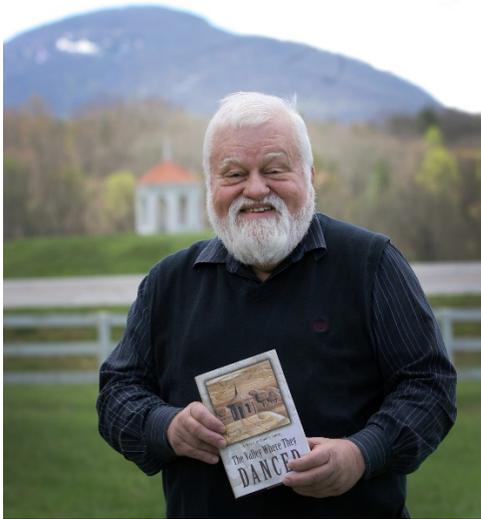


PIEDMONT COLLEGE

Caption:

Author Emory Jones near the Nacoochee Mound in White County, which plays a role in his new play, ‘The Valley Where They Danced.’”



New Georgia play, ‘The Valley Where They Danced,’ to premiere at Piedmont College June 15

As a teenager, Emory Jones used to bale hay around the Nacoochee Valley Indian Mound, which has stood for hundreds of years as a landmark in northeast Georgia.

It should be no surprise then that the mound and its picturesque gazebo earns a prominent role in a new play Jones has written, “The Valley Where They Danced,” which is set in Sautee and Nacoochee valleys during the early 1920s.

Based on Jones’ book by the same name, the play is now in rehearsals for its world premiere in June by Piedmont College’s North Georgia Theatre, a professional company in residence at the college each summer.

Directed by professor Bill Gabelhausen, performances are scheduled in the black box theatre at the Swanson Center for Performing Arts and Communications for 7:30 p.m., June 15–17 and June 22–24; and at 2 p.m., June 18 and June 25. Tickets can be ordered online at piedmont.edu/

theatre-schedule or by calling the box office at 706-778-8500 ext. 1355. The Swanson Center is located at 365 College Drive, Demorest.

After a long career in advertising and writing mostly non-fiction, Jones said that working with the Piedmont theatre department has shown him just how tough the playwright's job can be. At a first reading of the new play, Jones said one of the hardest things he had to do was cut scenes from the book to tighten up the play. "It's hard to write a play from a book," he said. "It probably would have been easier to start out as a play and then work into a book. In a play, you can't just introduce a new character whenever you want."

But, Jones said, the play retains the same story that has given the book five-star status on Amazon after more than 100 reviews. And it also retains the history of the region that he was so careful to weave into the love story about a local valley girl and the new doctor she marries. Even the speech patterns are carefully constructed from real people that Jones knew growing up. "My grandmother would never say, 'Shut the door,'" he said. "She would say, 'Pull the door to.'"

Although born in Banks County, Jones grew up in Mossy Creek, just south of Cleveland. His mother, the late Wirtha Meaders Jones Morgan, was part of the extended Meaders clan, famous as folk potters in the area. Jones graduated from White County High School, where he was involved in "everything that had to do with the FFA," (Future Farmers of America). He attended Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, "because that is where FFA state officers went to school," he said.

Jones joined the Air Force as a fireman, serving in Texas, the Panama Canal Zone, Germany, and Colorado. He then went back to college, graduating from the University of Georgia with a degree in agricultural journalism. In his long career in advertising and public relations, he worked for companies including Gold Kist, the Farm Journal, and ad agencies in Atlanta. In these jobs, he interviewed farmers in all 50 states. "All that helped me learn to listen to people and the way they talk," he said.

In 2000, Jones and his wife, Judy, semi-retired and moved back to White County, where they opened Yonah Mountain Treasures on Highway 75 between Cleveland and Helen, selling antiques and books; and Jones continued to do advertising work for a number of companies in the Southeast.

Jones said the late Shirley McDonald got him interested in the White County Historical Society, and together they published "White County 101," his first venture into writing about local history. That was followed by a coffee table book, "Distant Voices," a collection of photos and essays by local artists, all about the Nacoochee mound, which he and Helen videographer David

Greear turned into a documentary film. Jones and Greear also collaborated on a documentary about the Tallulah Falls Railroad, called “Memories of a Mountain Shortline.”

With all of that history in his head, Jones said he wanted to write a novel set locally, but needed a good story. Without giving away too much of the plot, he found it in an article about a local legend written by historian and journalist C.P. “Scoop” Scruggs more than 30 years ago. The tale involved a young doctor who moves to the valley and falls in love with a local girl.

Almost as soon as the book was published, Jones said, a friend and longtime resident of the valley, Ann Banke, encouraged him to rewrite it as a play. He approached Piedmont theatre professor Kathy Blandin about the project, and she helped him through “about a dozen revisions,” he said. When I finally finished, Bill Gabelhausen, chair of the Department of Theatre at Piedmont, agreed to take it on for the North Georgia Theatre’s summer production.

“I appreciate what Piedmont has done,” Jones said. “They care about the history behind the play, and they want to preserve the history and dialect of the area.”

So, what is next for “The Valley Where They Danced”? “Well, Jones said, “I’d still like to see it be a movie!”