The Playground in Our Own Back Yard

A Brief History of Red Top Mountain State Park

By Chantal Parker

One of the attractions at the Hills of Iron celebration at Red Top Mountain State Park in April was a tour of Iron Hill, site of a mining operation that closed down in the 1920s. The deep cuts into the mountain, now covered with thick vegetation, overlook a small cove of Lake Allatoona, creating one of the most spectacular settings in the park. Closed to visitors for more than two decades, Iron Hill might still be lost in obscurity if not for the recent efforts of EVHS and Red Top Mountain park officials to bring this scenic gem back into the public consciousness through its annual Hills of Iron celebration. That this once popular campsite was closed down at all and is now being reopened is part of the park's long history that all Bartow Countians can embrace and celebrate.

While the original intention of the damming of the Etowah River was to control flooding and provide electricity, the happy result was an unprecedented recreational area for Georgians, encompassing some 270 miles of shoreline. Before the completion of Allatoona Dam in 1950, the 1948 Corps of Engineers Master Plan called for the setting aside of almost 1,500 acres in the immediate vicinity for use as a state park. Two years later, in 1950, the state signed a twenty-five year agreement to lease the property, which would operate under the authority of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks, Historical Sites, and Monuments (now State Parks & Historic Sites). Just fifteen years into the original lease, with an optimistic eye to the future, the state renewed its lease in 1965, and leased an additional 96 acres.

Georgia's creation of Allatoona Dam and its adoption of Red Top as a state park served not only to preserve the area's history, which extends from the 20th century iron industry all the way back to the prehistoric Mississippian.

See Red Top, continued on page 4

Hills of Iron Returns to Red Top

The Etowah Valley Historical Society and Red Top Mountain State Park were pleased to once again team up for the production of Hills of Iron, a day-long event celebrating the iron industry in Bartow County, on April 27, 2002. Joining the hayride tour to Iron Hill was the park's special guest Francis Summey, an Iron Hill native who regaled visitors with stories of his youth spent growing up on the mountain. Mr. Summey's knowledge of the area has been invaluable to park officials as they attempt to gather and record the history of Red Top Mountain.

Returning for his second year with the program was

See Hills of Iron, continued on page 2
Hills of Iron, continued from page 1

Dr. Nicholas Honerkamp, an archaeologist and director of the Jeffrey L. Brown Institute of Archaeology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Dr. Honerkamp has extensive knowledge of the operation of iron furnaces, having excavated Bluff Furnace in Tennessee, and shared that knowledge with an exciting lecture delivered to an enthusiastic audience at Cooper's Furnace.

Also returning this year, following their success in the inaugural Hills of Iron program in 2001, was Alabama Art Casting, who fired up the audience right along with their coupola in another incredible demonstration of iron melting and pouring. Reproducing his hands-on approach to the program, Red Top park superintendent James Hamilton once again donned the gear of the iron masters to participate in the demonstration. Many visitors showed up early to create their own design on scratch boxes sold by the guild and went home with one-of-a-kind mementos. One of those taking home a memento was EVHS. The cast iron plaque with the society's name and "Hills of Iron 2002" may be viewed at the EVHS office in the 1903 gold-domed courthouse.

A new feature to this year's program was a pontoon boat ride to the ruins of Glen Holly, Mark Anthony Cooper's Etowah home. The caravan of six boats left the dock behind the lodge, following a route that took them over the submerged ruins of the town of Etowah before arriving at the tiny island (once a mountain top) where the remains of Glen Holly can still be viewed. Greeting visitors on their arrival was Cooper himself portrayed by historical impressionist Phillip Whiteman. Whiteman's thoughtful and realistic portrayal of "the Iron Man of Georgia" succeeded in giving life and personality to the otherwise remote historical figure and was thoroughly entertaining.

See Hills, continued on page 6

"A morsel of genuine history is a thing so rare as to always be valuable."
— Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Adams, 1817
Cassville Before the War
Membership Meeting
April 15, 2002

“In the sweet by and by may we not hope to meet and live again
with the sweet roses of the past with all the thorns left off. Who was
the one writing of old Cassville, and the Locust trees and the Moth­
ers graves. I tried but failed to recognize the voice. I would like so
much to go back there...”—letter to Jane & Lizzie Cobb from E.S.
Candler, Iuka Ms., May 27, 1885

A record turn out of forty to fifty people attended the
EVHS April membership meeting featuring historian
Jim Rongers and the unveiling of his map reconstructing
Cassville, the former Bartow County capital destroyed by
Union forces in 1864.

Mr. Rongers’s interest in Cassville began four years ago,
when he obtained some Civil War era letters that included
 correspondence from Cassville. Rongers’s curiosity about
the people mentioned in the letters and the town led him
to the offices of EVHS, where he found Joseph Mahan’s A
History of Old Cassville 1833-1864. His research took him
next to Columbus State University, where Mahan’s per­
sonal papers are archived. (Mahan’s research included two
interviews, conducted in the 1930s, with Cassville resi­
dents who had lived through the war, one a former slave.)

Mahan’s reconstruction of pre-Civil War Cassville in­
cluded only fifty-six people. “But there were thousands of
people in Cassville before the war,” Rongers said. Thus
began his search for the rest of the population that led to
the reconstructed map and the preparation of a manuscript.

Piecing together information gleaned from Mahan’s
records, surviving deed records, census, and personal let­
ters, including the Civil War correspondence of William
and Lila Chunn (see EVHS Newsletter, Vol. 42, An Ex­
traordinary Life), Rongers logically deduced a system of
town lot numbers that accurately reconstructed the layout
of the town and many of its residents. Lila Chunn’s letters
were especially helpful, as they were written from the por­
tico of her home on a hill overlooking the town of Cassville,
“and were full of descriptions of the town and the people,”
Rongers said.

Rongers has hundreds of names that are not on the
map because he couldn’t definitively place them. “But I
know they were there,” he said. Among them are the many
slaves known to have lived in Cassville. “I know how many
slaves were with who,” he reported, “but I don’t know how
they lived with them” [in the owner’s homes or in separate
quarters].

Rongers has quite a collection of Cassville memora­
bilia, some of which (war correspondence) is slated for
loan to Kennesaw Museum in Cobb County. Items he
displayed at the meeting included a signed letter by Lewis
Cass, for whom the town and the county were originally
named; letters postmarked Cassville; and a brick from the
Red Top, continued from page 1

mound builders, but also boosted Bartow County’s stagnant population growth and depressed agricultural economy. Popular from day one, the new park initially offered five picnic areas, three comfort stations (bathrooms), thirteen rental mobile homes, seventy-five tent campsites, seven boat docks, two boat launch ramps, a beach and bathhouse, a concession stand, and a miniature golf course—substantial offerings by 1950 Georgia standards, that transformed Bartow County’s backyard into a family playground to which depression- and war-weary Georgians flocked.

Another 345 acres were leased for “blacks only,” and was named George Washington Carver State Park, after the agricultural researcher who spurred the South’s peanut industry. It is perhaps no coincidence that just seven years earlier, in 1943, Carver had been honored with a national monument and park which preserved his childhood home near Diamond Grove, Missouri; the original George Washington Carver State Park was the first designated national monument to an African American in the United States.

Atlanta resident and former Tuskegee Airman John Loyd Atkinson was instrumental in helping establish Carver as the first “Negro” State Park in the state of Georgia. Returning from World War II, Atkinson found there were no state park facilities for blacks and set about trying to correct the oversight. After his requests for local permits were repeatedly turned down, the State Park system stepped in, leasing land adjoining Red Top and appointing Atkinson as Carver’s park manager, the first African-American park manager in the state. Atkinson, with his wife Bessie Evans and children Charles, John Jr., George, William, and Emma, are credited with early development of the park’s facilities, even going so far as hauling in hundreds of tons of sand to the lakeshore to create a sandy beach for visitors.

Though established under the umbrella of Red Top Mountain, Georgia’s George Washington Carver Park was maintained and operated separately as one of the state’s three “Negro” state parks. Not quite as substantial as Red Top, the park offered a picnic area, a “rough” tent camp-
number of campsites by half, which in turn slashed operational costs and brought the available sites more in line with occupancy. The improvement and development of twelve miles of nature trails in the early 1980s was followed by the building of two tennis courts in 1986. Other improvements included the construction of rental cottages and group shelters, and the implementation of educational programs for children and adults. Plans drawn up at that time for future additions included an 18-hole golf course. In 1989, the construction of a 33-room lodge, conference center, and full-service restaurant placed Red Top in a category shared by only five other state parks, that of State Lodge Park.

Enter the Etowah Valley Historical Society.

No man is an island, and no state park can exist in isolation without community support. Red Top and EVHS, once they met, found they had much in common—home, history, preservation—and the partnership forged between them sought to perpetuate those shared interests.

By the early 1990s, Red Top was looking to expand their offerings with the addition of interpretive history programs. What they dreamed of was a log cabin to center the activities around. EVHS was just coming into its own at the time, becoming a considerable force in the community, and, in a remarkable case of serendipity, it just happened to have a log cabin it was hoping to relocate.

The Vaughan Cabin Relocation Project, begun in 1993, sought to preserve a circa 1870s log cabin by relocating it from private property slated for development to Red Top Mountain. Taking more than four years and thousands of man-hours to complete, the ambitious project succeeded in uniting state and county governments, large and small business concerns, and individuals from the private sector in a true community effort. Today, Vaughan Cabin, located on the lake behind the lodge, is the center of numerous year-long activities ranging from pioneer days and Civil War encampments to mountain music and folk-storytelling.

With one hugely successful project under their belts, Red Top and EVHS looked forward to future opportunities in which they could work together, which included programs at Allatoona Pass Battlefield. The next big opportunity presented itself in the first year of the new millennium, when the two partnered together in 2001 to present the inaugural program of Hills of Iron.

Hills of Iron featured a first class display and program guide, tours, lecture presentations, and a live furnace demonstration that all combined to win Red Top the State Parks & Historic Sites' competitive and highly coveted Park Program of the Year award. As with the Vaughan Cabin, EVHS's cooperative and financial support was essential to the project's success. Hills of Iron succeeded, not only in celebrating the history of the iron industry in Bartow County and attracting new visitors to the park, but in reintroducing that all-but-forgotten section of the park that earlier park officials had shut down—Iron Hill. As the park continues to grow, Iron Hill promises to remain in the picture, becoming more and more a prominent focus among the park's many attractions. Already slated for development is a 12-mile bike trail that will end in an overlook of the deep cut mine that is the focus of the annual tour.

The project's greatest success, however, was in strengthening the park's ties to and solidifying its place in the community. From a segregated beginning to a unifying presence, the history of Red Top Mountain State Park is intimately entwined with the history of Bartow County. By continuing to partner with the community to bring interpretive history to Bartow County, Red Top continues to increase awareness and appreciation for the cultural, natural, and historical resources in our own back yard and greatly improves our quality of life.

"There is nothing that solidifies and strengthens a nation like reading the nation's history, whether that history is recorded in books, or embodied in customs, institutions, and monuments."—Joseph Anderson, 1836-1916
An unexpected bonus to the boat tour was the presence of Carl Etheridge, chief engineer and historian with the Lake Allatoona Corps of Engineers and a valued member of EVHS, where he chairs the Cemetery Preservation committee. Carl’s extensive knowledge of the archaeology of Etowah and Glen Holly, generously applied, helped visitors to appreciate, even more, the history of the area and the legend of Mark Anthony Cooper.

Another interesting new addition to the Hills of Iron program was an interdisciplinary team of iron enthusiasts from Jacksonville State University in Alabama. Whereas Alabama Art Casting melted iron scraps for pouring, this team actually smelted ore, to extract the iron, in a mini-furnace they constructed on site. And, while they had done this many times before, this was the first time the team then took the extracted iron and melted it to produce cast iron, which they poured on Sunday.

Team members joked about the small amount of cast iron (“a half-circle about 3” across”) produced with $100 of coke over two days, but what these novice ironmasters accomplished was immeasurable. What had begun as an attempt to understand how the Janney Furnace in Alabama (being excavated by team member Chris Hill) operated has come “full-circle,” as the team continues to explore 19th century furnace operations.

“Mining and the iron industry have been a huge part of Bartow County’s history,” said EVHS vice president David Parker, who represented the society in the president’s absence. “With Hills of Iron, we celebrate that history, even as we continue to learn more about it. This second edition of the program was an even greater success than the first, and the only people who weren’t impressed were those people who weren’t there.”

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**We Are Not Alone**

**Early Preservationists Had It Just As Tough**

**In Honor of National Historic Preservation Month**

Historic preservation is not a modern phenomenon. History itself records that even while whole civilizations were being wiped out, there were individuals inside and outside those cultures working to record and preserve their histories. So, we’re not alone in our efforts to preserve history, and as this excerpt in honor of Preservation Month reveals, the need to preserve our history is, indeed, as old as our history itself.


“Over the years Americans have shown an astonishing indifference to the relics of the past... During the War of 1812 the room in which the Declaration of Independence was signed was slated for demolition and partly torn down. Preservationists managed to save the edifice, but only after two great wings of Independence Hall had already been destroyed. In 1853 a syndicate of enterprising Virginia businessmen attempted to turn Mount Vernon into a hotel. Appalled, the governor of Virginia sought to buy Washington’s home, but when the owner demanded to be paid the going market rate of two hundred thousand dollars, the legislature refused to go along. Only the concentrated efforts of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association saved the building from commercial exploitation.

“The homes of less famous patriots were not similarly spared. During the Civil War the John Hancock mansion was demolished so a developer could put to more profitable purpose the land underneath, which had grown in value to more than a hundred thousand dollars.”

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**June Dinner Meeting**

at Old Mill Farm

6:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 22

Weinman Family History and A Tour of the Horse Farm with hosts

Billy Wright, Grandson of Francis Weinman

Virginia Yates, Farm Manager

Frank Lewis, Horse Trainer

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“History is the glass through which we may behold, with ancestral eyes, not only the various deeds of past ages and the old accidents that attend them, but also discern the different humors of men.” —unknown

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6 EVHS Volume 43, May 2002
Confederate Memorial Day
Triple Ceremonies Mark Annual Observance in Bartow County

Among the many traditions preserved throughout Bartow County's history, none is more controversial than the observance of Confederate Memorial Day, and none more stirring. Gathering in those same places where our ancestors gathered, singing the same songs, remembering the same fallen, history is reborn into the present.

**Cassville**

"They're not just stones in the ground," Lt. Commander Mike Wennin of the Stiles-Akin Camp of the Sons of Confederate Veterans told attendants at Cassville ceremonies. "And today we remember their names, and honor their lives and their sacrifice."

The first of three observances held in the county, on April 20, 2002, the ceremony at Cassville Confederate Cemetery included the reading of the names of 153 soldiers known to rest among the three hundred unknown Confederate dead. Familiar among them were the names William T. Wofford, Warren Akin, and William Chunn.

In a tribute to Southern patriotism, the song of Dixie was sung in remembrance of those who have carried the battle flag into every war since the Civil War. The ceremony also included a performance of "America the Beautiful" by Amelia DeRamus and readings of "Letters from Cassville" by Mike Wennin and Bill Arp impressionist Buddy Autry. The service concluded with infantry and artillery salutes, and the playing of Taps by bugler C. J. Shields.

**Cartersville**

At the 1903 courthouse on April 27, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, P.M.B. Young chapter, sponsored a ceremony featuring guest speaker Daniel M. Roper, who spoke about Judge Augustus R. Wright, a preacher, lawyer, and judge who served two terms in the U. S. Congress and later in the Confederate Congress, and who, for a short time, owned the Chieftans in Rome.

Ceremonies included the awarding of two medals: the Cross of Military Service to Sgt. Steven Rood, U.S. Army; and the National Defense Medal to Rood's brother, Sp-4 Bruce Rood, U.S. Army.

**Kingston**

The oldest continuous observance of Confederate Memorial Day in Bartow County is also the oldest in the nation. For 138 years, the Kingston Confederate Memorial Day service has paid tribute to 252 unknown Confederate and Union soldiers who never made it home from the war. This year, in response to events of September 11, 2001, the service on April 28th was extended to include all heroes, past and present, and honored the service of those others among us who wear uniforms, firefighters and law enforcement officers in Bartow County.

Moving from the church service to the cemetery, the tradition of decorating the graves with flowers was observed, followed by an artillery salute by members of the Carl Boyd Post 42 of the American Legion. The Kingston service is sponsored annually by the Kingston Women's History Club.

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**EVHS Welcomes New Members**

Allen County Public Library—Fort Wayne, IN  
Bill & Angela Birdsong—Powder Springs, GA  
Steve & Kate Dougherty—Cartersville, GA  
Margaret Farmer—Cartersville, GA  
Judy M. Ferguson—Acworth, GA  
Samuel C. Graham—Cartersville, GA  
Joy B. Harlin—Cartersville, GA  
Mary C. Holmes—Acworth, GA  
Christina R. Jenkins—Cartersville, GA  
Mark J. Kimball—Cartersville, GA  
Wayne Steed—Atlanta, GA  
Katherine Taheri—Cartersville, GA  
Malvin & Gail Underwood—Cartersville, GA  
Gary Wehner—Smyrna, GA  
Virginia Yates—Cartersville, GA

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**Change in EVHS Office Hours**

The EVHS office is now open on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of the month. Weekly hours remain Monday-Friday, 1:30-4:30.
Allatoona Texas Monument

The Etowah Valley Historical Society is teaming up with the Allatoona Texas Monument Campaign (ATMC), headed by Clay Williams of Abilene, Texas, to raise funds for a monument "to honor the brave Texans of Young's/Ector's Brigade." The granite monument is scheduled for dedication on Saturday, October 5, 2002 as part of the annual celebration of the anniversary of the battle at Allatoona Pass. It will be the second monument erected at Allatoona, joining the monument dedicated last year to the Missouri Brigade.

Individuals and organizations wishing to contribute to the ATMC may send their check, made payable to: EVHS, P.O. Box 1886, Cartersville, Georgia 30120. (Please mark your check "for Texas Monument.") We'll have more information about the campaign in a future publication.

May is National Historic Preservation Month

"In great deeds something abides. On great fields something stays. Forms change and pass; bodies disappear, but spirits linger, to consecrate ground for the vision-place of souls."

Major General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain
October 3, 1889, Gettysburg

Celebrate Your History & Heritage
The Past Belongs to All of Us

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of
Mildred Pierce & Menta Ward

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Inside ...
1... Red Top Mountain State Park
1... Hills of Iron 2002
3... Cassville Before the War
6... Preservation Month
7... Confederate Memorial Day
and more...