

# BROOKS

BY DAN LANGFORD

## Brooks. It's filling u p

**quickly.** Some of the old-timers... and new-timers, too... say, "I wish someone would shut the gate." But others of us are delighted to see so many folks who enjoy our large, spacious lots and wide-open spaces settle here. For settling here has been a tradition for a long, long time – even since before Fayette County was Fayette County.

For you see, there was a Creek Indian village here for apparent centuries, and one of our main thoroughfares, the Mc-Intosh Road, was a main route for the Creeks as they journeyed from Indian Springs in modern-day Butts County to Coweta Town, Whitesburg, and other points around the present Georgia-Alabama line. Scrapers and arrowheads are still found rather often in freshly-tilled soil around Brooks, silent but enduring testaments to these settlers who were here so long ago. The center of this Creek village was located approximately where the present-day Woolsey-Brooks and Morgan's Mill Roads intersect with Highway 85 Connector.

It is told that in 1819, a young white couple named James Edward (1799-1879) and Margaret Cartwright Haisten settled here, building a cabin oft said to have been in the vicinity of the big gas tanks on present-day Price Road. The first Mrs. Haisten, who was remembered as "Aunt Peggy," was a mere sixteen-year-old bride when she arrived here with her new husband two years before the Creek cession that created Fayette County in

A LITTLE BIT OF HONEY  
THAT THE BEES AIN'T FOUND



*Brooks farmers in Atlanta presenting a cotton bale to representatives of President Roosevelt, in thanks for all the President's leadership in trying to lift the nation out of the Depression, 1935.*

Nov. 28-1935

May 1821. Peggy Haisten lived until 1891 and was remembered well by people who lived until the 1950s or '60s.

Very soon thereafter, a couple of James's brothers joined their relatives in the wilderness here, and as other settlers stopped and put down roots, the area became known as "Haistentown," the village's first name. By the 1840s and '50s, settlement was really beginning to take hold, and churches (Whitewater Baptist and the Methodist Episcopal church in the village, and County Line Christian a few miles south, at the Spalding line) and a school were established. Villagers decided a scripturally-inspired name, "Sharon Grove," would be a more euphonious name for the up-and-coming village. That it became and remained until some years after the War Between the States.

The village gave dearly of its young men to the Confederacy. A case in point is the founding family, Mr. and Mrs. James Haisten. Four of their sons, James, William, Stephen, and John, all died in the war, and a fifth son, Alexander (1843-1912), became an invalid due to injuries suffered. A sixth son, Henry (1840-1918), told his children that the most difficult thing he'd ever had to face was having on two occasions to march past the dead bodies of two of his brothers in two separate battles. A descendant paints a compelling visual for us. "I felt sorrow as I saw James Edward Haisten walking the red clay dusty road to the village post office, and with his head bowed, for the fourth time in three years sign for the personal effects of another son sacrificed to the Lost Cause. I watched as he, with trembling weather-worn hands, picked up the items – perhaps a pen knife, a handkerchief, a handful of Confederate coins, and the last pay due his son – and slowly shuffled back down the dirt road he came by, carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders, wondering what he was going to say to Peggy, his wife."

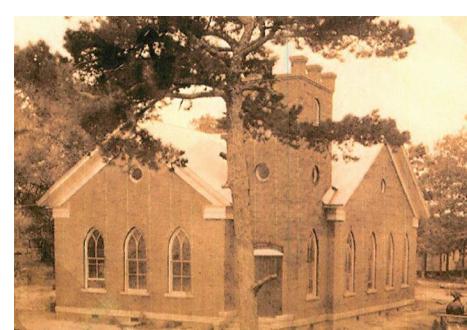
In 1871 the Savannah, Griffin, and North Alabama Railroad, on which construction had begun before the war, was opened through Sharon Grove. A local planter, Hillery Brooks, who had



Hillery Brooks (1806-1881), the town's namesake.



William Hardy family at their home near Brooks, Hardy is said to have been the first white child born in Coweta County, and the home pictured is fairly typical of Brooks's earliest residences.



Brooks Methodist Episcopal Church, South, built in 1911.



Whitewater Baptist Church, 1940s.

arrived here following several married daughters around 1850, sold the lot on which the depot was to be built, which is roughly the site of the present post office. The only consideration he required was that the depot be called "Brooks Station." The station's name soon came to be what the village itself was called, as the appellation "Sharon Grove" quietly faded away.

Not only did Hillery Brooks provide the village's name, but he also brought the first modern convenience to town. His house, which stood in modified form till the late 1990s, is said to have been the first in town to have a well, the implication being that theretofore everyone had toted water from nearby streams. Wells, a railroad, telegraphic ability – what an exciting world it must have been, even though Reconstruction and the losses of war kept most villagers in near penury for a number of years, as was common across the South.

By the turn of the Twentieth Century, though, Brooks Station's day in the sun appeared to have come. Most of our inventory of downtown commercial buildings date to this 1900-10 period, which indicates that post-war prosperity had finally reached south Fayette. Several stores, a cotton brokerage, and a bank were established here in that period, as cotton once again became king of the local economy. Telephone service was established in this time frame, too.

The village's name was officially shortened from "Brooks Station" to "Brooks" on December 20, 1905 and Brooks it has remained ever since. In 1910, the town was incorporated by the state legislature, and a mayor and council were elected to oversee the business of the village.

Things hummed along in a promising way until the boll weevil first showed up in 1920 or '21. This pest devastated the cotton crop and launched what is known as "The Boll Weevil Depression" of the 1920s in Brooks and other farming villages around the South. Stores closed their doors forever, the Bank of Brooks went into liquidation, and the Masonic Lodge, a fixture of the community since antebellum times, gave up its charter for want of a few dollars needed to pay dues.



Downtown Brooks facing south, around 1912.



Cotton gin, located on the present site of Brooks Park, 1930s.



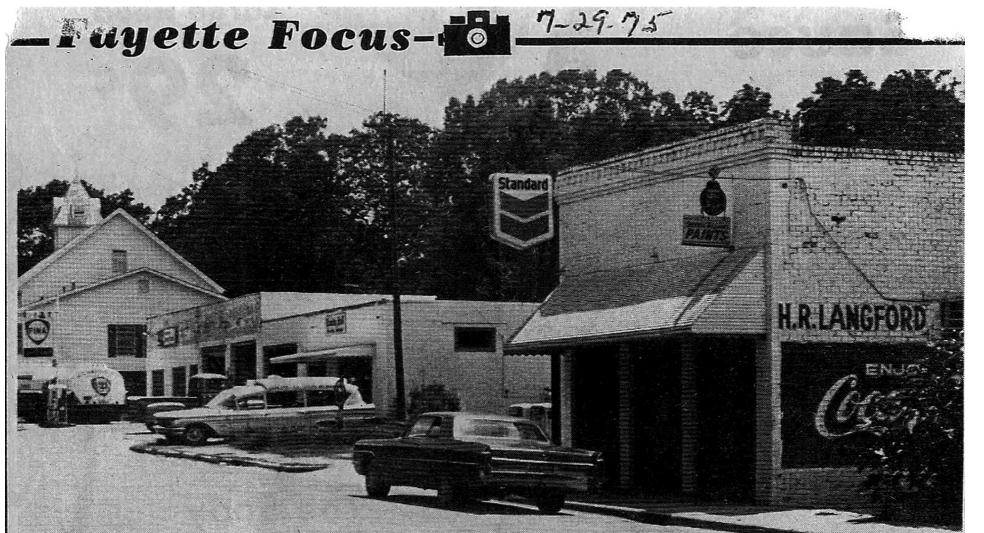
Downtown Brooks facing south, 1940s.



*Left, Brooks School, between 1905 and 1910. The building pictured was built in the 1880s for joint use as the Methodist Church and as the schoolhouse. It burned about 1915, but stood on the site of today's Hardy Hall. Right, Brooks Bank.*



*Downtown Brooks, facing east, around 1940. Isabel "Rabbit" Iverson, one of the town's most eccentric and well-beloved and -remembered characters is pictured.*



*Downtown photos of Brooks made in 1975. One faces south and one faces north.*

In fact, the town gave up its charter during those years, and self-government went on a long sleep – a forty-year nap, outsleeping Rip van Winkle twice over – in the Brooks community. A former mayor, E. N. Crawford (1879-1938), told his family during those years that he believed there was perhaps as much as 20 dollars cash in all of Brooks, and that it made its way around from hand to hand each week, never inuring to anyone in particular. The Boll Weevil Depression didn't so much end as become subsumed by The Great One, which came roaring in with the stock market crash in October 1929.

The 1930s were bleak times from an economic standpoint for most of the nation. Brooks was no exception. To add insult to injury, a hailstorm hit the village in 1933 which caused extensive damage and knocked out the phone system, plunging Brooks into a telephonic silence that would last nearly twenty years. But a bright ray of hope arrived in the fall of 1939. The REA brought electricity to Brooks, which not only meant consistent light, but which also meant the end of outdoor privies and the manual drawing of water. The modern age was truly at hand!

And with the modern age came airline pilots and their families, Brooks's first new influx of residents in decades. The Neals, the Weatherups, and several others, and by the mid-1970s Brooks had become a regular home base for airline families. By then we had a re-constituted charter and town government (since 1964), and things were rocking along pretty well. We had a volunteer fire department, a home-made fire truck, a community-built fire station, and a 1950s ambulance which another vehicle had to follow in case of breakdown. (That reminds your correspondent of the story of when Fayette High burned in 1954. Several seniors, who were also volunteer firemen, lit out for the fire station. There, they found Fayetteville's fire truck had a dead battery, so calls had to be made to Jonesboro, Riverdale, Griffin, and Newnan for help. The school burned to the ground while waiting for help to come. Your correspon-



*Recent aerial photo of Brooks. Photo courtesy of Doug Maxwell.*

dent digresses, but he can't help it; he's Southern.) But no matter how you slice it, somewhat shaky first-responder capabilities are better than no first-responder capabilities at all, and their development constitutes an important milestone for any community.

Meanwhile, Fayette County rode Atlanta's coattails in terms of population and saw its residents grow from 8,000 in 1950 and '60 to 11,000 in 1970, then to 29,000 in 1980, to 62,000 in 1990, to 91,000 in 2000, and to approximately 114,000 today, better than a fourteen-fold increase. Brooks's population increased roughly four times over the same period, from 136 in 1950 to an estimated 559 today. That's just the city limits, though; those living within the Brooks mailing address (which extends into the Spalding County panhandle) would be several times more, and the Brooks community is much larger geographically than the town limits.

For several years following the 2008 financial crisis, it appeared that Brooks's five-acre minimum for lots outside the town center might not have been the great idea it was long thought to have been. But local support for maintaining

that five-acre minimum never wavered, and now young families can't seem to get enough – it's almost as if lots sell as soon as they are subdivided and listed. And here's why your commentator thinks that is so: first of all, Brooks seem to be the only part of Fayette that time and its rather two-faced companion, progress, seem to have ignored. We're roughly forty miles from Atlanta, and in many ways it's like we're forty years away from the big city's seamier aspects – snarled traffic, mounting crime, neighbors on top of neighbors, and general busyness. Secondly, the town government has in recent years burnished the image of its downtown area, so that it's now quite attractive and pedestrian friendly. There's scarcely an unattractive corner of Brooks any longer; downtown looks and feels a bit like something out of Norman Rockwell's portfolio. Third, our residents are heavily invested in their properties, and as a whole, maintain them in a way that keeps them lovely to behold. One hears comments from all over the southside about how pretty the Brooks area is. And finally, while folks move to Brooks largely to have space between themselves and others, to revel in the elbow room

our community offers, that doesn't mean they're unfriendly. On the contrary: the community is tightly knitted, and folks help each other as help is asked for, in a way and on a scale that is truly uplifting to behold. Social media is of inestimable value in this regard.

So what is the essence of Brooks? If you ask your commentator, he'd say it's just a little bit of honey that the bees ain't found, to paraphrase an old song. But they surely are buzzing around our bucolic meadows and open spaces, which bodes well for Brooks's future – good buzz is always beneficial. So come on down to Brooks, sit on the porch, enjoy a cold drink, and have a heapin' helpin' of our Southern hospitality.

*Dan Langford is Brooks's mayor and a 7th-generation resident of the town. His fourth-great grandfather, Hillery Brooks, once owned the farm upon which Dan and his family reside.*