



EXPLORING THE EASTSIDE



Above: FINAL COPY: Athens community members Dr. Maxine Easom and Patsy Hawkins Arnold hold a copy of their book "Across the River: the People, Places, and Culture of East Athens" outside of the University of Georgia's School of Social Work building on Aug. 14. Easom and Hawkins Arnold spent six years researching and uncovering data about the Eastside of Athens. "One of the things that we did in the book was mix together actual history with things that people told us," Easom said. "We would be looking for history, and we would write about history, and then we would have (information) from our interviews (of) things people said." Photo by Luna Reichert

“Across The River: The People, Places, and Culture of East Athens”, written by Dr. Maxine Pinson Easom and Patsy Hawkins Arnold, acknowledges the origins of East Athens and the city of Athens as a whole.

BY TECOYA RICHARDSON
Variety Staffer

PHOTOS BY KRISTA SHUMAKER
Photography Editor

LAYOUT BY NATALIE RIPPS
Variety Editor

For years, there has been a stigma surrounding East Athens originating from the Westside. What seems to be an endless competition in terms of academics, class, progression and growth has created a division within the community, leaving one to question what makes the Eastside so different from the Westside.

According to former Clarke Central High School principal Dr. Maxine Pinson Easom and community member Patsy Hawkins Arnold, the Athens community was divided into wards in the 19th century. The first ward was East Athens, and the second and third wards were the Northwestern and Northeastern parts of Athens.

“The governed black districts, voting districts now, used to be called wards. There were three originally, and the first ward is what we defined as East Athens. Honestly it was about half of Athens at that time,” Dr. Pinson Easom said.

The wards separated parts of the community

and, in response to that separation, the people of Athens created competition.

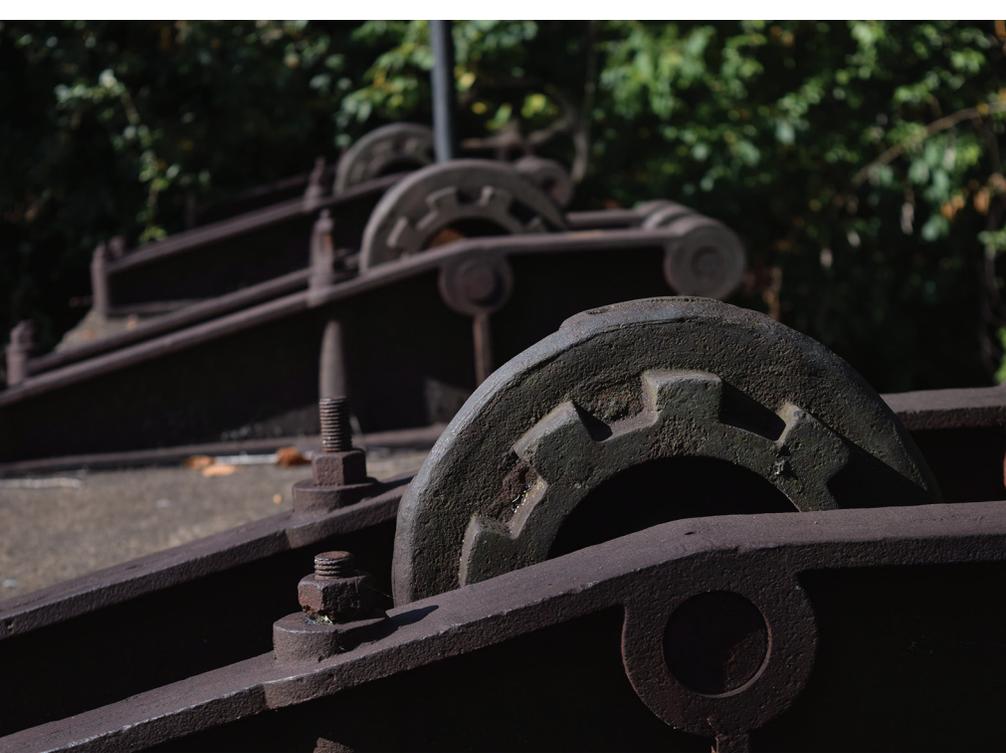
According to Christine Kadri, a CCHS sophomore and former Cedar Shoals High School student, there is an ongoing rivalry between CCHS and CSHS, both athletically and academically.

“A lot of people tend to quickly judge Cedar Shoals like, ‘Oh, they’re crowded.’ ‘They’re troublemakers.’ Which is not the truth,” Kadri said. “The truth is that (CSHS) is no different from (CCHS). Sure we’re on a different side of the town, but that shouldn’t draw a line between people.”

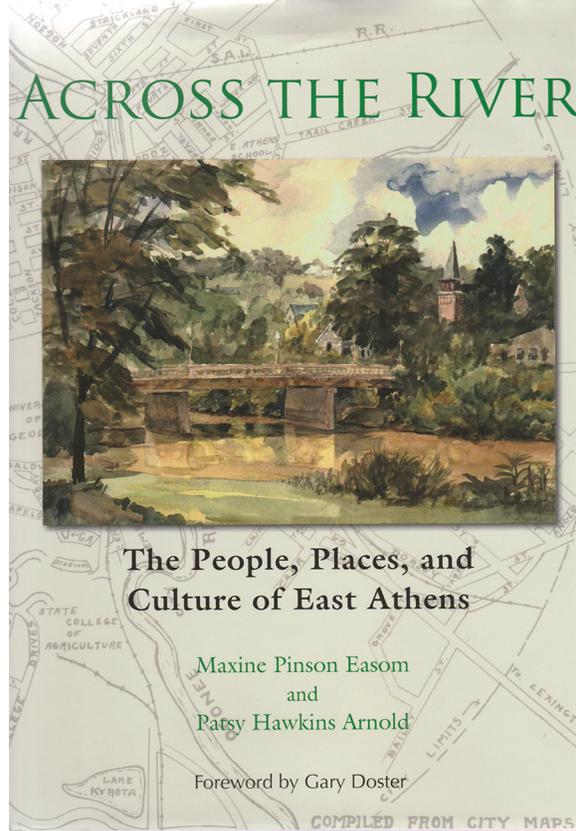
District 8 School Board Representative John Knox believes some community members have an incomplete understanding of the differences between East and West Athens.

“I just think that there are people that live in (Athens, and) their definition of Athens is pretty small,” Knox said. “To some extent, there are definitely people for whom Athens means just right around a very small





Above: STILL STANDING: On the Eastside of Athens lies the remains of a historical mill that has existed for centuries. According to community member and author Dr. Maxine Easom, the mill represents the origins of Athens. "Once I started learning the area (and) about the history of where we are now, I learned that there was a mill right there (and) that was the first mill in Athens," Easom said. "These shoals are the Cedar Shoals. This is where Cedar Shoals (High School) got its name." Photo by Luna Reichert. **Right:** ATHENS' STORY: The book "Across the River: the People, Places, and Culture of East Athens" was published on July 19. According to author Dr. Maxine Pinson Easom, the book's title carries significance. "The Oconee River is hugely important, and we grew up on the river, so that's why our book is called 'Across the River'," Pinson Easom said.



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-- DR. MAXINE PINSON EASOM,
Author

definition. We're never going to change things educationally or otherwise if we keep those attitudes."

Although many may believe Athens is a small and unified community, there are lingering divisions between the East and West sides.

In 2013, two women native to the Eastside of Athens, Dr. Pinson Easom and Hawkins Arnold, united to write a book that would highlight the history, landmarks and culture of East Athens. Their book, "Across the River: The People, Places, and Culture of East Athens", includes historical maps, photographs and handwritten journal entries, giving context to the lives of many citizens from Athens.

"I grew up on Oak Street and had lived on the Eastside of Athens all my life. Maxine had also lived on the Eastside of Athens all of her life. We met at a local restaurant several years ago, and she said, 'You know, Patsy? We ought to write a book about our side of Athens.' And I said, 'Well, I don't write, but I can help you do that,'" Hawkins Arnold said. "We both realized it was an important part of Athens that had not been written about before, so we decided we would give it a try."

Although the two had lived on the Eastside, they didn't have much knowledge of the previous events that had occurred on their side of town, revealing the need for a comprehensive history to be written.

"(Patsy and I) spent the summer in the (Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript) Library, which is one of the libraries at the University of Georgia that has rare books and historic documents in it," Dr. Pinson Easom said. "I wasn't deliberately

disinterested in history, but it wasn't one of those things that drew me. (Then) I started learning the area, about the history (of) where we are now."

Fascinated by their discoveries, the pair came to the realization that there was an entire plethora of history about their side of town that hadn't been recognized.

"There are a number of history books about the Westside of town, but nothing is written about what we call the old first ward, or East Athens," Dr. Pinson Easom said. "East Athens is where Athens started, so there ought to be a recorded history about (it)."

"Across the River: The People, Places, and Culture of East Athens" starts off by organizing the historical events and monumental sites.

"The first chapter of the book kind of is an overview of early history that started in the 1700s. So, we talked about some of those things that were important to Athens' beginning that had a connection to East Athens," Dr. Pinson Easom said.

The book not only expresses the significance of locations on the Eastside, but it also provides information on the people of that area. According to Dr. Pinson Easom and Hawkins Arnold, they worked to ensure that people of all races and struggles were represented in the text, in addition to recognizing the accomplishments of the Eastside.

"We certainly didn't omit the discrimination that we think occurred to people of Athens of all colors," Dr. Pinson Easom said. "But our emphasis was on the celebration of the contributions that East Athens made."

Dr. Pinson Easom and Hawkins Arnold traveled through their hometown unearthing untold stories of native East Athenians like themselves. According

to Hawkins Arnold, the pair came across journal entries from a variety of people, detailing various aspects of their lives.

“(Dr. Pinson Easom and I) got information from all kinds of people. Everybody that we talked to were very supportive and wanted to share their memories and how their family lived,” Hawkins Arnold said. “One man in particular, (who) shared a lot of his life with us, shared with us a copy of a small book that his sister, who was a schoolteacher, had written. It was priceless.”

Although the two women crafted the book, they needed assistance in collecting visuals and designing the cover. They hired local formatter Kenneth Storey, who had previously worked on similar books related to the Athens community.

According to Storey, there were a few minor challenges with the production of the book, but he was satisfied with the outcome.

“It was so much material involved (with) images, and we had to keep backing up and checking references and photographs to make sure everything was correct,” Storey said. “Considering all that, I was very happy with the way the book turned out. It’s a very handsome looking book, so I’m very pleased with it.”

After six years of research, writing and production, the book was published on July 18. Now that the book is released, Dr. Pinson Easom and Hawkins Arnold hope it will inform readers about Athens’ history and encourage them to embrace their town’s full story. 



Above: OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW: Oconee Street United Methodist Church has existed since the 1800s. In 2014, OSUMC underwent rebuilding following its destruction due to a fire. “We had been (writing the book) for maybe close to a year, and (OSUMC) was Maxine’s church all of her life and there was a tragedy: her church burned,” Hawkins Arnold said. Photo by Luna Reichert. **Below:** FAMILY HOME: Author Dr. Maxine Easom’s former home stands on Oak Street. According to Easom, when growing up on the Eastside of Athens, she did not learn about her area’s past. “I lived there my whole life, but I don’t know the history about the area,” Pinson Easom said. Photo by Luna Reichert

