

Preserving History Through Archaeology



December 2018
Volume VII, Issue 10

GWINNETT ARCHAEOLOGY BULLETIN

Happy Holidays.....	1	GARS/Fort Daniel News	5
Atlanta's Famed Cyclorama.....	2	2019 Places in Peril.....	5
More Diggin's.....	4	Call to Action: Bears Ears	6



ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISER:

Jim D'Angelo, PhD RPA
Email: 4drdee@bellsouth.net

GAB NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Delana M. Gilmore, MA
Email: gwinnettarchaeology@gmail.com

Atlanta's Famed Cyclorama Mural Will Tell the Truth About the Civil War Once Again

Excerpt from an article by Jack Hitt as featured in the [Smithsonian Magazine](#) December 2018 issue

It was called the *Cyclorama*, and the canvas was suspended around the 360 degrees of a high circular wall—showing hundreds of clashing soldiers. A guide would tell the story of a great Confederate victory in the Civil War—depicted in images almost three stories high and more than a football field long—and talk about its mysterious origin—how in the 1890s a circus came to town with this spectacular visual entertainment and some exotic animals. Later the circus went bankrupt, and everything that people were looking at—this big canvas and all the animals—had washed up in Atlanta's Grant Park.

All of that is an exaggeration, of course. The painting depicts the Battle of Atlanta—a decisive *Union* victory in 1864. The story of the Cyclorama's journey is no carnival tale but more a Homeric odyssey for a canvas that got touched up and repainted as it got kicked farther and farther South until it was marooned in the Atlanta Zoo.



To gaze upon the painting today—restored, reinstalled, and reopening in February at the Atlanta History Center—is to see an unintended monument to the wonders of accretion: accretions not merely of paint but of mythmaking, distortion, error, misinterpretation, politics, opportunism, crowd-pleasing, revisionism, marketing, propaganda and cover-up (literally). Only a few years ago the attraction seemed done for. Attendance was down to stragglers, and the city was hemorrhaging money. The future of the big canvas seemed to be a storage bin somewhere and, after some time, the dustbin.

However, a few folks in Atlanta realized that restoring the painting would not only resurrect one of the more curious visual illusions of the 1880s, but also show, in the paint in front of your eyes, a neat timeline of the many shifts in Southern history since Appomattox. This was no mere cyclorama. What the saviors had on their hands was the largest palimpsest of Civil War memory to be found anywhere on planet Earth—the Atlanta Cyclorama, one of the great wonders of the postmodern world.

Cycloramas were a big popular entertainment once upon a time, and the way it worked was this: Once you entered the big building you would typically proceed to a staircase that you walked up to a platform located in the dead center of a painting—completely encircling you. The canvas was slightly bowed away from the wall, and the horizon line of the painting's action was at the viewer's eye level. As much as a third of the top of the painting was sky painted increasingly dark to the top to create a sense of distance extending away. The bottom of the canvas would often be packed up against a flooring of dirt with real bushes and maybe guns or campsites, all part of a ground-floor diorama that, in the limited lighting, caused the imagery in the painting to pop in the viewer's mind as a kind of all-enveloping 3-D sensation.

Beginning in the 1880s, these completely circular paintings started appearing from half a dozen companies, such as the American Panorama Company in Milwaukee, where Atlanta's canvas was conceived. APC employed more than a dozen German painters (*pictured on next page*) led by a Leipzig native named Friedrich

continued to next page

continued from previous page

Heine. Cycloramas could depict any great moment in history, but for a few years in the 1880s the timing was just right for Civil War battle scenes. A single generation had passed since the end of the Civil War and survivors everywhere were beginning to ask the older family members what happened in the war.

These giant paintings constituted the first time anyone in America encountered a sensation far more immersive than a magazine illustration or a Mathew Brady photograph—the illusion of seeing a full reality, the grand overview, viewed from on high—the big picture. The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama was significant because it captured this one moment of the Civil War when everything changed.

That midsummer of the war's fourth year Northern voters were losing interest, Lincoln's popularity was sinking,

an election was coming up, and all news from the battlefields had been bad. Then in an instant momentum turned around. Atlanta was defeated, and afterward General William Tecumseh Sherman turned east for the long march that ended the war. However, this battle almost went the other way, especially at one key moment—4:45PM on July 22, 1864. On the railroad line just outside Atlanta, near a place called the Troup Hurt House, the Union Army had set up a trench line with artillery commanded by Captain Francis DeGress. Rebels broke that line and were heading to take on the Yankee troops until General John “Black Jack” Logan counter-attacked and pushed the Confederates back.

The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama opened in Minneapolis to a Northern audience in the summer of 1886. A few weeks later a local newspaper reported that General Sherman declared it to be “the best picture of a battle on exhibition in this country.” Part of its allure was not just the cognitive effect of a 3-D sensation but also the accuracy of detail. The Milwaukee Germans interviewed lots of Union veterans, they traveled to Atlanta to sketch locations, and they spoke to Confederates. In the studio helping out was Theodore Davis, war illustrator for *Harper's Weekly*, who was on the field that July 22. (The Germans thanked Davis by painting him on horseback just behind a covered-wagon ambulance.)

The Cyclorama was a big moneymaker. Crowds packed the rotundas to see a battle, and veterans were full of pride to point out to family members “where I was.” After only a couple of years of popularity, the easy money in cycloramas had been made; time for the smart investors to sell off while the getting's good. The Battle of Atlanta went on the block that year and sold to a Georgian named Paul Atkinson. He was a semi-successful promoter, a poor man's P. T. Barnum. Atkinson's heyday as a promoter was also when the South's attempted rewrites of the war began to solidify into the first chapter of what we now call the Lost Cause. Slavery might have been the only cause discussed and written about *before* the war, but down South that claim had long ago been talked out of the story. Now the war was about principles of states' rights and self-determination, but mostly, it was about honor. Atkinson saw a problem with his new acquisition. Because the painting had



continued to next page

continued from previous page

been done originally for Northern vets, there were a few images that were obviously meant to tip the meaning of the entirety of the canvas. There was one image in particular that would not jibe with the new Lost Cause view of things. It was that scene, just off from the counterattack, where one could see some Rebels in gray being taken prisoner. In the hand of one of the Union soldiers was a humbled Confederate flag. POWs and a captured flag—these are the emblems of weakness and dishonor. With some touches of blue paint Atkinson turned a cowering band of Johnny Rebs into a pack of cowardly Billy Yanks—all running away from the fight. By the time the painting was moved to Atlanta in 1892, the newspaper made it even easier for everybody: announcing the arrival of the new Cyclorama and its depiction of the “only Confederate victory ever painted!”

As the years passed, the Battle of Atlanta suffered. Roof timbers in one location crashed through and damaged the painting, and when it was finally moved to Grant Park in 1893, it sat outside in the weather for four weeks before being moved into the new building. When they finally hung the thing, it was discovered the site was too small, so the new owners razored a sizable vertical chunk out of the decaying canvas to make it fit.

By 2011 the Cyclorama was again in shabby condition—no longer an attraction but a moth-eaten relic, Downtown was the host to all kinds of buzzy attractions invoking the New Atlanta—the College Football Hall of Fame, the World of Coca-Cola, the Center for Civil and Human Rights. There were recommendations to hang the old canvas near Underground Atlanta or maybe finally put it in that storage bin, wait a few decades, and throw it away.

With donations from real estate mogul, Lloyd Whitaker, and others the amount of \$25 million was raised to construct a building, restore the painting, and create exhibits telling the true story of behind cycloramas and the Battle of Atlanta. People at the Atlanta History Center are in the process of restoring the painting according to the documentary history recorded by the German artists in 1886. They want to recapture the original optical effect as well, with attention to scale and lighting. They are also filling back in elements snipped out, painted over, or otherwise altered over the years. Those Confederate captives reimagined as fleeing Unionists by Atkinson will again be shown as prisoners. This new, reconceived Cyclorama is a monumental pageant that took a slow-motion flash mob of painters, politicians, promoters, propagandists, and restorationists 140 years to complete—a multilayered artifact that tells the episodic tale of the Old South’s evolution. *To read the full article visit the [Smithsonian Magazine Web site](#).* ■ SM

More Diggin’s



- **Christmas in Dacula** will be occurring at the **Elisha Winn House** on **December 8 from 10AM–5PM**. Christmas in Dacula brings together the very best of Dacula and surrounding communities for a variety of family-friendly activities to celebrate the holiday season and foster the spirit of Christmas. For information visit the [Christmas in Dacula Web site](#).
- The **Atlanta History Center’s Candlelight Nights** will be on **December 14 and 21 from 5:30–9:30PM**. Experience Christmas past with a candlelit stroll through beautifully decorated gardens and grounds and be transported into the warm glow of the holidays. Visit the three historic houses to experience how Southerners celebrated Christmas during the pioneer days (*pictured left*), the Civil War era, and the 1930s. Holiday traditions of years past come alive with interpreters, music, and special activities. This special holiday program is \$20 for the general public; \$15 for members; \$10 for children. For information visit the [Atlanta History Center’s Web site](#).

GARS/Fort Daniel News

- The Annual **Christmas Party** will be on **Sunday, December 16** at **Jim and Natasha D'Angelo's house** (451 Thornbush Trace, Lawrenceville) **beginning at 5PM**. The party will be potluck; therefore, bring a covered dish that can feed up to 20. There will be the traditional snag-a-gift exchange (AKA Dirty Santa), so please bring a wrapped gift from each person attending to participate in the swap. All Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) and Fort Daniel Foundation (FDF) members are welcomed.
- *There will NOT be a regular GARS meeting this month. However, there will be a special-called business meeting at the Christmas Party to vote on the new GARS officers.*
- Though the weather was very chilly, people ventured out to participate in the first annual Native American Heritage Celebration at Fort Daniel. Visitors were exposed to the making of early primitive tools by Scott Jones, the Native American history at Fort Daniel, and storytelling by Barry Stewart Mann.



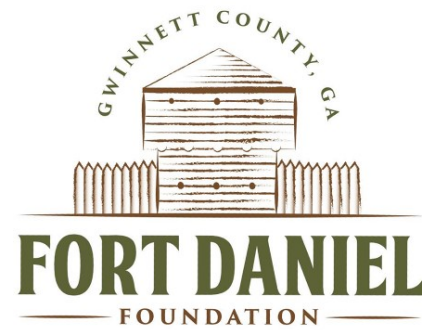
Georgia Trust's 2019 Places of Peril

The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation (GTHP) has released its 2019 list of *Places in Peril*. This list is designed to raise awareness about Georgia's significant historic, archaeological, and cultural resources—including buildings, structures, districts, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes—that are threatened by demolition, neglect, lack of maintenance, inappropriate development, or insensitive public policy. The Fort Daniel archaeological site was one of those listed in 2009, and with a matching grant from the GTHP FDF and GARS started on the road to preserving the site and developing a program of preservation and education. Subsequent efforts by the County to purchase properties on which, and around which the site is situated, have assured that this War of 1812/Creek Indian War site has been saved from development and will be used for the benefit of the public.

The 2019 listed properties are: Colquitt County Arts Center in Moultrie, Colquitt County; Glennwanis Hotel in Glennville, Tattnall County; Huston House at Butler Plantation in Darien, McIntosh County; Juliette Gordan Low Birthplace Garden in Savannah, Chatham County; Madison Theatre (pictured right) in Atlanta, DeKalb County; Needwood Baptist Church and School in Brunswick, Glynn County; Rhodes Center South in Atlanta, Fulton County; Springfield Log Cabin School in Union Point, Taliaferro County; Stark Mill Community Building in Hogansville, Troup County; and The Cedars in Washington, Wilkes County. For more information about the 2019 Places of Peril visit the [Georgia Trust's Web site](#). ■



Preserving History Through Archaeology



December 2018

Volume VII, Issue 10

Call to Action: Reduction of National Monument Borders

Last month the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) along with the Archaeological Institute of American (AIA) and American Anthropological Association (AAA) joined together to submit an [amicus curiae brief](#) in support of the plaintiffs who have sued the Trump administration alleging that the President does not have authority under the Antiquities Act to substantially reduce the size of Utah's Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument.

The President's actions to weaken protections for the monuments represents the largest elimination of protected areas in US history and the most significant reductions by any president to designations made under the 1906 Antiquities Act. Bears Ears represents one of the country's most significant cultural landscapes with more than 100,000 archaeological sites spread across 1.3 million acres of land; Grand Staircase-Escalante may have an additional 100,000 archaeological sites at risk.



In an effort to facilitate mineral extraction, off-road vehicle use, and other surface-disturbing activities, the Administration's recent proclamation entirely rescinds the monument status of numerous archaeological objects designated for protection under the original proclamation

that created the monuments. The Antiquities Act—a statute intended to ensure the preservation of archaeological resources and their surrounding context for scientific study—provides the President with no such authority. Archeological objects designated for protection within a national monument cannot lose their protections absent congressional action. As the oldest professional arch-

aeological and anthropological organizations in the United States, AAA and AIA were instrumental in the drafting and passage of the Antiquities Act in 1906, and this call to action is needed to restore full protection of the Act to all archaeological resources and preserve the rich cultural heritage of these lands. ■ AAA

GARS OFFICERS

www.thegars.org

President:	Secretary:
Delana Gilmore	Vicki Watkins
Vice President:	Treasurer:
Jenna Pirtle	John Hopkins, Jr.

To keep up with the latest digs and activities from GARS follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

FDF OFFICERS

www.thefortdanielfoundation.org

President:	Secretary:
Jim D'Angelo	Vicki Watkins
Vice President:	Treasurer:
Catherine Long	Betty Warbington

To stay up to date with the latest news from FDF follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).