



STONE MOUNTAIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

GREETINGS!

Fall is here and with it comes the political yard signs. This November there will be a mayoral race with Mayor Patricia Wheeler stepping down after an 18-year stint at City Hall. A lot has happened during her tenure. While Randolph Medlock's three decades as mayor sets a high bar, we thought we would research Stone Mountain's past mayors to learn what motivated them to run for public office and the issues they faced. We are still working on a complete list of mayors and their dates of service but we have a fair grasp of those who served in the twentieth century. We are honored to note that we can claim three mayors, the current mayor pro tem, one first lady, and numerous council members as current or past Society members. Read on below!

Save the Date! We are planning a SMHS New Year celebration on January 8th rather than an end of year event. Think good food, music, and strolling through our new garden paths. We are ready to celebrate 2022 so look for invitations in December and check the website and our Facebook for details

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THE BOARD MEMBERS



We are sad to report that Naomi Thompson has resigned from the Board. Naomi was our liaison with Stone Mountain Park and so much more over the years. She volunteered at all our gatherings, helped foster

our society, and was an incredibly active supporter. We will miss her great smile, sense of humor, and "can do" spirit. We wish her the best moving forward. Duane Studdard will be our new liaison with the Park. Duane grew up here and is known to many of you. Welcome to the Board, Duane!

Mary Beth Reed
President
and Newsletter Editor

Theresa Hamby, Secretary

Pauline T. Myers, Treasurer

Chakira Johnson, Membership Coordinator

Susan Devine, Groundskeeper

Beth Snead, Events Coordinator

Wayne Snead, at large

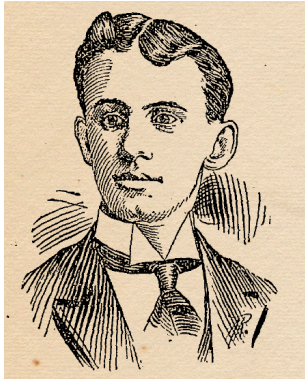
Rusty Hamby, at large

Kathryn Wright, Board Member Emeritus!

Melanie Florence, House Manager

Stone Mountain's Twentieth-Century Mayors

More research is needed to identify all our mayors especially those that served in the nineteenth century but historical newspapers provide strong information on our twentieth-century leadership and our city and its development.



John E. McClelland
The Atlanta Constitution,
January 3, 1899

John E. and Livingstone F. McClelland “Upbuilding the Town”

The turn of the nineteenth century was a boom time for Stone Mountain. Thwarted by Decatur in the contest for county seat in 1890, it turned toward education to make its mark. Underneath a progressive agenda, two well-educated and civic-minded brothers, John E. McClelland (1869- 1914) and Livingstone Forsyth McClelland (1875- 1928) helped Stone Mountain achieve its goals, providing leadership from 1898 through World War I.

While both selected the law as their profession, each was driven to make Stone Mountain one of the “most progressive and industrious of all of Atlanta’s neighboring cities” by placing education at the front and center of its economy. Both were young, energetic, and well educated. Their father, John F. McClelland, a professor at the Stone Mountain Institute and a Presbyterian minister, was likely one of their teachers. Livingstone was elected mayor of Stone Mountain in 1898 at the tender age of 21 winning him the possible designation of Stone Mountain’s youngest mayor. Terms appeared to be two years in length at this point and he would serve in 1904, 1907, 1910, 1911. A popular mayor, he was elected for a fourth term even though he was not running for the office. His brother, John E., went to work in the dry goods business initially where he excelled but, at age 28, he took the bar exam to become a lawyer. John E.’s obituary states he also served as mayor for five terms prior to his move to Atlanta. The two brothers ultimately established a law practice downtown at the Temple Courts building, commuting daily from Stone Mountain by train.



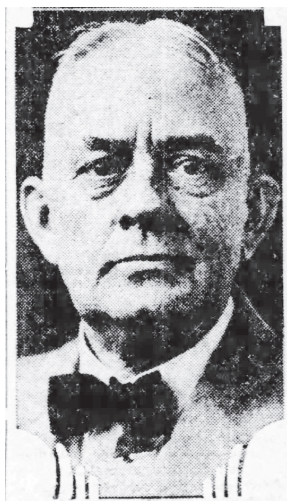
L. F. McClelland
The Atlanta Constitution,
December 15, 1904

A 1907 *Atlanta Constitution* article shows the McClellands at work. With the University School for Boys well established and earning the village a great reputation, they began to lay the groundwork for a public school system. A school for girls as well as an elementary school was needed.

This agitation so stirred the town that last year an amendment to the city charter was secured whereby a public school system was authorized by local taxation. The educational feeling swept the town and bonds for the erection of the school building and the installation of a public school system were carried by a large majority and the school is now in the course of erection.

Livingstone made his brother, John E., the head of the Board of Education and provided support for the construction of the village's first public school. An earlier wood building was demolished to make way for the new school. When asked about his professional career later in life, John E. McClelland was most proud of his achievements as the head of the Board of Education in Stone Mountain. The school cost \$10,000 to construct using Stone Mountain granite and was distinguished by a large belfry from which a bell rung each morning at 7:30AM. Described as having four large school rooms on the first floor and an auditorium with a stage and two dressing rooms on the second floor for assemblies, the school would house about 150 white children, providing a free education in a modern school. A Rosenwald school for African American children to accommodate four teachers would not be built with public funds until 1927 in Shermantown.

Underneath Mayor McClelland, Stone Mountain went from a village to a city. The public school system took hold, the streetcar line arrived in 1913 and private homes started to be plumbed. This exuberant time of change ended with the Great War. John E. McClelland moved to Atlanta in 1911 where he served as councilman and alderman until his death from a prolonged illness in 1914. His son, James Ralph McClelland, following in his uncle's and father's footsteps, served as mayor of Stone Mountain for one term starting in 1916, married Marie McCurdy, and then went on to become a municipal judge in Atlanta. Finally, Livingstone McClelland moved to Morningside in Atlanta becoming a municipal court judge in 1914. Poor physical health and the sudden death of his only son of acute appendicitis while studying at UGA in 1922 weighed too heavily on him and he took his life in 1928 leaving a bereft family. The progressive McClelland era had ended but the two leaders left their impress on the city particularly in terms of education.



Carl and William Marion Guess

“Servants of the People”

Carl Newton Guess (1872-1937), a veteran of the Spanish American War, was elected mayor in 1919 after the close of World War I. Unlike the McClelland brothers, Carl Guess became mayor later in life at the age of 47. Referred to as Colonel Guess, he had run against L.F. McClelland earlier but was unsuccessful. He moved to Atlanta about 1910 where he successfully established himself as a lawyer with offices also in the Temple Courts Building and served as a member of the city council.

Carl N. Guess. *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 3, 1929

His political aspirations leaped when he was elected a representative from DeKalb County to the legislature in 1918 after he and his family moved back to Stone Mountain. Describing himself as a “servant of the people,” he served three consecutive terms. By 1920, he and his wife Ella lived on Main Street in 1920 with their sons Frank and William Marion. He ran unopposed for mayor of Stone Mountain in 1919. Two years later at the close of his term, he became a city councilman and then the city attorney in 1929. Between 1925-1926 he served as a state senator and he would consider offering for secretary of state in 1929. He was truly a well-known figure in Georgia’s political and civic life.

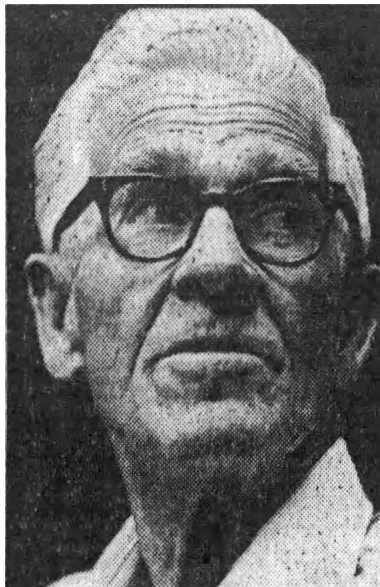
For all his larger political aspirations, Carl Guess was closely associated with City Hall for over a decade. That decade saw prohibition, women getting the vote, and a downturn within the local granite industry. He began his tenure as mayor proposing a bond issue of \$50,000 in 1919 to build a waterworks system, install electric lights and improve the streets. Research has not disclosed whether he was successful in those objectives but he definitely ushered in a new era of mayors – one that saw public service and the development of the consummate public servant. An *Atlanta Constitution* editorial noted his death: “removes from life a man whom in an unusual degree, served his community, his neighbors and his friends at the task placed before him.... Quiet, conservative and analytical in mind he was a strong factor in all causes that had their reason founded upon the continued welfare of the people among whom he loved.”

William Marion Guess (1907-1987) followed in his father’s footsteps, pursuing a legal career after graduating from Emory University and getting a law degree from Atlanta Law School. He was a partner in a legal practice, Guess, Guess and Guess from 1931-1940 as well as a part business owner of a retail gasoline company. While he served as a clerk within the DeKalb



1939 photograph showing, from left to right, J. M Bagwell, retiring mayor; T.E Rawlins, councilman; Marion Guess, newly elected mayor; W. E. Sexton, councilman; J. D. Mc Curdy, clerk; J. T. Street, councilman; and C.T. Gillam, councilman.

County Recorder's Court and later served as a Recorder's Court Judge, it was his work in his home community in Stone Mountain that shows his commitment to service. Called Marion and husband to Dorothy Williams (Dot) Guess, he served as mayor from 1940 to 1945 and was head of civil defense during the war years. He then served as city councilman intermittently between 1945 and 1950, acted as city clerk from 1950-1960, and followed this with over three decades of service as city attorney. It is likely that his presence lent stability to the city's governance in the post war years and that his familiarity with city hall would aid new mayors stepping into their jobs in a more complicated world. He and his father Carl really brought home the idea that being a public servant was an honor.



Maner Randolph Medlock ***Advocate for the Preservation of and Self Determination of Cities, Whatever Their Size***

You have to take the thorns with the roses if you are going to work with the people. You soon discover there are more thorns than roses. - Randolph Medlock

Between Marion Guess's term and 1956, Julian Harris, businessman, and James R. Venable, Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, would serve as mayor. In 1955, a veteran and employee of the Atlanta Gas Light Company, Maner Randolph Medlock (1912-1988), ran for mayor against Venable and won. He was successful at being reelected for the next 30 years. His record was unimpeachable. Mayor Medlock was driven by one goal: to protect and care for his home community of Stone Mountain.

Under his leadership, Stone Mountain pursued and won a legal suit against gravel truck companies forcing them to use the truck route rather than coming through town in the 1950s. Streets got paved, a sewer system established, streetlights were installed, a Recreation Department was established and the Depot became City Hall. He was perceived as his own man and not a cog in county politics. Under him, Stone Mountain's small-town values remained intact. It was a place where people lived, not a tourist town and he and his wife, Florence, were part of the city's fabric.

Just as the Guess' should be lauded for making public service an honor, Randolph Medlock made it a vocation. When he retired in 1987, he was lauded by his peers for his integrity and his leadership in making the voice of the city heard and for keeping its identity. Stories about his work ethic and his pragmatism are legend. He was an iconic mayor and leader. The recitation of his pallbearer's names at his funeral shows how important he was to the whole

community which he cared for: Robert Holley, James Rivers, Elmer Hicks, Sam Hewatt, Jim Payne, Hugh Jordan, Henry Shoemake, and Howard Moon.

Groundbreaking Mayors

The late 1980s through the new century were decades of change. The continuity of life and times offered by Marian Guess and Randolph Medlock ended. The modern world caught up with Stone Mountain.



The Atlanta Constitution,
November 14, 1991

Jane Rhodes and Patricia Wheeler **Women Mayors!**

In 1988, Jane Rhodes became the first woman mayor of Stone Mountain. Not only did she have the courage to succeed the beloved Randolph Medlock but as a woman candidate she was a ground breaker. Generations of Rhodes have lived in Stone Mountain so Jane was well known to city residents. Working at Towers High School as a Media Specialist, she began her public life in 1983 when she was elected to an at-large city Council seat. As that term ended, she learned that Mayor Medlock was retiring and she announced her intention to run for mayor “surprising even her mother” as reported by the *Atlanta Constitution*. She ran unopposed with an agenda “to clean up the city and get organized growth while retaining the hometown atmosphere.” At age 33, she succeeded Medlock and would remain in the mayor’s seat until 1991 successfully moving

from her day job as an education professional to her job as mayor on weekend and nights. She provided her successor some good advice: “When you make a promise in politics, promise you will try to do your best, but never promise that it will definitely be done, because you never know.”

Patricia Wheeler followed Jane Rhodes as mayor. She attributed her interest in becoming mayor to her long-term experience as president of an elementary school’s PTA. That experience allowed her to work with others and she had a taste of civic life having served as mayor pro tem for the preceding three years. The long-term resident of Stone Mountain ran unopposed in her bid to become mayor succeeding Jane Rhodes.

Newspaper articles on her election initiatives note that Mayor Wheeler saw the need to keep the hometown appeal that made Stone Mountain special. The Olympics were approaching

which could lead to unplanned growth if not checked. On the other hand, a downtown beautification program might be needed for the betterment of the city. Finally, the new mayor hoped to implement a drug awareness program for teenagers. Mayor Wheeler would get the community through the Olympic era, working with the Park and the community, during her term. It was a time of great optimism for the village. A huge boom in tourist activity was predicted which unfortunately did not materialize.



Mayor Burris celebrating Stone Mountain Day in Shermantown.

Chuck Burris First Black Mayor!

Chuck (1952-2009) entered Stone Mountain political life in 1991 as a City Councilman. A native of Louisiana and a graduate of Morehouse, he was a progressive Black man with time spent with Civil Rights Leaders. Like many African Americans, Chuck and his wife Marcia moved to DeKalb's suburbs specifically Stone Mountain, becoming part of "new Stone Mountain." In 1998, he was

elected the first African American mayor of a city associated historically with the Ku Klux Klan. James R. Venable, the former Imperial Wizard of the National Knights of the Klan was a former mayor and resident. Images of the Klan meeting and the burning of crosses atop the mountain were part of the nation's visual memory bank.

Chuck Burris' election was historically significant. In Councilman Gary Peet's words, "It was the denouement of years and years of people working to change the city's image." Chuck was immediately catapulted to the national stage as the media fed on the story of his election, the ironies involved (he had purchased the Venable home), and the triumph. He was invited to DC by the Clintons, articles were written, newsfeeds conjured up. The Burris' family visit to DC at the request of the Clintons to attend the State of the Union address in 1998 to recognize the new mayor as a symbol of racial reconciliation was marred by the new mayor's expense report submitted to the city for the trip. The city council had not approved the expense and the matter became an embarrassment that only ended when Mayor Pro Tem Billy Mitchell announced he would pick up the tab.

In 2000 Mayor Burris proposed the annexation of area bounded by Hairston Road to the west, the Gwinnett County line to the east, Stone Mountain Freeway Hwy78 to the north and Redan and Rock Chapel roads to the south to the city. Mayor Burris' vision on annexation

likely stemmed from his own suburban roots and his recent coming to Stone Mountain. Such an annexation did not make sense to Councilman Gary Peet and others and they prevailed. Chuck was very supportive of historic preservation. He was involved in the first city cultural resources survey and was an advocate for many of the historically Black historic resources particularly in Shermantown.

Chuck would serve only one term as mayor. Annexation and historic preservation were some of the narrative threads within his term while the financial health of the city was debatable. After losing reelection to Gary Peet, he moved out of state with his wife, Marcia, to Baltimore where he resided until his death in 2009 at the age of 57. The bridge on Ponce de Leon Avenue was named in his honor and the cast bell that presides over Main Street, that references MLK's famous statement "Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain!," is attributed to Chuck's tenure as mayor.



Gary Peet

Gary Peet bested Chuck in the next election. Chuck's opposite in many ways, Gary Peet characterized himself as "dull as dirt" a description the media liked to quote contrasting the quiet, unassuming new mayor with his predecessor. His two terms in office, however, were anything but dull. His first term was spent working on the financial health of the city and his second started with a brouhaha over the City's Main Street Program and the start of the Streetscape Program. Businesses were in decline, preservationists had a vendetta with the

The Atlanta Constitution,
November 15, 2001

much loved, single-story canopy that stretched down Main Street like a unibrow. Change was needed. In 2008, voters were asked to weaken the role of the mayor and place more responsibility on a city manager and they voted yes. Under that framework, Pat Wheeler became mayor once again.



Pat Wheeler

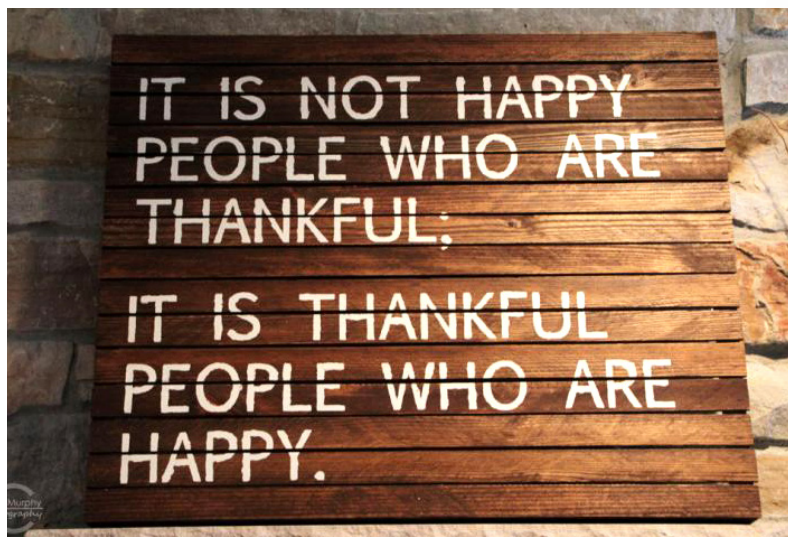
Women Return to City Hall

Pat Wheeler inherited the Streetscape Program, established City Hall staff and the police department in a new Municipal Building that brought city services under one roof in a purpose-built building, has led the city through new annexation attempts, the evolution of the DDA,

the Main Street Program, worked in partnership with the county and Stone Mountain Park, represented us at a multitude of festivals, and has been an ardent supporter of ART Station, our community theater. She has also presided over 18 years of city council meetings, some highly dramatic and contentious, worked with the police to keep peace, while maintaining for the most part her equanimity and sense of humor. Mayor Pat was certainly a ground breaker as a female mayor but she more importantly exemplifies what a small-town mayor should be: a consensus builder that cares about her community. We applaud her years of service and wish her well moving forward.

This week the *Atlanta Journal* published an article on the three women running for mayor this November: Beverly Jones, Andrea Redmond and Eileen Smith. We hope this look back at their earlier counterparts and their leadership styles gets them thinking. We are not sure if Mayor Wheeler will leave a private note of encouragement for the incoming mayor, as presidents do, or maybe just a short “to do” list, but if she does we hope getting the Rock Gym back for the city is on it!







SPREAD



How many of you enjoy
climbing the mountain after
your Thanksgiving meal?





Character

Poem by Howard A. Walter

Poem visible on chalkboard (background)

I would be true, for there are those who trust me;

I would be pure, for there are those who care;

I would be strong, for there are those who suffer;

I would be brave, for there is much to dare.

I would be friend of all--- the foe, the friendless;

I would be giving, and forget the gift;

I would be humble, for I know my weakness;

I would look up, and laugh, and love, and lift."

Holding a cornucopia of food, these five youngsters were actors in a Thanksgiving play at the elementary school circa 1940. Left to Right: George Dingler, Howell Hamby, Amelia Pinckard Burler, unidentified, Bill Hadaway, Julian Bean and Ann Freeman Campbell. Courtesy of the Hamby Family.

