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Snellville Historical Society

To Research, Document and Publicize the History of Snellville and the Snellville Community

Snellville Police The "Sam Ketchem" Era

When Tom Snell and James Sawyer came to Gwinnett County, the Sheriff of the county, who was located in Lawrenceville, handled law enforcement. In 1923 when Snellville was chartered, Mayor Gladstone Snell and the City Council appointed Byron Whitworth as the first Marshal. The Marshal had the responsibility to maintain order in the small town, but lacked the authority the sheriff had. Lacking a jail in Snellville, any men needing incarceration were taken to the jail in Lawrenceville. The main offense Mr. Whitworth addressed was drunkenness.

In the late 1920's the city charter became dormant for a period of approximately twelve years, and again Snellville depended on the county government for assistance with maintaining order.



was a small rock building facing Hwy 78 at Pate Street

In 1940–1942 the charter was reactivated, and Mayor W.C. Britt hired George Martin and Crawford Juhan as Marshals. During Mr.

Britt's administration the city limits were expanded to a one mile radius from the center of town which was the intersection of Hwys.78 and 124. At this time the mayor served as the judge at city court whenever individuals were ticketed by the Marshals. The Marshals' pay was a percentage of fines collected by the city court. The first city hall and court house in Snellville was a small rock building facing Hwy. 78 at Pate Street.

The city charter again became dormant during World War II and was reactivated in 1946 with Arthur Stancil as Mayor and Barnie Wade as Marshal. In 1947 David Wade became a Marshal.

In April 1949 a man named Francis Bobb came riding

into Snellville on a Harley Davidson and applied for a job as Marshal in Snellville. He was stationed at Fort McPherson during the war and while there he met and married a lovely girl from Decatur, Georgia, Juliette Oxford. His wife's family, Clinton and Dida Oxford.



Francis Bobb AKA Sam Ketchum

had moved to Snellville from Decatur, and Mrs. Bobb felt she needed to be close to her mother to help care for her. Mr. Bobb was from Milton, Pennsylvania. He was born May 10, 1923 the fifth of eight children. His father was employed as a fireman in the steel mills in Pennsylvania, and his mother was a homemaker. Francis Bobb had the nickname "Nook" when he was growing up. When the Second World War began, he joined the army. Little is known about his service experience except that he was in the Battle of the Bulge.



Although it is not known in what capacity, at some time during his time of service he learned to ride motorcycles and developed a great love for them. While he was in Europe. his wife moved to Pennsylvania and during this time gave birth to the couple's first child, Linda.

On April 25, 1949 Francis Bobb was employed as a City Marshal in Snellville for a trial period of thirty days. He was paid \$10.00 a week plus 50% of the fines collected from arrests. He was on duty Saturday afternoon and night and Sunday afternoon. His first commission for fines was \$62.00. In May the city council allocated funds for Mr. Bobb to buy a siren for his motorcycle.

After the trial period, it became apparent that Mr. Bobb was quite an asset to the city and particularly so in increasing the city coffers. In June of 1949 the City Council met to make a decision regarding the police. All of the citizens' responses were positive, so Mr. Bobb was given a permanent position.

Mr. Bobb was a favorite of the young men in the community and is remembered as one who always had a smile on his face. On weekends teens gathered in Snellville after they took their dates homes and frequently tried to do something to irritate Mr. Bobb so he would chase them on his motorcycle. One night one of James Sawyer's sons felt very daring and sped off down North Road. He didn't expect the Marshal to follow him, but a chase began and continued into the rural area between Snellville and Grayson. Although Mr. Bobb was an experienced motorcycle rider, he lost

control at a curve on a soft sandy place in the road, and was thrown into a wire fence. Although sustaining multiple lacerations, he was able to return to Snellville on his motorcycle but in need of medical attention. For the next few days the accident was the talk of the town. However, the morning after the accident, the culprit responsible for the chase turned himself in to Mayor Stancil. It is not known if punishment was given, but it was not long after that that the city acquired a police car for the Marshals.

Although Mr. Bobb had good rapport with the youth, in 1952 he asked the City council to pass an ordinance pertaining to boys hanging out around the stores in Snellville after midnight and disturbing the peace. The Council complied with his request.



The Bobb Children Stephen, Paul, Linda, Mom, Delores, Dida

After the Bobbs came to Snellville, their family increased with the birth of two sons, Steve and Paul, and a set of twins Delores and Dida. As the children matured, there was a competition between one of the Bobb sons and the daughter of the Mayor. The Bobb son said his Dad was more powerful than the Mayor because his Dad could put the Mayor in jail, but the Mayor's child felt her Dad was more powerful because her Dad could fire the Bobb's father.

Word of Snellville's motorcycle riding Marshal spread through out the state. People going and coming from the University of Georgia football games were great catches. About this time Mr. Bobb acquired a nickname that was straight out of the Dick Tracey comic strip. He became known as Sam Ketchem.

Highway 78 was a major thoroughfare for eighteen wheelers, and they were consistently exceeding the speed limit. One night two truckers came into Snell-ville, and the first one was speeding knowing Sam

would soon be on his tail. As Sam started following him on his motorcycle, the second truck come in close and wedged Sam in between the two trucks refusing to allow him to get out of the predicament until they reached Athens.

A few years after Sam became a Marshal, the City built a new city hall at the corner of Lenora Church Road and Hwy.124. It contained two holding cells. Mr. Edgar Johnson was hired to be the jailer, and his wife, Ruby, prepared meals for the prisoners. Mr. Johnson's daughter, Marilyn,. said that her Dad would come home for a meal and Mrs. Johnson would send food for the prisoners. Those in prison had the same menu as the Johnson family. Being a jailer could be a boring monotonous job, so on nice days Mr. Johnson and the prisoners would sit on the side of the road and watch the cars go by.

After Sam had several close calls, the Mayor and City Council felt it would be safer for him if he had someone to ride with him. Sanders "Hitler" Wellmaker, Charles and Billy Starnes were some of the men hired to assist Sam.

One Sunday Sam pulled over a car in front of Snell-ville Baptist Church. He and Billy Starnes got out of their car and had the driver stand outside his car. While talking to the "out of towner", the passenger in the car jumped in the driver's seat and attempted to escape. Little did he know with whom he was dealing. Sam jumped in his car and within a few minutes had possession of the runaway.

When Snellville Baptist Church demolished the old clapboard church, Sam obtained the wood and built a home for his family on Pate Street. (The home is still standing.)

In the 50's Sam became the head Marshal, and in the late 50's and early 60's the law enforcement in Snell-ville became known as the police.

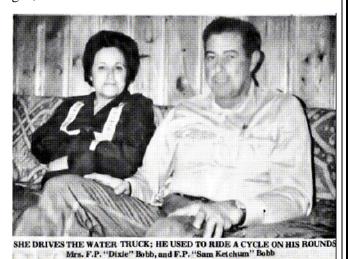
As the years went by, Sam was given more responsibility. When Snellville put in the water system in the 1950's, Sam was not only Chief of Police but also Superintendent of Utilities. He was responsible for the installation of water meters as well as the constant regulation and observation of the flow of water to the city of Snellville.

He was on call night and day to check problems with the water. Once when he was hospitalized, a water main burst and no one could find the problem. The other members of his department decided the only solution was to have him brought from the hospital in an ambulance so he could show them where to cut off the water. Fortunately, when they called him, he was able to direct them to the cutoff over the phone.

The Bobb family members were outdoorsmen like their father. All of them except their mother had motorcycles, and she was willing to ride one holding onto her husband. They always had a boat that was great for fishing at Lake Lanier. Camping was also one of their favorite activities.

In the summer of 1971 after 23 years with the City, Sam had to choose between his two jobs, and he decided he would stay with the water department.

Around the time of his change in duties, he and his wife Julie divorced, and he married another Snellville girl, Dixie Martin.



When Sam chose to stay with the water department, Red Bramblett became Chief of Police. During his

term the City hall was moved to the old ag building.

In 1974 Bill Wood was hired as Police Chief and the force enlarged to five including a woman who served as a school crossing guard.

Harold Bradford, J.D. Hewatt and Jimmy Davis followed as Police Chiefs.

Today Chief of Police is Roy Whitehead. He heads a department of 59 trained, professional and dedicated personnel. The new 2009 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax will enable the City to build a new police facility on the campus with city hall.

When Sam Ketchem left his position as Police Chief, he commented on the changes he observed since he began with the city. He noticed a change in the population and the increase in drinking and driving. Today Chief Whitehead and his staff are facing more violent crimes. They have to solve murders and



Sam Ketchem with

At the bird and Ed the wire haired terrier

contend with gangs and drugs. Things Sam could not have imagined.

On Labor Day 1991, Sam died of a heart attack. He was buried in a mausoleum in Lawrenceville across from Tom Wages funeral home.



The President's Corner

By Carolyne Kirkland

Dear Members,

I hope your summer has been filled with a true southern classic—a delicious tomato sandwich! Yes, with white bread, real mayonnaise (Blue Plate or Duke's) and a slice or two of a home grown tomato. This is a simple pleasure that is easily prepared for lunch or dinner. Enjoy!

We welcome four new members to our Historical Society: Greta Coble, Dewey Bentley, Bruce Maney and Joan Aderhold.

On Sunday October 11, 2009, The Snellville Historical Society is having its fall meeting at City Hall at 2:30P.M. in the Community room. Mrs. Mary Frazier Long, who is the author of a recently published book *About Lawrenceville*, is presenting the program. Please plan to attend and be prepared to be thoroughly entertained by this talented woman who is a member of our society.

At our fall meeting we are having a quilt exhibit, so bring your quilt or quilts for everyone to enjoy. If you could include information about your quilt—who made it and when, the name of the pattern—it would add to the exhibit.

In 1915 in the Snellville News Section of the *News Herald* newspaper was printed the following:

From the way the ladies are quilting they must be predicting another long extreme winter or rather taking advantage of the cheap cotton, as some men don't like to leave out much for quilting purposes when it is a fancy price. Ladies you will have one more chance at it this fall, if we are any judge.

During Snellville's earlier years quilting was a necessity to provide a warm cover during the cold winter nights. Grandmothers and Moms saved any available fabric and cut and sewed the pieces to create a design that was a one-of-a-kind quilt top. Feed sacks were saved and often used for the lining.

Dresden Plate, Lone Star, Double Wedding Band, Flower Basket, Postage Stamp, Fan and Broken Star are names of popular quilt patterns. It wasn't until I found my Mom's quilting frame in the attic that I recalled the times when she announced she was going to "put in a quilt" because the quilt top was pieced and ready to be quilted. Preparation was made by moving the dining table and letting the quilt take center stage under the chandelier. The frame filled most of the room as Mom secured the lining, cotton filler and the pieced top to the wood that had so many holes. Four dining chairs were used to support the frame, but many years later Mrs. Josie Bankston's brother made quilt stands for Mother. I remember the ornate clamps used to secure the frames. Ladies from the Snellville area were invited to come to our house for a quilting bee. It was a social event where friends gathered for a fun day of stitching and at the end of the day had created a beautiful work of art.

Our Girl Scout display for Snellville Days was successful with 445 people visiting our exhibit. A special thank you to the City of Snellville for their continuous support and to the Snellville Girl Scout troops who participated with their individual displays. Thank you to our members who worked both days of the event.

The following donations have been made to our Historical Society: an oil painting donated by Emmett Clower, and a CD of pictures of Rev. Bankston's Grave marking ceremony given by Mrs. Glyndia Norton.

Please look through your collection of pictures for any military pictures you could share with us. We will make copies and return the originals to you.

The City of Snellville is near the completion of the first phase of improvements to Briscoe Park. Please visit our park and see new bridges, landscaping, the children's playground and expanded parking.

The Elisha Winn Fair is on October 3 and 4, 2009 at the Winn House at 908 Dacula Road, Dacula, Georgia. This event is sponsored by the Gwinnett Historical Society.

An objective of our Historical Society this year was to encourage everyone to share memories of growing up in this special place we call Home. We appreciate those that have responded, and in this newsletter we share our first **MEMORIES OF SNELLVILLE**.

May 3, 1958—Our Wedding Day

By Ruth Allyn Williams Slade

Although it has been more than 51 years since Joseph Burton Slade and I were married, I can remember some parts of the days leading up to our wedding day as if it were just this year. I remember what a beautiful spring day it was and the smell of all the flowers that were blooming, especially the rose-

bush with the fragrant pink roses that was growing in the side yard of our farmhouse and the one that provided the rose petals for the flower girl to scatter at our wedding.

Burton and I had been dating off and on for almost two years and had recently been talking about getting married, but I was reluctant to commit at that time because we both were paying a car note. I felt we should wait until we had our cars paid for. How I ever agreed on a Monday at work, over the telephone, to get married the following Saturday is more than I can understand. (I think it was to get him to shut up about getting married because he could be very tenacious.)



Although five or six days is a short time to plan a wedding, some preparation had begun in anticipation of our getting married, but Mother was in shock when I called her. She was in the midst of making my wedding dress that actually was supposed to have been my older sister Melia Beth's, but she and Buddy

married secretly and didn't have a church wedding. Daddy was working on adding a bathroom and closet to our house so we could live with them until we could afford a place of our own.

My week was spent doing things in preparation for the big day. I was secretary to the Commanding Officer and the Personnel Officer of the Georgia State Patrol, and they allowed me to be gone most of the day that week to go downtown shopping. When I got home from work on Monday, Mother and I visited Mrs. Frazier's florist to arrange for the flowers, and I guess someone called the pastor to see if he and the church were available on the upcoming weekend.

One of the first things I did that week was to pick out dress patterns and material for my attendants' dresses. Melia Beth was the matron of honor and my cousin Carol Camp and my cousin by marriage and very special friend Martha Snell were my bridesmaids. I chose a pink polished cotton with a net overskirt for Melia Beth and the same in blue for Carol and Martha.

I bought the groom's ring, the guest book and individual gifts for the wedding party. The wedding cake had to be ordered, and Burton and I had to go to the Decatur Health Department to have our blood drawn for testing. On Thursday night we went to the home of the Justice of the Peace, Alton Tucker, who also happened to be an old family friend, to get our marriage license.

Miraculously everything came together. Mother finished my wedding dress, and Melia Beth made her dress. Daddy finished the new living quarters for us, but almost cut off a finger in his rush to get everything ready. Mother's large family all came in and helped get the furniture back in place and the dust cleaned up. Since we decided on Monday to marry on Saturday, invitations could not be sent out nor could it be announced at church that members were invited. so...people had to be telephoned!! Mother didn't have time to go shopping for a dress, so Aunt Mable loaned her the dress she wore to Carol's wedding. Due to all the preparation that had been taking place for the wedding, the family garden had not been planted, so Daddy insisted that he and Mother plant the garden the day of the wedding.

Mr. Pritchard, the photographer for the Crime Lab had said for ages that he would make my wedding pictures if and when I got married. On the upcoming Saturday he had a trip planned to go spelunking and was not available, so he had a friend come and make my pictures using Mr. Pritchard's equipment. I got my pictures free except for some money I gave the friend for his time and gas.

When Saturday arrived, Melia Beth came and dressed at our house with Mother and me and was there for the photographer. I gave her Burton's ring, and she decided to put it in her two-month old daughter's diaper bag. Later that day the wedding party was waiting their cue to go into the church, and Melia Beth realized she didn't have the ring. Her husband, Buddy, had already gone into the church with Jennifer and the diaper bag. My cousin Sonny Partee tried to get Buddy to let him have the diaper bag just for a second to get the ring, and it took a lot of convincing before Buddy let him have it. The ring was not in the bag. She had left it

in her housecoat pocket. It was too late to go home to get it. Ronald Chadwick volunteered his ring to use for the ceremony. Although Ronald and Burton were such different sized men, the ring fit. At the reception Ronald asked Burton for his ring back. Since Burton had no idea what had transpired, he was reluctant to give up the ring.

The ceremony was uneventful and, I thought, very special. Rev. Charles Duffey performed the ceremony. Elaine Shell Mitchell played the organ and sang *Oh Promise Me* and *I'll Walk Beside You*. At the end of the ceremony she sang *The Lord's Prayer*. Billy Richardson was Burton's best man and Ronald Chadwick and Sonny Partee were the groomsmen. Susan Buchanan Williams was the flower girl and Hugh Snell, Jr. was the ring bearer.

Everyone was invited to the reception at our house. Burton's sister, Betty Burnett Smith and my cousins Kay Williams Mellone and HuEllen Briscoe Connolly served cake and punch. Barbara Peters Chadwick kept the bride's book.

I chose a pink linen dress with navy purse and shoes for my going away outfit.

During the reception, word got to us that the Best Man had put my suitcase in the car. Some of my contemporaries had removed it from the car and hid it out of sight. What they didn't know was that Richardson had seen them and after the mischief makers had gone back in the house, he retrieved the bag and put it back where it belonged.

The same "friends" had decided to follow us, and they had Burton's car blocked. We decided that Melia Beth and I would walk out to her house, get her car, and she would drive me to Lawrenceville to Alton Tucker's house. Burton would drive his parents' car and meet me in Lawrenceville.

Melia Beth and I slipped out the backdoor to walk to her house. We took the field road that went by her house and through the woods to another road. The field road was so grown over with small trees and lots of washouts that I was beginning to think we wouldn't make it, but we did. We made it to Alton Tucker's house and waited for what seemed like forever. We decided to go over to Aunt Omie's and call to find out what had happened to Burton. Mother was shocked with our call because Burton had left right after Melia Beth and I left. We got back in the car and started down the street near the courthouse and spotted Bur-

ton. We learned later he was late because he couldn't find the Tucker's home in the dark having been there only once.

That night we were fortunate that we weren't in Burton's car because my boss, Major Underwood, had given out Burton's tag number and description of his car to the area police and was going to have us pulled over and possibly taken to jail, or at least detained to make us think we were in trouble. Thankfully that didn't transpire. (I think the only person in trouble was Melia Beth. Buddy wasn't too happy that she didn't tell him she was helping me escape, plus he was left with Jennifer who was very hungry.)

After a short visit at his parent's house, we drove to Cartersville and stopped for the night. I thought we

were going to Gatlinburg, but the next morning Burton said he would rather go to Griffin and visit some places he remembered from having lived there as a child. We stayed there one night and returned home the next day.

All in all, everything turned out well. I had a shower shortly after the wedding and received many nice gifts.

One other thing that happened that was memorable was that Burton bought my rings on Friday and at our wedding rehearsal he gave me my engagement ring, but it didn't fit! On Saturday morning he had to return the rings, and I received my engagement ring after I was married.

Gwinnett County Summer 1909

\$8 PER ACRE

IS THE VALUE OF LAND IN GWINNETT COUNTY AS RETURNED FOR TAXES

The tax digest for this year, just completed by the tax receiver, shows that the average value of farm land in Gwinnett County is a fraction over \$8.00 per acre. This is the value placed on it by the owners and for which it is returned for taxation.

The value of all farm land in the county as returned is \$2,252,944; and there being 280,350 acres, it was a matter of division to get the amount per acre.

Very little land in Gwinnett county can be bought for \$8.00 per acre. Much of it is bringing from \$30 to \$50. It is said that even at this valuation of \$8.00 per acre, land is returned in this county at a much higher rate than in adjoining counties.

Gwinnett Journal August 7, 1909

SNELLVILLE

Prof. W.R. Whitworth opened his singing school Monday with a good attendance.

J.M. Cofer who moved from here to Crisp county last winter, paid his relatives and friends a short visit the latter part of last week. He said that he had the best crop he ever made in his life and is well satisfied.

Gwinn Johnston has about recovered from typhoid fever and will soon be able for his parents to take him back to his home in Atlanta.

Mrs. Wells, of Atlanta, has been visiting her father, Kage Gresham, for the past few days.

The Gresham reunion, which was held at J.A. Gresham's last Wednesday, was well attended by nearly all of the relatives and friends, both far and near. A large delegation came down from Atlanta. All

reported a pleasant time and pronounced it a happy occasion.

G.F. Snell had another misfortune. His thee year old colt died last Tuesday. It would have made a fine horse, and for that reason he took great pains with it, and prized it very much. Only recently he lost his fine milk cow. His wife has been down with the fever

seven or eight weeks, and on account of sickness, he almost lost his crop. But to crown his misfortune, some one went into his smoke house while he was away from home and stole a fine ham of meat---the last one he had. Really there are some low down, mean people in this old world.

Gwinnett Journal August 7, 1909

Gwinnett County Summer 1959

Button Gwinnett Hospital is Concrete Reality for County

By Bruce Still

The plans which were made many years ago in the hearts of Gwinnett Countians have taken the form of steel, concrete, and brick. In less than two months the Button Gwinnett Hospital will swing open its doors.

The \$762,000 construction is one of 179 projects built through the Hill Burton Act. Work on the undertaking was begun in Dec. 1957.

Its 33,000 sq. ft. of floor space contains the most modern hospital rooms and equipment ever to be constructed in the county. "It is the best constructed hospital I have seen built under the act," said Hospital Administrator, Jack Welcher. "The workmanship is excellent."

Facilities allow for the accommodation of 35 patients. There are 13 white semi-private and 4 private rooms and 2 colored semi-private and 1 private room with no room containing more than 2 beds.

The building is equipped with a laboratory, piped oxygen, telephone outlet, and a call system which is so sensitive that a nurse can hear the patient breathing.

The building is air conditioned throughout with a separate system being used for the nursery, maternity and surgical areas which pipes in non-re-circulated 100% pure air.

Personnel on the staff will total from 30 to 35 with a 24 hour coverage. Among those employed will be a minimum of five registered nurses, four licensed practical nurses, five nurses aides, three orderlies, one surgical technician and an x-ray and laboratory technician.

"The critical area in securing personnel lies in the nursing service," said Welcher. Applications are presently being turned in to Welcher whose office is located in the hospital.

The hospital includes two operating rooms, minor and major; obstetrical section, consisting of two delivery rooms and a labor room; nursery; large modern kitchen; dining room; laboratories; doctors and nurses lounging rooms; nurses station; several work rooms and two waiting rooms.

Patients will not be admitted to the hospital except by doctors' requests or in case of extreme emergency.

The official opening has not been announced but is expected to take place during latter July or early August. There will be an open house and tours will be given to the public.

The News Herald June 11, 1959

PAUL GILLELAND IS FARMER OF THE WEEK

Paul Gilleland, Route 1, Grayson, has been chosen "Farmer of the Week."

Gilleland's farm is composed of 58½ acres of his own farm land and approximately 150 rented acres. He

works most of the land himself and spent less than \$100 last year for outside labor.

His crop acreage consists of 8 acres oats, 20 acres wheat, 23 acres corn, 14 acres watermelons, 3 acres cantaloupes, 45 acres ladyfinger peas, 42½ acres cow peas, 20 acres millet, 10 acres sericea lespedeza and 16 acres of millo.

Gilleland is known throughout the county for his excellent crop production. He averages 75 bushels of corn to the acre which doubles that of the state. He attributes his high production to heavy use of fertilizer and the planting of hybrid corn, Cokers 9 and 11.

He takes special pride in his watermelons and cantaloupes and makes sure they are graded before taking them to market. A stand of 300 to 400 saleable watermelons to the acre is Gilleland's average production.

Last year Gilleland marketed 30 hogs and sold 70 to 80 pigs. Presently he has 4 sows, 1 boar and some pigs. The hogs are fed on the raised corn rather than selling it to the market.

Mr. and Mrs. Gilleland have three children, two boys and a girl.

The "Farmer of the Week" is selected by the County Chamber of Commerce and the six agricultural agencies.

The News Herald July 2, 1959

Tastes of Snellville...

Old Fashioned Fruit Custard

Unbaked pie shell.

Custard

1 stick butter melted

- 3 whole eggs
- 2 cups of sugar
- 2 T. flour
- 2 cups of dried peaches or apples
- 1 cup of sweet milk

Mix flour with one cup of sugar.

Beat eggs and mix with flour and sugar. Add milk. Put remaining sugar with fruit and put in the crust. Add the remaining ingredients.

Bake at 300 degrees

This recipe was a favorite of Mrs. Ruby Johnson who prepared food for any prisoners detained at Snellville. She was so comfortable in the kitchen that she assumed everyone knew how to make a custard and was very brief with the instructions she shared with her daughter Marilyn Moon.

Neita Snell, Mrs. Johnson's niece, remembers a scrumptious strawberry dish "Miss" Ruby frequently brought to family reunions. (Unfortunately we don't have that recipe to share.)



We Remember...

Una Smith was a teacher at Snellville for many years. She taught both elementary and high school students. She died May 27, 2009.

On May 28, 2009 **Julia Head Pope** died. She graduated in 1939.

George Moon, a graduate in the class of 1948, died June 2, 2009.

Dorothy Stephens Johnson graduated in 1945. She died June 28, 2009.

On July 25, 2009 **Lola Bell Canup Milam** died. She graduated with the class of 1948. The obituary printed in the paper referred to her as **Frances** C. Milam.



Bessie Mosley Johnson, 88, died June 27, 2009.

Agnes Rawlins, 89, died July 29, 2009.

Snellville Historical Society Fall Meeting Sunday October 11, 2009 2:30 p.m. at Snellville City Hall Program: Mary Frazier Long

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