

The Story Of Laura Singleton Walker

One of Waycross' most distinguished citizens, Mrs. Laura S. Walker, was known for her literary ability, profound interest in mankind, and crusading spirit that launched many movements for the betterment of her community and state. She also was the author of the History of Ware County.

Mrs. Walker was born of Colonial ancestry in Milledgeville Georgia, February 28, 1861. She came to Waycross in 1886 as the wife of Dr. J. L. Walker, the former mayor. Mrs. Walker's friends included presidents, governors, military leaders and the great leaders of the South. Her home at 502 Gilmore Street was the most visited in Waycross.

Mrs. Walker was a teacher, writer and civic leader. She worked tirelessly for land conservation and tried in vain to persuade Ware County officials to buy land for that purpose. Had her advice been followed, the county probably would have never been in debt. She not only advanced the interest of forestry by her talks, but also by writings in the local paper. In the Waycross Journal of December 24, 1924, Mrs. Walker outlined a comprehensive program of forestry activities including forest parks, roadside beautification, forestry programs for schools, activities for civic organizations in forestry, and forestry legislation.

Her work in Waycross made history. In 1924, she planned a ceremony on the banks of the Suwannee River marking the centennial of General Floyd's victorious march through the Okefenokee Swamp. In 1934, she produced a pageant with 800 characters marking the 100th anniversary of Ware County and depicting the historical significance of Waycross. She erected markers and monuments at old trails and historic sites so that history and romance would not be forgotten.

Agricultural developments in Ware County advanced because of her interest. She was responsible for Ware County securing a home demonstration agent and a 4-H club. She also engaged herself in school and church welfare.

Interested in issues faced by African-Americans, she lent her efforts to their progress. She was responsible for the Negro Library. She was a member of the First Methodist Church, Daughters of the American Revolution, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Waycross Woman's Club, and other groups.

In the 1930s, the federal government bought land under Depression-Era programs; therefore, some of the eroded, worn out and uneconomical land was purchased from farmers and developed for recreational purposes. The land that became Laura S. Walker State Park was purchased under a Federal Land Use Areas project, was the first park in Georgia named for a woman. Laura Walker was a National Park until around 1941 when it became the 13th state park of Georgia. It had been built in 1937 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Work Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps.

Death came to the 94-year-old historian for whom Laura S. Walker State Park was named on April 9, 1955 following a lengthy illness. Hinson Funeral Parlor handled the arrangements.