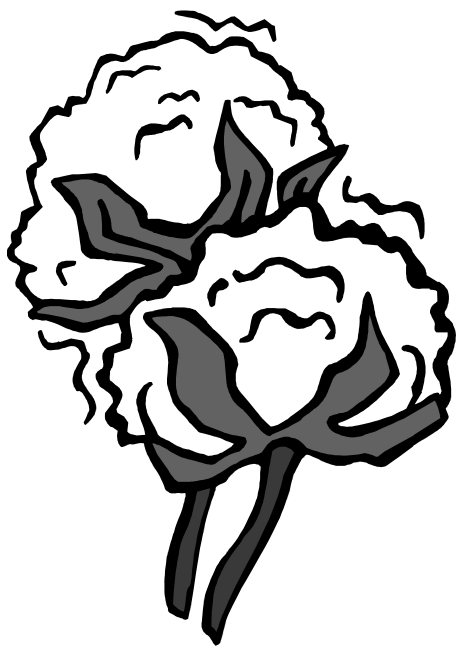


Exploring Georgia

Unit 11: Georgia Enters the Twentieth Century

Lesson 53

Boll Weevils, Peanuts, a Mountain, and a Road



The Boll Weevil Plague

Cotton had been the main product of Georgia farms for over a century. The Civil War had devastated the state's cotton production and shown the weakness of depending on only one crop. Henry Grady's calls for a New South had prompted Georgia farmers to begin growing a wider variety of crops in the late 1800s, especially peaches, watermelons, and other fruits. By 1919, some twelve million peach trees had been planted in the state.

Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century the main crop on Georgia farms was still cotton. The production of cotton was dealt a new blow with the boll weevil infestation that began in 1914. The boll weevil insect lays its eggs in a cotton bud. When the larvae hatch, they eat the bud and destroy the plant. In 1918, the state produced two million bales of cotton; but in 1923, production was only 588,000 bales.

Fewer Farmers, More Peanuts

It is estimated that about one-fifth of Georgia farmers either left the farm and moved to the city or left the state altogether during the 1920s. The economy throughout the South was struggling during this period, while the number of factories in the North was growing. Many families in Georgia and the South moved to the northern cities so that the husbands and fathers could begin working in factories. Georgia farming suffered another setback during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Still, farming continued to be the main aspect of the state's economy. Tenant farming continued in a few places until after World War II.

The failure of cotton encouraged Georgia farmers to consider other crops more seriously. In 1896, the African American scientist George Washington Carver became director of agricultural research at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. In his experiments with peanuts, he found over 300 uses for the crop. He also demonstrated how peanut plants restore nitrogen to the soil. Carver discovered new uses for sweet potatoes and soybeans, developed a new strain of cotton, and taught improved soil conservation. His discoveries encouraged southern farmers to grow a greater variety of crops. Georgia farmers soon



learned that their soil was perfect for growing peanuts. Today the peanut, not cotton, is Georgia's leading crop.

The Beginning of the Stone Mountain Memorial

Stone Mountain, east of Atlanta, is the world's largest granite outcropping. It rises to a height of 825 feet, 1,683 above sea level. In 1915 the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) leased the mountain from its owner and commissioned sculptor Gutzon Borglum to carve on it the likeness of General Robert E. Lee. Borglum envisioned carving a ring of Confederate leaders and soldiers to encircle the entire mountain. He traveled extensively to raise money for the project.

Borglum began work on the project in 1923 and completed part of Lee's head the next year. Then Borglum and the UDC came to a parting of the ways on the project. Borglum began work on the Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota in 1927 and continued on it until his death in 1941 (his son completed the Mount Rushmore project). Meanwhile, Augustus Lukeman worked on Stone Mountain until the UDC lease expired in 1928.

Thirty years later, the state decided to develop the Stone Mountain project and put Walter Hancock in charge. Work resumed in 1964, and the memorial was dedicated in 1970. The finished sculpture is ninety feet high and 190 feet wide (making it larger than the Mount Rushmore memorial). It includes the figures of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis. The area around Stone Mountain has developed into a large and diverse tourist attraction.

The Dixie Highway

As the automobile industry grew rapidly in the first part of the twentieth century, Americans fell in love with the idea of taking auto vacations. Land speculators and vacation promoters discovered the appeal of Florida as a destination for northern vacationers. The idea developed across the country for an improved highway to take travelers from the North to Florida, and in 1915 the Dixie Highway Association was formed. It promoted a road from Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan to Miami, Florida, a road that would pass through Georgia. Local and state governments paid construction costs.

The highway was completed in 1929 and cut through Georgia from northwest to southeast. The route from Chattanooga to

According to legend, a choirmaster in seventeenth century Germany handed out sugar sticks to keep the boys in his choir quiet during a long Christmas service. The choirmaster bent the ends of the sticks to make them look like a shepherd's staff in honor of the occasion. Candy canes caught on as a Christmas tradition, but it wasn't until the early twentieth century that stripes of red (for Christ's sacrifice) and white (for His purity) became standard. In the 1920s, Bob McCormack of Albany, Georgia began making candy canes by hand for his family and friends. Years later his brother-in-law, a Catholic priest, invented a machine to automate production. Bob's Candies became the largest maker of candy canes in the world.

Henry Ford built a winter home in the 1920s in the community of Richmond Hill near Savannah. He eventually owned 85,000 acres there.

Atlanta closely followed the route that Sherman's army took when it was advancing on the city. When the U.S. government began its system of numbered roads, the Dixie Highway became U.S. 41. Traffic on the highway inspired gas stations, motor lodges, camping facilities, roadside parks, tourist shops, and restaurants; and the tourism industry was born. Today's Interstate 75 closely follows the route of the Dixie Highway.

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses,
with insults, with distresses, with persecutions,
with difficulties, for Christ's sake;
for when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

Activities

- ◆ Visit a peanut farm and find out some of the many uses of the crop.
- ◆ Draw a likeness of the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial.
- ◆ Trace on a map the route of U.S. 41 or the Dixie Highway. What business would you like to begin that would appeal to tourists?

