

The Cherokee Inn

A Legendary Ringgold Dining Establishment

By Roger Bowman

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Very little is known about the original construction and/or when it actually began operation nor when it ceased operation.

In the mid-1940s Mrs. Charlotte Broyles Blaylock (1868-1959) wrote a series of articles for the Catoosa County Record. She and her family moved to Ringgold shortly after the Civil War. She lived here until 1888, when they moved to Chattanooga. She stated in one of her articles *“then down south from the Depot lived the Felkers and the Jobes. The Dr. Woods family lived where the Cherokee House (Inn) now stands and perhaps was the same building.”*

It is recorded that John Woods purchased a farm from Robert Cross in Woodstation in 1835 and that he was a local Methodist minister and merchant for several years.

Records show a John Woods living in Ringgold in 1850 and 1860 with the listed occupation as “Methodist Clergyman”. Perhaps he was a “Dr.” but based on the Harpers Weekly lithograph below, there was not a structure at the Cherokee Inn location in 1864.



Harpers Weekly Lithograph from 1864

The earliest photo (date not confirmed) that we have showing the Cherokee Inn is shown below and it could have been made anytime between the late 1800s and about 1938.



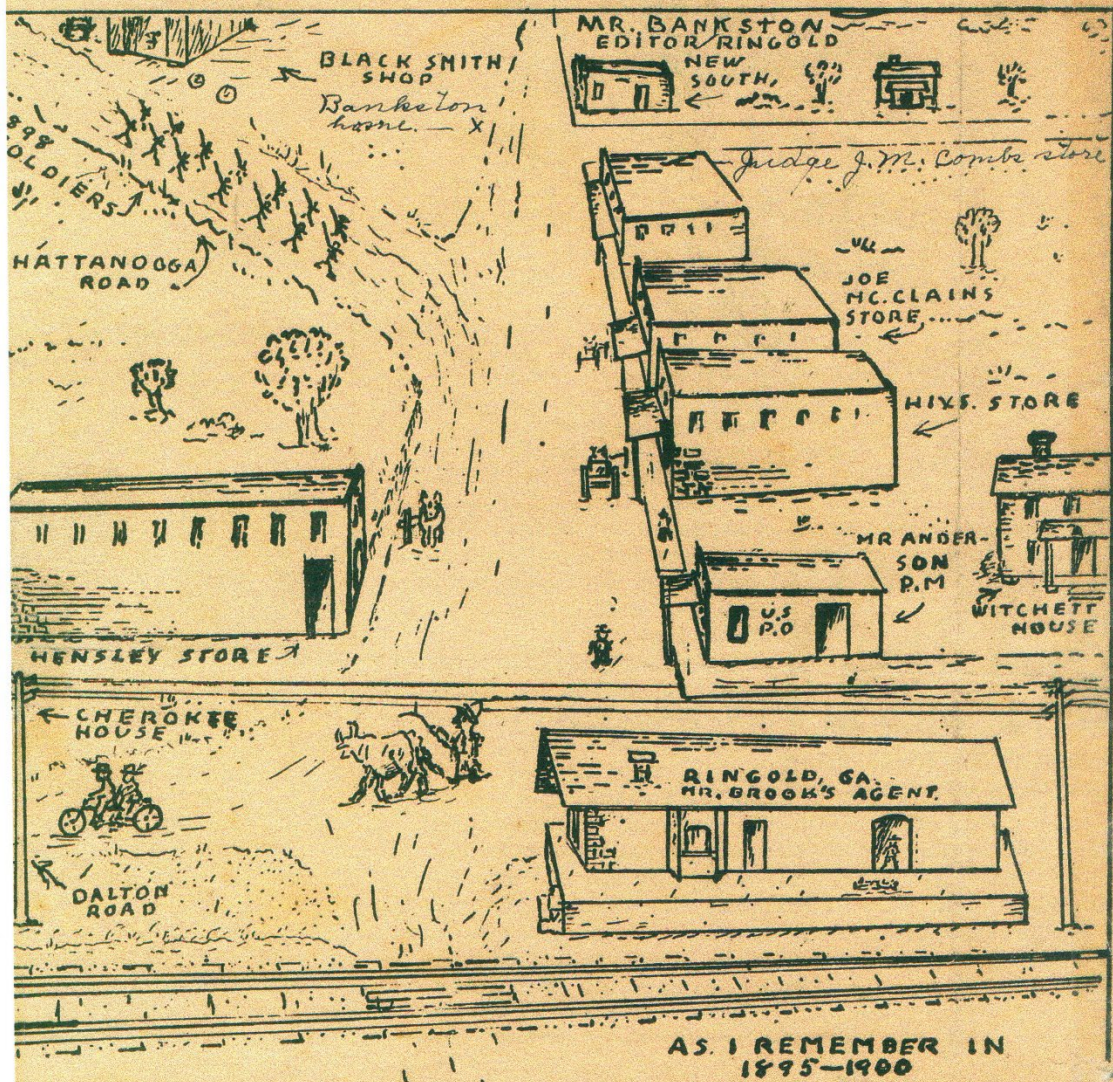
The Cherokee Inn Looking South from the Ringgold Depot Before 1940

Based on the records of the Edwards Family, we believe they began operating the Cherokee Inn in 1904.

In 1882 an ad ran in the Chattanooga Daily Times advertiing the sale of water from Cherokee Springs and further stating tha the water was available “*on draught at the Cherokee Hotel in Ringgold*”. This confirms that there was a hotel called the Cherokee Hotel operating in Ringgold prior to the Edwards family operation.

The below drawing was submitted to the local newspaper by a Mr. G.W. Kirklen who had lived in Ringgold as a young man prior to relocating to Florida. Note the reference to the Cherokee House in the lower left and in 1898 soldier marching down the Chattanooga Road (Lafayette Street/Boynton Drive) to board the train at the Ringgold Depot enrout from Fort Oglethorpe to the Spanish-American War in Cuba. (Records indicate that George Washinton Kirklen was born in 1883 in Chattanooga, so he would have been between the age of 12 and 17 when he lived in Ringgold).

Do You Remember When Ringgold Looked Like This?



Drawing by Mr. G.W. Kirklen

Mrs. Alice Cox Edwards is recorded to have operated the Cherokee Inn for more than a quarter century prior to her death, which would indicate the commencement of operation around 1900. She was the wife of James M, Edwards and the mother of Frances Edwards who operated the Cherokee Inn after her mother's passing.

The Cherokee Inn enjoyed quite a reputation in the area as a dining establishment, more so than a hotel, and it is believed that most of the operating effort was focused on dining rather than renting rooms.

One of the most interesting of many newspaper articles regarding the Cherokee Inn was published in the Chattanooga Daily Times in **January of 1922** and covered a Ringgold costume party held there. It reads:

Costume Party

A costume party was given Friday evening by the young men of Ringgold at the Cherokee Inn. The living room was artistically decorated to represent a sultan's harem.

The guests numbered about 20, and were costumed to represent different characters – Miss Boots Wright was a French maid; Edward Gibson, butler; Miss Isobell Wright was a Duchess Gray; Sultan Adul Hamid was C. D. Carter, and his wives were Misses Francis Harris and Tommie Edwards; dowager Queen Miss Frankie Edwards; Sgt. O'Hara, Bearl Coulter; Miss Vida Emberson was Poor Butterfly; Lieut. Cmdr. Coombs was represented by Gene Combs; Miss Ruth Fain was a farmerette; Gale Emberson, a farmer; John Gordon Williams was a clown, and Mrs. George Batchelor was a clown. During that the evening the maid and butler served punch, sandwiches, bonbons, and cigarettes. Prizes for the cutest costume and stunt was awarded to Miss Ruth Fain and Gale Emberson. For the best impromptu stunt, a prize of a box of candy was given to Miss Isaobell Wright and Gene Combs.

The chaperones were Mrs. Alice Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. Alice Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. S. R. Wright and Mr. and Mrs. Enoch West.

In **July of 1922** there was an accounting in the Chattanooga News regarding the Chattanooga Rotary Club outing that ended at the Cherokee Inn in Ringgold – *“The members were asked to get in their cars and again follow the arrows (on the map). These directed them back to the Cherokee Inn at Ringgold where they were greeted with tables that fairly groaned with fired chicken, and other good things cooked as only the motherly lady in charge knows how to cook. Everything was in true Georgia Cracker style. Seldom if ever have the Rotarians sat down to a more varied and sumptuous menu than placed before them in the little hotel at Ringgold.”*

In **July of 1923**, an article from the Society Page of the Chattanooga News stated *“The first surprise of the day came when the party dined at the Cherokee Inn for one of the most delicious dinners that old hostelry has served. The hotel is quaintly picturesque with its recovered furniture, its rag and hook rugs, its daintily homemade window curtains, and the restful atmosphere of an old-time home. On the walls are etchings that bring to mind old times and old things, days when friend was friend indeed, and a neighbor more than a friend. The inn stands beneath a large chestnut tree – for the tree for the tree in reality seems to have taken the old house under its protection.”*

In **April of 1934**, an article in the Chattanooga Daily Times reported a retreat to the Cherokee Inn by Mayor Bass and the Chattanooga City Commission hosted by Commissioner Eugene Bryan. *“We ate like wolves”* was the comment of Commissioner Wilkerson on return to his desk at City Hall.

In **October of 1940** it was reported in the Chattanooga Daily Times that the Curator General of the National Daughters of the American Revolution hosted a luncheon at the Cherokee Inn for three guests in route to Cleveland to attend the National D.A.R. Convention. Also attending were representatives of the four local DAR Chapters.

In the midst of World War II (1942) and the rationing of many food items, including sugar, the Chattanooga Daily Times published the following article quoting the owner/operator of the Cherokee Inn, Miss Frankie Edwards.

FAMOUS Cherokee Inn, at Ringgold, would not know how to stint on its food. So when the time came to put sugar in tiny envelopes, or ask guests if they wanted "sugar in their coffee," Miss Frankie Edwards was facing a problem. She solved it in masterful style. The usual big sugar-bowls full of sugar go on the tables, but she sticks in the middle of each bowl one of those little American flags on pins. Here is the gentlest of reminders to the person ready to dig down into the bowl with a spoon. Here is Old Glory staring one in the face.

"Has the flag done any good in sugar saving?" Miss Frankie was asked by Next to the News.

"It has cut down table consumption of sugar by half," she replied.

How much more delicate and effective is that method than the one Andrew Carothers tells concerning a restaurant out in Tucson, Arizona. The sugar bowls carry a printed card which says: "Use only one spoonful and stir like hell."

The first confirmed signal to the closure of the Cherokee Inn came in 1946 when an ad appeared in the Chattanooga Daily Times reading:

For Sale – 14-room house, lights, and water,
servant's house, 1 acre ground, known as the
Cherokee Inn in Ringgold, GA.

Another ad appeared in the same newspaper in 1947 stating:

Ringgold, GA
Known as Cherokee Inn,
11 rooms and 2 acres
Must Sell



A Civitan Club Meeting at the Cherokee Inn in the late 1940s or Early 1950s

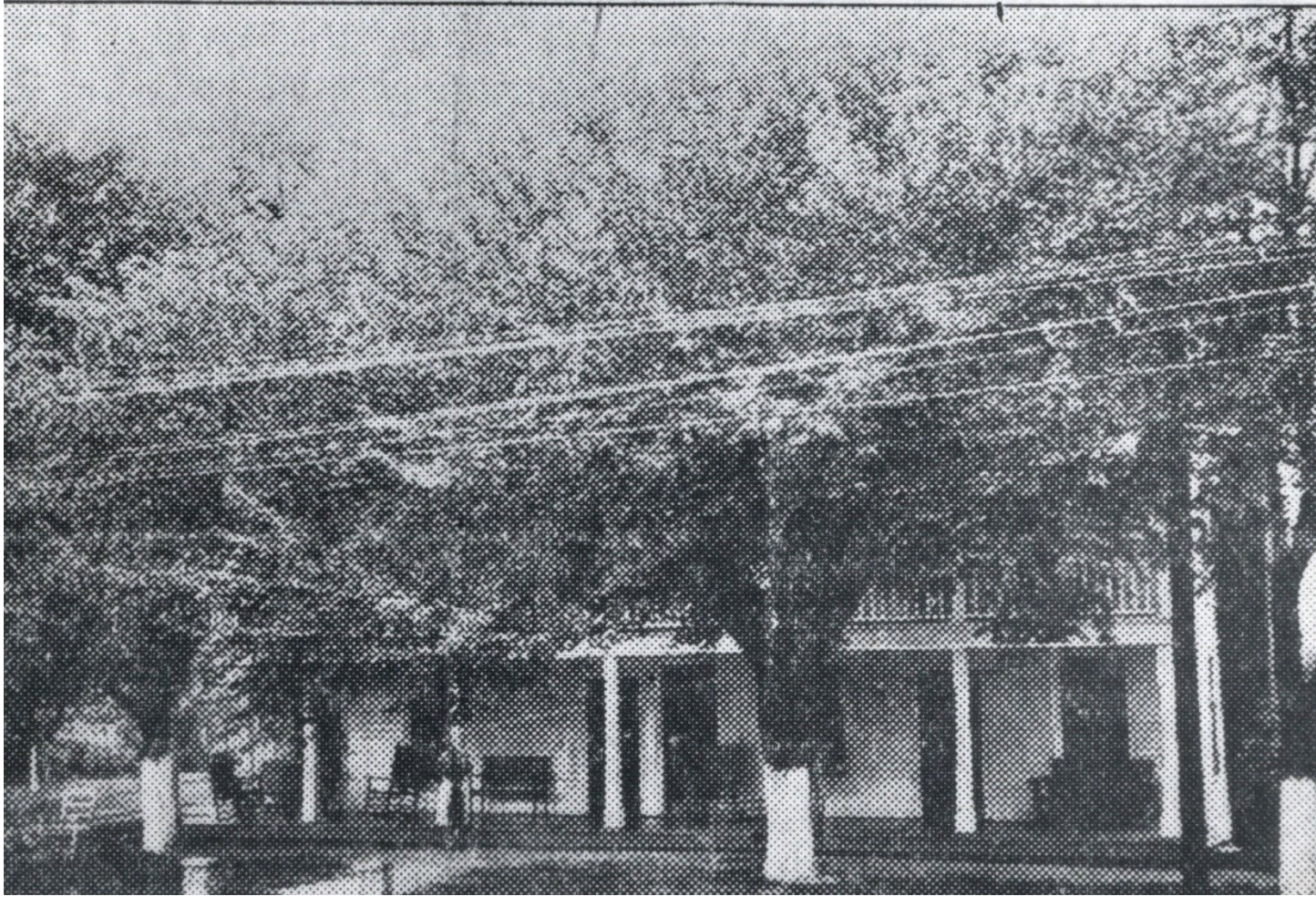


A Civitan Club Meeting at the Cherokee Inn in the Late 1940s or Early 1950s. The lady is Miss Frances (Frankie) Edwards, daughter of James M. and Alice Cox Edwards

The gentlemen seated, starting in foreground on the left are Lanier Harris, George Hunt, Solomon Ward, Gene Combs, R. Lynn McGill, and John Plemons)

In November of 1954 an article lamenting the closing of several popular Chattanooga area dining places as follows: *“Heave a sigh of fond remembrance for the Drummers Rest at Murphy, N.C., for the **Cherokee Inn at Ringgold**, for Ocoee Inn at Ocoee Dam, for Lauderbach Springs, high on the ridge behind McDonald, Tenn., for Scott Hotel at Whitwell, for Tucker Springs hotel, all long only a memory.*

From the early 1900s through the late 1940s there are many articles appearing in the Chattanooga, Dalton and even Atlanta newspapers, many from the society pages and reports from civic clubs touting the food, service, ambiance, and hospitality served up at the Cherokee Inn on Depot Street in Ringgold. This street was also known (before US-41) as the Dalton Road, this road having been built on the bed of the famous Federal Road of 1805, years before the white man came to Catoosa County when it was under the control of the Cherokee people.



The Cherokee Inn When It Was in Its Prime

Summary and Timeline

1882 – Newspaper ad states that Cherokee Springs water is available at the Cherokee Hotel in Ringgold

- *This indicates that the Cherokee Hose/Hotel/Inn was operating in 1882.*

1888 – Catoosa County Confederate Veteran James M. Edwards married Alice Cox Edwards marry in Catoosa County

1889- Daughter Frances Cox “Miss Frankie” Edwards is born

1891 -Daughter Jamie A. Edwards is born

1898 – Daughter Tommie Edwards is born

1904 – Alice Cox Edwards begins operation of the Cherokee Inn

- *We do not know if the family was considered operating it before this date or if a previous owner was operating it. If deed records can be located indicating the purchase date by James M. and Alice Cox Edwards, we can establish the date of their ownership and the name of a previous owner.*

1918 – Death of daughter Jamie A. Edwards

1933 – Alice Cox Edwards dies, and Miss Frankie assumes management of the Cherokee Inn

Late 1940s or early 1950s – The Cherokee Inn ceases operations

1975 - Death of Frances C. “Miss Frankie” Edwards

1989 – Death of Mrs. Tommie W. Edwards Head (wife of T. Grady Head, the Presiding Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court

Questions Remaining to be Answered:

When was the building erected, and by whom?

Who lived there before the Edwards family?

Did those residents prior to the Edwards family operate it as a hotel and/or restaurant?

When exactly did Miss Frankie close the Cherokee Inn?

When was the building torn down?

Sources

Chattanooga Daily Times

Harper’s Weekly Magazine – 1864

History in Catoosa County, Volume II, by William H.H. Clark

U.S. Census Records