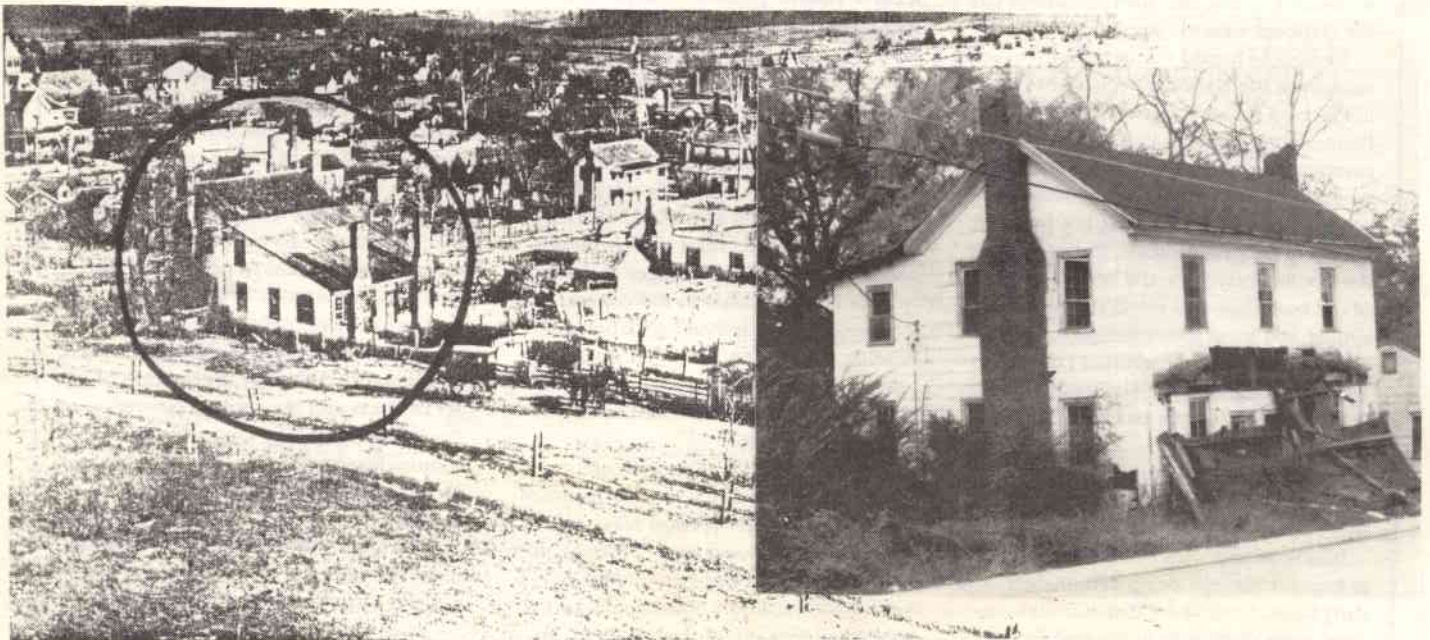


Could the house in the photograph at right be the same as the one circled in the 1908 photograph of Lawrenceville at left? There is good reason to believe the answer to this question is "yes." If so, this building could be the oldest standing structure in the City of Lawrenceville.

The question came about because of the traveling photographic exhibit recently developed by GHS' Preservation Committee.* The exhibit depicts the development of Gwinnett County through photographs. While trying to determine the fate of the buildings pictured in the 1908 photograph of Lawrenceville (which is featured in the exhibit), we read through a National Register application for the Clarence R. Ware House, which currently stands at the corner of Oak and Perry Streets. According to the application, the house in the 1908 photograph was demolished when Clarence Ware built his new home in 1910.

GHS member Bob Wynn refused to settle for this answer and began digging through the old News-Heralds for the year 1910. In the February 7, 1910 paper Bob found what he was looking for - an article stating that the house circled in the 1908 photograph was to be rolled back from Perry Street to face Oak Street, making way for Ware to build his new home. The article gives a brief history of the house and the families that lived in it and states that "It was put up by Dr. William J. Russell nearly 100 years ago." The article goes on to say "The old house will be rolled back and face the school building. The shed rooms have been torn away, and it will be converted into a neat eight room dwelling. The timbers were all mortised and pegged and seem to be as sound as when put together nearly a century ago."

Although the front porch has fallen in and the rear shed portion has deteriorated, the main structure of the house at 106/108 Oak Street still appears sound and worthy of rehabilitation. We hope someone takes an interest in the building soon. It could certainly serve as nice office space, as so many of Lawrenceville's older homes now do. The house is definitely a find for the City of Lawrenceville which has lost so much of its early architecture. To lose the William Russell House now, after learning its history, would certainly be a great loss.



*The traveling photographic exhibit is available for display at civic group meetings or to other interested parties. Please contact the GHS Office (962-1450) for more information and to schedule dates. The exhibit is approximately 10 feet long. It may be seen at the Lake Lanier Natural History Museum until Christmas.

Most of the early settlers were small farmers. The 1820 census states that the population of Gwinnett County was 4,589 persons, with seven percent of that number being Black. Twenty-four percent of the population were slave-holders. The number of slaves each person owned was small, however. Of the 162 slave-owners, 76 owned one slave, 43 owned two, and only three owned ten or more, the largest number being 14. By 1860, the percentage of slave-holders was up to thirty-four percent, with the average now being seven slaves per owner. The four largest slave-owners had 72, 65, 63, and 55 slaves, respectively. Although the percentage of the Negro population never surpassed 17 percent, the growth in slave population corresponds with the increase in cotton production.

In 1838, the Cherokees were forcibly removed from the land north of the Chattahoochee. Two companies of volunteers from Gwinnett County were called to assist in the removal. After the land was vacated by the Indians, the Cherokee Land Lottery was held and many Gwinnett residents drew lots in the territory. This probably accounts for the loss of population from 1830 to 1840 of 2,485 people, or eighteen percent of the population. Those farmers who had drawn lots on less fertile land or land that was impractical to farm in Gwinnett were probably the first to move on westward when new territories were opened.

Most farms were small subsistence ones, but cotton production led to the formation of several large plantations in the area. One early plantation owner was Thomas Maguire, an Irish immigrant who came to Gwinnett County around 1825. By 1860, he owned 956 acres and 26 slaves. He kept a journal for many years, although some volumes have been lost and one was reportedly taken by Union Army foragers. In these journals he reveals the daily routine of plantation life, including the temperature, state of the weather, condition of the roads and streams, and accounts of comings and goings of the family, slaves, and visitors. The years that are covered by the existing journal are 1859-72, eventful years for a Southern family. Maguire himself voted against secession, as he states in his January 2, 1860 entry. Maguire's two sons were soldiers and are often mentioned in the journal, although it is primarily a straight forward account of day to day life on his plantation known as "Promised Land". (A few entries from the journal follow.)

August 2, 1859 - David Anderson and I went to Lawrenceville and got an order from Inferior Court to construct a bridge across Yellow River to cost \$250.

August 20, 1859 - Negroes have a holiday. This pleases them very much. David and I attended a meeting of the Sons of Temperance at Lithonia. Ten were initiated. There was some fighting at the grocery. The commission there trying the delinquents when we left.

November 13, 1862 - Finished gathering corn in upper bottom. Amounted to 210 barrels.

February 23, 1863 - Shipped to James H. C. a bundle containing 4 lbs. butter, about 4 lbs. sugar, bag of sage and pepper, ball of thread, a hat, three pairs of socks, writing paper and envelopes and addressed to J. H. C. Maguire, C.C. Cobb's Legion, Georgia volunteers, Fredericksburg, Virginia, care Mr. Pendley.

March 6, 1863 - Planted 130 apple trees in potato patch.

November 17, 1863 - Sold 6118 lbs. cotton at 55¢. Amount of sale \$3364.00.

January 14, 1864 - Finished making 27 pairs of shoes. I paid \$162.80 for two sides of sole leather.

8. (Cont'd from p. 67)

July 18, 1864 - Yankees at Stone Mountain. Water tank burned and track torn up. Fighting in Atlanta. Folks badly scared here.

July 21, 1864 - At midnight Yankees came here in force. Roused us up. The house was filled with them. They robbed us of nearly everything they could carry off. They broke open all trunks and drawers and carried the keys away.

November 17, 1864 - We are still in the woods. Slept but little. We were dodging about trying to see the Yankees from our hiding places. The Yankees all left about 11 o'clock. I went home at 2 o'clock, tired enough and sleepy, but glad to find the home folks were not abused, although there was great destruction of property. The gin house and screw were burned, stables and barn in ashes, fences burned and destruction all around. Carriage, wagons, corn, potatoes, horses, steers, sheep, chickens, geese, syrup, and many other items carried away or destroyed. (James C. Flanigan, History of Gwinnett County, Georgia 1818-1960, Vol. II [n.p., 1959; reprint ed., n.p., 1984], p. 189-98.

George M. Waters was another large slave-holder, owning 100 slaves in 1840, but only possessing 40 at the time of his death in 1852. His will provided that the slaves be freed, and since it was illegal to free slaves in the state of Georgia, they were transported at the expense of his estate to Liberia. Unfortunately, they were not suited or prepared for the conditions that they found in Liberia, for within one year, thirty of these slaves were dead. The survivors found passage on a merchant ship to Philadelphia. Howell Cobb and Alexander Stephens provided money or transportation for their return to Georgia, where they apparently took up their lives again on the Chattahoochee River plantation that had been their home and remained there until freed at the end of the Civil War. (James C. Flanigan, History of Gwinnett County, Georgia 1818-1943 Vol. I [n.p., 1943; reprint ed. Buford, Georgia: Moreno Press, 1975], p. 163-7.

One of the wealthiest men in the county was Robert Craig, who lived near Lawrenceville on the Old Stone Mountain Road. He came to the county in the early years with very little, but at his death there were 300 bales of cotton in his yard, 4,000 bushels of corn in his cribs, and 2,000 bushels of wheat in his bins. In addition, he owned many cattle, sheep, and hogs, and in his cash box was the sum of \$16,500. (Ibid., p. 98)

Most of the farmers who settled in the county could not afford the \$800 to \$1500 purchase price for a young, healthy slave, which was more than the price of a 200 acre farm. Many of the slaves owned by small slave-holders were young boys or girls used as household help or for minor chores. These smaller farmers were more dependent on towns and settlements for various commodities, and several grew up to serve their needs.

Lawrenceville, the county seat, was established in 1821, and remained the only incorporated town for some time. It is near the geographical center of the county. Pinckneyville, which later became the town of Norcross, developed in the early years and had a post office by 1828. Settlements grew up at Suwanee, which had been an Indian settlement previously, and at various crossroads such as Trickum and Five Forks that have not since become towns.

In 1833, the Court directed that a ferry across the Chattahoochee River be established by Evan Howell on his land and that a road be

(See p. 72)

built to it from Peachtree Road. A settlement formed at this point, which was known as Howell's Cross Roads until 1871, when the railroad came through and Howell's grandson named the town Duluth. (Ibid., p. 78-9)

At the first census in 1820, the county contained a spinning wheel maker, Thomas Mchathy, who had a one-man operation. Otherwise, there were four blacksmiths, a shoemaker, two hatmakers, and a saddler. Industrial development was slow in the county. There seems to have been very little capital investment other than in slavery. When a cotton factory was built in 1851 in Lawrenceville, it joined 26 other manufacturing establishments reported in Gwinnett in 1850. It was a granite building of three stories, 208 by 54 feet, with numerous outbuildings. The projection was for 6,000 spindles and 200 looms in the steam-powered mill, although it may not ever have reached this capacity. It was converted to the manufacture of bags to store and carry salt during the Civil War, and was reportedly destroyed by raiders after the war. ("The Lawrenceville Textile Factory", Southern Tribune, 1 February 1851.)

Although there were no major battles in the area, the Civil War took a heavy toll on the county. Union foragers entered the county from Atlanta along the Decatur Road. After destroying many buildings and crops, they returned with their wagons loaded with 9,300 bushels of corn, five loads of wheat, and 100 head of cattle. The official report does not make mention of the cotton bales burned and the personal property that was taken by the soldiers. 672 wagons were loaded with goods from Gwinnett farmers. Far more devastating to the economy in general, however, was the freeing of the slaves. (Flanigan, History of Gwinnett, Vol. I., p. 228-33.)

Between 1860 and 1870, there was a four percent population loss in the county. This includes 86 less white persons and 453 less black persons. Although there were a few "free persons of color" before the war, most of these 2,159 remaining black persons were former slaves who chose to remain in the area and work in some manner for their former masters. Freedmen were at first organized in large labor gangs managed by an overseer, which resembled the situation before the war so closely that it was not popular with the freedmen. New labor arrangements were made which included new forms of rental. Renting may have seemed attractive to the freedman because the idea of working a tract of land of his own, at his own pace, would give him a sense of independence and control. It was agreeable to land owners because it eliminated the necessity of supervision of labor. But, although the new arrangement seemed to offer freedom to blacks, it actually replaced slavery with other forms of peonage. Tenant farming turned out to be good for land owners but often a disaster for the tenant.

White farmers also came to participate in these new methods in increasing numbers, until white sharecroppers outnumbered black ones in the South and in Gwinnett County. The reasons for this increasing white group may have to do with the poverty of the South in general during the Reconstruction period. Farmers who had lost the farms they had sometimes remained on the same land, working for the new owner and new farmers starting out found it easier and less expensive to work as a sharecropper. One important result of the growth of this method of farm labor was the breaking up of the large plantations into smaller farms, many of which were still controlled by a single owner. In 1850, the average southern farm was 360 acres, with 104 acres in cultivation. By 1890, the average had fallen to 143 acres, with only 57 usable for

cultivation. (Charles S. Johnson, Edwin R. Embree, and W. W. Alexander, The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935] p. 25.

Records are not available on the number of farms that were involved in share cropping during the last half of the nineteenth century, but by 1930 there were 2,449 tenant farmers and only 1,058 owners or part owners in Gwinnett. Tenancy usually took one of three forms. In all of these forms the landlord furnished the land, a house, and fuel, while the tenant furnished labor. In the case of share cropping, the landlord would also furnish tools, stock and feed, seed, half of the fertilizer, and would receive one-half of the crop. Share renting involved only one third or fourth of the crop to the landlord, who furnished only that share of the fertilizer. In cash rental, the tenant furnished everything and payed a fixed amount in cash or cotton to the landlord. (Ibid., p. 74)

During the period from 1860 to 1900, a cotton boom occurred. The population of the county grew steadily, but inequities were growing between the rich and the poor. Sharecroppers and tenants were often caught in a system of debt peonage. Sometimes landlords or merchants who marketed the cotton exploited the tenant, managing to keep him in debt and obligated to work the land until he earned enough to pay what he owed. Sometimes accounts were manipulated or prices of goods inflated to insure the debt of the tenant. This system combined with the high illiteracy rate of blacks to keep them almost as landless by the end of the century as they had been at the close of the Civil War. By 1903, blacks composed almost half of Georgia's population yet held only four percent of the land. Although Gwinnett County was only sixteen percent black in 1900, there is no evidence to suggest they held any more than a minimal part of the land.

Share cropping and cotton production proved to be a destructive combination for the fertility of the soil of the Georgia piedmont. Abusive farming practices had been common from the beginning of cultivation of the area, but tenant farmers were even less careful of the land, understandably, as their focus was on earning enough to survive and maybe get ahead without expending too much of their resources on land that they did not own. As early as 1860, Dr. Joseph Jones reported that the yield of cotton had not increased in proportion to the increase in population, which he attributed to deterioration of the land. Throughout the years, farmers were urged in newspaper articles and speeches to follow good farming practices, but to those for whom living was on a subsistence level, these pleas were impractical. Experts urged farmers to plant only the amount of land that could be cultivated and not attempt to expand cotton acreage. Cotton schools were offered around the turn of the century. In a newspaper interview in 1910, Gwinnett farmer W.R. Hunt stated that most area farmers were in debt and must grow cotton in an attempt to try to get even. He urged farmers to plant corn and hay to feed their families and stock, and complained that Georgia farmers had spent \$124,496,000 on such necessities in the previous year that they could easily have grown themselves. (Gwinnett News-Herald, 25 January 1910.)

Many of the small crossroads communities of the area took on new importance as cotton farming grew and the population increased. When the railroads were built, those towns on the line became local centers for the shipment of cotton. In 1871, the Southern Railway road was built through the county, and Norcross, Duluth, Suwanee, and Buford developed along it. When what is presently the Seaboard Air Line

Railroad laid track in 1891, the towns of Carl, Auburn, Dacula, Gloster, Luxomni, Lilburn, Grayson, and Loganville on a branch line, grew from small settlements.

In the late nineteenth century, railroads and industries accompanied a 28 percent population boom in the county. Lawrenceville grew during this period, but the new town of Buford was especially booming, and by 1930 had a population of 3,357 compared to Lawrenceville's 2,156. Buford was built at the site of a railroad camp on what is now the Southern Railroad, which was being constructed from Atlanta to Charlotte, North Carolina. It was named in honor of the president of the railroad. The two entrepreneurs who created the town, Larkin Smith and J.S. Garner, laid out the town, built a hotel across from the depot, and set out to attract inhabitants with railroad excursions from Atlanta, free barbecue, a brass band, and speakers. Soon the town did begin to grow, and one of the early settlers was Bonaparte Allen. He moved to Buford in 1873, and opened a small tannery which later expanded into the largest industry in the county. It eventually included horse collar, harness, saddle, glue, and shoe factories employing 2,000 people. The factory was in operation until the 1980s. Bona Allen built a luxurious home for himself in Buford, which was easily the largest and most costly of any house built in Gwinnett until the modern period. (Flanigan, History of Gwinnett, Vol. 2, p. 141-4, 410.)

The railroads connected Gwinnett County to its new neighbor, Atlanta, which was fast becoming the center of commerce of the state and region. Excursions into the city were popular with Gwinnett County residents, and rail remained the preferred way to travel until the 1940s. Railroad towns gained in importance as the collection centers for cotton shipment. A principal figure in these towns was the storekeeper, who extended credit to tenants and landowners alike, which loans were secured by liens on the crops. Storekeepers of this sort became an effective replacement for the cotton factor of early seaports.

By the early 1920s, the stability of cotton production was undermined by low prices and the arrival of the boll weevil. The boll weevil reached Gwinnett County around 1919, and in 1920 cotton prices dropped from 35¢ per pound to less than 15¢ per pound. By 1930, the price had dropped to 9½¢ per pound, a devastating situation for the small farmer or tenant who was usually in debt. The smaller harvests from boll weevil destruction, combined with lower prices, reduced the number of farms in the county from 4,460 in 1920 to 3,925 in 1930. There was a population loss in this decade of eight percent. The lack of industry in the county made it difficult for displaced farmers to find jobs locally, and many moved to neighboring Atlanta. Small farming communities lost population and importance. The improved state highways, especially US 29 which follows a former stage coach route from Atlanta to Athens and was dirt and gravel until the 1930s, enabled county residents to move about inside the county and to leave it more easily. People were able to bypass smaller towns and shop or sell their products in larger ones. (The Statistical History of the United States From Colonial Times to the Present [Stanford, CT: Fairfield Publishers, Inc., 1947] p. 301.)

Farmers who remained were forced to experiment with new crops and farming methods. The federal and state governments began assisting with agricultural transition by supplying county agricultural agents. But cotton production remained important in Gwinnett County until the 1940s, at which time there were still 50,000 acres of cotton under

cultivation. What finally killed cotton was the development of synthetic fabrics, begun because of necessity in World War II and flourishing in the post-war boom. Simultaneously, Kentucky 31 Fescue grass became available in the late 1940s and combined with these factors to change the landscape of Gwinnett County. The countryside turned from red brown cotton fields to green pasture in just a few years. Many more acres were taken out of cultivation and used for timber production. Small farmers began raising chickens, usually by contracting with a large packing house, and using the poultry litter as a source of fertilizer for the grass. The litter could also be composted and mixed with corn to produce an extremely inexpensive feed source for beef cattle. Both the cattle and poultry found ample market in the burgeoning Atlanta area, whose suburbs were rapidly using up closer farmlands. ("Cotton Was Once King in Gwinnett County" Gwinnett Daily News, 10 February 1980).

These changes led to a consolidation of small farms into pastures, and the further displacement of the tenant farmer, whose labor was not as valuable as it had been when needed for cotton production. As roads were paved and cars became available to the middle class, the farmer was sometimes able to keep his land and travel to nearby industrial areas for employment. Conversely, Atlanta residents began spreading the suburbs to Gwinnett, buying houses on the land nearest the DeKalb County line and commuting daily to jobs in or near Atlanta or Decatur. The construction of Interstate 85 through the county in the late 1950s fueled this suburbanization.

In the 1950s, Gwinnett began the extremely rapid growth that has characterized it in the modern period. Each decade has shown a jump in the growth rate and has resulted in a population increasing from 32,320 in 1950, to 116,903 in 1980. In the first four years of the 1980s, Gwinnett's population almost doubled in size to 226,100 people. Although this growth began as the suburban sprawl from Atlanta, Gwinnett has become a major employer of its own people. Of the farms still in operation, the broiler industry is biggest in terms of dollars, but extensive cattle herds employ most of the land in use for farming. Third is horse farming, or ranching, which is less common but lucrative. In addition, many families have a few acres which they use for pleasure horses.

The Department of Agriculture reports that there were 68,000 acres farmed in Gwinnett in 1964. By 1985, there were an estimated 25,000 acres in farmland. The number of farmers had dropped from 2,000 in 1950 to 100 in 1985. With more and more pressure on these remaining farmers, even this number could dwindle in the years to come. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1964.)

Gwinnett County was begun in an age when agriculture was the dominant form of labor for Americans, and rural life was the preferred style. For more than one hundred years the growing of cotton determined the fortunes of the people who lived in the county. There are no cotton crops left in Gwinnett now. Indeed, there are very few crops of any kind, as urbanization rapidly spreads. But occasionally there can still be seen a row of cotton growing beside the tomatoes, corn, and peppers in a backyard garden. Perhaps its there to show Northern visitors, or for grandchildren, or maybe just to remember what it was like when cotton was king in Gwinnett County.