

Discovering Laurens County

How the people and local places helped mold a nation

By Judith Brown
Staff Writer

When Union soldiers were trying to chase down Jefferson Davis in April and May after his escape from Richmond in April of 1865, the former president of the Confederacy might have been captured a few weeks earlier if Laurens County had only one Martin's Store at the time.

"They had been told he was in the Martin's Store area, and the Union soldiers went to the Martin's Store near Ware Shoals, but Jefferson had been spotted at the Martin's Store near Joanna," said historian and Gray Court resident Sarah Jane Armstrong. "They just went to the wrong Martin's Store."

This and other stories are in the third book of the Discovering Laurens County, a series of three history books which, so far, chronicles the county's place in the formation of the young nation from pre-history to 1900.

The books came about following a conversation between the late Elaine Martin and the late Russell Burns, who were concerned that if those who knew the county's local history didn't get it written down, it would all soon be lost.

"You can't separate Laurens or Laurens County or the state of South Carolina from the early national history because we were one of the 13 original colonies," Armstrong said. Each book brought in authors who knew the

most about their subjects, such as the late Chief Gene Norris who wrote about the Cherokee influence in the area.

Published in 2014, that first book includes the earliest known pre-history of the Native American and Cherokee influence through the colonial era, including the Simpson family group who hiked to this backcountry from Charleston.

The second book, from 2015, takes the population from that time through the Revolutionary War and its skirmishes and battles fought here, including Musgrove Mill, Fort Lindley and others. It highlights personalities who fought both for the Patriots and the Tories, including Bloody Bill Cunningham, who after the war ended still mutilated 15 neighbors and former friends near the Milton Road area of Clinton. He then took his soldier's pension and escaped to the Caribbean to live out his life.

The third book published in 2018 shows the extensive growth of the Laurens County area from 1840 to 1900. Chapters include the impact of the Civil War on the population and the dramatic changes which took place during and after reconstruction.

New authors are brought in to research and write for each consecutive book, Armstrong said, including Harold Ligon of Laurens, who chronicles some of the achievements by the first freed African Americans. Subjects of Ligon's entries include Priest

Miller, who was the first former slave to purchase and own property near the Mt. Zion area of Laurens, Martha Dendy's influence in the Clinton area as well as the Duckett and Garrett families.

The third book also serves to redeem the Cunningham family name when, two generations after Bloody Bill's massacre, Ann Pamela Cunningham, a young invalid from the Waterloo area, led the first preservation fundraising campaign to restore Mt. Vernon, George Washington's home in Virginia.

"It's amazing how people can get together and work, and I call them ambassadors of history for Laurens County," Armstrong said.

More people are getting interested in genealogy, Armstrong said, but to find a place or homeland, it's necessary to have the early maps from that time period, many of which are in the books.

"People will see Berkley County and think it's Charleston," she said. "You have to look at the maps because Berkley County at

one time went from Charleston to the mountains."

The many volunteers who have authored the first three books encourage people to start with your own family stories and get them written and documented.

"If you don't write your story down, it's going to be gone," Armstrong said. "Elaine Martin was my go-to person, and I'm always wishing I had her still here when I am trying to figure something out, because she knew it all."

Books have been purchased from as far away as Texas and Oregon and as far north as Maine, Armstrong said, because so many early settlers came through Laurens County or have someone buried here.

The books are currently available through Genealogical Society by calling Armstrong, 864-876-3712, at The Laurens County Advertiser or at the Laurens County Museum. All proceeds are going back into the reprinting or more books and eventually will benefit the Laurens County

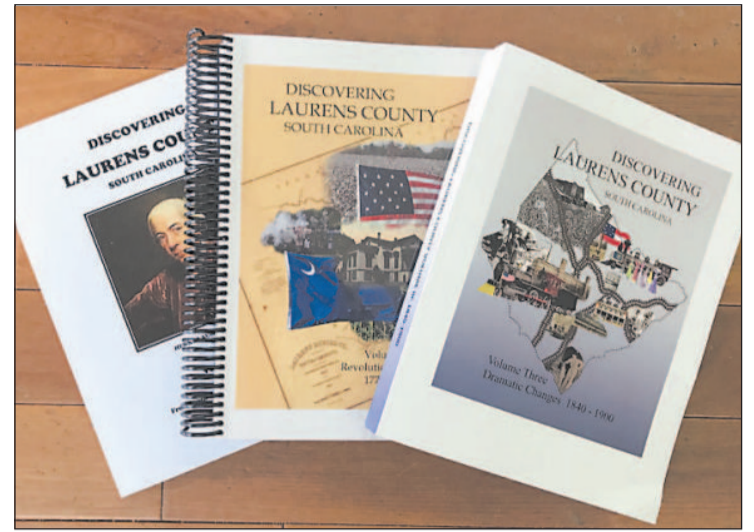


Photo by Judith Brown

DISCOVERIES — Books chronicling the early days of Laurens County are already in their second and third printings as volunteer historians document the county's influence and past. Additional copies of the third book will be available later this next week. They are for sale at the Laurens County Museum and at The Laurens County Advertiser.

Museum and the Gray Court- Thursday at 7:30 at the Laurens Owings Historical Society. The County Library and meetings are society meets each second open to the public.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
Laurens County Citizens Participation Plan and Needs Assessment


Communities anticipating participation in the State of South Carolina's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program must provide for participation of their citizens in the planning and implementation of community and economic development projects that will involve CDBG funds, in accordance with Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended through 1987. Therefore, a Citizens Participation Plan has been developed by Laurens County for the purpose of providing their citizens with a written detailed plan for their participation in the planning and implementation of community and economic development projects that may involve CDBG Funds.

Notice is hereby given that on Thursday, February 28, 2019, at 2:00 PM, in the County Administrative Building Lower Level Conference Room, 100 Hillcrest Square, Laurens County will hold a public hearing to review and solicit public comments on the before mentioned Citizens Participation Plan and to solicit public input on community needs and priorities for housing, public facilities, and economic development. At this hearing, the County will provide the results of a needs assessment and the activities that might be undertaken to meet identified needs including the estimated amount proposed to be used for activities that will benefit persons of low and moderate income. This public hearing and the matters to be discussed are subject to the provisions of the Citizens Participation Plan that is available for review at the Administrative Building between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Laurens County does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, religion, sex, national origin, familial status or disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in its federally assisted programs or activities. Lisa Kirk, Finance Director, 864-984-5214 (TDD 711) has been designated to coordinate compliance with the nondiscrimination requirements contained in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's regulations.

Persons with questions or comments concerning the hearing, Citizens Participation Plan or the Needs Assessment may contact Keith Smith, Community Development Director, Upper Savannah Council of Governments, and 430 Helix Road, Greenwood, SC 29646, telephone 864-941-8068 or 1-800-922-7729.

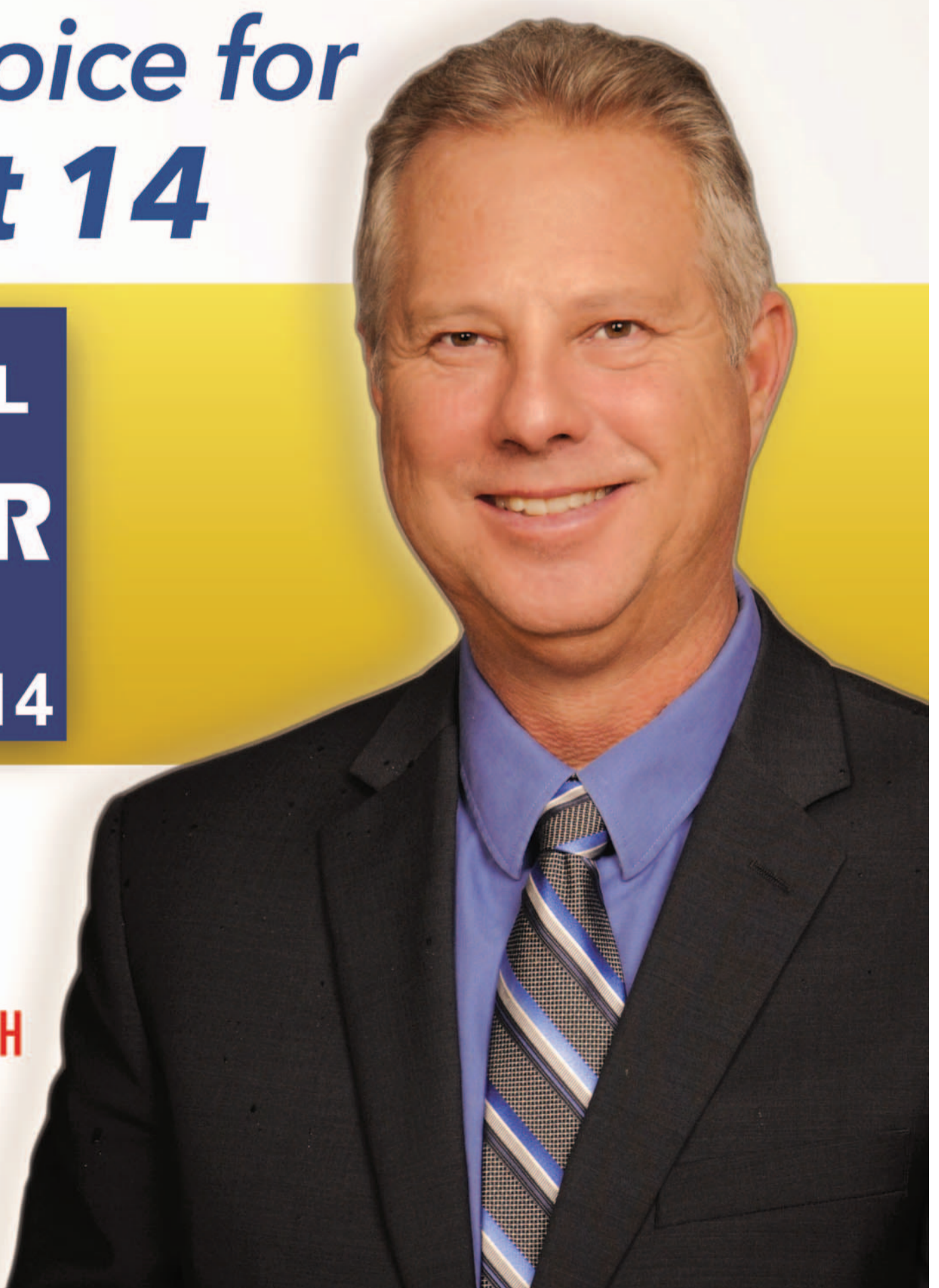
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