



Graysville History

Early Cherokee Village

- The town that today lies along the CSX rail line and the South Chickamauga Creek in northeast Catoosa County was first a Cherokee Village named Opalika.
- Scrapeshin, a famous Cherokee warrior, lived in the area of Opalika. The ridge that runs from Graysville to Ryall Springs (East Brainerd) is named after him.
- Audobon Acres in East Brainerd just north of Graysville along the South Chickamauga Creek was also the site of a Cherokee village.
- The earliest post office in Graysville was called Opalika.
- In the Cherokee removal (1848) the area of Graysville was sold into lots.

John Gray – Railroad Builder

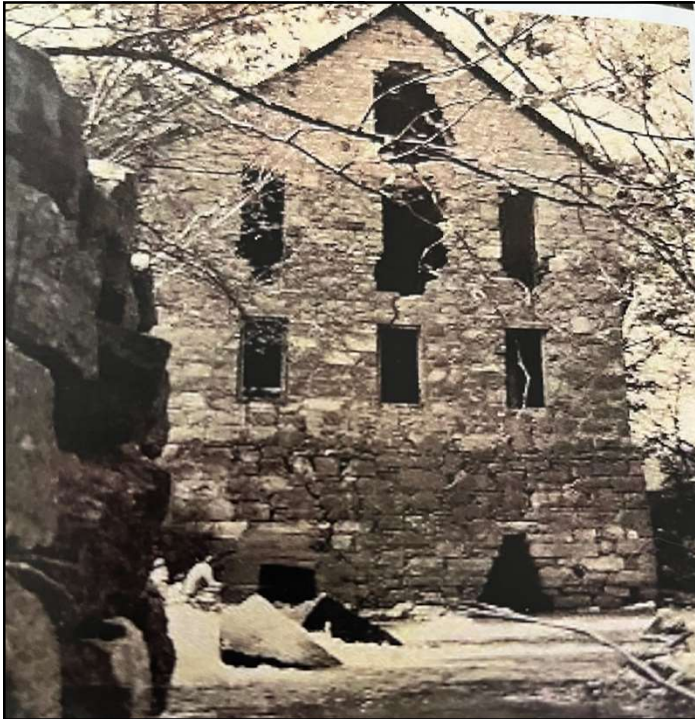
- John David Gray (1808-1878) was born in London, England. He came to the United States (Boston) from England at a young age with his parents (Elizabeth Granger and Thomas Gray) and at least two brothers, William and Robert.
- The Gray brothers began their careers as railroad builders in Charleston, South Carolina. They also owned and operated a steamboat on the canal system around Charleston. They later moved into Florida, establishing the town of St. Joseph, (now Port St. Joe) and built four of Florida's territorial railroads.
- St. Joseph was hit by a yellow fever epidemic in 1841 and the town experienced a rapid decline. At this point, the Gray brothers took up the tracks they had laid there as well as a small steam locomotive and headed to Georgia to build railroads there.
- The Gray Company (as it was known) completed railroads in and around Macon, Atlanta, West Point, Rome, Augusta, Savannah and into Alabama and Tennessee. William Gray settled in Macon.
- John Gray received the contract to build a railroad (Western and Atlantic) for the State of Georgia from Atlanta to Chattanooga, particularly to help build a tunnel through Chetogetta Mountain at present day Tunnel Hill. (He later built the tunnel through Missionary Ridge in Chattanooga.) W&A railroad was completed in 1849.
- As he traveled through the Catoosa area building the railroad, he noticed a natural water fall on the South Chickamauga Creek and decided to buy up the land (a few hundred acres) and make that area his new manufacturing town. At this time the area was called Pull Tight by the early white settlers.
- He, of course, named the new town Graysville! (1849)

John D. Gray



John Gray's Enterprises

- Grist mill and dam were built in 1851.
- Furniture factory, distillery were soon added.
- Graysville Mining and Manufacturing Company was established to mine limestone from nearby hills and to manufacture other items.
- One lime kiln still exists on Lime Kiln Road off of the Dug Road in Graysville.
- He used convict labor as well as slaves to do his work.
- His home was on a hill above the grist mill and distillery (site of present day Dessie Lou Swanson home.)
- Barrels made for distillery were also used to ship lime (earliest form of cement) on trollies from the hills to the rail road.



Graysville Mill

Graysville Mining and Manufacturing Building



John Gray's Dreams

- Gray ultimately had factories in several southern cities. His were some of the first "rolling" mills (process used to make thickness of metal uniform – used to create structural products – i.e. rails) in the south.
- His dream was to have Graysville the hub of his enterprises by building a rail line from Dayton, TN to Lafayette, GA intersecting the Western Atlantic rail line at Graysville.
- Gray's dreams were dashed when the Civil War broke out.

Graysville and the Civil War

- John Gray supplied Mississippi rifles, carbines, gun stocks, sabers, bayonets, scabbards, cedar buckets and other items to the Confederacy.
- Due to his work, the Union General Ulysses Sherman, put a target on the small town of Graysville.
- November 26, 1863 a skirmish happened about 3 miles from Graysville at Mackie Branch (East Brainerd.) The Confederates were routed and thereafter the Union army occupied Graysville.
- John Gray was confronted by Union officers about his work for the Confederates.
- Over 40,000 Union soldiers were stationed in Graysville as they prepared for the battle at Ringgold and the move south to Dalton.
- On November 28, 1863 Graysville was destroyed by order of General Sherman.

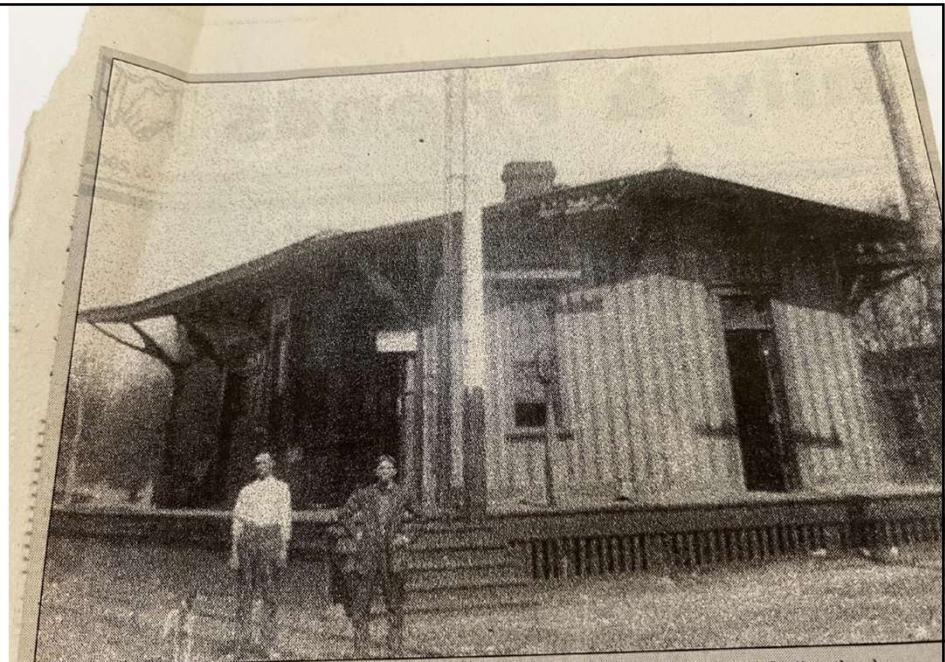
Graysville After the War

- John Gray rebuilt Graysville and continued his manufacturing and mining. He never regained his fortune or all of his enterprises.
- He died in 1878 and is buried in the Graysville Cemetery. A historical marker has been purchased by family and supporters of Graysville and placed at his grave in recent years.
- Few structures were left after the war in Graysville. The oldest houses there today date from the 1870s - 1880s. (There is a house pictured in Clark's History of Catoosa County on Gray Street with General R.W.Johnson and his officers standing on a front porch balcony. That house, or a house rebuilt after the Civil War in the same style – but with a second floor, still stands.)

Graysville after John Gray

- Members of the Gray family continued to live in Graysville following John's death. They served as postmasters, store owners and ran his mining and manufacturing company.
- As late as 1899 the quarrying of limestone in Graysville was a big business.
- Agricultural output was strong also with strawberries from Graysville area being shipped as far as Atlanta and Cincinnati.
- The train depot was renovated in 1899.
- As Portland cement became the choice of builders, the lime industry began to fail and soon the mining of limestone ceased in Graysville.

Graysville Depot



The Graysville Depot (Courtesy of the George Hendrix Collection)

Graysville in the early 20th Century

- The Ordinances and By-Laws of Graysville of February, 1928 show that there was a mayor, recorder, four councilmen, a treasurer and a marshal.
- The mayor was the judge in all cases that happened in the town limits (1/2 mile north, south and east of the depot and to the Chickamauga creek on the west side of town.)
- Some of the more interesting items listed under “Revenues” are:
 - A tax on dogs = 50 cents each
 - A tax on any “performances” = \$50
- All able bodied men ages 21-50 were required to do street work, or pay \$3 for each day not worked, or spend 30 days in the town jail.

What you could NOT do in Graysville in the early 20th Century

- Cannot drive more than 15 miles per hour.
- No bathing suits except within 200 yards of regular swimming holes.
- Cannot change from bathing suits to street clothes in public.
- No petting or having a petting party.
- No sitting in cars at night unless all lights are on inside and outside the car.
- No fishing on Sunday.
- No feeding of hogs on the sidewalk.
- No goats running at large.
- No hitching horses to fences or trees.

History of schools in Graysville

- One of the first schools was at the corner of Front Street and the “Hollow” Road (now called Swanson Hollow Road.) This school burned when a shingle from a fire across the creek caught the roof on fire.
- There was a school in a building that was on Gray Street behind the Mining and Manufacturing Company.
- There was a school behind New Liberty Baptist Church.
- All of the early schools were subscription schools. Parents would pay for their children to attend. These schools were in session only 2-3 months each year.
- The first “official” Graysville Elementary was located across Julian Road from the Methodist Church. This school no longer exists.
- In the early 1950s Graysville Elementary School was moved out of the “town” of Graysville to property on Graysville Road in the New Liberty Community where it is today.
- A new building was dedicated in recently.

Old Graysville School House



Churches in Graysville

- Graysville United Methodist Church was founded as Blackwell's Chapel in 1840. In 1876, Allen Kennedy, partner of John Gray, deeded the property on Graysville Road to the church and it was relocated there. The present church sits on the spot of the old wooden church of 1876.
- Graysville United Methodist is the oldest Methodist Church in Catoosa County.
- New Liberty Baptist Church was organized in 1853 and has been at its present location (land donated by John Gray) since its beginning.

Graysville United Methodist Church



Graysville Post Office

- Graysville's first post office was organized as Opalika in 1850.
- Henry Fisher was the first postmaster.
- The name of the post office was changed to Graysville in 1856.
- For 173 years, the Graysville Post Office has served the community.
- Two of the postmasters over this time, Mrs. Jennie Dalton and Mrs. Laura Swanson served the office for a combined 68 years.
- Today Graysville Post Office is under the umbrella of the Ringgold Post Office. We receive clerks to fill the office from Ringgold. It is open M-F from 8-12 and Saturday from 8-11. Lobby is always open!

Loss of Incorporation Status

- Graysville was one of 188 towns in Georgia that lost its charter in 1995 due to failure to provide services or hold elections.
- Graysville officials chose to become unincorporated in the mid-1940s.
- W.E. (Pete) Brown was the last mayor of Graysville.
- Interested citizens applied for and received status as an Historic Township for Graysville soon after the loss of its charter.
- Historic Township simply means that we remain "on the map" and that we work together for historical preservation and beautification.

Graysville Today

- Points of Interest

- Big Springs (also called Convict Springs) on southeast end of town (3 natural springs flow from under the beginning of Scrapeshin Ridge to the creek.) This was the site of Edgewater Beach a very popular tourist attraction in the early 20th century.
- Blackford House – Victorian House on Front Street also called the Gray House. Built in the early 1870s by Dr. W.T. Blackford. It is on the National Register of Historic Places
- Weathers/Robinson/Simpson Store – Front Street – one of the early post offices in Graysville.
- Graysville Cemetery – Gray Street – final resting place of John Gray and the early founding families of Graysville. Soldiers from the Civil War are buried in unmarked graves in the middle of the cemetery.
- Dalton House – Gray Street – built in early 1880s home of Dr. John Booth Dalton, who delivered most of the babies in Graysville.
- Ward House – Gray Street – Could it be the house pictured in Clark's History of Catoosa?
- Spring on north end of Graysville. This spring feeds into a lake that empties into the creek. This property was the site of all of the limestone operations. Trolley lines are still visible on this property.

Blackford/Gray House





The Ward House

Weathers/Robinson/
Simpson Store



What we have lost!

- Old Mining and Manufacturing building on Front Street. Lost to fire in 2003.
- Graysville Store – Closed in 1998. Structure is unstable.
- Robinson House – built in 1870 – structurally unstable and is slated to be torn down.
- Vaughn house at the corner of Front and Swanson Hollow. This three story house was lost to fire in the 1980s.
- Old Graysville School between the Chickamauga Creek and the railroad. Lost to fire in the last 10 years or so.
- Depot was removed after the water tower burned the 1930s.

What we have saved!

- Dam at the mill was in ruins. A group of concerned citizens worked together to rebuild the dam in 1982.
- Mill was saved and made into a home by the Don Grant family.
- Concerned citizens worked to keep a developer from putting up billboards in the Graysville community.
- The one-lane bridge was saved in 1980 after the new two-lane bridge was built. It is now on the State Historic Bridges Registry.

Graysville's Future

- The growth of subdivisions around us (Council Fire, Martha's Vineyard, Windstone, Mill Creek) has increased traffic tremendously.
- The fragility of the old town limits (at least 30-40% designated a flood plain) is very real.
- The need for either the removal and relocation of the CSX side track or an overpass over the tracks to help with traffic flow is evident.
- Any overpass built, however, should not be built within the historic town limits. Doing so would ruin the layout of the town and wipe away much history.
- We celebrate 175 years as a town next year!