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# Snellville Historical Society

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

## The JT Alexander Family

By Shirley Alexander Smith

Alexander Park opened to the public Saturday June 13, 2009. I don't believe JT Alexander or his wife Jane would ever have imagined such a wonderful dream could happen when they purchased the property in 1949.

JT Alexander, or "Alec" as most people knew him, was born November 30, 1914 in Pickens, South Carolina. He was the third child of seven and the oldest boy. He was raised on a farm and after high school ventured to Dillard, Georgia and Rabun Gap College. There he met his future wife Jane T. Alexander. Rabun Gap was a work school, and they both completed two years of their education while spending many hours working in the cafeteria, delivering milk, working in the barns, housekeeping, etc. Both put themselves through college taking available jobs and paying their own way.

Jane was born on a farm in Adrian, Georgia on April 21, 1920 and was the seventh of ten children. She was working on the family farm from a young age and loved school. After high school, she saved enough money and also headed to Rabun Gap. She has often said if not for Rabun Gap, she would probably not have gotten an education, but knowing her, with her determination, I am sure she would have found a way!

After graduating from Rabun Gap, World War II called, and JT served for almost four years in the Pa-



**JT and Jane Alexander**

cific. Like everyone else, the War took its toll on JT, and he arrived home much smaller than when he left. Meanwhile, Jane worked and received her Bachelor's Degree in Business Education from Reinhardt College and taught at Tucker High School. After JT returned home, they married on June 8, 1946. Living in Athens, JT received his BS in Agriculture and became affiliated with the Veterans Farm Training Program in Duluth as a teacher.

In 1949, the Alexanders purchased 126.5 farm acres fronting on Scenic Highway with 100 of the acres fronting on both Scenic Highway and Old Snellville Highway. There is a fact sheet from the US Department of Agriculture that states that the farm was in a bad state of erosion. At that time, most everyone agreed with the fact sheet, but JT, with his farm background and his desire to live on a farm, was prepared to do whatever it took to make the land into workable pastures. Jane often listened at night to hear the tractor engine going at two in the morning. JT began early with conservation measures by terracing the fields and putting into practice information from the Soil Conservation Service, County Forestry Unit, Extension Unit and ASC. By 1962 JT had 50 head of cows and calves with 18 registered Angus, three broiler houses with a capacity of 20,000 and marketed around 150 head of hogs from feeder pigs. Finding new ways to recycle, he often fertilized the pastures



**JT Alexander with some of his Angus cows**

and even the front yard of his home with the litter from the broiler houses. There were many comments as people drove by with their car windows rolled down and smelled the aroma of the “fertilizer” in the air.

While JT held down full time jobs, there was often someone living on the farm to help. After teaching in Duluth, Dacula and the old Grayson HS, he became the assistant County Agent in 1955 and County Agent in 1960. This was a perfect job for him with his education and love for farming. In 1963 he had to retire because of health issues. Wayne Shackelford was promoted to County Agent. The writer was humbled when reading an article about Mr. Shackelford receiving the Citizen of The Year Award when he said “Mr. Alexander taught me so much in a very short time. He always introduced me as his co-worker, and I have tried to do the same ever since”. This from such a giant of a man.

JT loved people and Gwinnett County. He always had a smile, a handshake and many times a hug for those he met. He was chairman of the March of Dimes, Commander of the Lawrenceville VFW, member of the Fair Association and many other Agriculture and Farm organizations. He loved the Georgia Bulldogs and had football season tickets. He was a true farmer and very hard worker. He passed away in December 1974 after his fourth heart attack.

Jane began her career as a business education teacher. She taught at the old Grayson HS until it was consolidated into South Gwinnett High School. She retired in 1976. During her teaching career, she earned two more degrees from UGA. Over the years, many of her students, some of them now in their eighties, told her how well she prepared them for their careers. Jane has always been a people person



**JT with a prize bull**

like JT. After retiring she has served on numerous committees, held leadership roles in church, Retired Teachers, Delta Kappa Gamma, homemakers, and given countless hours to Red Cross and Eastside Hospital where she still volunteers after more than 22 years. For all her time and efforts she has received numerous awards. Her church, Snellville United Methodist, is her anchor. Stopping 3 years ago, she had taught Sunday school for 57 years.

JT and Jane had one daughter, Shirley, who actively participated in the 4H program through her high school years. Her father was often encouraging her and helping with the steer program and showing at the fair. Even though the Alexander’s had a Lawrenceville address, most of their activities have been in Snellville. Until the 70’s people would ask Jane if she wasn’t afraid living on Scenic Highway with no close neighbors. Those were the days with little traffic by the home place.

Shirley earned a BSHE from UGA and taught for a few years. She married Donald L. Smith in 1971. What a blessing for Shirley and Jane! Jane will tell you she could not have lived on the farm without



**Jane surveys the new Alexander Park**





# The President's Corner

By Carolyne Kirkland

Dear Members,

Sunday February 2, 1969, the town of Snellville dedicated a new Post Office located in Snellville Plaza Shopping Center. A large crowd attended the ceremony held at South Gwinnett High School and the Open House at the new facility. In his welcome speech, Mayor Thomas Briscoe told of the rapidly growing town and living in one of the most wide awake areas in metropolitan Atlanta. He said, "Our classification as a small town may soon not fit us when it comes to size and the numbers in our midst, but we must earnestly and sincerely try to maintain and hold to our small town spirit." He recited the following poem:

*My Hometown is a friendly place  
Where a smile is found on each kindly face  
A door thrown wide and a welcome true  
For anyone who is passing through  
My hometown is a treasured spot  
Where friends and neighbors forget us not  
Its all in the world a town should be  
My hometown, Snellville, is the place for me.*

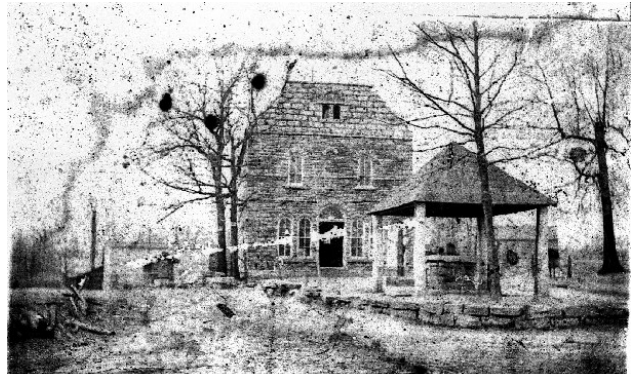
*Author Unknown*

Snellville Post Office staff consisted of postmaster Frank Leon Phillips; clerks, Barbara Rawlins, Dianne Britt and Sarah Briscoe; rural carrier, Dennis C. Williams; substitute rural carrier, Charlotte F. Nash; custodian, S.G. Lopez.

This post office remained open until 1983 when a larger post office building opened at 2250 Oak Road, Snellville. The Oak Road facility continues to serve our community today.

Thank you to Mrs. Ida Mae Langley and Clay Sorrow for their donation of military pictures. Please continue to bring photographs to share with our organization. We will make a copy of your picture and

return the original to you. It is because of people's willingness to share that we have the wonderful collection we have today.



**Patsy Sawyer Davis donated an early picture of the Sawyer Store, and this picture shows a well in front of Mr. Sawyer's store.**

Patsy also gave us a picture of the Sawyer family. We appreciate these contributions.



**L-R: Maggie Jo Sammon, Marian Hubbard, Lacy Johnson, Grace Brooks, Virginia Hill, Mack Brannon, Lucile Starnes, Henry Clower, Helen Storey**

The picture above of the Brannon Store in Snellville was donated by Joe Snell. Thank you for sharing your pictures with our society.

On October 10, 2010 at the Snellville Historical Society's fall meeting, Spence Roberts, past president of Gwinnett Historical Society, installed the new officers for 2011-2012. President—Emmett Clower, Vice President—Jim Cofer, Secretary—Marlene Buchanan, Treasurer—Lynette Couch. Directors-at-large are Shirley Smith, Snell Buchanan and Clark Britt.

We send our sympathy to the following families: the Annette Pate Clower family, James Jackson family, Gloria Odum family and the Mac McCluskey family

On Sunday November 7<sup>th</sup> Pharr Elementary celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In honor of the occasion,

artist Cheryl Werkheiser painted a beautiful mural in the school hall near the entrance to the lunchroom.



Cheryl Werkheiser and her mural at Pharr Elementary

Need a special Christmas gift? The Snellville Historical Afghans are available for \$30.00, Pap Ewing's book, *Snellville Consolidated School* for \$45.00, a CD containing thirty Snellville Historical Society Newsletters 2001-2010 is available for

**\$30.00. Please call the Historical Society office to place your order for a CD.**

Snellville Historical Society pins are for sale at the cost of \$5.00.

#### **New Office Hours:**

The Snellville Historical Society Office is open Monday and Friday from 10:00 to 12:00. You may make an appointment to come other days by calling Carolyne Kirkland at 770-972-4729.

Wishing the best for you and your family during the Christmas holidays and the New Year! In 2011 our society begins its fifteenth year, and we thank you for your continuous support to our organization as we work together to research, document and publicize the history of Snellville, and the Snellville community.

Our Hometown, Snellville, Is the Place To Be!

**Merry Christmas!**

*Carolyne*

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## **MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS**

### **Earning Money for Christmas**

**By Tom "Pap" Ewing**

Earning money for Christmas was difficult when I was young. Each year I would set about six to eight rabbit boxes/traps. I usually would catch rabbits each week, and if the weather was right I would catch several. I would catch and skin them and then pack them in ice. Dad would sell them for me at 35 to 50 cents each on his dairy route.

Second, the two weeks before Christmas I would go to the woods where there were a couple of holly trees and cut and bundle holly in small bunches, and Dad would sell it for me. When school was out, I would go with him and sell it myself.

Most of his customers came from the country, but I never knew if they really wanted the holly and rabbits or they were just sorry for a small kid trying to make a dime. It gave me a feeling of independence,

for by Christmas I would have enough to do a little Christmas shopping on my own.

My mother always made 6 to 8 cakes at Christmas, sometimes more. Families and friends visited each other's homes and cake was always served. She made cakes the hard way, from scratch. She would make the traditional cakes, then fruit cakes, a peanut cake, fresh coconut (from the coconuts first take the milk, crack the coconuts, get the shell off, grate the coconut, etc.), black walnut (walnuts from our trees and I got to crack the walnuts and help pick the meat out), and can you believe a hickory nut cake. Guess who got to go pick up the hickory nuts (the large ones) then the same routine as for the black walnuts. The cakes were very tasty at Christmas, but I am not sure that was "the good old days". But it is good memories.

# Santa Parachutes Into Snellville Remembered

By James W. Cofer, "Jr."

The Christmas season, which spans from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day for me, has always been a time with magic in the air. Special memories from the 1950s include: Christmas carols and cantatas, standing in the middle of Forsyth Street in downtown Atlanta and looking up at the choirs singing and the 'Great Tree' being lighted on top of the Rich's bridge, dad coming home with his mail car full of presents from his route patrons, a large banana box full of apples, oranges, peppermint and candy corn, and a couple of fresh coconuts, and spending Christmas Eve gathered around a wood burning stove with my grandparents (Dolphus and Florence Ford) in a drafty old clapboard house on a dirt trail called McDaniel Bridge Rd. I also remember that the old Snellville School was decorated for the season complete with small Christmas trees in each homeroom and refreshments furnished by the grade mothers, which usually included Polly Gresham, Ruby Cates, Commie Simpson, Dot Dillard, Gladys Gilleland, Edna Myers, Dorothy Smith and others including my own mom.

When asked recently to recall my most unusual Snellville Christmas memory, I naturally thought of the goodies, the celebrations and gifts, the exploding tar paper fireworks stands, and even the \$9.00 friendship ring that I gave my first girlfriend (name withheld). However, the event that stands out most in my mind is the time that Santa Claus parachuted out of an airplane over downtown Snellville. The time was in the early 1950s, so I would have been 8 or 9 years old. I don't know who paid for this stunt, but Santa was supposed to land near the Kenerly's Truck Stop just west of downtown near where the current street up to Nob Hill is loc-

ated today. Quite a crowd had gathered to witness this spectacle, and my brother Bobby and I were part of the group. Old Santa was decked out in red and white with black boots and a pack on his back, but appeared as a tiny speck in the sky as he arrived in a small personal aircraft. Unfortunately, the prevailing winds and the unsophisticated parachute technology of the time caused the jolly old jumper to be severely blown off course. Instead of landing in Kenerly's gravel parking lot alongside U.S.78, it became apparent that he would come down some where up on Brownlee Mountain. I was running at breakneck speed while looking up so as not to lose sight of Santa through the treetops. All of a sudden, my forward motion came to an abrupt halt, and I felt excruciating pain in my legs. I looked down and to my horror saw that I had run headlong into somebody's rusty barbed wire pasture fence, and all three strands had ripped me good. With tears of pain in my eyes and blood on my blue jeans, I extricated myself from the fence and resumed the chase. Sure enough, we found Santa dangling by his parachute straps about 30 feet up in a hardwood tree. He somehow got loose from his harness, climbed down the tree, and accompanied the Snellvillians who had made it up the mountain back down to Kenerly's.

The reason that this event has stuck in my mind after 57 years is that my body still bears the scars of that cruel fence: one scar about mid-shin, one just above the knee cap, and one at mid-thigh. I'll likely carry these "Christmas memories" with me for the rest of my life. But scars or not, the excitement of the experience was well worth it.

# Gwinnett County Winter of 1910

## Secret Wedding made Known

Grayson, Ga.

Mr. W. L. Knight and Miss Eva Brannon were quietly and secretly married on May 15, T.C. Rutledge, Esq, officiating.

They were met on the public road near the house of the official and the words that made them one were pronounced by him. The happy couple went on their way rejoicing and the wedding remained a secret until recently.

Miss Brannon is the charming young daughter of Mr. and Mrs. H.C. Brannon of near

Centerville and is possessed with many lovable traits of character.

Mr. Knight is a prosperous young farmer of near Caleb, Georgia and is a highly cultured gentleman and numbers his friends by the score.

They will be at home to their friends near Centerville.

May they live a long and prosperous life and their pathway ever strewn with flowers.

A Friend

*News Herald November 24, 1910*



## Snellville News

We have a splendid school, with Professor Hoyt Oliver and Miss May Woodward as teachers.

Sunday School was well attended Sunday afternoon. Among visitors were Miss Lettie Gunter and Professor Chapman, teachers at Pharr Academy. Professor gave an interesting talk to the school.

J.M. Barnett has returned to Milton County to sell washing machines.

Two couples were happily united in marriage Sunday, as follows: James Ragan to Miss Tiny Rawlins, Walter Cates to Miss Anna May Eth-

eridge. May the gentle breeze of happiness waft them o'er the sea of life.

Quite a number of our young people attended the singing at Mrs. Lee Loveless' last Sunday night.

Olia Cofer of Tucker called on relatives and friends here Saturday.

Mrs. Will Dutton and Mrs. W.J. Harper, who have been quite sick, are much improved at this writing.

William Williams has a double smile now. They are twin boys.

*News Herald January 19, 1911*



## Gwinnett County Winter 1960

### Jane Alexander Attends Classes at the University of Georgia

Athens, Georgia

Jane Alexander of Lawrenceville, a member of the faculty of South Gwinnett School at Snellville, is among those attending the Family Finances Workshop at the University of Georgia this summer.

The 3 ½ week session is being held primarily for teachers to aid them in incorporating information on family finance in their own classrooms this fall.

The workshop is sponsored by the National Commission for Education in Family Finance and the University's Colleges of Business Administration and Education. It is one of 16 such workshops being held at colleges and universities throughout the United States this summer.

*News Herald August 18, 1960*



### Thomason of Snellville Shows Champs

Hiawassee

In two state competitions at Georgia Mountain Fair's livestock show here last week, Troy Thomason of Snellville was awarded grand championship honors in both male and female Angus classes.

The animals in the show were in greater number and better quality than in previous years, and attracted a huge audience. Walter E. Nix was manager of the show.

*News Herald September 1, 1960*

### Tastes of Snellville...



*The following two recipes are favorites of Jane Alexander.*

*This chocolate icing has been used on family birthday cakes since Shirley was a child.*

#### One Minute Chocolate Icing

2 ¼ C. sugar    1 ½ T. white karo syrup  
Dash of salt    2 blocks chocolate  
3 T. butter    1 block chocolate bark  
3 T. Crisco    2/3 C. milk (scant)

Place all ingredients in sauce pan. Stir and place over low heat until butter, Crisco and chocolate are melted. Turn up heat and bring to a rolling boil. Boil one minute and take from heat. Cool and beat until right consistency to spread.





## Sweet Potato Balls



3 cups cooked yams or sweet potatoes	¼ C. butter
¾ C. brown sugar	2 T. milk
¼ t salt	½ t. grated lemon rind
8 marshmallows	½ C. crushed corn flakes

Mash sweet potatoes. Add butter, sugar, milk, salt and lemon rind. With tablespoon, scoop up about ¼ C. of mixture. Center with marshmallow. Cover with more potato. Shape into ball. Roll each ball in crushed corn flakes. Place in buttered baking dish. Bake until marshmallows begin to ooze about 20 mins. at 350°. Makes 8 balls.



## We Remember...



### *Snellville High School Alumni Deaths*

**Gloria Juhan Odum** a graduate with the class of 1951 died September 11, 2010.

**Joyce Hazelrigs Brownlee** died September 14, 2010. She graduated in 1951.

On November 4, 2010, **Emily Jane Rawlins** died. She was in the class of 1954.

**Jeanne Nash Fuller** graduated in 1944. She died November 7, 2010.

**Annette Pate Clower**, the mother of former mayor Emmett Clower, died November 28, 2010. She graduated in 1937.

**Alta Mae Chesser**, a graduate in the class of 1948, died December 12, 2010.

## Also Remembered...



**James T. Jackson** died September 24, 2010. He was the husband of Edna Moon Jackson of the class of 1938.

**William "Mac" McCluskey** died October 10, 2010.

**William Allen Bowman** died November 24, 2010.

On December 1, 2010 **Lauri Jean Wade** died. She was the daughter of George Brown, class of 1949, and Thelma Moon, class of 1955.



**Officers of the Snellville Historical Society**

**President.....Carolyn Kirkland  
Vice President.....Elaine Roberts  
Secretary.....Janet Gibson  
Treasurer.....Lynette Couch**

**Directors at Large  
Ann Britt  
Neita Snell  
Emmett Clower**

**Annual Membership**

**Individual \$15  
Family... \$25  
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**Carolyn Kirkland...770-972-4729  
Or  
Lynette Couch.....770-972-1457**

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770-985-3512**

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Carolyn Kirkland at 770-972-4729**

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