

# History

The [Etowah Valley Historical Society](#) is proud to present the following oral history of Emerson, GA. As a courtesy EVHS encourages you to visit our web site at [evhsonline.org](http://evhsonline.org) to view additional Oral Histories and historical information about Bartow County.

*The information provided below was taken from a document titled "Early History Emerson, Ga." found while sorting through old files at Emerson City Hall. The author of this document is unknown. If you have any information regarding history of the city, which is not listed or if you see anything that is incorrect or should be modified please contact City Hall too let us know.*

## Early History

The first inhabitants of this area were the Cherokee Indians. Evidence of their existence is proven by the artifacts found along the Etowah River and Pumpkinvine Creek. These Indians were considered to be rather civilized because they had small garden spots where they raised corn or maize (as it was known to them) and other vegetables. The Indians used Pumpkinvine Creek and the Etowah River for fishing and transportation in dugout canoes.

The first settlers in this area were of Scottish descent. Many Scottish men married Indian women and raised families. One of the most famous Indian women in this area was named Sallie Hughes, she had married a Scott. There was a Ford named after her (Sallie Hughes Ford) across the Etowah River near the present Highway 293 Bridge. Many of the Cherokee Indians believed in sending their children to school, Brainerd Missionaries opened a school for Indians at the present site of Paga Mine Road. The name of the school was Etonee, but was later changed to Hightower Mission.

In 1819 Alabama was admitted to the Union, and there was a flood of people that migrated from the Carolina's into Alabama. The main road was along a Cherokee trail also known as the Hightower Trail, which is presently roughly the same course that the Alabama Road follows today. Many of these people settled in this area instead of traveling on to Alabama.

The discovery of Gold in Dahlonega brought more movement of whites to this area and the demand for land increased. In 1838 the Indians were moved to Oklahoma along the famous Trail of Tears at which many died during the long and cold winter months.

In 1840-41 the land was surveyed and divided into 40 acre lots (if gold was believed to be on it, also known as a "Gold Lot") or 160 acres for farm land also known as a "Land Lot". The lotteries

that the state conducted for this land brought more people into this area.

## **Early Families**

One of the first families to move to this area was Moses and Elijan Stroup in the early 1820's. These men were soldiers and gun makers under Washington. They were familiar with the making of iron. (They will be discussed later in the Early Industry Section).

Another prominent family of this era was Emsley Stegall and his family. They settled in what is known today as "Emerson". They came here from South Carolina. They were farmers by trade and built a home that was known as "Plantation Plain".

Mrs. Kitty P. Lerey owned a large portion of land between Emerson and Cartersville. Portions of this land was obtained later by Elijah Murphy Fields who was from Pickens Co. South Carolina.

## **Coming of the Railroad**

In 1837, the State of Georgia began the construction of a Railroad from 0 milepost (today's underground Atlanta) northward to Chattanooga, Tennessee as it is known today but was known as Ross Landing in the early days. Construction was slow in those days because forest had to be cleared and bridges had to be built. The Railroad reached the present town of Emerson in 1839. The state owned Western and Atlantic Railroad was finished to Chattanooga in 1850. With the coming of the railroad this connected Emerson (as it did other towns) to the rest of the country. This made everyday needs more accessible.

Emerson according to W and A maps was just noted as a wood station. These stations were necessary for stops to take on wood for the steam engine.

The first Depot at Emerson was a box car and the first wooden depot wasn't built until the 1850's. Telegraph lines followed the railroad subsequently the depot was a popular gathering place to get the latest news.

## **Early Industry**

Emerson's early primary industry was mining. When the Stroup's settled in this area they were quick to note that this areas red dirt contained large deposits of Iron. The Stroup's opened a furnace and forge in the Stamp Creek area, also a furnace in the area of Bethany Bridge. The Stegall's had a furnace at Bartow. These furnaces produced what is known as "Pig Iron." This Pig Iron was taken to a forge where it was beaten with large drop hammers into mild steel. This steel was used in the manufacturing of farm implements, stoves, machinery, railroad rails and wheels for railroad cars.

In 1842 the Stroup's entered into a partnership with Mark A. Cooper to form Cooper's Furnace at Etowah, Ga. Graphite, a lubricant, was also mined near Emerson, and small quantities of gold came out of the Stamp Creek.

## Civil War

With the use of slaves in the south this soon became a national issue. In 1861 hostilities arose between the North and the South. The Nation became a house divided. Civil war had become a fact. South Carolina succeeded from the Union followed by several other Southern States, at which time the Southern Confederacy was formed.

Men of military age hastened to join the Confederate Army. Most of the fighting in 1861-63 was in Virginia, with high casualties on both sides.

The Iron industry at Etowah was busy producing railroad rail, cannons were cast and cannon balls were produced here.

The war came close to the town in late May of 1864, when the Confederate army was forced by superior Union Forces from nearby Cassville, Ga. Inhabitants were alarmed by the retreat of the Confederate forces through the town. Many fled southward to escape the advancing union forces. There was fighting at or near the W & A Railroad and Wagon Bridge over the Etowah River, which is today at the US 41 Bridge south of Cartersville. These bridges were burnt by the retreating Confederate forces. One of the Confederate Army Corps under Gen. Hood was stationed on the South Side of the River. Gen Joseph E. Johnston's Headquarters were Bartow, Gen Pole was stationed at the W & A and Wagon Bridges on the Etowah, and Gen. Hardee's troops were stationed on Pumpkinvine Creek at Williford's Mill.

Union Gen. Sherman, who some years earlier had toured the County and was familiar with the Allatoona Mountains and he knew if the Union Forces tried to go through these mountains he might face defeat, so he decided to cut away from the railroad and move southward from Kingston and Cassville by passing the Allatoona Mountains and regain the railroad at Acworth. The Union Army moved through Euharlee and Stilesboro, crossing the Etowah River near Burnt Hickory.

Gen. Johnston moved his army from Emerson to Paulding Co. where he fought several battles. Finally nearing Atlanta, President Jefferson Davis replaced Gen. Johnston with Gen. John B. Hood, who fought losing battles around Atlanta. Finally Atlanta was captured by Gen. W. T. Sherman on Sept. 1, 1864.

Union forces occupied all the territory from Atlanta northward to Chattanooga, Tenn. Locally, Union troops occupied the town and built a fort overlooking the Etowah River Bridge. This was necessary to guard the W & W Railroad and the supply line.

Confederate forces retreated to Palmetto, Ga. where their army rested and was resupplied . After about a month Gen. Hood had a plan to wreck the Union Supply Line over the same territory in which the Confederate Army moved earlier in the year, along the W & A. Railroad.

Confederate troops again closed the Chattahoochee River and started the destruction on the W & A Railroad at Acworth. There he sent Gen. S. G. Frenck's division to capture and destroy Union forces at Allatoona, Ga. A bloody battle was fought there on Oct. 5, 1864. The Forts held off the attack, although the Union defenders were outnumbered only the appearance of Union reinforcements saved the town and forts.

Confederate forces moved into Tennessee and were defeated at Nashville, Tenn. Gen. Sherman started on his March to the sea after burning behind him all the bridges and removing the rails from the railroad. He also burnt all railroad Depots.

Confederate forces continued to be defeated and in April 1865 the War ended.

## **Post Civil War**

Returning veterans found widespread destruction. The W & A Railroad was in ruins; the Iron Works at Etowah and the town were destroyed. There was no salt, corn or livestock. Both armies had destroyed everything in the area.

After the War Gov. Joseph E. Brown quickly put forces repairing the railroad. In the interim he had wagons haul salt and corn to the area that had been cleaned out by both forces.

About the time of the Civil War Emerson was known as Stegalls' Station and it was so named until it was incorporated into a city in 1889.

The City of Emerson as it is known today was known as Stegall Station in honor of Ensley Stegall, a noted land owner and business man from about the time of the Civil War until it was incorporated in 1889. After the war Stegall Station began to grow because of the mining operations nearby. The people met in a Trading Post at the present corner of Old Alabama and Puckett Rd. to form a church. It was called Stegalls Chapel. Out of this church the Emerson United Methodist was born. This church was deeded in Jan. 1873.

## **Emerson Incorporated**

In 1889 the town was incorporated into a city. The City of Emerson was named after Gov. Joseph Emerson Brown. This was the Governor who sent supplies to this area after the war, and its possible the city was named after him in appreciation of this deed. The early records of the City cannot be located so the history is incomplete.

The most prominent structure in Emerson over the years was the three story hotel that stood where the new Post Office is today. It is not known who built the hotel or when, but it was torn down in about 1926. In fact part of the lumber from the hotel was used to build the house this is serving as the City Hall today.

When Emerson was laid out the streets that run north and south were numbers and the streets that run east and west were named after states. This still holds true today except that Wisconsin Ave was renamed Gaston Westbrook Ave. in honor of one of the past mayors. The City was originally surveyed by H. J. McCormick.

After the turn of the century several important things are known about Emerson. The black section of town on the west end of Gaston Westbrook Ave. and consisting of 9th and 10th Streets. The most prominent building at this time was the Good Samaritan Lodge. It was a two story building with office space. The First Black Doctor had an office here and he came twice a week to see patients, on Monday evening and again on Thursday morning. His name was Doctor Moore. Henry Fryer had a store on Gaston Westbrook Ave., it consisted of a shoe shine shop, peanut stand and a barn for his livestock. The Black school was also on this street near Mr. Fryer's store. At the corner of Indiana Ave and 10th Street was a cafe, that was run by Jim Ross who lived in Atlanta and opened the café on the weekends. The public well was located in an alley between Indiana and Michigan Ave.

This section today has two churches. Damascus Baptist and the Church of God in Jesus Christ.

## Historical Dates

July 12, 1942 - R. C. Gordon hired as engineer for the Water System

February 5, 1946 - First mention of a Water System in Emerson.

February 17, 1947 - \$60,000 borrowed to install a water system.

February 1948 - First well drilled for the City of Emerson.

## Links

Withred's Mill [<https://www.be-roberts.com/se/ruins/with/with.htm>]

Pumpkinvine Kiln [<https://www.be-roberts.com/se/ruins/pump/pump.htm>]