

Community Pillars
Dorothy Granberry, Geneva Miller Historical Society

In the past most Haywood County communities were organized around one or a combination of four institutions - a church, a school, a lodge, and/or a plantation site. Regardless of how these farming hamlets came into being, each one had families that formed the core of community life. These were hardworking thrifty families who dutifully sent their boys and girls to the neighborhood school and somehow found the means to send them on to Brownsville to attend high school and for some to go on to college and professional school.

The Mary and Willie Waller family of the Beech Grove Community was such a family in the 1930s - 1950s.

The Wallers farmed for a living. They grew cotton and corn. Every year, they planted a garden and had irish potato and sweet potato patches. They planted and harvested crowder and purple hull peas. They grew sorghum and made molasses. They had hogs, cows, horses, tractors, chickens, ducks and guinea fowl. Their eight children worked alongside them to produce a thrifty farm able to feed and clothe the family and educate the children.

The recent death of the youngest of the Wallers children, Dwight Waller - a former professional basketball player and noted TN high school coach - reminds us of the contributions families like the Wallers made to Haywood County and the United States despite not always being afforded access to many opportunities the USA had to offer.