

The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

The Dillard House A Legacy of the Dillard Family

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In the early 1800s, the Cherokee, who had lived in the southern Appalachians for centuries, were forced to abandon their homeland to make way for white settlers. They ceded the northeast corner of Georgia to the state in 1819, and Rabun County was established on that land. The land was divided into lots and given away in a land lottery in 1820.

Captain John Dillard was a native of Virginia and a veteran of the American Revolution. Around 1821, he moved with his family to the newly created Rabun County. When the land in Rabun County was granted

by lottery, John's son James began acquiring land and became one of the county's first legally titled settlers. The subsequent generations of the Dillard family wrote the history of the town of Dillard, which was founded in 1846. Frontier life was rigorous, but the Dillards were hard-working and innovative, and they flourished.

A few generations later, shortly after the Tallulah Falls Railroad was extended to Dillard in 1906, Zack Dillard renovated a family home and began to take in boarders under the name of the Dillard House.

Main Street Dillard
in the 1920s





In 1911, Zack’s nephew, Arthur, married Carrie Edwards from Highlands, North Carolina, and they moved into an old tenant house that belonged to the Dillards. Uncle Zack, who was running a good boarding business at the Dillard House down the road asked Arthur and Carrie to take some of his overflow guests. They did and liked the business so much, they went into the boarding business themselves under the name Oaklawn.

Carrie was a culinary magician. She learned to cook as a child at her family’s boarding house in Highlands. When Uncle Zack retired, he asked Arthur and Carrie to take the family name. So Oaklawn became the Dillard House featuring Carrie’s fabulous food...and the rest is history, as they say. Her cuisine was perhaps the original farm-to-table, with Carrie being the gardener as well as the cook.

The Dillard family endured economic adversities during the Great Depression and the war years, but the family managed to keep their land and turned more toward the burgeoning tourism business.

In 1953, the Dillard House expanded greatly to handle the crowds, and Carrie was warned that she was overreaching. She recalled that “One

Sunday the next summer, we fed almost five thousand guests.” When Arthur died, Carrie kept the business going - cooking, tending the gardens and taking care of her boarders. Her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren carried on the legacy for decades, serving generous amounts of vegetables and meats, and Southern hospitality at its finest.

In subsequent decades, they added motel units and began to expand their business. A modern dining room was built in 1957 and then additional motel units and cottages in the 1960s and 1970s. The Dillard House is now a modern hotel that includes a conference center. Amenities include horseback riding stables, tennis, swimming pool, and a petting zoo. Some of the famous guests of the Dillard House have included business leaders, politicians, sports figures and movie stars.

The Dillard Family legacy now reaches back more than 200 years in Rabun County and is inexorably intertwined with the history of the county itself. Traditions of patriotism, hard work, entrepreneurship and love of family and heritage are shared by many who have called Rabun County home, but the Dillards are among those whose lasting mark on Rabun County history is unequalled.



The original Dillard House, started by Zack Dillard in 1905, is still standing today.



The Zack Dillard family in 1904



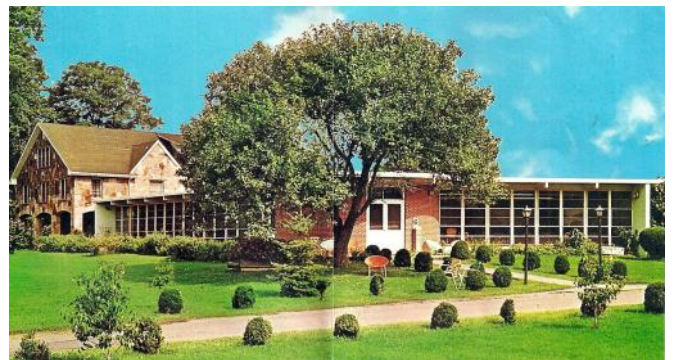
Arthur and Carrie Dillard's home that began as Oaklawn and later became the Dillard House. It was originally a wood structure, and in subsequent years was covered in stone. It has often been referred to as the Rock House.



Carrie Edwards Dillard working in her garden in the late 1960s.



Arthur and Carrie Edwards Dillard, circa 1913



The modern Dillard House dining room in the 1970s. Arthur and Carrie's rock Dillard House is in the background.

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



Stop by our booth at the
Foxfire Mountaineer Festival
 October 5 at the
Rabun County Civic Center & Pavilions

***Historical Society
 Membership Updates***

Welcome to our new members
 who have joined since June 2024

Benefactor
 Doug Nassaur/
 Moonrise Distillery

Family
 Julie Crowe

Friend
 Kristi Nicholson