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The Story of Bulloch County: A Script for Narration

Robert G. Hughes

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THE STORY OF BULLOCH COUNTY

A SCRIPT FOR NARRATION

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Gen. James E. Oglethorpe arrived at the mouth of the Savannah River. Oglethorpe claimed and named the territory for King George and governed the first settlement in the colony.

THE STORY OF BULLOCH COUNTY

In 1733 the Trustees united the Georgia Government to take over the rule of the colony. A Trustee Government began functioning in Georgia with 12 Trustees. The Planters had a large say in the choice of Trustees.

The Trustees chose to have a large say in selecting their own officials. They believed in the need for a "broad" and "liberal" rule of the Church of England.

Governor Thomas Jefferies, a member of the Revolutionary Party in Georgia was Archibald Bulloch, from South Carolina, who became the Governor of Georgia. Governor Bulloch was a good officer and with his help, Georgia was able to break away from the British. Bulloch went on to become a major in the Revolutionary War.

In 1777, Governor Bulloch was only active one year in Georgia before he died. He is buried in Talbot Cemetery.
Whether you're a native or a newcomer to Bulloch County, most of what you see around you was here long before you were. And all of the qualities that make Bulloch County the thriving community it is today were built on a foundation laid in the wilderness more than 200 years ago.

How did Bulloch County get from there to here?

First let's take a look at where we are: Bulloch County is located in the coastal plains of Southeast Georgia 30 miles west of Savannah, 65 miles south of Augusta and 115 miles southeast of Macon.

Original inhabitants of this primitive land were natives who were direct ancestors of the Creek Indians of the 1400-1700 era.

A spot said to have been an assembly ground for the Indians is now the site of Middleground Primitive Baptist Church. This area was known as "Five Points" for the five paths leading to it.

Another Indian assembly ground is believed to be this bluff on the Ogeechee River where Magnolia Lodge is located.

Around 1540, Hernando de Soto, a Spanish explorer, led a well-equipped army across what is now Georgia, from the Southwest, heading Northeast and departing near Augusta. It is possible some of his men traveled through land that is now Bulloch County.

On February 12, 1733, 135 English settlers under Gen. James E. Oglethorpe arrived at the mouth of the Savannah River. Oglethorpe claimed and named the territory for King George and governed the first settlement in the colony.

The second largest settlement is early Georgia was traveled by Germans, known as Saltzbergers, who came from Austria in 1734. They built their settlement of Ebenezer 25 miles northwest of Savannah in what is now Effingham County. A religious group, they established this Jerusalem Church.

Some of the Salzburgers who migrated into the Bulloch territory had names such as Groover and Zetterower, which are familiar in Bulloch County today.

In 1741 Georgia was governed by a group of Trustees in London, and the Province was divided into two counties: Savannah County in the north and Frederica County to the south.

In 1752 the Trustees asked the English Government to take over the rule of the colony. A Royal Government was established as administrator. The Province of Georgia was then divided into eight Parished providing for religious work and worship according to the Church of England.

Georgia was one of the 13 colonies that rebelled against England. Among the Revolutionary patriots in Georgia was Archibald Bulloch, from South Carolina, who became the first provisional Governor of Georgia from 1776-1777. Bulloch County became the namesake for this Revolutionary War Leader.

Archibald Bulloch only served one year in office before he died in 1777. He is buried in Colonial Cemetery, downtown Savannah, Georgia.
Upon the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a state government in Georgia was organized. The eight parishes were divided into the counties of Burke, Camden, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, Richmond, Wilkes, and Liberty.

This map outlines the Bulloch Territory when it was a part of Effingham County in 1777.

Nearly 20 years later in 1796 Bulloch County was created from a 1200 square mile area carved from Bryan and Screven Counties. Then in 1812, a part of Bulloch was ceded the new county of Emanuel, and in 1905 more Bulloch land was annexed to create what is now Jenkins County.

The present boundary was finalized in 1914 when the western corner of Bulloch county was staked out for Candler and Evans Counties. Within the past century Bulloch had shrunk to about one-half its original size and is now 684 square miles.

The early pioneers had few possessions, but land was cheap in the piney woods of Bulloch County. They built their one room log cabins and grazed their cattle on the abundance of wiregrass.

Agriculture has always played an important role in the development and progress of Bulloch County.

At first a means of survival, farming later became a source of income.

Because there were few, if any, stores and travel was very limited, settlers learned to be self-sufficient. Chores were numerous. Women did the family cooking in an open fireplace. Milk was churned into butter, yarn was spun for clothes, and ironing was always waiting.

Men and boys, too, were busy from sun-up to sundown.
As pioneers began to enjoy some prosperity around the 1820s, log cabins gave way to finer houses built with dressed lumber.

In some sections of the state, many planters acquired tracts of land developing plantations. The large plantation system was not evident in Bulloch although most prosperous farmers had slaves.

Quality furniture was also replacing homemade items, and buggies made for a better ride over rough roads.

Pioneers were a proud and independent people. They married early and raised large families. Their food was plain but abundant. They worked hard and lived hard.

Early pioneers such as William Cone, John Neville, Nicholas Anciaux, and John Abbott contributed much to the development of Bulloch County before and after its establishment in 1796.

Lack of roads was an obstacle for the settlers, but one highway was already in the area. This pre-historic highway, an old Indian trail, still runs through part of Bulloch County. Known today as Burkhalter Road, the English colonists called it "Kings Highway."

Transportation for the early settlers was primarily by horse.

In the 1830-40s, before the railroads, long distant travel was limited to stage coaches. One stage coach route, which ran from Savannah to Milledgeville through the northern part of Bulloch County, is known as the "Old River Road" because it followed the river.

Coach stops were established along this road for rest and food. One of these stops was probably in Blitch at the location of this store run by Oscar Lane.

The horse and wagon provided the early farmer with both labor and transportation.

For many years the early pioneers moved freight long distances by wagon train.

The buggy was another popular method of travel before the invention of the automobile.

The Ogeechee River proved to be a vital means for floating logs down to saw mills in Savannah.

The growth of the country is reflected in the story of the county seat--Statesboro. Nine years after the birth of Bulloch County its first town, Statesboro was incorporated on a 200-acre tract of land donated by George Sibbald of Augusta for the sum of one dollar.

There is no evidence which reveals how the name "Statesboro" originated.

The town was laid out in lots which were sold and the proceeds used to erect the first county courthouse, a log house which burned during the Civil War.

When the present courthouse was erected in 1894, it replaced a two-story frame courthouse building which was moved down West Main Street where it became the Opera House.

In 1880 the population of Statesboro was only 25; by the middle of 1890, it had increased to 525. During the decade between 1880 and 1890, the county population increased from 8,053 to 13,709.

It was during this time that the future of Statesboro and Bulloch County became evident, and the first businesses were established in Statesboro. By 1890 the town's business section had mushroomed,
and Statesboro's business and industrial expansion began.

Citizens came to town and watered their horses at the public trough.

Shoes were obtained from the E.C. Oliver or Olliff & Smith department store. Nails were purchased from the W.C. Rains Hardware Co. on E. Main St.

Their money was deposited in the Bank of Statesboro. Bread could be purchased at the Maull Bakery or an elixir for medical purposes could be obtained from Bulloch Drug Co.

Overnight travelers stayed at the Lee Hotel or later at the Jaekel Hotel.

For entertainment they may be lucky to find the Statesboro Normal Institute orchestra in session.

Residential growth was also thriving, and new houses were going up throughout Statesboro in the late 1880s and into the 1900s.

Growth brings change and to keep abreast of developments, citizens read the county's first newspaper, The Excelsior News. The press was housed in a small building in the Excelsior Community, then a part of Bulloch County.

The first newspaper serving the City of Statesboro was The Statesboro Eagle, published by Cap. John Stone and Rev. W.M. Cowart in 1883. Many newspapers followed including the Georgia Farmer, The Bulloch County Banner, The Bulloch Herald, and others.

Certainly newsworthy was the Statesboro and Bulloch County cotton market. The Statesboro News in 1902 proclaimed that "Statesboro is now the second biggest sea island cotton market in the world."

Bulloch County was also heralded as the largest buggy producer in the state, and buggy repair was a thriving business.

Another large business was tobacco. Bulloch County started growing flue-cured tobacco around 1895, but the commercial tobacco market was not established in the county until 1928.

Of special interest was the arrival of the automobile, which also provided merchants a convenient means for hauling freight and produce.

But the event with the most impact was the coming of the railroad near the turn of the century. The popular steam locomotive puffed into Bulloch County in 1885 and became the workhorse for hauling logs to the sawmill and later to market.

The Dover & Statesboro Railroad was the first to start transporting passengers and freight in Bulloch County.

Sadly for the romantic railroading era, transportation and the intervention of World War II eliminated most of the county's tracks and steam engines. The Savannah and Statesboro Terminal, the Pulaski Terminal, Nevils Terminal and Leefield Terminal are the last original surviving buildings around.

Bulloch Countians worked hard to prosper in the 1800s, but their progress suffered a setback when war between northern and southern states broke out in 1861 over slavery and other issues. Many citizens were saddened by Georgia's secession from the union, but, nevertheless, they supported the cause their state had chosen.

From a small population of 5000 citizens, Bulloch County supplied about 600 soldiers for the army of the Confederacy. Five groups of troops came from the county alone, serving on battlefields from Gettysburg to Peachtree Creek. Many never
came back.

Except for the men away in battle, most families in the county endured little wartime hardship until the Fall of 1864. On September 3, 1864, Union Army General William T. Sherman occupied Atlanta and on Nov. 15 with a force of 60,000 troops began a sweep through middle Georgia to Savannah known as the "March to the Sea."

Sherman's main thrust was 40 miles wide with a northern column and a southern column.

On December 3, 1864, a part of Sherman's southern column, the 15th and 16th Corps, under the command of MG. Gen. O.O. Howard, passed through Statesboro and skirmished with Confederate locals at the present junction of Savannah Ave. and U.S. 80.

The Union Cavalry under the command of Lt. Gen. Judson Kilpatrick plundered, destroyed and wasted everything in sight. Citizens were left with very little except what they had been able to hide.

Statesboro honored the Bulloch County men who served in the Confederate forces with a monument located on the courthouse square. The project was undertaken by the Statesboro Chapter of the UDC and was formally dedicated April 26, 1909.

Early pioneers were religious by training and tradition, but as late as 1830 very few belonged to any organized denomination.

Because they settled close to the river, their small, log house churches were established near the water. Paynes Chapel Methodist Church, constituted in 1776, in what is now Jenkins County, was Bulloch County's first established house of worship.

Union Methodist and Nevils Creek Baptist churches were constituted in 1790, followed by Lower Lotts Creek Primitive Baptist in 1801. Upper Black Creek Baptist 1802, and New Hope Methodist in 1804. Union and New Hope are on the Old River Road.

The first worship services were held in clearings under brush arbors built as temporary shelters. People came from the surrounding areas in horse carts and on horseback to hear the travelling preachers.

Church was usually held once a month on Saturday and Sunday with services lasting all day. In early times, blacks and whites attended church together.

Since very few communities were in existence, churches like Lanes Baptist, Lower Mill Creek and Upper Lotts Creek Churches were social and cultural gathering places, as well as religious centers.

After the Civil War, church life changed. White wooden buildings replaced log meeting houses and blacks left the white churches to establish their own. The first black Primitive Baptist Church in Bulloch County was Banks Creek Church, founded around 1879.

In 1882 Bethel Primitive Baptist Church was organized followed by Mt. Pisgar in 1883.

When the population of Statesboro started growing in the 1880s, various city churches were organized, beginning with First Baptist in 1882. Later came Hodges Grove Baptist in 1884, Thomas Grove 1895, First Methodist 1886, First African Baptist Church 1880, Statesboro Primitive Baptist 1891, and Statesboro Presbyterian in 1891.

Over the years churches have been established in Bulloch County. The coming of the railroads brought the development of many small communities and towns... and with them, churches.

The original buildings of those first churches no longer exist, and some have changed locations.
but many, such as Deloach's P&B, Old Fellowship BC, Eureka Methodist, Mt. Zion AME Church, Bethel BC, and Bethlehem BC flourish today in newer structures.

Just as these hard-working settlers had opened up the region to agricultural and then industrial development, they also paved the way for future growth through education.

Concerned that their children should have an education, the first Bulloch County Academy was reported built in 1822, but its location is undetermined.

Many of the early schools were called "Old Field Schools" because they were located in an unproductive field contributed by the owner. Local families would build a crude one-room neighborhood schoolhouse, then hire a schoolmaster to teach the basics.

After the Civil War, families with means sent their children out of the county to recognized schools such as Bradwell Institute in Liberty County and Reidsville Academy in Tattnall County.

In the 1870s an academy established at Excelsior was considered the finest school in Bulloch County history, up to that time.

By 1890 the population of Statesboro had grown to 525, and parents decided it was time for the town to be served by a school. The Statesboro Academy was established.

Within ten years the school population had outgrown the academy, and on September 2, 1901, the Statesboro Normal Institute and Southeastern Business College opened with an enrollment of over 200. By the end of September that figure was over 300.

These early schools all operated on a tuition basis, although there had been an attempt to establish a state school system before the Civil War. In 1903, Statesboro voters defeated a measure to institute a free school system for the city, but two years later the issue passed in a 1905 election.

Thus began a series of additions to the original Statesboro Institute. By 1915 the enrollment was over 500 students.

During the 1800s there were few schools within easy riding or walking distance, but by 1914 there were 56 schools in Bulloch County. Later, paved roads, modern buses, economic and social conditions reduced the number of schools to the present 15.

By 1915 Statesboro's population growth dictated the need for a new school. Following World War I, voters approved funds for Statesboro High School, which opened in 1922.

Bulloch Countians' commitment to education is illustrated by the establishment of the First District A and M School, now Georgia Southern College.

Local leaders initiated an active campaign in the early 1900s to secure sufficient support for the establishment of the school in this area. Offering 200 acres of land and enough cash to construct the school building Bulloch County won the bid as the location of the First District A and M School, which opened in February 1908.

The institution expanded over the years in size, mission, and name, until Georgia Southern College is today one of the leading institutions in the University System of Georgia.

The growth of Georgia Southern College parallels the expansion and development of its hometown Statesboro and Bulloch County.

Gone are the communities of Blitch, Sinkhole, Colfax --- now replaced by Portal, Brooklet, Nevils, Denmark, and Stilson.
The decline of the railroads and World War II ushered in a new era for Bulloch County. Today our once-self sufficient farmers are exporting their crops. Timber from the county builds houses around the nation; local industries ship products near and far; college graduates contribute to mankind everywhere.

In education, in business and industries, and in agriculture, those pioneers who cleared the forests, farmed the fields, built the stores and factories, founded the schools and churches... they indeed paved the way for the progress and prosperity which Bulloch County enjoys today.