

# OKEFENOKEE HERITAGE CENTER NEWSLETTER

## Waycross Sesquicentennial & Ware County Bicentennial C.C. McCray City Auditorium

The Waycross City Auditorium was dedicated on May 9, 1937. More than 1,000 folks attended the dedication ceremonies, to inspect and “enjoy the beautiful new building which offers decidedly the largest auditorium in Southern Georgia,” reported the Waycross-Journal Herald.

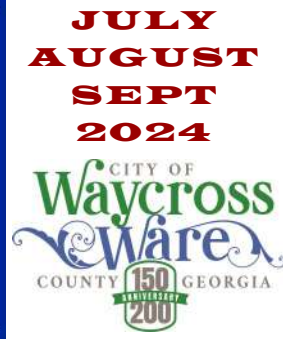
Civic dances, the Lure of the Wilderness and Swamp Water “Swamp Balls” were held there, graduating seniors from throughout the town and county made that march across her stage, symbolizing that last long journey from student to adult.

The auditorium also served as a gymnasium with many area high schools holding their region and basketball tournaments there. It was a mighty time with Nichols, Douglas, Pearson High, Nahunta, Blackshear and Hoboken gathered in Waycross for their basketball tournaments.

The auditorium, now named for Waycross’ first African American mayor, C.C. McCray, originally cost \$65,000.00 and was built with assistance from the Waycross Lions Club and money from the Works Progress Administration. During its lifetime, the likes of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Ella Fitzgerald, Otis Redding, Louis Armstrong, James Brown, and many more, have performed on its stage. Waycross’ native son, Gram Parsons, also played there. Parsons’ impacts on rock and roll history have been well documented after he is said to have heavily influenced the likes of The Rolling Stones and The Eagles.

Over time, the building was used less and less, and fell into disrepair. It served as temporary offices when City Hall was being renovated and for a time included basketball goals and bleachers. Faced in 2008 with the decision to tear it down or renovate it, the people of Ware County voted in favor of a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, or SPLOST, and the 15,000-square-foot facility was reborn.

Today, the auditorium, located at 865 Pendleton Street, is on the National Register of Historic Places and provides a place for Waycross to gather to celebrate, learn, or continue the rich musical history and contributions of Waycross with various concerts and events. Whether you’re booking a wedding, attending a father-daughter dance, catching an up-and-coming performer, or attending a community meeting, spend much time in Waycross and you are sure to spend some time at the C.C. McCray City Auditorium.



### OHC Calendar

#### JUL

2&16	Pickin’ in the Pines	6PM
6	Local Fare Market	10AM
8-12	OHC Summer Art Camp #1	9AM
9	OHC Photography Guild	6:30PM
10	OHC Board Luncheon	12PM
11	OHC Learning Series	10:30AM & 6PM
13	Red Hill Cemetery Clean-up	9AM
15-19	OHC Summer Art Camp #2	9PM
16	OHC Black Heritage Com.	6PM
23	OHC Art Guild	5:30PM
26	OHC History Guild	6PM

#### AUG

1	OHC Learning Series	10:30AM & 6PM
3	Local Fare Market	10AM
6&20	Pickin’ in the Pines	6PM
10	Red Hill Cemetery Clean-up	9AM
7	OHC Board Meeting	12PM
13	OHC Photography Guild	6:30PM
23	OHC History Guild	6PM
27	OHC Art Guild	5:30PM

#### SEPT Judge Ben Smith Art Gallery

3&17	Pickin’ in the Pines	6PM
4	OHC Board Meeting	12PM
5	OHC Learning Series	10:30AM & 6PM
7	Local Fare Market	10AM
8	Judge Ben Smith Awards	3-5PM
10	OHC Photography Guild	6:30PM
14	Red Hill Cemetery Clean-up	9AM
14	“Through the Years”	7-9PM
17	OHC Black Heritage Com.	6PM
24	OHC Art Guild	5:30PM
27	OHC History Guild	6PM



**NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR:**

We have seen a lot of activity at the OHC the last three months with the Okefenokee Color Run, Business After Hours OHC Birthday Celebration and the "Inaugural Okefenokee Folk Festival ~ Sue Clark Day". We are already planning for next year, so stay tuned. Looking ahead we have our annual OHC Summer Art Camp, Judge Ben Smith Juried Art Competition and a Sesquicentennial/Bicentennial event called "Waycross City Auditorium ~ Through the Years" featuring "Big Sound of the Okefenoke" big band, spotlighting famous entertainers who performed at the City Auditorium. That should prove to be a fun musical walk down memory lane. We will also have a space for dancing. Our guilds are going strong as well as our "Pickin' in the Pines" Jam Sessions, Clover Heritage Group, OHC Learning Series and more. If you would like to become a member of the OHC, just come on by and fill out a form. We would LOVE to have you. There is always something going on at OHC. The Okefenokee Heritage Center, we're on the right track!

*Carla Garrett Cornett, Executive Director*



**OKEFENOKE HERITAGE CENTER  
SUMMER ART CAMP ~ 2024**



**Wk 1: July 8-12**   **Wk 2: July 15-19**  
FOR AGES 5 - 15   MON - FRI 9AM - 12PM  
\$75 FOR NON- OHC MEMBERS OR \$65 FOR OHC MEMBERS.  
FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL: 912-285-4260  
1460 N. AUGUSTA AVE.   WAYCROSS, GA 31503

**CHECK OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING!**

Okefenokee Heritage Center presents:  
**"WAYCROSS CITY AUDITORIUM ~  
THROUGH THE YEARS"**  
Saturday, September 14th - 7PM - 9PM  
CC McCray City Auditorium,  
865 Pendleton Street ~ Waycross, GA  
Waycross 150th  
Ware County 200th  
Featuring:  
"Big Sound of the Okefenoke"  
Music & Dancing   okeheritage@gmail.com   912-285-4260



**SEPTEMBER 2024**  
**JUDGE BEN SMITH**  
**ART COMPETITION**  
PAINTING | DRAWING | PHOTOGRAPHY | 3-D

**Artwork entires must  
be submitted by**  
**AUGUST 31st**  
**AWARDS PRESENTED**  
**SEPTEMBER 8th**

OHC Learning Series 2024  
1st Thursdays ~ March - Oct.  
Two Lectures Available  
10:30AM & 6PM



**Special Events:**



**Congratulations to the WINNERS of the Okefenokee Color Run 2024!!**



**Special thanks to Chris "Turtleman" Adams for a successful "Okefenokee Folk Festival ~ Sue Clark Day"**



**Red Hill Cemetery Clean-up Day, Every 2nd Saturday 9AM**



**Ware County Bicentennial Committee 2024**

**Special Thanks to:**  
**Memorial Satilla Health**

**Georgia COUNCIL for the Arts**

**ART WORKS.**

**National Endowment for the Arts**  
arts.gov

Throughout history, certain small Southern towns have ingrained themselves in the cultural hearts and minds of people around the world. Whether it be through the townsfolk, born or raised there, who went on to fame and fortune or a hallowed building, whose spirit lingers on, manifested in the ghosts of the music and the people who once played there.

Waycross, Georgia is one of those towns. From Ossie Davis and Pernel Roberts to Gram Parsons, Waycross has had its share of famous actors and musicians. It is also home to the Waycross City Auditorium, a solid brick edifice that has seen the best of the best sing and play on its humble stage.

Just check out this list of Who Was Who in the music biz: Fats Waller, Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Big Joe Turner, Dizzy Gillespie, the Ink Spots, Hank Williams Sr., Ernest Tubbs, Roy Acuff, Tex Ritter, Minnie Pearl, Bill Monroe, Kitty Wells, George Jones, Johnny Cash, Ray Price, Webb Pierce, Faron Young, Marty Robbins, Jim and Jesse, Little Jimmy Dickens, Conway Twitty, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Guy Lombardo. Whew!

But it was the night of February 22, 1956 that was a virtual rock toss in the water, causing ripples that affected the lives of many, some still to this day. I'm sure the city of Waycross—at least the teenage sector—was abuzz on that Wednesday, after reading in the Waycross Journal-Herald that Elvis Presley, Country Music's "Mr. Rythm", would perform two shows that night at 7:00 pm and 9:00 pm.

On the bill with Elvis were Grand Ole Opry favorites, Justin Tubbs, the Louvin Brothers, Mother Maybelle and the Carter Sisters featuring June Carter, and bluegrass fiddler Benny Martin. All for the price of \$1.25 at the door. In the audience that evening was nine-year-old Ingram Cecil Connor III (Gram Parsons), who tagged along with teenage twin sisters, Daphne and Diane Delano. It's been said that Gram met Elvis after the show and introduced himself as "the little kid that buys your records". What is known is that Elvis had a meteorical impact upon Gram Parsons in his desire to become a performing musician, following an endless pursuit of stardom.

(Article by Uncle Dave Griffin, Tail of the Weak, Jan '20)



# Okefenokee Heritage Center

1460 N. Augusta Avenue  
Waycross, GA 31503  
912-285-4260

[www.okefenokeeheritagecenter.com](http://www.okefenokeeheritagecenter.com)

## OHC Mission Statement:

The Okefenokee Heritage Center is a cultural art center and local history museum for all people, which seeks to promote an appreciation of the arts and an increased understanding of history and development of the Okefenokee region through its cultural and educational programs, collections, and exhibitions.

*Proudly serving Atkinson, Bacon, Brantley, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Pierce & Ware.*



## **OHC Board of Trustees 2024/25**

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\* Denotes Life Member

### **Ex Officio Members:**

Dr. Brandon Carter, RESA  
Greg Smith, City of Waycross  
Christy Hattaway, Waycross Service League

### **Staff:**

Carla Garrett Cornett, Executive Director  
Sherian Barnes, Office Manager

A special thanks to ALL of our  
**OHC Members!!**  
Thanks to YOU....  
“We’re on the Right Track”!

## **Invite a friend to join the Okefenokee Heritage Center**

Individual	\$36
Family	\$60
Heritage Club	\$100
Sue Clark Society	\$200
Small Business	\$150
Business Sponsor	\$500
Corporate Sponsor	\$1,000
Corporate Partners	\$5,000

\* Join one of our many Guilds

**All donations are tax deductible**

## **RENT OUR SPACE**

You can rent the facilities at the Okefenokee Heritage Center for parties, reunions, etc.

Community Room	\$200
Community/Kitchen	\$250
Depot	\$300
The Venue	\$250
Warehouse/ Depot	\$400
Grounds	\$200

(Tables & Chairs available for rent)  
For more information call:  
912-285-4260

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For Updates on Events



**And on YouTube**  
For video interviews  
[okeheritage@gmail.com](mailto:okeheritage@gmail.com)

