



John A. Treutlen
Dec. 10th 1777

John Adam Treutlen, first colonial governor of Georgia,

HISTORY OF PEACH COUNTY GEORGIA

Compiled By
Governor Treutlen Chapter
Daughters of the American Revolution
Fort Valley, Georgia

CHEROKEE PUBLISHING COMPANY
ATLANTA

1972

¹² William F. Geeslin, Personal letter, "Information on Rail Passenger Service to Fort Valley for *History of Peach County Georgia*," July 14, 1972.

¹³ A. A. Forehand, Agent, Southern Freight Office, Fort Valley, July 10, 1972.

¹⁴ William F. Geeslin, *op. cit.*, July 14, 1972.

Chapter III

SCHOOLS, EDUCATORS AND NEWSPAPERS

Twenty years before Fort Valley was incorporated, the Fort Valley Academy was chartered on December 24, 1836. It was one of a growing number of academies in existence throughout the state at that time.¹ Established by legislative act and sustained mainly by tuition fees, these academies received state appropriations from time to time that rarely were as much as three hundred dollars per year for each school. Trustees for the Fort Valley Academy as named in the charter were James A. Everett, John P. Allen, Hardy Hunter, Henry Kaigler and John Humphries.²

Another stimulus to education in 1836 was a gift of six acres of land to school trustees by co-donors James A. Everett and Mathew Dorsey for school and church purposes.³

In addition to the chartered Fort Valley Academy there was a manual labor school incorporated by Act of the Georgia Legislature, approved December 25, 1837, and known as the Wesley Manual Labor School of the County of Houston. Its board of trustees was made up of nineteen Methodist ministers over the state and the following: James A. Everett, Alexander Smith, Carlton Wellborn, Donald B. Jones, Joel Walker, James Wimberly, Noah Long, Reuben E. Brown, James Dean, Isaac H. Smith, Daniel F. Wade, Samuel Jenkins and Isaac Taylor. The act of incorporation stated: "James Abingdon Everett of Houston County hath made a donation of twenty-five hundred dollars, designated as a permanent fund, the interest alone to be used and go toward the officers of the school." The power to fill vacancies in the board of trustees was placed with the annual conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴

The Wesley Manual Labor School was of a type popular in the 1870's. Since churches were too poor to finance successfully church schools for the training of the ministry, they adopted the idea, prevalent in England, of having students bear the cost of their education by "working out" their expenses.⁵

A third school, the Fort Valley Female Seminary, received a charter in 1852 with the following board of trustees: George W. Persons, John J. Hampton, William Asbury Mathews, Adolphus D. Kendrick, Miles L. Greene, William J. Anderson, D. N. Austin, Judson Kendrick, William H. Hollinshead, Mathew Dorsey, Benjamin Barnes, Robert M. Patterson and James Miller. This school was located near the intersection of College and Miller streets.⁶

In 1860 the Fort Valley Female College was chartered with trustees William Skellie, James P. Allen, T. N. Killen, W. T. Thomas and Malachi Patterson. Among their other duties the trustees were empowered to grant degrees upon graduation. The location of this school was in the old Gray house on West Church Street, which was torn down to make room for the Peach County Court House.⁷ But for the outbreak of the War Between the States this school might have developed into a real college.

During the years when most of Fort Valley's educational institutions were academies, there were privately-owned schools, two of which were operated by Mrs. D. N. Austin and by Professor Thomas Baker Russell. The late W. H. Harris, who attended both schools, gave the following humorous glimpses of his school days at a home-coming celebration in Fort Valley. At least five of the schoolmates were then living: Frank Smisson, Charlie Gray, Henry Branhams, Roland Hiley and Joe Flournoy.

"In 'My Day' we had no graduating class and no graduates. *The teacher—not 'a' teacher would just say, 'School's out for the term. Behave yourselves during the summer.' Those who were 'through' would just not come back.*

"Most of us first went to Mrs. Austin, whose school was in a cabin in the back yard of her home on Church Street—next door to the Lee Houser home. Then we progressed to the Male Academy in a two-story frame building on the south end of Everett Square, where Professor Forrester gave quinine for punishment. Finally 'finished'—not 'graduated' in Professor Russell's school—still all boys—in a house just to the left after crossing the Central of Georgia Railroad on South Miller Street. There he prepared boys for college. None of us went on credits—maybe on credit but not on credits. To enter a college or university one had to stand written examinations."

FORT VALLEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

As early as 1886 Fort Valley had a public school system.⁸ The public school was housed in a wooden frame building called Grady Institute in honor of Henry W. Grady and located at College and Miller streets. The school consisted of four rooms with a stage built into one of them, where occasional road companies put on shows and commencement exercises were held. Grades one through nine constituted a public school education; grades seven, eight and nine being considered the high school. The principal taught all subjects, including Latin and algebra, to the high school grades. Graduates were prepared to enter college by entrance examinations. In 1895 there were about one hundred pupils enrolled in the school.

Though not the first principal of Grady Institute, Professor W. J. Scroggs was one of the best-known and most beloved teacher-principals. He and his family lived on Everett Square in the house now occupied by the J. E. Davidsons. Mrs. Scroggs for a few years had a private school at home. There were two Scroggs sons, Will, who was an editor of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and Phil, an architect who designed the first brick school building on Everett Square. That building was occupied in 1912 by grades one through eleven.

Following Professor Scroggs at Grady Institute were Richard Powell; Harry Strozier, who left teaching to become a lawyer; and L. O. Freeman. Beginning with Ralph Newton in 1912, Grady Institute was replaced by a fine new building on Everett Square.

Ralph Newton, a graduate of Mercer University, received the master's from the University of Georgia and did graduate work at the Universities of Tennessee and Chicago and at Columbia University. He was principal of the high school at Americus and at Brunswick before coming to Fort Valley.

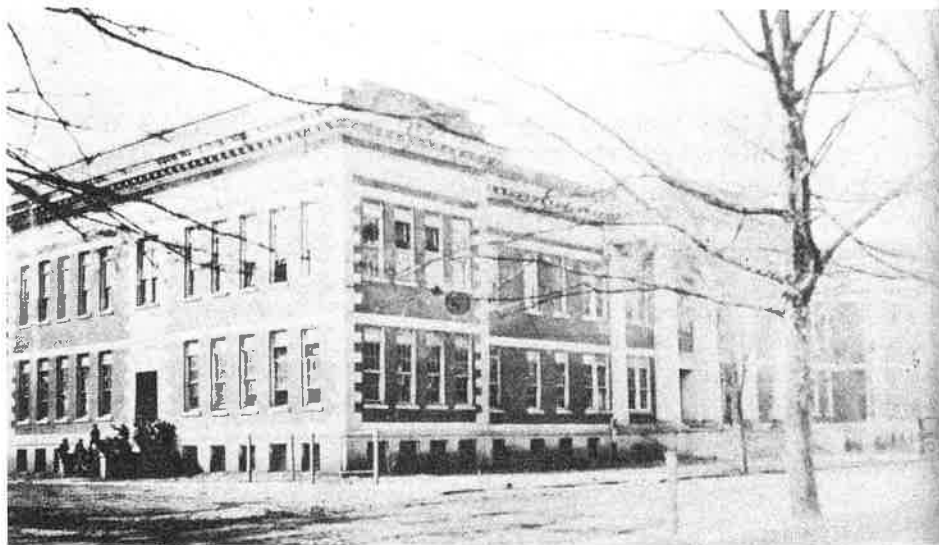
Here Mr. Newton assembled a faculty which included teachers of speech, home economics and public school music, as well as an athletic coach. The first Hi-Y Club in Georgia was organized under his leadership. He led the Fort Valley schools to a high rating among the schools of the state, so that local students were well prepared to compete in district and state competitions and for college.

Mr. Newton, who resigned from the school system in 1928, later served as Superintendent of Schools in Waycross. In 1947 he became a professor of Education at Mercer University, which honored him with the LL.D.

THE PEACH COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Peach County School System came into being on January 1, 1925, following the creation of Peach County by the State Legislature on July 18, 1924. Management and control of the school system was vested in a five-member County Board of Education appointed by the Grand Jury from Militia Districts. J. D. Fagan was the board's first chairman and served until his death. The information in this and succeeding paragraphs on Peach County Schools was furnished by Ernest R. Anderson from the records of the Peach County Board of Education.

Ralph Newton was the first County School superintendent and served until August 31, 1928. He was succeeded by J. F. Lambert, who served until March 15, 1945. Ernest R. Anderson succeeded Mr. Lambert and was still serving in 1972. All of the superintendents were elected by the people. No superin-



Dr. Ralph Newton, superintendent of Fort Valley Public Schools.

tendent ever had opposition at the polls, a record that no other school system could claim.

There was continued growth throughout the system. Peach County High School, formerly Fort Valley High, was built in 1927 when the Fort Valley Public School outgrew the building on Everett Square. Additions in 1948, 1954, 1961 and 1966 modernized the school into an institution with increased opportunities at the secondary level. The Fort Valley Primary School, built in 1912 as the Fort Valley Public School, was remodeled in 1952 on a one-floor plan for grades one through three. The H. A. Hunt Elementary School was built in 1954 as the Peach County Elementary School for Negroes. In 1955 and again in 1963 this school was increased in size and equipment.

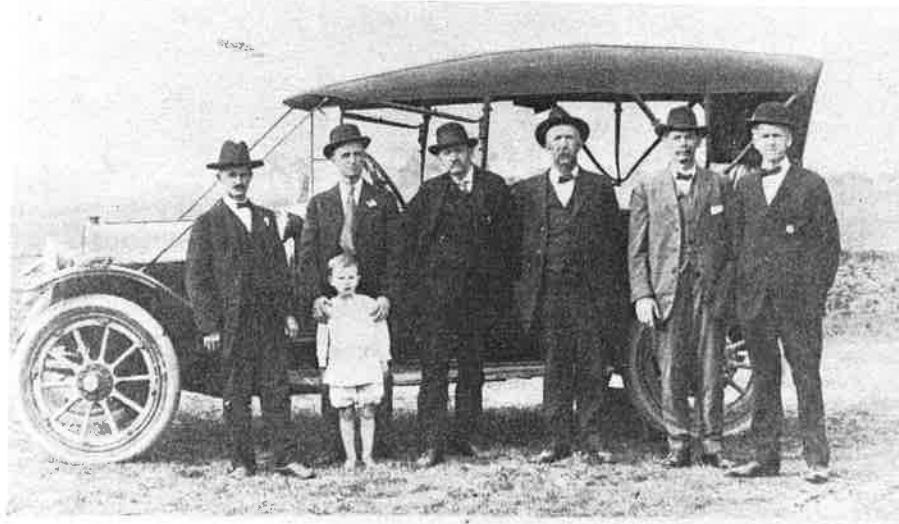
Fort Valley Junior High was finished in 1967 and an addition was made the next year. In 1955 Fort Valley Elementary was constructed; additions in 1956, 1963, 1965 and 1968 were necessary to take care of increased enrollment. A sixth school, Hunt Junior High, was built in 1965 and later renamed the L. R. Bywaters School. The Byron School, housing grades one through twelve, was rebuilt in 1951. In 1955, 1965, 1967 and 1971 this school was increased in size and facilities. Hunt High School, first occupied in 1954, became in time the Peach County Kindergarten.

In 1970 the people of the county voted to enlarge the Board of Education to seven members, and to have each member represent a School Board District of equal population instead of a Militia District. The August, 1970, Grand Jury appointed David Carter and Melvin Lindsay, both Negroes, to serve on the Board of Education. Transportation for Negro students was begun in September, 1953. A major building program took place in 1952-54. Three new schools were erected, two of which were for Negroes. Later all of the Negro schools in Fort Valley were consolidated into three schools.

The physical facilities of the Peach County System in 1972 consisted of 121 acres of grounds and \$4,456,000 in buildings and equipment. The budget for maintenance and operation of the schools for 1971-72 was \$3,112,153.21, an all-time high.

The citizens of the county approved three county-wide bond issues for new school facilities in the following amounts: \$360,000 (1951); \$460,000 (1964); \$250,000 (1970). No school bond issue was ever defeated in the county.

In 1964 Peach County became the first county in Georgia to have all of its schools air conditioned, a distinction still held in 1972. Fort Valley High School, prior to being converted into Peach County High, set a record by winning the State Literary cup for ten years in succession—1957 to 1966, inclusive.



Houston County Board of Education in 1915 or 1916. Left to right: Redding H. Howard of Houston Lake; William Emmette Vinson, chairman, and son Edward Robertson Vinson of Byron; George W. Hartley of Fort Valley; Lawton Houser of Kathleen; Will Cheek of Perry; Frank Greene, Superintendent of Schools from Perry; "EMF" automobile owned by W. E. Vinson. Bottom: Byron School group—about 1915.

The system was converted, under a Federal Court Order, to a unitary system at the beginning of the 1970-71 school year. The entire system was reorganized into seven schools as follows:

Byron Elementary	Grades 1-8
H. A. Hunt Elementary	Grades 1-3
L. R. Bywaters	Grade 4
Fort Valley Primary	Grade 5
Fort Valley Elementary	Grades 6-7
Fort Valley Junior High	Grades 8-9
Peach County High	Grades 10-12

The total enrollment in the above schools for 1971-1972 was 3,819, made up of 1,399 white and 2,420 black students. All of the schools except Byron Elementary were located in Fort Valley. These schools were staffed with 177 teachers, librarians, counselors, principals and four system-wide personnel.

Peach County High School was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Georgia Accrediting Commission. All of the other schools in the system were accredited by the Georgia Accrediting Commission. The System and all of its schools were rated as standard by the State Board of Education. This record was achieved every year since the State Board began rating schools in 1966-67. During 1970-71 only 65 systems in the State of Georgia were rated as standard.

The present Peach County Board of Education consists of the following members: Joseph A. Johnson, chairman; A. B. Johnson, Clarence O. David, Robert E. Dunbar III, David Carter, Melvin Lindsay and Billy A. Dick.

In the 1972 session of the State Legislature Representative Dan Grahl introduced House Bill 1306, which passed as Act 1205 and was signed by Governor Jimmy Carter March 31. The Act provided for the appointment of the county school superintendent of Peach County by the board of education; and for other purposes such as a referendum. When submitted to the voters on May 17th, the measure was defeated by a vote of 2,648 to 688, thus maintaining for this office the elective process in effect since the creation of Peach County in 1925.⁹

FORT VALLEY STATE COLLEGE

In 1949 the Fort Valley State College was officially designated by the Georgia Legislature as the Land-Grant College for Negroes. Begun in 1895 by leading white and Negro citizens as the Fort Valley High and Industrial School, it was headed by John W. Davison, a graduate of Atlanta University, with John H. Tolbert as financial agent. The first buildings were a frame

Mirror was put out by W. T. Christopher and published subsequently by S. B. Burr, Captain I. H. Branham in partnership with a Mr. Mathews, and E. T. Byington.

In 1888, when the Atlanta and Florida Railroad was completed to Fort Valley, the *Mirror* was still being published. A second weekly, the *Fort Valley Enterprise*, was also in publication with Will Kersh and Will Wynne as partners. During their joint editorship Fort Valley entertained the Georgia Press Association.¹⁵

In the 1890's in *Memoirs of Georgia* there was a brief account of the emergence of the *Fort Valley Leader* "as the successful result of the establishment of two newspapers—the *Leader* and the *Enterprise*." The *Leader* was rated "a first-class journal" for a flourishing Fort Valley under the management of T. V. Fagan, proprietor, and Bully Austin, editor.

Throughout the following years into the 1970's the Fort Valley weekly newspaper was either the *Tribune* or the *Leader-Tribune*. Among the editors of the two above-named journals were T. J. Shepard, Dan Bickers, W. R. Branham, M. M. Mathews, Mann Martin, Johnny and Margaret Jones, and Dan Grahl, who brought the *Leader-Tribune* from its location on Main Street to a new business center on Vineville Street. With a staff to keep the *Leader-Tribune* coming out on Thursdays, Editor Grahl represented Peach County during sessions of the Legislature.

In 1972 there were again two weekly newspapers being published in Fort Valley, for a while on opposite sides of Vineville Street, the *Leader-Tribune* and the *Peach County Enterprise*, which moved to a new location on Main Street overlooking Fincher Park.

SOURCE NOTES

- ¹ Warren Grice, *Georgia Through Two Centuries* (New York and West Palm Beach: 1965), *op. cit.*, I:566-567.
- ² Lucian Lamar Knight, *Georgia's Landmarks, Memorials and Legends* (Atlanta: 1913, 1914), *op. cit.*, II:798.
- ³ W. H. Harris, letter to Miss Thelma Wilson, October 4, 1958.
- ⁴ Iza H. Houser, "Early Schools," *Leader-Tribune*, May 26, 1938.
- ⁵ Spencer B. King Jr., *Georgia Voices, A Documentary History to 1872* (University of Georgia Press: 1966), pp. 210, 213.
- ⁶ *Acts*, 1852-1853, p. 326.
- ⁷ Iza H. Houser, *op. cit.*
- ⁸ Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 799.
- ⁹ Copy of Act 1205 (H.B. 1306) in office of ordinary, Peach County Court-house.

¹⁰ "History of Fort Valley State College," *Fort Valley State College Bulletin*, May 1971, p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹³ Office of the Registrar, June, 1972.

¹⁴ "Petition for incorporating of Fort Valley High and Industrial School," photostatic copy.

¹⁵ Data on old newspapers obtained from undated clippings of articles by J. Dawson Kendrick.