

Chapter 4A: Historic Resources

Developmental History

The area around Braselton initially developed along an early frontier trail called The Jackson Trail, blazed and protected by Andrew Jackson in 1812-15. Jackson himself housed his headquarters in the Cochran House, ca. 1774 on SR 124 about 6 miles east of Braselton. The Davis family was one of the first inhabitants within present-day Braselton and the homestead still stands today (2003) on SR124 and dates to ca. 1820s. It evidences an early settlement within Jackson County and the developing frontier, predating the Town.

The Town's more recent history began when William Harrison Braselton and his wife, Susan, settled in the area in 1876. They farmed and raised three sons: John Oliver, Green, and William Harrison (W.H) Braselton. Their youngest son, John, opened a candy store at the age of eight that ultimately lead to Braselton's emergence as a mercantile center within Jackson County beginning in 1884. John sought the help of his two brothers in running the first and subsequent stores. They were known as "the three Bs." The first candy store was located at the intersection of SR53 and SR124. By 1902, four other stores opened near this location and expansion continued into the 1940s. The Town was officially incorporated on August 21, 1916.

Braselton was unique as a commercial center in the diversity and variety of goods and services it offered. It primarily catered to area farmers needing groceries, dry goods, and agricultural supplies. Other services it offered included banking, blacksmithing, and milling. The Braselton Roller Mill, in fact, began as one of the first full-service roller mills in northeast Georgia around 1900. Farmers in Jackson County and surrounding counties depended on Braselton as a commercial and distribution center.

The railroad's introduction also encouraged economic growth. It was built in 1882 and a spur was added in 1902 that linked the line to the Braselton cotton mill. This allowed processed cotton to be shipped to other markets. It also provided a supply line for Braselton's numerous stores and businesses. Braselton offered an alternative to the services found in Gainesville and Athens and appealed to many. Braselton also remained competitive by offering credit at a lower rate than neighboring towns. This advantage helped the town remain solvent during the failing years during The Great Depression.

The Braselton brothers also played an important role within the community. They paid for the construction of a high school in 1919 and a gymnasium shortly thereafter. They also built prominent homes that stand today. One of them, the W.H Braselton Home appropriately functions today as Town Hall. Many recall the Braselton's generosity and inclusiveness towards the community.

Braselton is usual in that many of the buildings that evidence the town's early history remain: the mills, the stores, and the homes despite its recent industrial, commercial and residential growth. Other historic resources like barns, cemeteries and the landscapes they occupy are also intact. Some representative buildings, however, have been lost: the old blacksmith shop and the Braselton Hotel.

Sources for Additional Historical Information:

Braselton, Leta G. The Braselton Family Album: Braselton, Georgia, 1876-1982. Atlanta: Conger Printing, 1982.

Elrod, Frary. Historical Notes on Jackson County Georgia. Jefferson, Georgia 1967.

Georgia Department of Natural Resources. "Tilling the Earth: Georgia's Historic Agricultural Heritage." Atlanta: Historic Preservation Division, 2002.

White, W.E., ed. The Early History of Jackson County, Georgia. Atlanta 1914.

Inventory of Cultural Resources

In 1976 the Georgia Department of Natural Resources funded a survey of historic resources in Jackson County. This survey identified three historic buildings: the Green Braselton Home (1910), the John Braselton Home (1900) and the Braselton Bros. Storefronts (1902-1940). Many other cultural resources were omitted from this survey, including the W.H. Braselton home (1913) and other more modest homes. Most if not all of the town's cultural resources, however, are included in the Braselton National Register Historic District. The National Register nomination lists 52 contributing historic properties within the historic district. In addition, the U.S. Bureau of Census compiles data on "Houses Built Before 1939" that gives some indication of the number of historic, residential properties. For Braselton in the 2000 census, 12 properties built before 1939 were counted while twenty-three houses built between the years 1940-1959 were recorded. A more detailed inventory that not only identifies number but the condition and significance of the existing cultural resources is needed. This information then can be used for informed decisions and future preservation planning.

Types of Cultural Resources

Braselton possess a unique variety and diversity of homes. They range from small houses built between 1900-1930 to larger homes like the ones owned by the "3 Bs" that reflect the Neoclassical architectural style. The smaller houses generally include three vernacular building types: saddlebags, bungalows, and central halls. These types are common in Georgia reflecting the modest homes of a rural population. The larger homes are related to the Neoclassical and Colonial Revival architectural styles and reflect elements and features popular between 1900-1913. The presence of these varying building types shows Braselton's diversity and the relationship between common and prominent residents.

Commercial resources define the Town of Braselton. The continuous commercial block at the crossroads of SR124 and SR53 mark the town's center. They stand as physical evidence of the town's founding and prominence as a commercial center. Several other historic commercial buildings survive: an early twentieth-century gas station, a c. 1920 garage, and a 1935 tire store. These buildings evidence the emergence of the automobile and its influence on a local economy. They likely demonstrate the intent of the Braselton's to attract out-of-town shoppers while also catering to their transportation needs. Indeed some of Braselton's historic resources reflect the automobile's emergence as an integral part of 20th life.

The most notable historic, industrial buildings in Braselton include the c. 1900 roller mill, a c. 1920 cotton gin, and c. 1920 cotton warehouses. These buildings evidence Braselton's diversity of services and presence of industry related to agriculture. The John Braselton Barn & Bell reflect heavy agricultural uses within the Town. The importance of these buildings is also shown in the railroad spur line that connected the complex directly to the Gainesville Midland Railroad (of the Central of Georgia Railroad). Braselton, unlike many railroad towns, did not have a depot. A loading platform at the mill functioned as the Town's station.

Braselton lost one of its most important institutional resources shortly after its construction. The Braselton High School, built in the early 1920s, was destroyed by a storm. The site of this building is important as they mark the contributions the Braselton Brothers made to the community.

The railroad line once traveled through Braselton along the east side of SR53, curving to the east south of the town center and then paralleling SR53 north of town. The tracks are removed, but the railroad's contribution in making Braselton a regional shopping is historically significant. Without the railroad and the spur to the cotton mill, Braselton's would not have achieved its industrial and commercial success. The railroad and automobile (i.e., transportation) played an important role in Braselton's development through the mid-twentieth century and to present-day.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register provides recognition to historic resources significant on a local, state, and national level. It means properties listed are themselves worthy of preservation.

Listed Properties:

Braselton Historic District. Listed in April 2001. The district includes residential, commercial and industrial buildings. The total number of contributing (historic) properties is fifty-two. The district includes all of the “Community Landmarks” listed below. (See Map for boundaries). A copy of the nomination is on file at Town Hall, The Northeast Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) in Athens, and Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources in Atlanta.

Community Landmarks

Braselton’s historically and culturally significant buildings, objects, and sites are known as “community landmarks.” The following list was identified by the Citizens Advisory Committee (see Map for locations). Information about many of these historic resources can be found in the National Register nomination. They should be considered in the Town’s future development, particularly when change may negatively affect them.

- Davis House
- Braselton Brothers Stores
- Braselton Roller Mill
- Braselton Cotton Gin
- John Braselton House
- John Braselton Barn & Bell
- Braselton-Stover House
- W.H. Braselton Home
- Braselton Post Office
- Braselton Gas Station
- English Vernacular House on SR53.
- Braselton Jail
- Braselton High School Bell
- Braselton High School Building
- Braselton Home Economics Building (Library).
- Braselton Tenant Homes
- Braselton Cemetery

Georgia Historical Markers

The familiar bronze markers found across Georgia are erected through a partnership with the Georgia Historical Society and individual sponsors. The purpose of the program is to document and display information about Georgia’s historic resources for public use. In Braselton, no markers have been placed as of 2003 but four possible markers were identified for placement.

Potential Sites for Posting:

- William Harrison Homeplace
- Braselton Bros. Stores.
- Braselton High School site
- Duncan’s Crossing

Assessment

Braselton's historic town center offers many rehabilitation opportunities, especially for retail, commercial and mixed-use development. It could be preserved and/or redeveloped to strengthen the downtown center and provide for economic development within a vastly growing community. Many of the historic buildings are vulnerable to change and exist on primary frontage along SR53 and SR124. These same properties suffer from vacancy and neglect. Vacant parcels that once contained historic buildings also should be considered. New buildings constructed in the historic district should be contemporary in design and not imitations of historic buildings. They should, however, be compatible (e.g., size, scale, massing) with historic buildings and remain sensitive to the patterns (e.g., setbacks, roads, etc.) in their immediate surrounds. Design guidelines for new infill construction should be used to protect the Town's historic and visual character. Another important component should involve master planning for roads and streetscapes leading into and around the town center. Transportation enhancements could include: landscaping, new sidewalks, burial of utility lines, installation of street furniture and period lighting.

Braselton's historic resources would benefit from a coordinated strategy that includes planning components related to economic restructuring, promotion, design, and organization. Participation in The Better Hometown program will help implement this type of community based strategy. As a small, but rapidly developing town, it would also help pool and coordinate local resources.

Braselton possesses a unique collection of historic buildings, many which can be readily adapted for contemporary uses, such as the Braselton Brothers Commercial buildings. Other, less suitable properties, require more innovative and careful planning solutions. Careful planning will insure adaptive-use opportunities will not be lost. A historic preservation ordinance could also protect Braselton's historic resources from physical changes that would alter or destroy their architectural integrity. Many, however, require stabilization and repair and are the most pressing issues and the potential "eminent loss of the identity of the town itself" (downtown master plan).

Braselton's historic resources evidence a bygone era in the town and, in many ways, the state. No longer does Braselton serve as a regional center serving the agricultural community. Opportunities exist to reuse these historic properties to sustain the town's character. Reuse of significant and prominent historic buildings could accommodate the demands of increased population and related growth while investing in a rural, yet "real" downtown center. Local planning and protection should be in place to manage the demands of future growth and its impacts on the town's historic resources. The preservation and coordinated redevelopment of a downtown center will provide Braselton with community character while retaining its identity. It will also allow visitors of other area attractions (e.g., Chateau Elan) a place to experience an authentic Georgia town.

Tourism potential to the historic town is considered strong. The historic Town could serve as a secondary attraction to visitors of Chateau Elan as well as those traveling I85. It also has the potential to bring visitors and residents attracted solely by the historic district. The main user of the historic downtown, however, will be its residents, seeking a traditional environment to shop, eat, and live.

Within the community, support for historic preservation is strong as symbolically displayed by Town Hall. Long-time residents value their historic buildings and how they evidence the past. New residents, too, view these historic buildings as providing their Town with distinctiveness. Improving the historic downtown should appeal to a large cross-section of the community.

Needs

- Strategic planning involving town center including appropriate, infill design.
- Design guidelines for exterior changes and infill construction within the historic district.
- CLG status and architectural review within historic district.
- Improvement to vacant and/or poorly maintained buildings.

- Participation in Better Hometown Program and creation of Downtown Development Authority (DDA).
- Transportation enhancements within town center and historic district making the downtown more pedestrian friendly and aesthetically pleasing.
- Public information about historic preservation.
- Funding and financial incentives for historic-preservation projects.
- Rehabilitate underutilized historic buildings.

Goals and Policies

Goal: Preserve historic resources when fiscally and practically possible.

Goal: Build a strong and healthy downtown using historic preservation.

Policy: Promote private reinvestment in historic downtown.

Policy: Reestablish historic town center to benefit residents and visitors.

Policy: Retain original, town character especially around the Braselton Store complex.

Policy: Encourage use of financial incentives towards rehabilitating the historic town.

Policy: Seek public funding for preservation projects.

Policy: Make new development compatible with historic buildings.