

Taylor recounts hanging at Historical Society meeting

By Mark Novak
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Bad blood resulted in the death of two Towns County men in the late 1800s, and County Historian Jerry Taylor told the tale in the April 9 meeting of the Towns County Historical Society.

The year was 1887, and Tillman C. Justice was a local resident with something to hide – he knew if word got out he would be in trouble with the law.

Justice was a moonshiner and ran a still on his property, and he aimed to protect his interest in the moonshine business.

Backing up just a bit from '87, U.S. Congress created the Internal Revenue Service to collect taxes on liquor, tobacco

and other items during the War Between the States.

And though it was not illegal at the time to operate a still, it was illegal not to pay taxes on the ill-gotten gains.

Many Georgians at the time refused to pay taxes on the liquor they produced and kept their stills well hidden from the government, much like Justice in 1887.

Enter James B. Godard.

Godard owned property next to Justice, and the two argued over property lines for years, creating animosity between the men.

Another man named Jason Coward told his son David, who worked the still with Justice, that Godard had reported the still. He also told his son that Godard ought to be killed for it.

Young Coward soon after informed Justice over dinner just what his father had told him, before returning to his post at the still.

The very next day, the elder Coward and Justice began to drink heartily in preparation for the coming crime.

The men loaded Justice's double-barreled shot gun and laid in wait for Godard to come by, all the while drinking more and more whiskey.

Finally, Godard appeared at his home, and the two confronted him about reporting the still.

Godard denied reporting the still, but Justice didn't believe him. He pulled the trigger and hit Godard in the face, then shot him a second time and broke his arm.

Well, Coward reported the murder that evening, and the body was found as well as the gun used in the murder.

Justice was charged with the murder and trial was held in Towns County, ending in a mistrial with the jury being 11 for conviction and one for acquittal. Justice was held in jail to be retried.

Justice escaped jail with three other prisoners, only to be caught five days later, and he was called again to answer the charge for murder.

This time, he was convicted and sentenced to hanging on November 18, 1887, for murder in the first degree.

Taylor relied upon an 1887 article from the *Atlanta Constitution* for the retelling of the only hanging in Towns County history.

Also in the April 9 historical society meeting, Mr. Ernest Noblet was fondly remembered, and a display was prepared for the late Gov. Zell Miller, who was a lifetime member of the Towns County Historical Society.

Members were also delighted to have special guest Hugh Howell in attendance, whose father Oscar Howell was sheriff in the early 1940s. Hugh shared a scrapbook of pictures and memorabilia from his childhood when his family lived in the Old Rock Jail.

The society meets on the second Monday of the month at 900 North Main St. in Hiawassee at 5:30 p.m.



Photo by Shawn Jarrard

County Historian Jerry Taylor standing at the intersection of River Street and Lakeview Circle behind the Towns County Courthouse, near the area of the only hanging in Towns County history.

Mountain Movers and Shakers welcome elected leaders



Photo by Mark Novak

District 50 State Sen. John Wilkinson, right, appeared with these Towns County students, Sam Fullerton and locally elected leaders at a town hall-style meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday, April 20.

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There were many distinguished dignitaries on hand to speak in front of a standing-room only crowd at the Friday, April 20, meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers.

To open the meeting up, guest emcee Amy Barrett addressed the crowd.

"I have the great privilege of serving as a city council representative for your great community," said Barrett, a Hiawassee City Councilwoman. "Before we get started, I would like to take a minute to thank the Movers and Shakers for asking me to emcee this amazing event this morning."

Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton then led the group in prayer before Towns County High School student Summer Rahn performed a moving rendition of "God Bless America."

The first guest speaker that Friday was 2018 Top of Georgia Speech Contest Champion Larson Church, who delivered her award-winning speech on being grateful.

Next up, District 50 State Sen. John Wilkinson spoke about his experiences with positive thinking and the work he is doing to represent the people of Georgia.

"I'm thankful that I get to represent a district like this where we can get together and have prayer," said Wilkinson. "That I get to be with a lot of other people that put their faith first."

"And then I think we need to put our family second. I think you would agree with that, and then the other things in life need to come after that."

One of the key issues that Wilkinson has worked on is education.

"No. 1, for the first time in history, the legislature fully funded QBE, Quality Basic Edu-

cation," said Wilkinson. "Some people will tell you that it was fully funded in 2002, but it has never been funded to the extent that it is funded right now."

Wilkinson has been instrumental in getting a number of bills passed through the state House and Senate that will be of tremendous use to many of the residents in his district.

One of the bills, Senate Bill 330, deals with agriculture and education in the schools, and Gov. Nathan Deal will be signing that bill next weekend at the FAA convention in Macon, in front of 5,000 FAA students, including some of the students from Towns and surrounding counties.

"What it does is set up pilot programs in our elementary schools across the state to teach children," said Sen. Wilkinson. "Right now, we have instruction in agriculture in grade six through 12."

"This would set up pilot programs in kindergarten through the fifth grade, so children can learn more about what it takes to produce food and how you grow food."

In closing, Wilkinson rec-

ognized the people that work so hard in Towns County to make it such a great place.

"I want to especially commend the leadership that you have in Towns County," said Wilkinson. "As long as God continues to bless me with good health and we feel like we're making a difference, we're going to keep working, and may God continue to bless you."

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw followed up the senator with a summary of his most recent county meeting, and Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales spoke about the many improvements the city has been making.

"We're getting ready to start all the work at the sewer plant in the next couple of months," said Ordiales. "We finally got official award of our \$600,000 grant, so we're moving forward with that."

Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berong also gave an update in the meeting, speaking on the upcoming campus construction, which will start on May 21, after school has let out for the summer.



Photo by Mark Novak

Sen. Wilkinson in Hiawassee on Friday, April 20.

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the completion of its merger with Park Sterling Corporation (NASDAQ: PSTB) in December 2017.

Under the terms of the merger agreement, Park Sterling shareholders received 0.14 shares of South State common stock in exchange for each Park Sterling share outstanding immediately prior to the merger.

Park Sterling Bank, the Park Sterling Corporation bank subsidiary, has merged with South State Bank, a South Carolina banking corporation and the wholly owned banking subsidiary of South State Corporation.

"We are pleased to announce the completion of this merger with Park Sterling and look forward to welcoming their employees and customers to South State," said Robert R. Hill, Jr., CEO of South State

Corporation, in December. "This is a significant step forward in accomplishing our vision to build a quality regional bank in the Southeast."

With this merger, South State Corporation has assets over \$14 billion and a market capitalization of approximately \$3 billion.

"We are proud to partner with South State and this combination will fulfill the vision we laid out in 2010," said James C. Cherry, CEO of Park Sterling Corporation. "Together, we have the scale and resources necessary to deliver value-added services to our customers."

As a result of the merger, 53 locations will be added to the South State footprint: 5 in Georgia, 23 in South Carolina, 17 in North Carolina and 8 in Virginia.

In addition, in connection

with the merger, Cherry and Jean E. Davis, a former director of Park Sterling, have been appointed to the South State Corporation and Bank Board of Directors.

Cherry has served as CEO of Park Sterling Corporation since its inception. Prior to Park Sterling, he served in numerous executive roles for Wachovia Corporation.

He is currently a director of Armada Hoffer Properties, Inc. (NYSE:AHH), a Virginia-based REIT.

Davis has been a director of Park Sterling Corporation since 2011.

In 2006, she retired from Wachovia Corporation as Head of Operations, Technology and e-Commerce. She currently chairs both the Safe Alliance Board of Directors and the Charlotte Latin School Board of Trustees.