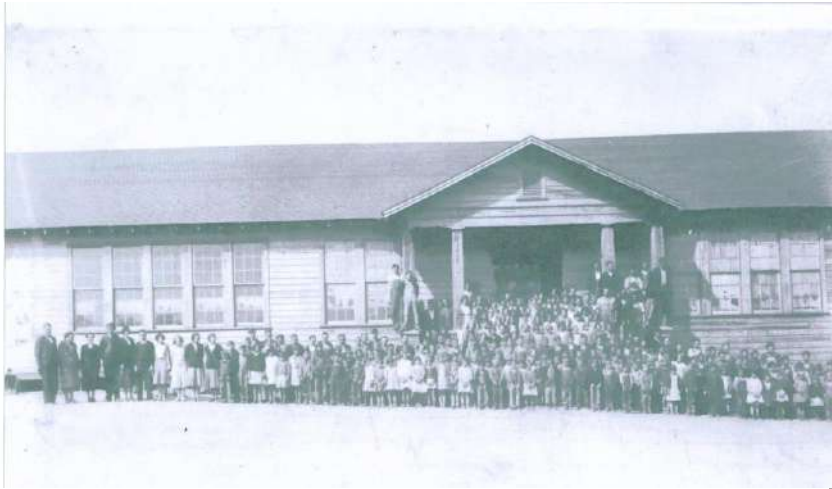


Chestatee School (1931-2011)

Happy 80th Birthday !



A Celebration of Education,
History and Community
Connections.



The time was **1929**, the depression year. The place was Forsyth County, and the people lived in five small rural communities: Mayfield, Center Grove, Salem, New Hope, and Harmony Grove. The population of the community was several hundred. Their main occupation was farming. The depression hit them without a doubt, but these people didn't waste time feeling sorry for themselves.

They continued with plans to fulfill a dream they had long held dear, a high school in their community.

Each community had its one or two room schools, like the one called **Center Grove**.



Children attended through sixth grade. But, to get an education past the sixth grade, the children had to travel as far as 21 miles, to the county seat of Cumming, in some cases. Most often students would choose to go into Hall County because it was closer. Many students just quit after they left these small schools.

Delegates from the communities went to the Forsyth County Board of Education for help. The board would go 50-50 with the people in the construction of a high school.

The county board bought a spot of ground from **A.C. Kennemore** near the old "Jot-em Down Store". There were five acres and the board paid \$275 for it. The building committee was chosen with each community represented.

The men were to serve as the school's first local Board of Trustees also. They were **W.T. Smith, Homer G. Howard, Sam Westbrook, E.A. Bennett, A.D. Pierce, F.M. Porter, and W.C. Tumlin.**

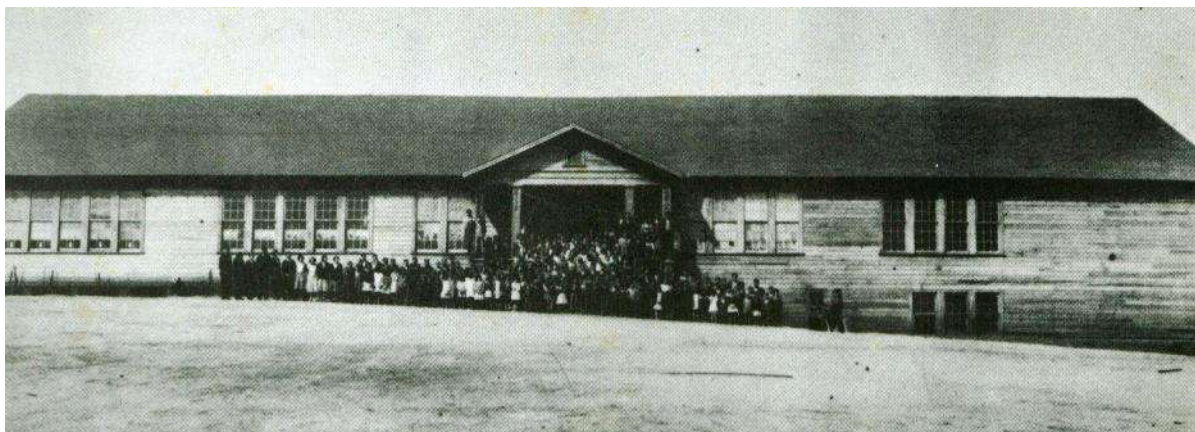


With strong wills and strong backs they tackled the job at hand. They went to the spot where the school would stand. Men came with scoops and mules, to scoop out the basement area big enough for several

classrooms. They cut timber, bought from **O.J. Smith** and got it to the sawmill of **Charlie Castleberry** and **Jewell Bennett.**

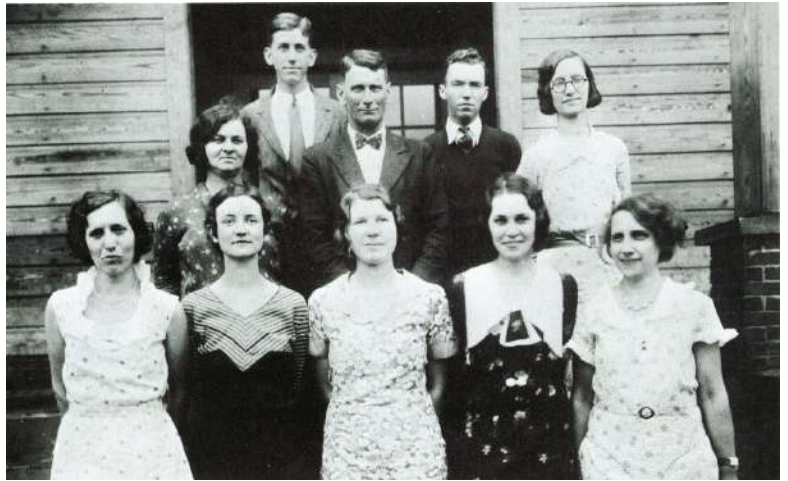
The floorplan of the school was provided by the county board. The school would have about 14 classrooms and a big auditorium when it was completed. They finished out only 10 of them at first. A building supervisor was employed, **F.M. Porter.** The other men came out of their fields early for a few hours work on the building, or some left their crops in charge of their older boys. Their rewards would come when they could see their children in cap and gown. It was **1931**, that the people finally saw their school as a reality.

They called it **Chestatee**, an Indian name meaning *"everlasting"*.



The school's water supply came from a well in the basement. The water piped out the window into a water barrel that had fountains attached to the base of it.

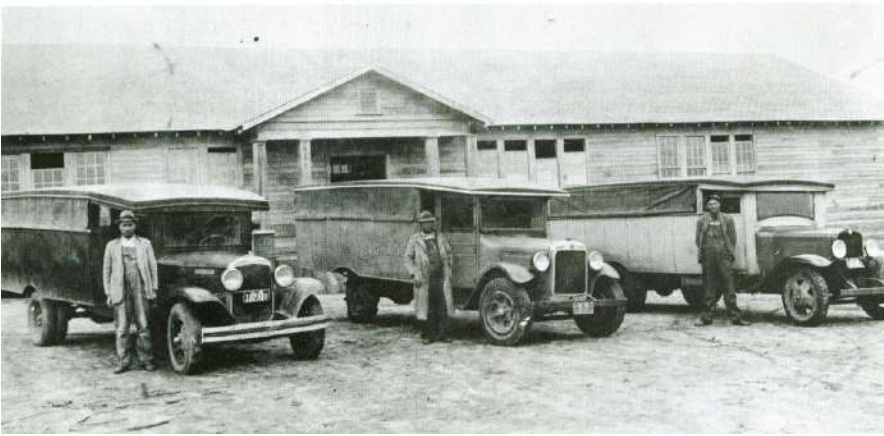
Walter Howard (*2nd from right on back row*) was one of the first teachers at Chestatee, along with **Ralph Westbrook**. (*2nd from left on back row*).



Howard said, "Chestatee's heating system was among the first of its kind in North Georgia. I remember how we hauled that boiler from Murrayville on wagons." The boiler was an old sawmill boiler, and **Floyd Ellis** of Murrayville supervised the installation of the steam heat. Howard said they bought pipes, threaded them and put two inch pipes, six per room, through the walls into adjacent rooms. Steam traveling the straight pipes would heat the school comfortably.

The school was insured for \$5,000 in May of 1931. At the time the board decided not to have summer school and apply the teacher's salary to the building fund. **The school opened on November 16, 1931.** Summer School, to rural folks, was during harvest time and school age children were needed on the farm to gather crops.

Although the High School opened in 1931, the first graduation wasn't held until **November 28, 1934**. Many students had to go two years to make one grade level, because of the short school terms. There were only 11 grade levels at this time.



Before school started at Chestatee, there was a need for bus transportation. Three men answered the call for bus drivers: **F.M.**

Porter, Clarence Bagwell and Penn Patterson. The men had to convert 2 old trucks and 1 new truck into buses, by sawing lumber to make frames for a bus. They went to Gainesville and bought sheet metal, molded it and bolted it on the wooden frames. Patterson was the community blacksmith and supervised the construction of the buses.

When they had the bus bodies ready for a roof, they went to *Sears, Roebuck and Company* for huge tarpaulins that would fit across the tops and hang down the sides far enough to cover the windows. The tarpaulins were fastened down with a band of strips across the roof. When the days were pretty the tarpaulin curtain was rolled up to let in fresh air. When the weather was bad they were put down, which made the inside of the bus quite dark.

The buses had four seats each, one long seat on each side and two in the middle. The seats were also made by these men. They were long boards, padded, then covered with a type of waterproof material. The largest bus would haul about 85 children per load. Many times the bus would slide into a ditch, or just bog down in the mud. Then the driver would unload all of the children, and put the biggest boys to work, pushing, heaving and lifting. Finally the road would let go of the bus tires. The bus would lurch forward, causing a squeal of glee to come from the girls, who had been standing in mud, sometimes ankle deep.

On **November 2, 1933** a new tradition was started at Chestatee with a Fall Festival. A crowd of 5,000 people attended the school grounds. The **Governor** of the state, **Eugene Talmadge**, attended and was one of the speakers of the day. Another speaker was **Dr. M.D. Collins, State Superintendent**. A program of music was presented by the Riverside



Military Academy and Dawson County High School. Afterwards a basket lunch was served picnic style.

About 1939, the Crossroads, Hopewell, and Pleasant Grove School districts consolidated with Chestatee. These additional students caused the school to need its other four classrooms. The library was improved and its elementary school became accredited. Home Economics, physical education, mechanical drawing and business law were added to the curriculum. The high school became accredited after a 20 year struggle.

Chestatee is credited with having the **largest PTA** in Forsyth County and the best attended. The school always has been a family affair.

Sometimes the women would decide something like, the school needing a piano, but instead of asking their husbands to shell out some money, they just took a big fat hen to market, every one of them. This was how they got a piano for the school.

In **1948** the wooden structure was bricked with red brick.





In **1950** a gym was needed, so the parents began making donations of lumber, timber and money. The Veteran's class from Cumming would cut the logs and haul them to the sawmill where Jewell Bennett and

Sonny Thomas sawed them into lumber. Cement blocks were used for the walls. Thirty-three parents and trustees of the school signed a note to borrow \$3500 from the Bank of Cumming. The money was borrowed and the board of education completed the building. The gym was first used in 1951.

In **1951-52** the 12th grade was added for high school.

In **1954** a lunchroom was built behind the High School. Now there were hot lunches provided at school.

In **1961** a lower building was added to house the younger classes. In



1973, an addition was added to the front of the old building.

There were new classrooms, a new library, offices and cafeteria.



In **1989** a new wing was added with a new gym and several new classrooms.

Then in **1990** the original building was torn down, after it had been condemned for safety concerns. This shows the old building behind the new additions.



In **1999-2000** many classes were held in mobile units, while new rooms were being built. They were completed by the **2000-2001** school year.



In **2011** we celebrate our 80th birthday of Chestatee School. We hope to have many more years of memories and history to add to our community. **Happy 80th Chestatee!**

History of Chestatee Basketball Teams (1932-1967)



The first basketball team was started in **1932**, during the very first school year. The county road machinery graded off an outdoor (dirt) court. The first coach was **S.M. Rosser**.

The boys donated money to pay for their uniforms and basketballs.

The first suits were black with gold patch on the front with C.H.S.



When the team played another team it was usually cold and windy. Sometimes the ball would blow across the road, as the court was near the front of the school. This made it hard to score on a windy day.

The biggest thrill of the team was playing in the tournament at Oakwood, on an indoor court. There were no girl's teams at this time.

From **1932-34** there was **Coach Hoke Spence** and from **1934-37** **Coach T.J. Jackson**. These coaches,, with the help of their players, would take wheelbarrows and haul soil to the outdoor courts. The boys would stay after school and help work on the court, then walk 3 or 4 miles home.

Clarence Bagwell was one of the first bus drivers to carry the ball teams to games away from home. He very well remembers the trips made to Candler in mud up to the axle of the bus with double chains on. The players rode the bus free, while fans would pay 10 cents to ride. A lot of games were played in the Candler Gym. The roads were not paved and there was no rural electricity-the lights were from a Delco Light Plant, kept at the gym. During one game the lights went out.

Mr. Bagwell was a good sport, he supported the team regardless of winning or losing. The team was successful in 1937. These players would walk regardless of the weather to meet the bus to go to the away games.



Herbert Castleberry was another faithful bus driver for the team. He was one of the most faithful supporters from **1937-1967**. He missed seeing very few games played during these years. In **1938** the **Boy's team** was winner of the Hall County Invitational Tournament at Candler. The girl's team also won many games during the **1938** season.

The coach from **1937-1939** was **C.E. Coker** and from **1939-1941** was **Jimmy Driskell**.

From **1939-1940**, the boys had a winning season, playing in 3 tournaments. They even won the Forsyth Senior High Tournament. This was the first time for Chestatee to win over Cumming. The girls could always be found doing their part of the games as well.

From **1941-1947** there was not much activity in basketball due to restrictions of use on gasoline and tires. It was during World War II.

In **1949** the Chestatee High School became accredited and much interest was begun in basketball. The teams could now play in state tournaments, if they could win the regional tournament.

From **1947-48** the coach was **Ray Bennett** and from **1948-1951** was **G.S. Davis**.

In **1951** the girls won the 8-C Regional Tournament, this was the first team to enter a state tournament.



In **1950** the gym was built and was first used during the **1951-1952** school year.

The coach from **1951-1952** was **Paul Wells** and from **1952-1956** was **J.T. Acree**.



Next came **Coach Clarence Denard** from **1956-1966**.

In **1957**, the 8-C Regional Tournament was played in the Chestatee Gym.

This is the **1958** Boys Team with Coach Denard on the left.



In **1961** both boys and girls teams were in state tournament play. Both teams were runner-up in the 8-C Tournament.

the boys to earn a trip to state play.

Both teams entered the state tournaments as runner-up of 8-C in **1962**. The girl's record to the tournament was 18-5. In **1963** the Lady Eagles won the Christmas Tournament in White County. They had a record of 20-4.



In **1964** the girls won the Regional 8-C Tournament with a record of 20-1 and stayed in state tournament until semi-finals. The boys were runners-up in the region this same year.

In 1965 the Lady Eagles were in the state tournament again as winner of 8-C Region. They played two games in the state tournament and finally lost to Red Bud.

Brenda Hubbard, a graduate in 1965, went on to join the All American Red Heads. She was famous for her hook shot.



In **1966** both boys and girls were runners-up in the 8-C Region.

The coach from **1966-1967** was **Stanley Ertzberger**.



The last Basketball teams to play for Chesatee High School were from **1966-1967**.

During this season the girls team had a record of 21-4 and the boys team had a record of 21-7. Many of the players went on to Forsyth County High School to play on their team the next season.



History and photos compiled by Melanie Martin Roper 2011