

The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

When the Lights Came On

Inside this issue

- Laying Down the Law
- More vintage photographs



Magnificent Estatoah Falls in 1925, a few years before the power plant was built at the base of the falls



Tom Roane's Power Plant on Stekoa Creek south of Clayton, circa 1915

So it is interesting to note that Rabun County's first electrical power did not come from Georgia Power, but instead from a local entrepreneur. In fact there was not sufficient local demand for Georgia Power Company to run lines. Thomas E. Roane built his own hydroelectric plant on Stekoa Creek. Roane applied for a charter in 1908 under the name of Clayton Light and Water Works Company. By 1914, he had run power lines to Clayton and was serving more than fifty businesses and homes. In the next decade, Mr. Roane realized that his plant was not able to supply the demand for electric current in Clayton, and he made arrangements with Georgia Power to connect with their lines in Lakemont. The connection was made in July of 1927, which allowed Mr. Roane to buy current from Georgia Power as needed. He sold his company to Georgia

Power in December 1928. In September of 1929, Georgia Power completed running its own lines to Rabun, assuring residents and businesses in the county of all the electricity they needed. In that same month, street lights were installed in Clayton.

Meanwhile in the northern part of the county in September 1928, a group of citizens met and agreed to build a hydroelectric plant to serve the City of Dillard and the surrounding community, including the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School. Another local resident, J.B. McCrary, built the dam and generating plant on Mud Creek at the base of Estatoah Falls north of Dillard. His engineering company bore the expense of building the plant, and the citizens of the community agreed to pay for building the lines from the main trunk line to their residences and businesses. They began soliciting customers in January 1929.

The plant, known as Rabun Land and Water Company, served the community for decades and was purchased by Georgia Power Company in 1960. The purchase included the dam and powerhouse, 59 miles of distribution facilities, two full-time employees, and a 1960 Chevrolet pickup truck. Now called Estatoah, the plant continues to generate electricity for Georgia Power. It is by far, the smallest Georgia Power hydro plant, but it continues to be a reliable source of electricity for the residents served on its distribution lines.

Into the 1930s in Rabun, as well as other areas in Georgia and the United States, electricity was still

only available to city residents. In 1936, Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act to establish the REA as a full-scale agency of the government for the purpose of loaning money to cooperatives and other groups to build rural power lines. Habersham Electric Membership Cooperative was formed in 1938 in order to bring electricity to the rural areas of Habersham, Hall, White, Stephens, Rabun and Lumpkin counties. It is a non-profit member-owned cooperative. Forming a cooperative was necessary, because at that time it was not profitable for the investor-owned power suppliers, such as Georgia Power, to build power lines to the farm families spread out in the rural areas.

The newly formed co-op hired the engineering firm, J.B. McCrary (the same company that built the



Clayton's Main Street in 1910 showing Mr. Roane's recently installed primitive power lines

Estatoah Plant), to build their power lines. The first 70 miles of line were energized in Habersham, Rabun and White counties on May 15, 1939. Even with these advances, it was still decades before all the remote, rural areas had electricity. The most recent was in 1972 when, following a ten-year campaign, electric power lines were finally brought to Tate City.

- 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



Laying Down the Law

In the 1920s and 30s, Clayton was no longer the “ramshackle town” described by historian Andrew Ritchie before the arrival of the rail line in 1905. The isolated village of the nineteenth century was now a booming summer resort with hotels and boarding houses lining Main and Savannah Streets.

To ensure orderly development and discourage “uncivilized” behavior, the city of Clayton by 1930 had enacted a wide variety

of ordinances, some of which may still be in force today. Many concerned animals, noise, nuisances and litter. Several applied to the behavior expected of elected officials.

Livestock “running at large” through Clayton’s streets was dealt with in an ordinance providing that “no horse, mule, sheep, goat, hog or other animal” shall run free in the town. The animal would be impounded and then sold if the owner did not show up and pay the penalty fee and any expenses incurred feeding the animal.

Another major concern was liquor within the city limits, although the making of moonshine was a principal industry during this era in Rabun County. “No person shall bring any intoxicating liquors or wines within the city for the purpose of selling or giving away.” Some alcohol may have made its way into the city, however, and may have contributed to the “firing of firearms at indiscriminate times and places” and general disturbance of the peace. No gun was to be fired within 300 yards of Main Street or 100 yards of any other street except to protect one’s family or property. In case of a “riot”, all males in Clayton between the ages of 16 and 50 were “obligated and subject to summons by town authorities to suppress such unrest.” This presumes, of course, that these men were not responsible for the “riot” to start with.

Keeping the town in a presentable condition for visitors prompted several regulations. “No person shall place, throw or empty in the streets or on the sidewalks, hog heads, chicken coop waste, rubbish and dead carcasses.” In addition, one could not tie a horse or any other animal to shade trees, fences, or lamp posts. All male residents age 16 to 50 were required to work cleaning the streets, not to exceed fifteen days in one year.

As for government rules, many were set down to “assure best operation of the local government.” It was mandated that the mayor



1928 Clayton with street lights and sidewalks just installed

must preserve order in meetings and “suspend irrelevant debate and command silence whenever he may deem it best.” City council members failing to attend regular meetings were to be charged one dollar per meeting. Their positions did relieve them from road duty, however.

The city also established speed limits of 15 mph and the penalty was a \$100 fine, imprisonment, or labor on the city chain gang. Rainwater running

off roofs onto sidewalks was considered a “nuisance”. Other listed nuisances were excessive noise from train locomotives or any whistles or bells from sawmills that disturbed the citizens. Those convicted of violating any of the city ordinances could be put to work maintaining the town’s roads.

Today’s laws and ordinances may be more complex and perhaps even more numerous, but they offer a snapshot of the times and what issues are deemed important to the citizens of a particular era. Where liquor was once completely banned, streets now close for beer and wine tastings, and vineyards are celebrated for drawing visitors. Where locomotive and sawmill noise was once regulated as a nuisance, now it is more likely to be the noise from a rock band at an outdoor restaurant. Whether it is because of laws, ordinances and regulations, or in spite of them, Clayton retains a quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

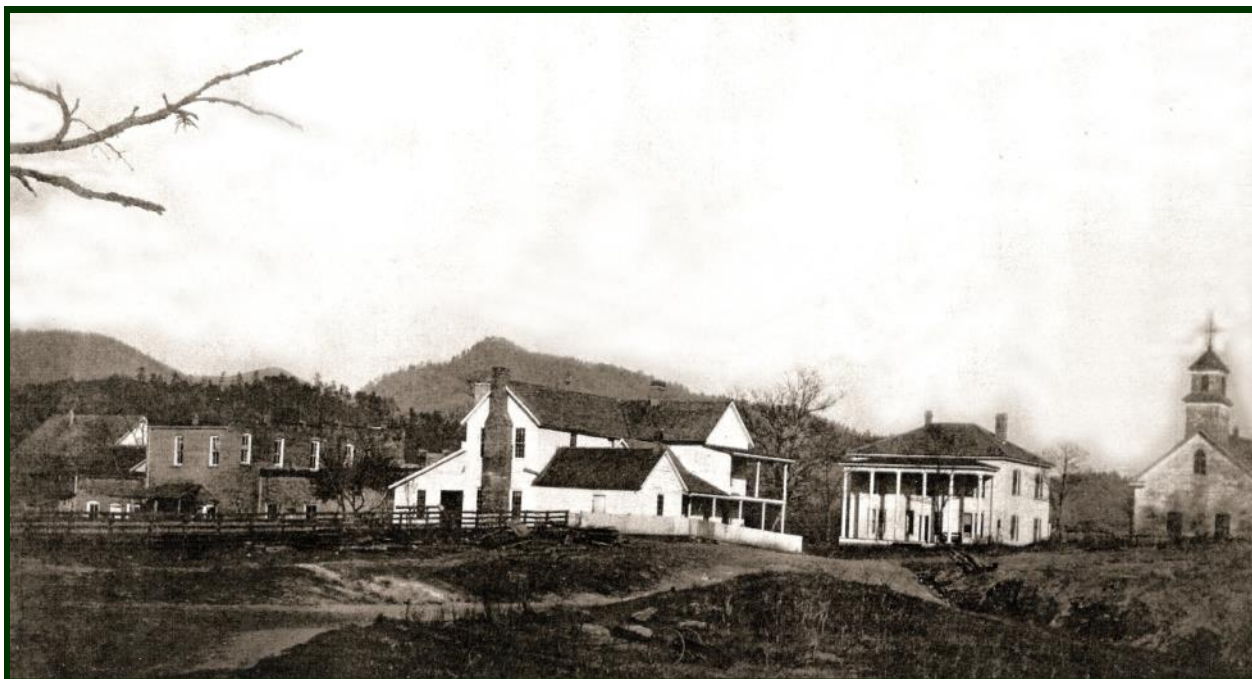


Main Street paving, circa 1925

More Clayton Scenes in the 1920s



Savannah Street looking east, circa 1925. The brick buildings were recently constructed. The Bleckley House can be seen on the hill where Savannah Street intersected Warwoman and Chechero Roads.



An unusual view of Clayton, circa 1920, shows the rear of the Clayton Hotel, the Green Hotel, and Clayton Methodist Church, all on South Main Street.

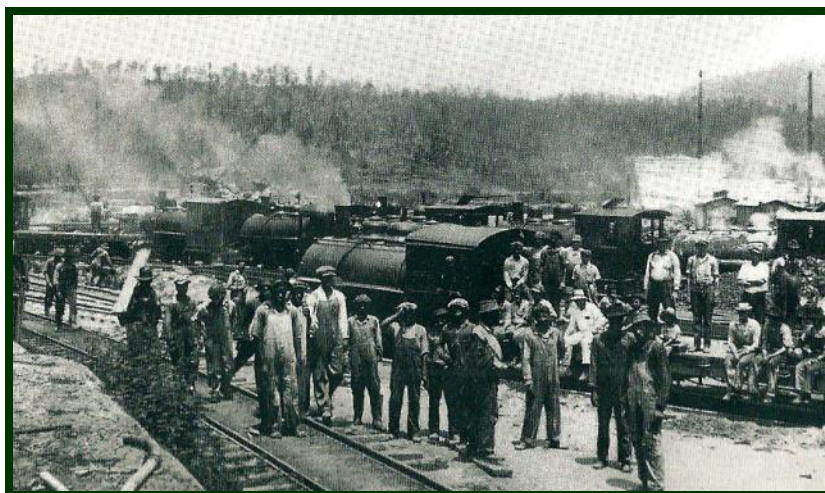
Rabun County Historical Society
81 North Church Street
P.O. Box 921
Clayton, GA 30525

Phone: 706-782-5292
E-mail: rabunhsy@windstream.net



*New exhibit in our Museum:
African-Americans in Rabun*

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



Crew working on the spur rail line built for Georgia Power dam construction on the Tallulah River from 1911 to 1925.