

# GWINNETT HISTORY

## THE QUICK AND EASY LOWDOWN ON THE HISTORY OF GWINNETT.

### THE ORIGINS OF OUR BELOVED GWINNETT GO BACK TO THE YEAR 1818.

The county was created on land ceded by the Creek and Cherokee Indians and named after one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Button Gwinnett. One could argue, if not for the success of the county over the years, poor old Button would have faded into the shadows as barely a memory.

But, thanks to a vibrant economy and a long history of success, the legacy of Button Gwinnett is on solid ground - or just above it. His likeness is perched high atop the Mall of Georgia looking down over what was once a rural, agricultural area.

The oldest surviving building in Gwinnett is the Elisha Winn House in Dacula. The original occupant, Mr. Winn, was a justice of the court and a senator in the 1800's. The House was built before the county even existed, and for a few years, it served as the planning headquarters for what would become Gwinnett County.

Many of the county's government functions were held there in the house and in the backyard. Court was held there and the first jail was built on the property. They probably had very orderly social events there, given it was a short walk to court and jail if you got out of line!

It was Mr. Winn who was later chosen to select the first county seat and a site for a new courthouse. He plunked down \$200 for a 250 acre plot pretty much in the center of the county.

In 1821 the city of Lawrenceville was incorporated and declared the county seat. Lawrenceville by the way, was named after a naval commander James Lawrence, who's best known for his dying command, "Don't give up the ship!"

By 1885 in L'ville, there had been a courthouse fire, a courthouse rebuilding, a courthouse outgrowing and ultimately a courthouse replacement. The new courthouse,

now known as the Gwinnett Historic Courthouse was built in 1885 on the square in Lawrenceville and served the county's judicial needs until 1988. Today it's a quaint majestic venue for tours, weddings and a host of community events.

And then, along came a choo choo. The birth of many of Gwinnett's cities can be attributed to a railroad line that was built through the county in 1871. Out popped Norcross, Duluth, Suwanee and Buford. Yep, back then, just like today, transportation and infrastructure were and are the main catalyst for growth and economic development.

The county's first major industry was leather goods. Seems Buford was the place to be for shoes and saddles and everything in between. Those saddles were pretty famous too, as cowboy Roy Rogers fancied them and visited Buford often for fittings. His statue, marking days gone by, can be seen in downtown Buford.

The Bona Allen tanneries were vibrant businesses right through the depression. They had around 2400 employees and even by today's standards they'd be seen as a prominent employer. Their presence spawned residential and business growth in the area. It should come as no surprise, the first banks in the county were built in Buford.

You want to do something totally awesome that will change the evolution and history of an entire region? Try putting a bunch of rocks in a big old river and dam it up to make a humongous lake. Works every time. The dam for Lake Lanier was built on the Chattahoochee in the late 1950's. Located on the northern tip of Gwinnett, forming our western border, the lake now provides power, water and recreation for Gwinnett and the region.

Over the next couple of decades, Gwinnett would continue to evolve and prosper. In the 1970's a lot of attention was given to developing the county's water and sewer system. The iconic Water Towers were constructed along I-85 and what is now known as Jimmy Carter Blvd. Back then it was Rockbridge Road. Later, the slogans "Gwinnett is Great" and "Success Lives Here" were added, creating a landmark of sorts for Gwinnett - at least until they were dismantled in 2010.

The visionary thinking on infrastructure paved the way for substantial growth during the eighties. So much so that Gwinnett became known as the fastest growing county in the country.


It was the mid-eighties when Gwinnett opened its first mall at Pleasant Hill Road and I-85. Prior to that, the intersection was mostly noted for the US 76 Truck Stop, where scenes for the Burt Reynolds movie *Smokey and The Bandit* were shot. Yep, seems like Hollywood and movie making were knocking on the door way back then.

In the nineties, growth would slow a bit but Gwinnett continued to prosper.

Zell Miller became the Governor of Georgia and ushered in the lottery, creating the Hope scholarship that would benefit many Gwinnett families.

The landscape would continue to evolve with signature buildings emerging from a land that was once home to cotton crops and dairy farming. The Gwinnett arena, a new Chamber of Commerce building, a four-year college, a baseball stadium and the Mall

of Georgia marked milestones of vision and progress through the early 2000's.

No doubt our forefathers would be surprised to see what has become of Gwinnett and one can only imagine what the future holds. If history is a precursor for what lies ahead, we'll be saying "Success Lives Here" for years to come. The quick and easy lowdown on the history of Gwinnett. 

# Burton #LoveGwinnett



Sign the Declaration of Independence? CHECK. Lend your name to a county? CHECK. Be the subject of an epic rap battle between Steven Colbert and Lin-Manuel Miranda? CHECK... and kudos to BURTON GWINNETT.