

A Glimpse of Life in Haywood County 80 Years Ago

Dorothy Granberry, Geneva Miller Historical Society

Eighty years ago was 1936. Haywood County was beginning to recover from the Depression. County work jobs through the WPA (Works Progress Administration) were putting needed cash into the cotton economy, a largely credit enterprise. Operators of small farms, both tenant and owner operators, had money to spend from federal subsidy checks received for decreasing how much land they planted in cotton.

The county population was a bit over 26,000. Sixty-five percent of this 26,000 population were African American. Although most African American men in Haywood County had voted in elections between 1868 and 1888, none had voted since 1907. In the early 1920s Dick Morgan, Daniel Tucker, and William Leigh, Sr. , all county citizens and landowners, were unsuccessful in their attempts to register to vote. Not one Haywood County African American woman had registered to vote by 1936 despite the recent passing of the 19th amendment in the preceding decade.

Most people in the county farmed for a living and the rest made their living providing services that supported farming. Merchants sold agricultural supplies (hoes, cotton sacks, files, wagon tongues, plow points), clothing (dresses, suits, overalls, jumpers, straw hats), food, and animal feed (shorts) as well as household goods. Many farm women made their family's clothes, including diapers and smocks for babies. Clothes were often made from flour/sugar and feed sacks saved by thrifty women after the contents were consumed.

County schools operated on a split school year. County schools began in July after cotton chopping was over and continued through mid September when cotton picking began. Schools reopened in mid November and operated through early May. Brownsville City Schools were not on the split school year. They were in session September through early May. In 1936, Haywood County Training School was considered a city school. Mr. Festus E. Jeffries, a graduate of Roger Williams University in Nashville, TN, was the principal. During this time, Haywood County Training School had a football team, but no band.

In 1936, Ms. Alma Taylor was operating Kozy Beauty School, Rawls Funeral Home had been in operation for two years, and the Davis Service Station had been in operation for a year. Ms. Irma Taylor was directing the Haywood County Training School chorus and Ms. Violet Ankrum was opening windows to the world for her students.