

Gloryland Train



A History
of the
Old Ruskin Church

Ruskin, Georgia



Preface

Eudora Welty writes at the beginning of her essay “Some Notes on River Country,” “a place that ever was lived in is like a fire that never goes out”. This fire is what I feel when I visit a place and why I think the preservation of the past matters. The arrangement of the windows and doors in a building, ancient trees surrounding a home place that no longer exists, rural churches located on back roads leading to settlements abandoned ---all of these tell a story about the builder, the ways a place was used, and the people that used it. In the case of the Old Ruskin Church, I felt the essence of its past the first time I entered it and that fire burns brighter with the study of it. Located on a narrow, unpaved road that tunnels through planted pines, the church is enchanting because of its distinctive architecture but also because of its incongruous setting. The church is located about seven miles southwest of Waycross in an area of Ware County that now consists of planted pines and wetlands—more akin to the wilderness of the Okefenokee Swamp than to a community.

“... a place that ever was lived in is like a fire that never goes out.”

Since no nearby buildings date from the same time period, any passerby would be curious about its history.

Eudora Welty goes on to say that this fire of a place “flares up. It smolders for some time, it is fanned or smothered by circumstance, but its being is intact, forever fluttering within it, the result of some original ignition.” That is certainly true of the Old Ruskin Church. The environment surrounding the church has been “fanned and smothered” several times since the church’s formation in 1896, as various economic endeavors drew residents to the area and drove them away. Thanks to the congregation and community that love and treasure it; its being remains beautifully intact. I believe that the original ignition was not only reverence but also a determination to inspire the young community to dream big.

I hope that this study of the Old Ruskin Church helps to preserve this architectural treasure and answer some of the questions about its history.

Sharman Southall
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Old Ruskin Church

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Introduction

In the early 1990s, planning began to widen US Highway 84/SR 38 from Waycross to Homerville as part of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP). The GRIP was originally adopted in 1989 by the Georgia General Assembly with the purpose

of stimulating economic growth via an improved transportation network within the state. Because the proposed widening would employ federal funding, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 required the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to take into account the effects of this undertaking on historic properties. During the planning process for the



transportation project, a number of architectural historians surveyed the area to identify historic resources located within the area of potential effects of the proposed project. The earliest surveys for historic resources identified the Old Ruskin Church as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic places for its significance in the area of architecture. Although the proposed road

would not physically affect the church, the widened road would be located closer to it, constituting a visual change and an adverse effect. Because of the adverse effect, GDOT agreed to mitigate the impact. Initial mitigation plans called for the planting of additional trees in front of the church to screen the view of the widened roadway. Because the area is prone to fires, and the proximity of trees potentially hazardous, the congregation felt that it would be more valuable to the church to research and document its history.

Researching the history of a small, rural church has particular challenges. Many rural churches are not affiliated with larger associations or councils. If the church does not keep written records or the written records have been lost, other methods must be utilized, and this is true of the Old Ruskin Church. The oral tradition of current members is one way to document past activities. The Old Ruskin Church has a few long-time members who assisted in this endeavor. Reverend Johnnie Crumbley currently serves as the pastor of the church and has been a member since he returned to the area after World War II. Reverend Raymond Strickland was also interviewed because he has been a pastor for this and other area churches since the 1970s. At the time of the interviews, both men were in their 90s, both were born in Ware County and feel a strong connection with the area around the Okefenokee Swamp. Research on the early days of the Old Ruskin Church relied heavily on the South Georgia Historic Newspaper Archive which contains digital and searchable records of the Waycross Headlight, the Waycross Herald, and the Waycross Journal from 1884 through 1914. Considerable research has been conducted on the utopian community that was located in the area known as Ruskin. Although the church formation preceded this settlement and has outlasted it by over 100 years, the existing research provided some information about the





(Top) Ruskin, a Utopian community, was established in the area in 1899. Scrip issued by Ruskin Commonwealth was used as local tender by its members between 1899-1902. Source: Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State. (Left) Photograph of church at Ruskin Colony, Ruskin, Ware County, Georgia, 1899-1902. Source: Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

built environment, social activities, and educational development of the area in the early 1900s. The most difficult years to document were between 1920 and 1968. During this period, rural population was in decline, and newspapers seldom reported church news, especially in a small rural community.

The purpose of this history is to tell the story of the Old Ruskin Church as an institution describe the influence it had on the early settlers and the rural lives they led, and record the architecture of the building that so beautifully represents the long history of the church. This document is divided into nine chapters followed by the references used and a collection of newspaper articles about the church and school. Photographs and images of the church and area are also included.

The Significance of Rural Churches in Georgia

The church once symbolized community in the South. In areas too small for a depot, store, or school, a small, clapboard building occasionally topped with a steeple embodied the spiritual and social heritage of an area. In addition to the commemoration of deaths, births, and marriages, the rural church could also serve as the center of education, commerce, and politics. Political and social movements began or were reinforced at the pulpit or on the front steps. It was the place where you wore your Sunday best, got the latest community news, and sang hymns with your neighbors. The church promoted a sense of belonging and ameliorated the isolation of everyday life on the farm. Rural churches as a whole are important historical resources and help tell the story of rural development across the state.

These early churches like the Old Ruskin Church ranged from primitive buildings to more elaborate structures, and they were hand built with whatever local materials were at hand. Though simplistic in design, they projected civilization, order, and safety with an architectural dignity that was appropriate for the center piece of a rural life.

Many of Georgia's historic rural churches still stand, but the communities that once worshipped in them have declined as families abandoned farming and moved to cities. Some churches and congregations



Trinity Methodist Church, Waycross, Ware County, circa 1900. Source: *Vanishing Georgia*, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

have managed to survive, some are barely holding on, and some have become dormant. The simple buildings, and the way of life they represent are both endangered.

The Old Ruskin Church is one of these churches. It is in excellent physical condition, and the congregation, though small, is active and holds regular services. However, the members also recognize that their

numbers have dwindled and that both the beauty and historical importance of the building must be documented.

Early Ware County and Duke

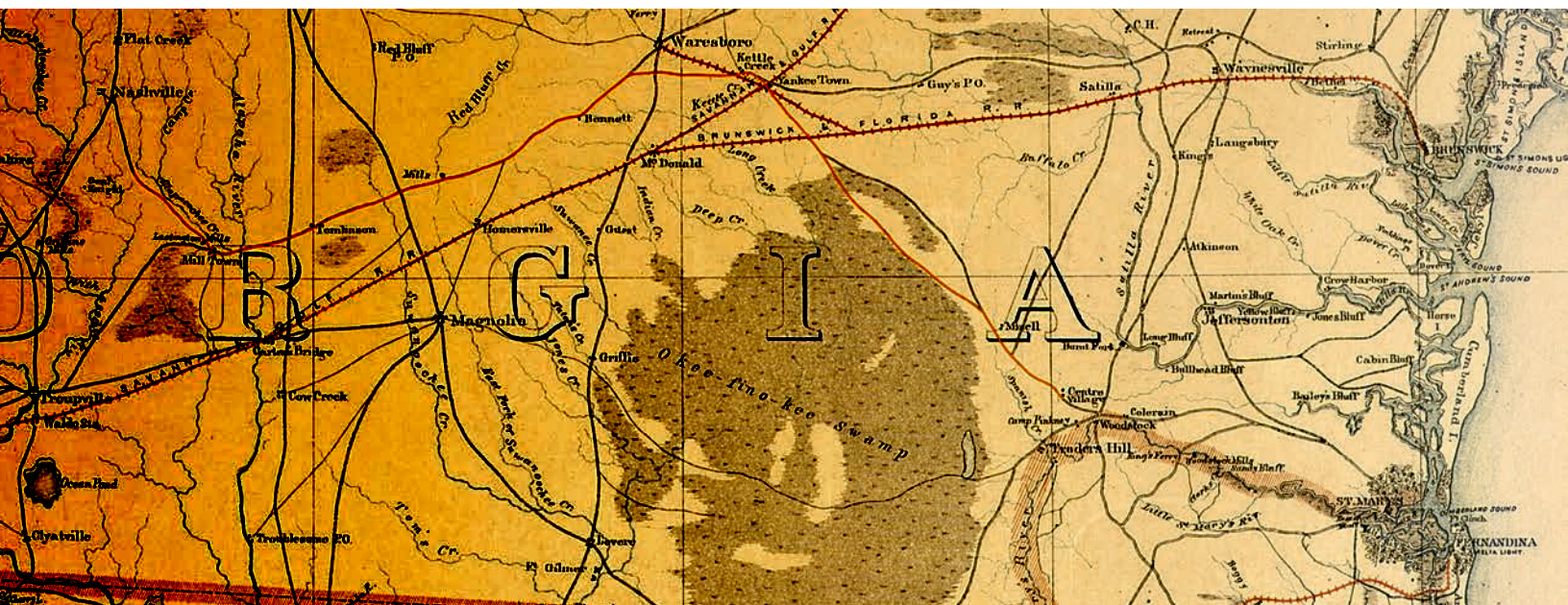
When Georgia was a colony, it was controlled by an elite group of planters located around Augusta and Savannah. Between 1805 and 1833, the state of Georgia conducted eight land lotteries in which land located in the interior of the state was dispersed to small yeoman farmers based on a system of eligibility and chance. As soon as a new wave of pioneers moved in to an area and began the process of clearing land and planting crops, places of worship quickly appeared. Sometimes the congregation met with barely a roof over their head in a “brush arbor,” a simple open-air structure. But soon there emerged a communal place of fellowship and worship that usually involved a simple, one room building with various structural enhancements that were part of the accepted religious architecture of the time.

Ware County was formed in 1824, and Waycross was designated the county seat in 1873. Located in extreme southeast Georgia, the Okefenokee Swamp dominates the lower portion of the county. In 1889, part of the swamp was purchased by the

Suwannee Canal Company with the intention of cutting the large growth timber and then draining the land to use for crops. The company began to construct a canal from the St. Mary’s River into the Okefenokee Swamp, but this undertaking was abandoned. In the early 1900s, most of the holdings of the Suwannee Canal Company were acquired by the Hebard Cypress Company which built tram roads into the swamp to transport lumber to its mill.¹ The harvesting of cypress and other timbers, the building of railroads, and the wilderness of the Okefenokee influenced the lives of early settlers and the citizens of Ware County today.

William Stacy Bailey, born around 1848, settled in the Waycross area with his family around 1855. He would eventually own 490 acres in Duke, the site of a railroad camp used during the construction of the Atlantic & Gulf Railroad. Mr. Bailey established a sawmill, built a home, and cultivated the land. In 1892, his son, James Stacy Bailey was appointed postmaster of Duke, as the community surrounding the Old Ruskin Church was known at that time.

Detail from 1864 map shows early Ware County, prior to establishment of Waycross at the intersection of the Savannah & Gulf Railroad and a trunkline from the Brunswick & Florida line to Waresboro. Source: *U.S. Coast Survey Map, Northern Part of Florida, 1864*, <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/histcountymaps/ware1864bmap.htm>.



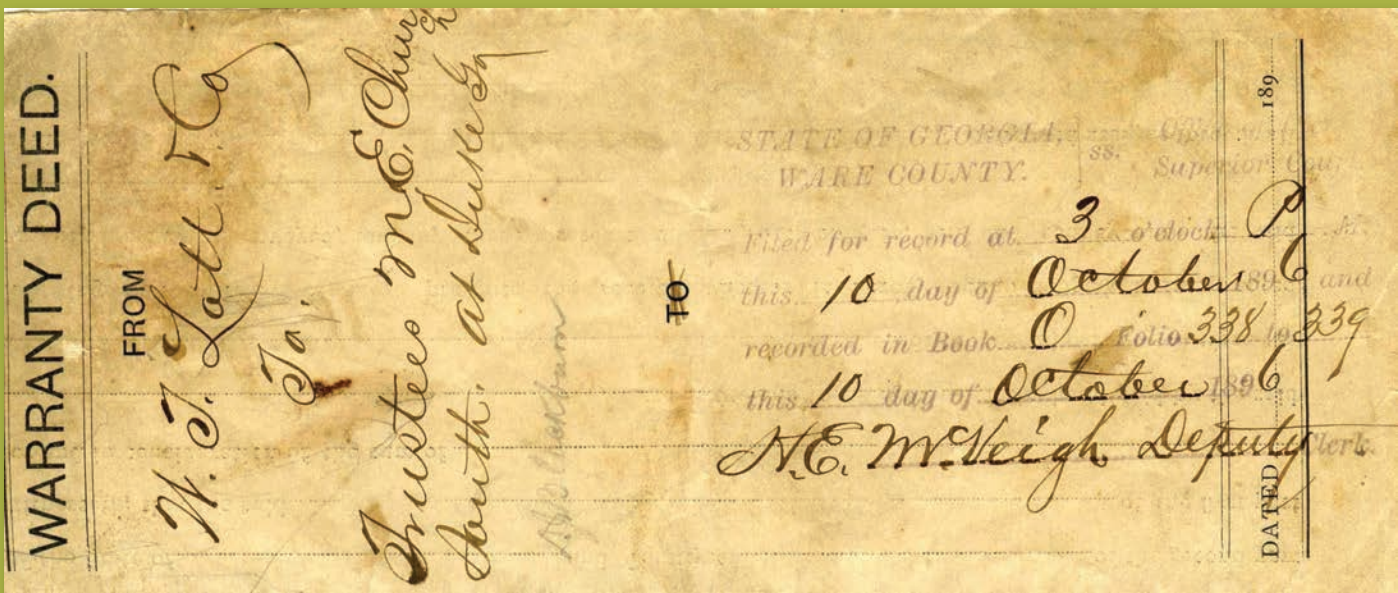


James Stacy Bailey was known to be a devout Methodist, and a church established in the area likely began as an arbor church served by the Methodist circuit riders. During the early days, the large circuit area around Waycross was described as one with scattered inhabitants primarily engaged in agriculture. Travel was difficult due to poor roads and "not a bridge in the whole district."² A review of the Waycross Herald lists Reverend George W. Mathews and Reverend M. C. Austin as preaching in Duke during 1892. Reverend Austin lived in Brunswick, located more than 65 miles from Duke.

In 1896, the parcel of land where the Old Ruskin Church now stands was deeded from W. T. Lott & Company to the Trustees of the M.E. Church South at Duke, Georgia. The trustees were listed on the document as W.T. Lott, J. S. Bailey, C. L. Thigpen,

(Above) Hebard Cypress Company workers loading cypress timber from Okefenokee Swamp and transporting it to company mill in Waycross. Source: State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/4460>. (Inset) Lumber and turpentine distilling anchored the town's local economy. Source: Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

and D. J. Blackburn. Several signatures are also located at the bottom of the deed. Along with the signatures of J.S. Bailey, C. L. Thigpen, and D. J. Blackburn are the signatures of Warren Lott and two signatures that are illegible. All of these men have ties to the community known as Duke, the lumber industry, or the Lott family. Warren L. and Walter Thomas Lott were sons of Dr. Daniel Lott who along with Mr. William Stacy Bailey were considered the founders of Waycross. Warren Lott was the City of Waycross Treasurer and participated in a number of business ventures during this time. In April of 1896,



(Above) 1896 Warranty deed conveying acreage to the Trustees of the M.E. Church South at Duke Georgia for a church. Source: Ware County Deed Book O:338-339.

(Left) Walter T. Lott (1857-1896) was instrumental in the construction of the church. Source: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=53567432>.



he announced his candidacy for City Ordinary. Walter Thomas Lott married a daughter of William Stacy Bailey and lived in Duke where he operated a sawmill with C.L. Thigpen, James Stacy Bailey, and Henry C. Williams.³ Walter T. Lott was said to be a very devout man who gathered his workers in the morning for prayer. His family believes that he “built or helped build” the church in Duke.⁴ Unfortunately, Walter T. Lott died on December 29, 1896 and would never see the church building completed. Calvin L. Thigpen was also related by marriage to Mr. Bailey and operated the aforementioned sawmill with Bailey and Williams. According to census records, Daniel Blackburn was a farmer in the area between Duke and Needham. One of the illegible signatures on the deed could be James Knox Jr. Mr. Knox was

employed by the bank of Waycross as Mr. Warren Lott’s assistant and was also an appraiser for the City of Waycross.⁵

Newspapers from this time period refer to the Methodist Church in Duke but do not discuss an actual church building until 1902. An article dated

July 4, 1902 in the *Waycross Journal* entitled "New Church, Services Held near Ruskin and Several Members were Received" reports that "after preaching, Rev. Moses Thrift made it known that the church doors were now open and three came forward and were accepted into full membership."⁶ Reverend Thrift, a resident of Ruskin, also preached at area Baptist churches and would establish a primitive Baptist church near Manor in 1907, but he did reside in Ruskin. In these early days of Ware County's development, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians worshiped together so the use of a local minister of a different denomination is not surprising.

The builder of the church is unclear, but an article in the *Waycross Journal* in 1904 relates the community effort required to construct another new church during this time. Although this article documents the activities associated with the building of Grace Church, it is assumed that some if not all materials were similarly donated and funds were collected for any other construction costs associated with the Old Ruskin Church.

Because ministers held services in multiple churches and regularly blended denominations, one can derive much about these early services by reading descriptions of services held at other churches. Reverend Thrift's preaching style and the reaction of the congregation to it was described in a letter from Howe Cobb Jackson to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* dated 1890.⁷ Fifty congregants were present at a log church located in Brantley County when ".....two preachers favored us with discourses - the Rev. Richard Lee and Rev. Moses Thrift. If the faith of these pilgrims be measured by the time they spend at their devotions, they all deserve a high place, for services commenced at a little before twelve and wound up a little after four. Each of the ministers opened by saying he had preached



Photograph of Elder Moses Thrift at Ruskin Depot, Ware County, Georgia, 1918. Source: *Vanishing Georgia*, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

“...If the faith of these pilgrims be measured by the time they spend at their devotions, they all deserve a high place...”

Photograph of group of colonists arriving by train, Ware County, Georgia, Sept. 16, 1899. Source: Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

out and had nothing to say; yet each occupied about two hours to get rid of that nothing.” One can imagine that the services held in the Old Ruskin Church were similarly long and passionate.

The letter continues by describing the segregation of men and women and also reinforces Mr. Jackson’s opinion that the length of the service was excessive. “The men and women were separated during the services, and everything was conducted in a very democratic way. Men, women and children would go out and return as often as they desired, the sleepy slept, and the thirsty made repeated trips to the water bucket. Generally, however, the behavior of the congregation was devout, and there were beyond doubt many good people present. [But] the exercises were entirely too long and wearied out everybody.”



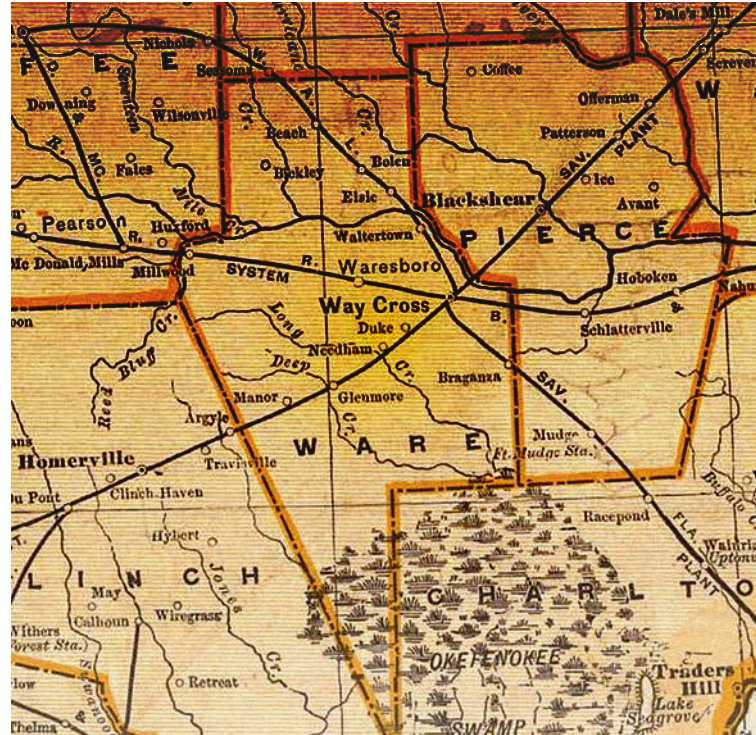
Duke Becomes Ruskin

At around the same time of the formation of the church, a utopian community would briefly occupy the rural community of Duke. Initially referred to as the Ruskin Community at Duke, Georgia, the area soon became known as Ruskin. The name was also applied to the church, and both the community and church retain that name today.

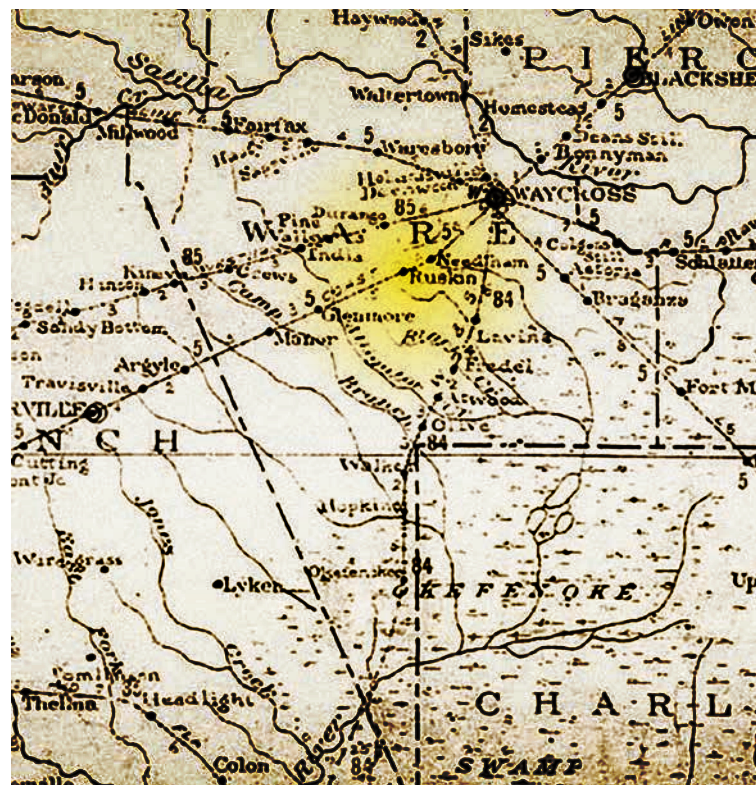
Socialist communities had grown in America around the turn of the twentieth century. The Panic of 1893, which was the worst economic depression the United States had ever experienced at the time, caused many people to lose faith in the American government, industrial capitalism, and the capitalistic dream.⁸ Socialism was an alternative, and over 250 cooperative or utopian communities, self-sufficient and separated from the capitalistic system, were established as havens from economic oppression.⁹ Most of these communities failed due to impracticality and infighting, and the Ruskin Commonwealth was fated to last only two years.

Fleeing from a failed colony in Tennessee, 240 individuals moved over 600 miles on a chartered train to their new home in Duke in 1899. They merged with the American Settlers Association, a smaller group established a year earlier and comprised of a group of farmers from Ohio and Indiana, to form the Ruskin Commonwealth. The group wished to establish a way of life that expressed their stated goal "to create good homes, scientifically constructed, supplied with every convenience that the rich enjoy..."¹⁰

After the first year in Georgia, the number of colonists dropped by half. Unlike the earlier location in Dickson, Tennessee, Ruskin was not surrounded by fertile land and good sources of water. Ruskinites were plagued with disease, unprofitable business



(Above) 1899 Map showing Duke, Georgia. (Below) 1915 showing name changed to Ruskin, Georgia. Source: <http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/histcountymaps/warehistmaps.htm>.





(Left) Part of Ruskin Community showing Hotel and other buildings adjacent to railroad. (Bottom) Sawmill of George and W. H. Thrift, Sr., Ruskin, 1901. Source: *Vanishing Georgia*, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

ventures, and a continual slide into poverty that eventually led to the auction of the property that they had acquired to settle its debts. The Ruskin Commonwealth was effectively disbanded in the autumn of 1901. Some members stayed, some moved to form a new Ruskin colony in Florida, and others returned north.

But while the Ruskinites inhabited the land, they operated several factories that produced brooms, coffee, leather belts, and suspenders. They also farmed, operated a sawmill, a planing mill, and a cobbler shop. Using the printing equipment that they brought from their Tennessee location, they continued to publish *Coming Nation*, a socialist



communalist newspaper with a circulation of 150,000 to 200,000.¹¹ Today many assume that the Old Ruskin Church was also built by the colonists, but religious affiliation was not part of the economic purpose of the Ruskin Commonwealth, and the colony had disbanded by the time the church was constructed. Although some of the colonists may have attended services with the congregation, the church was formed prior to their migration to the area and would last long after the demise of the Ruskin Commonwealth.

From reviewing local newspapers articles published during the time of the Ruskin Commonwealth, the text reflected acceptance of the presence and activities of the colonists by the residents of Ware County. The social activities, including a band, dances, and a 4th of July celebration were highlighted. The business activities were described in positive terms as well.



(Top) The Coming Nation, Ruskin, Printing Office and Dining Room. (Above) The Coming Nation's Printing Office Force (From Left to Right.) Charles McDill (Son), Dr. Henry Clay McDill (Colony Notes Man), Harp McDill, J. H. Denny, J. K. Calkins, May Kennedy, Mrs. Bernard, Grace Kennedy, L. O. Roselle, Clara Jackson, Mrs. Shaw, Jere Rogers, Verne Reed. (Below) Ruskin Band at Ruskin Hotel, Ruskin, Ware County, Georgia between 1899 and 1902. Source: Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.





Mary Miller, Ruskin, 1902. Source:
Vanishing Georgia, Georgia
Division of Archives and History,
Office of Secretary of State.

“the
colony
may
reorganize,
but
fail:
NEVER.”

Ruskin Health Coffee was frequently advertised in the newspaper in 1900. The Ruskin Colony also exhibited their wares at the county fair. Their exhibit was described as “indeed creditable and their committee is courteous and cordial.” Even during 1901 when the articles reported the sale of the newspaper plant, land, buildings, and musical instruments associated with the colony, the Waycross Herald also printed an editorial that protested the opinion that the Ruskin Commonwealth had been a failure, stating that “the colony may reorganize, but fail: NEVER.”

The last reference to the colony was a 1902 report that the sale of land and buildings had occurred. Mr. John G. Steffe (alternately spelled Steffes in some records) had been listed earlier in 1901 as an elected official of the Ruskin Commonwealth. He was said to have purchased all 700 acres and demolished some of the buildings described in the article as “old.” Mr. Steffe had planned to raise sugar cane, sweet potatoes, and broom corn on the land. The broom corn was to be used in the manufacture of

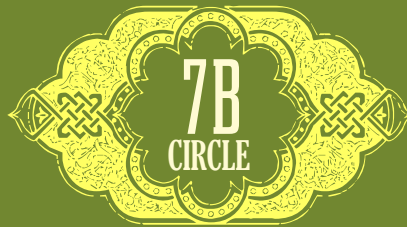
brooms using the equipment left behind. Mr. Steffe continued to farm the property until his retirement around 1910. He did write a letter to the editor of the newspaper in January 1910 defending socialism against “certain statements recently made by one of the Waycross ministers”. At this time, Mr. Steffe was listed in a city directory as living in Waycross, so it is unlikely that he attended church services in Ruskin or was referring to comments from the pastor of the Old Ruskin Church.

It is not known how much impact the Ruskin Commonwealth had on the Old Ruskin Church. The newspaper accounts do not indicate any strong positive association with the church or any Commonwealth is that the name of the area continues to be called Ruskin and the collection of photographs of the utopian community included in Vanishing Georgia. This collection gives an idea of the built environment and social activities in and around Ruskin during the brief life of the utopian community and the early years of the church.

After the Ruskin Commonwealth dissolved, the area returned to agriculture with a few families engaged in farming. No longer active due to railroad construction, timbering, or occupation by a group searching for a cooperative community in a rural setting, the small, once thriving community grew quiet.

Prohibition and the “7 B Circle”

The period from 1890 through 1920 is often referred to by historians as the Progressive Era. Known as a period when social activism and political reform flourished, many Progressives supported prohibition in order to destroy the political power of local bosses based in saloons. Home Circles and Home Mission Societies were religious organizations associated with all denominations. They developed from around the time of Reconstruction and some survive today. Not all churches had a Home Circle or Home Mission but many Waycross area churches did and it appears that many of these focused on temperance. More than a bible study group, these organizations sponsored community improvements such as playgrounds or education while some concentrated on improving the parsonage of their church. During this time period, the groups tended to be separated by gender. According to articles in the Waycross newspapers, the Old Ruskin Church was used by the 7B Circle in the early 1900s. The 7B Circle was comprised of young men, and newspaper articles confirm that part of the mission of the group was to ask each member to sign an abstinence agreement. Since the temperance movement extended into the 1920s, it is likely that the 7B Circle continued to meet at the church at least until the eighteenth amendment went into effect in 1920.



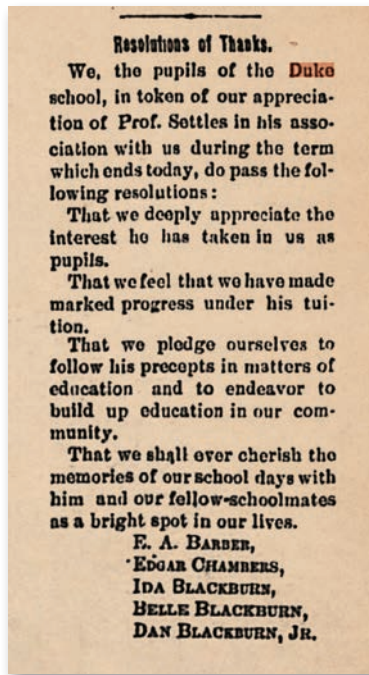
The Duke School

Like churches, rural schools played a central role in their communities. In many cases, the establishment of churches and schools were intertwined. The development of the educational system in the state was slow and lagged the nation, but by the turn of the twentieth century, Georgia had more than 3,000 rural schools dotting the landscape.¹² A growing realization developed in Georgia that northern industrialists and opportunists were coming south to buy mining, water power, and timber rights. It was the beginning of the South's recognition that it must educate its children if they were to be a part of the new sources of prosperity and wealth that the northerners were seeking. The state constitution of 1777 provided for schools to be established in every county and supported by state funds, but few schools were built. Some Georgia children went to private schools but more common were rural schools supported by the community. Over the next 100 years, the state legislature passed various acts to fund the establishment of schools, increase the state level funding, and to allow counties to supplement state funds by levying a tax similar to incorporated cities and towns, which had started providing education through a local tax. After the Civil War, legislation was enacted to provide a system of common schools for white children with a state superintendant, county commissioners, and three trustees in each county district. By the end of the 19th century, free public education had advanced greatly in the state; but due to the devastation of the Civil War, segregationist policies, short academic years, and the inability of local or county governments to raise taxes to support public education, Georgia public schools still offered a poor quality education when compared with other states.

According to some current members of the church, a school was once located next to the church on the adjoining two acres. It was a public school and not strictly associated with the church, but because historical information about the school was difficult to obtain and because the school and church convey the aspirations once held for this community, the members descriptions and selected newspaper accounts are included here. In 2013, Reverend Crumbley, one of the parishioners interviewed about the history of the church, remembered the school and had attended class there. Reverend Crumbley thought that the two acre plot for the school had been donated by W. T. Lott and J.S. Bailey similar to the church property. He also remembered that the school building was often used during church revivals and the church was often used for school performances. The earliest mention of a school was found in a *Waycross Herald* article from February 23, 1897 that stated that the trustees of the Duke School were being elected. Mention of the Duke School was also found in the *Waycross Weekly Herald* issue dated October 20, 1900. This article identified the pupils, described as "studious and polite," as follows:

- E.A. Barber
- Edgar Chambers
- Ida Blackburn
- Belle (Isabelle) Blackburn
- Daniel Blackburn

Due to the reference of the Duke School in the 1897 newspaper article and the statewide efforts to provide education, it is quite possible that the building for the school preceded the construction of the church.



Newspaper clipping. Source: *Waycross Weekly Journal*, Volume XXI, Number 35, October 20, 1900, Page 7.

Beginning in 1894, almost 3,000 rural school houses were constructed with locally raised money. Prior to this time period, it was common to reuse donated agricultural buildings or other buildings for use as a school. Like the church, it is possible that the Duke community supported the construction of a school with labor and materials. By 1897, a school had been established in Manor while a school would be established in Glenmore by 1901.

The first principal of the Duke School was Sterling Preston Settles, a well known educator in the Waycross area. Professor Settles had organized the first high school for boys in Waycross in 1885. Many years after being a student at the school, Inez Blackburn described Professor Settles as a "stout man, and he knew how to teach. He knew everything. He was a good teacher, and he liked history."¹³ Judging by newspaper reports on other schools being established during this time, the Duke School was likely funded by patrons who selected several trustees to attend to the operation of the school.

In late 1899, the Ruskin Commonwealth also established a school "in a rickety, abandoned church on colony property."¹⁴ A total of 110 students were taught by four teachers. J. W. Denny, the principal of the school, managed to recruit a few local children who paid a small tuition fee in an attempt to supplement the lack of county funding. By March of 1901, the financially strapped school had closed, and most colonists enrolled their children in the public school.

Throughout the early 1900s the public school at Ruskin (also renamed when the area was referred to as the Ruskin Commonwealth) was mentioned in Waycross newspapers as it "progressed very nicely." By 1903, it had been expanded into the high school grades with Miss Simpson as the teacher. In 1907, the school term in Ruskin was listed as 5 months, and teachers were paid a \$35 salary. Since the teacher's salary was paid from local taxes, the article also touted the benefits of offering education to children, particularly in a rural location.

School consolidation occurred during the years between the two world wars. A major study by the State Board of Education in 1920 determined that so many decentralized schools were costly to maintain and operate. The study recommended fewer, better schools. In 1923, schools in Thrift, Griffin, and Ruskin were consolidated and located in the school building in Ruskin¹⁵. About ten years later, the school in Ruskin closed and students were transferred to Manor in another consolidation effort.

The school building survived this change and was purchased by Toomer Crawford and used as a house until it was demolished around 1960, according to

Reverend Johnnie Crumbley, the current pastor of Old Ruskin Church. The house currently located next to the Old Ruskin Church (east) was constructed in the approximate location of the old school building.

Reverend Crumbley remembers the school as a one-room, wood frame schoolhouse that had two rooms added in the late 1920s making the footprint of the school I-shaped. There were three rooms, and the newer two rooms featured bands of windows. The exterior was painted, and the windows were glazed, according to his recollection.

Old Ruskin Church After 1920

The history of the church from 1920 through present day was more difficult to research and relies on the memories of the remaining members due to the slow, steady decline of the rural population of Ware County and the congregation of the Old Ruskin Church. Local newspapers did not report news for

The 1930 Population Census recorded only 16 households in Ruskin, the majority of which were either associated with the turpentine industry or farming.

Form 1242
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE—BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
FIFTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1930
POPULATION SCHEDULE

State: Georgia
County: Ware
Incorporated place: Millie Dist. (2214, 111)

Enumeration District No. 1507
Supervisor's District No. 15

Estimated by me on April 16, 1930

FLACK OF ABOVE	NAME	RELATION	BIRTH DATA	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION	EDUCATION	PLACE OF BIRTH			MOTHER TONGUE OR NATIVE LANGUAGE OF FOREIGN BORN	COGNAMES, ETC.	OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY		EMPLOYMENT	VETERAN
						FATHER	MOTHER	PLACE			OCCUPATION	INDUSTRY		
1	W. M. Seale	George J. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
2		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
3		Henry J. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
4		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
5		Willie M. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
6		Agnes Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
7		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
8		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
9		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
10	133 123	Richard	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
11		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
12		Maggie Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
13		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
14		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
15		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
16		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
17		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
18	124 124	Richard	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
19		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
20		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
21	125 125	Barber	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
22		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
23		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
24	126 126	Crawford	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
25		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
26		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
27		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
28		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
29	127 127	Barber	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
30		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
31		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
32		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
33		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
34	128 128	Hampton	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
35		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
36		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
37	129 129	King	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
38		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
39	130 130	Mobley	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1
40		John S. Head	10 4 1860	W. M.	High School	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia			Farmer	1918	20	1



This photograph taken in 1961 along the tracks indicates that Ruskin was a placename for a one thriving community. Source: Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Office of Secretary of State.

small churches as frequently as those located within the city of Waycross, so aside from confirming that services continued to be held in the church, no information was derived from local newspaper accounts.

In researching the church's history, the library and archives of the Arthur Moore Methodist Museum in St. Simons Island, Georgia was contacted. When the staff accessed the Methodist archives, only one entry in the 1968 Journal of the South Georgia Annual Conference was found. It stated that Ruskin on the Gilchrist Park charge was discontinued. In the past, the Old Ruskin Church was also on charges or on the circuit with New Prospect, Glenmore, Wood's Chapel, St. John's Chapel, Winona Park, and Manor churches.¹⁶ When the charge was discontinued, the church records should have been given to the Gilchrist Park United Methodist Church which was still an active church in 2014. Unfortunately, no one from that church was able locate the records when contacted. The Old Ruskin Church continued to hold services after 1968, but the denomination of the church was no longer considered Methodist by the congregants or pastors.

During the 1980s, Dr. Ted Harris with Waycross College¹⁷ contacted the church in connection with

his studies of the Ruskin Commonwealth. According to Reverend Crumbley, Dr. Harris conducted interviews with church members and may have obtained some of the church records during this work. At the end of this research, Dr. Harris presented a program "Ruskin: Why Early Socialist Communities Failed" at the college on April 5, 1989. Unfortunately, Dr. Harris died in 2004, and his papers were not archived at Waycross College or any other institution.¹⁸ It is not known if these papers included any additional information about the church's history.

What remains of the history of the Old Ruskin Church was obtained through interviews with two long-time members and pastors of the church and natives of Ware County.

Reverend Johnnie Crumbley

Anyone familiar with Ruskin recognizes that Reverend Johnnie Crumbley is the man most responsible for the preservation of the Old Ruskin Church and its memories. He has been a member all his life and has been active in the pastoring of the church for the past 50 years. Johnnie Crumbley was born in 1922 in a house located two miles from

Reverend Johnnie Crumbley
on Ruskin Church porch,
2015. Courtesy of Sharman
Southall.

the church. As a child, he attended the church and studied at the Ruskin School until it was closed and the students transferred to Manor. He recalls walking to the school and church on an unpaved wagon road that roughly follows Griffin Road. He also remembers using a tram road to get to the school and church.¹⁹ After suffering injuries in World War II and being held Prisoner of War in Germany, he returned to Ruskin and worked for the railroad. In 1964, he became the Superintendent of the Sunday school at the Old Ruskin Church. At the encouragement of his wife, Mary Belle, he began to deliver the sermon on Sunday and was ordained by E. P. Nelson in the late 1960s.

In the late 1970s, he asked Raymond Strickland to preach a sermon at the church, and he accepted the invitation. They continued to preach together and conduct baptisms in the St. Marys River until Mr. Strickland left the Waycross area in 2012. At the time of this writing, Reverend Crumbley is 92 years of age and still preaches at the Old Ruskin Church.

Over the years, Reverend Crumbley has been an ardent caretaker of the church building and the souls within it. Both the interior and exterior of the beautiful little church have been well-maintained and appear to be generally unaltered. Whether it was Mr. Bailey, the original trustees of the church, or another unnamed builder who designed and built it, the Old Ruskin Church would be immediately recognizable to these men who have been gone nearly 100 years. Although the historic setting once included a railroad camp, various sawmills and turpentine camps, and a utopian community, the current setting is simpler now but continues to change subtly with the growth of pines and their subsequent harvest.



Reverend Raymond Strickland

Raymond W. Strickland was born near Braganza in Ware County on February 22, 1921. His first memories of the Old Ruskin Church are of visiting family in the area during the 1920s with his father. He remembers that a Model T Ford had been modified with train wheels to run up and down the abandoned tram line to deliver the mail. The sight of a car driving along the tracks delighted all of the children in the area. By 1931, both of Mr. Strickland's parents had died, and he and his brothers lived with various family members. He worked the fields for his Uncle Dock for room and board. For a time, he lived with his uncle's family in the former log cabin of Obediah Barber, whose exploits earned him the title the "King of the Okefenokee." Today the cabin is part of a National Historic Landmark and is known as Obediah's Okefenok. At age 19, Mr. Strickland enlisted in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). After telling the recruiter in Homerville that he was



Before becoming a pastor, Reverend Raymond Strickland had a musical career that included performances at the Grand Ole Opry. Courtesy of Reverend Strickland.

willing to travel, he was assigned to Camp Tulelake in California, a base for the CCC that would transform the newly established Lava Beds National Monument by building roads and trails, install electric and telephone lines, and construct the park administrative and visitor services buildings. For his work, Mr. Strickland received room and board in an Army-style camp and \$30 a month, of which \$25 was sent home to his family. Mr. Strickland sent this allotment to his Uncle Dock Strickland, whom he encouraged to buy a radio. While at the camp, Mr. Strickland met Johnnie Crumbley, also assigned to Camp Tulelake. The men immediately became friends and traded stories about their lives on opposite sides of the Swamp. After his service at Camp Tulelake, Mr. Strickland worked at various jobs in New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Montana. A cattle-brander, laborer, tobacco picker, and soldier, Mr. Strickland taught himself the harmonica and began to play professionally in bars and “honky tonks.”

By the 1970s, Mr. Strickland had returned to Waycross, married, had become a step-father and father, and had begun to preach at the Woodard Chapel

Congregational Methodist Church with Reverend Emerson “Pete” Hayes. Thirty years after meeting at Camp Tulelake, Raymond Strickland encountered Johnnie Crumbley by chance while attending a meeting at the Ware County Courthouse. The two exchanged details about their lives since Camp Tulelake and discovered another parallel—they were both preaching. Reverend Crumbley invited Mr. Strickland to deliver the sermon the following Sunday at the Old Ruskin Church. Mr. Strickland preached that sermon and many more. In 1997, the members of the Old Ruskin Church, including his wife Lucy D. Strickland, signed a certificate of ordination. Reverend Strickland also brought his considerable musical talents to the church and the area. Along with other local musicians, he recorded a gospel song compilation entitled “Gospel Train.” On the cover of the compilation is a photograph of the Old Ruskin Church.

When Reverend Strickland prepared to leave Ware County in 2012, a reporter called Reverend Strickland “a legend” in the area. When interviewed for this history, Reverend Strickland quickly denied that he was a legend “but a simple country preacher.”

At the time of this writing, Reverend Strickland is 94 years of age and lives in Lawrenceville, Georgia, with his daughter. During an interview for this document, he played several gospel songs on his harmonica and sang several more, including Gospel Train²⁰ which is his daughter's favorite. When asked what he missed most about the Old Ruskin Church, he replied "being around good people."

The Architecture and Setting of the Old Ruskin Church

Most historic rural churches that dot the Georgia rural landscape are simply designed and constructed. Although the Old Ruskin Church shares the simple floorplan of most rural churches, the embellishment generously applied to the exterior is not humble. The decorative wood shingles in the gables, elaboration along the eaves, scrolled brackets, and ornamental porch balustrade are the same elements featured in abundance on buildings in the Waycross Historic District, which was home to many of the town's community leaders and listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. Although separated from this neighborhood, the church possesses a high degree of sophistication considering its location at the threshold of the Okefenokee.

In general terms, the form of small rural churches can be classified as either classical or gothic.²¹ A rural church employing a classical style commonly has a full width integral porch with vernacular classical columns supporting the triangular pediment on the front façade like the example pictured at right. Viewed from the front, the shape of this church is square. The architecture of the Old Ruskin Church would be generally classified as gothic because of the verticality of the structure, as

well as its embellishment. The steeply pitched roof, side brackets used on the porch to mimic arches, and the decorative verge boards are features of the Gothic or Gothic Revival style. The Gothic Revival style began in England in the mid-eighteenth century and migrated to America in 1837. This architecture was also used for houses, but the style was not used as prominently in the South as in other parts of the country.

(Top) This church from Talbot County is classically designed with formal columns and triangular pediment over the entry. (Bottom) The Gothic style of the Old Ruskin Church is reflected in the steeply pitched lines of the roofs, the pentagonal roof vents, the peaked drip molds above the windows, and the porch brackets that form arches.





(Left) The louvered window openings on the bell tower allow the sound of the ringing bell to carry over the surrounding area. The bell can be rung by pulling a rope located in the interior of the church.

(Opposite) The interior of the Old Ruskin features four rows of wooden pews separated by a half-wall in the center of the sanctuary. The barrel ceiling is also visible in these photographs.

(Opposite Center) Ruskin Church's Floor Plan. Drawn by Terri Gillett, 2015.

The architectural style of the Old Ruskin Church can also be described as Carpenter Gothic which is the vernacular form of Gothic Revival. By the end of the 19th century, Carpenter Gothic houses and small churches became common in the United States. These structures adapted gothic elements such as pointed arches, steep gables, and towers to traditional American wood frame construction. The invention of the scroll saw and mass-produced wood moldings allowed a few of these structures to mimic the elaborate fenestration of the High Gothic style. But in most cases, Carpenter Gothic buildings were relatively unadorned, retaining only the basic elements of pointed-arch windows and steep gables.

The Old Ruskin Church has a rectangular footprint with a front gable roof and a roof top belfry. This is the most commonly used floor plan of rural churches found in Georgia. The windows and doors are arranged symmetrically, with four windows on each side elevation, and a partial front porch protects the three-bay entrance. The building is oriented to face northwest, with its façade running parallel to the railroad. The building rests on cypress blocks. Reverend Strickland has been under the church and has noted that the sills are 10 x 10 heart pine timbers. He believes that this wood is impervious to termites and resistant to decay.²²

While one would expect a rural church design to be utilitarian with little decoration due to the expense

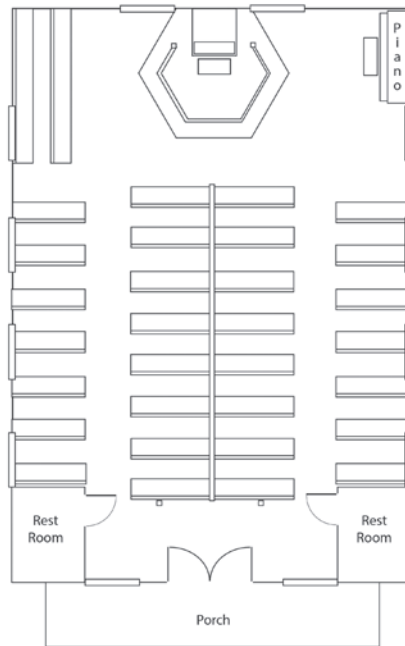
associated with embellishments, the Old Ruskin Church is distinguished by its Victorian decorative detailing applied to its simple form. Spindlework friezes suspended from the porch ceiling, decorative wood shingle gable and tower detailing, elaboration



(Above) The double doors at the front entrance are capped with a pediment. The spindlework friezes and the ornamental porch balustrade are examples of components that were being mass-produced during the period of rapid industrialization from 1860-1900.



along the eaves, scrolled brackets, the use of pentagonal gable vents, and ornamental porch balustrade are featured on the exterior of the church. Most of this decorative woodwork was likely prefabricated and made readily available by the railroad. The window surrounds have a simple pediment or drip-mold. The bell tower features louvered pentagonal vents on all four sides. The church bell remains intact and is rung by pulling a rope from the interior of the church.



beadboard was shaped to form the arch. This material has the capability to go around corners readily, a unique attribute for wood products. Narrow boards can be nailed up to follow a curved piece of molding to create a ceiling with a graceful camber. This feature illustrates the creativity of the builders of both churches. The Ezekial Church is thought to predate the Old Ruskin Church and may have served as an inspiration for its design.

The interior of the church is also largely unaltered. The wood plank flooring is painted. Windows and the double door entrance are surrounded by complex trim with rosette blocks at each corner. The ceiling and walls are covered with beadboard, and the ceiling is barrel-shaped a feature which was also observed in the Ezekial Church located in Ware County. The barrel ceiling is an interesting feature of both churches. Barrel ceilings or barrel vault ceilings often rely upon a series of arches to form the semi-circular support beneath the plaster, wood, or stone finish. Since the ceiling of the Ezkial Church is collapsing, the presence of trusses rather than arches can be seen. Rather than using arches to form the ceiling, a thin variety of

Ezekial Church (Inset) shows many of the same architectural details as the Old Ruskin Church in this 1960 photograph. Ezekial Church (Below) in 2014.





(Above and Right) Four rows of pews face the altar. (Below) Wall-mounted oil lamps were the primary source of lighting, historically.



The pews in the Old Ruskin Church are made of pine put together with screws and nails. The style of the pews is simpler than other "furniture" in the sanctuary. The bench ends go to the floor and are curved but have no elaboration or carving. All pews face the altar. Lighting historically came from two swinging oil chandeliers in the center of the room and oil lamps on brackets along the side walls. Although the church was electrified in the 1950s, the hooks for these earlier fixtures remain. As was common at the time of construction, the men sat on the right of the sanctuary and the women on the left. A unique feature of the Old Ruskin Church is a half-wall that runs between the pews. Oral tradition asserts that the purpose of the wall was to provide privacy for breast-feeding mothers. There are 7 rows of pews on each side of the half-wall with 8 rows



(Above) The altar is raised on a platform that has also been used to stage performances by nearby school groups. In the 1970s, Reverend Crumbley resisted requests to carpet the sanctuary. He carpeted the altar to make kneeling there more comfortable. (Below) Although proposed locations of 214 plots were planned long ago, the Ruskin Cemetery, as the site map is labeled, has never been used.

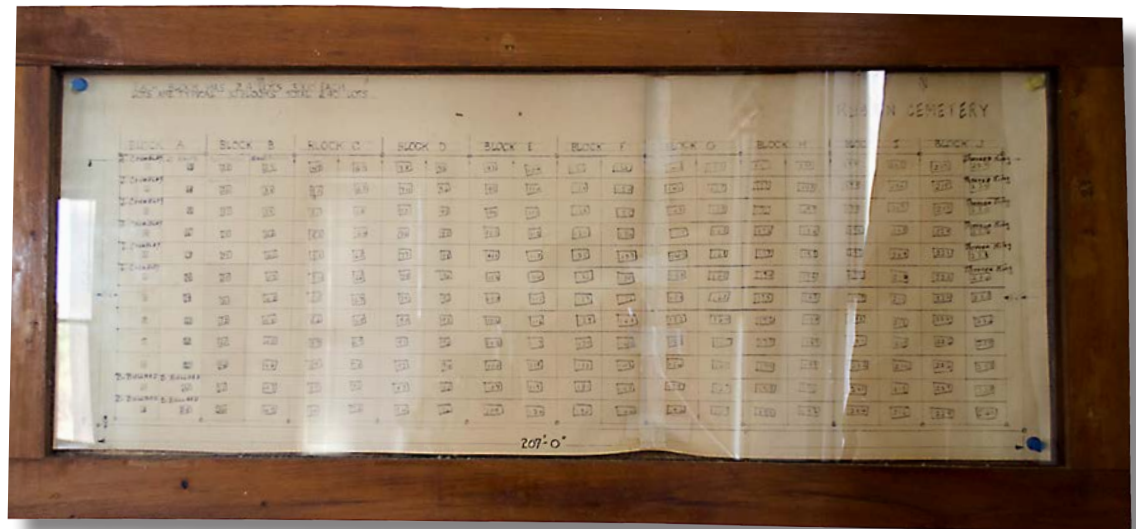
of pews flanking them. (The pews form an interior arrangement of pews-aisle-pews-half-wall-pews-aisle-pews).

The altar is raised and surrounded by altar rails that have a similar design to the exterior porch balustrade. The pulpit is flanked by wood pedestal plant or candle stands. The lectern itself is centered and features an angled shelf atop a wide flat top which is supported by decorative brackets. The altar rails, pulpit, and candle stands have been painted white within the last ten years. A credence table has been placed in front of the pulpit. This marble topped table reflects the Eastlake style which was popular from 1870-1890. This table would have been mass-produced rather than handmade. It may have been a gift from a congregant or purchased from one of several furniture stores operating in Waycross during the early twentieth century.

On the rear interior wall of the church, there is a paper site map of a cemetery containing 214 plots set in a plain wooden frame. When asked why the proposed cemetery was never used, Reverend Crumbley replied that "nobody here wants to die".

The builder of the church is unknown. Since W. T. Lott, C. L. Thigpen, and James S. Bailey were trustees of the church and owned sawmills, it is

**“nobody
here
wants
to
die.”**





Surrounded by the planted pines that characterize much of this area, the Old Ruskin Church continues to serve as a very special place to worship and stands as an architectural treasure.

possible that they donated the building materials for the church. Dr. Daniel Lott, Warren and Walter's father, had erected a wooden courthouse when the county seat moved from Waresboro to Waycross in 1874. The design of the wooden courthouse bears a resemblance to the Old Ruskin Church, but this comparison is inconclusive. It is also possible that Walter Thomas Lott influenced the design. He also operated a sawmill, and the Lott family's oral tradition attributes the design and building of the Old Ruskin Church to him.²³

Reverend Crumbley believes that his grandfather Jesse Crumbley, a Civil War veteran who was born in 1844, worked on the construction of the church with his son Joe. Both Jesse and Joe were carpenters as well as farmers. Most likely the construction of the

church was a collaboration, built by members of the community with local materials.

The setting of the church tells part of the story of the church and the surrounding community. Accessed by a dirt road, the building is oriented to the railroad rather than U. S. Highway 84. The community of Duke, the school, the Old Ruskin Church, and the Ruskin community were built along the railroad which was completed in this area in the late 1850s. The position and orientation of the church speaks to a time before good roads when the railroad was the primary form of transportation. The Ruskin community is no longer extant but was located on both sides of the railroad tracks west of the church. Both Reverends Crumbley and Strickland remember that many of the houses were extant when they were children and that the area was vibrant through the 1920s. They also remember a train depot and store located just north of the railroad track. Reverend



Crumbly and his brother would walk to the store each day to pick up the family's mail, which was delivered by train and held at a post office within the store. These buildings are no longer extant.

Conclusion

In April to June 2007, wild fires raged in Ware County and ultimately became the largest fire in the history of both Georgia and Florida. On April 16, a downed power line started the fire on Sweat Farm Road, located southwest of Waycross. On April 21, it entered the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge. By April 30, it had burned about 80,000 acres—approximately 20% of which was in the refuge—and had also destroyed 22 homes, and forced the evacuations of over 1,000 people. Close by, another fire was ignited by lightning on May 5. By May 20, the two fires converged and became known as the

Georgia Bay Complex - one of the largest fires in the South and, indeed, in the nation. The governor of Georgia made a disaster declaration, making Ware and Brantley Counties eligible for government aid.

In the early days of the fire, the Ruskin area was threatened and concerns about the Old Ruskin Church, as well as other structures in the area were voiced. Firefighting techniques which concentrated efforts on protecting structures were employed by the Ware County Fire Department. This strategy worked well, particularly along U. S. Highway 84 around Ruskin and along Swamp Road, where many homes, Obediah's Okefenok, a National Historic Landmark, and Swamp Road Baptist Church were saved, some of them more than once. Although the area around the Old Ruskin Church was evacuated, several members and neighbors came to the old church and raked pine straw away from it in order to protect it from the encroaching fire.²⁴

When a community is founded, a church is often the first permanent building erected. In the case of this community, the Old Ruskin Church is also the last historic building standing. Once a railroad camp, a bustling town of 240 people, and a center of timbering, the Old Ruskin Church stands as the solitary trace of these eras and the aspirations of each.

The Old Ruskin Church was built by community leaders and lumbermen at a time when the rim of the Okefenokee Swamp was transforming from a frontier to a railroad society. The church has witnessed the economic changes wrought by timbering an area



that was once the domain of yeoman farmers and the slow, steady decline of its rural population. The church has also witnessed a devastating fire and still stands as proof of its value to the community. The architecture supplies us with a conduit to the spirit and character of this time, this place, and its people. The vision for this community so vibrantly expressed by the architecture of the Old Ruskin Church appears not to have been realized here. But the perfectly proportioned little church with its sophisticated woodworking provided the congregation with a very special place that reinforced their reverence and devotion.

Endnotes

- 1 Waycross Journal, October 2, 1914, Page 7
- 2 Owen, Page 305
- 3 Clark, Pages 212-213
- 4 Clark, Page 212-213
- 5 Waycross Herald, June 26, 1895, Page 16
- 6 Note: By 1902, the community of Duke was also referred to as Ruskin due to the location of a utopian community. This utopian community will be discussed in the next chapter.
- 7 Personal correspondence Julie Hutson, Descendant of Rev. Moses Thrift, January 27, 2014
- 8 Robinson & Young, Page 8
- 9 Brundage, Page 49
- 10 Hurst, Page 92
- 11 Waycross Herald, September 16, 1899, Page 6
- 12 Ray, Page 7
- 13 Hurst, Page 64
- 14 Brundage, Page 156
- 15 Note: It is assumed that the Duke/Ruskin school was racially segregated. In the History of Ware County published in 1934, an African-American school was also reported in Ruskin. It was described as having a teacher, 7 grades, and 16 pupils. Theodosia Hoover was identified as the teacher, although no year was given. Mrs. Hoover was listed in the 1930 Census as residing in Waycross and her occupation was teacher.
- 16 Note: The Old Ruskin Church was associated with other Methodist churches in the area such as the New Prospect Church (now named the New Prospect United Methodist Church and located on Manor Millwood Road) and the Manor Church (now called the Manor United Methodist Church and located on US Highway 84/SR 38 in Manor).
- 17 Note: On January 10, 2012, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia approved the merger of the school with South Georgia College. The two institutions were consolidated into a new institution named South Georgia State College on Jan. 8, 2013.
- 18 Note: Unsuccessful attempts were made to contact Dr. Harris' daughter concerning his papers and the church in 2012.
- 19 Note: According to Mr. Crumbley a small, flat railcar called a tram was used to haul lumber out of the woods to a sawmill located in Ruskin when he was a boy. These roads were used to travel the area on foot.
- 20 Note: Gospel Train is popularly known as This Train or This Train is Bound for Glory
- 21 Morgan, Page 50
- 22 Strickland, November 5, 2014
- 23 Clark 2008, Page 351
- 24 Strickland, November 21, 2014

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Appendix 1 - Church Deed

WARRANTY DEED.

FROM
W. T. Lott & Co.
Ta.

Trustees m. E. Church
South. at Duke St

W. T. Lott

TO

Filed for record at
 this 10 day of *October*
 reported in Book *October*
1896

W. T. Lott's deputy

STATE OF GEORGIA
 WARE COUNTY.

DATED 1896

State of Georgia,
Ware COUNTY.)

WARRANTY DEED.

This Indenture, made this the *10th* day of
October in the year of one thousand eight hundred and *Ninety Six*
 between *W. T. Lott and Company*

of the State of *Georgia* and County of *Ware* of the first part
 and *W. T. Lott, C. L. Thigpen and D. J. Blackburn*

of the State of *Georgia* and County of *Ware* of the second part
 witnesseth, that the said *W. T. Lott & Company* of the first part
 for and in consideration of the sum of *One dollar*
 dollars, to *them* in hand paid by the said
parties of the second part at or before the
 ensenaling and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, have granted
 bargained, sold and conveyed, and by these presents do grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said
parties of the second part, and to their successors in office heirs and assigns forever all
 That certain piece or parcel of Land bounded and described
 as follows to wit: Commencing at a point six hundred

Land being of Lot Number 289 where the same joins lot # 290
 running Stone southerly from thence and up then 74.8
 feet thence westerly and parallel with the Savannah River
 and Western Railroad Right of Way Two hundred and
 thirty (213) feet thence Northwesterly Four hundred and eight
 (418) feet thence easterly and along the line of the Savannah
 Florida and Western Right of Way Two hundred and thirty (2
 feet to the point or place of beginning. The same contains
 two (2) Acres More or Less in the eighth district of Ware Co

To Have and to Hold, the said property

together with all and singular the rights, members,
 appurtenances thereto in anywise appertaining or belonging to the only proper use, benefit and behoof
 of the said *parties* of the second part or their successors
 heirs and assigns in **Fee Simple** forever.

And the said *parties* of the first part will and their
 heirs, executors and administrators shall the afore granted premises unto said
parties of the second part their heirs, executors,
 administrators and assigns, forever warrant and defend, by virtue of these presents.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said *parties* of the FIRST part have
 hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year above written.

Signed, Sealed and Delivered in Presence of

Warren Lott } *W. T. Lott* [L. S.]
J. S. Bailey } *J. S. Bailey* [L. S.]
C. L. Thigpen } *C. L. Thigpen* [L. S.]

Deed

Warren T Lott (served on 1894 Board of Ed-died 1907)
 Calvin L. Thigpen
 D. J. Blackburn
 J.S. Bailey

Appendix 2 - List of Preachers and Teachers



First row, standing—Rev. C. L. B. Davis, Rev. J. M. Glenn, Rev. E. M. Whiting, Rev. R. A. Brown, Rev. J. C. Gillespie. Second row—Rev. T. M. Christian, Rev. W. H. Thomas, Rev. W. T. McMichael, Rev. W. H. Scruggs.

Preachers

- 1892 M C Austin (Folkston circuit in 1894)
George W Mathews (First Methodist Church in 1892)
- 1894 William H Scruggs (Scruggs) listed (photo) in History of Ware as affiliated with Trinity Methodist but also served at First Baptist Church 1886-1908 and later at Central Baptist Tabernacle per Walker
- 1895 G B Culpepper (J. P. listed as preached at tent meetings in Walker)
- 1897 J W Domingo (Domingoes in Walker: associated with First Methodist)
R E Bradley
- 1902 Moses Thrift
R A Ratcliffe
- 1903 R A Ratcliffe
G C Ingraham
A B Wall
- 1906 Rev. J Robert McDonald
- 1907 B C Prickett
- 1911 B A Harper
(a list of Trinity ministers through 1930 does not contain any of the above except Rev. Scruggs) 1920 Legislature passed act to Consolidate schools by 1923. Thrift, Griffin & Ruskin would be consolidated and located in Ruskin

Teachers

- 1900 Professor Denny
Professor Sterling Preston Settle (also in Waycross and Waresboro in 1887)
- 1903 Miss Simpson
- 1907 Vesta Denham
Lena Good (Miss Lena Phillips taught at Gilchricht 1913) Also involved in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)
Mae Wilson Principal 3 teachers

Myrtle Bankston (not sure of years; David Rowland memory; 1940s?)

Appendix 3 - Ruskin Church Related Newspaper Clippings

School Articles

Dots from Duke.

An excellent series of meetings are being held this week by that old faithful soldier of the cross, Uncle Carmichael. His discourses have been timely and able. He promises to read a paper to the pupils of the school Saturday afternoon.

Speaking of the **Duke** school, we are glad to realize the immense good it has wrought and work for our people; and we are especially proud of the Waycross boys who are attending. The addition of Mr. Ben Sirman's sons to the roll delighted both teachers and pupils. Also Mr. Steedly from the Magic City. They are all studious and polite young men.

The farmers have saved their fodder in nice condition, and have plenty of corn, rice, potatoes and hogs to follow. They work hard and make plenty. VIGIL.

Waycross Weekly Journal, Volume XXI, Number 27, August 25, 1900, Page 1

DUKE ITEMS.

By Waycross Telephone to the Herald.

Duke, Ga. Feb. 23-Mr. J. W. Brown, of Glenmore, was in town yesterday.

Miss Katie Gray, of Waycross, is visiting Miss Lillie Thigpen.

The children's meeting yesterday conducted by Rev. R. E. Bradley, of Waycross was a complete success.

The patrons of the **Duke** school met Saturday to elect trustees, but there were not enough present. They will meet again on the 5th of March. We hope they will succeed in this and elect their trustees at that meeting.

Mr. T. J. Wilkinson is in town today.

Mrs. Crawley, of Waycross, who has been visiting Mrs. Riggins, has returned home.

Waycross Journal, Volume 1-No. 6, June 11, 1909, Page 1

Resolutions of Thanks.

We, the pupils of the **Duke** school, in token of our appreciation of Prof. Settles in his association with us during the term which ends today, do pass the following resolutions:

That we deeply appreciate the interest he has taken in us as pupils.

That we feel that we have made marked progress under his tuition.

That we pledge ourselves to follow his precepts in matters of education and to endeavor to build up education in our community.

That we shall ever cherish the memories of our school days with him and our fellow-schoolmates as a bright spot in our lives.

E. A. BARBER,
EDGAR CHAMBERS,
IDA BLACKBURN,
HELLE BLACKBURN,
DAN BLACKBURN, JR.

Waycross Weekly Journal, Volume XXI, Number 35, October 20, 1900, Page 7

INTEREST IN LOCAL TAXATION FOR IMPROVEMENT SCHOOLS

Letters from Different Sections of the Country Show That the Work For Better Schools is Being Carried on in Earnest.

That the efforts made within the past year for better schools in the country districts have made an impression that counts for something is evident in letters which have been received from different sections, and it appears that local taxation will be the leading question until settled.

Not only does the sentiment seem to be for improvement in school buildings and equipment, but the people, having this end in view, want to know more about the subject.

When the Manor school closes on the twenty-ninth of this month the question of local taxation will probably be discussed thoroughly, and Prof. E. A. Pound of this city, has been asked to talk on the matter. The **Ruskin** school closes on September third, and local taxation will be taken up here also. Other districts of the county will be heard from in regard to this at an early date, and concentrated action may then be expected.

Waycross Journal, Volume 2-No. 152, August 28, 1908, Page 6

EIGHT SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE VOTED FOR LOCAL TAX

Moore, Jamestown, Pine View, Ruskin, Griffin, Manor, Millwood and Pine Valley Have Determined to Lengthen School Term and Provide Better Schools.

Eight school districts in Ware county have within the past eight months voted in favor of a local tax for school purposes. Those progressive parts of the county are Moore, Millwood, **Ruskin**, Pine View and Pine Valley.

There are some interesting facts in connection with these districts whose people have determined to improve the chances of their children. In these districts there are 490 children of school age out of a total school population in the county of 2280, outside of Waycross making nearly a fourth of the school population which is now in the districts favoring a local tax for school purposes. It is said also that more than one-fourth of the wealth of the country districts is to be found in these eight districts. Four of them have railroad, telephone and telegraph privileges, 17 miles of each in all.

The local tax means that instead of the children of a district having a school term of four or five months, they will have a session of eight or nine months. Under the local tax law, more power is put into the hands of the school trustees who manage the local school very much as the school board does in the cities and towns. These trustees have the power to engage the teachers and to improve the school property. They handle the money of the district, both that from the local tax and what the school receives from the state and county, instead of leaving the school entirely under the control of the county board of education and the county school commissioner.

If the vote in favor of local tax for school purposes continues at the present rate, the whole county will have this system within the next year and a half.

Waycross Weekly Journal, Volume XXI, Number 35, February 27, 1900, Page 5

Church Articles

NEW CHURCH.
Services held near Ruskin and several Members Were Received.

RUSKIN, GA., July 7.—The farmers are rejoicing to see the ground drying off again so they can plow. While the crops are injured very much we trust that the people will harvest enough for their needed wants.

Mr. Hardy Thrift has sold his horse and buggy, and invested the proceeds in a mule team. Mr. Hyrd is running a flourishing business here.

The Ruskin school is progressing very nicely.

Mr. D. J. Blackburn lost one of his mules recently.

Part of the Ruskin farm in the broom corn department, during the rainy weather reminded us of the many lakes in the Okelinokee.

Mr. Harvey Crawford's family, brother, and Prof. Lee took a pleasure trip last Sunday, to the new church located fourteen miles south of Waycross on the tram road. The services were conducted by Rev. Moses Thrift and Richard Lee. After preaching Rev. Moses Thrift made it known to the people that the doors of the church were open and those came forward and were received into full membership.

The school will vacate Friday July 1, for the teacher's institute. The Sunday school is making good progress here.

The Waycross Journal, Volume VII, Number 755, July 8, 1902, Page 6

BEAUTIFUL NEW PUBLIC BUILDING

The Erection of Grace Church Will be Started Within a Short While.

At a vestry meeting Tuesday evening, it was decided that the erection of the proposed new building for Grace Episcopal church be begun at once.

The building of this new church has been in prospect for several years and a fund has been accumulating for it, so that a good portion of the money to build the edifice has been subscribed.

The financing and building of the church has been put into the hands of Messrs. W. M. Toomer and A. M. Knight and they have already begun the preparations for building, some of the material being now on the lot, on the corner of Pondleton and Mary streets.

The new plans for the building are very attractive and it will be one of the handsomest little church

The Waycross Journal, Volume 8, Number 50, June 10, 1904, Page 8

Mrs. M. E. Jurnegan opened a private school Monday.

A number of the patrons who are of the Primitive Baptist belief had withdrawn their children from the public school because the teacher, Miss Lena Good, opened her school by reading a few verses from the Bible, without comment, and prayer.

The Waycross Journal Weekly Addition, Volume 1, Number 163, September 20, 1907, Page 4

THE PULPIT, THE PARLOR or THE PRESS.

In the pine forest not far from Manor, we saw the new church nearing completion a place of worship for the primitive Baptist with Elder Moses Thrift as pastor, with a reasonable membership of the Rubenite tribe, it being remembered that about 25 years ago there was a division in the church which resulted in two factions of Rubenites and the Bennetites, while the Bennetites worship on the opposite side of the village at Camp Branch Church with Rev. Markey as pastor and a membership of about sixty.

The Waycross Journal, Volume 11, Number 10, February 5, 1907, Page 1

a pound party to a number of their friends Saturday night.

Mr. Albert Barber and wife of Waycross visited Ruskin friends Sunday.

James O'Neal, who is employed in the car works of Waycross, spent Sunday with his parents.

Mrs. Martin and daughter, Miss Sara, are the guests of Mrs. J. F. Calder.

The T. B. Circle held its weekly meeting in its Home Circle room, the first in two months as it was occupied by one of the members, Mr. T. E. Waldron, who is now able to be up after his long illness. An election of officers was held with the following result: Rufus Blackburn, president; Robert Blackburn, vice-president; David Waldron, secretary; F. R. Rire, treasurer.

Mrs. M. E. Jurnegan opened a private school Monday.

A number of the patrons who are of the Primitive Baptist belief had withdrawn their children from the public school because the teacher, Miss Lena Good, opened her school by reading a few verses from the Bible, without comment, and prayer.

The Waycross Journal Weekly Addition, Volume 1, Number 163, September 20, 1907, Page 4

Articles Related to Ruskin Commonwealth

...the has blown up one of our finest warships and killed more than a hundred of our seamen. What will McKinley do now?

The mill at Duke, between here and Waycross, it is said, has been purchased by the G. S. Baxter Company. Bailey & Co., former owners of the property, have moved to Coffee county to establish a large mill there. It is not known yet what the purchasers of the old mill expect to do with it, though it will probably be moved to some place on the Atlantic, Valdosta and Western road.—Valdosta Times.

Waycross Weekly Herald, Volume XVIII, May 8, 1897, Page 1

Miscellaneous Articles Related to Duke

Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Stiger made a fast trip to Glenmore farm last Tuesday morning.

Rosy James is doing a thriving railroad tie business here.

Glenmore has at last started to boom. The turpentine still is in full blast, and Rev. Stiger has recently traded 8,000 acres of land to some Indians firm.

Wm. Bainbridge has again traded

Waycross Weekly Herald, Volume XVIII, February 19, 1898, Page 7

J. G. STEFFES OF RUSKIN DENIGNS SOCIALISM.

To The Editor, Waycross Herald:

Dear Sir:

I feel called upon to answer certain statements recently made by one of the Waycross Ministers, "sic" that Socialism advocates "Free Love." To me it appears astonishing at any one, and especially a minister of the Gospel, should express such opinions about a matter of such world-wide interest as Socialism without having learned what Socialism means, and what it stands for. Socialism is not Anti-Religious, nor does it advocate "Free Love."

Socialism is essentially religious because it stands for Justice and Mercy in the most practical affairs of human life. It promises to banish Industrial, Political and Commercial chicanery, exploitation and tyranny, and to free the people, making it possible for them to educate themselves truly to live the best possible moral lives. Instead of destroying the home it will destroy the saloon, the bribe, business injustice, and political corruption, this will protect the home, instead of "Free Love."

It will destroy woman's economic dependence upon the lust of man, it will put an end to all mercenary marriages. It will cause marriages for TRUE LOVE alone, and will make the monogamous home absolutely essential for the protection and happiness of mankind. If ministers and other honorable and intelligent people will take the trouble to study Socialism thoroughly, they will find themselves compelled by reason, by scripture, by conscience and their own good hearts to support it earnestly, and thereby help bring about the Brotherhood of man.

Very respectfully,
 J. G. Steffes.

Waycross Evening Herald, Volume XVII, Number 190, January 29, 1910, Page 3

