

## A Timeline of Walden's History

### Pre-1800s:

- Native Americans used Walden's Ridge for fire and smoke signals long before white settlement.
- Cherokee lived along the Tennessee River, hunted on Walden's Ridge, and used a trail at Roger's Gap (later the W Road) to reach the top.
- They hunted deer, turkey, grouse, and bear on the ridge

**1796:** TN to become the 16<sup>th</sup> state admitted to the Union but Walden's Ridge remained part of the Cherokee Nation.

**1819:** Hiwassee Treaty – Cherokee Nation ceded territory in East TN including Walden's Ridge.

**1823:** Walden's Ridge legally open to white settlement but few families moved to Walden's Ridge prior to 1838

**1830 –1838:** Joseph Miles (Uncle Joe), remembered as a reliable distiller of "moonshine" whiskey, claimed that his great uncle was among the first settlers.

**1838:** Cherokees forced to move farther south.

**1839:** Josiah McNair Anderson began building Anderson Pike as a toll road across Walden's Ridge. It connected to a corduroy road that climbed almost straight up the east side of the mountain from Chattanooga. This corduroy road was made by laying poles side-by-side in the dirt. The purpose of the route was to connect Sequatchie Valley with Chattanooga, giving valley residents access to the railhead located there. Anderson placed the tollgate at the top of the area now known as the W Road.

- Toll charges:
  - Horse and rider, 20 cents
  - Horse and buggy, 25 cents
  - Carriage or wagon drawn by team, 50 cents
  - Herds of horses, mules, or cattle, 3 cents each
  - Herds of hogs, sheep, or a flock of turkeys 1 cent each

**1848:** James C. Conner purchased a thousand acres from Elisha Rogers' land grant on Walden Ridge and built a log cabin and moved his family by ox-pulled wagon up the Roger's Gap.

### 1852:

- Anderson Pike officially opened for public travel.
- E. H. Mabbitt purchases 400 acres surrounding what is known today as Mabbitt Springs, in the hope that the waters would improve the health of his ailing son.

**1858:** Subscription school, Fairmount Academy, founded. It was the first school approved by Hamilton County. A subscription school, Fairmount Academy, was built to serve early mountain families.

**1860s:** (Civil War Era): Anderson Pike becomes strategically important:

**1863:** (October) – Used as a Union supply line during the Siege of Chattanooga.

- Ulysses S. Grant crosses the ridge on this route.
- Grant's horse slips, reportedly on the steep original "V" turn at Roger's Gap and he later describes these roads as the worst he traveled during the entire war.

**1865:**

- Anderson sells rights to Anderson Pike to James Conner.
- The tollgate is moved to the home of James Conner, referred to as the Conner Toll House. Which still stands today just outside of Walden's boundaries and is believed to be the oldest structure on Walden's Ridge.

**1870s** – Cholera (1873) and yellow fever (1878) drive wealthy families from Chattanooga to Walden's Ridge for health benefits. Chattanooga families make a five-hour ascent to the area on Walden's Ridge known today as Summertown seeking:

- Clean air
- Cooler temperatures
- Chalybeate (iron-rich) waters of Mabbitt Springs

**1870s:** Oakwood School, a one room schoolhouse, built and attended by mountain children ranging from 5 to 19. According to plat on what is now the Lines Orchids property, at the point where the driveway meets Taft Highway.

**1873**

- Judge D. M. Key came home to lunch and asked his wife, "Lizzie can you and the children be ready to go to Walden's Ridge tomorrow?" "No, Judge, I cannot possibly go. All of our clothes are in the tub soaking." "Two people died of cholera this morning." "Have the hack here by noon, Judge, we'll be ready." The Keys with their seven children and his brother Summerfield A. Keys and his family left the next day.
- The Key brothers bought land just south of Mabbitt Spring where present day Glenway Ave. and Ivory St. intersect. There they built two three-bedroom log cabins, and such was the birth of Summertown
- Transportation up and down the mountain provided by hack until automobiles. The hack would leave every morning at 6:00am and would arrive in town at 8:30am. The return trip was more arduous, leaving town at 2:00pm for the four-hour trip. Tickets were 50 cents.

**1882 -1883:** Dr. P. D. Sims, Judge John Cleage, and Mr. John C. Griffiss bought the land around Mabbitt Springs, extending to the brow, and divided it into lots. They set aside the Mabbitt Springs gulch recreation area. This park, including the spring and its water rights, was jointly owned by the property owners in the Mabbitt Springs tract.

**1882:**

- Mabbitt Springs designated a public park.
- Judge and Mrs. Key bought a 135-acre farm from Mr. Levi for \$400. They were drawn to the property by its large chestnut trees, abundant wild blackberries, and the Levi spring. Before returning to Chattanooga for the winter, Mrs. Key asked Uncle Billy Miles to build a house on the land. The home, named Topside, still stands today, is privately owned, and is listed on the historic registry. Many of the homes in modern Summertown are built on what were once the Levi acres. The Poindexter, Willingham, Williams, and Lupton families built homes on parcels of this land, and many of their descendants still live in Summertown today.

**1889:** Owner of the Chattanooga Weekly Times, Adolph Ochs, wanted to establish a town on Walden's Ridge called Timesville. He ran a promotion in the Times titled "Have a Mansion in the Sky!" With the purchase of a \$1 year's subscription to the paper, the subscriber would be entered into a lottery for a "splendid tract" more than 2000 feet above the sea. 1,000 lottery winners won 25-by-130-foot lots in Adolph Ochs' planned town. The town never came to pass but the promotion was a success with subscribers from every state as well as South America, Canada, Europe and Asia.

**1890:**

- Summertown residents, tired of paying the toll to travel up and down the mountain. A committee was formed including D. M. Keys, Dr. Sims, Frank Fritts and S. M. Gardenhire purchased the Anderson Pike toll rights from Squire T. C. Connor's for \$300.00 and assigned the rights to Hamilton County. Hugh Whiteside the county judge agreed that the county would build and maintain a new road up the ridge.
- Emma Bell Miles, who became a noted author, poet, and artist, moves to Walden's Ridge. Emma is 11 at the time. Her painting of the Bachman-McCoy homeplace hangs in Walden Town Hall.

**1891:** Mrs. Martha Ann Bell (Emma's mother) teaches at Oakwood School.

**1892-1893:** Modern W Road constructed for a cost of \$11,000.00. The single steep "V" turn at Roger's Gap re-engineered into the three-switchback "W."

**1893:** Albion View, a neighborhood (subdivision) at the top of the W, featured a store, dance pavilion, and post office.

**1900s-1950s:** Coal mining on the ridge provided work.

**Early 1900s:** Summertown becomes a seasonal mountain colony with cabins, boarding houses, a dance pavilion, and The Little Brown Church. (Following the Cholera outbreak, yellow fever outbreaks further increase migration.)

**Early 1900's:** Mrs. L. J. Sharp began discussing having a place for Sunday worship and organized a Ways and Means Committee to accomplish the goal.

**Early to Mid-1900's:** Mountain residents were mostly farmers, shopkeepers, coal miners or moonshiners. The infamous moonshiner Uncle Joe Miles is said to have shipped whiskey disguised as "books" to Senator Bachman in Washington.

**1908:** (Summertown) Union Chapel AKA Little Brown Church built for \$750; dedicated August 11 by Dean Bovard.

**1911:**

- Fairmount Academy and Oakwood School merged into Fairmount Grammar School. The new school was built near what is today the intersection of Key Hulse and Fairmount Pike.
- Senator Nathan L. Bachman and his wife, Pearl Bachman, purchased the property at 1912 Anderson Pike and built the home now known as McCoy Farm & Gardens. The senator grew deeply fond of the mountain—its people, history, and natural surroundings. The Bachman home was known for its open and welcoming atmosphere. Their Signal Mountain farm became the embodiment of a Southern gentleman's ideal. A large orchard produced abundant apples, and each summer, an extensive garden provided generous quantities of fresh produce, most of which was given to the mountain people.

**1911–1912:** W Road surfaced with crushed rock.

**1917:** Community Sunday School in the Fairmount area, Wayside Presbyterian Church, was organized by Mrs. Della Camp, a resident of Fairmount and a mother of 14 children.

**1919** (March 19): Walden artist Emma Bell Miles passed away.

**1920** (November 5): A debate was held at the Fairmount School Improvement League meeting to decide whether to build a community auditorium. Speaking in favor were Mrs. C. W. Shackelford and Mr. T. M. Kell, while Mrs. A. W. Freudenberg and Mr. Beene argued against the proposal. After the debate, it was decided to proceed with constructing the auditorium. Following this decision, a wide variety of events—ice-cream socials, carnivals, fetes, recitations, readings, spelling bees, arithmetic contests, picnics, tacky parties, watermelon cuttings, turkey shoots, plays, musicals, and more—were hosted in private homes to raise funds.

**1921:**

- Fairmount Elementary Auditorium was built under the guidance of Principal W.V. Bean for school & community events. Today the Fairmount Auditorium is home to Walden's Ridge Civic League.
- Wayside Presbyterian Church formed.

**1924:** (July 4): Dances at the Albion View pavilion ended after a shoot-out between rival bootleggers.

**1926:** Walden's Ridge Civic League, who began as the Fairmount School PTA, was founded to improve essential services on the mountain—roads, utilities, water, electricity, and fire protection. At a time when no local government existed to provide these needs, the League became a driving force for community development. Its work fostered a strong sense of shared responsibility, emphasizing self-reliance, volunteerism, and collaboration among residents.

**1927:** W Road widened to 20 feet; switchbacks widened to 15 feet.

**1930:** Walden's Ridge Civic League incorporated.

**1937:** Nathan L. Bachman Elementary School, which included eight rooms and an auditorium, but no indoor toilets, built for a cost of \$35,000. It was named in honor of the late U.S. Senator who lived nearby at what is now McCoy Farm & Gardens.

**1940:** W Road widened to 24 feet and rebuilt into its present form

**Early 1950s:** Bachman Elementary School adds indoor restrooms, two kindergarten classrooms and a cafeteria.

**1950's:** Coal mining ends as a major local livelihood.

**1951:** Walden's Ridge Utility District formed, bringing clean water to the mountain.

**1958:** Walden's Ridge Guild formed.

**1970's – Crime in the Community**

- Silver prices rise sharply; home break ins increase.
- Many Forest Park residents were robbed.
- Signal Mountain declines to provide police service.
- The 60 families who lived in Forest Park formed the Walden's Ridge Protective Association, paying \$250/year for private policing.

**1975:** Bachman Elementary School facilities were modernized.

**1975:**

- Movement toward –organization as a town begins when residents decide to “solve their problem themselves.” Kay & Joe Gaston and Max & Sara Bahner help lead planning for incorporation.
- Kay and Joe Gaston form the Walden's Ridge Historical Society to save the Toll House.

- Organizational meetings for a new town are held at the Bahner's home on Parsons Lane, then at the Walden's Ridge Civic League.
- Local referendum supports forming a town; boundaries are drawn.
- About 75 residents meet at the Civic League after the positive referendum.
- Temporary officers appointed:
  - Joe V. W. Gaston — Temporary Mayor
  - Marvin Morris — Temporary Vice Mayor
  - M. Reid Brown — Temporary Recorder

**1975** (August 21): Town Charter recorded at the Hamilton County Courthouse.

- 1975 – Residents vote 46–12 for *one ward*.

**1975** (November 4): First Election

- Population: 1,200
- Voters: 840
- Fred Hetzler elected Mayor
- Billie Ansel and Sam Chester elected Aldermen
- Boundary referendum passes 275–32.

**1975:**

- Boundaries at conception - The town spans from the northern boundary of the town of Signal Mountain to the end of Forest Park and from the East Brow west to Taft Highway and Fairmont Road. At the time, the area was home to about 350 families and 1,202 residents and few businesses
- First town meeting of Mayor & Aldermen; 14 citizens attend.
- Ordinance No. 1 drafted to adjust the town boundary by transferring a 100' x 100' parcel to Signal Mountain
- The new town, in debt and without income, accepts suggested donations of \$5–\$10 per household.

**1976:**

- Walden's Ridge Emergency Services (WRES) founded. WRES has grown to a large volunteer membership that quickly responds to contain fires, provide medical assistance, rescue individuals and protect property and is noted for their rope rescue team.
- Special Census reports a population of 1,118.

**1977:** Billie Ansel becomes Mayor, the first woman elected mayor in Tennessee.

**1978 (July 18):** The town officially adopts a sketch of the W Rd. submitted by Walden artist Marha Williams to be the town seal.

**1979 (Dec. 11):** Ku Klux Klan burns cross at Town Hall Meeting in protest of Resolution 57 Prohibiting Fund Raising or Soliciting from Passing Motorists on the Street or Highways of the Town of Walden.

**1984:** Bachman Elementary School modernized for a second time.

**1992:**

- Minimum lot size increased to two acres.
- The Board of Mayor and Aldermen vote to proceed with construction of a town hall, accept the \$248,148.00 bid from H. M. Davis Construction, and appoint Mayor Harold Warren as project manager. Resident Carroll J. Henley designed the building to resemble a turn-of-the-century summer cottage.

**1993:** Walden's new town hall is dedicated on September 9.

**1996:** Walden resident and pediatrician, Dr. Jane Jones, led a community effort to raise money and build the Pumpkin Patch Playground.

**1997:** Walden purchased five acres of the McCoy property at the corner of Anderson Pike and Taft Highway, the former site of Emma Bell Miles's family home.

**1999:**

- Hamilton County Department of Education planned construction of larger schools and transferred ownership of Bachman Elementary to the Town of Walden.
- W Road added to National Register of Historic Places.

**2000:** Bachman Center Council, Inc. (a 501(c)(3)) leased the building from Walden to establish the Bachman Community Center (BCC).

**2001:** Bachman Community Center building was placed on the National Historic Register.

**2002:** Bachman Community Center received a matching grant from the Community Foundation of Chattanooga and donations from civic groups and individuals to replace the roof.

**2004:** McCoy Farm purchased by the Town of Walden after Martha McCoy's death. The Town of Walden now owns Martha's entire 38 acres, which includes an arboretum, apple orchard, woodland, and Shoal Creek headwaters as well as a main house, carriage house, smoke house, horse ring parking areas, pavilion, barn, corn crib, equipment shed, gardens (children's sensory, horseshoe, sensory and boxwood), propagation beds, and dog park.

**2008:** Walden's Ridge Community Guild established as a 501(c)3 charitable organization.

**2015:** McCoy Farm & Gardens nonprofit established. They lease the property from the Town.

**2022:** Land Use Plan adopted and awarded the Tennessee American Planning Association Outstanding Plan for Small Jurisdiction Award

**2026 (Feb.):** The Walden's Ridge Civic League auditorium (formerly the Fairmount auditorium) is placed on National Registry of Historic Places.