

Voices That Hail the Earth: Historic Land Use at the Chattahoochee Nature Center

1796-1996

This exhibit is inside the Administration and Education Building along the hallway in the ground floor of the building.

To celebrate its twentieth anniversary in 1996, the Chattahoochee Nature Center (CNC) created this unique exhibit documenting historic land use on CNC's 127 acres during the last **200 years**.

Who are the "voices that hail the earth"? They are the voices of the Cherokees, the Creeks and the many tribes that came before them. They are the early settlers, Civil War soldiers, farmers and families who have cherished yet, unknowingly, exploited the land. They are also the voices of animals that no longer roam the land freely - elk, cougar, bear, wild turkey and many others that have lost their habitats to human progress and, more specifically, urban sprawl.

The exhibit is organized into two chronological sections exploring both cultural and natural history. It is hoped that this story of land use will encourage the community to value natural resources and to support CNC's mission to promote an understanding and appreciation of our natural environment. Designed as a traveling exhibit, "Voices That Hail the Earth" will be enjoyed by many people throughout Georgia.

This exhibit is dedicated to the memory of Bonnie Baker, a CNC volunteer who loved nature, art and history and who always felt that the story of CNC's land needed to be told. It is from her early research of the remains of historic structures and places on CNC's grounds that we were inspired to find out more.

Madeline L. Reamy
Project Director

Cultural History - People and Places

Introduction

The Chattahoochee River Valley and its watersheds have a rich and long history of providing resources for many people. Prior to the 1800s, mostly American Indians lived along the river and made use of its bountiful resources. Archaeological research traces these cultures through thousands of years as they developed from nomadic hunter-gatherers, to mound builders, to farmers.

1796-1850 Removal and Settlement

During most of this period much of northwest Georgia was "Indian territory," with the Chattahoochee River serving as an unofficial boundary between the Cherokees to the north and the Creeks to the south. Trails linked the scattered Indian settlements establishing networks of trade and contact. One of these, the Hightower or Etowah Trail, crossed through CNC's property.

By the 1820s European settlers were encroaching on the Indians, and the State of Georgia began to acquire both Creek and Cherokee lands, ultimately removing the Indians from the region. The Creeks signed removal treaties before the 1828 discovery of gold in north Georgia, which hastened the removal of the Cherokees.

Georgia held a lottery in 1832 to redistribute the remaining Indian lands located in the gold strike area. In 1835 a faction of Cherokee leaders signed the Treaty of New Echota with the federal government, giving up their remaining lands in Georgia in exchange for territory west of the Mississippi River. By 1839, Cherokees in Georgia had been forcibly relocated to the Oklahoma territory. This exodus, which resulted in the deaths of almost one-fourth of the Indians who began the journey, is known in Cherokee lore as the "Trail of Tears."

William Shorey Coodey, a nephew of Cherokee Chief John Ross, described in a letter of 1838 what he witnessed at the start of the first of the 13 forced removals:

"At this very moment a low sound of a distant thunder fell on my ear. In almost an exact western direction, a dark spiral cloud was rising above the horizon and sent forth a murmur. I almost fancied a voice of divine indignation for the wrongs of my poor and unhappy countrymen, driven by brutal force from all they loved and cherished in the land of their fathers, to gratify the cravings of avarice..."

With the forced removal of Indians from northwest Georgia, the way was cleared for pioneer settlement and development. In the following decade, the nearby town of Roswell, founded by Roswell King, was established as a cotton textile center - the first in (what was then) Cobb County.

The 1832 gold land lottery brought the first change in ownership for the land on which CNC is now located. Four gold lots (295, 296, 333 and 334) were distributed to Benjamin Braswell, Richard Norrell, John Jones and William Starling, respectively. These men used their land lots for speculative purposes only.

1850-1900 Farms, War and Kinships

During this period, settlers farmed the land surrounding and including what is now CNC property. Archibald Smith relocated from the Georgia coast to the Roswell area where he built a house and established a 400-acre cotton plantation. Smith owned 33 slaves and furnished much of the cotton for Roswell's mills. In the 1840s he bought land lots 295 and 296 for farming. The other two land lots (333 and 334) were purchased in 1857 by William Kelpin whose house is believed to have been located on what is now Azalea Drive. Today only a chimney remains. His farm was later described in the Marietta Journal in 1887.

"We noticed this side of Roswell that our friend, William Kelpin, has some of the finest wheat we have seen this season. He has very rich river bottom land, and in fact we think he has one of the best farms in the State. His fields of corn were clean and well worked. He is a thrifty and industrious farmer, has a nice residence, outhouses, good stock, and an extensive orchard of fruit trees. His house is situated on a level stretch of ground, while in the rear is a large hill with its massive rocks and trees, while in front rolls the silvery waters of the Chattahoochee. It is a lovely and picturesque spot, and would excite with keen admiration the pencil of the artist."

The lives and lifestyles of these early residents were affected dramatically by the Civil War. One of Kelpin's sons, Charles, enlisted in the Confederate Roswell Battalion and died in Augusta on February 21, 1864. His grave can be found along CNC's Forest Trail.

Roswell's mills were destroyed by Union troops, and the workers were arrested and sent north. Before crossing the Chattahoochee at a nearby shallow ford and heading towards battle in Atlanta, Federal troops occupied an area near CNC.

David B. Sullivan was one of the few men rounded up with the female mill workers. When he returned to Roswell after the war, Sullivan bought the land once owned by Archibald Smith. Sullivan's property already included land west to Willeo Creek. His daughter, Miranda, married Aaron Kelpin, son of William in 1887, thus connecting the families and farmland and creating the rich legacy of the Kelpin-Sullivan clan. Roswell's mills were rebuilt after the war and as the 20th century approached a railroad line extended to the town.

1900-1950 Power and Progress

Though situated 17 miles to the north, Roswell was not immune to the effects of Atlanta's rapid growth in the early 20th century. Increasing demands for electricity resulted in the construction of Morgan Falls Dam about two miles downstream from CNC. The dam was built by the Atlanta Water and Electric Power Company. The Georgia Railroad and Electric Company bought the power from the plant to supply electricity to the region's growing population. Later, area power companies consolidated to form the Georgia Power Company. The construction of the dam greatly affected the area, flooding home sites, fields & other low-lying areas of land along the river's course.

While the region's land was changing, so was its economy. In the early 1920s, the boll weevil destroyed much of the region's cotton crop. In the late 1920s and 1930s, a severe economic depression hit the South, making farming less attractive as a way of life. Family farmsteads in the area were divided and sold.

The growing popularity of the automobile brought more change by lessening the population's dependence upon trains and other means of public transportation, thereby increasing individual mobility. One result of this development was an increase in the construction of suburban homes and weekend retreats. In 1942, Robert Wade, owner of a car dealership in Atlanta, purchased portions of land lots 270, 295, 296, 333 and 334, and built a one-story bungalow home. The Wade home was found behind the amphitheater on what is now CNC's property. Archaeologists have dated a chimney, charcoal pit and spring house found along the Homestead Trail to the late 1940s. The chimney is probably the remains of a cabin also built by Wade during this period.

The following quote by Harold Martin, from the Atlanta Constitution of May 31, 1940, illustrates the rapid growth beginning to take place in the Roswell area:

"Business has suffered recently, but new hope is seen in the number of homes being built there by Atlantans ... If we can build Roswell up as a fine place for well-to-do Atlantans to come and build, they'd buy groceries and gas and stuff here. We want to see swank station wagons around the park where ox teams stood in the old days ..."

1950-present Education and Recreation

The suburbanization that began in the first half of the 20th century accelerated after World War II. In 1950 Roswell's population was only 2,123. It rose to 23,337 by 1980 and 48,257 by 1990. Between 1960 and 1970, Roswell's population increased by 835 percent. With this suburban growth came an increasing demand for educational institutions and recreational facilities to meet the rising population needs.

Changes on the land that is now CNC reflected both of these trends. In 1961 Horace Holden purchased 90 acres in land lots 295 and 296. Three years later, he bought an additional 40 acres. His wife, Jodie Holden, organized a nursery school in the bungalow that was built by Robert Wade. Local kindergarten teachers, Tillie Wood and Katherine Singletary, began a kindergarten in a small white building close to where CNC's administrative offices are now located. This building was later moved to become part of the pool house. During the summer months from 1961 until 1994, Horace Holden operated Camp Chattahoochee. In 1970 and 1971, American Adventures, a swim and tennis club, was also in operation on the premises.

Horace Holden, Sr., in an interview in August, 1996 recalled his first impressions of the land in March, 1961.

"When I first saw the property overlooking the Chattahoochee River, I went back home and told Jodie, This is it. We can live there, raise a family, have a camp and school. It's the perfect place."

The Chattahoochee Nature Center (CNC) opened its doors in 1976 when approximately six acres of land were purchased from Holden. On the land was CNC's main building and Kingfisher Pond. CNC was initially established through the efforts of John Ripley Forbes, who directed the Natural Science for Youth Foundation. Roy Wood, who worked with the U.S. Dept. of Interior, located the facility and encouraged the land purchase. Additional support was provided by Fulton County, the Georgia Heritage Trust Fund and concerned citizens.

Many land transactions took place between 1979 and 1986 including a land swap between Fulton and the National Parks Service for portions of land lots 333 and 334. In 1986 CNC purchased an additional 10 acres of land from Horace Holden including the Wade bungalow and Beaver Pond. In 2002 CNC bought the remaining 27 acres of Holden's land, including tennis courts, gymnasium, cabins, picnic pavilions and swimming pool. (This purchase also included portions of land lots 270 and 271.)

Natural History - Land, Animals and Plants

1796-1850 Links to the Land/Crop Development

Introduction

The earth, its animals and plants were all vitally important to the Cherokee and Creek, who tried to live in harmony with nature. The floodplains, river and forest provided a wide variety of animals and plants for food, medicine, clothing, housing and tools.

LAND

Most of the Indian tribes that inhabited the Chattahoochee River Valley at the beginning of the 1800s survived through a combination of hunting, fishing and farming. Their fields were usually located on the rich valley floodplains. Contact with European settlers and traders brought different crops, new cultivation techniques and domesticated animals. With the removal of the Indians from the region by 1838, more and more land was cleared for crops and pastures. Forests were harvested for lumber to build houses, stores and factories while wildlife increasingly competed with livestock for living space and food.

ANIMALS

Shellfish, turtles and fish were harvested from the floodplains and rivers. Game animals such as raccoon, opossum, beaver and otter were hunted, as were bear, deer, turkey and smaller game in the forest . Many of these animals declined in number from over-hunting, as did predators such as cougar and wolf. Europeans brought animals such as horses, mules and oxen with them to plow their fields and pull their wagons. Livestock such as cattle, hogs and poultry became more common on many farms.

PLANTS

Fruits and nuts of many plants were gathered including strawberries, raspberries, serviceberries and many others. In the floodplains, plants such as cattail and duck potato were eaten as a starch; persimmons, blackberries, elderberries and many others would be eaten fresh or dried. Walnut, water oak and box elder trees provided nuts and seeds as well as wood for tools, weapons and houses. Many plants were used for medicinal purposes. For example, the roots, twigs and bark of the black willow tree were boiled for a tea and used as a pain killer. Crops grown by Cherokees and Creeks in the early 19th century included corn, squash, beans and sunflowers. Other crops such as wheat and cotton were introduced to the region by European settlers.

1850-1900 The Land Exposed/Soil Erosion

LAND

In the years leading up to the Civil War, the number of farms and homesteads along the Chattahoochee River grew steadily. The presence of cheap land and poor farming techniques depleted the soil and increased erosion. Rather than rotating crops to

protect the soil, most farmers grew cotton and corn until the soil was exhausted, and then either cleared new fields or moved to new areas. The remaining topsoil was washed into nearby creeks and streams, clogging these waterways and raising the water table so that former fields in the floodplains were permanently saturated. By the end of the century, farmlands were highly eroded, and the creeks and drainage areas along the Chattahoochee were clogged with silt. Hillsides on the woodland trails at CNC are scarred with gullies formed as a result of poor farming practices.

ANIMALS

Large game animals such as turkey, bear and deer as well as small game (quail, squirrel, etc.) continued to decline in number, especially near towns or clustered homesteads. Cattle, pigs, goats, sheep, horses and other livestock were often allowed free range of the wooded hillsides and swamps where they fed upon acorns and other nuts, grasses and low-growing foliage and shrubs. This practice destroyed the undergrowth in many forests, contributing to further soil erosion. The change in temperature resulted in aquatic life changes. Silt accumulation in the waters resulted in the loss of mollusks and the fish species that fed upon them. Silt also raised the water temperature causing reptiles and amphibians to move to warm back water areas, rather than remaining in the cold waters of the river.

PLANTS

Forests continued to be cut for firewood and lumber and cleared for pasture. On some farms, peach and apple trees were planted in the rolling uplands. Though many individuals still gathered and used wild plants for food and medicine, total reliance on these resources had diminished.

1900-1950 - Wetland Creation/Forest Succession

LAND

The completion of Morgan Falls dam in 1904 permanently changed the landscape, animals and plants of the area. Floodplains along the Chattahoochee River were submerged. Plants and animals with adaptations suitable for this type of environment became more abundant while other species declined in numbers. The wetlands and lakes around CNC were created during this period. The boll weevil destroyed local cotton crops, and the severe economic depression of the era reduced agricultural production. Fields were abandoned and eventually taken over by shrubs, pine trees and other softwoods that characterize initial forest growth. After World War II, urbanization and the construction of weekend homes in the area brought further changes to the landscape.

ANIMALS

In the early 20th century, before hunting restrictions were introduced in the area, many game animal populations decreased drastically. The re-growth of forests and shrubs brought about the return of some animals, but other species such as wild turkey and deer had to be restocked. Low-lying swampy areas attracted animals such as mink, raccoon, barred owls, crayfish, water turtles and water snakes.

PLANTS

The flooding of low-lying areas along the river encouraged the growth of trees such as river birch, green ash, black willow, box elder and silky dogwood which thrive in this environment. In areas where fields lay fallow or abandoned, the natural order of plant succession began with native and non-native grasses and herbs. Next, shrubs and trees such as Blackberry, Poison Ivy, pine and Tulip Poplar grew, followed by oak, hickory and other hardwoods. The introduction of new and exotic plant varieties to the region also had dramatic (and often unfortunate) results. The importation of ornamental chestnut trees from Asia introduced a deadly fungus that eventually killed all of the native chestnut trees. While English Ivy, imported from Europe and used for ornamental purposes, and kudzu, imported from Japan and used to control erosion, made effective ground covers, these vines also competed with many native plants.

1950-1996 Urban Sprawl/ Environmental Awareness

LAND

Since the 1950s, a steadily increasing number of people have moved into the region, building homes and suburban communities along the Chattahoochee River. Run-off from construction sites, yards and recreational areas has gradually found its way into the river and local marshes, reducing water depths and clogging them with silt. The construction in 1957-58 of Buford Dam, approximately 40 miles upstream, has also had an impact. The creation of the dam that formed Lake Lanier lowered temperatures downstream in the Chattahoochee, affecting the fish. Since 1976, CNC has offered the community an opportunity to evaluate the impact of these trends. At this site, land is used as an environmental education facility, and much of the grounds are left to grow and change as nature intended. Even within these protected confines, the long-term impact of soil erosion, the introduction of non-native plants and animals, and the creation of man-made lakes is evident.

ANIMALS

Despite attempts in the 1950s to supplement the wild turkey population through captive breeding programs, game animals in the area have greatly declined in number. Turkey, black bear and white-tailed deer have largely disappeared as the density of the region's population has increased. The cooling of the Chattahoochee's waters has also induced change as warm water fish and shellfish species have died out and new cold water species of fish such as rainbow, brown and brook trout have been introduced.

PLANTS

In CNC's woodlands, plant succession will continue as pine trees die out and are replaced by oaks, hickories, sycamores and other hardwoods. Native shrubs and herbs will grow in the shade of the forest's changing canopy, yet will continue to face competition from non-native plants such as English ivy, Japanese honeysuckle and kudzu. In the wetlands, increasing sediment and changing water depths will also continue to bring about change, killing some trees and encouraging the growth of others. Non-native plants such as Chinese privet and daylilies (from Asia) will also compete for space with native flora.

The Chattahoochee Nature Center Celebrates Twenty Years of Environmental Education

1976-1996

The purpose of CNC has been, and continues to be, increasing community awareness and understanding of the natural environment. In 1996, its 20th year, CNC offers a wide range of educational programs, a reputable wildlife rehabilitation clinic, extensive native plant gardens and numerous special events. School classes are designed to complement the curriculum and state educational guidelines at all levels. Public programs such as Night Owl Adventures, birthday parties, after-school classes and Camp Kingfisher have significantly aroused public interest and increased support. The membership, rising towards 3,000 patrons, has also provided a strong community base. CNC now annually serves nearly 50,000 school children and 100,000 family visitors.

As we turn the corner on the next 20 years, CNC will continue to grow by embarking on major capital improvements to greatly improve and expand the grounds, facilities and exhibits.

"The Chattahoochee Nature Center is a special place, because of its natural beauty and because of the wonderful people who have made it what it is today. CNC has grown tremendously since its beginning twenty years ago, from wildlife rehabilitation to education, from special events to Camp Kingfisher. The amazing part about this growth is that the board of trustees, staff and volunteers have made it what it is today with extremely limited financial resources.

I look forward with great enthusiasm to CNC becoming even more special because of many incredible people. I came to CNC because of the beauty of the surroundings, but I remain here because of much more. We are a special place where special people work."

Gregory C. Greer
Executive Director, July 1996

Time line for CNC Property 1800 – 1996

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Cherokee Nation occupies land | 1800 |
| Discovery of gold in North Georgia | 1828 |
| Land lottery of Cherokee lands | 1832 |
| Federal treaty signed with Cherokees | 1835 |
| Removal of Cherokees - Trail of Tears Founding of town of Roswell | 1838 |
| Archibald Smith buys land lot #295 | 1840 |
| Archibald Smith buys land lot # 296 | 1848 |
| William Kelpin buys land lots # 333 -334 | 1857 |
| Civil War begins | 1861 |
| Archibald Smith sells land lots #295 -296 to W.R. Allen | 1863 |
| Charles Kelpin buried on Kelpin Hill | February 21, 1864 |
| Occupation of Roswell area by Union forces Mills burned - Workers shipped up North | July 5,1864 - July 17,1864 |
| Civil War ends - mills rebuilt | April, 1865 |
| David B. Sullivan buys land lots # 295 -296 | 1866 |
| Rail service to Roswell begins | 1881 |
| Aaron Kelpin marries Miranda Sullivan | 1887 |
| Kelpin estate sells land lots # 333 -334 to James R.Power | 1890 |
| James R. Power sells to R. H. Smith backing water rights on land lots #334-334 due to construction of a proposed dam on the Chattahoochee River | 1897 |

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|---|-----------|
| Sulivans sell land to S. Morgan Smith Co. including land lots #295 and 296 that may be damaged by backwater due to construction of proposed dam | 1900 |
| Telephone service begins in the city of Roswell | 1901 |
| Morgan Falls Dam construction begins` | 1904 |
| Morgan Falls Dam and powerhouse completed | 1905 |
| President Theodore Roosevelt visits Roswell | 1905 |
| World War I | 1914-1918 |
| Electricity available to homes in the city of Roswell Destruction of cotton plants by boll weevil | 1920s |
| Train service from Roswell to Chamblee discontinued | 1921 |
| Covered bridge dismantled over Chattahoochee | 1925 |
| Great Depression | 1930s |
| Roswell militia district merges with Fulton County | 1932 |
| World War II | 1941-1945 |
| Robert Wade buys portions of land lots #295,296,333,334 | 1942-1956 |
| Horace Holden buys portions of land lots #295,296,333,334 Camp Chattahoochee founded | 1961 |
| Chattahoochee Nature Center founded | 1976 |
| Chattahoochee Nature Center buys remaining Holden property | 1992 |