



September 2020

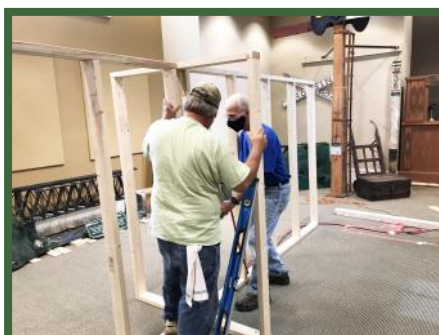
Volume 14/No. 3

The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

INSIDE THIS EDITION
PEOPLE WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE:
SHERIFF LUTHER RICKMAN
JUSTICE LOGAN E. BLECKLEY

Museum Renovation Is Underway

George Prater and Ron Barden have been at work on the museum renovation. The museum will organize exhibits around the major developments that have shaped the history of Rabun County. In addition to constructing walls, they have built a raised floor from old lumber that George had stored at his home. The floor will be the base for a replica train depot ticket office and freight counter. George and Ron also erected a semaphore in the museum. The semaphore stood at the Tallulah Falls Railroad depot in Dillard from 1906 to 1962. It was restored by Dess Oliver and stood in the Tallulah Falls Railroad museum at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School until early this year.



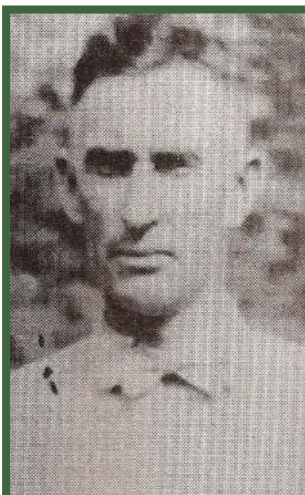
A new website for the Historical Society

The Society's completely redesigned website will be up and running by early September. Our user-friendly site features the exciting new exhibits that will be displayed in the museum when the extensive renovation is completed. From our Native American heritage to the Tallulah Falls Railroad, hydroelectric dams, and moonshining, the exhibits on our website bring Rabun County's history alive. We invite you to visit us at www.rabunhistory.org.

Remembering Sheriff Luther Rickman

By: Rick Story

Rick Story is a Rabun native and currently serves as Director of Development for Rabun County.



Luther Rickman
Sheriff 1917-1940

The history of law enforcement in Rabun County is perhaps one of the richest histories in all of Georgia. Reminiscent of the style of the “Wild West,” and rife with accounts of the bravest of men, Rabun’s law enforcement history certainly distinguishes itself as one of the foundational blocks upon which our community is built. Within the heart of this rich history lies a host of hometown heroes and local legends whose dedication to public service is exemplary. And, standing tall among these legendary heroes is certainly my great uncle, Sheriff Luther Rickman.

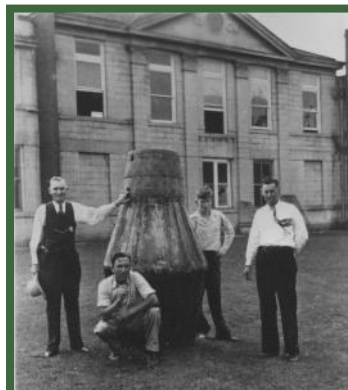
Born in 1889, Luther Rickman grew up on a family farm in Rabun Gap. As the oldest of eight children, he is said to have always strived to set a standard of both excellence and achievement. Perhaps this is why I’m told his parents, my great-grandparents, were not shocked when, at the age of ten, he informed them he wanted to become Sheriff of Rabun County. His mother, my great-grandmother, reportedly advised him, “son, make lots of friends, because in that position you’re going to need them.” My uncle Luther obviously took my great-grandmother’s advice as he went on to distinguish himself as a law enforcement official whose career is legendary.

With a career spanning over four decades, Luther Rickman served as both the Sheriff of Rabun County and the Chief of Police for the city of Clayton. His career was indeed colorful and intriguing, as it is filled with accounts of thwarted bank robberies, moonshine raids, various high-speed chases, and multiple apprehensions of fleeing fugitives. The various accounts and details of his career have been well-chronicled in places like the pages of Foxfire magazines, and in the archives of the Atlanta History Center. But, perhaps nowhere is Sheriff Rickman more legendary than with those who knew him best--his family.

Sheriff Rickman was my grandfather’s oldest brother, and my childhood memories certainly include the fact that the mention of Luther’s name seemed to always bring a smile to my grandfather’s face. Those same childhood memories equally lend themselves to the recollections of his sisters, my great-aunts, remembering Luther fondly, saying: “he was the high Sheriff and everybody knew that he was in charge.” They smiled as well while speaking highly and respectfully of both the Sheriff and his family.

Luther married fellow Rabun native Stella Nicholson in 1916, and together they raised four amazing children; Ethel, Josephine, Evelyn and Frank. Ethel and Josephine excelled as educators teaching in the public schools of Rabun County, while Evelyn also excelled teaching in the city schools of Alexandria, Virginia. The Sheriff’s only son, my cousin Frank, distinguished himself through his career as a local developer, entrepreneur, and member of the Georgia Film Commission. All four children sought highest achievements and certainly proved without doubt that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

Sheriff Luther Rickman’s presence was commanding and his stature was large. He was an old-fashioned Sheriff with a stern face and the truest of grit. But, there was also a softer side to Sheriff Rickman. As a young child, I remember him as a gentle man, always smiling when he came to my house and always willing to sit me on his lap and allow me to wear his hat as I sat with him in my living room. Even though I was very young at the time, I vividly remember knowing that I was in the presence of a great man who loved his family and community. He left us a legacy to be long-admired.

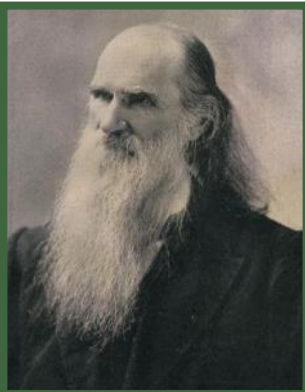


Luther Rickman, Bill Page, Frank Rickman, and Harley McCall with a captured still on the courthouse lawn in the 1930s.

Logan E. Bleckley

By: Marie Cottle

Marie Cottle is a retired Rabun County school teacher and an active volunteer at the Rabun County Historical Society.



Logan Bleckley
Georgia Supreme Court
1875-1880, 1887-1894

At the center of downtown Clayton, Georgia is a memorial to a past citizen of great importance to our county and state. Rabun County can proudly proclaim that in Logan E. Bleckley it produced and gave to Georgia the most eminent jurist and philosopher of the law that the State of Georgia has ever had.

Born in 1827 on Screamer Mountain in Rabun County, Georgia, Bleckley became a self-taught lawyer. He was the second son born to Catherine Lutz and James Bleckley, both natives of

North Carolina. His father's service as a clerk of court in Rabun County exposed his son to the law at an early age. When quite a young boy he used to assist his father in copying his law papers, and this gave him a love for law. By age eighteen the self-educated Bleckley was admitted to the Georgia bar.

He was nineteen when he began to practice and his fees for the first two years amounted to only thirty-five or forty-five dollars. After two years of practice in Rabun County, Bleckley obtained employment in Atlanta as bookkeeper for the state railroad, where he remained for three years. In 1853 he was elected solicitor of the Coweta Judicial Circuit, where he served until 1857.

In 1857 Bleckley married Clara Caroline Haralson, and together they had five children. In 1861 he joined the Confederate military but was discharged prior to combat because of ill health. In 1864 Bleckley was chosen as reporter for the state supreme court, and he served in this role until 1867.

Bleckley accepted an appointment as associate justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia in 1875. There he displayed a brilliant legal mind and an ability to explain complex legal doctrines in concise and vivid ways. His opinions circulated nationwide because they were often humorous or contained

a stanza of Bleckley's poetry, and he gained a reputation as one of the finest jurists in the country. Serving on an overburdened court, Bleckley resigned due to health concerns in 1880. Despite the consensus that he was one of Georgia's finest justices, the humble Bleckley wrote that he was "not sufficiently learned in the law" to serve on the court.

In 1887 Governor John B. Gordon appointed Bleckley chief justice of the state supreme court. His service was exceptional, though short. In 1894 poor health once again prompted Bleckley's retirement. Twice voters rejected a constitutional amendment that would have added two justices to the court, thus reducing the workload for the chief justice. Losing Bleckley inspired voters to approve the very amendment (although with three additional justices) that was twice before rejected.

Bleckley was famous not only for his legal talent but also for his eccentricities. In annual speeches to the Georgia Bar Association, he eloquently analogized law to his other interests—poetry, philosophy, and mathematics. In 1892 Bleckley's first wife died, and in 1893 he married Chloe Herring, who was almost forty years his junior. They had five children. In his later years Bleckley kept busy, enrolling at age seventy-three in mathematics courses at the University of Georgia.

Bleckley died in Clarkesville on March 6, 1907. He is buried at Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta. In 1912 Bleckley County was created and named in his honor.

The Logan E. Bleckley Distinguished Service Award is conferred each year by the Litigation Section of the Atlanta Bar Association at the Section's Annual Bench and Bar Reception. The Litigation Section presents the award to one of the judges of the courts located in Atlanta in recognition of years of devoted public service as a member of the judiciary. The award is named for Logan E. Bleckley, Associate Justice from 1875 to 1880 and Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court from 1887 to 1894. Bleckley is considered by many legal historians to be the most illustrious judge ever to sit on Georgia's highest court.

"Law is the scripture of Justice, the gospel of Right, and Truth is the minister at its altars. Error is a pretender to holy orders, a wolf in sheep's clothing, always striving to usurp the sacred office, or to share in the exercise of its functions. To exclude Error from the sanctuary, and to admit and keep Truth within it, are objects of sedulous endeavor in every system of enlightened jurisprudence."

- Justice Logan E. Bleckley

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Our museum is currently closed for an extensive renovation.



*Dr. Jack Short
1934-2020*

Acknowledging the recent passing of Dr. Jack Short, the Board of Directors of the Rabun County Historical Society recognizes the contributions he made to help preserve the history of Rabun County. Dr. Short grew up in the house that was the first home of the Historical Society. His interest was piqued when Rabun County purchased his family home and loaned it to the Historical Society. He became a life member and an active volunteer and supporter. As an educator and former principal of Rabun County High School, he was influential in gathering the history of the schools in the county. In addition, he made extensive video recordings of the Society's meetings and activities. His work has left a meaningful impact.

