

Howell's Mills Historical Marker

John McCusker

HIST 3325: Introduction to Public History

Dr. Dickey

November 21, 2018

The following paper was prepared under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Dickey at Kennesaw State University for an Introduction to Public History course.

The Howell's Mills historical marker, erected in 1989, is located by the Peachtree Creek Bridge along Howell Mill Road in Atlanta, Georgia.¹ The marker explains that this antebellum landmark, established by Judge Clark Howell in 1852, was the site of a grist mill and a sawmill along Peachtree Creek. The mills, which were at the center of a rural community, burned down in 1879. The marker also mentions another mill called Foster's Woolen Mill that was on the other side of the creek.

Clark Howell was born in Cabarrus County, North Carolina, in 1811.² Howell's ancestors were originally from Wales and settled in Virginia.³ Howell's father moved his family to Georgia in 1821, shortly after the land was annexed from the Creek Indians, in the area that later became Gwinnett County.⁴ Howell's father worked at a mill, which is how he and his brother learned how to operate one.⁵ Howell married when he was 21, and soon had a child. His wife and child died soon after.⁶ He got married again and had seven children.⁷ Howell eventually began working in the Cobb County legislative system.⁸ He moved to Atlanta after his wife died

1 "Howell's Mills". Georgia Historical Society. Last modified 2014. https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/howells-mills/

2 Upthegrove, Larry. "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell". Historic Oakland Foundation. Last modified 2014. <https://oaklandcemetery.com/2014/02/19/oakland-resident-spotlight-judge-clark-howell/>

3 Kaufman, David R. *Peachtree Creek: A Natural and Unnatural History of Atlanta's Watershed*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 139.

4 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

5 Kaufman, *Peachtree Creek*, 139.

6 "Judge Clark Howell". Find A Grave. Last modified 2018. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/10320143/clark-howell>

7 "Judge Clark Howell".

8 "Judge Clark Howell".

and became a landowner and a businessman and was very successful.⁹ He owned a home on Luckie Street in Atlanta around 1850.¹⁰

The first mill that Howell operated was near Roswell along Big Creek and was known as the Lebanon Mill.¹¹ Around 1852, he purchased thousands of acres of land by rivers in Atlanta and began to construct mills there.¹² By 1854, he owned a saw mill near the modern-day Peachtree Circle, which is to the west of the Howell's Mills site.¹³ This mill was burned down, but he also had another one on the Peachtree Creek, which is the site of the historical marker.¹⁴ Local legend says that during the Civil War, General Sherman did not burn this mill, because he thought it was owned by a Mason.¹⁵ A more likely reason why Howell's mills may not have been burned by the US army is because they wanted to use the mills to make food for themselves while they were in the area.¹⁶ The mill also played a role in rebuilding Atlanta after the Civil War, because food produced at the mill was taken downtown and bought by people who were trying to rebuild the city.¹⁷ This became a great source of income for Howell.¹⁸ He owned a total of about 4,000 acres, including the land on which his mills were built.¹⁹ While the mills significantly contributed to Howell's wealth, he also made a large amount of money through cotton, most likely grown on the acres that he owned.²⁰

9 "Judge Clark Howell".

10 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

11 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

12 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

13 Ottley, James, Chad Wright, and Dick Hall. "Interview with Henry L. Howell". Buckhead Heritage Society. Last modified 2014.

<http://www.buckheadheritage.com/sites/default/files/Buckhead%20Heritage%20Oral%20History%20Project%2C%20Henry%20Howell.pdf>

14 Ottley, Wright, and Hall. "Interview with Henry L. Howell".

15 Ottley, Wright, and Hall. "Interview with Henry L. Howell".

16 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

17 Ottley, Wright, and Hall. "Interview with Henry L. Howell".

18 Ottley, Wright, and Hall. "Interview with Henry L. Howell".

19 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

20 Kaufman, *Peachtree Creek*, 142.

Howell was more than a mill owner and planter. Howell was also a well-known judge, and that title is used on the historical marker.²¹ More specifically, he was a justice in the inferior court of Fulton County, shortly after the county's creation, and was the first person to hold that position.²² Howell was also on the first grand jury of the new Fulton County, and was the foreman of that jury.²³ One of his notable accomplishments as a judge was helping legally create Fulton County, which contains Atlanta.¹

In 1882, Howell died from heart disease.²⁴ Howell was buried in Westview Cemetery, and later Oakland Cemetery.²⁵ Described as kind, generous, and fair, Howell also supported several people who might have starved otherwise.²⁶ Part of Howell's legacy includes having Howell Mill Road named after him, as well as several locations in Gwinnett County.²⁷ After Howell's death, other members of his family continued to play important roles in the city of Atlanta.²⁸ Evan Howell, who became the mayor of Atlanta and also helped control the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, became perhaps the most famous member of the family.²⁹ According to Henry Howell, the Howell family once owned several acres of land in the modern Atlanta area close to the middle of the 1900s.

The Howell's Mills historical marker accurately describes the location of the mills, uses accurate dates, and describes true information about the mills. Its subject matter lines up with what members of the Howell family have stated in interviews, and with what other sources have said about Judge Clark Howell's life. The mills boosted the economy of Atlanta after the Civil

21 "Judge Clark Howell".

22 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

23 Kaufman, *Peachtree Creek*, 143.

24 "Judge Clark Howell".

25 Kaufman, *Peachtree Creek*, 143.

26 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

27 Upthegrove, "Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell."

28 Ottley, Wright, and Hall. "Interview with Henry L. Howell".

29 Ottley, Wright, and Hall. "Interview with Henry L. Howell".

War and helped with the reconstruction of the city. The marker points towards the mills' significance to the Howell family, including how the mills and the land that Howell owned became a significant source of income to Howell.

Bibliography

“Howell’s Mills”. Georgia Historical Society. Last modified 2014.

https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/howells-mills/

“Judge Clark Howell”. Find A Grave. Last modified 2018.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/10320143/clark-howell>

Kaufman, David R. *Peachtree Creek: A Natural and Unnatural History of Atlanta’s Watershed*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007.

Ottley, James, Chad Wright, and Dick Hall. “Interview with Henry L. Howell”. Buckhead Heritage Society. Last modified 2014.

<http://www.buckheadheritage.com/sites/default/files/Buckhead%20Heritage%20Oral%20History%20Project%2C%20Henry%20Howell.pdf>

Upthegrove, Larry. “Oakland Resident Spotlight: Judge Clark Howell”. Historic Oakland Foundation. Last modified 2014. <https://oaklandcemetery.com/2014/02/19/oakland-resident-spotlight-judge-clark-howell/>