

A Bridge to the Past: The Euharlee Covered Bridge

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When I first started my research, someone suggested that I get on the Internet and look up rural sites in Georgia. I found a site on covered bridges, www.dot.state.ga.us/homeoffs/bridge_dsgn.www/covered/ . Bridges play an important role in the identity of a community—I thought of the Golden Gate Bridge and London Bridge. The website I found featured a map of Georgia that showed the location of the oldest bridges, and I looked for the one closest to where I live, which was in Euharlee, Georgia, between Cartersville and Rome. I clicked on www.dot.state.ga.us/homeoffs/bridge_dsgn.www/covered/euharlee.htm and received some information about the bridge, the old mill adjacent to the

bridge, and the museum, which contains all the history of the bridge and of the town of Euharlee.

I packed a lunch, not knowing what I was in for but willing to take the risk, and headed for Euharlee, Georgia. This was my one day to do research and I was just going to go to the bridge and hope that the museum would have all the necessary information. I knew that a lady named Miss Taff worked at the museum, and I hoped that she could tell me about the bridge.

I drove north on Interstate 75 and got off at the Cartersville exit. I passed through the town and got deeper and deeper into the country. I found the bridge off of a little country road. The Euharlee Bridge has now been recognized as a historical site and actually has a historical marker as well as its own store and museum.

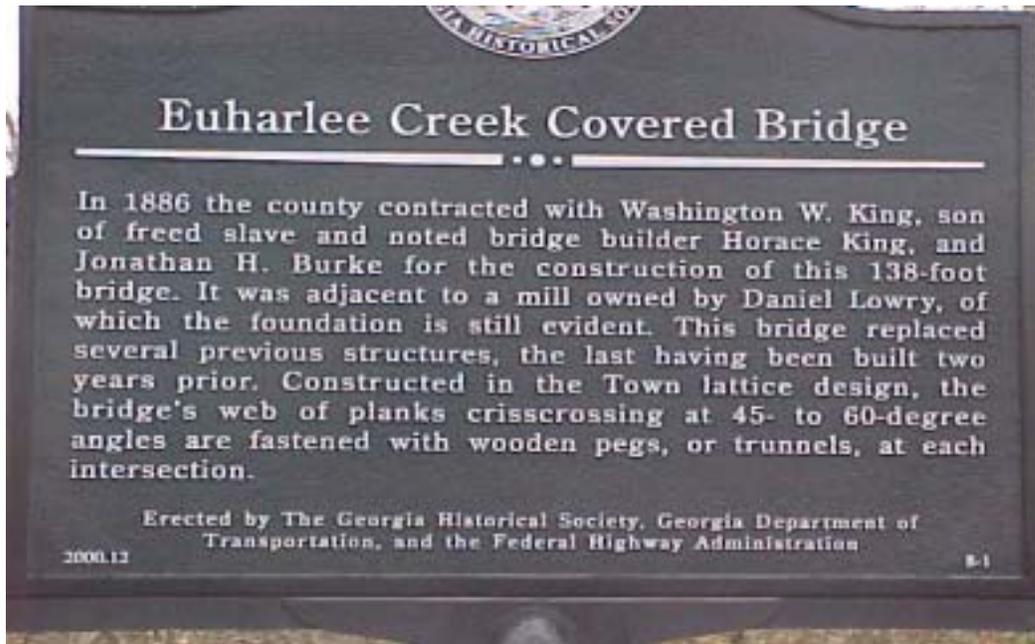
The museum was supposed to open at noon, and it was almost twelve. Since nobody was there yet, I walked out onto the bridge. It is made up of heartwood pine, and there are cracks between the boards. Along the sides, the boards crisscross and are held together with wooden pegs.



I imagined myself riding a horse and trolloping across the 138-foot-long bridge.



I was to find out later that one of the men who built the bridge was the son of freed slave and bridge builder Horace King.



When Miss Taff showed up, I was sitting on the grass, eating my lunch and writing down some questions that I wanted to ask her. She was so small I could barely see her in the car. She had a firm look on her face and I could not help but feel discouraged—this was not going to be very easy. I gave her some time to get situated, and then I walked up to the museum. She was outside, sweeping the acorns off the sidewalk. She made some comments about the annoying squirrels and then walked inside with me.



Every important time period of the whole history of Euharlee was inside this museum. Miss Taff had Indian arrowheads, Civil War artifacts, World War I and World War II photos and letters, and photos of the

people who had lived in Euharlee. She did not just possess the material objects, she also possessed the knowledge and oral history of Euharlee.

She began talking about how the town first began: “The early pioneers—their values were different from what ours are now. When they first came here, and built their homes, the first thing they wanted to build was their church. And they tried to set their standards of life from what is taught in the Bible . . . after they built their school, they knew that they didn’t care how thinly populated they were. You have to have rules to live by, and so, there stands the little courthouse . . .” She took me around the room explaining and telling stories about the town and the people and adding things about her own life experiences. She compared the yesterdays with the todays. She said, “But we lived that way where y’all could live this way cause it’s like a baby learning to walk, he had to crawl. And we built

upon yesterday for today, and what scares me to death is what kind of tomorrow we're building. Nobody's worried about tomorrow—they are worried about how much money they've got. And it scares me. My sister, before she died, she said, 'I've decided we were born in the best time that there was to be born. We had a mother and a father that loved us and we had standards. And we were taught respect for each other . . . and we were taught to respect other people and their property.' ” Miss Taff, who is eighty-two years old and loves history, talked to me for about two and a half hours. She said, “ I guess the good Lord was preparing me for this a long time cause I have always loved history. I tell you, I was a pack rat. I always saved everything.” She has lived in Euharlee all of her life, and her family has been in Euharlee for almost 150 years. She said that most of the people in Euharlee came from Ireland and Scotland.



She showed me an organ that she owns that is over one hundred years old.

By this time, all my thoughts about researching the bridge and the old mill had faded. All I wanted was to learn as much as possible about

Miss Taff and her community. Her main concern today seems to be that the emphasis on morals, values, and family is withering away. Respect, truth, and honesty are not taught the same way they used to be.

After talking to Miss Taff for two hours, I made an appointment to see her again on Friday. I left feeling like a different person than I was when I arrived. I could not wait to come back and see her again.



On Friday, I arrived around two o'clock, and again she was getting ready to sweep her sidewalk. She again made a complaint about the squirrels, and then she sat on the porch swing with me and told me about her life:

“There was twelve of us, six girls and six boys, and I never remember all of us being at home till my dad died. The oldest ones were done gone to college when I was old enough to remember.”

“Are you the youngest?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you farm?”

“Yeah, I still farm. I married a farmer... And I live on a farm. I am surrounded by subdivisions and they are waiting for me to die so they can go ahead on my farm. Farming life is all I’ve ever known. And I like it because you can be your own boss—for one thing, you steer your own boat. And you have some privacy, and every time you walk out the door, you don’t have a witness to the fact that you’ve walked out . . . We grow soybeans—some years, wheat—and while I was growing up, after my husband died, we raised cotton and corn . . . Now, it’s a funny thing, we grow cotton here, but this gin right up Stilesboro is the only one in North Georgia. If you grow cotton, you have to either go there or to Alabama. When I was farming and when I was growing up there was a cotton gin in every little rural community. You had your gin, your school, your little country store, your church and everything. That was the way you lived. So,

most of the cotton land is getting covered up. I don't know where all the people are coming from . . .”



On the first weekend of October, Euharlee held a small fall festival near the museum and the bridge. There were people from Euharlee, some from Cartersville, and a few from other towns. I had the wonderful experience of being a part of a community that doesn't seem want to give up what it has for the new world. Now I know that bridges play a role in the community, because if it were not for the covered bridge, I may not have ever discovered Euharlee, Miss Taff and the history that they both bring together.