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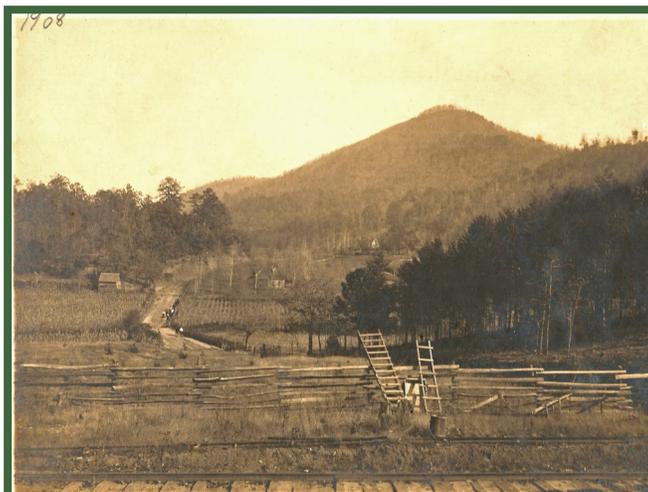
The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

Rabun's Origins: A Land Lottery

Archaeological evidence suggests that Cherokee Indians or their ancestors had lived over much of the Appalachian Mountains for at least a thousand years before Europeans arrived. At the height of their influence they claimed parts of the Carolinas, the Virginias, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama.

The white colonists first settled coastal areas, but the urge for more land drove them westward. They began moving into Cherokee territory in the early 1700s, and the colonial governments began demanding that the Cherokees cede their territory. By the end of the American Revolution, the Cherokees had already surrendered more than half of their original territory.

After the War of 1812, prominent southerners like General Andrew Jackson called for the United States to end what he called the "absurdity" of negotiating with the Indian tribes as sovereign nations. Jackson was elected president in 1828,



The Historical Society has only a few photographs from the nineteenth century. We have included some of the earliest photographs from our collection to show how Rabun looked in the early twentieth century. This 1908 photograph shows the view looking east out Warwoman Road toward Screamer Mountain. The tracks of the Tallulah Falls Railroad are in the foreground.

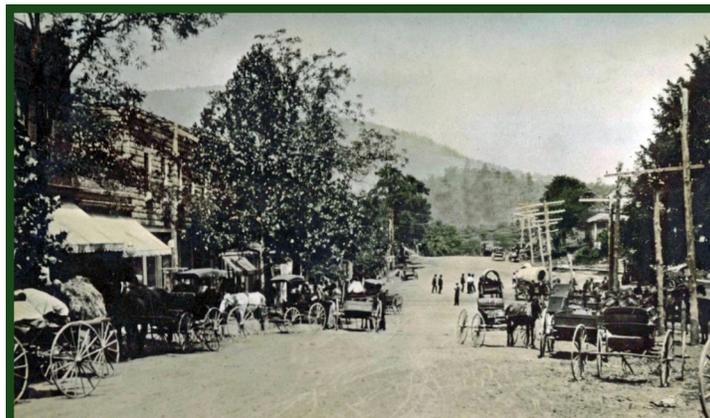
and he immediately declared the removal of Eastern tribes a national objective. In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, which authorized the president to negotiate removal treaties.

Georgia politicians increasingly raised the pressure on the federal government to remove the Cherokees from the state and seize their land. The Indians were forced to sign "treaties" to give away their land; some did so passively while others fiercely resisted. (Of the forty treaties executed with the Cherokees, the Federal Government broke every one.) In 1819, Native Americans were removed from their homeland in what is now Rabun County. The northern half of Gwinnett, all of Rabun, Habersham, and Hall counties were ceded by the Cherokees. Some of them moved

farther west in the state, some migrated to the "Indian Territory" located in what is now Oklahoma, and others simply hid in the mountains.

In 1835, a group of Cherokees signed a treaty that required the

Cherokee Nation to exchange its national lands for a parcel in the Indian Territory and to relocate there within two years. In 1838, President Martin Van Buren ordered the U.S. Army into the Cherokee Nation. The soldiers rounded up as many Cherokees as they could into temporary stockades and subsequently



Main Street in Clayton, circa 1915

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marched the captives to the Indian Territory. Scholars estimate that 4,000-5,000 Cherokees died on the journey that became known as the Trail of Tears.

Rabun County was created by an act of the Georgia General Assembly on December 21, 1819. The new county was named after the 11th governor of Georgia, William Rabun, who was elected in 1817 and served as governor until his death in 1819.

The laws required that when a new county was being organized, the boundaries were established and the area surveyed and divided into land lots and placed on a map. The lots were numbered and the numbers were put on slips of paper and placed in the office of the Secretary of State to be given away to white settlers in a lottery. The State advertised that lots could be had and new land acquired by placing your name in the lottery. Only Georgia citizens could

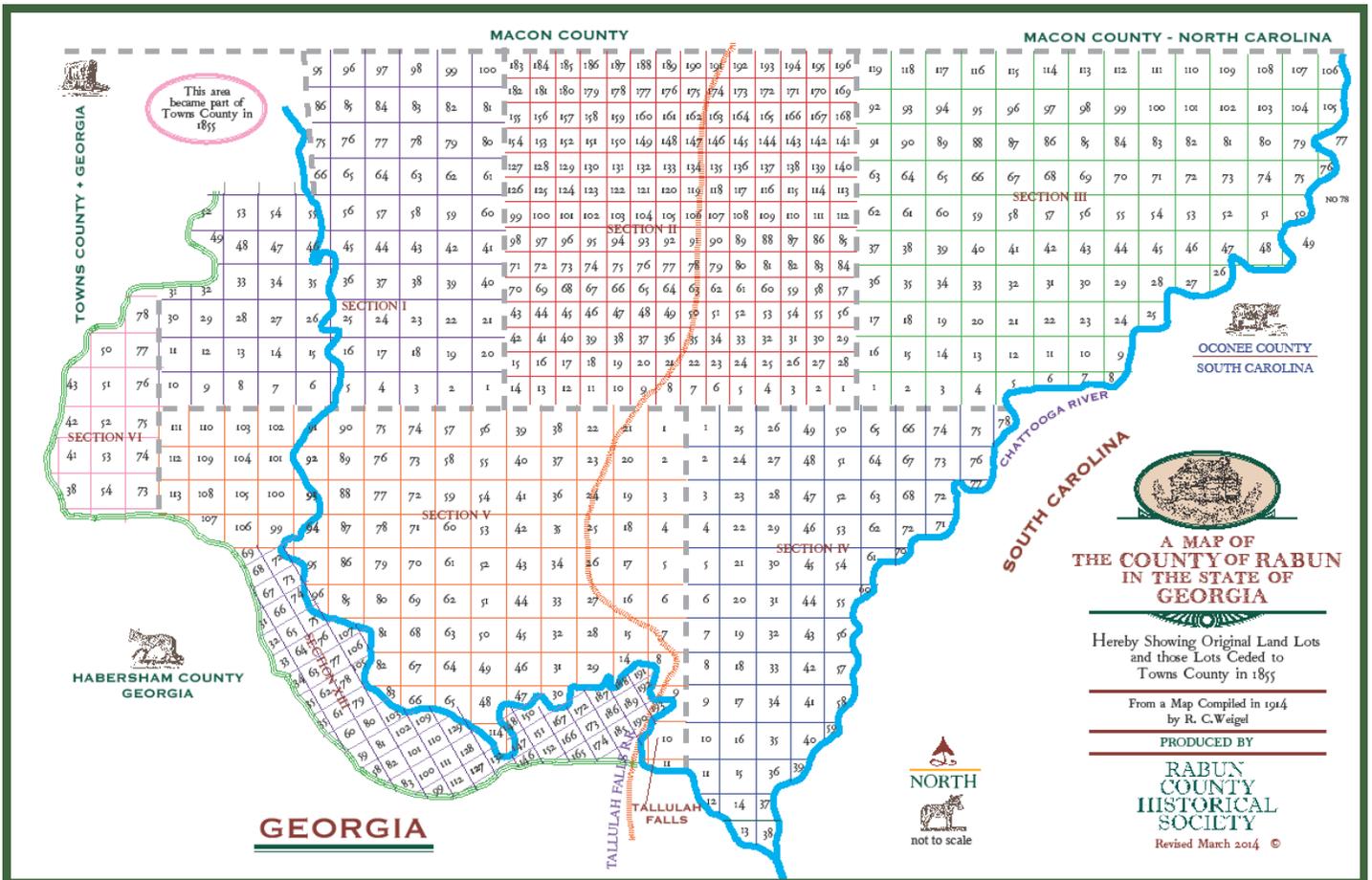
participate and draw one lot. A veteran of one of the old wars or a widow with minor children could draw two lots. The Georgia Land Lottery of 1820, the third of eight, was the largest cession of land by the State of Georgia to white settlers.

Rabun County was created by an act of the Georgia General Assembly on December 21, 1819.

There were a few white people living within the boundary of the new county, but they had no title to the land where they lived except permission from the Indians or from the agents of the State who patrolled the region when the Indians were moving out.

We can find no records that indicate what happened to those people.

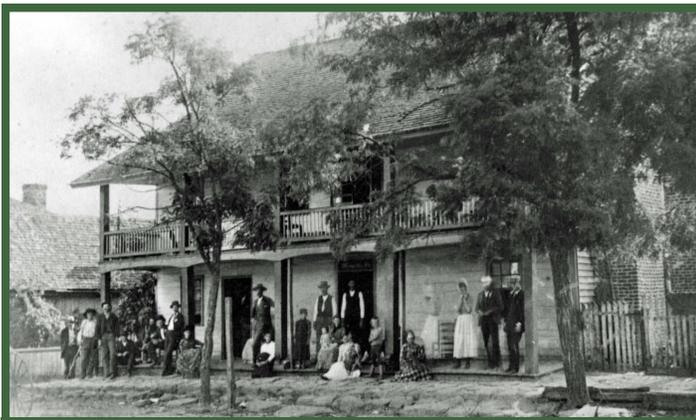
Rabun County was laid out in five land districts—1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. In 1828, a district known as the 16th in Habersham County, which lay on the south side of the Tallulah River was transferred to Rabun County and became District 13. The land in the second



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district included the Little Tennessee River Valley (now known as Wolffork Valley) and areas around the county seat in Clayton. This was the most valuable land in the county and lots were laid out to contain 250 acres each. In the other parts of the county the lots contained 490 acres. Records show that nearly every lot in Rabun County was drawn by a citizen in another county in the State. Most of the people who drew these lots had no intention of coming to the distant region of Rabun. Rather, they intended to sell the lots.



The Blue Ridge Hotel in Clayton in 1895

Persons who were interested in purchasing a lot in the newly organized Rabun County had to select the lot number, find a map and determine who drew the lot in the lottery, then ask the price. Next they had to travel to Milledgeville, which was the state capital at the time, to obtain a deed.

The price during the first ten years after Rabun was created was about one dollar per acre. In many cases, the fertile land in the valley where the 250 acre lots were located sold for no more than \$250. The steep mountainside lots and those that were more remote contained 490 acres and sold for as little as \$25.

The archives of the Rabun County Historical Society include a log book of the original land lottery. One of the interesting facts in this book is the amount of land that was sold for unpaid taxes. If the taxes on the property were not paid, the sheriff got involved and sold it for the

amount owed. Sometimes the amount was less than ten dollars.

In 1824, the Inferior Court, the governing body of Rabun County, bought 67 acres of land in lot number 21 in the second land district from Solomon Beck, who had drawn 250 acres in the State Lottery. The county paid Beck \$150. From this purchase the county created smaller lots for use and sale. In the beginning, the town of Clayton was laid out in lots from this original 67 acres that were sold to settlers. Clayton was named for Judge Augustus S. Clayton, the first Judge of the Rabun Superior Court.

The county built a courthouse and jail and established a court system. The governing body had been instituted by the Legislature and consisted of Justice of the Inferior Court. Only five members served at a time for a period of four years.

Rabun remained a rugged and remote area of high mountains and wild rivers for the remainder of the nineteenth century, sparsely settled by hardy frontiersmen. Roads, if they existed at all, were treacherous and often impassable.

When the Tallulah Falls Railroad arrived in Tallulah Falls in 1882, access to the area became easier and Tallulah Falls became a major tourist destination. Settlement tended to follow the railroad as it was extended to the north. The railroad arrived in Clayton by 1905, and things really began to change. The tourism industry in Rabun County boomed. Travel that had once taken several hours by horse and buggy just to traverse a few miles was now much faster and easier.



The building on the right was Hamby Hardware in Clayton. The photo was taken in the first decade of the twentieth century. The building still stands on Savannah Street near the intersection with Main Street.

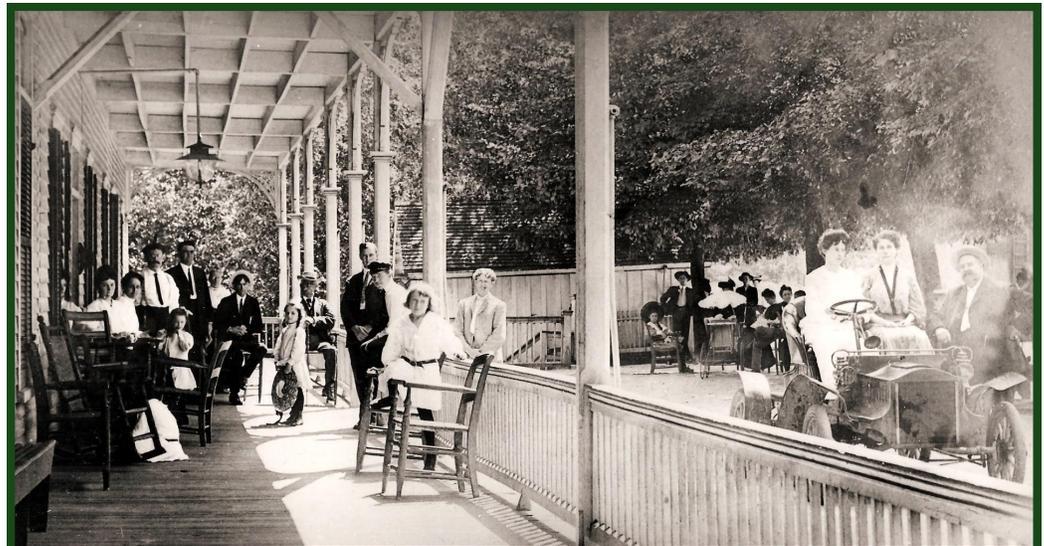
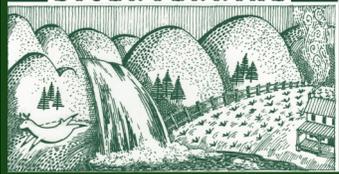
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- Please visit our museum and research library on Mondays and Fridays from 10:00 until 2:00.
- Group tours by appointment

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Guests on the porch of the Cliff House Hotel in Tallulah Falls in 1906

The Historical Society is always looking for more historic photographs relative to Rabun County. If you have any interesting photos, please consider letting us scan them for our collection so that we can share them with others who are interested in Rabun's fascinating history.