

# *Signs Of The Times*



**FORTSONIA, GEORGIA**

**1900 — 1990**

**by**

**GILMER J. HUDSON**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

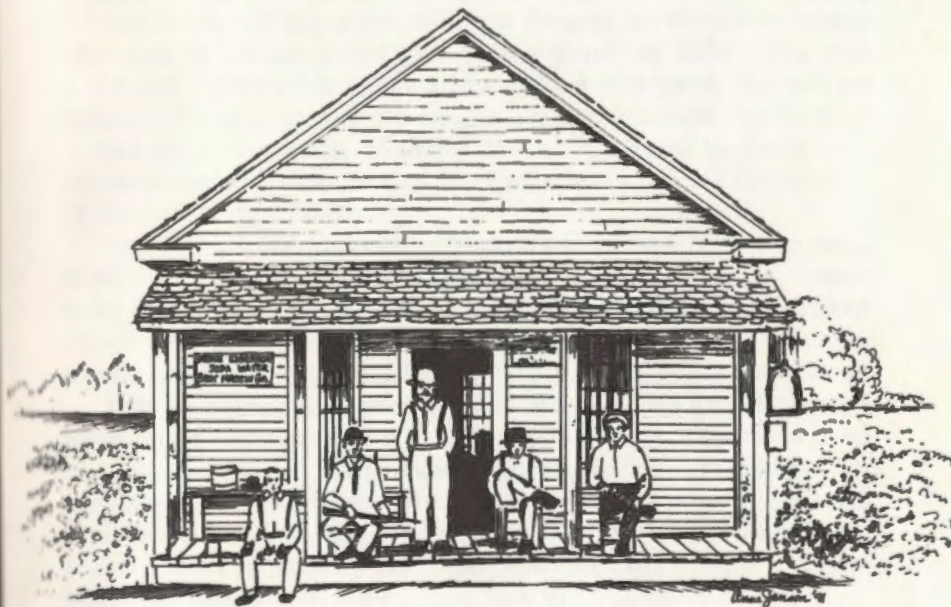
This book is written with the purpose of preserving facts of history, memories of favorite stories, belief in moon signs, human bits of wisdom, and acknowledging the common thread of faith exhibited by the different churches and denominations living in our community. The name of Fortsonia needs to be remembered. I acknowledge assistance in putting these pages together from two books of early publication. One is the **Early History of Elbert County** by John H. McIntosh printed in 1940 covering a period of 1790 to 1935. Also book number two written by Carl B. Smith, **Ancestors and Related Families, Volume II**. This book was written in 1964 while he was living in Tampa, Florida.

STYINGHRYWOKZM

**FOREWORD**

**Gilmer J. Hudson is the author of this book. He was assisted in preparation by Barbara H. McWhorter, his daughter. All illustrations are by local artist, Anne Jenson.**

G. Hudson and Sons  
1912



# S.C. Hudson and Sons

Started in 1912

One of the first settlers of the Fortsonia community was Mr. Barnard Forest Smith, who was born in Anderson County, South Carolina, on October 7, 1867. He had to work at a very young age to help support a large family for his father died when he was quite young. He came to Georgia as a young man and married Sarah Elizabeth Jones, known as Sadie. They settled our village at Fortsonia, Georgia. Here at Fortsonia, he owned a large plantation. He owned the first cotton gin system, a large lumber mill, a grain mill, and general mercantile business that was in the southern part of this county of Elbert. He was a man of indomitable courage and sound judgment. His advice was sought by many of his neighbors. Mr. Barnard Smith died at the very young age of thirty-five at his home in Fortsonia. He was buried at old Bethel Baptist Church in the lower part of Elbert County (Smith).

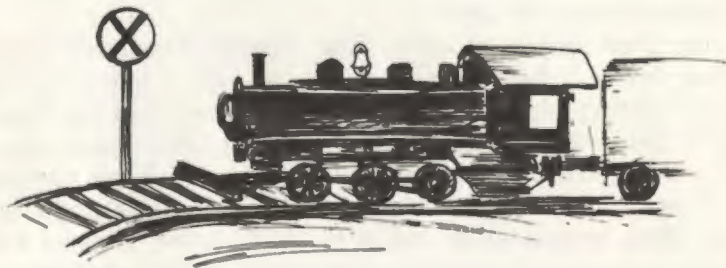
My Grandfather, Stockton Cobb Hudson, bought the original family home, a four-room frame house, and a one-story frame store building with wooden porch on the front from the Barnard Smith Estate sometime between 1900 and 1910. There was also a small fifty-odd acre tract of land that went with this purchase.

Now in regard to Stockton Cobb Hudson, my grandfather, I have these comments to add to his background. He was a man of great moral and intellectual influence in his community. He was a man of few words. He raised a large family of cultured and useful children. He was a large landowner and merchant, reasonably prosperous. He lived and died in Elbert County, Georgia (Smith).

To illustrate the fact that Granddaddy was a man of few words, I'll give you an account that was told by members of his immediate family. On a certain weekend at the Hudson home, a Baptist minister was being entertained for a period of time. This was the custom of that day when ministers visited among the families of the church. There was no parsonage in which the pastor could live. This particular visit of the minister was during the winter season. The story goes that on Saturday night and early Sunday morning, a heavy snow storm came and the members of the Hudson family and the visiting minister were preparing to go to church, that is, all except Granddaddy Stockton. Brother Weldon, the visiting minister, seeing the circumstances approached Grandfather and said, "Brother Hudson, aren't you going to church with us this morning?" Grandfather's reply was simple. He said only, "No, Sir." The minister insisted, "Brother Hudson, would you mind telling us why?" Grandfather couldn't

have wanted it any better. He said, "Yes, I will tell you why. I have always thought a person should have religious beliefs but should also have common sense enough to know when to stay at home." Needless to say, Grandfather Stockton did not attend services that day.

Now, let's talk about Fortsonia. Our little village is located nine miles south of Elberton on Highway 17. We are situated twelve miles on the north side of Tignall and approximately twenty miles north of Washington, Georgia. We are a quiet village inhabited, I believe, by some of the friendliest and most dependable people to be found anywhere.



The name came from the railroad, namely the Elberton and Eastern shortened by some to be the E and E railroad. Its depot name goes back to 1913. The George T. Fortson family gave land for the depot and the three warehouses that were placed on said land and, because of that fact, the name Fortsonia, which is spelled in one word. Over the years, some people have tried to give the name an army slant. By that I mean they spelled it as Fort and Sonia, two words, but that was erroneous.

There was a clamor of public support and interest from people of Elbert and Wilkes counties for the construction of a railroad to have as its termination Augusta, Georgia. The work of determined citizens of both Elbert and Wilkes Counties came about in 1911. A charter was granted for the Elberton and Eastern Railroad Company at a meeting held in Elberton, Georgia, July 27, 1911. There a group of officers, legal counsel, and board of directors from both counties were appointed. Bonds were voted in the amount of \$300,000 and the contract was let during the month of December to Ira L. McCoy of New York City. The route was completed in 1913 from Elberton to Tignall, a distance of

twenty miles. This was through a rich and beautiful farming area that crossed Broad River to reach Tignall located in Wilkes County. The route was later extended to Washington, Georgia (McIntosh).

On June 28, 1913, the first train over the newly constructed Elberton and Eastern Railroad ran from Elberton to Tignall. This train left Elberton at 9:43 a.m. and reached Tignall at 1:30 p.m. A large number of prominent officials made this maiden voyage. Over the years following 1913, this railroad prospered for a period of some twenty-odd years. Before its termination, there were double header steam locomotives pulling large numbers of box cars over these rails (McIntosh).

There were depots along the route of the Elberton and Eastern at Elberton, Cauthen, Fortsonia, Bell, Norman, Tignall and Washington. There was a turnaround station for the steam locomotives in Elberton and Washington as the E & E made its daily runs. My Father, W. O. Hudson, was agent at Fortsonia for this railroad during its entire life. I have been told that one of the most enjoyable past times on Sunday afternoons was for parties of young people from the Fortsonia area to walk the railroad tracks from Fortsonia north to Cauthen station just across Dry Fork Creek and south to the Bell station just this side of Broad River. In 1932, hard times and depression had its effect and a receiver was appointed for the road. But it continued in operation until 1934, when it was sold and scrapped. This road had a life span of some twenty-one years, and there are many pleasant memories of the train whistles and the noise of the steam locomotives as they made their rounds.

My Grandfather, Stockton Cobb Hudson, and two of his sons, my Father, Will Oscar Hudson, and his brother, Stockton M. Hudson, jointly opened a general merchandise store in Fortsonia in 1912 under the name of S. C. Hudson and Sons. The building in which they started in business was a wooden one-story structure 20 feet by 40 feet that had already been operated approximately ten to twelve years by others. My Grandfather and his two sons moved into a somewhat larger building next door, 20 feet by 50 feet, one year later. My Father later bought out the other interests in this business and operated as such until his death in March, 1944. I, Gilmer J. Hudson, the younger son of Will Oscar Hudson, did not feel at the time of his death that I wanted to be tied down with inside work, and I went into farming at that time. Our family sold the stock of goods of the S. C. Hudson and Sons building to a cousin by the name of J. Clark Hudson. Clark

operated this Hudson's Store from March of 1944 to April 1990 at the time of his death.

In May of 1962, I, Gilmer J., bought land of the store building from my Mother, and decided to open up the original building where the Hudson's Store first began. I acquired this building and did extensive renovations by putting on new weather boarding, a new foundation of some sixty-odd pillars of granite from Elbert County, sleepers and double sleepers with subfloor as well as a tongue and groove oak floor on top. I instructed the carpenters to prepare it so that I could drive a railroad car on it if I so desired from front to back over the entire area. So you see, we had two Hudson's stores for twenty-eight years in Fortsonia, the J. C. Hudson Store building in the original S. C. Hudson and Sons' building and the present building of Gilmer's Grocery that began in May of 1962. This Gilmer's Grocery building has been expanded to the size of approximately 35 ft. by 50 ft. with additional storage space upstairs.

Let me say here that there has never been a U. S. Post Office in Fortsonia. There are those who believe there was at one time, but I had the Post Master in Elberton a few years back to check records. He could find no mention of any post office ever being at Fortsonia. There has been some confusion, however, over the years in that letters have been sent incorrectly to Fortson, Georgia, located somewhere in south Georgia. They, of course, would be returned after a period of time to their correct address.

Among the older businesses that existed in Fortsonia was the F. B. Fortson and Son General Merchandise, operated by Mr. F. B. Fortson and son, Frank, Jr. They had a large wooden frame building approximately 20 ft. by 50 ft. This business operated in the 1920's and early 30's. This building was removed in later years, and the new buildings of T & T Tires is located on the same property. Sometime later after Mr. Fortson ceased to operate the F. B. Fortson and Son General Merchandise business, he moved across the highway and began a large steam engine operated sawmill. For several years in the 1930's and 1940's, Mr. Fortson operated a large mill with yard full of logs and rack after rack of lumber stacked on said yard. Mr. Fortson bought and sold timber and employed a crew of workers to carry on his operation.

Mr. F. B. Fortson's son, George H. Fortson, also operated a general merchandise building for a number of years. In the olden years back to the mule days, blacksmith shops for a number of years were operated by several different individuals at various

spots.

Mr. James Fortson, son of Mr. and Mrs. F. B. Fortson, Sr., operated a service station and auto mechanic shop during the period of the early 1930's. James later moved into Elberton after returning from work in Tallahassee, Florida, during the war years. He and Ben Searcy were mechanics for Mr. Claude Ray, Sr. at the Dodge Auto Agency in Elberton, Georgia. When James left Fortsonia, the station and auto shop was operated by Raymond Kolly, son of Mr. T. F. Kelly for a good while. Raymond also ran a saw mill part of this time at Fortsonia.

Our community for years, even decades, was one of the most affluent sections in our county in the production of cotton. There have been at least two different cotton gins located in Fortsonia. One operated by the Elberton Oil Mills for a number of years and the other privately owned in the mule and buggy days.

Besides the stores and business facilities, we have beautiful church edifices. On the north side of our thriving village is the Fortsonia Baptist Church. On the east side is the Eliam Methodist and also the Flatwoods Pentecostal Holiness Church. All of these are modern brick buildings and full-time church facilities. Over the years, our village has seen quite a lot of changes. The present nursing home was one time the site of an accredited eleven year high school named the Nancy Hart Memorial School. This school was built in 1925 and opened for classes in the fall of 1926. It was financed by local district bonds. We had a good school until our state officials decided to consolidate all of our county schools into one school system in the city.

J. C. Hudson's Store ceased to operate in April, 1990, as a general merchandise store because of the death of the proprietor, J. Clark Hudson. Clark bought the store from my Mother, Mrs. W. O. Hudson, in April, 1944. So you see, he had a continuous record of some forty-six years. Clark was a good merchant. He had previous mercantile experience having left Joe Allen's in Elberton, Georgia, before coming to business and to live in Fortsonia. During the forty-six years of operating the J. C. Hudson Store at Fortsonia, Clark was friend to all who came in his store. He left pleasant memories to white and black, for he helped to carry accounts for them. Some of these were weekly, some monthly, and even some of six month duration during the cotton farming years. He specialized in groceries, gas and oil, hardware, meats, shoes and dry goods; and for some years, he sold fertilizer to the farmers.

There was a period of four and one-half years that the Hudson



Store was a partnership. In the spring of 1957, I bought one-half interest in the J. C. Hudson General Merchandise Store, and Clark and I jointly operated this store until May 1, 1962. At this time, I moved next door to a renovated store building in the original building in which S. C. Hudson and Son began their operation. I began my own store operation under the name of Gilmer's Grocery. I chose this name because of there being less confusion about two Hudson stores insofar as mail delivery, bank accounts, etc.

I want to say that in the four and one-half years that Clark and I worked together as partners there were no harsh disagreements. We only had friendly impressions of each other, and I never dealt with a person that I respected more than Clark Hudson. He taught me many good lessons that he had learned by experience. A common question that was asked by strangers during the twenty-eight year period of two Hudson stores being operated in Fortsonia was, "How do you people manage to operate two stores carrying virtually the same line of goods, side by side, here in the rural part of the county?" My answer was, "Why not? Each of us operates our own business, our competition is friendly. I would help Clark if at all possible, and I believe he would do the same for me."

Now back to our present day businesses in Fortsonia. Besides Gilmer's Grocery that operates daily Monday through Saturday from approximately 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., we have Chandler Madden's Grocery and Service Station that also operates Monday through Saturday. The largest and only industry agency at the present time in Fortsonia is the Nancy Hart Medical Center. This is a nursing home facility with a bed capacity of approximately sixty-five patients. This is a well staffed facility with a good state rating and well operated with good personnel, both black and white.

There are two granite sheds and finishing plants that are operating at or near Fortsonia. The H & A granite shed is just above the Fortsonia sign on Highway 17 to the north of our community. Steve Peppers and his father, John C., operate this shed along with other employees during the year. The other shed began by J. A. Smith, Sr. began his operation two miles to the west of Fortsonia two or three decades ago. Since the death of J. A., Sr., the son, J. A., Jr. is operator today along with other help as he needs it.

The new building located on Highway 17 at the intersection of the Flatwoods Academy Road is in operation under the name

of T & T Tires. It is operated by Ted and Timbo Dye, father and son. Ted has been associated with the tire business for a number of years. He worked with the Granite City Recappers in Elberton for a long period of time before joining the staff of John Duncan also of Elberton. He operated his business when he first came to Fortsonia in the George Ward old feed mill building for several years under the name of Ted's Tires.

Just south of Fortsonia on Highway 17, Barry Brown operates a machine shop under the name of Crown Construction Company. Brown along with other workers builds and services machines used in the making and marketing of granite products for finishing plants. Barry is the son of Billy R. Brown, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of Elbert County.

The building next to Chandler Madden's service station, formerly the feed mill building belonging to George A. Ward, has been operated since the later part of 1990 by Reuben Smith under the name of Fortsonia Paint and Body Shop. Reuben has just begun his operation and is at the present a part-time operator.

The old Fortsonia Hardware and Furniture building that was operated by Mr. Guy T. Bell until his death on December 30, 1970, is now owned by John Coleman. John started a business known as the Game Room in part of the hardware and furniture building. The operation began in the year 1990.

Fortsonia is on the move. The future looks bright.