

THE VOICE

of the *Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society and
Cobb Memorial Archives*

A SISTER'S LOVE: LEGACY OF HANK WILLIAMS AND HIS SISTER IRENE

The Winter program of CVHS will be held virtually on January 28th, at 3:00 PM (EDT). Our presenter, Dr. Steve Goodson, is a longtime instructor of History at the University of West Georgia (having recently just retired) and an authority on the history of Country Music in the Deep South. This will be Dr. Goodson's third program for CVHS, the former highlighting the life and music of Hank Williams, Jr.

"It is the story of Hank's older sister Irene," says Goodson. "Irene played an important but underappreciated role in protecting and promoting Hank's reputation and legacy in the decades following his death in 1953." Both Irene and Hank were born in Butler County, Alabama in the early 1920s. Their father Elonzo "Lon" Williams was a former Railroad Engineer for W.T. Smith Lumber Co. before serving (and suffering injuries) in World War I. Following the death of Ernest Williams two days after his birth in 1921, Irene became the oldest child of the Williams family. For this reason, perhaps, she took on a more protective role in the upbringing of her younger siblings. This applied to Hank, who struggled with Spina Bifida (a painful spinal condition) during his childhood (and later).

This presentation will highlight many of the hardships the Williams family endured during Irene and Hank's childhood. All of this heavily influenced Hank's musical career. Regarding Irene's role in Hank's career and legacy, Goodson feels that her story is very much a part of Hank's own story (both



Hank Williams and the Driftin' Cowboys Band, 1938. Irene Williams Smith is 3rd from left and Hank Williams is 5th. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

before and after his death). He feels it is essential to all who wish to learn more about the Alabama-born Country legend.

Steve Goodson was born in Montgomery, Alabama, and grew up in nearby Prattville. He received his B.A. in History from Auburn University at Montgomery in 1988 and earned his Ph.D. in History from Emory University in 1995. He joined the faculty at the University of West Georgia, where he served as a professor (and for twelve years as department chair) until retiring just last month. His book *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930*, published by the University of Georgia Press, won the Georgia Historical Society's Bell Award as the best book on Georgia History

published in 2002. He is also co-editor of *The Hank Williams Reader*, which was published in 2014 by the Oxford University Press. This work has received much critical acclaim as a detailed account of Williams' life and career.

Join us for this very informative and interesting presentation on January 28th. To attend this virtual meeting email ccpowers02@gmail.com prior to 12:00 PM noon (EDT) on Sunday, January 28th. You will then be sent the Zoom link with instructions regarding how to join the meeting.

**THE CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY MEETING**

Sunday, January 28th, 2024

3:00 PM Eastern (2:00 PM Central)

VIRTUAL MEETING

HAPPY NEW YEAR

2024

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Jason Williams*

The Holiday Season has always been a special time for everyone in the Greater Valley Area. From the City of Valley Merry – Go – Round and Madonna and Child, the Kiwanis Club Nativity (Manger) Scene and the Christmas Lights along Highway 29 we have enjoyed a very festive celebration. As we begin the new year, take time to remember our shared history, stories, and traditions. Please send

in your 2024 Membership Renewals (a membership form should be included in your Newsletter). We look forward to seeing you at the Winter Meeting and please consider submitting a story in a future newsletter.



IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

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 <https://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 newspaper, 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.

CHINABERRY TREES

by Ron Williams

Chinaberry trees have left their mark on our history. In Chambers County, in the Langdale Community there is a place called “China Town.” It was called this because so many chinaberry trees grew there. I have been told that it was the area around Highway 29 on the hill just north of Fob James Drive. In Riverview, just north of McGinty’s Crossing, where the train crossed the road, was Chinaberry Crossing. I love these names.

A distant cousin of mine wrote a book about her family called “Old Timey Pink Roses,” and in it she said that her father would never move into a house unless there was a chinaberry tree in the yard.

He, like many southerners, had a fondness for the trees. To him the shade of a chinaberry tree was a place to meet and joke and rest. I see men sitting backwards in kitchen chairs brought outside. They are laughing, telling stories, and having a good old time, all in the shade of a chinaberry tree.

I like chinaberry trees myself. I think Chinaberries should root out magnolias as the classic picture of all things Southern. My Southern experience has not been filled with magnolias, but a few chinaberry trees grow here and there in my memories.

The trees grew out close to the road just behind where the barn used to stand. My brothers, cousins, and I played many times in those trees. We would sit and talk for hours or play chase in the limbs. After all, the chinaberry tree is made for climbing.

And the berries are made for shooting! Chinaberry berries are about the size of a marble, and they are hard. Boys can hollow out the limbs of a chinaberry to make a pop gun and shoot the berries at the enemy. I have been a casualty of chinaberry war, and I can testify to the fact that berry bullets pack a wallop!

Girls used to use the limbs as umbrellas, giving the tree the nickname of “umbrella tree,” and they would



dye the fruit and string them to make necklaces and bracelets.

You would be hard pressed to find an old home place without a chinaberry tree in sight. They grow on roadsides, beside collapsing barns and on fence rows. They seem as Southern as cotton or the Georgia pine.

I was surprised to learn that chinaberry trees were not native to America. They came from China—who would have figured! As a child I wondered how the plant got its name. I thought that possibly the name was derived from the fact that the berries were as smooth as a China doll’s face, but it is much simpler than that—the trees come from China, and they have berries.

It was in the mid-1800s that the trees were introduced from Asia as an ornamental plant. Some call it an invasive species.

Invasive? Yankees were invasive. Fire ants—
invasive. Chinaberry trees are a welcome invasion.

Just behind my house on the right of the old farm road leading into the pasture is a young stand of chinaberry trees. One of these days I’m going to transplant one to my front yard. Someday it will provide shade. My children may play chase in the branches. And, like my cousin, we might pull out some old kitchen chairs and tell some stories.

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James Patterson visiting the Korean War Memorial's Wall of Remembrance in Washington, DC, and indicating the name of Corporal Harold Calhoun on Panel 52.

VALLEY'S HEROIC KOREAN WAR VETERAN CORPORAL HAROLD CALHOUN

by James Patterson

Corporal Harold Calhoun was born in Shawmut, Alabama, on July 23, 1930. He served with the 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. He was Killed in Action while fighting the enemy at the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge in North Korea on October 7, 1951.

Cpl. Calhoun's name appears on Panel 52 of the Korean War Memorial's Wall of Remembrance. For his heroic service, Calhoun received the Purple Heart, the Combat Infantryman's Badge, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, and the Republic of Korea War Service Medal. (Source: Military Hall of Honor ID 109855)

Cpl. Harold Calhoun is buried at Shawmut's Oakwood Cemetery in Lanett, Alabama. The small Alabama community honored Cpl. Calhoun by naming its former National Guard Armony in Fairfax, Alabama, as Fort Harold Calhoun. Fairfax was later incorporated with other small towns into the city of Valley.

Alabama native James G. Patterson, my father, served in Korea from June 1953 to 1958. Afterward, he served with the Alabama Army National Guard at Fort Harold Calhoun from 1962-1968. I went to Ft. Harold Calhoun with my father, who once told me that Cpl. Calhoun was a very important man and a hero.

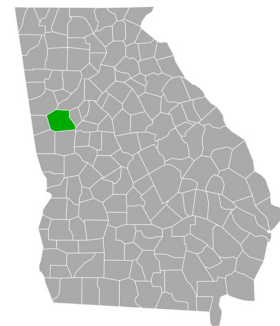
In 1963, President John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard, including Fort Harold Calhoun, for the integration of the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. In March 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson federalized the entire Alabama National Guard for the 50-mile, 5-day Selma to Montgomery march led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The march began on March 21, 1965.

James G. Patterson's granddaughter Alexandra was born on March 21, 1989, in Washington, D.C. She lived to be 17. I was cast as a reporter in the Academy Award-winning 2015 film "Selma." My scenes were directed by Ava DuVernay in Atlanta on Father's Day weekend in 2014. During filming, I had my late daughter's photograph, and father's Guard papers with his military photograph in my jacket pocket.

Cpl. Harold Calhoun was a name that I long remembered for his heroism in Korea. As a young boy, it was always a thrill to go to our small town's Fort Harold Calhoun. Cpl. Calhoun richly deserved his honors from Washington and Seoul, South Korea. He richly deserved recognition on the Korean War Memorial's Wall of Remembrance. Corporal Harold Calhoun is a hero to Alabama, the United States, and the Republic of South Korea.



Robin Watson, Archivist, H. Grady Bradshaw Library, Valley, Alabama, contributed to this article.



MURDER IN COWETA COUNTY: THE EARLY YEARS OF JOHN WALLACE

The 1948 murder of farmhand Wilson Turner sealed John Wallace's fate as one of the most notorious criminals in Georgia history. The subsequent investigation, trial, and death of Wallace in Georgia's electric chair, inspired Margaret Ann Barnes to draft the book *Murder in Coweta County*. However, long before John Wallace crossed the Coweta County line, he was just a boy growing up in and around Chambers County, Alabama.

15 – The day in November 1893 that Ms. Myrtie Strickland married Welsey Wallace in Meriwether County, Georgia, where her family was from. The Stricklands were prominent in the area. Myrtie first caught Welsey's eye as a student in the school at West Point, Georgia.

2 – The number in miles of the red dirt road that cut through cotton fields in the southeast corner of Chambers County, Alabama, about two miles south of Glass. Welsey's father, Thomas, had settled with his family in the Hopewell Community by 1870. In the 1890's Welsey and his brother, John W., were farming on the property. The newlyweds, Welsey and Myrtie, would call the farm home and welcomed their first child, Jean, in 1895.

11 – The number of words which appeared in the *Langdale News* section of the *Lafayette Sun* in June of 1896. These words announced the birth of a baby boy: "Mr. Welsey Wallace is overjoyed—it is a fine little boy." They named the baby, John, after Welsey's beloved brother.

2 – The number of rocks Nim Williams held in his hands on the day that he beat up John Wallace at the one room schoolhouse in the Hopewell Community known as Bryson Academy. John was a bully and tormented Nim daily. It had gotten so bad that Nim's mother walked to see Myrtie one day after school to put a stop to it. "One of them is going to get hurt," Mrs. Williams warned. The next day, John was worse than ever. Nim coaxed John to a rock pile back behind the school and with one rock in each hand Nim "wore that boys head out." That evening it was Myrtie doing the walking. After that the boys were friends.

1904 – The year that held sadness for the Wallaces. The last child, Baby Louie, was born and lived only a few days. He was buried in the Wallace Plot of Pinewood Cemetery in West Point, Ga.

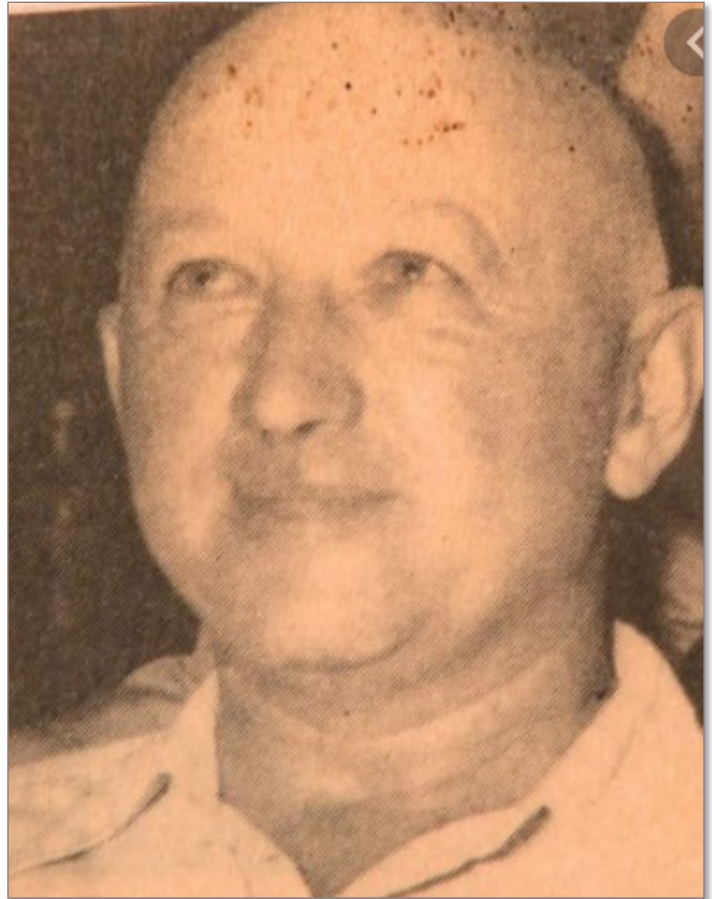
13 – Welsey became the County Commissioner for Beat 13 in Chambers County. He announced his candidacy in March and had the support of every prominent family in the area. He was up and coming in politics and things were looking exceptionally good for the Wallace Family.

23 – Day in July 1907 when, after an illness of 2 weeks, Welsey Wallace died unexpectedly. "He was one of Chambers Counties most progressive farmers," explained the *Inter-State Herald*. "He was about 40 years of age—just in the midday of an active, useful life. His death comes not only as a blow to his devoted wife and two fond children, but also in his community, county, and state."

6 – The number of heads of stock, along with cows, hogs, sheep, and the growing crop which were seized to pay the debts of Welsey's estate, which exceeded \$2500.00. There was less than \$400.00 in assets. It appears that the family was financially destitute.



John Wallace as a young boy.
Photo from the Mike Moon Collection



John Wallace on trial for the murder of Wilson Turner.
Photo from the Mike Moon Collection

1910 – The Year of the Census that records that Myrtie Wallace had moved away from the family farm, still owned by her father-in-law and farmed by her brother-in-law, John W. She was living in nearby Riverview with the family of Lafayette Lanier, Jr. Myrtie’s occupation was listed as “None.” Were the Wallace’s at the mercy of the world? Later, Myrtie would take her young son, John, back to Meriwether County, Georgia, to live with her people, the Stricklands, on the family land known as “The Kingdom.”

8 – The number of words in a sentence from one of John Wallace’s prison letters. “It takes time for a tree to grow,” Wallace wrote. When a tree is young you can’t tell which way it will lean. John lost his father as an eleven-year-old boy. It was a tragedy beyond measure! What if his father had been there through John’s formative years? What influence could Welsey have had? Which way could the tree have grown?

8 – The number of witnesses who saw John Wallace beat Wilson Turner at the Sunset Tourist Camp, just after they had crossed the Coweta County Line.

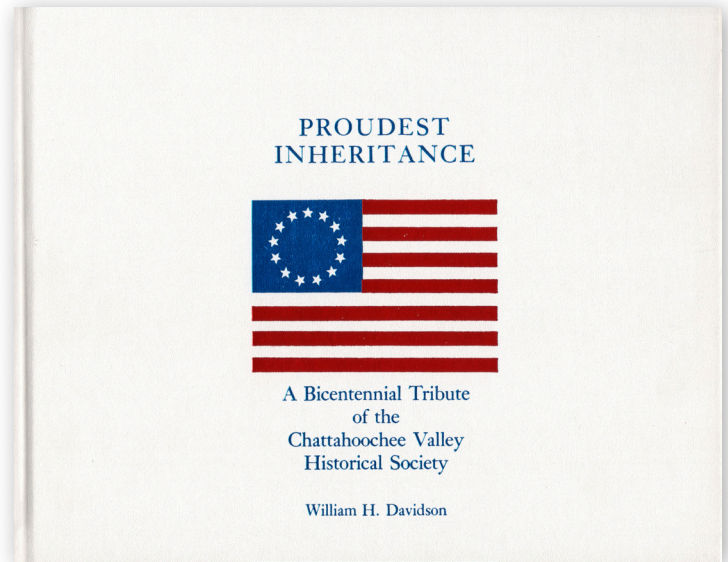
23 – The number of the Psalm that the chaplain read as John Wallace, the little boy from Chambers County, walked to the electric chair on November 3, 1950.

287 – Number of pages in Margaret Ann Barnes’ book, “*Murder in Coweta County*.”



\$10 *Proudest Inheritance*

An unsung hero in our cadre of publications available for purchase is “Proudest Inheritance: A Bicentennial Tribute of the Chattahoochee Valley Historical Society”. Published in 1975, this little gem of local history features the early history of West Point, as delivered in a stirring oration by Captain J.W.F. Little at the West Point Female College on July 4, 1876, on the occasion of our nation’s centennial celebration. The book is filled with information from the local D.A.R. chapter in West Point (1917 - 1933), and includes a roster of Revolutionary soldiers and lineal descendants from West Point, Georgia and Chambers County, Alabama. 74 p.



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