

In this era of heightened interest in historical preservation, the continual search for "roots," and a sudden and sometimes excessive reverence for any and everything old or nostalgic, from 1910 Coca-Cola bottles to rare manuscripts and unique Victorian courthouses, what does a rural Georgia county do with a 52-year-old historical monument that nobody wants?

Pickens County, Georgia, and its county seat of Jasper have had this problem for a number of years. On the crest of a 3,200-foot mountain just inside the Pickens County line — a peak said to be the southernmost member of the vast Appalachian chain — stands a carved marble shaft dedicated to, of all people, General James Edward Oglethorpe, founder of the city of Savannah and the colony known thereafter as Georgia.

The mountain itself was once called by the simple descriptive name of Grassy Knob. In 1930, however, its owner, an eccentric, flamboyant and very rich Pickens County resident, Colonel Sam Tate, decided that Grassy Knob should be renamed Mount Oglethorpe. Furthermore, Tate, whose wealth came from hard white veins of marble and whose business, at least in part, was making monuments (mostly of the tombstone variety), erected a splendid marble obelisk on top of the newly christened mountain heralding General Oglethorpe. Why Tate chose General Oglethorpe for his honorary efforts is unclear; nonetheless, the "marble king," as Tate was billed in the newspapers of the day, was able to get the Georgia legislature to proclaim Grassy Knob as Mount Oglethorpe. In November of 1930, Tate held a great ceremony at the summit to dedicate the monument and the mountain. Legislators, the governor of Georgia, the mayor of Atlanta and many other dignitaries were there; photos of the festivities filled almost a full page in the Sunday society section of *The Atlanta Constitution*.

Reverence for the honorable General Oglethorpe, though, was hardly Tate's sole motivation. Not far from the mountain peak were Connahaynee Lodge and a residential development, Tate Mountain Estates, enterprises that Tate ran and, naturally, wished to promote among wealthy Atlanta patrons.

Simultaneously with Tate's monumental endeavors, a Georgia forest ranger and his colleagues were lobbying for another distinction for Mount Oglethorpe: that it be designated the "southern terminus" of the just-begun 2,000-mile long Appalachian Trail.

Lost Legacy of A Marble King

On a mountaintop in north Georgia, an almost forgotten monument to the state's founder, General Oglethorpe, has become a center of controversy.



After its christening, Oglethorpe monument suffered a gradual desecration.

After considerable discussion and strong opposition from a Tennessee group wanting the trail to end farther west, the Georgia group successfully proposed Mount Oglethorpe to the national Appalachian Trail Conference in Washington. And so the fanfare of the mountain's dedication day included, as well as the unveiling of a monument to Oglethorpe, the official opening of the Appalachian Trail in Georgia. Three Eagle Scouts who had just completed a 13-day hike on the new trail — all the way from the North Carolina border — were given a hero's welcome when they reached the mountaintop, as planned, just in time for the ceremony.

Colonel Tate never got around to deeding the land where the monument stood to either the county or the state as it was hoped he would. When he died in 1938, the Tate Mountain Estates property, along with his Georgia Marble Company and other

wealth, became the object of a two-year-long court battle among his relatives. Some of his holdings were sold at auction, and although Mount Oglethorpe remained in the family's possession for some years, it too — monument and all — was eventually sold. The great Connahaynee Lodge burned, and Tate Mountain estates shrank to a few acres on a small lake halfway up the mountain.

Meanwhile, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, the volunteer organization formed to oversee and maintain the trail in Georgia, found increasing problems with the stretch of trail beginning at Mount Oglethorpe. Until the path entered the Chattahoochee National Forest, about 20 miles farther north, its course traversed private lands. At Mount Oglethorpe, especially, the trail was easily accessible by car or pickup truck — its winding seven-mile route to the crest of the mountain was not a foot-

path at all but a well-graded dirt road. The area became a favorite garbage dump for local residents. Picnickers and loiterers left their debris at whatever scenic spot they chose, and the pristine white surface of the Oglethorpe monument attracted graffiti — "John loves Susie," "Class of '52" — like a magnet. Some enterprising hunters even used General Oglethorpe's carved patrician nose for target practice.

The worst problem, however, was that the area's new landowner decided to turn his acreage into a chicken farm. By 1955, the Georgia AT Club and the national Appalachian Trail Conference were receiving numerous complaints. "We proceeded along the crest of Oglethorpe Mountain amidst glorious scenery," one hiker wrote. "Our next encounter was with a chicken ranch, acres in extent, which sat astraddle the trail. There was no way around it, so we again waded through filth, this time of thousands of chickens. It was so slimy that one of our group fell flat on her face in the stuff."

At the 1958 Appalachian Trail Conference meeting the southern terminus of the Appalachian Trail was officially moved from Pickens County north to Springer Mountain.

The chicken houses are gone now; Mount Oglethorpe has other, somehow more sinister inhabitants. The mountain ridge is presently the site of three different sets of towers — a radio tower, a huge AT&T microwave tower and, at the very crest, within 50 feet of the Oglethorpe monument, two giant towers and a corrugated metal building making up the "Remote Communications Air/Ground Facility" (RCAG) operated by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The 38-foot-high marble monument, overshadowed by its metallic neighbors, stands surrounded by tall thistles and weeds and carries angry-looking lettering and ugly scratches as far up as the defacers could reach. The bas-relief map of Georgia on one side is pockmarked by rifle shot, and the likeness of General Oglethorpe carved on the other side of the stone shaft now has red hair and brown eyes, courtesy of a particularly artistic vandal armed with spray paint. An inscription on the base declares the structure is dedicated "In Grateful Recognition of the Achievements of James Edward Oglethorpe, who by Courage, Industry, and Endurance founded the Commonwealth of Georgia in 1732."

In 1983 Georgia has a big birthday, the 250th anniversary of Gen-

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Original U.S. Morgan Silver Dollars

Philadelphia, January 1982. IMM announced today the release for sale of a small cache of less than 10,000 original U.S. Government Morgan Silver Dollars. Esteemed by collectors worldwide, Morgan Silver Dollars are among the last .900 fine silver dollars to have been struck for circulation by the U.S. Government and have become extremely scarce in recent years.

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The Morgan Silver Dollar was authorized by an Act of the United States Congress in 1878 and was struck for circulation from 1878-



1904. Due to a bullion shortage, coinage was suspended until 1921, when Morgans were once again minted for a single year. During World War I it is estimated that over 270 million silver dollars were melted down for

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To qualify for this special offering, call Lee Collins toll free at 1-800-345-8502, Dept. MDL-1857 for credit card orders; or if you would prefer, send check or money order in the full amount to: International Monetary Mint, Dept. MDL-1857, 390 Pike Road, Huntingdon Valley, Pa 19006. An additional \$2.75 is requested to cover insurance, postage and special handling per order. If not completely satisfied, you may return your U.S. Morgan Silver Dollars in their original condition within 30 days for a full refund. This offer expires January 30, 1982.

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STATEWIDE (Continued from page 7)

eral Oglethorpe's grand deed. For this reason, Mrs. Edwin J. (Mildred) Grimes, a retired American history teacher from Columbus and the current Georgia regent (president) of a patriotic group called the Daughters of the American Colonists, thinks this year would be particularly appropriate for finally doing something about the Pickens County monument. There are very few monuments to Oglethorpe in the state, she points out, and her group, which has 17 chapters and 2,000 members in Georgia, has been concerned about the condition of this one for years. "We'd like very much to see the monument cared for and made meaningful again to the people of our state," she explains.

So far, Mrs. Grimes' DAC efforts have been confined to discussing the issue with the state Historic Preservation Section, the FAA and the owner of the property, Ralph Edwards, an Atlanta real estate businessman. "They've all been very helpful," she says, "but restoring or moving the monument will be an expensive proposition. Right now, we're just doing some investigations to see what might be possible — and within reason." Her group has collected some money for the project over the last few years, but as yet, they're uncertain how to proceed.

Within Pickens County itself, the loss of the Appalachian Trail has long been a lamentable topic. As recently as 1978, for example, the local weekly paper, *The Pickens Progress*, ran a wistful editorial about how grand it would be to bring the trail back to Mount Oglethorpe — a fact that the writer conceded, "won't be easy to do." When the FAA leased the mountaintop and built its towers in 1979, it noted that the Georgia Historic Preservation Section had determined that since the monument had been built with private funds on private land, it had "no official status."

Official status or not, the monument is a point of interest to many in the county. "It's been a local concern for a long time," remarks Al Cunningham, vice-president and founder of the Marble

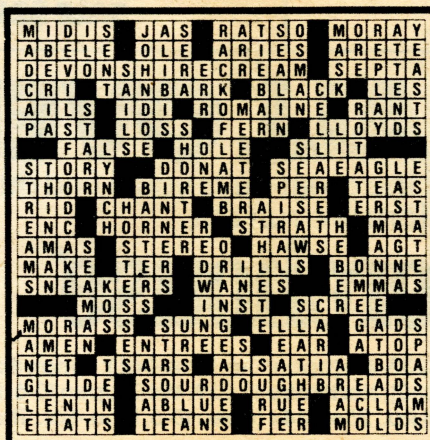
Valley Historical Society, formed in April of 1981 to serve Pickens and surrounding counties. The 70 or so members of the new society have not yet formally tackled the monument question, but Cunningham himself has done some checking on the matter. There is little the U. S. Forest Service, or anyone else, can or will do, he discovered, to restore the Appalachian Trail to its original terminus, as many county residents would like, because even though the area is far more scenic now than it was in 1958, it is still on private land.

On the other hand, the mountain ridge is bounded on two sides by two separate residential mountain resorts, Big Canoe and Bent Tree, which have lakes, golf courses, fine homes and well-maintained forests and trails. There is a possibility, says Cunningham, whose full-time job is county agent of Pickens County, that money can be obtained to turn part of the mountain into a county recreation area, especially if a lake can be built. Last fall, a federal soil conservationist based in Jasper began researching the question. If the area were turned over to the county, the monument might well be relocated and restored.

For now, history buffs worried about the desecration of General Oglethorpe are best advised to make their visit to the monument in a four-wheel drive vehicle and sturdy walking shoes, and to be prepared to bypass a locked metal gate and warning signs about one-quarter mile from the summit. At the top, Oglethorpe stares out toward the graveled drive and bare stubby trees, and the FAA superstructures nearby seem to beam their signals almost audibly across the distant horizon. No informed appraisal has been done to determine if the monument, after years of neglect, can ever be adequately cleaned and restored. As it is, until one more bolt of lightning strikes or a few more marksmen aim, the neglected monument will continue its solitary vigil, raising a cracked and maimed visage to the cold, north Georgia sky. ■

Next week Frank Orrin Smith writes *Doing It*.

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