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More Rabun County Women Who Made a Difference

There are many women in Rabun County history with fascinating stories and significant contributions. This is a continuation of Rabun's notable women that we featured in our June 2025 newsletter. As noted there we certainly do not claim to list all of them here. Their varied accomplishments range from public service to artistic endeavors to entrepreneurial proficiency. The contributions of these women to Rabun history are often overshadowed by those of men, and we have sought to give these women their due in some small way.



Maude York Fisher (1893-1981) was born in Burton as one of 13 children. She became educated at a time when few women in this area did. After graduating with honors from the Ninth District Agricultural School in Clarkesville in 1913, she enrolled at the Georgia Normal and Industrial College in Milledgeville. She left GNIC in her senior year to become the first home demonstration agent in Rabun County. Maude traveled throughout Rabun on horseback teaching agriculture and cooking. She taught conserving food—canning, preserving and drying as well as the “economical conduct” of the home. Eventually she gave up her horse, bought a car and became the first woman in Rabun to own and drive a car.

During World War I, Maude worked with the Red Cross in Rabun County. Following

the war, in 1919, she married Harry Fisher, and they raised three children. In the early 1930s, she opened the Green Shutters Restaurant and Tea Room, on the main highway in Tiger. It became an institution for almost fifty years, with delicious food cooked on a woodstove. Travelers passing through and summer visitors alike appreciated her food knowledge, attention to detail and her strong-willed determination. When World War II broke out, she once again worked with the Red Cross. She spent her life helping people, and she taught her children and grandchildren the importance of an education.

Fannie Picklesimer Kerby Smith (1825-1914) This dark-eyed little woman became one of our area's best-known, most colorful and most industrious citizens—the famous “Aunt Fannie” of Sinking Mountain. She was born in North Carolina and in 1841 at the age of 16, she married William Rufus Kerby and moved to Rabun County. Four years and four children later, her husband died shortly after completing the family's log home at the foot of Sinking Mountain. She remarried in 1852 to Ambrose J. Smith, who became a prosperous farmer in the Camp Creek settlement around Sinking Mountain. She and Mr. Smith had seven more children.

Known as a good cook, the enterprising woman decided to serve meals to the growing number of tourists from Tallulah Falls who passed near their home to visit Sinking Mountain. Aunt Fannie's tourist trade began in the late 1870s, and for more than thirty years, she opened her home to guests from throughout the country. Visitors came with the idea of enjoying a meal of Aunt Fannie's fried chicken, home-grown vegetables and hot biscuits, but some decided to stay for a few days or even weeks. Tourists came on horseback, in buggies and on foot to enjoy her fabulous food. Aunt Fannie continued serving her guests until the day she passed away at age 89.



Mary Crovatt Hambidge (1885-1973) Born in Georgia and educated in Massachusetts, Mary Crovatt lived in New York City in her youth and aspired to be an actress. While living in New York, in 1914 she met Jay Hambidge, a Canadian magazine illustrator who promoted a theory that mathematical laws of proportion were the basis of great art. On a trip to Greece with Jay, Mary was awakened to the idea that weaving was to be the focus of her life. Jay Hambidge died in 1924. Though he and Mary Crovatt were never married, after his death Mary took his name and devoted the rest of her life to promoting his theory of dynamic symmetry in her weaving.

With the help of a wealthy friend, she purchased 800 acres along Betty's Creek Road near Rabun

Gap. During her almost forty years on the property, several buildings were added to the two already on the site. At age fifty, Mary began to recruit women to spin and weave. The “Weavers of Rabun” not only produced lengths of fabric used for drapery and upholstery on the presidential yacht, but also hand woven scarves, shawls and men's neckties that were sold at a shop on Madison Avenue in New York City. In the 1950s, the work produced on Betty's Creek Road was the subject of several major museum shows, including one at the Smithsonian. After Mary's death in 1973, the property became the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences, which instituted a residency program for artists. It continues today. The entire property of the Hambidge Center is now on the National Register of Historic Places.



Josephine Kinman Brewer (1910-1998) was instrumental in revolutionizing the delivery of healthcare in Rabun County. She became Rabun's first public health nurse on July 1, 1939 with the county health office located on the top floor of what is now the White Birch Inn.

In November 1942, she and Dr. James A. Green opened a county-operated maternity home where expectant mothers could give birth in a safe environment with full-time medical attention. The 12-bed Rabun County Maternity Hospital on Clayton's Main Street was the first of its kind in Georgia, providing around the clock pre- and postnatal care, in addition to giving instruction on preventative healthcare to the

mothers. No expectant mother was turned away. Jo Brewer noted it was the "only such facility ever organized under a local public health nurse-midwife." The maternity home closed in 1951 with the opening of the new Rabun County Memorial Hospital.

In 1973, Josephine Kinman Brewer was named "Nurse of the Year" for the Ninth Congressional District. In a newspaper article in 1996, it was pointed out that "any attempt to list what this woman has done for the health of Rabun County will be inadequate." She served as chair of the Rabun County Board of Health and chair of the committee to build a new library. Jo Brewer continued working for the people of Rabun County and northeast Georgia until her death in 1998 at the age of 88.

Lillian Smith (1897-1966) was an internationally acclaimed author, an outspoken critic of segregation in the South, and an owner of a summer camp for girls that molded many young lives. Lillian moved to Clayton with her family in 1915, where her father repurposed their large home into Laurel Falls Camp for girls.

Lillian Smith's first novel, "Strange Fruit," was published in 1944 and was the story of an interracial love affair. The book sold millions worldwide, perhaps partially because of its controversial topic. Banned in Boston and Detroit, it was called pornography by the Atlanta postmaster who refused to send it through the mail. Lillian's later novels never achieved this level of recognition.

Lillian Smith was the most liberal and outspoken of white mid-twentieth century Southern women on issues of racial, social and gender injustice. She was often scorned by more moderate Southerners and threatened by arsonists. She continued to write and speak for social justice, and since 1968 the Lillian Smith Book Awards have been presented each year to recognize writers who carry on her legacy.



Rabun County Historical Society
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Historical Society Membership Updates

Welcome to our new members who have joined
since June 2025

Patron

Beverly & Marc Williams

Friend

Darlene E. Huey
Ron Leslie

Phone: 706-782-5292
www.rabunhistory.org
Email:
rabuncountyhistory@gmail.com

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



We would like to acknowledge our dedicated volunteers.

Linda and Ron Barden
Steve Bingham
Anne and Dick Cinquina
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Kaye Collins
Wanda Darnell

Wanda and Gracie Dunn
Gail Hopper
George Prater
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