summary of the Coffee County Centurama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title on Script</th>
<th>Title on Program</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Cast Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Prologue”</td>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>Introduction of the Centennial Royalty, followed by a procession of cadets, sailorettes, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, antebellum ladies, and representatives of various states and nations. The United States flag is presented, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance [words “under God” had not yet been adopted as the script omits them]. After reading the names of the royalty, the lights drop out except for red lights directed at the stage. Narrator reads lines concerning the unknowable nature of time and the creation of humanity. Of the many races of humans, some are white, yellow, black, and brown, “And the man whose skin was likened unto clay: the Redman!”</td>
<td>6 trumpeters, 6 nation queens, 12 queen attendants, 16 cadets, 18 “American ladies,” 19 Girl Scouts, 21 sailorettes, and 8 Boy Scouts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Redman”</td>
<td>The Red Man</td>
<td>The Indians are portrayed as living unchanged for untold generations while living in teepees and paying homage to the Sun and Moon. Scouts hurriedly enter camp and Spanish missionaries arrive with soldiers. The Medicine Man warns the chief about them, but the Chief listens to the missionaries’ message.</td>
<td>Indian Chief, Medicine Man, 10 Indian Braves, 20 Indian Squaws, 6 Indian Boys, 8 Indian Girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The English Traders”</td>
<td>The Early Traders</td>
<td>Discussion of English and Spanish rivalry over Georgia while some Indians trade with whites. Trading goes peacefully, but the narrators imply that trouble is on its way.</td>
<td>2 Missionaries, 3 Spanish soldiers, Indians from previous scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Indians Take to the War Path”</td>
<td>War Drums</td>
<td>After the colonies gain independence, white settlers begin moving into Indian land: “Angrily they rebelled, and the peaceful Redman became a wild savage.” Indians attack homes, but as they celebrate with a war dance, they are surrounded by soldiers behind bushes and surprised. Seeing themselves surrounded, the Indians surrender.</td>
<td>Indians from previous scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title on Script</td>
<td>Title on Program</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Cast Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Treaty of Fort Jackson”</td>
<td>The Treaty of Jackson</td>
<td>Andrew Jackson speaks to the assembled Indians and informs them that because of their foolishness in fighting, they must give up all lands south of the Ocmulgee. They sign the treaty, smoke a peace pipe with Jackson, and give up their land, although a portion is allotted to the Indians for a few more years before they move into Florida “leaving the land of the Wiregrass and great pines forever.”</td>
<td>Gen. Jackson and Indians from previous scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Early Settlers”</td>
<td>A Home in the Wilderness</td>
<td>Several of the first families arrive in southern Georgia despite doubts concerning the value of the land. Several early family names mentioned. A couple of families in wagons along the Blackshear Road heading for a fort near Huffer stop by a cabin and are invited for dinner. Some of the men engage in a shooting match. After dinner, they have a dance. After most go to bed, some of the men stand watch and beat back an Indian attack. The two families decide to press on to the fort and the family from the cabin joins them.</td>
<td>15 Pioneer Men, 17 Pioneer Women, 9 Pioneer Boys, 10 Pioneer Girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Remember the Sabbath”</td>
<td>Remember the Sabbath</td>
<td>Narrator mentions the high religious ideals of the pioneers, calling the settlement a “crusade.” The pioneers gather for Sunday services as the narrators talk about various churches: Lone Hill Methodist, Hebron Primitive Baptist, the coming of the Mormon missionaries, first Catholic Church in Willacoochee, Union Baptist, Nicholls Baptist, First Baptist of West Green all mentioned. Congregation sings “Holy, Holy, Holy,” followed by the Lord’s Prayer. The episode ends with narrator praising the early work of religion in the county.</td>
<td>Minister and Pioneers from previous scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Transportation in the Wilderness”</td>
<td>Transportation on the Frontier</td>
<td>Features group of people waiting for stagecoach (supposedly coming down Coffee Road, which is discussed). A man teases a woman who had been expecting a corset to come by mail while another man opens a package to find red underwear. Audience asked to compare early roads with modern ones.</td>
<td>Pioneers from previous scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title on Script</td>
<td>Title on Program</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Cast Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A County is Born”</td>
<td>A County is Born</td>
<td>A group of people gather around to place bets on who will win the election. The counties Coffee was carved out are mentioned, and a list of the first county officers are read to cheers.</td>
<td>Election announcer and Pioneers from previous scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Taught to the Tune of the Hickory Stick”</td>
<td>Taught to the Tune of the Hickory Stick</td>
<td>A brief overview of school legislation before opening upon a scene in a one-room school. A boy comes in late and gets scolded. The same boy disrupts a spelling lesson and gets a dunce camp. An intelligent kid asks a hard question and the teacher dismissed the children for recess. More information on early schools is read, much of it from <em>Ward’s History</em>. Recess ends, the disruptive boy fails a math question, and the entire class is dismissed, except for the boy who gets whacked.</td>
<td>Teacher, 2 mothers, 8 school boys, 7 school girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The South Georgia College”</td>
<td>The Founding of South Georgia College</td>
<td>Two men look over a map while the history of South Georgia College is reviewed. The scene changes to a group of students receiving diplomas.</td>
<td>Gov. Terrell, B. Peterson, and Choir of South Georgia College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Plantation Days”</td>
<td>Plantation Days</td>
<td>“Many plantations were started in our county...the old plantation, perhaps more than anything else, helped [typify] the colorful high life of the Old South.” Various statistics are read while people dance a Virginia reel. Coming of war depicted as an approaching storm with no explanation as to why war came.</td>
<td>15 Gentlemen, 15 Ladies, Confederate Officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In Answer to the Call”</td>
<td>In Answer to the Call</td>
<td>Shows wife saying goodbye to husband while others march forward. Names of some officers are mentioned.</td>
<td>Wife, Husband, Child, and 11 soldiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Homeward the Soldier”</td>
<td>Homeward the Soldier</td>
<td>Soldiers come back, some limping as the toll of the war is described. Scene ends with the declaration that the greatest nation on Earth arose from the conflict. The “long and dreadful” period of Reconstruction is mentioned, but prosperity returns with the coming of the railroad.</td>
<td>Same cast as previous scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The First Iron Horse”</td>
<td>The First Iron Horse</td>
<td>Facts about various railroads listed (but few are wholly accurate), a man stands up to give a long-winded speech before his wife drags him down when the train arrives.</td>
<td>Engineer, Band Leader, 15 members of “German Band,” cast from previous scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title on Script</td>
<td>Title on Program</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Cast Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Richness of Coffee County”</td>
<td>“The Richness of Coffee County”</td>
<td>With an Indian smoking, discusses mainly tobacco, mentions cotton and turpentine as well.</td>
<td>Indian Chief and Spanish soldier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Spanish-American War”</td>
<td>The Spanish-American War</td>
<td>“In 1898 the Spanish-American War was upon us, and once more Coffee County responded. But then the war was over and we moved on into the new century.”</td>
<td>Recruiting officer plus men from “Plantation Days.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Gay 90’s”</td>
<td>The Gay Nineties</td>
<td>People gather for a Fourth of July picnic with a two-seater bicycle going by, a hurdy-gurdy man, a boy shooting a cop with a pea, some games, and an unlucky photographer constantly being thwarted in taking a picture. Nothing historical for Coffee County is discussed except for the founding of a civic club in 1908. Mostly an appeal to nostalgia and an age when automobiles were brand new.</td>
<td>14 Gentlemen, 14 Ladies, Man and Girl on Bicycle, Man and Woman in auto, Cop, Balloon Man, Hurdy Gurdy Man, 8 Boys, 8 Girls, 6 Can-Can Dancers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Lest We Forget”</td>
<td>Word War I</td>
<td>The poem “In Flanders Fields” is read, and a bugler plays “Taps.”</td>
<td>1 Woman, 1 Bugler.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Charleston”</td>
<td>The Roaring Twenties</td>
<td>“Years roared onward, and before we knew it the Roaring Twenties hit with a bang.” Charleston dancers perform.</td>
<td>3 Charleston Dancers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Depression”</td>
<td>The Depression</td>
<td>Bankers watch the bad news on the ticker tape and many in Coffee are affected, but “Gradually prosperity returned and time moved onward.”</td>
<td>2 Bankers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“World War II”</td>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>A family sit around a radio as a record is played of Pearl Harbor news and FDR’s speech to Congress. A list of battles is read, ending with a reenactment of the flag raising over Iwo Jima as “God Bless America” is sung.</td>
<td>Father, Mother, Son, and Daughter (an actual family), and 5 Marines (actual soldiers).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Atomic Age”</td>
<td>The Atomic Age</td>
<td>Countdown to detonation, and a large firework simulates an atomic bomb explosion.</td>
<td>No cast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Finale”</td>
<td>[not listed]</td>
<td>“To the great story of Georgia, Coffee County has contributed one of the most colorful chapters. To the great American ideals for which Georgia stands, she has given her blood...This has been a century of progress...this has been the ‘Coffee County Centurama.’”</td>
<td>Entire cast.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C2: “Coffee County Centurama” versus “Flora Through The Years”
Similarities between titles and descriptions are in **bold**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Coffee County Centurama</th>
<th>Flora Through The Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Douglas, Georgia</td>
<td>Flora, Illinois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>10-15 May 1954</td>
<td>5-10 July 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td><strong>A brilliant scene of pageantry presenting</strong> Miss Coffee County, Queen of the Centennial Celebration. Miss Coffee County will welcome visitors from various foreign nations surrounded by the beautiful ladies of her court, the Queen’s cadets, sailorettes, antebellum ladies, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and representatives of the various states. (Coronation to be held on Monday, May 10 only.)**</td>
<td><strong>A brilliant scene of pageantry presenting the Queen of the Flora Centennial Celebration. The Queen will welcome visitors from far and near surrounded by the beautiful ladies of her court, the Queen’s cadets, sailorettes, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and representatives of the various states. (Coronation to be held on Monday, July 5, only.)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode I</td>
<td><strong>THE RED MAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>THE RED MAN</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The early inhabitants of Coffee County were the many Indian tribes which included the Appalachee and Creek Indians. Here they paid homage to the Sun-God, to the moon and stars; it was in this land of their fathers that they followed the pursuits of free children of nature. Their carefree life was soon interrupted by the coming of Spanish priests and missionaries who attempted to teach them civilized ways and a new religion.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The early inhabitants of Flora were the many Indian tribes which included the Kaskaskias, Delawares, Kickapoos, Shawnees and Piankenshaws. Here along the banks of the Wabash, they paid homage to the Sun God, to the moon and stars; it was in this land of their fathers that they followed the pursuits of free children of nature. Their carefree life was soon interrupted by the coming of French priests and missionaries who attempted to teach them civilized ways and a new religion.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode II</td>
<td><strong>THE EARLY TRADERS</strong></td>
<td><strong>THE EARLY TRADERS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>On the heels of the Spanish Missionaries came the English traders offering gaudy baubles in return for luxurious furs.</strong></td>
<td><strong>On the heels of the French Missionaries came the English traders offering gaudy baubles in return for luxurious furs. Thus ensued a great rivalry between the English and the French which culminated into the French and Indian wars.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode III</td>
<td><strong>WAR DRUMS</strong></td>
<td><strong>THE SPIRIT OF ‘76</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>After the Revolutionary War, the Indians found their land being taken away by the influx of settlers. Angrily they rebelled and their war hoops were heard throughout the frontier striking terror into the hearts of the settlers.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Under the yoke of a tyrants oppression hatred flamed in the hearts of the gallant colonists...and there followed the Revolutionary War, a bitter struggle to throw off the mantle of persecution and declare the country to be a free and independent nation.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Episode IV | THE TREATY OF JACKSON  
The campaign against the warring Indians was conducted by Gen. Andrew Jackson and in 1814 the Indians were defeated and forced to sign a treaty. | CLARK STIRS THE MELTING POT FOR DEMOCRACY  
George Rogers Clark with the aid of his co-patriots planned to kindle the fire of liberty by attacking their first objective, Kakaskia. On July 4, 1778 it was taken by complete surprise and fell into their hands. |
|---|---|---|
| Episode V | A HOME IN THE WILDERNESS  
Further and further the white man pushed into Indian territory until by 1820 their settlements in the wilderness were a common sight. Every day people arrived to build new homes. Renegade bands of Indians still threatened these early settlers and harassed those who attempted to colonize the wilds of South Georgia. | CLARK TAKES VINCENNES  
On the twenty third of February 1778, after much suffering from cold and hunger, Clark and his men arrived at Vincennes and stormed the fort and after a gallant battle the American flag was raised about the stronghold. |
| Episode VI | REMEMBER THE SABBATH  
In the midst of their arduous tasks of settling South Georgia, the early pioneers still found time to pause and give spiritual thanks. | THE NEW FRONTIER  
As the American Flag was run up over the Fort of Vincennes the great influx of homesteaders came flocking to the undeveloped country of the western frontier, and settlers eager to purchase lands, to hunt and traip and gain entrance to the forest regions, loaded their possessions into covered wagons and the search for a home on the frontier was on. |
| Episode VII | TRANSPORTATION ON THE FRONTIER  
It was a big day when the first coach arrived down the Coffee road bringing with it the first mail and passengers. | REMEMBER THE SABBATH  
In the midst of their arduous tasks of settling the frontier, the early pioneers still found time to pause and give spiritual thanks. |
| Episode VIII | A COUNTY IS BORN  
In 1854 Coffee County was established and everyone anxiously awaited the results of the first election. | FLORA IS BORN  
In 1854 the town of Flora was officially founded and was incorporated under the general law in 1857 and in 1867 given a special charter by which the town has been governed ever since. |
| Episode IX | TAUGHT TO THE TUNE OF THE HICKORY STICK  
The early settlers, realizing the need for education, first attempted to teach their children at home. Later, the first schoolhouse in Coffee County was built. | TAUGHT TO THE TUNE OF THE HICKORY STICK  
The early settlers, realizing the need for education, first attempted to teach their children at home. In 1855, the first school house was built. |
| Episode X | THE FOUNDING OF SOUTH GEORGIA COLLEGE  
In 1906 the college was founded as the Eighth District Agricultural and Mechanical School. In 1927 it became South Georgia Junior College when Mr. B. Peterson donated the land which today is the site of the present campus. In 1910 it graduated its first class. Today the college with its 335 students plays an important part in Coffee County. | THE FIRST IRON HORSE  
The first railroad to be built through Flora was the Baltimore and Ohio. It was completed on June 1, 1857 and with its completion a new era of industry and agriculture was born. |
| Episode XI | PLANTATION DAYS  
Life in Coffee County was carefree and gracious as witnessed by the many house parties and plantation parties. But this was soon to be interrupted by the gathering grey clouds of civil strike. | IN ANSWER TO THE CALL  
Like an overwhelming tidal wave, the pioneers were swept along until they clashed in conflict. The war between the states turned forges into factories for cannons, rifles and iron plates...brother against brother on the bloody field of strife! Gallantly the men of Flora responded to the cause. |
| Episode XII | IN ANSWER TO THE CALL  
Like an overwhelming tidal wave, the pioneers were swept along until they clashed in conflict. The war between the states turned forges into factories for cannons, rifles, and iron plates...brother against brother on the bloody fields of strife! Gallantly the men of Coffee County responded to the cause. | SURRENDER  
On April 9, 1865 General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox and the war was over. Wearily the men of Flora returned home to peace once again. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode XIII</th>
<th>HOMEWARD THE SOLDIER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many an anxious heart scanned the broken ranks of the soldiers as they wearily returned, hoping to find their loved ones. Many a heart was filled with happiness as families were reunited but a countless number of young Coffee County men were never to return.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BIkes, Bustles and Mustaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was the era of “The Bicycle Built for Two,” Leg O’Mutton Sleeves, Empress Eugenie Hats and Wasp-Like Waists. The fair was great and everyone was in the mood for basket picnics. The innovation called the “Horseless Carriage” made its first appearance. The “naughty girls” were the Can-Can dancers who travelled with the medicine shows. All good clean fun of the Gay 90’s...reminiscent of the days when Grandma was in her teens.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Episode XIV</th>
<th>THE FIRST IRON HORSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The coming of the first railroads to Coffee County marked the beginning of a new area of industry and agriculture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLORful PERSONALITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[no description given]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode XV</th>
<th>“THE RICHNESS OF COFFEE COUNTY”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The soldiers had returned home, the South was in a bad economic condition, but, with the coming of the Iron Horse, out of the rubble of that dark period rose a new and promising future for Coffee County...Tobacco.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORLD WAR I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 1914 Flora heard the troubled sounds of war in the waking as President Wilson protested the unresisted submarine warfare. However, the climax came in 1917 when the Lusitania was sunk and the United States entered the war.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode XVI</th>
<th>THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The flow of prosperity that once again was seeping back into the veins of Coffee County and the South was interrupted by the Spanish-American War. Once again all the eligible young men of Coffee County willingly put down their hoes to take up arms in defense of their country.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE ROARING TWENTIES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was the golden age of bathtub gin and “Yes, We Have No Bananas,” plus fours and flappers. A dance sensation hit the nation and everyone in Flora was doing...The Charleston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode XVII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>It was the era of “The Bicycle Built for Two,” “Leg O’Mutton Sleeves,” “Empress Eugenie Hats” and “Wasp-Like Waists.” The fair was great and everyone was in the mood for basket picnics. The innovation called the “Horseless Carriage” made its appearance. The “naughty” girls were the Can-Can dancers who travelled with the medicine shows. All good clean fun of the “Gay 90’s”—reminiscent of the days when grandma was in her teens.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode XVIII</th>
<th>WORLD WAR I</th>
<th>WORLD WAR II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 1914 Coffee County heard the troubled sounds of war in the making as President Wilson protested resisted submarine warfare. However, the climax came in 1917 when the Lusitania was sunk and the United States entered the war.</td>
<td>With startling suddenness the news of war came to the United States for the second time in a generation. The Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Places like Anzio, Guadalcanal, Mt. Suribachi, the Battle of the Bulge and the South Pacific were just a few of the historic places in which many boys from Flora fought, struggled and died.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode XIX</th>
<th>THE ROARING TWENTIES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was the golden age of “Yes, We Have No Bananas,” plus fours and the flappers. A dance sensation hit the nation and everyone in Coffee County was doing—The Charleston.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode XX</th>
<th>THE DEPRESSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the heels of the golden era of the 20’s came the depression with the sudden crash of the New York Stock Market in 1929.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Episode XXI | WORLD WAR II  
With startling suddenness of the quiet afternoon of December 7, 1941, the news of war came to the United States for the second time in a generation. The Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Places like Anzio, Guadal Canal, Mt. Surbachi, the Battle of the Bulge and the South Pacific were just a few of the historic places in which many Coffee County boys fought, struggled and died. |
| --- | --- |
| Episode XXII | THE ATOMIC AGE  
With the arrival of the “Forties,” came man’s knowledge of splitting the atom. This he used for a defensive measure—a weapon of destruction that heretofore had been unknown or unequaled. Today he is striving to use the atom for peace time progress. Will it be the beginning of a new advance civilization—or the destructive end? |

**SOURCE:**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and Date</th>
<th>Title of Pageant</th>
<th>Number of Showings</th>
<th>Number of Scenes</th>
<th>Indian Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walhalla, SC 7-11 Aug 1950</td>
<td>The Saga of a People</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Fourteen</td>
<td>(1) An Early Indian Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonsburg, PN 10-16 Aug 1952</td>
<td>Canonlore</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Seventeen</td>
<td>(1) Life Among the Indians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartwell, GA 1-6 Jun 1953</td>
<td>Hart Centurama</td>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Fourteen</td>
<td>(1) In the Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kankakee, IL 20-27 Jun 1953</td>
<td>Kankakee Centurama</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Twenty-one</td>
<td>(3) Watch-e-kee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkston, GA 15-20 Feb 1954</td>
<td>Charltonarama</td>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Unknown; Fifteen?</td>
<td>(?) Okefenokee Swamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watertown, WI 26-30 Jun 1954</td>
<td>Watertown Centurama</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Fifteen</td>
<td>Yes, title unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora, IL 4-10 Jul 1954</td>
<td>Flora Through the Years</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Eighteen</td>
<td>(1) The Red Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostoria, OH 15-17 Jul 1954</td>
<td>Fostoria Centurama</td>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Nineteen</td>
<td>(3) Heritage of Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfort, IL 11-14 Aug 1955</td>
<td>Frankfort Through the Years</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Fourteen</td>
<td>(2) The Red Man in the Land Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb, IL 10-16 Jun 1956</td>
<td>The DeKalb Story</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Eighteen</td>
<td>(2) The Heritage of Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peotone, IL 2-6 Aug 1956</td>
<td>Peotone on Parade</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Fifteen</td>
<td>(2) Indian Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, IL 26 Aug-1 Sep 1956</td>
<td>Yesteryears of Windsor</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Eighteen</td>
<td>(3) Red Men in the Land Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denton, TX 21-27 Apr 1957</td>
<td>Denton Centurama</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Eighteen</td>
<td>(3) The Men of Destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison, GA 14-20 Sep 1957</td>
<td>Panorama of Progress</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Thirteen</td>
<td>(1) Village of the Creeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, GA 27-31 Oct 1957</td>
<td>Centurama</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Fourteen</td>
<td>(2) Indians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady, NY 22-29 Aug 1959</td>
<td>Schenectady Sesqui-Spectacade</td>
<td>Unknown, eight?</td>
<td>Nineteen</td>
<td>(3) A Voice From the Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oconee County, SC 1968</td>
<td>Oconee Centurama</td>
<td>Not listed.</td>
<td>Twelve</td>
<td>(1) Owners of the Soil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta, GA 1975</td>
<td>From This Land</td>
<td>Not listed.</td>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>(2) Another Man’s Nightmare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: See Bibliography’s list of “Centennial Programs.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and Date</th>
<th>Early Settlers Scene</th>
<th>Churches Scene</th>
<th>Education Scene</th>
<th>Civil War Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walhalla, SC 7-11 Aug 1950</td>
<td>(5) Activity Around the First House</td>
<td>(6) Early Worship</td>
<td>(9) Early School</td>
<td>(7) Adopted son and Native son to the Cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonsburg, PN 10-16 Aug 1952</td>
<td>(2) The Early Settlers</td>
<td>(3) John McMillan’s First Church Service</td>
<td>(5) The Old Log College</td>
<td>(11) Civil War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartwell, GA 1-6 Jun 1953</td>
<td>(3) Early Settlers</td>
<td>(5) Nation Under God</td>
<td>(6) Learnin’ the A,B,C’s</td>
<td>(7) Storm Clouds Threaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkston, GA Feb 1954</td>
<td>(?) Life Among the Pioneers</td>
<td>(?) Remember the Sabbath...</td>
<td>Yes, title unknown.</td>
<td>(?) War Between the States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas, GA 10-15 May 1954</td>
<td>(5) A Home in the Wilderness</td>
<td>(6) Remember the Sabbath</td>
<td>(9) Taught to the Tune of the Hickory Stick</td>
<td>(12) In Answer to the Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watertown, WI 26-30 Jun 1954</td>
<td>Yes, title unknown.</td>
<td>(?) The Lord’s Prayer</td>
<td>Yes, title unknown.</td>
<td>Yes, title unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora, IL 4-10 Jul 1954</td>
<td>(6) The New Frontier</td>
<td>(7) Remember the Sabbath</td>
<td>(9) Taught to the Tune of the Hickory Stick</td>
<td>(11) In Answer to the Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peotone, IL 2-6 Aug 1956</td>
<td>(3) Our Pioneers— Early Americana</td>
<td>(5) Remember the Sabbath</td>
<td>(4) The Birth of Our Fine Modern Schools</td>
<td>(6) The Lincoln Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, IL 26 Aug-1 Sep 1956</td>
<td>(4) A New People to a New Land</td>
<td>(5.1) Remember the Sabbath</td>
<td>(5.2) Readin’, Ritin’, and Rithmatic</td>
<td>(5.5) A Chapter in Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denton, TX 21-27 Apr 1957</td>
<td>(4) Unto This Land</td>
<td>(5) The Seventh Day</td>
<td>(6) Readin’ Ritin &amp; Rithmatic</td>
<td>(8) The Volume in Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, GA 27-31 Oct 1957</td>
<td>(3) Pioneers</td>
<td>(5) Church</td>
<td>(6) School</td>
<td>(7) Volume in Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Falls, IL 30 Jul-5 Aug 1967</td>
<td>(5) And So We Began</td>
<td>(6) For Thine Is the Kingdom</td>
<td>(7) Dawning of the Three R’s</td>
<td>(9) A Volume of History Bound in Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta, GA 1975</td>
<td>(3) Because They Dreamed</td>
<td>(5) Dreams of Worship</td>
<td>(4) The Dream of Knowledge</td>
<td>(7) Shattered Dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place and Date</td>
<td>Railroad Scene</td>
<td>Gay 90s Scene</td>
<td>Roaring 20s Scene</td>
<td>World Wars Scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walhalla, SC 7-11 Aug 1950</td>
<td>(8) Busy Day in Walhalla</td>
<td>(12) Bustles, Bikes and Mustaches</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>(13) Iwo Jima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canonsburg, PN 10-16 Aug 1952</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>(12) A Picnic at the Turn of the Century</td>
<td>(14) The Decade of the 1920’s</td>
<td>(13) World War I; (15) World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartwell, GA 1-6 Jun 1953</td>
<td>(9) The Iron Horse</td>
<td>(10) The Fabulous Era</td>
<td>(11) The Roaring Twenties</td>
<td>(12) Lest We Forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kankakee, IL 20-27 Jun 1953</td>
<td>(10) The Iron Horse</td>
<td>(14) The Gay Nineties</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>(15) In Flanders Field; (17) Iwo Jima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkston, GA Feb 1954</td>
<td>(?) The Coming of the Iron Horse</td>
<td>(?) Bikes, Bustles and Mustaches</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>(?) World Safe for Democracy; (?) Iwo Jima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watertown, WI* 26-30 Jun 1954</td>
<td>(?) Iron Horse</td>
<td>(?) The Gay Nineties</td>
<td>(?) The Roaring Twenties</td>
<td>Both; titles unknown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora, IL 4-10 Jul 1954</td>
<td>(10) The First Iron Horse</td>
<td>(13) Bikes, Bustles and Mustaches</td>
<td>(16) The Roaring Twenties</td>
<td>(15) World War I; (18) World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb, IL* 10-16 Jun 1956</td>
<td>(?) The Coming of the Iron Horse</td>
<td>(10) Bikes and Bustles and Mustaches</td>
<td>(14) The Roaring Twenties</td>
<td>(13) To the Cause for Freedom; (15) Siege for Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peotone, IL* 2-6 Aug 1956</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>(9) The Tintype Era</td>
<td>(11) Prohibition and Prosperity</td>
<td>(10) In Flander’s...Poppies Grow; (12) Lest We Forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, IL* 26 Aug-1 Sep 1956</td>
<td>(5.3) The Iron Horse</td>
<td>(7) The Windsor Picnic</td>
<td>(8.3) Roaring Twenties-Golden Age</td>
<td>(9) Lest We Forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison, GA 14-20 Sep 1957</td>
<td>(7) The Iron Horse of Progress</td>
<td>(10) The Gay 90’s</td>
<td>(12) Roaring 20’s</td>
<td>(11) World War I; (13) Lest We Forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson, GA* 27-31 Oct 1957</td>
<td>(8) Iron Horse</td>
<td>(9) Gay 90’s</td>
<td>(11) Roaring 20’s</td>
<td>(10) World War I; (13) Iwo Jima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schenectady, NY 22-29 Aug 1959</td>
<td>(7) All Steamed Up</td>
<td>(12) In the Good Old Summertime</td>
<td>(15) Daze of the Flappers</td>
<td>(14) Over There; (17) Siege for Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oconee County, SC 1968</td>
<td>No specific scene.</td>
<td>(8) The Gay 90’s</td>
<td>(10) 23 Skiddo</td>
<td>(9) War in Europe; (11) Day of Infamy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta, GA 1975</td>
<td>(6) Progress</td>
<td>(8) Unconquerable Dreams</td>
<td>(9) Just a Dream</td>
<td>Completely omitted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates Atomic Bomb scene.
APPENDIX D: MAPS OF COFFEE COUNTY

Each of the following maps’ physical features, town placement, major roads and railroads, and recent political boundaries use the following map as a base: *Waycross, Georgia 1:250,000* (Washington, D.C.: United States Geological Survey, 1958), scanned by University of Texas Libraries and available online at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/topo/250k/txu-pclmaps-topo-us-waycross-1953.jpg.

Map 1: Coffee County in 1865

Map 2: Coffee County in 1880

Map 3: Coffee County in 1896

Map 4: Coffee County About 1910

Map 5: Coffee County About 1932

Map 6: Coffee County About 1955
MAP 3: COFFEE COUNTY IN 1896

MAP OF COFFEE COUNTY IN 1896

- Lumber City
- Ocmulgee River
- SOUTHERN RAILWAY
- Hurricane Creek
- Little Hurricane Creek
- Big Horse Creek
- Jacksonville
- Hazlehurst
- Broxton
- Lone Hill Methodist Church
- Gaskin Springs
- Nichols
- Satilla River
- Hebron Baptist
- Willacoochee
- Willacoochee River
- Douglas
- Kirkland
- Pearson
- McDonald Mills
- Mt. Zion Baptist
- 17 Mile Creek
- Brunswick & Western Railroad
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