

# Commemorative Birthdays/Anniversaries Celebrated in Peach County!

by Claire Houser-Dodd, Columnist

**T**wo auspicious events recently occurred for the citizens of Peach County... the 100 year anniversary or the creation of Peach County and the 150th Birthday of the City of Byron.

The Georgia General Assembly approved a constitutional amendment to create Peach County from parts of Houston County and Macon County on November 04, 1924. Peach County became Georgia's 161st County and the last new county in Georgia.

Peach County opened officially for business on January 01, 1925 and elected its first commissioners on January 07, 1925.

Fort Valley became the county seat for Peach County after the creation of Peach County. Fort Valley had been established as a trading post in the early 1820's and was incorporated as a city in 1856. After the incorporation of Fort Valley, discussion for the idea of a new county began in earnest until the culmination of Georgia's newest county and the last county in 1924.

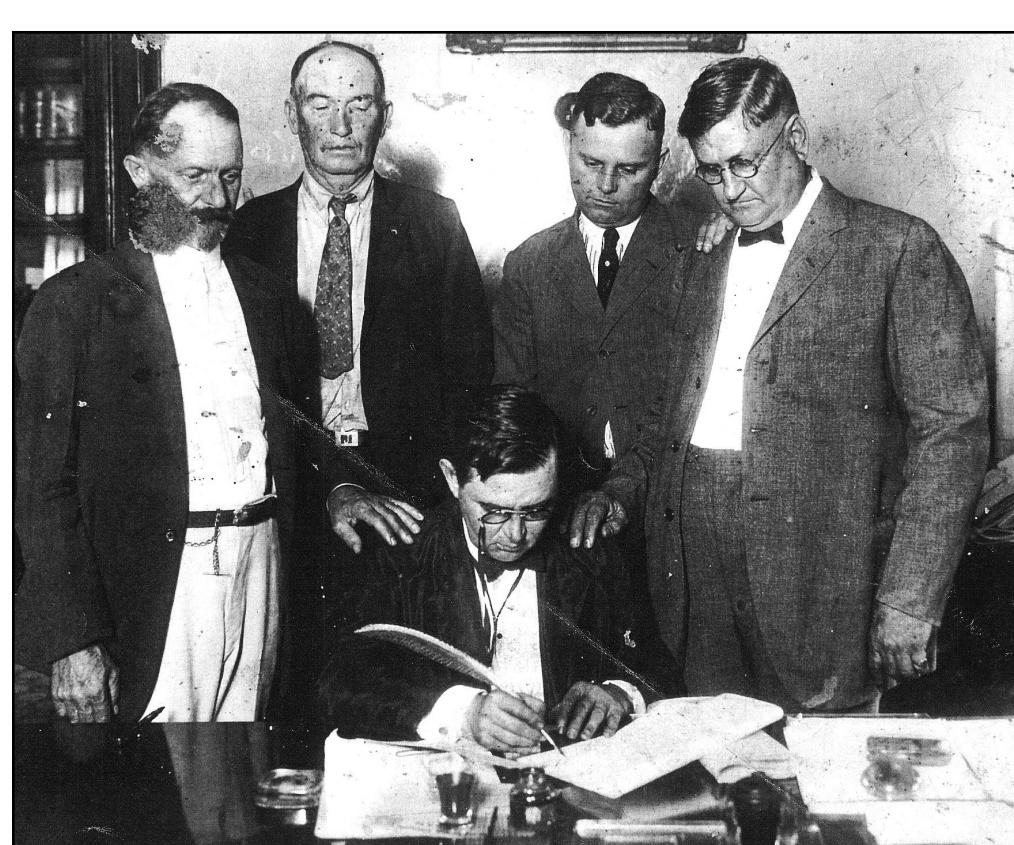
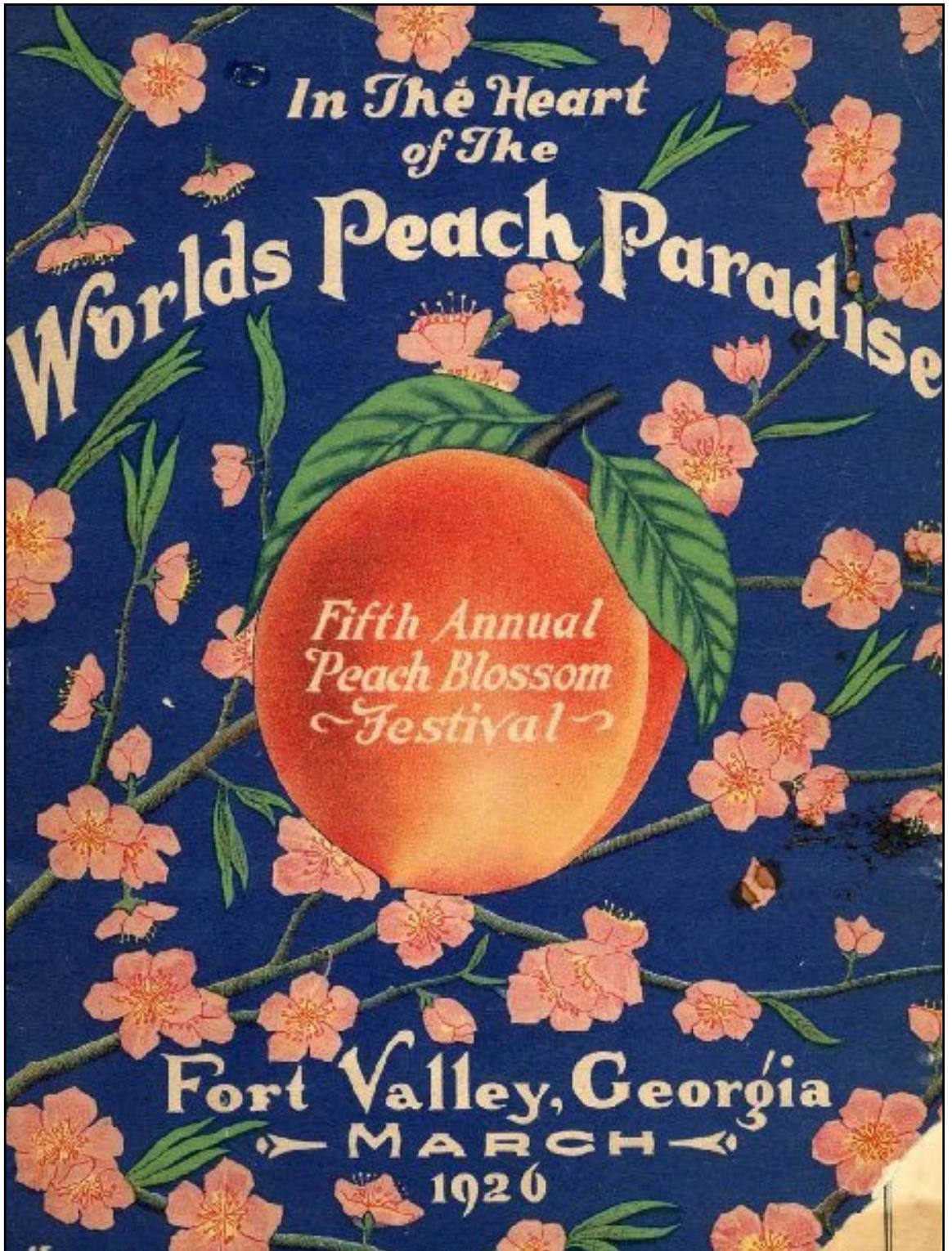
Something of interest is the origin of the county seat's name. One story claims that James Abbington Everette, who established the trading post in the 1820's, named it Fox City; but, it was misread by officials in Washington, D.C. as Fort Valley. Another story says that Everette named the town after his friend, Arthur Fort from Milledgeville. There was never a military fort in the newly created Peach County.

Perhaps the greatest event to take place in Peach County was the idea of a Peach Blossom Festival. The first Peach Blossom Festival in 1922 attracted more than 40,000 visitors from all over the world. The festivals featured dancing, songs, pageants and delicious pit cooked BBQ in its truest form. The Peach Blossom Festival ended in 1926... because it was too successful!

Sixty years later, in 1986, Fort Valley hosted the first Georgia Peach Festival. The Georgia Peach Festival honors and promotes Peach County and the peach industry.

The Georgia Peach Festival officially incorporated in 1988 under the direction of the Peach County Chamber of Commerce. Currently, an all volunteer board of directors plans and executes the job of organizing the Georgia Peach Festival in Fort Valley and Byron.

The City of Byron just recently celebrated its 150th Anniversary Celebration at North Peach Park on Saturday, October 26th. The day-long event featured two sets of firework shows. One was a daytime show by Deep South Fireworks and the other was a nighttime show.



Georgia Governor Thomas W. Hardwick signs the bill to create Peach County on July 18, 1924. Standing from the left are: Emmett Houser, Representative; Charles H. Jackson, Representative; H. C. Neil, Mayor of Fort Valley and Joe E. Davidson, Senator.



**Preparing delicious “pit cooked BBQ” for celebrating the “Peach Blossom Festival” in the early days!**

Musical acts included the A2Z band and Edwin McCain. The headliner was the infamous 1970's rock band “.38 Special,” who performed from 7:30-9:30 pm.

City of Byron Mayor, Michael Chidester, spoke about the Sesquicentennial Anniversary of Byron and how excited he was to be a part of this event as Mayor of Byron.

In its early beginnings, Byron was a flag stop on the Southwestern Railroad in the 1850's and was known as Number One and a Half Station. It had a wood rack for all the wood burning locomotives that passed through and was kept and managed by Nimrod Jackson. Later, the settlement became known as Jackson Station.

In 1860 a store was built by William Hays and later a post office was added. Dr. C. H. Richardson, who would later become Byron's first Mayor, built another store in 1867. The town was incorporated by the Georgia Legislature in 1874 and was named Byron for Dr. Richardson's favorite poet, Lord George Gordon (Noel) Byron.