

The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

Playing as Hard as They Worked: Early Recreation in Rabun

first choice of a dance partner. One lucky youngster was even reported to have received a Jersey heifer.

Like farming, hunting served as both a leisure activity and a necessity at a time when families lacked access to well-stocked grocery stores. This

that led one 1899 *Clayton Tribune* writer to "... suggest that a little proof (of one's hunting exploits) would be nice."

In 1897, another form of outdoor recreation, trout fishing, was already being used to lure tourists to the York House. Even more anglers arrived between

Recreation in Rabun County has a long and varied history dating back to the county's earliest days. This newsletter offers a glimpse at some popular forms of recreation as pursued by previous generations.

One might think that the subsistence farming practiced by most Rabun families a century ago would have allowed little time for any type of leisure. Yet, families of this era proved adept at transforming farm tasks into recreational opportunities. This was especially true at harvest time when neighbors would arrive at a given home knowing their help stringing beans or shucking corn would be rewarded with social conversation, food, music and dancing. Games were also played, as at corn shuckings where youth of courting age competed to find the first ear of red corn. If the lucky spotter was a boy, he might receive a kiss from a girl. If the first spotter was a girl, she might get



A quilting bee in the Betty's Creek Valley, circa 1940, shows a quilting frame being used on a front porch.

meant that a man's hunting skills were of great importance, perhaps explaining why some exaggerated their level of expertise. For example, one hunter reported that he shot a wild turkey only to see it fly off. Upon returning home, the hunter further reported that he found the turkey lying dead on his door step. Numerous other reports had men killing six or more birds with one shot. It is these types of fanciful accounts

operational in 1934, about the same time that men from the Warwoman Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp completed a small hatchery at Warwoman Dell. While the Lake Burton Hatchery is still in operation, only remnants remain of the hatchery at Warwoman Dell.

Women of the early era had their own recreational outlet in the form of quilting bees. While outwardly a docile form of leisure, quilting could turn competitive

1913 and 1927, with the impounding of Rabun's four lakes. Subsequent concerns about local fish reserves led the county and state to construct the Lake Burton Fish Hatchery. The hatchery became

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when women compared the quality of stitches in their quilt squares. Such comparisons were especially important for young single women whose eligibility for marriage was in part judged by their skills as a seamstress.

One form of early recreation which appealed to men and women alike was group singing. Singing schools in particular were large social events, often doubling as a courtship venue for young adults. Usually held in churches, the schools were conducted by traveling singing masters who used “shape notes” to designate pitch, thereby making it easier for students to sight read vocal music. Gospel singing conventions were even larger affairs that lasted up to three days. Each convention had its own by-laws which guided the presentation of featured singers and singing classes. Operating from 1882 to the present, singing conventions arguably are one of the oldest forms of organized recreation in the county.

Without doubt, drinking was as popular a form of recreation in Rabun’s past as it is today. And while the *Clayton Tribune* routinely published warnings against boys “taking on some tangle foot,” few seemed to have taken heed. One case in point occurred in 1894 when two cousins, who ironically were returning from a gospel singing convention in Persimmon, began to imbibe before laying down by the roadside. The turn of events become muddled at this point, but in the end one of the boys died from a knife wound and his cousin was arrested pending further investigation.

No doubt drinking of all types took place at square dances which were initially held at private homes, local hotels and boarding houses. Although popular with most citizens, there were periodic complaints. This was certainly true in 1915 when a Dillard resident blamed low youth attendance at church on a square dance held the previous evening. That a square dance was held that same year in a local pool hall most likely raised additional protests, even though the *Clayton Tribune* described it as “the most enjoyable and most successful dance of the season...”



Singing School at Liberty Baptist Church in Tiger, 1915

The popularity of square dancing continued to grow during the twentieth century, requiring larger venues that included the high school gym in Clayton and ultimately the Mountain City Playhouse. In fact, during the 1960s one Atlanta reporter went so far as to estimate a tripling of Mountain City’s population whenever

locals and tourists flocked to the Playhouse to square dance, buck dance and do the bunny hop. It was not until the early 1980s that the Playhouse hosted its final dance.

The first decade of the twentieth century marked the arrival of a new recreational pursuit in the form of baseball. As early as 1907, teams from Clayton, Dillard, Mountain City, Lakemont and Burton were competing against each other and regional teams. The Clayton team seemed to have performed especially well, no doubt in part due to brothers Claude and Fred Derrick, both of whom went on to play college baseball. While Claude also played in the major leagues and Fred

in the minor leagues, neither forgot their Clayton roots. In 1914, the brothers even furnished the Clayton players with uniforms.

These early games generally were described as “good natured,” although there was one dustup between Clayton and Highlands when, in 1907, “...two crack Athlens men bobbed up on the side of the tarheels.” After the Highlands team gave some thought to league policies, the game was called off.

In the 1930s baseball in Rabun took on added interest when local CCC camps formed their own teams, playing against each other and clubs from surrounding towns. Although World War II brought a halt to the games, in 1946 the Clayton Fire Department announced it would sponsor a new team. Despite having no field on which to properly practice and only two weeks to get ready, Clayton prevailed over Toccoa in its first game by a score of 7 to 2.

The year of the last local baseball game is not known, but we do know that in 1946 a men’s softball team from Clayton participated in the Northeast Georgia Regional Tournament (score unknown). The following decade marked the heyday of softball in Rabun, with spectators enjoying games from a wooden stadium which stood at one corner of the old high school football field. The year 1955 proved especially exciting with the Tiger team and its 15-year old pitcher finishing the season undefeated.

Another recreational landmark was established in 1921 when Clayton High School, the forerunner



The first football game at Rabun County High School was October 7, 1949. It was an afternoon game because there were no lights on the field, and many Clayton merchants closed early for the occasion.

of Rabun County High School (RCHS), constructed a basketball court and immediately fielded a boys’ basketball team. A girls’ team was in place by 1930. Rabun Gap Nacoochee School (RGNS) established its men’s basketball program sometime around 1926. We could find no information regarding the first

games played by any of these teams. Likewise, we could find no information as to when the RGNS girls’ basketball team was formed.

The first football game at RCHS was played in 1949. After just four weeks of practice, the Wildcats lost their first game to Royston High School by a score of 7 to 6. However, this was only one of two losses that season. Football did not arrive at RGNS until sometime after 2004.

That so many of the above recreational pursuits continue today is noteworthy, given the emergence of many new and far more elaborate recreational venues during the past half century. No one can deny Rabun County residents’ hard work to make a living in the mountains. Their historical record of playing hard is also difficult to deny, and it continues today.





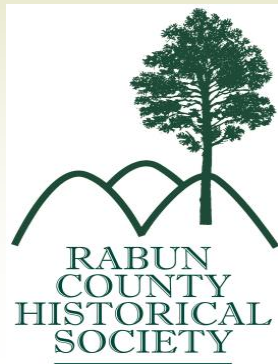
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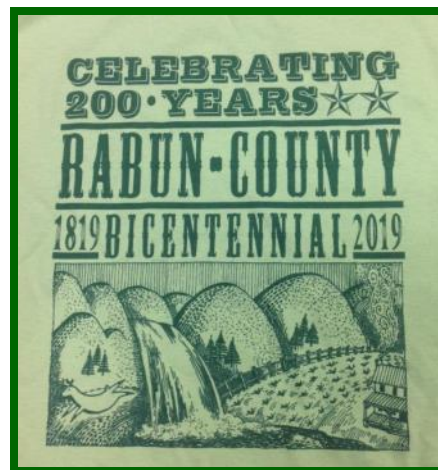


Only three years until Ra-
bun County Bicentennial!

- 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



Members of our Board of Directors, Ron and Linda Barden and Mick Coleman, are shown modeling the bicentennial t-shirts currently for sale at the Historical Society Museum. Please come by, call, or email us today to get your own.



Sizes S-XL: \$15
XXL - XXXL: \$18