



Dawson County was created by a legislative act on December 3, 1857, primarily out of Lumpkin County and smaller parts of Gilmer, Pickens and Forsyth counties. Georgia's 119th county, and the county seat of Dawsonville, were named for Judge William C. Dawson, a

compiler of the laws of Georgia and commander of a brigade in the Creek Indian War of 1836. Dawson served in both houses of the Georgia state legislature, in Congress from 1836 to 1842 and in the U.S. Senate from 1849 until 1855.

Prior to the creation of Dawson County, the area enjoyed a rich history. Originally settled by the Cherokee Indians at about the time of the American Revolution, the river valleys were dotted with farms, orchards and numerous modern log structures. Native Americans thrived in the area until the discovery of gold in 1829. By 1832, prospectors had over run much of the area and Georgia claimed the region as a new territory. During 1838, those Native Americans who had not voluntarily moved west were forcibly removed to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears. Although absent as a people from the area for more than 150 years, the legacy of the Cherokee remains in many names found throughout Dawson County: Amicalola, which means "tumbling waters", Etowah, Toto Creek - named for the Cherokee Toter family, and a host of other local names. Throughout the 1830's and 1840's the area that was to become Dawson County was in the midst of the first gold rush in America. Numerous mines and mining operations - some within the city limits of Dawsonville - were located throughout the area. Remnants of these mines and small mining projects can still be found within the county.

By April 28, 1858, all county officers had the books that were necessary for the records of the county, and these were placed in a log structure which had been built for the temporary use of the court and other officials of the county. The log courthouse was built by James Foster for the sum of \$30.00 and the benches by James Jackson for an additional \$1.25.

Plans for a permanent courthouse were not long postponed, and by May 1858 plans were accepted to have a building 50 by 30 feet, with four gables, and the window sills and steps were to be made of "good plant". The contract was made to Wesley McGuire, John Hockenhull and Anderson Wilson. In August of 1858 the plans were changed by the recommendation of the grand jury. The new plans for the structure called for an enlarged building of 54 by 38 feet, two gables, the use of good bricks or other materials "such as the [courthouse] in Gainesville" and window sills were to be made of granite, soapstone or marble.

Harrison Summerour, John McAfee and R. N. McClure secured a bond for \$9,600.00 to erect the courthouse. As the money came in to the county treasurer, the contractors were to be paid, but a difficulty arose and \$2,500.00 was borrowed from Mr. Summerour to meet the deadline of a contract payment. N. H. Goss made chairs for the new building for \$4.95. The bricks, which were purchased at \$8.00 per thousand, were made by the slaves of John Hockenhull on a branch on the east side of Old Georgia 19 (now Highway 9), across the highway from the building that housed Standard Telephone Company in Dawsonville. It is thought that other bricks were made at John Hockenhull's for "paving and fixing the courthouse outside walls".

In February of 1860, the grand jury commented on the "abused and defaced condition of the building by persons unknown." The damage was repaired and as time passed, the building was kept in good condition through the efforts of the grand jury and its recommendations.

Some of the more interesting recommendations implemented by the grand jury: William Hollingshed ceiled the building, old shingles were removed (and sold for \$5.00) and the building recovered, the lathing was removed, the northwest

room (which had been rented for \$10.00 per month) was fitted for the commissioners' office, the windows were glazed (paned with glass), and from time to time the building was painted. A fence was built around the courthouse and painted (there was no stock law in effect). A well, which had been dug earlier on the courthouse grounds, was included inside the fencing. Sawdust was kept on the floor until carpeting was installed, printed material was purchased for the making of curtains for the windows, and shutters were made and added to the windows. In a contract given to H. C. Thompson, the building was plastered, and later the plaster was removed and re-plastering done through a contract awarded to Mr. Finger. Throughout the years the building received many coats of whitewash to keep it "spic-and-span".

The county's original jail was destroyed by fire soon after it was completed during a failed escape attempt. The county was without a jail until 1881 when a new jail was completed. The old jail is located west of the courthouse and, along with the historic courthouse, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Both the jail and the courthouse have undergone extensive renovation to restore them to their original appearance. The Dawson County/Dawsonville Welcome Center is currently housed in the historic jail.

For the first hundred years of its existence Dawson County remained primarily an agricultural economy, largely due to the lack of railroads or major highways in the area. Dawson County was however a significant source of illegal corn whiskey (known as 'moonshine') for Atlanta during and after the prohibition era. During prohibition, many bootleggers would modify their cars for better speed and handling in order to evade police when delivering their illegal cargo. Even after prohibition the trend continued, as bootleggers were on the run from state revenue agents who sought to tax their illicit operations. Eventually these cars were raced for entertainment (and profit), leading to the birth of modern stock car racing and NASCAR.

Bill Elliott, one of NASCAR's most successful drivers, was born in Dawsonville. "Awesome Bill from Dawsonville" won 44 races on the NASCAR circuit, including two Dayton 500 victories and the 1988 NASCAR Winston Cup

championship. Elliott won NASCAR's Most Popular Driver Award a record 16 times between 1984 and 2002.

In 1957, the Appalachian Trail was re-routed to a new endpoint about 8 miles north of Amicalola Falls State Park, establishing the county as a major destination for hikers. At the same time the flooding of the Chattahoochee River plain to form nearby Lake Lanier was completed, resulting in Georgia's largest lake at 39,000 acres. The lake forms the southern end of Dawson County.

With the construction of the Georgia 400 highway to Atlanta in the 1980's, the county finally had the major highway that it had lacked for a hundred and twenty years. This transportation route, combined with Lake Lanier, Amicalola Falls and the recent development of the North Georgia Premium Outlets have helped Dawson County transition from a quiet mountain enclave to one of Georgia's fastest growing communities.