



The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

The Lasting Legacy of the WPA

When the stock market crashed in 1929 and the United States sank into a major economic depression, jobs disappeared and families suffered significant hardships. President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" was a series of programs designed to put citizens back to work and reform the nation's economic infrastructure. The largest program was the Works Projects Administration (WPA). The WPA was established in 1935, and at one time was the largest employer in the United States.

The WPA not only impacted Rabun County by providing desperately needed jobs, it left a legacy of new construction, much of which remains today. Frank Smith, once Rabun's CEO, recalled that approximately 300 Rabun County men and women were put to work by the WPA. Some worked as stonemasons on buildings and bridges. Some worked sewing, building 262 outhouses for public and private buildings, or cooking hot lunches for

school children, a program that was begun with federal money from the WPA. Some critics of Roosevelt's agency called it "make work," suggesting that the jobs were not productive. Those three hundred families that were employed in Rabun County would no doubt disagree, much preferring a "real job" with lasting results to receiving a handout from the government.

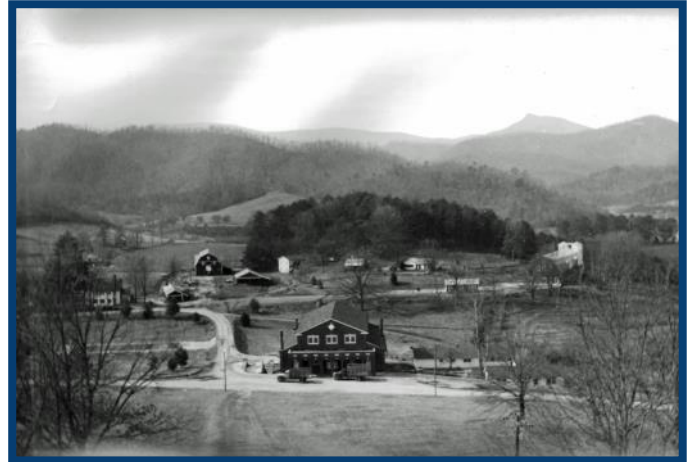
When the WPA was phased out in 1943, Rabun County had the WPA to thank for fifty miles of new roads, seventeen new bridges, a new bookmobile, 760 persons taught to read and write, thousands of garments sewn, and 371,000 hot school lunches served. *The Clayton Tribune* reported in December of 1941 that "this program has been one of the largest factors in the well-being of the county... It was designed to give employment to jobless people, but the benefits are permanent and will be a credit to the county for many years to come." This prediction certainly came to fruition, as we still enjoy much of the New Deal's legacy today.



One of the most visible and highly used WPA buildings in Rabun County is the Rock House in downtown Clayton, which was built in 1935.

Originally, the upstairs was used as a community center. Other functions have included the headquarters for the Civilian Conservation Corps, office space for the Clayton City Clerk, the Chamber of Commerce Office, and the County Extension Office. The basement was Clayton's fire station for a time.

Today, the Rock House is again a community building. The park in front serves as a staging area for concerts and other outdoor events.

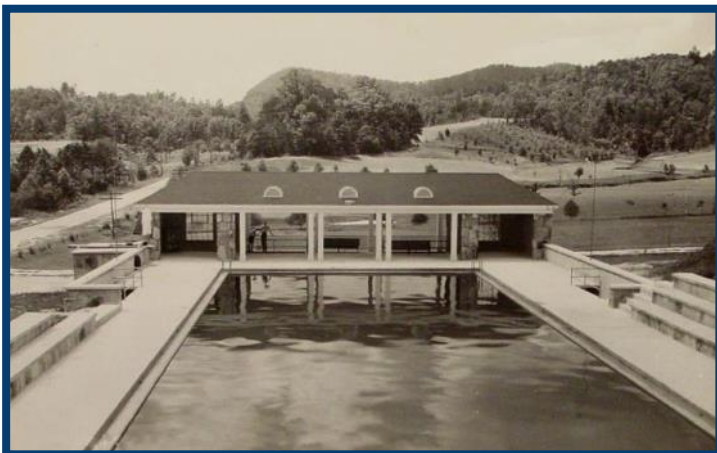


Two gymnasiums were constructed with WPA funds and workers. The Rabun County High School gym (on the left above) is now used as the county civic center. The original gym at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School has been remodeled and houses their lower school.



In 1936, the WPA offered Rabun County a grant of \$55,000 to construct a country club. The City of Clayton provided the land, the WPA paid for most of the labor for the project's construction, and about \$9,000 was pledged by citizens to pay for materials.

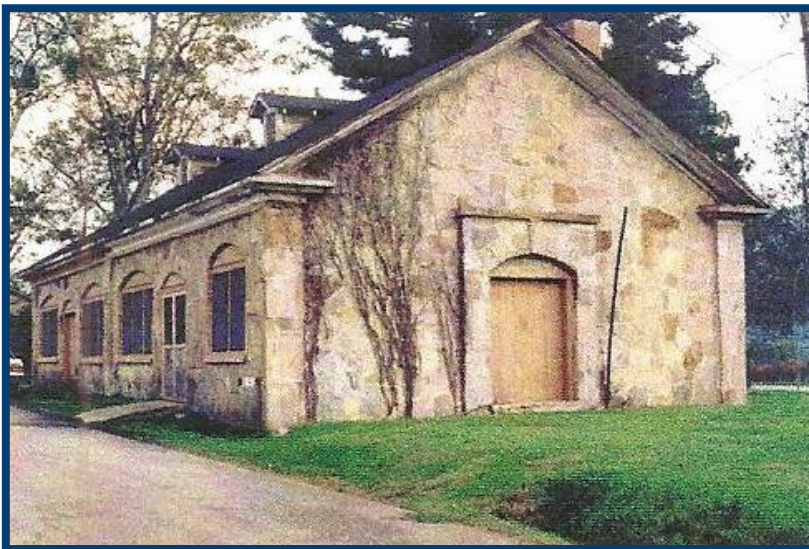
In June 1940, the project, located south of Clayton, was completed at a cost of \$100,000 and named Rabun Country Club. It included a large concrete swimming pool, club house, three hard-clay tennis courts, and a nine-hole golf course. All were available to the public.



The facility operated off and over the years and experienced a number of issues, including a swimming pool that leaked, tennis courts that needed resurfacing, and a lack of equipment to maintain the golf course. In 1977, the country club was renamed Rabun County Public Golf Course to emphasize that it was open to all who wanted to play. The swimming pool was filled in, the tennis courts have been repurposed, and the club house was replaced. The golf course is now well-maintained and a popular facility for locals and visitors.



Three new schools in Rabun County were built by the WPA in Persimmon, Satolah, and Tiger. The school at Tiger (top photo) has been remodeled and expanded and serves as the administrative office for the county Board of Education. The Persimmon Community still uses their former school (above) as a community center, while the Satolah building is a private residence.



Two canning plants were built for homemakers to preserve their garden produce. The plant in Clayton was located across from the old Rabun County High School on Savannah Street. It has been torn down. The cannery building on the left is still standing in Dillard and is currently home to a distillery.

Rabun County Historical Society
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Historical Society Membership Updates

Welcome to our new members who have joined since
March 2024

Patron

William Edwards (upgrade)
Maggie and Ed Waggoner

Friend

David Carswell
Robert Marshall

Family

Betty Jo Blalock (upgrade)

Student

Meleta Hansen

Phone: 706-782-5292
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- Please visit our museum and research library Wednesday through Saturday from 11:00 until 3:00.
- Group tours by appointment

