

THE VOICE

of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and
Cobb Memorial Archives

THANK YOU, MR. ROSENWALD

Presented by Susan Webb, historical interpreter

The Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society is happy to announce that Ms. Susan Webb will be the speaker at this month's general membership meeting. Using photographs, documented interviews, historical artifacts, audience participation of authentic recitation lessons and tales of early American education, America's Traveling Schoolmarm will transport you to the legacy of Julius Rosenwald and the schools he helped build in the back roads of Alabama. Julius Rosenwald, the early 20th-century president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, was a German-Jewish immigrant, philanthropist and trustee of Tuskegee Institute. From 1912 until 1932, his generous caring and compassion for the education of 663,615 African-American children helped blanket 15 Southern states with over 5,300 school buildings, 407 of which were built in Alabama. His collaboration with Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee Institute, and grassroots community efforts resulted in a program which constructed schoolhouses, teacher homes and

industrial high schools across the South. By 1928, one in every five African-American rural schools in the South was a Rosenwald school. Makeshift classrooms in run-down shanties and dusty church basements were replaced with well-constructed and carefully planned Rosenwald school buildings. Today, through the efforts of local residents, the National Trust of Historic Preservation, and generous corporate contributions, many Rosenwald schools are being restored in southern communities, including Notasulga, Greensboro, Midway, and Fredonia, Alabama.

Susan Webb, early American school historian, has become America's Traveling Schoolmarm. Having lived in areas of the country steeped in the history of country schooling, Susan has developed a passion for the study of American education. Her 20 years as a classroom teacher, her background in theatrical presentation, and over a decade of early-American education research prompted her to develop

her entertaining and unique, yet informative, programs. These ventures have transported her to libraries, universities, conference sites, historical societies and museums across the United States. From these journeys she has collected a small library of antique schoolbooks and an array of historical school artifacts. Susan has set foot in countless historically restored country schools throughout the country to engage audiences in school reenactments, utilizing her book *Country School Copybook* and other publications she has written: *Ready for Reenactment?*, *School Days Lessons*, *Masterful McGuffey*, and *My One-Room School Copybook*.

Members of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and the general public are invited to attend the program in the Fredonia Community Center (formerly the Fredonia School House) in Fredonia, Alabama, Sunday July 28, 2019, 3:00 p.m. EDT.



PLEASE NOTE THE LOCATION OF THIS MEETING!

Members of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and the general public are invited to attend this program.

**THE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY MEETING**

Sunday, July 28, 2019 3:00 p. m. EDT

*The Fredonia Community Center
Fredonia, Alabama*

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Malinda Powers

Another Independence Day has come and gone, and I hope you all had a very special day celebrating with family and friends. For many years my own family has loaded lawn chairs into the station wagon en route to an annual fireworks extravaganza hosted by the City of Valley. Throngs of people attend each year and line the roadsides in the vicinity of the Sportsplex.

We usually leave home right after supper, traveling directly to the old entrance road to the now-defunct Lanier-Carter Mills. This location is prime real estate for watching pyrotechnics. We get there early, usually waiting two hours or more until total darkness descends. Entertainment consists of watching others who got there even earlier, some grilling and many fraternizing, while teenage Rams toss footballs to pint-size Ram wannabes. Time moves very slowly but finally the sun slips away and the show begins. For this half-hour, the crowd is one body- no one is in a hurry, the wannabe-Rams are stilled, and the crowd is not too cool to ooh-and-ah appropriately.

I hope you got to witness this year's broadcast of the national Independence Day celebration at the Lincoln Memorial. A grand tribute was paid to all branches of our military, those who volunteer to serve our nation and protect our liberties and freedoms while risking their own lives in our defense.

This very special holiday is a time to reflect upon our country's beginnings, where patriot defenders of liberty fought very long odds to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity". Each

generation has a responsibility to pass the twin torches of freedom and opportunity to the next. We need to double-down on teaching our children the fundamentals of our Constitutional Republic and celebrate our heritage and heroes. We weren't a totally just and free people in 1776, but over the past two and a half centuries, we have continued to progress toward these bedrock goals. Americans today need not look far to see examples of other governments whose citizens lack the basic freedoms we so often take for

granted. It is our duty to educate our younger generations, so they will understand that the freedoms we enjoy and strive to preserve are very precious indeed!

As we trend toward more divisiveness in our political arena, let us remember we are *one* nation under God, with liberty and justice for all. Generations of our country's defenders have made the ultimate sacrifice to uphold our freedoms. Let us never forget.



It is our duty to educate our younger generations, so they will understand that the freedoms we enjoy and strive to preserve are very precious indeed!

The VOICE is a quarterly newsletter of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 718, West Point, Georgia 31833

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Find us on Facebook and visit our website at <http://cvhistoricalsociety.org>

MISSION STATEMENT: As a non-profit membership organization, the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society seeks to preserve and promote the history and heritage of Chambers County, Alabama, West Point, Georgia, and the greater Chattahoochee Valley area. CVHS produces and sells historical books and media, publishes a quarterly newsletter, and presents programs with speakers on historical topics of local and regional interest.

VISION STATEMENT: Having been in continuous operation since its founding in 1953, the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society strives to uphold the vision of its founders while posturing the organization for growth in the 21st century.

Our security vault contains a very interesting assortment of artifacts, important documents, and memorabilia collected by our founders in the mid-1900's. Among its contents there is a 35 mm film labeled, "Memorial Day Services & Parade", and dated April 26, 1961. From this date, we can ascertain that the program and parade were held to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the departure of the 4th Georgia Regiment, aka the "West Point Guards". The townspeople gave them a grand send-off that day, as they boarded the train for Augusta to be mustered into Confederate service.

Now, fifty-eight years later, the film footage itself is historical in its own right. The box is addressed to Mr. Harold Smith, the Valley's foremost professional

photographer of this time period. Note the mailing address, with no street or post office box listed. Obviously, this was before the era of zip codes. The cost of postage from Columbus, Georgia to Lanett, Alabama was nine cents.

Mr. Smith was the photographer, and was more than likely assisted by Mr. C. Jim Murphy, who worked in Columbus at that time at WRBL-TV.

Our plans are to have the 35 mm film transferred to digital media, and perhaps show the footage at a future CVHS meeting. Stay tuned for more details!



STATUS REPORT – THE RESTORATION OF THE NEW HOPE ROSENWALD SCHOOL AT FREDONIA, CHAMBERS COUNTY, ALABAMA

by George Barrow

In the Spring 2015 issue of *The VOICE* we documented well the history of the New Hope Rosenwald School and described efforts underway to preserve the building and use the historical facility for community educational and cultural programs consistent with the original values of the Rosenwald School movement. This Rosenwald School will celebrate in 2019, the centennial anniversary of existence. The Fredonia community values the history of this Rosenwald School and its contribution to improving educational opportunities for local youth for almost forty years.

The New Hope Rosenwald School was built in 1919 at a cost of \$1200. The African American community raised \$400, the Rosenwald Foundation contributed \$400 and Alabama government contributed \$400.

The school was built to conform to Design #11, a blue print that was developed at Tuskegee Institute. The Design #11 is significant because this design was created under the stewardship of Robert Robertson Taylor, Dean of Architecture at Tuskegee and the first African American to graduate from the School of Architecture at MIT.

About a decade after its closing, the Trustees of the New Hope Missionary Church petitioned the State of Alabama, pursuant to existing statutes, to purchase the property for \$500. The building was rented for a number of years as the residence for an elderly couple. During this residential period the building was modified. The library room and a coat closet were dismantled and converted to an open front porch.

*South exterior structural restoration.
Small photo to the right shows this structure before restoration.
Large photo below shows the restoration in progress.*



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Almost twenty years ago a Board of Directors separate from Church Trustees took ownership for the purpose of preserving the building and initiating a new era of community service. In 2001 the New Hope Rosenwald School was accepted to the National Register of Historical Places.

The New Hope Board of Directors unanimously decided to return the school to its original Design #11. The building was basically sound but externally damaged by decades of assault from weather, decay, and insects. In the past decade the Directors have made significant progress in conserving and restoring the building doing much of the work themselves.

Without doubt the tall and ganged windows are the most distinguishable features of the Rosenwald schools. Consequently, restoring and preserving the windows became one of the highest priorities. There are 34 window sashes in the New Hope school. Of these, 31 window sashes were salvaged and completely restored over a two year period. Some were in deplorable condition. Three sashes were missing and had to be replicated to exact design specifications. 306 glass panes were installed where 30% of the glass was salvaged from the original windows. It was

important to the Directors that old glass was salvaged for restoring all the windows. The original window panes have noticeable imperfections as compared to clear clean transparency of current glass. These glass imperfections are quite apparent in the salvaged glass.

The restoration is currently focused on the exterior and returning the school to its initial design configuration. Work is on schedule and this phase of restoration will be completed by end of August. The next priority for work will be to move inside and complete the interior restoration of the rooms. Complete restoration will take several more months and will progress as a function of funding availability. Current restoration activities are being funded in part by grants from the Alabama Historical Commission (\$14,000), Coosa Valley RC&D Council(\$2500) and numerous individual donations from organizations and friends. The Board of Directors appreciates all assistance in financial gifts or in kind.



*North exterior wall restoration.
Photo to left shows the north wall and windows before restoration.
Photo above shows the same wall after restoration, where the sill for the entire length of the wall was replaced.*

Born July 16, 1906 in Chambers County, James Still left a lasting literary legacy. Although his published works celebrate Kentucky and Appalachian people and culture, he is a native Alabamian with roots stretching deep into Chambers County. A collection of Still's works and letters are available at Cobb Memorial Archives.

One of Kentucky's best-loved writers wasn't from Kentucky at all. James Still, born on Double Branch Farm near LaFayette, called Alabama home until he was college-bound.

Still first attended school in LaFayette and spent many hours outside of school working on the family farm. After World War I, the Stills moved to Shawmut. Perhaps inspired by his time in the Boy Scouts, Still composed and submitted a poem, "Nature Memories," that appeared in the *West Point News* on March 9, 1921. In 1924, Still graduated from Fairfax High. According to an article published in the *West Point News*, the promising young graduate met with local mill executives. The meeting was a brief one - when asked about his ambitions, he allegedly replied "Writing." With that the meeting ended.

At the age of eighteen, Still struck out for the Cumberland Gap area of Tennessee to attend college. Lincoln Memorial University offered students the opportunity to work to pay for their courses. Guy Loomis, the benefactor behind the scholarships promised to make things possible, not easy. Odd jobs, beginning at the local rock quarry, and ending with an evening shift as the library's janitor, allowed him to pay for his education. Impressed by Still's tenacity and talent, Mr. Loomis agreed to help fund his graduate education. He earned a Master's Degree from Vanderbilt and a library degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Graduating from nationally-recognized schools failed to aid Still's job efforts during the Great Depression. A former classmate invited him to accept a volunteer position organizing the Boy Scouts in Knott County, Kentucky. He accepted and later found work as a librarian at the Hindman Settlement School. In the 1930s, Still's literary efforts garnered attention. He published poetry and short stories in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *American*

Mercury, and the *Saturday Evening Post*. With the publication of his first novel in 1940, *River of Earth*, he had written an American classic. Although a newcomer to Kentucky, Still possessed an ear for Appalachian dialect and the ability to portray the local way of life with authenticity and sympathy. Chambers County remembered its former resident and admired his burgeoning career. The *West Point News* praised Still as an author who "has something to say," with the publication of *River of Earth*.

During World War II Still was drafted. He served with the 8th Air Depot Group and spent more than two years in Africa. He returned to his adopted home of Kentucky, where he would remain.

In the 1990s, George Zachry, a West Point native, began corresponding with the aging author. The two exchanged letters over several years. These letters are available for research in Cobb Memorial Archives. Having left Chambers County as a young man, Still

nevertheless harbored fond memories of his childhood and his native state. Writing to Zachry, Still reminisced that "there is no substitute for a Southern boyhood. And the word Alabama is about the most beautiful one in the language. It rings in my head like a bell." In 1995, Kentucky honored Still by naming him the state's poet laureate. Chambers County followed suit by creating James Still Day on July 16, 1999 in the city of Lanett. In 2001, at 94 years of age, Still passed away, one of the last among the authors of the Greatest Generation.

Kentucky claims James Still, but Alabama shaped him.

■



James Still 1906-2001



FREDONIA SCHOOL DAYS – REMEMBERED by J.J. Frickert



The Fredonia Community Center 1950-Present; The Fredonia School 1913-1948.

Finding information describing the Fredonia School is difficult. Little documentation is available and many discrepancies occur in news clippings, published books, or the memories of folks who are available to discuss this historic property. What we do know is that there was a school building(s) on the site of the Fredonia Community Center prior to the one that currently exists, possibly dating to the 1830s. It was always called the, “Fredonia School” or “Fredonia High School.” In an attempt to best document the Fredonia School and the existing Fredonia Community Center, resources were sought from the Cobb Memorial Archives, the Chambers County Board of Education as well as material which might be in the collections of local historians. Issues of the *LaFayette Sun* from the second decade of the twentieth century were read seeking to find information about the school, the building and the community at the time when the last building was erected. The Fredonia School is the building which is today the center of our community activities.

Local historians have written about the migration of the Hurst, Cox and McDonald families to the location on an ancient Indian path where they established a community they named Fredonia. As settlers came to this area and the population increased, a log one-room school house was erected but the exact date of the founding of that first school is not known. The federal censuses for Fredonia displays the names of school teachers. Schools were well

established in the 1840’s according to documentation by the writings by Carl Summers in *Chronicles of the Chattahoochee Valley*. Documentation of school activities in the nineteenth century occasionally appear in fugitive materials such as letters or brief statements in family histories. There has been no comprehensive collection of these statements. A wonderful source of social information for Chambers County at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century is *Allie Abernathy’s Scrapbooks* which contains more than 2,000 text items, newspaper clippings, about local doings. Most items related to comings and goings, marriage, illness and death. Only three items related to the school at Fredonia.

One of Miss Abernathy’s clippings from about 1909 describes “Fredonia High School. Miss McFerrin very pleasantly entertained her patrons and vicinity with recitations and spelling by her little folks on last Friday evening. Following is her program which was well carried out.” The item lists 37 recitations and the pupils who made them. Miss Abernathy also pasted up the clipping of the obituary of Marshall B. Hurst, son of Rev. J. A. Hurst, a founder of Fredonia. Marshall Hurst of Fredonia may have been the most significant male teacher in rural schools in Chambers County in the nineteenth century. In 42 years of teaching he taught thousands of young men and women at many school locations in the county. The final clipping about Fredonia School describes the Fredonia High School

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year end closing exercises on May 24, 1909. Twenty-nine recitations, pantomimes or songs are performed by the students are listed in the paper. The program includes a flag medley, a pantomime of 'Columbia – Gem of the Ocean' and ends with a Coon Concert.

Almost a quarter century ago local historian Margret Keelen Newman published a wire bound travel guide to Chambers County, entitled *There to Here and Here to There*. Her words document the history of the Fredonia School and the importance of the building to the community:

“A little further down the road (editor, from Fredonia Methodist Church) on the left sitting some distance from the road is the school building, built in 1913. The Blair, Bailey, Jacob, Lindsey and Barber families combined in 1907 to form the Oakland School, now inundated as a result of the building of the West Point Dam. The Schools at Oakland, Ward’s Mill, Adams, and Sharon became part of Fredonia School in the 1920’s. Five teachers were teaching at Fredonia when the school closed in 1948.”

In the Cobb Memorial Archives, there is a collection of sketches of Chambers County Schools before consolidation in a book entitled, *Lest We Forget*. Chambers County Retired Teachers Association initiated a project more than 50 years ago for the teachers to write and record reminiscences about the various schools, communities where they had taught in the county. Mary James wrote about the early Fredonia School and indicated it was a two-room building with a porch that went all the way around the front of both rooms. They called one the, “Big Room”

and the other the “Little Room.” This building also had a steeple with a large bell. When school was about to start, the bell would ring. The children would form two rows in front of the steps and the teacher would call the roll.

Each room had a pot belly stove for heating. Hattie Mae Holderfield came in early every morning with her father, Nute (Newton) Holderfield (who was a blacksmith) to start the fire in the stoves. She recalled that they could never get the rooms very warm, so they moved their desks closer. That allowed the children to whisper to each other and pass notes.

Mary James said the first year she went to Fredonia School, her teacher was Mrs. Webb. She was a sweet, tall lady with gray hair who wore long black skirts with a white shirt waist and a little short white apron.

Other teachers included Miss Cleo McFerrin, Lilly Belle Magnon, Bessie Veasey, Mary Lee Askew, Mary Frank Wallace, Tonette Wooddy, Mary Jim Reynolds, Georgia Raney, Laura Prather, Eva Rickard, Ruby Finlayson, Lona Christian, Mattie Willis – who later married Mary James’ brother Ben Turner James (Pete); Mr. McCall, Mr. Reagan, Mr. C.E. Lunceford, and Helen England. Another teacher, Mr. Lee Christian, didn’t teach very long. The boys would put pins in his chair at lunch, so he resigned at Christmas.

Mary James recalls playing hop scotch, marbles, dropping the handkerchief, pattle cat, vaulting, hiding and baseball. The boys and girls played baseball together.

She did not go to school in the new building – the one that is currently used as the Fredonia Community House. The



At Heritage Day in the old school room: museum display, weaving demonstration, Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society member helping folks interested in local research.

continued on next page

teachers in the new building were Mrs. Buffington, Eddie McCree, Thelma Hodge, Gladys Turnham, Verta Clack, Verna Tatum, Leonida Pinkard, Mable Christian, Minnie Lane, Bennie Walton, Elsie Walker, Frances Floyd, Katie Todd, Mary Pope Smith, and Bertha Adamson. There were approximately 65 to 70 pupils.

In the early twentieth century, the *Lafayette Sun* newspaper was good to keep communities informed about the experiences of daily living! On April 16, 1919, the *Sun* announced an Easter egg hunt would be held at the Fredonia school house Friday afternoon at 3 o'clock. All the children in the community were invited to come and join in the fun.

Visiting teacher Miss Eva Rikard who had been here for two months returned home according to the May 7, 1919 article. Also announced was that, "the Fredonia School closed last Friday with a picnic and fish fry at Wehadkee Creek. This has been the best session Friday School has had in many years, was the report."

October 8, 1919 stated that Fredonia School opened with Mary Frank Wallace and Ruby Finlayson as teachers.

October 22, 1919 reported that "Miss Zelma Gaines met her club girls at the schoolhouse Friday afternoon and made an interesting and instructive talk to the entire school, urging the planting of winter gardens."

November 12, 1919 reported that on

"Thursday, a large crowd gathered at the schoolhouse to meet the ghosts, spooks, witches, and black cats of Halloween. The rooms were attractively and tastefully decorated with the hand work of teachers and pupils, giving evidence of the efficiency of Misses Wallace and Finlayson. Each guest was presented at the door with a card of admission to the Witch's Den. After being ushered down the Ghost Walk to shake hands with Death, past booths containing the boy 'who always cuts from himself and never cuts himself,' the huge black cat, Bluebird's seven wives still hanging by their hair, and the Chief Jack-o-lantern; cards were presented at the Witch's Den, where the witch told fortunes. The children present engaged in such merry games as the peanut race, the cracker race, and the corn race. With lights lowered, ghostly refreshments were passed from hand to hand around the circle and then followed by more substantial refreshments in the form of as many parched peanuts as one could want. Guests departed feeling that they had spent a jolly evening of fun and merriment."

A clipping from March 12, 1919 stated that "Miss Eva Richards, who has just received her diploma at the Troy Normal school, came Saturday to fill the vacancy in the school made by the resignation of Miss Woody."

In 1948 the Fredonia School was consolidated into Five Points High School. Margret Newman describes the fate of the old school building in her travel guide:

"In 1950 Fredonia citizens acquired the building to be used as a community center. The state deeded the building and the grounds to the community club with the provision that if the club becomes defunct the property will revert to state ownership. Much elbow grease was expended in cleaning, repairing and painting the building.

The Home Makers Club was organized soon after the Community Club. Certificates hanging on the wall of the building give proof that for a number of years the club was the best in the state for its Community Improvement Program. One of the original reasons for this organization was to support agriculture. As fewer acres were being farmed, the Home Makers Club disappeared.

The Community Club sponsored a recreation program. Painted numbers on the floors of two rooms are reminders that cake walks were once held as well as box suppers to make money for club needs. A boys' club for boys five to fifteen years old had a membership of about forty. Dancing, square dancing and basketball games took place.

On the first Saturday after Easter, cars will line the roads for some distance for it is time for the annual barbecue sponsored by the Community Club. In 1965 the date for this annual affair was chosen because a Catholic member could not eat pork on Friday or During Lent. The first year 200 people attended. By the 1990s the attendance had grown to about 2,000. The first years of this event the members did all the work, but later some items were bought. Although there is a basic recipe, the stew is always different, depending upon what ingredients are available. The recipe is secret for some members have accused a neighboring community of trying to steal it."

In 2019 the 1913 Fredonia School house continues to serve its community as the Fredonia Community Center. The Fredonia Community Club remains vibrant. The community center and its grounds are well used to present as the annual Fredonia Barbecue and Fredonia Heritage Day are also attended by two thousand individuals. The Fredonia Community Club is a responsible caretaker for the historical building insuring that it and its grounds are well maintained and preserved for future service to the inhabitants of one of the oldest communities in Chambers County.



CHATAHOOCHEE VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S ALABAMA 200 TOUR

JUNE 22-26, 2019



200
ALABAMA
BICENTENNIAL
www.alabama200.org



A guided tour through Sloss Furnace, Birmingham



Guided tour at the First State Capital (Old Cahawba)



Visiting the Birmingham Civil Rights Center



*Tour listens at the Alabama Territorial Capital,
St. Stephen Historical Park*



Receiving a presentation in the Alabama State Capitol, Montgomery



Tour dines at Dreamland, cited in the Encyclopedia of Alabama, is of historical importance for bbq ribs.



Tour entering Fort Gaines, Dauphin Island



Fort Gaines



Inside Constitutional Hall, Huntsville



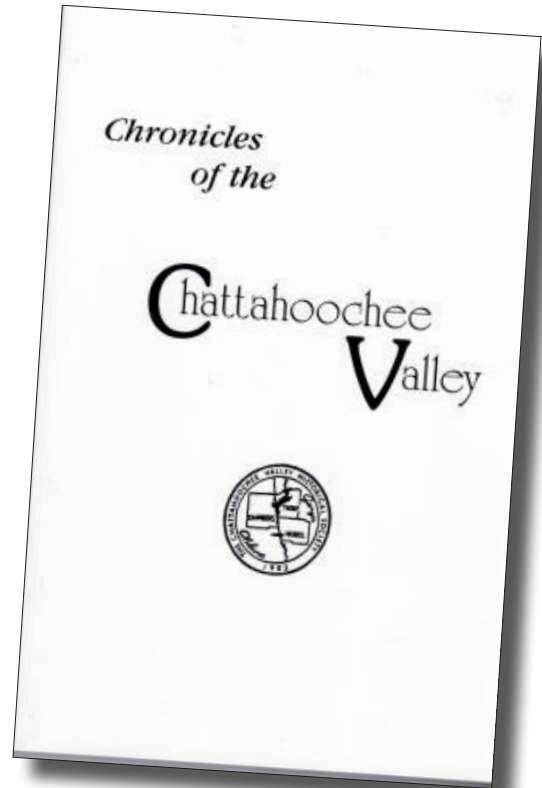
Product of blacksmith demonstration for tour at Fort Gaines, Dauphin Island



IN THE SPOTLIGHT: CVHS PUBLICATIONS

“Chronicles of the Chattahoochee Valley is a compilation of historical articles and essays. The topics are by intention diverse.”

So begins the Introduction to one of our most interesting books. Published in 1995, it contains a veritable potpourri of stories about people, places, and events of our region's past. From famed Oakbowery evangelist Rev. Sam P. Jones to Simon Suggs' creator Johnson Jones Hooper, or the Early History of Fredonia to the Chattahoochee Valley Railway, this well-researched book is sure to delight! Soft cover, 189 p. To order, go to our website at www.cvhistoricalsociety.org and click on our on-line bookstore.



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