



As Featured in

# GEORGIA MOUNTAIN LAUREL

## Exploring Northeast Georgia Memories of a Mountain Shortline

On an unseasonably warm, sunny December day I had the pleasure of sitting down with Emory Jones, author of books including, *Distant Voices*, the history of the Nacoochee Indian Mound and *The Valley Where They Danced*, an historic novel set in the background of the Nacoochee Valley, along with David Greear, photographer and author, both local residents of White County, to hear about their recently released DVD, a documentary called, “*Memories of a Mountain Shortline – A History of the Tallulah Falls Railroad*” which they produced in cooperation with the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center.

Their enthusiasm for the project is contagious and after speaking with them both I immediately went home and sat down and watched the DVD. Having lived in Rabun County for a number of years, many of the names and faces on this DVD were familiar. I would love to mention all of the names involved in the creation of this documentary but there may be too many and I apologize for any omissions.

My challenge today, is how you begin to describe a fifty six minute documentary that is so full of history and stories, in a short article. I will try to hit the highlights but watching the DVD will be a gift to you and your family or friends. From the start of this collection of memories, with the sound of the lonesome train whistle in the background and the touching dedication to Dess Oliver (1937 to 2015), longtime teacher at Rabun Gap Nacoochee School, whose commitment to the preservation of the history of the Tallulah Falls Railway made the documentary possible, the viewer will be captivated.

For fifty four years, the “Old TF”, as locals called it ran fifty eight miles from Cornelia to Franklin, North Carolina. The documentary not only includes the history of the railway but also stories of Tallulah Falls, Clayton and the long gone town of Burton which lies under the waters of Lake Burton. Many Rabun County lake property homeowners will enjoy hearing the history behind the construction of the dams and lakes in the area. As Emory Jones put it, “the hardest part was finding a stopping place”, and condensing more than fifty hours of information into a DVD just short of an hour. The documentary is a wonderful collection of historical photographs, including images of some of the fifty eight trestles that were built on the “Old TF”. There are images of trestle collapses, including the 1898 Panther Creek incident and the 1927 Hazel Creek trestle accident. Dess Oliver describes construction of these trestles based on his deep knowledge and understanding of the early engineering techniques that were utilized so many years ago.

Rabun County residents will especially enjoy the colorful interviews with local residents, such as Doris Welch, who describes being a child growing up in Mountain City when the train came

through and catching candy and chewing gum (a rare treat back then!) thrown to them from the train. Barbara Taylor Woodall tells a wonderful story of the “slowness” of the train and Paulette Carpenter shares a detailed memory of the train stopping to help put out the fire at the old Lakemont school building. Doug Bleckley shares memories of the role he played in the Disney movie “*The Great Locomotive Chase*”, which utilized the Tallulah Falls Railroad for the film in 1956.

So many of the memories of the Tallulah Falls railroad are stored in the minds of the people who lived to see the trestles and stations, tracks and engines. This documentary has captured these memories at an important crossroads in time. Several of the people involved in the history provided for this DVD are no longer with us.

John Kollock, (1929-2014) left many treasures for Northeast Georgia in his art and writing, but he also filmed “*The Last Run*” of the “Old TF” in March 1961 on 8mm film which was digitized and clips are included in the DVD. Rutherford Ellis (1928-2015), railroad historian, shared his rich knowledge of the origins of the Tallulah Falls railroad for this DVD.

As I mentioned earlier so many people are involved in contributions to this rich, historical documentary. Brian Boyd, Director of Communications at Tallulah Falls School, author and historian contributes his detailed knowledge

on the “impact” the railway had on the surrounding area. Paige Spivey with Rabun Gap Nacoochee School discusses “*The Mystique of the Tallulah Falls Railroad*”. Kay Carver Collins, Rabun County Historical Museum, discusses the impact the railway had on bringing jobs to local people. A popular job was to cut crossties, which were constantly being replaced. Workers would be paid fifty cents each for a crosstie. Also cutting firewood and leaving it by the tracks was another popular job. Many residents remember the train catching the woods on fire when a spark would fly from the firebox.

A review of this delightful DVD would not be complete without mentioning the support of Piedmont College, The Northeast Georgia History Center at Brenau University, Burton Rabun Real Estate Company and many others. To order a copy of the DVD online visit [www.yonahtreasures.com](http://www.yonahtreasures.com) and look under the bookstore tab for Emory Jones. The DVD is also for sale at local area merchants.

By Kitty Stratton



David Greear & Emory Jones

