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Book Review - Historic Rural Churches of Georgia

Austina Jordan

University of North Georgia, austina.jordan@ung.edu

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Off the SHELF

Historic Rural Churches of Georgia by Sonny Seals and George S. Hart (University of Georgia Press, 2016: ISBN 9780820349350, \$39.95)

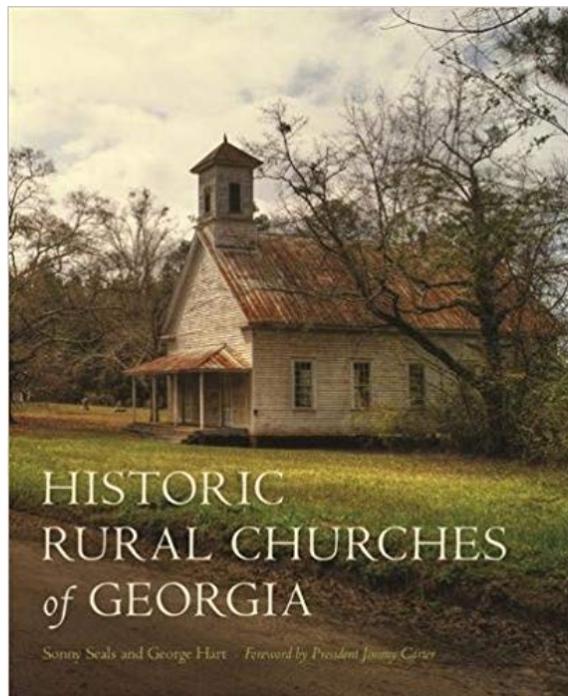
Georgia has an astonishing 159 counties, second to Texas's 254. Of those, 120 are classified as rural counties, with county populations of less than 50,000 residents. *Historic Rural Churches of Georgia* explores the history and architecture of 47 churches from 34 counties in the state. One can only imagine, given Georgia's history with religion, that it really only scratches the surface of historic churches in the Peach State.

This classic coffee table styled book is published in association with the Georgia Humanities, and the foreword is written by former president Jimmy Carter. Carter shares about how physical church buildings played a significant role in his own personal story.

The authors' preface provides context for the story of these historic churches and why they felt compelled to tell their stories. The introduction penned by Dr. John Thomas Scott, historian from Mercer University, gives excellent background about the role of churches throughout history. Scott stated, "Although not an overly religious colony, among the other British American colonies it has a relatively diverse collection of religious groups."

Arranged alphabetically by county and looking predominately at Baptist, Methodist, and

Presbyterian churches, Seals and Hart provide adequate background narratives for each church. These structures were not just places of worship. Many of the buildings were used as meeting houses and schools, in addition to being a church. The grounds of these churches also served as the cemeteries for the surrounding areas. Who is buried in the cemeteries tells readers much about the political and religious landscape of the region.



Historic Rural Churches of Georgia is a beautiful work of art; while Seals and Hart author the text throughout, it wouldn't be as spectacular were it not for the photographers contributing such breathtaking images. It is also a trifecta of Georgia history, religious history, and architectural history.

It is worth noting that the authors occasionally address the complicated relationship between Georgia's religious history

and the slaves who often worshipped upstairs in these churches. They do include a few churches built exclusively for slaves. The discussion is important and necessary, but perhaps an in-depth discussion is too much to ask of a coffee table book?

Ultimately, their motivation in publishing this book is to raise awareness and interest in these structures, with the hope that others might join them in their efforts to preserve historic churches throughout the state. Together the authors founded the nonprofit, Historical Rural

Churches of Georgia. You can visit their website at www.hrcga.org, and even take a Pews and Pulpits bus tour, visiting a handful of historic rural churches.

Readers who are interested in architectural, religious, and Georgia history will find Seals and Hart's project eye catching and thought-provoking. It also might be of interest to

genealogists looking for information about churches related to their family history. Recommended for both academic and public libraries.

Austina Jordan is Collection Management Librarian, Coordinator of Information Services, Gainesville Campus Library at University of North Georgia