

## Ringgold History

Recent archeological discoveries indicate that there has been a settlement in Ringgold as far back as 1000 BC. One can easily travel north and south by following our parallel valleys. But to go east and west, walking is made much easier by a gap in the mountains. Ringgold Gap lines up with Mill Creek Gap in Dalton to provide the shortest distance from the Mississippi Valley to the East Coast. Ringgold's existence was then and still is based on its being a crossroad. The village persisted during the era of the Mound Builders. The Union Army reported a large mound about where the Alabama Road crosses I-75. Early maps referred to the village as Cross Roads, Taylor's or sometimes Taylor's Cross Roads.

In 1805 the Cherokees gave the Federal Government permission to build a road through the Nation from Athens to below Chatsworth. There it split, with one leg going north to Knoxville and the other to Varnell, Ringgold, Ross' Landing and Nashville. The Indians maintained the road, collected tolls, grew corn to feed the passing herds, established taverns to entertain the drovers and grew rich.

Richard Taylor established a tavern at his home located on the corner of LaFayette Street and the Alabama Road. Taylor was one-fourth Cherokee but was chosen as Chief of the Chickamauga District of the Cherokee Nation. He made several trips to Washington on behalf of his people and was personally acquainted with Presidents Jackson and Monroe. Pres. Monroe stayed with Taylor on his tour of the South in 1819. Taylor's Ridge is named for the Chief. He was probably the most outstanding public figure the county has produced. He conducted one of the 12 contingents of Cherokees to Oklahoma on the "Trail of Tears" and there continued to be a leader among his people.

The removal of the Indians in 1838 brought a flood of immigrants from the Carolinas, Tennessee and Middle Georgia. The town was incorporated in 18 December, 1847 and named after Major Samuel Ringgold, the first regular army officer to be killed in the Mexican War. Ringgold was recognized as a National hero and died about 19 months before the town was organized.

The arrival of the railroad in 1849 turned the sleepy cross road village into a railroad boomtown complete with saloons, distilleries, stores and mills. Prospectors searched the county for precious minerals and entrepreneurs had a field day. One scheme was to run a flume line around White Oak Mountain and provide waterpower for a dozen mills along the mountainside. The town grew to about 1,500 residents.

The first taste of the Civil War came when Andrews tried to steal a train and was caught just above town. As the fighting raged in Kentucky and Tennessee, Ringgold was turned into a hospital town, receiving the wounded by train. Two Confederate nurses, Kate Cummings and Fanny Bears, left vivid descriptions of conditions in the local hospitals during the war.

In 1863 the town was partially burned by Col. Wilder in his search for the Confederate Army, then located near LaFayette. Gen. Longstreet arrived with a major part of the Army of Northern Virginia and unloaded at Catoosa Platform. It was his charge that won the "Battle of Chickamauga." Nearly 25,000 men were wounded. It took four days just to collect the Confederate wounded from the field. Most of the Confederates were evacuated by wagon to Ringgold and to hospitals further south by train.

After the "Battle of Missionary Ridge," the entire Confederate Army retreated through Ringgold Gap. Gen. Patrick Cleburne and his 4,000 men were given the task of delaying the Union army until the Confederates could reorganize at Tunnel Hill and Dalton. The Confederate Congress gave him an accommodation for his gallant and successful stand in at Ringgold Gap.

Much of the Union Army spent the winter of 1863-64 camped in and around Ringgold. When they advanced toward Atlanta in May 1864, the town had been reduced in population to one family and one lady. Most of the buildings had been burned, but the depot, four stores of the downtown block, the Whitman house, Jones house and Evans house still stand today.

The Civil War created a local economic depression that lasted almost a hundred years, only to be broken by the construction of I-75 in 1959. But today, Ringgold's location, climate, water resources, good schools and low taxes are again making it the boom town that started in 1847.

*~Compiled by William H.H. (Bill) Clark*