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Looking back at 'The Law Ground and the vote'

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Feature Writer

Herman Eller hasn't forgotten a lick about the way folks went to the polls to vote in the general and primary elections during the 1950s. It all happened at "The Law Ground," the name given to a place in Titus, Towns County, Ga.

Eller said the place was actually a big flat rock where Democrats and Republicans in the community came to fill out a paper ballot that would be carried to the courthouse in Hiawassee and counted by evening the same day.

"A few times I worked on election day at the Republican table. My brother and I used to go and hang out there around election time. That's all there was back then, a spot off Upper Hightower Road.

"I graduated high school in 1953, and it was after graduation I worked at the polls. I wasn't in charge, I was just helping the Republicans working at their table.

There were two tables, one for each party. When it was the primary election people came up and you'd ask them what party they belonged to.

"Most of the time they'd say it before you'd ask. We knew everybody in the district, they didn't have to show us any identification to know who they were. Then you gave them the ballot, it was printed and it was paper.

"If there was rain on election day, the tables were moved to the post office and general store run by Homer Berrong. Homer had two rooms off to the side and the election could be moved inside. Voting ended around 6 p.m.

"Then the ballots were taken to the upper part of the old courthouse in Hiawassee. The offices of elected people were downstairs, the Ordinary, the Superintendent of Schools, all the main offices that ran the county.

"Upstairs was where court was held and the votes were counted.

They made sure both parties were there and that votes were counted right so there would be no cheating.

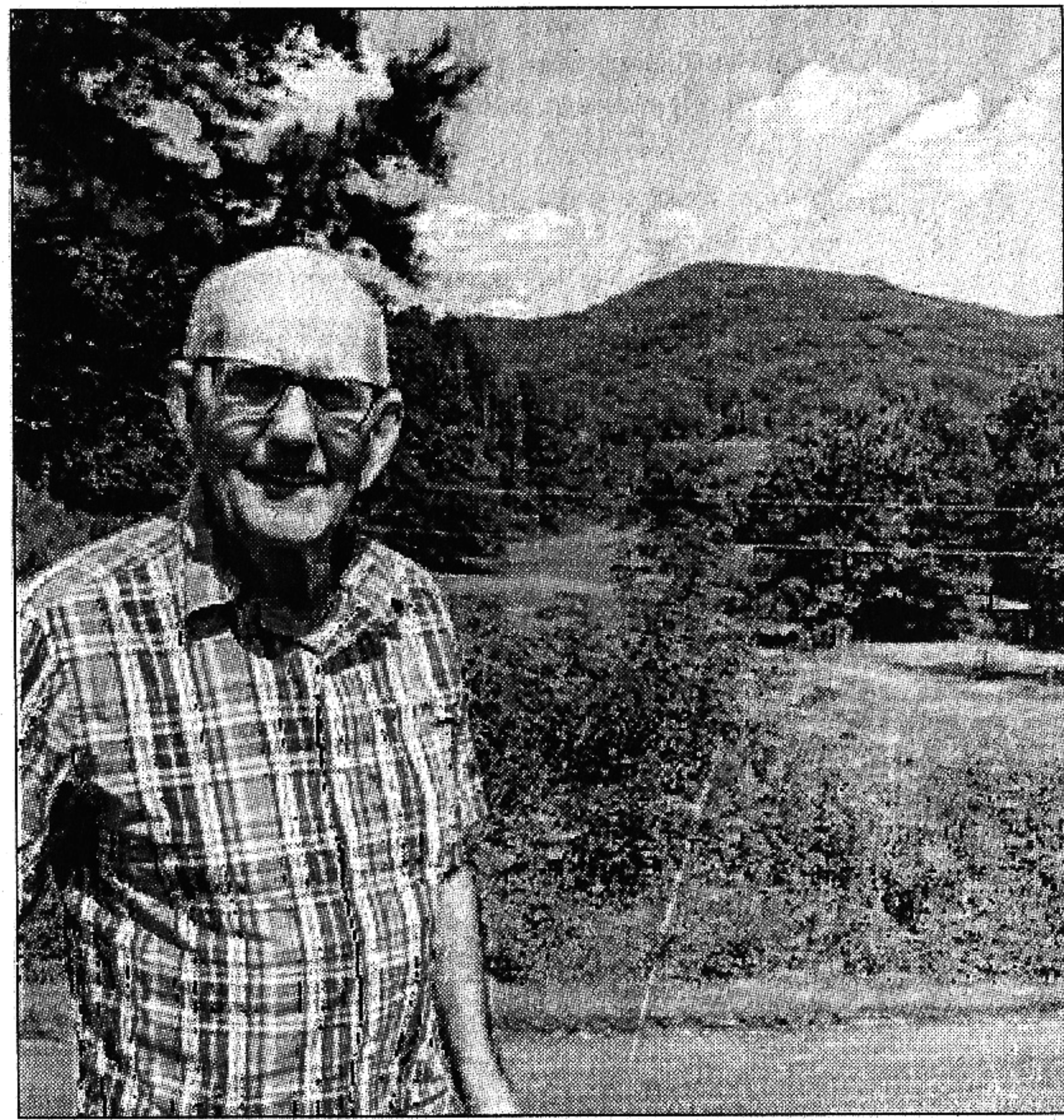
"Three or four families lived in Tate City at that time. They had a separate polling place which was further back in the mountains and a greater distance from the county seat.

"As for cheating, it happened earlier near The Law Ground," Eller said.

"People who wanted to bribe a voter took them off to the side and tried to persuade them before they reached the polls. Most people had to walk to vote back then in Titus. Mail was still delivered by horseback until 1954.

"It was not allowed within so many feet of The Law Ground to persuade a voter. They would try to detour a voter along the way and moonshine was the bribe.

"We're not naming any names, most of them have passed on, but it made me so mad. I didn't like that. See LAWGROUND A2



Herman Eller stands near the place where he was born on the face side of the mountain behind him in Titus, Towns County, Ga.

LAWGROUND

Continued from A1

"There were no jobs around, that's why people made it. You knew who made it, you found out who bought it and the ones who didn't."

Eller was serious when he said there were no jobs, there was no money. His first car was a broken-down '42 Plymouth, a car that had been in a wreck and given to him by his brother.

"My second car was a '49 Ford from Hoke Eller. I didn't have any money and he let me work it out by the hour on his Ford tractor.

"By the time I had my third car, a '56 two-tone Chevrolet, some buddies wanted me

to run moonshine. There were three other people and it came my time to take it to a woman in town.

"I loaded six cases in my car, six gallons in a case, and headed to Hiawassee. She lived off 288, the first house on the left. I past Highway 75 going to Atlanta and saw the sheriff's car parked up on the crest by Macadonia Church. I went on to town.

"After a while, it was near to dusky dark, I went back. The sheriff was gone and I delivered."

That night changed many things for Eller. He had a good reputation, he wasn't a suspect.

"I sold the Chevrolet, then I went up to Ohio to find real work. My dad was already up there."