

Stone Mountain History

Stone Mountain, GA

Early History

Due to its size and visibility from great distances, Stone Mountain has long been a landmark and gathering place. Pieces of soapstone bowls, dishes and other artifacts have been linked to people living around the mountain as early as 8,000-10,000 years ago. During the Spanish exploration of the New World, the Creek Indians occupied what is now Alabama and North Georgia – including the Stone Mountain area. Later in the 16th century, the Cherokee tribes forced the Creek nation farther south in Georgia. Stone Mountain was located in a buffer zone between the Creek and Cherokee tribes and was used as a neutral meeting place. Through colonial times, Native Americans farmed around the mountain and traded actively in the area with the Spanish, British and French.

Stone Mountain first played a part in modern history in 1790 when President George Washington sent Colonel Marinus Willett to meet with micos of the Creek Confederacy regarding cession of Creek lands. The micos were invited to the nation's capital at the time, New York, to negotiate. Willett and the micos agreed to meet at Stone Mountain to begin their trip. Willett wrote of his first visit to Stone Mountain that "Here we found the Cowetas and Curates to the number of eleven waiting for us. While I was at Stony Mountain, I ascended the summit. It is one solid rock of circular form about one mile across. Many strange tales are told by the Indians of the mountain..."

Confederate Memorial Carving

The Confederate Memorial Carving depicts three Southern heroes of the Civil War: Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. The figures measure 90 by 190 feet, surrounded by a carved surface that covers three acres, it is larger than a football

field – the largest relief sculpture in the world. The carving is recessed 42 feet into the mountain. Work on the carving began in 1915 and was finally complete in 1972.

The Three Sculptors

Several designs were proposed by the three sculptors, whose work spanned a period of more than half a century. Gutzon Borglum's 1915 vision of the carving featured seven central figures – the three men of the completed carving and four others – accompanied by an “army of thousands.” Work was delayed until 1923 by funding issues and World War One.

Borglum's workers worked quickly to blast away large portions of stone with dynamite, allowing the unveiling of Lee's head to coincide with the general's birthday on January 19, 1924. The Confederate half-dollar, designed by Borglum, was minted in 1925 for sale at \$1 a piece by the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association to finance the carving project. A funding dispute with the managing association in 1925 caused Borglum to abandon the project. He is best known for his later work at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota.

Augustus Lukeman was hired in 1925 to complete the carving around the head of Lee, with revisions mandated by the Association. Lukeman completely redesigned the carving and blasted Borglum's earlier work off the mountain. However, the lease on the mountain ran out in the summer of 1928. Sam Venable, owner of the mountain, had agreed to a 12-year lease of the side of the mountain for the carving in 1916. When the lease expired, he refused to extend it unless Borglum was brought back to complete the carving. The Association refused to rehire Borglum and so the work stopped and the project was abandoned until after the purchase of the Mountain by the State of Georgia in 1958.

Walker Hancock was announced as the new sculptor in March 1963, and was responsible for completing the carving according to Lukeman's design – whose models were still intact. With the help of a new technique using thermo-jet torches, Hancock's chief carver Roy Faulkner was able to remove tons of granite each day. Vice President Spiro Agnew dedicated the carving on May 9, 1970, and finishing touches were completed in 1972.

Carving Timeline:

1909 – Mrs. C. Helen Plane of the United Daughters of the Confederacy has idea for a memorial to General Lee and to the Confederacy.

1916 – Face of Stone Mountain deeded to the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial Association by Samuel H. Venable.

1917 – Carving models are begun, but World War I delays the work at Stone Mountain.

1923 – Given \$250,000 and a three year time limit, Borglum begins carving.

1924 – Borglum unveils head of Lee on the general's birthday.

January 1925 – Minting of Confederate Memorial Half-Dollars begins (to raise funds).

February 1925 – Borglum's contract is canceled after disagreements.

April 1925 – Augustus Lukeman is hired to complete the work.

1928 – Borglum's work blasted from the face of the mountain.

April 1928 – Work on carving ceases due to lack of funds.

1935 – Lukeman dies. His work on the mountain not complete.

1941 – WW II interrupts all planning for completion of the Memorial.

1963 – Walker Hancock selected to complete the carving.

1964 – Work on the carving resumes.

1967 – Landscape design proposal is accepted to create a memorial area at base of carving.

1969 – Announcement of the finalization of plans for the completion of the carving and memorial area.

1970 – Memorial area is dedicated.

Development of the Park Timeline:

1941 – State Park Authority created to establish a park and complete carving.

1942 – Authority deactivated during World War II.

1949 – State Park Authority reactivated and first master plan prepared on features and structures for the park.

1958 – Stone Mountain Memorial Association established.

1958 - 1963 – Stone Mountain Park layout, infrastructure and architecture developed and built. This includes Confederate Hall, Memorial Hall, Mountain Top Facilities and Halfway House, West Gate, Stone Mountain Inn, Plantation Complex, Service Station, Marina, Antique Auto Museum, Horse Show Ring, Dams and lake impoundments, prison camp for park

labor, road system, and parking. Concessions brought in include the Railroad, Aerial Tram and Car Collection.

1964 - 1968 – Park development continues with the addition of streetlights, the grist mill complex, Campground, covered bridge, parking lots, equestrian facilities and lighted football field.

1968 – Park development includes completing a beach, 18-hole Championship Golf Course.

1977 – Stone Mountain Memorial Association takes charge of the skylift, plantation, inn, restaurants and gift shops from Concessionaires. Creates a water slide and sports complex (miniature golf, tennis courts and roller skating).

1983 – Construction of Ice Skating Chalet, Animal Forest, Mountain Top Theater and establishment of Laser Show.

1986 – Train Station is constructed.

1989 – Completion of Evergreen Conference Center and an additional 18 holes at golf course.

1992 -- Master Plan establishes four districts in the Park: the Natural District, the Recreation District, the Events District and the Park Center District.

1996 – Three Olympic events – archery, cycling and tennis – are held in Park. Memorial Hall exhibits refurbished, aerial tram replaced, top of mountain complex completely renovated.

1998 – Privatization of Stone Mountain Park occurs. Herschend Family Entertainment Corporation (HFEC) is selected to manage commercial aspects of Stone Mountain Park. SMMA retains authority of park and

concentrates on the development of the Park's historic and natural resources.

2001 – Outdoor Quarry Exhibit designed. HFEC develops “The Great Barn”.

2002 – HFEC develops “Crossroads” area. Prison camp is demolished.

2003 – Olympic archery range restored to a songbird habitat. Robert E. Lee Boulevard changed to one-way automobile traffic and bike lanes created.

2004 – Confederate Hall renovated to house exhibits and classrooms, and renamed the Confederate Hall Historical and Environmental Education Center.

Projects and improvements are ongoing. Please visit the ‘projects’ page for an up-to-date list of our park Projects.