Preserving History Through Archaeology

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From the Vault 1	Behind the Past..... 7
Frontier Life 4	More Diggin's..... 8
How Archaeologists Know 6	2026 Places of Peril..... 10

FROM THE VAULT:
Clay, Craft, and Everyday Life on the Georgia Frontier

During last October's Frontier Faire at Fort Daniel, archaeologists and visitors uncovered fragments of ceramic artifacts recovered from the site—broken pieces that, when studied closely, offer valuable insight into daily life on Georgia's early 19th century frontier. Recent archaeological analysis of these materials reveals not only refined earthenware, but also the bowl of a clay tobacco pipe—expanding our understanding of activity at the fort and the people who lived and stationed there. Together, these objects illuminate routine behaviors (eating, socializing, smoking, abandonment, and landscape transformation) that rarely appear in written records but are central to understanding Fort Daniel as a lived place.

Ceramics on Georgia's Frontier

Between the 1790s and the 1820s, ceramics were fundamental to frontier life in Georgia. Archaeologically, ceramics are among the most frequently recovered artifact types—not because they were especially valued, but because they were used constantly and broken often.[1,2] At military posts such as Fort Daniel, fired clay vessels were essential for cooking, serving food, storing liquids, and maintaining daily routines in the absence of modern infrastructure. Metal vessels were comparatively expensive and slow to replace, while wooden containers deteriorated quickly in Georgia's humid climate.

continued to Page 2

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continued from Page 1

Pottery—though fragile—was affordable, widely available, and easily replaced, making it the backbone of household equipment on the frontier. Because broken ceramics were rarely repaired, disposal tended to be informal, leaving behind archaeological traces that survive today. Ceramic assemblages from Georgia frontier sites typically include a mix of locally produced utilitarian wares—such as coarse earthenware and stoneware—alongside smaller quantities of imported refined earthenwares.[2,3] These refined wares were not strictly necessary for survival, but they served important social and cultural roles. Their presence reflects attempts to maintain familiar domestic habits and social norms in uncertain and often temporary environments.[3]

From an archaeological perspective, ceramics are especially valuable because they help anchor sites in time and context. Variations in paste, glaze, and form provide relative dating information, while patterns of use, breakage, and disposal offer insight into how people organized daily life.[2] At Fort Daniel, the ceramic evidence suggests not only practicality, but continuity—people eating meals from plates, using shared tableware, and carrying elements of everyday domestic life into the frontier. In this way, ceramics bridge the gap between military history and human experience. They remind us that Fort Daniel was not only a defensive structure, but also a place where people lived, ate, and attempted to impose order on a demanding landscape

Trade Networks

Although Fort Daniel stood on the western edge of Euro-American settlement, it was not isolated from regional or transatlantic systems of exchange. The presence of imported refined earthenware and clay tobacco pipes reflects participation in trade networks linking the Georgia backcountry to coastal ports, Atlantic merchants, and British manufacturing centers.[4]

By the late 18th century, Augusta had emerged as Georgia's most important inland distribution hub.[5] Located at the head of navigation on the Savannah River, Augusta served as a transfer point where goods arriving by boat from the coast were offloaded and redistributed inland. Ceramics, glassware, metal goods, textiles, and tobacco products moved upriver from Savannah to Augusta and then traveled overland by wagon or pack animal into frontier regions such as northeastern Georgia. The accompanying 1818 map of Georgia illustrates the established routes that connected Fort Daniel to coastal ports and inland supply centers. Viewed alongside the archaeological evidence, the map underscores that Fort Daniel's inhabitants lived within a well-defined network of rivers, roads, and exchanges that shaped daily life on Georgia's early frontier.

These distribution routes often followed earlier Indigenous trade corridors and river systems, reinforcing the importance of geography in shaping access to goods.[4,6] Imported ceramics destined for backcountry forts such as Fort Daniel were vulnerable to breakage during transport, making heavier utilitarian wares more common at frontier sites. Nevertheless, the refined earthenware recovered at Fort Daniel suggests intentional acquisition despite increased cost and risk.[2] Clay tobacco pipes followed similar routes; mass-produced in British manufacturing centers and shipped in bulk as inexpensive consumer goods, they were well suited to frontier markets. Their widespread use and frequent breakage make them common finds at sites.[7,8]

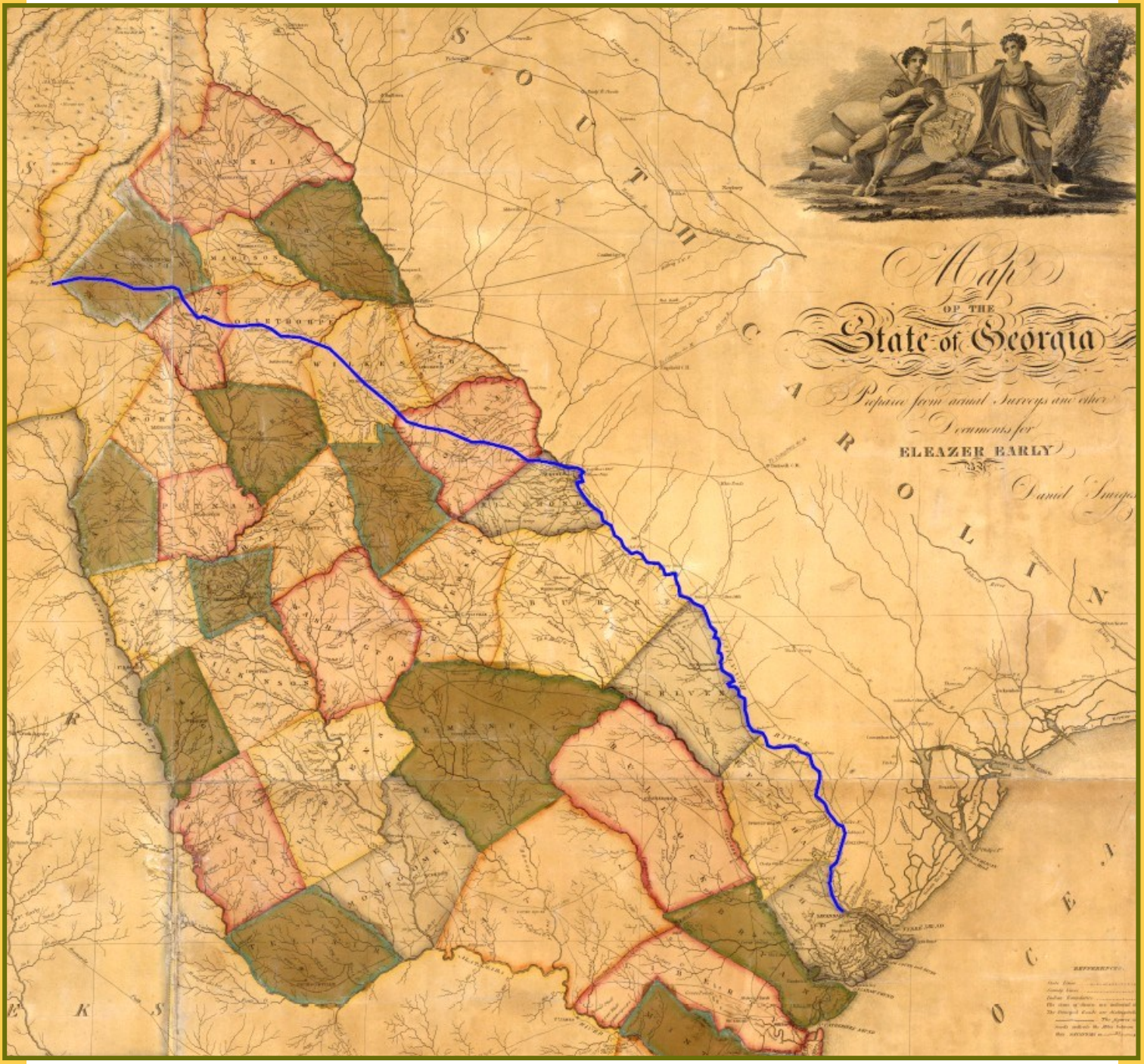
Together, the refined earthenware and pipe bowl recovered from Fort Daniel demonstrate that the fort was embedded within broader economic and cultural systems. These objects reflect not only supply logistics, but personal choice—decisions about dining, leisure, and daily practice made by people.

Archaeological Analysis

Refined Earthenware Tableware

Photographic documentation and visual analysis of ceramic fragments (*pictured above*) recovered from Fort Daniel demonstrate a high degree of consistency among several sherds, indicating that they likely derive from refined earthenware vessels.

continued to Page 4



"Map Of The State of Georgia Prepared from actual Surveys and other Documents for Eleazer Early By Daniel Sturges" c. 1818.
This historic map of Georgia with the principal late eighteenth–early nineteenth century supply route highlighted. Goods entered Georgia through the port of Savannah, traveled upriver along the Savannah River to Augusta, and then moved overland through interior Georgia counties to the Hog Mountain–Fort Daniel area.

continued from Page 2

Material and Manufacture

The fragments share:

- A fine, well-levigated cream to pale buff paste
- A clear lead glaze with extensive crazing
- Uniform wall thickness and curvature
- Parallel surface striations consistent with wheel-thrown manufacture

These characteristics are diagnostic of British-manufactured or British-style refined earthenwares, such as creamware or early pearlware, widely imported into the Southeast during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[9]

Vessel Form and Use

The curvature and rim angle of the larger fragments indicate flat or gently marly forms. The absence of handles, spouts, or thick basal sections argues against hollow wares such as jugs or mugs and strongly supports identification as tableware. At a frontier fort, such vessels were not essential military equipment, but items associated with domestic dining and everyday routine—likely used by officers, administrators, or associated civilian households.

Cross-Mending Assessment

Comparison of paste, glaze, crazing, wall thickness, and curvature suggests that many of the ceramic fragments may cross-mend into a single vessel.[2] Similar patterns of abrasion and burning appear on surfaces with comparable orientations, further supporting this interpretation. While physical refitting would be required for confirmation, there is moderate confidence that these fragments represent a single shallow bowl that broke and dispersed over time, rather than multiple vessels.

Evidence of Burning and Post-Abandonment Activity

Some of the refined earthenware fragments (*pictured above*) exhibit localized dark brown to black discoloration consistent with secondary exposure to open flame or embers rather than manufacturing defects. The glaze remains intact and unmelted, ruling out over-firing during production. According to oral history, Fort Daniel was burned after its abandonment to clear land for farming, a common practice across the Georgia frontier.[10] The condition of the ceramics aligns well with this account. Ceramics left behind inside abandoned structures would have been vulnerable during clearing fires, resulting in localized scorching, after which agricultural activity likely fragmented and dispersed the remains further.

continued to Page 5

Trade Networks on the Georgia Frontier

Frontier trade was not just about moving goods—it depended on a network of people and decisions. Merchants, boatmen, wagon drivers, and pack animal handlers formed the human infrastructure that carried supplies from Georgia's ports into the interior. Along the way, goods passed through storehouses, trading posts, and towns such as Augusta before reaching forts and settlements like Fort Daniel and Hog Mountain.

The journey inland was slow, expensive, and risky. Fragile items such as ceramics often broke during transport, while heavier or more durable goods were favored for long distances. Even so, the presence of refined tableware at frontier sites suggests that residents sometimes prioritized familiar household goods over cost and convenience, valuing continuity, status, and connections to life beyond the backcountry. Bringing these items allowed frontier households to recreate aspects of domestic order and social routine, even in demanding and uncertain environments.

For archaeologists, trade artifacts reveal more than supply routes—they highlight choice, access, and adaptation. What was brought in, what survived the journey, and what was ultimately discarded reflect how frontier communities balanced necessity with comfort, local conditions with distant connections. ■

continued from Page 4

Identifying the Clay Tobacco Pipe Bowl

Among the artifacts found last October was one object clearly identifiable as the half of clay tobacco pipe bowl (*pictured below*).

Description

The pipe bowl differs markedly from the refined earthenware fragments. It has thicker walls, an unglazed white-to-buff clay body, a conical bowl form with a rounded base, and interior burning consistent with tobacco use. These attributes are characteristic of European-style white clay tobacco pipes widely used during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[7]

Interpretation

Clay pipes were everyday personal items, particularly at military and frontier sites. Their stems broke easily, and bowls are frequently recovered as isolated artifacts. The presence of a pipe bowl found at Fort Daniel reflects daily habits and social practices—moments of rest, conversation, and routine—that rarely appear in official records. Pipe fragments are also useful chronological indicators; based on form and material, this bowl likely dates to the late 18th or early 19th century, consistent with the fort's period of occupation.[11]

Why These Broken Objects Matter

Together, the refined earthenware tableware and clay pipe bowl tell a story larger than any single artifact. A broken plate or bowl speaks to meals and domestic order; a pipe bowl reflects personal habits and social life; scorch marks recall the fort's destruction and the subsequent transformation of the landscape. Through archaeology, these broken objects connect us directly to past lives—people eating, smoking, abandoning homes, and reshaping the land. They remind us that Fort Daniel's history is not only about defense and settlement, but also about ordinary human experience on Georgia's early frontier.

Through the study of ceramics, archaeologists are able to move beyond walls and dates to glimpse the rhythms of everyday life—meals prepared, tables shared, and routines maintained far from established towns. These objects embody choices shaped by availability, cost, and personal preference, revealing how frontier residents sought comfort and familiarity amid uncertainty. Even when broken and discarded, ceramics carry traces of use and loss, preserving moments of daily life rarely captured in written records. Alongside other artifacts, they allow Fort Daniel to be understood not simply as a historic site, but as a place shaped by lived experience. In these fragments, archaeology reconnects us with the quiet, ordinary actions that defined life on Georgia's early frontier. ■ **DMRG**

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11. Walker, *Clay Tobacco Pipes from the Vicinity of Montreal*.

HOW ARCHAEOLOGISTS KNOW:
Reading the Past from Broken Objects

Archaeology often begins with broken things—sherds of pottery, fragments of glass, pieces of pipe stem, or discolored soil where a structure once stood. To the untrained eye, these remains may seem insignificant. To archaeologists, however, they are clues. By carefully studying ordinary, discarded objects, archaeologists can reconstruct how people lived, worked, traded, and interacted with the world around them. Fort Daniel offers a perfect example of how these broken objects help tell a much larger story about life on Georgia's early 19th century frontier.

What Broken Objects Tell Us

Dating the Past

Certain artifacts (especially ceramics) change in style, production, and materials over time. Because these changes are well documented, archaeologists can often estimate when a site was occupied based on the types of artifacts recovered. Even small fragments can provide surprisingly precise date ranges.

Daily Life on the Frontier

Artifacts reveal the routines of everyday life that rarely appear in written records. Cooking vessels, plates, bowls, and storage containers tell us what people ate and how meals were prepared. Clay tobacco pipe fragments point to leisure, conversation, and moments of rest. Together, these objects show Fort Daniel not just as a military site, but as a lived-in place, a home.

Trade and Connection

Even remote frontier forts were not isolated. Imported ceramics and pipes found at Fort Daniel demonstrate connections to regional and global trade networks that linked inland Georgia to coastal ports, Atlantic merchants, and overseas manufacturers. These objects tell us where goods came from—and how people on the frontier stayed connected to the wider world.

Soapstone pencil recovered from Fort Daniel. A marking tool possibly used during the fort's construction or maintenance.

Tools of the Trade

Not all archaeological finds are broken household items. Some artifacts speak directly to the work that shaped a place. One such object recovered from Fort Daniel is a soapstone pencil (*pictured above*), similar in use to a modern carpenter's pencil. Soapstone pencils were commonly used to mark measurements and cut lines on wood or stone—making them suited for frontier construction.

At Fort Daniel, this tool may relate to the building or maintenance of the fort and offers a glimpse into the hands-on labor involved in creating and sustaining a frontier site.

Why It Matters Today

By studying broken and discarded objects, archaeologists give voice to people whose experiences were rarely recorded in documents—soldiers, families, laborers, and community members living on Georgia's frontier. Archaeology allows us to understand not just when a place existed, but how it was used and why it mattered.

Events like Frontier Archaeology Day (*see Page 9*) and the Frontier Faire in October celebrate this connection between past and present. They invite the public to see how archaeology works, why it matters, how everyone can help protect and preserve the places where history happened.

Join us this Archaeology Month to learn more, see artifacts up close, and discover what broken objects can tell us about the past. ■ **DMRG**

Did You Know? Archaeology on the Georgia Frontier

- **Ceramics are among the most common archaeological finds** because they were used daily and broken often.
- **Clay tobacco pipes rarely survive intact**—their long, thin stems snap easily, leaving bowls behind.
- **Augusta was a key supply hub** for frontier Georgia, distributing imported goods inland from Savannah.
- **Burning abandoned structures was common**, often done to clear land for farming or reuse.
- **Artifacts don't have to be rare or valuable to matter**—ordinary objects reveal the most about everyday life.

BEHIND THE PAST:
The Archaeologists of Fort Daniel

This spring, we revive a familiar section to help introduce our new Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society President, Joshua Herrin.

About the Archaeologist

Name: Joshua Herrin (*pictured above right*)

Educational Background: Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Archaeology from Georgia Southern

Current Role: Principal investigator with Terracon, Inc.; Manager of archaeological projects and field work for the Macon office

Primary Research Interests: British colonial archaeology and historic ceramics

Becoming an Archaeologist

What motivated you to become an archaeologist? Indiana Jones first introduced me to archaeology. When I arrived at Georgia Southern, I met Dr. Jared Wood, who became my mentor and taught me so much about the science. I was motivated because I knew these stories were important and wanted to help tell them.

Who was your most influential mentor? Absolutely the faculty at Georgia Southern. Dr. Jared Wood showed me the importance of pouring your all into your work, being a good scientist, and having fun while doing it. The entire department shaped who I am as a scientist.

Fieldwork and Research

What site stands out most? An 18th century plantation site with a massive ceramic assemblage. It allowed me to truly flex my ceramic identification skills and work with some beautiful pieces

What is your favorite part of the profession? Visiting beautiful sites and talking with the public about archaeology—helping people understand why our science matters.

Least favorite? Sometimes the travel is rough, but overall, I love it!

Public Archaeology and Outreach

How can the public get involved? Attend Fort Daniel events and follow GARS online. We host many events, and the public is always welcome

Thoughts on Hollywood archaeology? I usually begin talks by explaining how bad an archaeologist Indiana Jones actually is—but at least he gets people interested.

Advice and Preservation

Advice for students? Don't give up. It's a difficult field to break into, but it's incredibly rewarding, and we need you

What can the public do to help protect sites? Learn about archaeology, get involved, and advocate—for preservation laws, funding, and the humanities. ■

UNEARTHING THE COMMUNITY:
Local History and Archaeology Events

- **Society for Georgia Archaeology Meeting:** Join us for the Society for Georgia Archaeology (SGA) Spring Meeting on Saturday, May 16, at Georgia Gwinnett College. The meeting will include paper presentations and the SGA Business Meeting. Doors open at 9AM. A call for papers is open—see below for more details.
- **Dacula Memorial Day Parade:** This year's parade will be on Monday, May 25 beginning at 10AM. Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) and Fort Daniel Foundation (FDF) members will be marching or riding on the "float"; some will be in costume. Come out and support this wonderful community gathering. If you are interested in participating, please contact Eli Stancel.
- **Cleanup Day at the Fort:** Volunteers are needed on Friday, May 29 to help in "sprucing up" the Fort inside the Lab and Museum and outside. We will be getting ready for the Frontier Archaeology Day occurring the following day, Saturday May 30. (*See flyer on Page 9.*) If you are able to help, please email Delana Gilmore.
- **Fort Daniel Open Houses During the Summer:** Once again this year, Fort Daniel will be open during the summer on Sunday, June 21 and Sunday, July 19 from 2PM to 4PM.
- **SAVE THE DATE:** The 18th Annual Frontier Faire will be happening on Saturday, October 17 from 10AM to 4PM.

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE:

If you would like to join or renew your GARS membership, please contact Delana Gilmore; and for FDF membership please contact Cindy Horsley.

Call for Submissions—SGA 2026 Spring Meeting

The Society for Georgia Archaeology is accepting paper and poster submissions for the 2026 Spring Meeting on Saturday, May 16 at Georgia Gwinnett College.

Send abstracts to:

sgasecretary@thesga.org

Abstract deadline:

Wednesday, May 13

FRONTIER ARCHAEOLOGY DAY

Saturday, May 30, 2026 • 10AM–2PM

Fort Daniel Archaeological Site

(2505 Braselton Highway, Buford)

FREE Admission

★Historic Demonstrations ★Hands-on Digs ★

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PRESERVATION IN FOCUS: Georgia's 2026 Places of Peril

The Georgia Trust's *Places in Peril* program seeks to identify and preserve historic sites threatened by demolition, neglect, lack of maintenance, inappropriate development, or insensitive public policy. The list raises awareness about Georgia's significant historic, archaeological, and cultural resources—including buildings, structures, districts, archaeological sites, and cultural landscapes.

Among the 2026 listings is Legion Pool at the University of Georgia (UGA). Opened in 1936, Legion Pool is a Works Progress Administration-era recreational facility located in the heart of the University of Georgia campus. Built through a partnership between the WPA, the American Legion and the City of Athens, it was once the largest swimming pool between Richmond, Virginia and Miami. For decades, the pool has served UGA students and the broader Athens community, becoming a beloved campus and civic gathering place. UGA's own historic study identifies Legion Pool as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, despite its historic significance and support from the community and students, Legion Pool is under imminent threat. In December 2025, UGA Georgia reaffirmed plans to demolish the pool for parking and greenspace as part of a redevelopment plan. The Board of Regents have signed off, and the university has received a demolition permit for the pool.

When a site is included on the *Places in Peril* list, it gains more than recognition—it gains visibility, credibility, and a stronger foundation for advocacy. The Georgia Trust works to ensure these stories reach decision makers, stakeholders, and communities across the state. For the complete list of this year's *Places in Peril* and more information about these places visit the Georgia Trust of Historic Preservation Web site. ■ **DMRG**