

The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

The Anchor of South Main

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Bynum House York House

- Please visit our museum and research library on Mondays and Fridays from 10:00 until 2:00 and on Wednesdays from 12:30 until 4:30.
- Group tours by appointment

Through fires, economic depression, and dozens of ownership changes, the Clayton Hotel has anchored South Main Street in Clayton for more than one hundred years.

James Ira Langston bought Lot Eleven on South Main at the corner of Derrick Street in 1888. The Langston family soon built a large two-story white home on the property. After the railroad was extended to Clayton in June of 1904, Clayton's tourism traffic expanded tremendously. Visitors now found travel from Atlanta and points south to be easy, and the mountain weather and attractions beckoned. Sometime in this first decade of the 20th century, the Langstons decided to cash in and began taking in visitors to what was now a boarding house. By 1918, the hotel boasted twenty-two rooms, but the Langston family had sold out and moved on to become hotel owners in Montana.



Circa 1970, the hotel was operated by Louise Dillard Coldren and called the Dillard Motor Lodge.

Several proprietors followed the Langstons, including Colonel Dozier who owned the hotel across Main Street. The Holdens, the Greens and Louise Dillard Coldren were among the owners in later decades. The hotel's name also changed over the years, from the Clayton Hotel to the Clayton Motor Lodge to the Old Clayton Inn, with others thrown in for good measure along the way.

Fires and remodelings forced dramatic changes to the building's façade. In 1929, a brick veneer and six columns were added to the front, along with steam heat and a "cooling system." Owners Ed and Nora Holden announced that this updating would "meet the demands of modern hotels." They also added a "splendid tennis court" for guests behind the building.

A small fire starting from the furnace slightly damaged the hotel in 1931. A devastating fire in January of 1946 completely destroyed the hotel and its contents. The alarm was given at 8:00 a.m., and firemen quickly extinguished a small blaze. Guests returned to their breakfasts, but

meanwhile the attic was burning furiously. Nothing could be saved.

The Clayton Hotel company which consisted of V.A. Green, J.A. Green and Roy Green, rebuilt an "ultra-modern" structure of steel, concrete and glass which would accommodate 150 guests in its spacious dining room. The formal opening was in October of 1947. Exterior embellishments were added in the 1970s which completely altered the hotel's appearance, but the 1947 building remains at the heart of today's Old Clayton Inn.

The hospitality shown by decades of proprietors was described in 1947 as "this haven for the tired, weary traveler and the vacationist." This block of South Main Street has held a wide assortment of businesses over the years, including a drugstore, movie theater, post office, grocery store, bank, barbershop, and dime store. Meanwhile the hotel on the corner carries on its century-old legacy of welcoming visitors to Clayton.



The Langston home had become a boarding house around the turn of the twentieth century. This photo is circa 1910. Note the wooden sidewalks and dirt streets.

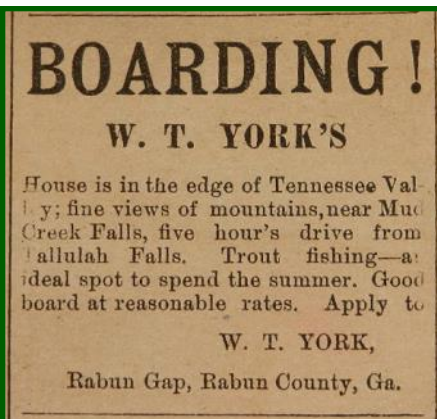
The Historic York House

According to Andrew J. Ritchie, Rabun County historian, the York House property was once part of a 1,000 acre mountain plantation in the Little Tennessee River Valley. Hiram Gibson purchased the property from the Peter Lamar Estate in 1851 for \$1,645. He brought his family and fourteen slaves to Rabun County from his Keowee River plantation in South Carolina. With the assistance of these slaves, Gibson farmed most of the bottomland. Although the slaves were freed through Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, many chose to stay with the Gibson family and continued to reside on the property. Gibson became sheriff of Rabun County in 1858. He and some of his family and former slaves are buried on a knoll on the north side of the property.

In 1873, Hiram Gibson gave 40 acres of land to his 14 year old granddaughter, Mollie Gibson. She was married in the 1880s to William Terrell York of the Persimmon community and a Confederate veteran. He also had been sheriff of Rabun County beginning in 1877. The couple moved into a two-story log cabin which stood within the 40 acre tract. It is not known whether this log structure was built by Gibson or whether it existed at the time of the purchase in 1851. The couple also purchased additional acreage from Hiram Gibson and his daughter, Fanny Gibson Fisher. By 1895, the York property totaled approximately 400 acres and consisted of the enlarged cabin and outbuildings. York added several outbuildings and filled in some of the marshy bottomland to grow barley, corn, and rye.

The use of the York property began to change with construction of the Tallulah Falls Railroad. The rail line began in Cornelia, Georgia, and eventually extended to Franklin, NC by 1907. Around 1896, surveyors for the railroad, needing a place to stay while they worked in this isolated region,

began boarding in the York home. From this beginning an inn, the York House, was created. Even before the railroad reached the northern part of Rabun, the Yorks drove a covered wagon to Tallulah Falls to meet the summer tourists. It was practically a day's journey. As the railroad pushed its way through Rabun, the York Siding was established. Tourists who arrived by train to spend the entire summer could then disembark near the inn.



1897 ad in the *Tallulah Falls Spray*

Guests of the inn wrote that weary travelers always cheered as the train roared to a stop at York Siding. They remembered the York House as a large two-story structure with a porch all around. Home-cooked meals were served family-style at large tables.

In 1907, an L-shaped addition and a dining

room were added to the structure to accommodate the guests. Stationery from the York House in the early 1900s describes the inn as "the large, ideal country home with a farm run in connection with the house where all kinds of fresh vegetables are raised: chicken and fresh meats daily, milk, and butter in plenty." Amenities were noted as "tennis court, mountain spring water, large verandas, shade trees, free access to grape, plum, and apple orchards, and a new system of hot and cold water-works and bathrooms on each floor." There was also a frame dance pavilion located to the northwest of the house. The Yorks, who had become known as "Little Mama" and "Papa Bill", operated the inn during the summers until 1916. They were followed by their daughter, Mrs. Fannie York Weatherly, and her husband, George Weatherly, who continued to run the inn on a seasonal basis.

The Tallulah Falls Railroad closed in 1961, but the York House, located off U.S. Highway 23-441, continued to operate. In 1975, the third generation of the York family, Mrs. Bea Weatherly Broadrick and her husband Ed, began managing the inn. They renovated the family living quarters. They also donated the smokehouse and a log cabin to the Foxfire Foundation. The buildings were moved to the Foxfire Center in Mountain City and reconstructed.

In 1982, the York House was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. John Dillon who succeeded in

having the property listed in the National Register of Historic Places. There have been several owners since the Dillons, and the property has recently been purchased by new owners. At this time the only surviving structures associated with the York family are the inn itself and the spring-house, along with the trees that were plant-



The York House Inn in 1983



The Bynum House: A 57-Year Family Affair

Thaddeus L. Bynum, a well-known Clayton attorney and member of the Georgia Senate (1917-1918) and House of Representatives (1939-1944), first opened his six-room farmhouse to summer vacationers in 1913. By coincidence or not, this was the same year the Tallulah Falls Dam was completed, taming the wild Tallulah River and raging waterfalls it created while flowing through Tallulah Gorge. These natural wonders, which for decades had sustained the Victorian era resort town of Tallulah Falls, now were just fond memories. The timing could not have been better for boarding house entrepreneurs north of Tallulah Falls, as vacationers already had begun travelling on the Tallulah Falls Railroad, which reached Clayton in 1904 and its terminus in Franklin, NC in 1907, to explore other scenery and amenities in the area. As noted by one Clayton businessman, "A lot of folks didn't care for the crowds and higher prices at Tallulah Falls and came on up here." The stage was set for Rabun County's boarding house glory days.

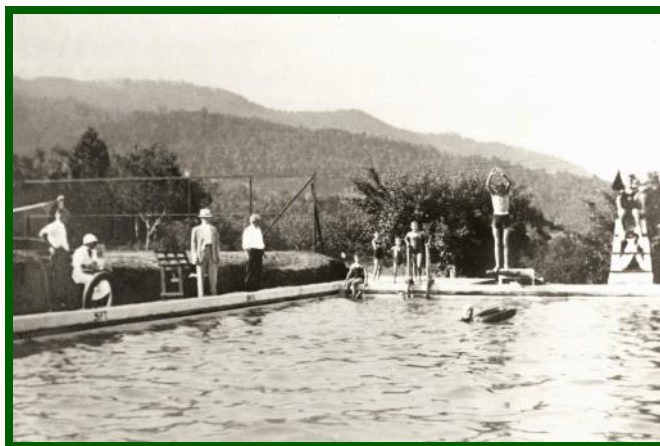
In reality, the Bynum House's glory days lasted fifty-seven years (1913 - 1970). During this time, Thaddeus and his wife, Irene Powell Bynum, expanded their farmhouse, located just west of downtown Clayton, into a three-story, 48-room establishment. They also built several cottages around the main house, some named for families who visited each summer.

Guests at the Bynum House enjoyed a number of recreational activities, including two venues which were "firsts" for the area. In 1930, the *Clayton Tribune* reported on upgrades being made to the Bynum House golf course, the first such course in the county. In 1933, a 30 by 60 foot concrete swimming pool was installed for guests to enjoy. Local citizens also could use the pool, for a fee, making it the county's first public swimming pool. Other forms of recreation offered by the Bynum family included tennis, shuffleboard, horseshoes, fishing and wading ponds, and ping pong tournaments. Many guests simply enjoyed sitting in rocking



chairs while talking with friends. In the evening, guests gathered in the lobby of the main house to enjoy magic tricks, play the piano, sing, play bingo with corn kernels, and participate in talent shows.

The importance of meals at the Bynum House was reflected in a post card advertisement: "American Plan - Fresh Vegetables, Meats and Dairy Products from Bynum House Farm." Maintaining such a daily farm-to-table production line meant a good bit of



time and energy were devoted to raising vegetables, feeding cattle and milking cows. The work continued in the kitchen where on some days staff would cook for 200 to 300 guests and local people. The resulting meals made devotees of visitors like Walt Disney who, with his crew, dined at the Bynum House while filming *The Great Locomotive Chase*. Celestine Sibley, a well-known author

and syndicated columnist, also was a fan of the Bynum House food. In a 1971 article, in which she lamented the closing of the Bynum House, Ms. Sibley noted the "superlative" dishes which had been served in the dining room and, specifically, "... the hot biscuits and rolls as light as angel wings."

Given the many activities taking place at the Bynum House, it is no wonder that its operation was a family affair. The four Bynum children and, in time, spouses and grandchildren all joined in. As one of the Bynum children, Knox, recalled, "All of us did what was necessary to do. It was a question of getting it

done - everything from being the 1930's Orkin man to plumbing." Even at age 16, Roslyn, Knox's sister, supervised a staff of 30 or more local students and citizens who lived on the Bynum House premises. The boarding of staff was necessary because of long workdays, seven days a week, which lasted from late May through Labor Day.

Overlooking the entire Bynum House enterprise was Irene Bynum. As one staff member explained, "Mrs. Irene ... wanted everything done right." It was also Mrs. Bynum who created the family-like atmosphere for which the Bynum house was known, even arranging picnics for her guests on Black Rock Mountain or at Warwoman Dell. It is therefore telling that, when announcing the closing of the Bynum House in a September, 1970 letter, Mrs. Bynum referred to her former guests as "... our Bynum House family."

A century has passed since the Bynum House, aided by the Tallulah Falls Railroad and Tallulah Falls Dam, first welcomed vacationers. Today, although the property on which the Bynum House once stood is for sale, proprietors of contemporary establishments, like bed and breakfast inns, continue to practice a form of hospitality first perfected by the Bynum family.





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Historical Marker Project

Two additional markers have been installed as part of a series of historical markers planned and paid for by the Society. In this photo, Society President George Prater, Treasurer Mary Elizabeth Law, Commissioner Jimmy Loudermilk, and County Administrator Jim Bleckley pose with the marker erected at the Courthouse in Clayton.



If you have a building you would like to be considered, please contact us at historicalsociety@rabuncounty.ga.gov or 706-782-5292.

We're on the web!
www.rabunhistory.org



Big News!!
Please visit the new "Discussions" page on our website for new articles and comments from readers.