

Historic Rural Churches

CHUBB CHAPEL METHODIST

STORY BY GEORGE S. HART
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM REED

Historic Rural Churches of Georgia (www.hrcga.org) is privileged to introduce you to Chubb Chapel United Methodist Church. The Chubbs, a family of “free blacks” dating back as far as the late 1700s, erected this simple but beautiful sanctuary in 1870. Led by Isaac Chubb, the family had migrated from North Carolina to Georgia, ultimately settling in northwest part of the state in Floyd County, near Cave Spring, in the 1850s.

The fact that before the Civil War a large black family could migrate freely into this area, settle peacefully, purchase land, start businesses and establish a new community makes Chubbtown and Chubb Chapel unique rural historic sites in the Deep South.

By 1870, after Isaac Chubb’s death, his son Henry had become the new family leader. He and his brothers formed the church congregation, designed the structure, and built it with their own hands. It was to be their place of worship and served as their first schoolhouse. The Chubbs believed that education

was of paramount importance to success in life, a tradition that continues even today.

Chubb Chapel’s historic and social significance was memorialized in 1990 by its placement on the National Register of Historic Places. The fact that the congregation still actively uses the original sanctuary in the 21st century is a tribute to the family and community. The present pastor, Dr. Harvey Palmer, greets a diverse congregation of regulars who attend services on the second and fourth Sundays of each month. The church also hosts an annual Chubb Cemetery memorial program on the fourth Sunday in April and a homecoming on the second Sunday in August. These events attract devotees of the Chapel and Chubb family members from far and wide.

Chubb Chapel’s National Register application describes it as “A fine example of a small, vernacular, Gothic Revival-style, country Methodist Church built after the end of the Civil War.” It is interesting to ponder how the Chubb family came to choose this unusual style, as Greek Revival church buildings





Gravestone of Isaac and Amanda Chubb

were the popular preference in rural Georgia at the time.

On the other hand, the board and batten construction was quite common in rural churches of that era. The wood needed for framing, covering the interior and exterior sanctuary walls, as well as the two four-panel entry doors, was milled on site from timber cut on the property. The foundations consist of stacked field stones that were originally laid without mortar. The mortaring of the present underpinning became necessary and was completed around the beginning of World War II. The cement steps and iron handrails were added in 1929, replacing the original wooden steps. The final addition—a fel-

lowship hall—was completed in 1986.

During Chubb Chapel's 145 years, many changes have been made within its interior. With a footprint of about 33 feet by 50 feet, the interior is less than 1,800 square feet. Though small by today's standards, it was and is quite suited to its congregation. Today, there are newly cushioned pews, hardwood floors have replaced the old heart pine boards, and central HVAC, electric lights, interior plumbing and bathrooms and other amenities have been installed. The original pine wall and ceiling boards, glass-paned two-over-two windows, and the simple columns remain, imparting an appropriately nostalgic atmosphere within.

The fact that the church is a simple structure without an interior vestibule, covered porch, ostentatious furnishings, or elaborate decorations does not detract from its cultural significance. The National Register application states: "Built after freedom had been officially achieved for the entire race, Chubb Chapel is a monument to and reflects the Black community's long association with religious freedom as one means of expression of cultural identity. The church was always one of the strongest institutions in a Black settlement...as it was here...and as exemplified by the survival of this church structure as the only historic vestige remaining from the community of Chubbtown."

Shifting the focus from the Chapel to the story of the Chubb family and its continuing impact on this community, the Registry application explains: "The history of the Chubb Chapel, and in fact Chubbtown itself, must be seen in the context of the Chubb family, its struggle, first to escape slavery and then as a rare, free black family migrating to seek better opportunities...as did most of its free white contemporaries."

The Chubb family history is somewhat clouded, but can be dated back to at least 1775, before the Revolutionary War. In the 1820 census of Caswell County, North Carolina, a Nicholas Chubb appears as "a free colored male, head of household and 45 years or older." So Nicholas could not have been born later than 1775. Whether he was born free or in slavery is not known. If born a slave, it is not known when or under what circumstances he was freed, but clearly, he was a free black by 1820, whatever the circumstances. Later, in the 1830 census of that same county, an Isaac Chubb, who is presumably Nicholas's son, appears. He later becomes the patriarch of the Georgia Chubb family.

It is known that sometime before 1833, Isaac Chubb migrated to





Georgia, where his sons (except William, who was born in North Carolina) and daughters were subsequently born. It is significant that Isaac, a free black, chose to move south to another slave state rather than to a northern free state. Why did he make that choice? The answer to that question remains an intriguing mystery. Since Isaac was a blacksmith by profession, perhaps he was sufficiently confident in his ability to keep his family intact and to thrive in almost any place of his choosing.

The Chubb family's business success suggests that the family embraced an assured and capable attitude, allowing it to thrive during the eras of slavery and Jim Crow limitations and discrimination. The family's status is reflected in a comment in *A History of Rome and Floyd County* (1922), when George Magruder Battey wrote: "Chubbtown is a settlement of prosperous and respectable negroes four miles south of Cave Spring."

The 1850 census listed Isaac Chubb and his family in Morgan County, Georgia, south of Athens. Later records reveal that sometime during the 1850s, Isaac bought land near Cave Spring in Floyd County, south of Rome. There the family resourcefully dug in and made their homes. This area was good land bisected by several creeks that, when dammed, provided plentiful water to power saw mills, grist mills and cotton gins.

While the racial climate was often difficult in parts of Georgia during this time, it seems that the Chubb family was welcomed by all, black and white. The isolation of the community probably enhanced its ability to withstand turmoil during the Civil War and especially during the tough times that followed, including the Jim Crow era and the lynchings and racial strife of the latter 19th and early 20th centuries.

Following their father Isaac's lead, Henry Chubb and his brothers were busy buying commercial and farm land and setting up businesses throughout the Civil War. When Isaac died in the 1860s, Henry became the new family leader. At this point, none of the Chubbs, who had wandered for so long, could have guessed that their family was just entering what was to be a 50-year era of prosperity and progress that lasted from

the late 1800s to the 1930s and beyond.

By 1870, when the Chubb family built Chubb Chapel, the census listed members as blacksmiths, wagon makers, house carpenters, sawmill operators and farmers. Apparently, these varied talents combined with a strong work ethic to enable the Chubbs to prosper even during the unrest of Reconstruction. Their progress continued into the 20th century, when many freedmen were struggling to find their place in the "new" South. Most of the family members chose to purchase and develop property. At one

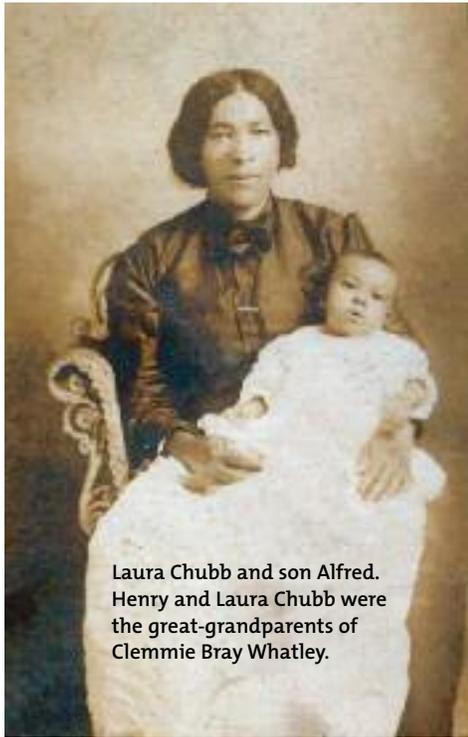
point in the 1920s, the Chubb family's combined landholdings exceeded 2,000 acres, quite a large amount for blacks or whites in the area at that time.

Chubbtown reached its heyday as a self-sustaining family enterprise by the 1920s. Much of what we know about the scope and function of this remarkable community comes from a 1988 book, *The Chubbs of Chubbtown*, compiled by Kenneth J. Jones (great-great-great-grandson of Isaac Chubb) and other family members. It includes many details, some photographs and a charming hand-drawn map of the community and its many amenities, all of which were owned and operated by the Chubb family. Amazingly, Chubbtown could provide almost all the necessities of life to its black and white residents and those from the surrounding area.

In addition to Chubb Chapel and numerous homesteads and farms, the community contained a lodge that served as the meeting place for the Youth & Age Society, a family fraternal organization. And a meeting hall hosted Chubb business gath-

Clemmie Bray Whatley (right) and cousin Farrie Chubb helped the family secure funds to expand the annex of the church in 2015. Clemmie is a professor of mathematics education at Mercer University. Farrie is employed part-time at Georgia Northwestern Technical College.

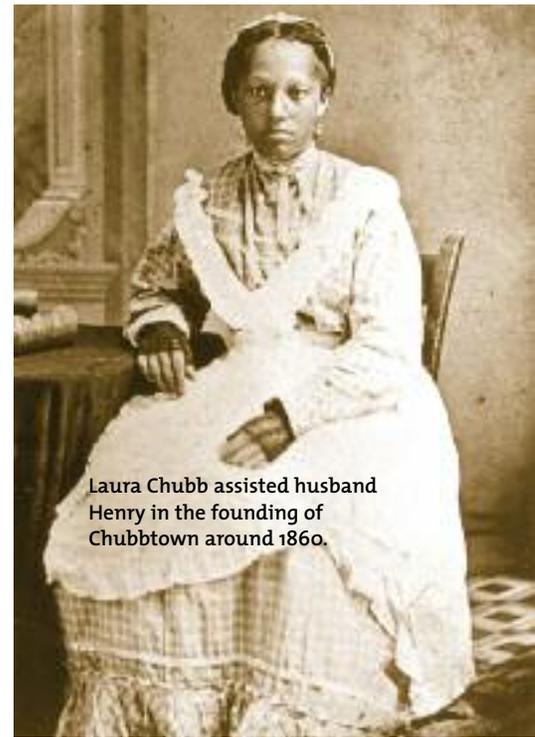




Laura Chubb and son Alfred. Henry and Laura Chubb were the great-grandparents of Clemmie Bray Whatley.



Henry and Laura Chubb's sons



Laura Chubb assisted husband Henry in the founding of Chubbtown around 1860.

erings and did double duty as storage for surplus farm produce.

That produce, along with other items of necessity, could be purchased at the general store, while one's alcoholic desires could be fulfilled at the distillery. Syrup was provided by the syrup mill, flour and cornmeal at the grist mill, and the cotton gin refined the cotton grown in the area. The sawmill produced the lumber for the many building projects, while horse-shoes and other necessary iron objects were created at the blacksmith shop. Since horses and mules provided the community's transportation, the necessary wagons and buggies were built at the wagon company. Chubbtown even boasted its own post office, while the final needs of the Chubb family were fulfilled by the casket company and the family cemetery.

In 1916, the blessing of the intersecting creeks that provided so much opportunity turned into a curse. Chubbtown experienced a monumental flood that seriously disrupted the prosperous state of the community. The residents, in the words of Elvira Chubb Bray Stone, "had to start over from scratch." Elvira, who

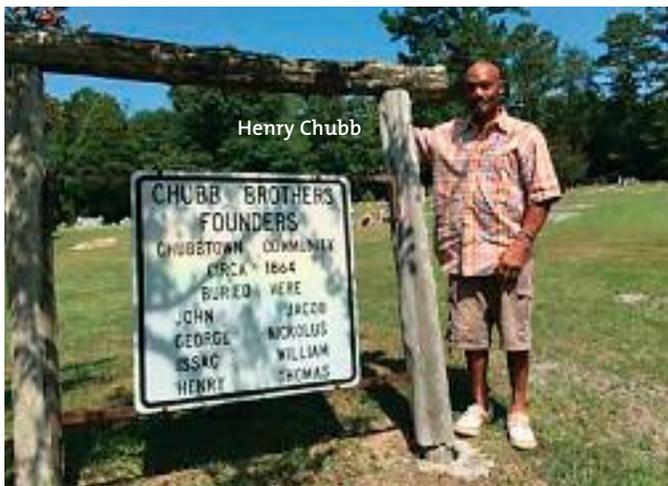
died this year at 97, was an astute eyewitness to the 20th century history of her family. Prior to her death, she recorded some of her memories in videos made by the Rome Broadcasting Company. College educated and "a force of nature," she exemplified the steadfastness of the Chubb women.

Though the residents of Chubbtown continued to work with characteristic diligence to maintain their self-sustaining lifestyle, they were hampered in the 'teens, '20s, and '30s by the relentless succession of flood, world war, and Great Depression. Many family members and residents moved to Detroit, Columbus, Akron, Chicago and other northern and western cities where factory jobs were available. The curtain slowly fell on once-prosperous Chubbtown as its population dwindled. Though it is no longer a town, it continues to bear the name and is recognized as such on the U.S.G.S. topographic map of Cedartown West Quadrangle.

Chubb Chapel still proudly stands, a testament to the Chubb family and the successes it found during the most challenging times in the state's history. Chubb progeny have scattered throughout the country, but there are still many who live in Chubbtown today.

One branch that still lives in Chubbtown is the Henry Chubb family. A veteran wounded during Operation Desert Storm, Henry attends services at the Chapel and is involved in the stewardship of the church and the family cemetery.

Henry's son is furthering the Chubb family tradition of pursuing higher education. Perhaps you've heard of him: Nick Chubb, star running back for the University of Georgia. ■



Henry Chubb

George S. Hart, a co-founder of Historic Rural Churches of Georgia, lives in Atlanta. He wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance of Clemmie B. Whatley, a Chubb descendant, in the preparation of this article.