

“A SOURCE OF PLEASURE, PROFIT, AND PRIDE”:
TOURISM, INDUSTRIALIZATION, AND CONSERVATION
AT TALLULAH FALLS, GEORGIA, 1820-1915

by

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(Under the direction of Professor John C. Insoe)

ABSTRACT

This is a history of the town and waterfalls at Tallulah Falls, Georgia. It focuses on a thirty-five-year period when that saw the region transform from an isolated area, to a popular tourist destination, and finally the site of a large hydroelectric dam. The process of building the dam was highly controversial and led to the first large environmental movement in Georgia. Ultimately the movement failed, but the battle to save Tallulah Falls touched on issues of Progressivism, conservation, gender, the “Lost Cause,” the “new South,” and industrialization that give an insight into the political and social climate of early twentieth century Georgia.

INDEX WORDS: Tallulah Falls, Helen Dortch Longstreet, Georgia Power, Hydroelectric Dam, Conservation, Progressivism, New South, Lost Cause, Gender, Tourism

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, H. A. “Bud” and Donna M cCallister. Who I am, what I do, and what I have accomplished in life is because of the love and support you have given me.

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It has been my great privilege to come into contact with many fine people during the process of writing this thesis. I would like to thank the staffs at the State Archives in Atlanta; the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah; Archives and Records Management at Georgia Tech; and the Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at the University of Georgia. Every place that I went to do research had fantastic people available to help researchers and it made what could have been a painful experience, quite pleasant. I would also like to thank Margaret Calhoon at Georgia Power for her help. I also need to thank Wally Warren, who spent an afternoon discussing my thesis and who pointed me to several sources that filled in blanks in my research. Also, it has been an honor to associate with such a great group of graduate students here in Athens. I especially need to thank Judkin Browning and Michael Buseman for their friendship and suggestions in making this project better.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1 ‘DESTINED TO BE THE RESORT OF THE SOUTH’	8
2 ‘HARNESSING THE FALLS TO TURN ATLANTA’S WHEELS’	30
3 ‘THE UNEQUAL STRUGGLE OF ONE WOMAN’	58
EPILOGUE	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY	90

INTRODUCTION

About a two-hour drive north from Athens on Highway 441 sits the sleepy hamlet of Tallulah Falls. A peculiar sign greets anyone passing through the town. It welcomes everyone to the town of Tallulah Falls, home of the Tallulah Gorge. Inside the city limits is the Tallulah Gorge State Park, a joint venture of the state of Georgia and the Georgia Power Company. Most people probably pass by the town without thinking about the inconsistency of the sign or the park. But the question remains: if the gorge is the main feature of the area, why is the town named Tallulah Falls instead of Tallulah Gorge?

That Tallulah Gorge State Park is partially located within the boundaries of Tallulah Falls is just one of the ironies that confronts the knowledgeable visitor to the park. Another ironic moment comes when the visitor steps out to enjoy the beautiful hiking trails in the park. The hiker walks along the Helen Dortch Longstreet trail system. A marker at the origin of the trail praises Longstreet for her efforts to preserve the gorge and make it a state park. While this is technically true, it leaves out an important fact: Helen Longstreet's main fight was to save the falls at Tallulah; the gorge was an auxiliary matter. The gorge only enhanced the falls in her view.

The final irony is that Tallulah Gorge is a state park at all. All attempts to make it a park in the early twentieth century failed and Georgia Power was able to build a hydroelectric dam and destroy the falls. Eighty years later, the company and the state partnered to make the area, sans the natural flow of the falls, a state park. Georgia Power, a company that was originally incorporated in 1912 specifically to build this dam and the entity responsible for destroying the falls at Tallulah, now receives great publicity for its progressive environmental policy and enlightened corporate thinking. It runs television commercials touting its outstanding corporate citizenship and contributions to the environment, all the while neglecting to mention the environmental changes that its

aggressive dam construction program wrought in north Georgia from 1911 to 1924. This is the story of the first of those dams: the tourist trade it destroyed, the political and legal battles it caused, and the larger social movements that the participants in those battles represented.

The recent struggle over the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) between those who want to preserve wilderness areas versus those who would develop them parallels events nearly a century ago at Tallulah Falls. Proposed oil drilling in ANWR raised public consciousness about the tension between the country's energy demands and protecting natural habitats and the delicate balance between providing energy and destroying natural habitats. Supporters of oil exploration in ANWR argue that the rigs would occupy a minuscule amount of the refuge and not interfere with the animals in any significant way. Environmentalists opposing the exploration contend that the impact of rigs is impossible to predict, and that the risk of environmental damage exceeds the negligible dent that ANWR oil would make on America's oil deficit. Local inhabitants, just like at Tallulah Falls, are divided over the drilling. One group, the Gwich'in, fear the loss of traditional food sources and the effect it will have on their culture. Another, the Inupiat Eskimo, have grown to depend on the money and jobs that the oil industry has provided, and want to drill in ANWR.¹ Yet, these local groups have less control over what will happen with oil drilling than environmental groups, oil companies, and the United States Congress. While the Senate refused the Bush Administration's request that oil companies be allowed to begin exploration in ANWR, the issue seems unlikely to vanish from the political landscape as long as the United States continues to use vast quantities of oil in automobiles and energy production.

Energy versus nature. The ANWR debate is not the first time that these two forces have come into conflict. Dating back to the pre-industrial era in Europe and North America, the inhabitants of heavily populated areas of those two continents depleted their

¹E.M. Swift, "Pipeline Dreams," *Sports Illustrated*, 13 May 2002, 72-81.

forests for fuel sources. With the arrival of the industrial revolution and the increased need for power sources, coal and oil became the most common forms of fuel to power steam engines. But it was Edison's invention of the light bulb, and the subsequent use of electrical currents to power streetcars, lights, and factories that created a great demand for new power sources.

It was this demand for more energy that moves the focus of this story from ANWR in the early twenty-first century, to the hills of north Georgia in the early twentieth century. Instead of oilrigs and pipelines, it was the proposed construction of a large dam and lake at Tallulah Falls that inspired protests from an emerging environmental movement. Like ANWR, building a dam would have profound economic and ecological effects. The dam would displace some residents and destroy the tourist industry built around the falls. In the battle for Tallulah Falls a century ago, much like the debate over ANWR today, the themes of protecting the environment and meeting increasing energy demands came into direct conflict.

Tallulah Falls was not the only scenic area that a hydroelectric dam affected, but it deserves study for several reasons. First, as previously mentioned, it speaks to today's environmental issues and concerns. Americans will continue to have to make difficult choices about protecting nature or producing more electricity, and this story may help to inform the decision-making process regarding nature and power. Also, the Tallulah Falls Conservation Association, the first true environmental movement in Georgia,² deserves attention for both its makeup and its tactics.

Another distinctive aspect of this story is the place involved. Tallulah Falls was no ordinary natural wonder; it was, by all accounts, the most scenic set of falls in Georgia and possibly the entire South. The hotels operating around the falls were first-class

² Most scholars agree consider the environmental movement to be a post World War II phenomenon, so the TFCA should be seen as precursor to modern environmental groups. Though it was concerned with environmental issues, the TFCA may be more accurately labeled as a preservationist movement.

establishments mentioned in many travel handbooks. They were well known, well respected and appeared to be financially stable. Yet even here industrialists came in and dammed the river, destroying the falls and the many businesses it supported. It seems illogical, even irrational, from both economic and environmental standpoints to build a dam and destroy a natural wonder that attracted thousands of visitors per year. This seeming contradiction needs to be explored.

A final aspect of this story is the time period involved. During the period from 1880 to 1915 the United States saw the emergence of the ‘New South’ ideology, the conservation movement, and Progressivism. The New South boosters’ belief in industrial expansion, the conservationist program of protecting certain natural treasures as state or national parks (while promoting the expert-driven development of others), Progressivism’s activist spirit, and the prominence of women within this movement, intersected at Tallulah Falls in the early twentieth century, providing interesting insights into all three.

Surprisingly for a story with so many connections to larger historical themes, as well as an interesting plot, little has been written about Tallulah Falls. *Georgia Waters* (1965) by E. Merton Coulter is the only major scholarly work to cover the history of Tallulah Falls in length. He devoted the first two chapters of his book, fifty-five pages, to Tallulah Falls. Coulter, a member of the traditional school of Southern history, gave a chronological account starting with the Cherokee who lived near the falls, then to the first white travelers to the area, the building of the hotels, and finally to the battle over the dam. Working mainly from newspaper accounts, he writes without exploring the participants’ deeper motivations, his description of events and people remains rather superficial.

Another, shorter account of the fight over the dam is in Wade H. Wright’s *History of the Georgia Power Company, 1855-1956* (1957). While he begins to answer the question of why Georgia Power chose Tallulah Falls, Wright spends only a few pages on

the controversy, adding little to our understanding. He is a former employee of Georgia Power, as a former assistant to the original president, and the company is the publisher of his book. Predictably, Wright's account of the Tallulah Falls affair tends to glorify the good that came from the dam while downplaying any negatives.

Still, Coulter and Wright provide useful starting points for research and they do an adequate job of laying forth the sequence of events that led to the damming of the falls. However, neither historian satisfactorily answered the central question that will guide this investigation: How did a thriving vacation spot frequented and enjoyed by thousands end up destroyed by a hydroelectric dam? This study will also look use approaches developed by historians of gender, the "Lost Cause," and the environment long after Coulter and Wright published their accounts of Tallulah Falls. These new approaches allow for a revisiting of old sources and a thorough examination of newly available sources to tell the story of Tallulah Falls.

This struggle of nature versus power, tourism versus industry, the New South versus conservation forms the crux of this project. Clearly, this is not simply a case of environmentalists losing to industry; the lines are much more blurred than that. This is an opportune time to reevaluate the history of Tallulah Falls in light of the emergence of the environmental movement and the development of environmental history. The role of women in the fight for Tallulah Falls, virtually ignored by Coulter, needs to be explored more thoroughly in light of the advent of women's history. Appalachian Studies, a field that has emerged since Coulter's work, also provides models and theories to test against the experience at Tallulah Falls, specifically the role of outsiders in deciding the fate of Appalachia. The secondary source material available now that was not available to Coulter, combined with new avenues of historical exploration, should allow me to re-tell the story of Tallulah Falls with new insights and different conclusions than Coulter.

New sources and scholarship ensure that this project will not simply revisit Coulter's work thirty-seven years later. While there will be some overlap of sources,

especially with newspapers and travel accounts, there are also be significant differences. Newspapers introduce historical actors and give an idea of what the public thought and knew about the Tallulah Falls battle. They also provide the general outline of events, especially during the publicity campaign and legal case. Travel accounts, which remain invaluable sources for analyzing both the appeal of Tallulah Falls and what activities commonly occurred there during the vacation season, are another valuable source in determining the history of the early years of the falls and the highlights of the tourist era.

While rereading Coulter's sources might provide some new insights, new sources to which he did not have access are much more integral to this work. The Georgia Historical Society has acquired the papers of Helen Dortch Longstreet, the widow of General James Longstreet and leader of the group that fought to save Tallulah Falls, and made them available to researchers. Her papers reveal an intense love for the falls, but also show that she shaped her message in very gendered terms to reach specific audiences. She appealed to Georgia's male population using the language of the 'Lost Cause,' while making sure that women knew their 'womanly duty' was to save the falls. Her presence as a woman leading this effort raises questions and must be put in context. Fortunately, the boom in women's history and in gender history provides secondary sources to draw from in interpreting her position as a female leader, especially during the Progressive era.

The battle for Tallulah Falls is not only significant because it allows for an application of various gender theories or because it adds to the southern environmental literature. Still, as important as historical approaches and previous works are to understanding the context of the period and the motivations of the actors, the people and the place in this dramatic event must remain the central focus of this thesis. Without Tallulah Falls and the people who contested with each other over its best use for the citizens of Georgia, this story is meaningless. While the fight for Tallulah may have something to add to present-day debates over land use and energy needs, it is still a

historical event, and any discussion of the battle cannot forget this fact. This, then, is intended to be the *story* of the battle for Tallulah Falls more than “analysis,” or “example,” of the fight for Tallulah Falls. Hopefully, this example will speak to present environmental concerns, and the analysis of the fight will add to the current historical literature on early southern environmental movements while fitting into established niches in gender history and the history of Progressivism. But if it fails to revolutionize current thinking about ANWR, or does not raise Helen Dortch Longstreet to the pantheon of Georgia heroes, this project will still be a success if it simply tells a good story.

CHAPTER 1

‘DESTINED TO BE THE RESORT OF THE SOUTH’

In the summer of 1828, A. Foster wrote in the *Georgia Courier* of Augusta of a recent carriage trip into the north Georgia mountains. What he found there surprised and pleased him, especially when he gazed upon Tallulah Falls. Foster’s description of the trip is one of the first written accounts of the falls. Using a literary device common among nineteenth century travel writers, Foster described the reaction of a typical visitor as he ventured to the edge of the gorge to take a closer look at the falls: “His mind surrenders itself to the overwhelming sensation of awe and amazement.” Foster continued, “He neither speaks nor smiles—and even a jest or smile from a friend is painful to his feelings; which, particularly with the ladies, (as at Niagara Falls) are relieved by weeping.”³ Obviously, Tallulah Falls made a major impression on Foster and his party, an impression that others would echo in years to come. Unless the falls had continued to hold visitors’ interest, the tourist industry would not have thrived at Tallulah and there would have been no need for the legal and political battles that surrounded the dam-building process. The eighty years between Foster’s article and the push to build the hydro project saw Tallulah’s appeal expand from purely aesthetic to include recreation and health aspects as well.

Tallulah Falls’ popularity as a resort in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had its roots in the reports that writers like Foster and others spread about the area. A government study on the Tallulah Fall region in 1971 remarked that, “traders

³A. Foster, “Notice of the Tockoa and Tullulah Falls in Georgia,” *Georgia Courier* (Augusta), 11 August 1828, p. 1.

from South Carolina were probably the first white men to see the falls and were also the least interested.”⁴ After a treaty with the Cherokee opened the north Georgia frontier to white settlement in 1819, a few adventurous tourists began to see the falls with considerably more interest. However, development came slowly, “In all the early history of the county,” wrote one local historian, “there was nothing at the Falls but the great gorge, the rugged mountain sides around it, and the mighty roar of the river.”⁵ Some travelers returning from the region published accounts of their journeys, and those who did gave the falls glowing reviews in their newspaper articles and travel accounts.⁶ Over the years the chorus of both northerners and southerners praising Tallulah Falls as one of Georgia’s natural wonders grew louder. These favorable reviews helped create a demand to visit the falls that was only satisfied after the arrival of the railroad and hotels.

Before the treaty in 1819 ceded the land to Georgia, the Cherokee were the main inhabitants of the north Georgia mountains. Their view of the falls was ambivalent at best, and bordered on apprehension. Though the Cherokee had a word that sounded like Tallulah, they did not apply it to the falls. Above what is now known as the Tallulah River, a Cherokee village named “Talulu” existed before the arrival of Europeans, but the Cherokees called the falls Ugunyi, not Tallulah.⁷ According to James Mooney, a nineteenth century anthropologist who focused on Cherokee traditions and myths, the exact meaning of Ugunyi had been lost by the time he interviewed many of them between 1887 and 1890.⁸

⁴Georgia Power Company and North Georgia Mountains Authority (GPC and NGMA), *Tallulah Gorge-Phase 1*, by the planning staff of North Georgia Mountains Authority, September 1971.

⁵Mrs. Lamar Lipscomb, “Developments at Tallulah Falls,” in *Sketches of Rabun County History*, ed. Andrew Jackson Ritchie (n.p., 1948), 384.

⁶E. Merton Coulter, *Georgia Waters: Tallulah Falls, Madison Springs, Scull Shoals and the Okefenokee Swamp* (Athens: Georgia Historical Quarterly, 1965), 7-8.

⁷Lucian Lamar Knight, *Georgia’s Landmarks, Memorials, and Legends*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Company, 1913), 874.

⁸James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*, from the Nineteenth and

Even though Mooney was unable to determine the meaning of Ugunyi, he did find two stories about the falls still circulating among the Cherokees. The stories shared a supernatural bent and appear fantastic and impossible, but their main value was in the view of the falls that they revealed. Whites viewed the falls as a curiosity to explore, a nice place to visit, or a potential power source. The Cherokee viewed Tallulah Falls as wild, mysterious, and dangerous, and this was undoubtedly due to the visual and audible effects produced as the water rushed through the gorge and over the falls. They gave Tallulah Falls a wide berth. Mooney quoted Charles Lanman, a famous travel writer of the mid-eighteenth century, who had written, "It is worthy of remark that the Cherokee nation, previous to their departure for the distant West, always avoided the Falls of Tallulah, and were seldom found hunting or fishing in the area."⁹ For any hunting society, including the Cherokee, to purposefully avoid an area teeming with fish and game required a powerful negative stimulus.

The cautionary tales illuminated the Cherokees' desire to steer clear of Tallulah Falls. In one, which Mooney titled "The Man Who Married the Thunder's Sister," a warrior meets a beautiful pair of sisters at a dance and after a night of merriment, the warrior professed his love for one of the sisters. The next week they invited him back to their home to meet their brother and get his approval, "but warned him that if he told anyone where he went or what he saw he would surely die."¹⁰ After a journey filled with fantastic happenings, the three arrived at the sisters' home, a cave close to Ugunyi or Tallulah Falls. When the brother finally arrived, it turned out that he was the Thunder. The poor warrior could not take all these supernatural events, even for the hand of a beautiful woman, and told her brother this. He struck the warrior with a thunderclap,

Seventh Annual Reports of the Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900; reprint, Nashville: Charles and Randy Elder-Booksellers, 1982), 11, 417.

⁹Ibid., 418.

¹⁰Ibid., 345.

knocking him senseless, and when the warrior came to, the cave, the family, and all evidence that they had ever existed had disappeared. Returning to his village, the warrior forgot the sisters' warning to remain silent about his experience and died seven days later. Mooney concluded this story with a word of warning, one that revealed exactly what sort of place the Cherokee thought Tallulah Falls was: 'No one can come back from the underworld and tell it and live.'¹¹

The theme of death surrounded the falls in the second tale that Mooney related as well. According to the Cherokee, several renowned hunters headed into the north Georgia mountains. They never returned, and a group of medicine men undertook an expedition to discover what happened to the hunters. Upon returning, 'they reported that they had discovered a dreadful fissure in an unknown part of the country, through which a mountain torrent took its way with a deafening noise.' The Tallulah River cut the fissure and provided the noise that alarmed the medicine men, but it was at the falls that they truly became delusional. In the caves and grottoes around the falls, which the group found to be completely untamed, they claimed to have encountered a race of little people who were enemies of the Cherokee. The medicine men concluded that these little people were adversarial because of the frequent shrieks they uttered, and postulated that they had killed the hunters. Whether Tallulah Falls was a gateway to the underworld, or a home to a race of vicious little people, to the Cherokee it was a place where the unexpected happened, and therefore somewhere to be avoided, not to be developed.¹²

From the first, whites did not conceive of the falls with the same fear that the Cherokee did. From the earliest written accounts, the falls were known as Tallulah, not the Cherokee name of Ugunyi. Unfortunately, no one could derive the exact origins or translate the meaning of the word. Mooney posited several possibilities, but never came

¹¹Ibid., 347.

¹²Ibid., 417-418.

to a definite conclusion. Tallulah is an Anglicization of the Cherokee Talulu, which closely resembled the word for being pregnant or having a child. One theory was that the name meant “there lies your child” because a child had been lost falling over the falls. Mooney disregarded this explanation, favoring the interpretation that the name came from the sound made by a frog native to the area.¹³ In either case, the name was not applied to the falls until the arrival of Europeans.

White settlers and travelers also offered their own interpretation of what Tallulah might mean, though they rarely had any basis in fact. Charles Lanman, the nineteenth century travel writer, popularized the view that “the Cherokee word Tallulah or Turrahah signifies *the terrible*.”¹⁴ Lanman got his translation from a small article in *Graham’s Magazine* in 1844, which first promulgated this misinformation.¹⁵ In a promotional pamphlet published around the turn of the twentieth century, the Maplewood Inn at Tallulah Falls continued to advance this interpretation.¹⁶ Evidently, this translation was partly based on the similar sounds between Tallulah, or Turrahah, and terrible, and partly on the initial reaction of awe that most people felt when seeing the falls.

As previously mentioned, settlers and travelers marveled at the beauty and power of the falls. Foster, the visitor to the falls who had published his account in the *Georgia Courier* in 1828, commented that the combination of sight and sound would “produce sensation unutterable,”¹⁷ while another wrote that the experience was “deep and

¹³Ibid., 417.

¹⁴Charles Lanman, *Adventures in the Wilds of the United States and British North American Provinces*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: John W. Moore, 1856), 364. [Emphasis in original]

¹⁵“The Falls of Tallulah,” *Graham’s Magazine*, 1844, in Tallulah Falls folder, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries. This article also gave the Tallulah river as the Terrora, which may have added to Lanman’s confusion.

¹⁶Maplewood Inn pamphlet, Tallulah Falls folder, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries, 2. The pamphlet gives the Cherokee word as “Terrorah.”

¹⁷Foster, “Notice of Tockoa and Tullulah Falls,” 1.

unutterable.” Luckily, Foster and others regained their ability to write about the falls, so much so that the same government study on Tallulah complained that “Tallulah Falls literature abounds in the exaggerated and sentimental metaphor . . .as scenic wonders popped up in this new world, they were taken over by the ‘booster,’ who exaggerated them to extraordinary heights.”¹⁸

Perhaps the study’s authors were thinking of Charles Lanman’s description of Tallulah Falls ‘far exceeds the scene which I had conceived . . . on par with the river Saguenay and the Falls of Niagara’;¹⁹ or Foster’s statement that the falls ‘present[ed] scenes like no other in the United States’²⁰; or even one local who, upon seeing the gorge and falls, “God almighty! What a Gully.”²¹ Though hyperbole about Tallulah Falls apparently flowed from writers like the waters rolling over the cataracts, that does not mean that all their praises should be discarded. Tallulah Falls may not have had compared favorably in water volume or scenic majesty with Niagara, but it did stand apart from other falls in the South.

Located in a gorge as deep as 1000 feet at some points, the falls stood as a striking contrast to the topography of areas just twenty or thirty miles to the south. One travel writer described this phenomenon: “We suddenly came upon a very grand and wild scene, an immense chasm or ravine.”²² Another commentator noted, “If you have imagined southern scenery to be lame and uniform, your disappointment like my own will be most gratifying and complete.”²³ The majority of the visitors to Tallulah Falls in

¹⁸GPC and NGMA, *Tallulah Gorge-Phase 1*.

¹⁹Lanman, *Adventures in the Wilds*, 364.

²⁰Foster, “Notice of Tockoa and Tullulah Falls,” 1.

²¹GPC and NGMA, *Tallulah Gorge-Phase 1*.

²²George William Featherstonhaugh, *A Canoe Voyage up the Minnay Sotor*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), 305.

²³Foster, “Notice of Tockoa and Tullulah Falls,” 1.

the pre-Civil War came to the mountains from the coastal plains or cotton fields, and the combination of the deep gorge and roaring falls produced a startling effect in them after the coastal plains, rolling hills, and lazy rivers of south and middle Georgia. The steep gorge made a definite impression, overshadowing the falls for some travelers who shared sentiments such as this: "The rapids, however splendid, apart from the sublimity with which they are surrounded, are only an appendage to the stupendous banks of solid rock"²⁴ As the river cut its way through the rock over thousands of years, it produced outcroppings and fissures that only added to the rugged beauty of the gorge and falls. The banks, "piled upon each other in the wildest confusion, sometimes shoot out, overhanging the yawning gulf, and threatening to break from their seemingly frail tenure and hurl themselves headlong into its dark depth."²⁵

The outcroppings provided spectacular vistas of the falls and gorge, and some became famous in their own right. Visitors and boosters gave these natural features colorful names such as Point Inspiration, Natural Statue, Grand Chasm, Witch's Head, Lover's Retreat, and the Devil's Jail. The most notable outcropping was the one which afforded the best views: the Devil's Pulpit. As its name suggests, many visitors associated the Devil's Pulpit with religious experiences. Some even thought the outcropping misnamed, such as one commentator who asserted, "His Satanic Majesty, if he preach at all, would not choose such a place for his ministrations. There is too visibly the presence of the Almighty."²⁶ Still, the steep banks and rugged outcroppings, notwithstanding the opinions of a few who regarded them as the most stunning part of the gorge, merely added to the beauty of the falls, the main attraction for most tourists.

Unlike Niagara Falls, to which it was often compared, Tallulah Falls was not one

²⁴Foster, "Notice of Tockoa and Tullulah Falls," 1.

²⁵"The Falls of Tallulah," *Graham's Magazine*.

²⁶William C. Richards, ed. *Georgia Illustrated* (Penfield, Ga.: W. and W.C. Richards, 1842), 11.

massive drop, but rather a series of four major cataracts and several small ones. The falls ranged in height from ten to ninety-six feet, and were estimated to drop a total of 350 feet over the distance of a mile.²⁷ After gathering speed through the Indian Arrow Rapids at the head of the falls, the water raced down the first of the major falls at forty-six feet tall: ‘L’Eau d’Or,’ French for ‘water of gold.’ ‘Tempesta,’ estimated to drop eighty-one feet; then the largest cataract ‘Hurricane,’ at ninety-six feet; and ‘Oceana,’ at forty-two feet, followed it. Finally, smaller cataracts, like ‘Bridal Veil,’ with a sixteen feet foot drop, followed the four larger ones.²⁸

Aside from their height the cataracts also produced some amazing effects, including a spray and sunlight-induced rainbow. Naturally, visitors wanted to get closer to the falls and not simply view them from the top of the gorge. The desire to climb down to the river and enjoy its refreshing waters and seemingly tranquil pools occasionally led to injury and even death. Vacationers always needed to be mindful of the strength of the river’s current, lest powerful eddies pull them under and they drown. The most famous death at the falls occurred in 1837 when Reverend Hawthorne, an Athens clergyman swimming in a seemingly harmless pool, drowned, leading to the naming of that spot ‘Hawthorne’s Pool,’ in his honor.²⁹

Sound played as important a role as sight in the Tallulah Falls’ identity as a place of awe. The sound of rushing water through the gorge had terrified the Cherokee, but it produced somewhat different response in white visitors. Instead of fear, writers, poets, and promoters often commented on the roar of the falls and how the sound was capable of simultaneously producing feelings of fear and peace. Charles Lanman was especially impressed by the noise of the falls; he mentioned it several times in his report about

²⁷Foster, ‘Notice of Tockoa and Tullulah Falls,’ 1.

²⁸Coulter, *Georgia Waters*, 12-13.

²⁹Knight, *Georgia’s Landmarks*, 874.

Tallulah and admitted that the awesome sound tempted him to stay for a longer visit. Nearly fifty years later, a brochure advertising the Maplewood Inn at Tallulah Falls trumpeted that the hotel was “within sound of the river,”³⁰ while the Tallulah Lodge noted its location “within easy reach of the falls,”³¹ as the rushing water continued to create a pleasant noise to the ears of tourists.

Even during these early decades, tourists were beginning to visit the falls, as the story of Reverend Hawthorne illustrated. The arduous journey to the area—it required several days of travel on narrow trails—limited the number of visitors to the falls. William Richards, writing in 1842, vividly described the typical trail experience: “The road, like the most of mountain highways, is rough and constantly threatens the overthrow of your vehicle.”³² Yet most of these pre-railroad tourists agreed with Lanman’s assessments of Tallulah Falls’ majesty and awe and thought the trip worthwhile. They urged others to make the trip and to plan on an extended visit because “the varied beauties of the Falls of Tallulah are not seen in a hasty glance, or a brief visit,”³³ but “two days *at least*, should be devoted to the Rapids.”³⁴

Tallulah Falls’ growth as a tourist destination benefited from a movement in American society that fed on feelings of terror, awe, and beauty in nature. These emotions were all rolled into one concept: the “sublime.” One historian defined the sublime as an aesthetic category that, “dispelled the notion that beauty in nature was seen only in the comfortable, fruitful, and well-ordered. Vast, chaotic scenery could also

³⁰Maplewood Inn pamphlet, 4.

³¹Tallulah Lodge pamphlet, April 12, 1904, Tallulah Falls folder, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries, 8.

³²Richards, *Georgia Illustrated*, 10.

³³*Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴Foster, “Notice of Tockoa and Tullulah Falls,” 1.

please.”³⁵ Sublimity, “cut to the onlooker’s psyche, inspiring sentiments that were both intensely embracing and repelling.”³⁶ These emotions often revealed themselves in religious language, and sojourns to the falls stirred spiritual feelings for many travelers. In 1850, Henry R. Jackson, a poet from Savannah, published *Tallulah and Other Poems*. In “Tallulah,” the longest of his poems, Jackson’s first line was, “A Sabbath on the Mountains,” which revealed the intense religious feelings he experienced at Tallulah Falls.³⁷ Southerners were not alone in their praise for the falls, as Lanman’s writings demonstrated. One Bostonian, B. Stephen Greenleaf Bullfinch, wrote a short poem entitled “Lines on Visiting Tallulah Falls, Georgia” after seeing the falls in 1850. Like Jackson, he experienced a spiritual awakening while at Tallulah Falls.³⁸ The sights and sounds of Tallulah Falls formed an irresistible combination of terror, awe, and beauty that appealed to people throughout the United States. It became clear in the years following the Civil War that only the lack of quick and safe transportation prevented the region’s development as a tourist venue.

After all, heading to the mountains during the hottest part of the year was nothing new for Southerners. Writing in 1842, William Richards remarked that Clarkesville, a small town twelve miles from Tallulah Falls was, “a favorite place of resort during the summer months, for the denizens of the more southern and less healthful portions of our state.”³⁹ However, no railroad serviced Clarkesville and that kept the tourist population lower than it would be when the railroad reached north Georgia. John Inscoe has shown

³⁵Roderick F. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 45.

³⁶William Irwin, *The New Niagara: Tourism Technology, and the Landscape of Niagara Falls, 1776-1917* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), xv.

³⁷Henry R. Jackson, *Tallulah and Other Poems* (Savannah: John M. Cooper, 1850), 22.

³⁸B. Stephen Greenleaf Bullfinch, “Lines on Visiting Tallulah Falls, Georgia,” Tallulah Falls folder, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries. .

³⁹Richards, *Georgia Illustrated*, 10.

that many slave owners from Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah and Augusta, Georgia often spent their summers in the vicinity of western North Carolina.⁴⁰ Other wealthy Southerners moved to the North for the summer during the antebellum era. Cooler climates in general, and mountain climates in particular, were thought to be healthier than warmer ones – especially in the summer when malaria was most common. But before the Civil War, Georgia’s elites found few mountain locations that were both easily accessible by railroad and offered the lavish service they expected from their summer destinations.

As the ‘New South’ movement began to gather momentum in the post-Reconstruction South, one of the issues for its proponents in Georgia was that wealthy Georgians should spend their summers in their home state. An editorial in Henry Grady’s *Atlanta Constitution* appealed to readers in patriotic terms, arguing, “a tour of three days from Atlanta to the falls of Tallulah is one which every Georgian should make.” It implored Georgians not to go to the North or to Europe for vacation because the splendor of Tallulah Falls rivaled any falls in the world. In addition, the entire trip could be made for ten dollars, a manageable sum for the emerging middle class or established elites willing to see “ascend unique, varied, and solemnly wild.”⁴¹ At least some Georgians were heeding the *Constitution’s* call: in 1877 about 1,800 people were visiting the area every summer. Still, impediments to Tallulah Falls’ growth remained in 1877. Only one hotel, newly opened that year, served the area while it was common in other vacation areas for there to be several, and the extension of the railroad to Tallulah Falls was five years in the future.⁴²

⁴⁰John Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

⁴¹*Atlanta Constitution*, 11 September 1877, p. 3.

⁴²GPC and NGMA, *Tallulah Gorge-Phase 1*.

Historian C. Vann Woodward noted that in the same year that the *Atlanta Constitution*, under Grady's leadership, had appealed to Southerners to vacation inside the region, it also published editorials "exhorting the South to exploit her 'mountains stored with exhaustless treasures.'" ⁴³ Grady referred to the seemingly limitless supply of timber, coal, and other natural resources native to the mountains, but tourism provided another potential source of profit in the mountains. The main problem facing Grady and the industrialists and the fledgling tourist industry at Tallulah Falls was how to get into and out of the mountains quickly, safely, and efficiently. Railroad expansion answered each groups' dilemma. Whether they carried people or products, trains were safe, quick, and extremely efficient. Railroads provided the initial impetus to develop Tallulah Falls as a vacation spot because the affordable fares (for the middle and upper class, at least) and quick travel time would permit more people to join in the Southern tradition of "summering" in more temperate climes. After the war, railroad construction boomed throughout the South, and tracks eventually spread from urban areas to the mountains of north Georgia, east Tennessee, and western North Carolina.

When the railroad came to the Tallulah Falls in 1882, it inaugurated a time of growth for tourism at the falls. Leading citizens of Athens, Georgia, had pushed for the railroad expansion for over twenty years, presumably because they wanted Athens to be the hub of goods coming down from and going into the mountains. Athenian railroad boosters had gotten the legislature to pass an act in 1854 to promote the construction of a railroad from Athens to Clayton. A company was chartered in 1856, but construction did not begin until 1871 and was not completed until 1882. ⁴⁴ After the completion of the

⁴³C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 166.

⁴⁴Kaye Carver and Myra Queen, eds., *Memories of a Mountain Shortline: The Story of the Tallulah Falls Railroad* (Rabun Gap, Ga.: Foxfire Press, 1976), 22.

Tallulah Falls Railroad, ‘a number of Athens families built cottages there. The place became a sort of Athens colony.’⁴⁵

The railroad’s arrival signaled the beginning of a time of tremendous upheaval throughout the mountain South. Appalachia contained one of the last great reserves of virgin timberland at the birth of the New South, but its lack of navigable rivers and streams had prevented widespread logging and trade before the Civil War. Ronald Lewis, writing specifically about railroads in West Virginia but describing the process throughout Appalachia, labeled them an ‘agent of change’ because their presence precipitated the logging of forests, the end of subsistence farming, environmental degradation, and social transformations in lifestyle and labor patterns accompanying these changes.⁴⁶ The railroad finally connected isolated areas of Appalachia to the larger economy of the South and nation as a whole.

The completion of the railroad opened up the region to lumber companies. Logging companies needed to gain access to the local farmers’ unimproved timberlands to capitalize on the railroad’s expansion into an area. Companies employed various techniques—some legal, some not—to obtain the farmers’ lands. Regardless of whether the companies fairly compensated the farmers for their land, the locals often took jobs working on timber crews or moved out of the region in search of work after they sold their farms. As the process continued, logging denuded Appalachia’s hillsides, and the railroads pushed deeper into the mountains to find timber.⁴⁷ This continual push into the mountains eventually brought the railroads and industrialists into contact with famed

⁴⁵Lipscomb, ‘Developments at Tallulah Falls,’ 384.

⁴⁶Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Transformation in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 6-8.

⁴⁷For a more thorough discussion of logging and mining companies and the techniques they employed to acquire land in Appalachia see, Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside* and Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

natural wonders heretofore inaccessible to most travelers—destinations like Tallulah Falls where the arrival of the railroad could bring enough tourists to support hotels.

Though the railroad brought massive changes to the Tallulah Falls region, many local inhabitants still considered it to be a blessing. As one local remembered: ‘It opened up the country, there’s no question about that. It was a great boon to this section of the country.’⁴⁸ From 1870 to 1900 the population of Rabun County almost doubled, going from 3,256 to 6,285 and keeping pace with the overall population growth of Georgia—something Rabun did not do in the decade prior to 1870 or the twenty years after 1900.⁴⁹ The railroad meant jobs as well opportunities for farmers to trade their wares. It provided ‘the main source for transporting merchandise and produce to the county and hauling things from here to other areas.’ ‘Things’ included livestock, fruits, vegetables, lumber, hides, the mail, and most importantly for tourism—people.⁵⁰

Though railroads were originally built to transport timber and other goods away from the mountains, they gladly ferried passengers to resort destinations in the mountains. Areas such as Tallulah Falls, the Great Smoky Mountains in east Tennessee and western North Carolina, and Blowing Rock, North Carolina benefited from the improved transportation network. Journeys that once took days via carriage now took hours. These mountain resorts touted the same attractions: clean, cool air and water, plenty of outdoor activities, and spectacular vistas. Only the lack of good facilities for guests blocked these locales’ growth into booming resort areas once the railroad had reached them. Fortunately, money flowed into the region with the railroad—money that

⁴⁸Carver and Queen, *Memories of a Mountain Shortline*, 20-21.

⁴⁹U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States*, Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1881; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1891; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States*, Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1901; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1911; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1921.

⁵⁰Carver and Queen, *Memories of a Mountain Shortline*, 22.

could build hotels and other accouterments associated with a tourist industry. A negative at Tallulah Falls, though not all mountain areas, was that it was “foreign capital” in the sense that the owners of the railroad, hotels, lumber companies, and other major ventures lived outside the region. Natives of Rabun and Habersham counties, the two counties bordering the falls, did not join in the spate of construction around the falls because they lacked the necessary capital to undertake such a project. Because the owners did not live at Tallulah Falls, the profits all too often flowed back out of the region before it could make a significant improvement in the living conditions of most natives.⁵¹ They were still laborers and not necessarily owners.

Georgians from outside the Tallulah Falls region had taken the lead in developing vacation properties at Tallulah Falls in the wake of the railroad’s arrival. In 1883, two businessmen from Athens, Rufus L. Moss, Jr. and Asaph K. Childs purchased a large tract of land at Tallulah Falls and built the first large hotel, the Cliff House, adjacent to the railroad depot.⁵² Excitement in Athens was running so high that by 1884, the *Athens Banner-Watchman* announced that “Tallulah is destined to be the resort of the South.”⁵³ Only one year later, the Cliff House’s letterhead proclaimed its proximity to the “Niagara of the South.”⁵⁴ Other developers constructed more hotels, inns, and cottages during the next two decades, capitalizing on the increased volume of tourists coming to Tallulah Falls. By 1900, seventeen hotels and boarding houses dotted the area, providing tourists with a wide selection of places to stay.⁵⁵

⁵¹Daniel Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 32-33. Ina W. Van Noppen and John J. Van Noppen, *Western North Carolina Since the Civil War* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1973), 371-373.

⁵²Mary Claire Warren, “Tallulah Falls: Athens Favorite Watering Place” *Athens Advertiser*, 15 July 1964 Tallulah Falls Folder, Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, University of Georgia.

⁵³*Athens Banner-Watchman*, 17 August 1884.

⁵⁴Blank letter from 1885, William Tate Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library / University of Georgia Libraries, box 7, folder 7.

⁵⁵John Harmon, “Town had 17 hotels—then dam was built,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 26 November

Simply having a railroad depot did not guarantee that Tallulah Falls would become, “the summer Mecca of tired city folk and numerous nature lovers.”⁵⁶ Other factors contributed to the growth of the area as a tourist destination. Echoing pre-Civil War writers, the tourism boosters once again described Tallulah Falls’ scenic beauty. The *Atlanta Constitution* described the falls as “grand, weird and picturesque” in its 1877 editorial urging Georgians to visit the falls.⁵⁷ In 1891, the writers of *Health Resorts of the South* echoed Lanman when they wrote that “the view is unsurpassed in the combination of grandeur and wildly picturesque beauty by any we have seen in New England or the Rocky Mountains.”⁵⁸ Lucian Lamar Knight, writing twenty-two years later, called Tallulah Falls “one of the greatest scenic wonders of the continent.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in a nation where trains connected tourists to many areas of natural beauty that boasted of similar natural wonders, Tallulah Falls’ promoters had to buttress its scenic appeal with other attributes.

Among the other attractive features of Tallulah Falls was a healthy environment. At least one writer, William Richards, was ahead of his time when he appealed in 1842 “to the dwellers in our cities, who tire of their eternal walls of brick, and their ceaseless clamor of business – who long for the pure air of the hills.” However, most travel accounts did not mention the benefits of the pure air and water in the pre-railroad years, although the Southern tradition of summering in cooler climates had as much to do with avoiding coastal malaria as the oppressive heat. As a greater awareness of germs and pollution reached a wider audience in the last years of the nineteenth century, boosters of

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⁵⁶Maplewood Inn pamphlet, p. 2.

⁵⁷*Atlanta Constitution*, 11 September 1877, p. 3.

⁵⁸*Health Resorts of the South* (Boston: George H. Chapin, 1891), 161.

⁵⁹Knight, *Georgia’s Lanmarks*, 872. Knight wrote during the period when Georgia Power was constructing a dam and their ownership of the land was being contested by the state in a court case.

Tallulah Falls and other mountain resorts trumpeted the clean air and water available in the mountains. Some city dwellers may have viewed the calls to enjoy clean air as an opportunity to escape the smell of streets littered with garbage and horse manure even more so than disease or pollution. In any case, as the South's urban population boomed, Tallulah Falls and other mountain resorts began to attract urban inhabitants as well as planters.

Promises about the rejuvenating properties of the climate at Tallulah Falls often lured sickly visitors. One travel writer states that "for invalids it offers extraordinary attractions, the air is dry, clear and invigorating; consumption, malaria, hay fever, and asthma are said to be unknown." Tallulah Falls was an "El Dorado for consumptives."⁶⁰ The Maplewood Inn advertised that "the water supply at Tallulah Falls is exceptionally pure . . . the weary may be at rest concerning germs and bacteria."⁶¹ Clean air and water certainly appealed to city dwellers concerned about the quality of their environment but this aspect of Tallulah's appeal was limited to a select minority.

Another facet of Tallulah Falls' appeal that related to its healthy environment, but better explained the reason for its popularity: climate. Hotels opened in early June and closed in late September or early October.⁶² The vacation season occurred during the hottest months of the summer and the hotels were busiest during July and August when the heat in the lowlands became most stifling. An altitude of 2,200 feet cooled the air, and the high temperatures in the summer months typically hovered in the high 70s to low 80s—more bearable than the temperatures in Athens, Atlanta, or the southern part of the

⁶⁰*Health Resorts of the South*, 161.

⁶¹Maplewood Inn pamphlet, 3.

⁶²Maplewood Inn pamphlet; Tallulah Lodge pamphlet; Cliff House ledgers 1887-88, William Tate Family Papers, Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries, box 8, folder 5.

state.⁶³ The hotels benefited more from the tourist's desire to keep cool during the scorching summer months than any other single factor besides the falls' scenic beauty.

Newlyweds often chose to spend their honeymoons at Tallulah, though one wonders if climate outweighed the area's romantic and private settings in their decision to come to Tallulah. Vacationers young and old, single or married could choose from a wide array of activities to wile away the hours. Hiking to the falls and down the gorge to the river was a main activity for many tourists. Not only did this allow the vacationer to enjoy the crisp mountain air, but it also presented him or her with the chance to see a variety of flora and fauna. Once at the river, the tourists swam, lounged on rocks, and had their picture taken by the photographers who worked in the area during the summer months.⁶⁴ Hiking was not the only reason to head into the woods or down to the water. Many visitors enjoyed hunting and fishing, and they found the woods and streams surrounding the falls teeming with fish and game.⁶⁵ Other tourists delighted in horseback riding, which these gave the riders a chance to explore more of the surrounding countryside and savor the panoramic views of the surrounding ridges and mountains. The authors of *Health Resorts of the South* (1891) reported that "in the season, Tallulah is full of life and gayety," for those tourists who wished to stay closer to the town.⁶⁶ Visitors to the falls lacked no comfort of home and could count on their hosts to provide various amusements to occupy their time. Hotels such as the Tallulah Lodge offered tennis, ten-pins (bowling), and billiards during the day, "while at night there will be card parties, dancing, musicales, etc."⁶⁷ Wine and whiskey were present though not often

⁶³Cliff House ledgers 1887-88, William Tate Family Papers, box 8, folder 5.

⁶⁴Warren, "Tallulah Falls: Athens Favorite Watering Place."

⁶⁵*Health Resorts of the South*, 166.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 166.

⁶⁷Tallulah Lodge pamphlet, 6.

abused. According to one former resident, “a drunkard then was a curiosity. If a fellow came along on his horse whooping and hollering, people could come out and take a look at him.”⁶⁸

“The cream of Southern society,” which probably included quite a few drunkards despite the former resident’s contention, came to vacation at Tallulah Falls every summer. One resident remembered that “even Charleston and Savannah condescended to give the resort its patronage.”⁶⁹ A Rabun County resident writing the late 1940s added “distinguished and talented people . . . from all parts of the country,” to the pool of visitors.⁷⁰ Though railroad fares to Tallulah were reasonable (only \$2.55 from Athens in 1905) and rates at the inns were not excessive (\$2.00 per day or \$9.00 to \$17.00 per week⁷¹), visitors to the falls tended to belong to the more affluent classes. Several factors contributed to Tallulah Falls’ middle and upper class clientele. First, visitors often stayed anywhere from one week to a month and the bills for laundry, food, and lodging quickly mounted during a lengthy stay.⁷² Also, not many independent farmers, sharecroppers, lumberjacks, miners, or mill workers could afford to miss work for a day, let alone weeks. The same cost and lack of opportunity that prevented the majority of Georgians from visiting Tallulah added to the atmosphere of exclusivity that attracted affluent guests.

Tallulah Falls’ reputation as a tourist destination for Georgia’s finest meant that for three or four months per year the town came alive, but during the other nine months it laid dormant. The hotels and boarding houses could accommodate a significant number

⁶⁸Hugh Park, “Around Town,” *Nell Reese Call*, 19 August 1949, Tallulah Falls folder, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries).

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Lipscomb, “Developments at Tallulah Falls, 385.

⁷¹*Athens Banner*, 28 July 1905; Maplewood Inn pamphlet, 4; Tallulah Lodge pamphlet, 8..

⁷²Cliff House ledgers 1887-88, William Tate Family Papers, box 8, folder 5.

of guests during the summer. The Willard House had 50 rooms to rent; the Hotel Robinson, 150; the Cliff House, 200;⁷³ the Tallulah Lodge, 100;⁷⁴ and the Grandview Hotel, 300 before it burned in 1897.⁷⁵ But even during the best of times, “the place was only a small village and a shipping point for farmers in the region behind it.”⁷⁶ Other than the nearly twenty hotels and boarding houses, the town consisted of three churches—Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic—a railroad depot, a telegraph office, a post office, a bar, and, for a brief time in 1897, a newspaper—the *Tallulah Falls Spray*. The *Spray*’s editor implored the citizens in Rabun and Habersham counties to support the paper, but the populace was unwilling or unable to do so. After the 1897 vacation season, the paper folded, even as the hotels continued to flourish.

During vacation season the hotels traded locally and nationally to acquire the wines, foods, and other goods necessary to run a hotel. Not surprisingly, much of the trade for finished goods occurred with merchants in Atlanta and Athens, especially for items like pillows, sheets, lumber, coal, and tobacco. However, the proprietors of the Cliff House did expand their trade network beyond Georgia firms for certain items. They ordered meat from the Chicago Packing Meat Market Company, bought wine from a merchant house in New York City, and traded with merchants in Jersey City and Nashville.⁷⁷ Although the railroad made it easier to trade with merchants in more distant areas, some drawbacks still existed. On August 1, 1888, H.B. Kirkland of Thurber, Whyland, and Company, a merchant house based in New York, informed the manager of the Cliff House that they did not include certain items in the last shipment—mostly various

⁷³*Tallulah Falls Spray*, 1 July 1897, p. 1.

⁷⁴Tallulah Lodge pamphlet, 6.

⁷⁵*Tallulah Falls Spray*, 1 July 1897, p. 1.

⁷⁶Lipscomb, “Developments at Tallulah Falls,” 385.

⁷⁷Cliff House Inventory Slips, William Tate Family Papers, box 7, folders 2, 3.

liquors, but also a luxury item: “1 case Toilet Paper.”⁷⁸ Other than the trade with the Chicago meat packer, the Cliff House acquired luxury items (including toilet paper) that its guests may have expected of a quality resort through trade with distant merchants.

Though visitors to the falls left duly impressed and refreshed by their stay, the tourist industry also played a major role in the lives of those people who stayed in the area. In the years before the train and large hotels, local farmers often rented rooms or small cabins on their property to the few travelers visiting the falls.⁷⁹ The relationship between locals and tourist industry developed as Tallulah Falls grew. Account books from the Cliff House documented a flourishing trade with local farmers and merchants, though not in luxury items. This trade centered on farm products—butter, milk, eggs and the like.⁸⁰ Farmers, faced with depleted soil on their farms, and timber companies hungry for their land welcomed the opportunity to acquire cash to pay property taxes and purchase goods at their local stores.

No farmer could survive economically trading exclusively with hotels. The vacation season at Tallulah lasted from the beginning of June to the end of September, a mere four months, though the railroad’s presence meant that the farmers could trade their wares for a longer period of time with a larger market. Relatively light occupancy in early June and late September meant that the actual trading period only lasted three months. Locals who worked at the hotels faced similar pressures. Cooking, cleaning, and other service jobs in the hotels were of a seasonal nature and could not support a family for an entire year. Workers welcomed the extra income that working for a hotel provided, but they did not quit their jobs in droves to move to the town. The tourist industry was not creating new jobs either, as the number of hotels and boarding houses

⁷⁸Letter from H.B. Kirkland to the Cliff House, 1 August 1888, William Tate Family Papers, box 7, folder 4.

⁷⁹*Atlanta Constitution*, 11 September 1877, p. 3.

⁸⁰Cliff House ledgers, 1887, William Tate Family Papers, box 8, folder 2.

had stabilized around seventeen, so some residents of the town and county had to leave to find work. Tallulah Falls actually lost population in the three censuses after its incorporation as a town. It dropped from 149 residents in 1890, to 134 in 1900, to 85 in 1910.⁸¹ Town life based upon employment in the tourist industry alone was not a viable option for most residents of Rabun County.

Tallulah Falls stood at a crossroads in 1900. For all the opportunities that came with the expansion of the railroad, there were also problems. First, even though the railroad improved economic conditions for the residents around Tallulah Falls, the individuals truly benefiting from the region lived in Athens, Atlanta, and other areas outside of Tallulah. They owned the hotels, the timber companies, the railroad, and other major investments that employed local folks. In this next decade the combination of outsider economic power and influence with a lack of local economic opportunity would have dire effects for the future of the falls. As farmers sold land to timber companies or other outsiders looking to develop the natural resources of the region, they lost the ability to stop the larger changes that were soon to come to Tallulah Falls. While the changes brought to Tallulah since 1882 had been significant, they would pale in comparison to the changes visited upon the region during the next fifteen years as hydroelectric power companies vied for the right to develop the latent power of the falls.

⁸¹*Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890; Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900; Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910.*

CHAPTER 2

‘HARNESSING THE FALLS TO TURN ATLANTA’S WHEELS’

If Tallulah Falls stood at a crossroads in 1900, its very future was at stake in 1905. On August 18, 1905 two relatively obscure items appeared in the *Atlanta News* that revealed the fate of Tallulah Falls was still very much in the balance, though mere hints of the challenge to the continuity of the tourist trade were evident in these two items. One item, an advertisement for the Cliff House, implied that the tourist industry was still thriving. The other, a small story about Robert A. Hamby’s proposed resolution in the Georgia State Senate to make Tallulah Falls into a state park betrayed the assumption that everything at Tallulah Falls was exactly like it was in 1900. Looking at the seemingly insignificant pieces in the newspaper that day, only the most inquisitive of minds would have questioned whether Tallulah Falls would remain a thriving tourist destination and in Hamby’s words, a “source of pleasure, profit, and pride to the citizens of this State.”⁸²

Comprehending why Hamby introduced his resolution in August of 1905 requires understanding Tallulah Falls as an object of desire for both conservationists and New South industrialists. Yet, the dynamics at work at Tallulah Falls in the early twentieth century necessitate more than facile descriptions of these two groups. They demand an in-depth examination of the motivations and interests of several groups with very different agendas: local residents, conservationists, and hydroelectric power developers. Much of the story revolves around the insider/outsider dynamic typical of Appalachia’s History. People or groups from outside the mountains dominated the commercialization process in the mountains because of their access to capital and technology. Local inhabitants are, at times, peripheral to the story of their home region because outsiders

⁸²Resolution 43, *Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, 1905* (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing, 1905), 1255.

define the natives' options, but even so they do make choices that contribute to the economic and ecological changes in the area. Outsiders, anyone not from the immediate vicinity of Tallulah Falls, brought a new type of economy to the region, forcing local inhabitants to adapt to changing conditions and later leading both sides in the fight to preserve the falls.

The proposed damming of Tallulah Falls triggered Hamby's introduction of the park resolution and the prospects of making it a park or damming it were both controversial. While the largest obstacle to the dam's construction, Helen Dortch Longstreet and the Tallulah Falls Conservation Association, will be discussed in the next chapter, this chapter will focus on the other aspects of its construction: land acquisition, corporate mergers, competing visions among developers, the proposed state park, local sentiment toward the dam, and the larger political and economic movements that surrounded the events at Tallulah Falls. Without the New South ideology of industrialization, the ability to transmit electricity over long distances, or the split in the conservation movement there would never have been any need to dam Tallulah Falls.

Hamby's resolution, though an important part of Tallulah Falls' history from 1900 to 1915, was only a small part of bigger developments there. It came in the middle of a turbulent period at Tallulah Falls, fifteen years that saw changes more drastic than any previous era. Not even the growth of the tourist industry and the expansion of the timber industry between 1882 and 1900 after the arrival of the railroad brought on the transformation that the construction of a hydroelectric dam brought between 1900 and 1915. Instead of a change of degree—more tourism, more logging, more trade of farm products—the dam meant the complete overhaul of the local economy.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, Tallulah Falls had been a source of pleasure for the people of Georgia since the early days of white settlement. The ad for the Cliff House in the *Atlanta News* implored readers to visit “the most delightful resort

in the South,” and thousands had during the previous two decades.⁸³ Around 1900, at the peak of its popularity, the seventeen hotels and boarding houses in Tallulah Falls accommodated visitors fleeing the stifling heat of the summertime in the South.⁸⁴ Situated nearly 2,200 feet above sea level, the area enjoyed mild summer weather. As an added bonus, the presence of regular railroad service since 1882 made Tallulah Falls easily accessible to those classes with the money and time to spend on vacations. The trip from Atlanta or Athens only lasted a few hours, and travel to the area was quicker than train rides to locations deeper in the Appalachians. Finally, the steep gorge, the scenic falls, and the rushing river around Tallulah attracted affluent vacationers from near and far who wished to enjoy their beauty.

While the search for pleasure brought vacationers to the mountains, it was the desire for profit that led to Tallulah Falls’ development as a timber provider and tourist destination. Access to the falls and the gorge, where vacationers could relax in beautiful and peaceful settings, was central to keeping the tourists, and their money, coming to Tallulah Falls. Unfortunately for the tourist industry, industrialization spread to the area at the same time that tourism expanded, forever altering the region’s economy and environment. Logging denuded the region’s hillsides, which detracted from the aesthetic value of the falls.⁸⁵ Those who would extract value from the land via logging or damming could not coexist with those who depended on access to the unspoiled beauty of the land to appeal to travelers. Two competing methods of profit were headed into a direct confrontation.

Businessmen comprised one party in this approaching battle. These self-appointed leaders of the “New South” believed commercialization and industrialization

⁸³*Atlanta News*, 18 August 1905, p. 2.

⁸⁴Margaret Calhoun and Lynn Speno, *Tallulah Falls* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 1998), 2.

⁸⁵*Acts and Resolutions, 1905*, 1256.

was essential if the South wanted to catch up to the North. Though Grady and the *Constitution* had urged Georgians to visit Tallulah Falls and support the nascent tourist industry there in 1877, by 1900 tourism presented an obstacle to industrialization at Tallulah Falls. Tourism was acceptable, even desirable, when it flourished in places that lacked the natural resources necessary for industrial advancement. While they supported the tourist industry in some areas, these New South business boosters—timber moguls, hydroelectric developers, and mill owners to name a few—refused to let tourism block development of valuable resources. At Tallulah, a place with ample timber lands and a swift running river logging and tourism coexisted as long as the timber industry did not detract from the beauty of the gorge or threaten the falls. However, when technological advances made it possible to develop the hydroelectric generating potential of the Tallulah River, the tenuous balance between tourism and industry disappeared. Harnessing the full electrical capacity of the river required damming the river and diverting the water's flow away from its natural course to a generating plant two miles away, completely destroying the falls. The falls' extinction would mean that Tallulah Falls' hotels, which depended on the attraction of the falls to lure tourists, would go out of business.

Before any of the various electric companies that were contemplating building a dam at Tallulah Falls could turn their plans into reality state senator Robert. A. Hamby proposed making Tallulah Falls a park. He feared for the future of the falls because of the arrival of timber companies and other individuals and companies that were pursuing other commercial enterprises was damaging the area's natural beauty. Pride in the scenic beauty of his native region and the preservation of its tourist industry motivated his actions. Hamby represented Rabun County, which included Tallulah Falls, and he clearly supported the tourist industry over the loggers and the growing number of waterpower developers purchasing land near Tallulah Falls. He argued, "It is the best interest of this State that the State should own said great resort and sufficient property adjacent to the

same for its protection and attraction.”⁸⁶ Hamby introduced his resolution during a period favorable to preserving natural wonders and President Theodore Roosevelt’s staunch advocacy for conservation in the western United States lent credibility to Hamby’s campaign. Many conservationists supported Hamby’s proposal, but as was often the case in the battle for Tallulah Falls, nothing was absolute. Significant ideological differences divided the movement into two camps—the more influential of which often aligned with industrialists because they supported expert directed development of resources. The combined might of the hydroelectric developers and the ideology of powerful conservationists in favor damming, proved a difficult hurdle for Hamby to overcome.

Because outsiders, like the Moss family of Athens – the owners of several hotels and cottages at Tallulah Falls – owned many of the hotels, profits left the region and flowed to Athens or Atlanta where most of the owners lived. While this was relatively insignificant in the short-term – except to the locals – the long-term effects on the tourist industry were catastrophic. Natives, as laborers and not owners, had less of a reason to fight to save the falls and the hotels. If the hotels failed because electric companies dammed the falls, then the locals could expect jobs building the dam and staffing the power plant. The real hope for the indigenous population was that industries might move to the region to take advantage of ample, cheap power. Another effect of the large proportion of absentee landowners, was that it shifted key decision-making processes regarding the future of Tallulah Falls away from the area, and into the hands of people with little permanent connection to the region. These factors played a major role in the outcome of the battle for Tallulah Falls.

It was a specific context – seasonal trade in low-profit goods, seasonal employment at hotels to supplement income, decreasingly fertile farmland, increasingly

⁸⁶*Acts and Resolutions, 1905, 1256.*

denuded forests, and most of the profits from the hotels flowing out of the region to Athens and Atlanta—that confronted the residents in and around Tallulah Falls in 1900. Such conditions proved to be effective arguments for the new business developers coming into the region. These full-fledged supporters of the New South creed understood progress to equal industrialization, but they were a varied lot. One, Boris Magid, was a German immigrant determined to establish a silk producing colony at Tallulah. Another, A. J. Warner, was a former Union General who dreamed of building a hydroelectric dam and shipping the power to Atlanta. Other developers, like Elmer Smith and Henry Atkinson, came to Tallulah after Warner and Magid abandoned their plans, but followed Warner's example of promoting waterpower development. Although these businessmen advanced several different possibilities for development at Tallulah Falls, they agreed that their new economic vision for Tallulah Falls would be centered on industry, not agriculture. Waterpower would drive the new industrial developments in the region, but that meant deciding whether to develop the waterpower into traditional water wheels to turn mills or try a relatively new technology—hydroelectricity. To find inspiration for their endeavors, the men attempting to harness the waterpower looked north to the place that Tallulah Falls had so often been compared: Niagara Falls.

Factories had been harnessing water to run mills for centuries, but after Edison's invention of the light bulb it became desirable to use the waterpower for electrical purposes. Hydroelectric development in North America had begun at Niagara Falls in the late 1880s.⁸⁷ By 1895, the plant at Niagara was the largest electrical generating plant in the world. At an unheard of sum of 50,000 horsepower, it was furnishing electricity to the town of Niagara Falls.⁸⁸ Union Carbide, Pittsburgh Reduction Company (ALCOA), International Acheson Graphite, and Carborundum Company had all moved factories to

⁸⁷Irwin, *The New Niagara*, 97-99.

⁸⁸David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 41.

the town to take advantage of the abundance of cheap power by 1900.⁸⁹ This followed the traditional model of electrical development. Direct current transmission limited the distance that electricity could be effectively transmitted, so factories had to be located close to these generating plants if they were going to utilize electricity. In larger cities, this limitation required several plants throughout the city to meet its various energy demands. Constructing a power plant that ran on fossil fuels or developing the latent hydroelectric power in a stream was usually a boon to a town during the heyday of direct current transmission, because companies often built new factories near the source of their electricity.⁹⁰

However, in the same year that the Niagara generating plant began producing power, the alternating current system came into practical use. Many in the power industry, including some at Niagara Falls, had anticipated the development of a means to transmit electricity over long-distances and welcomed it. They knew that the hydroelectric plant at Niagara Falls would provide more power than the native industries at the town of Niagara Falls could use unless some of the current could be transmitted over twenty miles to Buffalo.⁹¹ Alternating current allowed for the transfer of electricity over great distances with little loss of energy and with its advent factories would no longer have to be located within miles of the generating plants, but the electricity could be sent wherever it was needed within a 200-mile radius.⁹²

The most famous early example of long-distance power transmission technology occurred at the ill-fated Pan American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901. Before President McKinley's assassination during his visit there marred the perception of Buffalo's fair,

⁸⁹Ibid., 220.

⁹⁰Irwin, *The New Niagara*, 107.

⁹¹Ibid., 105.

⁹²Nye, *Electrifying America*, 196; Irwin, *The New Niagara*, 125..

it was best known for its extensive use of electricity from Niagara. The ability to transmit electricity was a technological marvel and a point of pride for Niagara and Buffalo.⁹³ It was also a death knell to some of the Niagara Falls' boosters who had envisioned a future with the town as a major metropolis. In 1890, with the power plant on the cusp of going operational, the Niagara Falls Chamber of Commerce estimated that the town would grow to a population of 2,739,000, based on statistics that showed an average of 4.98 persons per unit horsepower produced at traditional waterpower sites, usually mill towns.⁹⁴ Niagara Falls never approached three million inhabitants because the advances in transmission technology made it possible to spread Niagara's power to Buffalo and other areas in New York.

As knowledge of the conversion of Niagara's latent power into useful electricity circulated, developers began to search for other rivers and falls that might also be harnessed. While few possibilities possessed the potential of Niagara, likely candidates emerged throughout the country. David Nye, in his social history of electricity in America, writes of this period, "large tracts of irrigable land were monopolized by a few companies, and water resources often were developed without regard for needs other than power generation."⁹⁵ Unlike Niagara, where the volume of water allowed for the diversion of enough water to turn turbines without damming the river and drying up the falls, most of the newer hydroelectric projects required the construction of dams and the creation of large lakes. Horatio Livermore dammed the American River in California and sent its electricity to Sacramento to power its lights, streetcars, and industries.⁹⁶ Georgia had also seen the beginnings of hydroelectric development near Atlanta. The Atlanta

⁹³Irwin, *The New Niagara*, 161-162.

⁹⁴Ibid., 136-137.

⁹⁵Nye, *Electrifying America*, 183.

⁹⁶Ibid., 196.

Water and Electric Power Company dammed the Chattahoochee River in 1904, creating the largest waterpower development in the state.⁹⁷

Power companies viewed the Tallulah River as perfect for hydroelectric development for two reasons. First, the river possessed good volume and swift flow, both prerequisites but the Tallulah Gorge possessed another advantage. Its steep sides could be easily dammed, with the dam anchored into the rock walls. This created a deep lake that could hold a large amount of water, without taking as much surface area as a comparable shallow lake. Because of the depth of the lake, the company could purchase less land than average for a lake of comparable acreage, saving it some money. Finally, Tallulah Falls' location about seventy miles northeast of Atlanta, a city hungry for electricity to power everything from factories to streetcars, was also favorable.

Surprisingly, with all the focus on hydroelectricity, one of the first industrial developers to take an interest in Tallulah Falls had a completely different vision for the region. Louis Magid was born in Germany, graduated from the University of Padua, and immigrated to America. At the turn of the century a wave of excitement about silk weaving and silk cultivation swept the nation, and whether he was an instigator of the silk fad, or merely someone swept up in it, Magid became a major player in the silk industry. He opened a silk mill in Massachusetts, which led one commentator to describe him as 'well known in the North as 'a promoter' of ambitious enterprises, particularly to capitalists in Boston and New York.'⁹⁸ Magid's search for a suitable place to start a silk farm took him around the South and his appearance was usually followed by 'notes of exultation and bright forecasts of a silkworm inhabited Utopia,' in local papers.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Wade H. Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company, 1855-1956* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1957), 107-109.

⁹⁸'Sericulture,' (Silk Association of America, 1903), Louis B. Magid Papers, Archives, Library and Information Center, Georgia Institute of Technology, (Hereafter LBM papers). box 4

⁹⁹'Will Make His Home at Tallulah,' *American Silk Journal*, September 1902, LBM papers.

Georgia intrigued Magid because silk had been produced in Georgia before the American Revolution. This silk cultivation centered around Savannah, which had a slightly warmer climate than Tallulah Falls, but Magid felt the weather conditions in the north Georgia mountains were perfect for his project. He realized that cotton would still be the king of southern agriculture, but he wanted to convince farmers to supplement their income with silk production. He believed that, “in silk culture will be found the solution of many problems which have been vexing the rural districts of Georgia.” Silk cultivation would provide work for “surplus labor,” mostly women and children who did not find full-time work on farms.¹⁰⁰ At Tallulah Falls Magid found a place with a suitable climate, surplus labor, and a steady supply of water to power the silk mills he planned to build to process the raw product.

In 1902, Magid founded the Seri-Culture and Manufacturing Company at Tallulah Falls. The eccentric entrepreneur bought land from E.E. Mitchell and set to work implementing a comprehensive development plan for the area.¹⁰¹ He proposed separating 2,500 of his 3,000 acres into 100 farms of twenty-five acres each filled with mulberry trees and populated by Italians familiar with the silk producing process. After a few years, when the farms begin to produce sizable amounts of raw silk, he would construct a mill that would employ 300 people, mostly women and children. A small hydroelectric plant would power this mill, and result in a town full of, “modern homes equipped with all conveniences, including electric lights and water system.”¹⁰² The town, Tallulah Park, would also include a library, school, church, and a bank.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Louis B. Magid, Speech to Farmer’s National Congress, reproduced in *Clarksville Advertiser*, 7 April 1903, LBM papers, box 4.

¹⁰¹Coulter, *Georgia Waters*, 42-43.

¹⁰²Press clipping, *Dixie Magazine*, p. 24, LBM papers, box 4.

¹⁰³*Prospectus of the Seri-Culture and Manufacturing Company*, (Tallulah Lodge, Georgia, 1903), 4, LBM papers, box 4.

Magid's comprehensive plans for development near Tallulah Falls ran into one small problem: silk could not be produced and spun as cheaply in America as it could be done overseas. It is unclear when he realized this fact and decided to abandon his title as "Georgia's Silk Magnate,"¹⁰⁴ but by 1908 he had shifted his interests from silk to tourism and waterpower. Magid did not mention his silk cultivation plans in his 1904 full-page advertisement/article about the recently completed extension of the Tallulah Falls Railroad in the *Atlanta Constitution*, but focused on the other economic opportunities that availed themselves to him at Tallulah. In this article, Magid wrote, "that unlimited power is yet unutilized in this section . . . ambitious plans are afoot, backed by ample capital, to dot the entire region with summer homes and hotels."¹⁰⁵ Even though his silk scheme had collapsed, Magid continued to buy land and look to develop the area around Tallulah. On September 15, 1905, The *Athens Weekly Banner* reported that Magid had purchased the "entire property at Tallulah Falls, including the Cliff House," from the Moss family of Athens, which had owned it from its construction.¹⁰⁶ The *Weekly Banner* overstated Magid's purchase, as much of the town of Tallulah Falls and land bordering the gorge remained in the hands of local farmers and owners of the other hotels. Still, Magid's purchase showed that waterpower development was progressing at the falls.

The Moss family, one of the largest landowners at Tallulah Falls, was not only selling land to Magid; they had also formed the Tallulah Falls Development Company and were still purchasing strategically located tracts of land as well. As middlemen, they could buy land and resell it to Magid or other hydroelectric companies at a profit. While the Moss family had made the bulk of its land purchases between 1893 and 1905,¹⁰⁷ they

¹⁰⁴Press clipping, unknown date and origin, LBM papers, clipping book.

¹⁰⁵Louis B. Magid, "This Railway to Open Georgia Switzerland," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 May 1905, p.1.

¹⁰⁶*Athens Weekly Banner*, 15 September 1905, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷Rabun County, *Filing Docket and General Index Deeds and Realty Mortgage, L-Z, 1821-1940*, record book, x.

continued their land purchases until 1909 when the Tallulah Falls Development Company sold its holdings to the Atlanta Power Company for over \$100,000. One of the provisions of the sale was that the Moss family reserved the right to use their remaining hotels and cottages as long as they do not interfere with electric and hydroelectric development. If the Atlanta Power Company needed the land the hotels sat upon, they had to give the Tallulah Falls Development Company sixty days notice and the Moss family would have to remove the buildings.¹⁰⁸

Magid's purchase of the Moss property, combined with his previous holdings, gave him control of 'one of the largest water powers in the South.'¹⁰⁹ But, as the Moss family's sale of land to another power company four years later evinced, his ascendance to the top of the South's waterpower hierarchy was short-lived. Other industrialists had also moved into the region and had purchased lands from local owners with the intent of developing the Tallulah River's current into hydroelectricity. On September 18, 1905—only three days after his purchase of the Moss property was announced—Magid learned that 700 acres of prime land along the gorge had been sold to 'two Atlanta capitalists for \$30,000.' According to the article the unnamed purchasers wanted to acquire more land.¹¹⁰ Their plans for the 700 acres were simple: "a large power plant would be erected there and the falls used as the source of power."¹¹¹

Magid apparently felt that the 'two Atlanta capitalists' had cheated him out of those 700 acres, and he concluded that the incursions by them and others portended an ominous future for his dream of hydroelectric hegemony. Less than two weeks after the sale of the 700-acre plot, the *Atlanta News* reported that Magid was going to challenge

¹⁰⁸Tallulah Falls Development Company to Atlanta Power Company, *Deeds and Realty Mortgage*, Rabun County, record x354, 2 November 1909.

¹⁰⁹*Athens Banner-Weekly*, 15 September 1905, p. 2.

¹¹⁰*Atlanta News*, 18 September 1905, p. 9.

¹¹¹*Athens Banner*, 29 September 1905, p. 4.

the sale. He threatened to sue the new owners because of a dispute over who held the option to purchase the land. However, nothing further developed from Magid's threat and he also failed to follow through on his plans to build a dam there. In 1912, when the Georgia Railway and Power Company acquired Magid's property, they were in the final stages of the hydroelectric development of the river.¹¹²

A.J. Warner, a former Union general and congressman from Ohio, was one of Magid's competitors at Tallulah Falls. Warner organized the North Georgia Electric Company around 1900 with the intention of developing the waterpower potential north of Atlanta. The official history of the Georgia Power Company noted that Warner "expressed the opinion that, with the exception of Buffalo, New York, there was no city in the country more advantageously situated with respect to the development of hydroelectric power than Atlanta."¹¹³ Spurred by such convictions, and with financial backing from investors in Ohio Warner purchased lands at Tallulah and other prospective hydroelectric sites over the next few years in the hopes building a generating plant.¹¹⁴ Unfortunately for Warner, the North Georgia Electric Company defaulted on its bonds and had to sell out to the Atlanta Power Company.

The Atlanta Power Company was another in a long line of corporations trying to develop power sources near Atlanta. Like Warner, the founders and main investors in the Atlanta Power Company were northerners. C. Elmer Smith and S. Fahs Smith, brothers from York, Pennsylvania, convinced George G. Moore of Detroit and Elliot G. Stevenson of Detroit and Toronto to finance the Tallulah Falls hydroelectric project. Elmer Smith had made a trip to Tallulah Falls in the spring of 1909 and, like others before him, was so impressed with the potential of the falls that he directed the company to pay \$108,960 in

¹¹²Atlanta Hydroelectric Company to Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Deeds and Realty Mortgage*, Rabun County, record x352.

¹¹³Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 110.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 110-112.

cash to the Moss's for "a strategically located tract of land, considered indispensable for the full economic development of Tallulah Gorge for water power purposes."¹¹⁵ At the same time he and his brother were operating the Atlanta Power Company, Elmer Smith was also forming the Georgia Power Company for the specific purpose of harnessing Tallulah Falls. Eventually, Smith arranged for the Georgia Power Company to assume the holdings of the Atlanta Power Company and to be the point organization on developing Tallulah Falls.¹¹⁶

One common denominator in the companies developing Tallulah Falls was that northerners ran or owned them. Ironically, like other places and industries in the post-Civil War era, the leaders of the New South, were not southern. Even the president of the Tallulah Falls Railroad was from New York.¹¹⁷ Northern businessmen—Magid, Warner, the Smiths—had access to capital and the foresight to see that even though the demand for power in Atlanta and its surroundings far exceeded the potential supply from Tallulah and other hydroelectric plants in north Georgia. But Atlanta's growth into a major industrial and commercial center indicated that it might soon consume all of Tallulah's excess production. For all their bluster about creating a New South, southern industrialists in Georgia were either unable or unwilling to pursue hydroelectric projects. While some of this may have been due to the lack of available capital in the South compared to the North, it appears that the only contribution Georgians made in the early stages of the construction process was selling land to corporations controlled by northerners.

One Georgian did take an interest in all of these land transactions and plans for development, but not as a promoter of a dam. Senator Hamby from Rabun County

¹¹⁵Ibid., 114.

¹¹⁶Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 113-114, 116. James F. Crist, *They Electrified the South: The Story of the Southern Electric System* (n.p.: by the author, 1981), 28.

¹¹⁷Magid, "This Railway to Open Georgia Switzerland," p.1.

introduced a resolution exploring the possibility of making Tallulah Falls a state park realized that the best chance to stop the damming of the falls was before any construction started. His resolution stated: ‘It is the best interest of this State that the State should own said great resort and sufficient property adjacent to the same for its protection and attraction.’¹¹⁸ Hamby proffered his resolution before the well-funded corporations, like Smith’s Georgia Power Company, started buying land near Tallulah, but even the acquisitions of Magid and Warner were enough to alarm him. The previous owners, both local farmers and even outsiders like the Moss family, either did not care or encouraged visitors to cross their land to enjoy the gorge. For whatever reason, the new owners denied tourists the right to access the gorge through their lands, which proved detrimental to the tourist industry. According to Hamby’s resolution the area surrounding the falls, ‘is now owned and in possession of private individuals, who are denuding the same of its magnificent forest and are otherwise dismantling and disfiguring the same, and who have closed, or partially closed, the same to the public.’ The House and Senate passed the resolution on August 22, 1905 with the caveat that the ‘investigation shall be made without cost to the State.’¹¹⁹

Issues of cost and money pervaded the debate over making Tallulah Falls a park, a fact the *Atlanta News* recognized before the resolution passed. In an article entitled ‘Tallulah and the State’s Opportunity,’ the *News* pleaded: ‘sometime, when Georgia is in a cultured and generous mood, and when the key is found which Bob Toombs flung away when he locked the treasury, the state should buy that magnificent domain of scenery Tallulah Falls.’¹²⁰ General Robert Toombs had been a member of the Confederate cabinet, and played an important role in the Georgia constitutional convention of 1877.

¹¹⁸Resolution 43, *Acts and Resolutions*, 1256.

¹¹⁹Resolution 43, *Acts and Resolutions*, 1256.

¹²⁰*Atlanta News*, 29 July 1905, p. 4.

His lasting contribution to Georgia's government from this convention was his insistence on fiscal frugality.¹²¹ As a response to the supposedly "extravagant" spending of the Reconstruction government, Georgia did not subsidize railroads, reigned in state bonds, and cut down on state spending.¹²² The fact that the investigation had to be done without cost to the state foreshadowed the likelihood that if the cost of buying the land for a state park was anything other than minimal, it would likely fail.

Even though this campaign had little chance of success, its supporters jumped into the fray with aplomb. Eleven days after the first appeal in the paper, the *Atlanta News* published a poem by R.B. Adair about Tallulah Falls. After beholding the falls for the first time, she gushed, "It belongs in Georgia! Then why not to Georgia?"¹²³ Other papers joined the campaign to make Tallulah Falls a park. The *Athens Banner-Weekly*, located in the hometown of many annual visitors to Tallulah, asserted "every person in Georgia has an interest in this natural wonder, and that interest should be so strongly manifested that the proper steps will be taken to prevent the proposed destruction of the beauty of the falls of Tallulah." According to the editorial a dam augured the "utter destruction of one of the grandest pieces of scenery in this country."¹²⁴ Contrary to the hydroelectricity developers' claims later claims, the public in 1905 understood that damming the river meant the falls would lose their previous majesty and would likely stop flowing altogether.

On the surface, this seemed a clear battle between conservationists and industrialists. Electric companies and entrepreneurs wanted to dam the river and conservationists led by Hamby, the *Atlanta News*, and the *Athens Banner* sought to

¹²¹Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 21.

¹²²Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 229.

¹²³*Atlanta News*, 10 August 1905, p. 4.

¹²⁴*Athens Banner-Weekly*, 6 October 1905, p.4.

protect the falls. However, the realities of the conservation movement in the early twentieth century complicated this conflict. Even among avowed conservationists a debate raged over the best approach to “conserve” natural resources. For utilitarian conservationists, conservation meant a policy of wise development of natural resources that benefited the most people. The scenic preservationists, led by John Muir, took a more radical view of nature. They asserted that certain places were so beautiful that they should be harbored from all commercial encroachment.¹²⁵ The group that formed to oppose the dam at Tallulah Falls belonged to the scenic preservationist category. Any redirection or reduction of the flow over Tallulah Falls would destroy the main attraction drawing tourists to the area, so utilitarian conservationists had no place in the fight to save the falls.

Historian Dan Pierce has defined utilitarian conservationists as those who “believed in the wise, managed use of natural resources, under the direction of scientifically trained experts. They opposed ‘locking up’ resources in national parks and valued management over preservation.”¹²⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, long lauded as the first environmentally conscious president, supported the utilitarians, further frustrating matters for the preservationists. Gifford Pinchot, Roosevelt’s close friend and the future head of the United States Forest Service exemplified the utilitarian conservationist ideology during the early 1900s. His simple formula, “the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run,” became the mantra of the utilitarians. This would ensure both the long-

¹²⁵For a fuller explanation of the ideology of the scenic preservationists and utilitarian conservationists see Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, second revised edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) 68-71, and Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 189-198. Runte and Hays place the two groups in the context of the debate over building a reservoir in the Hetch Hetchy valley of California, which occurred contemporaneously with the Tallulah Falls debate.

¹²⁶Pierce, *The Great Smokies*, 38; Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 189-198; Runte, *National*, 68-71. The terms “scenic preservationists” and “utilitarian conservationists” are Hays’ and not my own.

term survival of forests and the profitability of lumber operations. Often, this equation thwarted preservationists' attempts to save scenic sites.

In 1903, the split within the conservation movement first came to the fore over a proposed reservoir in northern California. The city of San Francisco wanted to build the dam in Yosemite National Park and flood the Hetch Hetchy Valley, which a few thousand tourists visited every year. Because the reservoir would serve nearly 500,000 San Franciscans, the utilitarians supported the dam, while the preservationists opposed it because the dam would wreak massive environmental changes. Preservationists railed against the destruction of such a beautiful area, but after a ten-year fight, they failed to convince the public and the federal government that saving Hetch Hetchy was more beneficial than building the reservoir.¹²⁷

When the effort to save Tallulah Falls began two years later, the arguments followed a similar pattern to Hetch Hetchy. Preservationists appealed to the public to stop the destruction of the falls, but failed to show most citizens of Georgia how saving Tallulah Falls would benefit them. Nowhere in the written appeals did the writers adopt a utilitarian tone and plead for Tallulah based on the jobs it would save, and maybe even create, through the tourist industry. Instead, the preservationists stuck to language rooted in beauty and not pragmatism. Unfortunately, the Georgia of the first decade of the twentieth century was not a place where appeals such as "future generations will upbraid the Georgia of today if we fail to lay hands on this surpassing scenery and consecrate it to the joy and happiness of the people," by the *Athens Banner Herald* were liable to find attentive ears.¹²⁸

Instead, industrialists effectively appropriated the language of the utilitarians. The promised hydroelectric plant "would be the agency of supplying power for many

¹²⁷Pierce, *The Great Smokies*, 43; Runte, *National Parks*, 78-81.

¹²⁸"Tallulah and the State's Opportunity," *Atlanta News*, 29 July 1905, p. 4.

new industries which would likely follow its development.”¹²⁹ Because of the ability to transfer power over many miles, these new economic developments came in Atlanta instead of Tallulah Falls, but the natives of Rabun and Habersham counties did not envision this outcome in 1905. Much like the denizens of Niagara Falls when the hydropower development was first proposed, the inhabitants of Habersham and Rabun counties in the early 1900s expected great growth to follow the hydroelectric development. Others, with a clearer view understood that the Georgia Power Company did not care if industry came to Tallulah or not. They were, ‘harnessing the falls to turn Atlanta’s wheels.’¹³⁰

Besides the utilitarian language, the hydroelectric advocates had an equally useful tool in the cultural significance electricity had acquired in American life. Electricity assumed a mythic status in American thought soon after Edison demonstrated that it could be put to practical use. In many Americans’ minds, electricity was the answer to a myriad of problems, from job shortages to health ailments. For elites in rural or undeveloped areas, like much of the South, electrifying their towns was a method to distance themselves from a stigma of backwardness. Throughout the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries towns rushed to build generating plants to power everything from streetcars to street lights. It was easy to gain support for hydroelectric projects as the public believed the power they would provide augured for a brighter future, both figuratively and literally.¹³¹

Locals, at least elite ones, appeared to be either in support of the hydroelectric development at Tallulah or unwilling to oppose it publicly. In the midst of a legal battle to save the falls in 1912, the editor of the *Clayton Tribune*, the closest newspaper to

¹²⁹*Athens Banner Herald*, 13 November 1908, p. 4.

¹³⁰“Tallulah the Terrible,” *Madisonian* (Madison, Ga.), 12 July 1912, p. 4.

¹³¹Nye, *Electrifying America*, 138-184.

Tallulah Falls, claimed that a dam and power development was “more beneficial and better than virgin falls.”¹³² The *Toccoa Record* chimed in that same year: “Surely some good will come to these mountains and this state,” due to a dam, including fishing, lakes, hotels, lights, and, “last but not least, education for these mountain children.”¹³³ Finally, the *Record* revealed the main motivation for the support locals lent to industrialists. After the dam was finished, “factories will be springing up during the next ten years in the smaller towns and villages of the state as never before in its history.”¹³⁴

Locals still owned a majority of the acres necessary to build a dam and reservoir. The tourist trade benefited locals in small ways, but seasonal trade and employment in low wage jobs did not effectively wed natives to the tourist industry when another option came available. The *Toccoa Record's* editor argued for the construction of a new hotel at Toccoa while the hotels at Tallulah were facing extinction because, “many find jobs in and around such an institution . . . it means work when other work is slack and employment is hard to find.”¹³⁵ But other employment options, like logging, required local landowners to give up their farms as the timber industry moved deeper into the mountains in search of virgin forests and offered more sustained job opportunities. The dam must have seemed like a godsend to the locals. First, they could sell their depleted farmland to the electric companies at a relatively good price. Second, if they so chose, they could stay in the region and help to build the dam, power plant, and the tunnel that connected the two. Finally, the locals hoped that the higher paying industrial jobs would replace the low paying seasonal jobs lost due to the construction of the dam. It is no surprise that they did not support creating a park; it worked against their economic self-interest.

¹³²“Power Development at Tallulah Falls,” *Toccoa Record*, 21 March 1912, p. 6.

¹³³“Work Done at Tallulah Falls,” *Toccoa Record*, 19 September 1912, p. 10.

¹³⁴“What Power at Tallulah Will Mean,” *Toccoa Record*, 7 November 1912, p. 4.

¹³⁵*Toccoa Record*, 8 August 1912.

But, of course, damming the river and diverting water away from the falls was not in the self-interest of hotel owners if they wanted to continue to operate their hotels. Therefore, their silence is difficult to comprehend. Individual motivations for their silence probably varied, and, unfortunately, they left no record of their thoughts on the issue. The editor of the *Madison Madisonian*, a town twenty-five miles south of Athens, gave some insight into their thinking: ‘The owners of the Falls realized they could get an enormous price for the water power the falls afford . . . they sold it to the power company for a satisfactory price.’¹³⁶ The rhetoric of utilitarian conservationists might have fooled some owners into believing that the completed dam would leave the falls in their original state. Others might have been ready to get out of the tourism business altogether. As the railroad expanded farther into the mountains, it made new resort areas in east Tennessee and western North Carolina accessible, enticing some tourists away from Tallulah with the promise of even milder summer climates. Whatever their motivations, the hotel owners’ complicity with the power companies damaged the scenic preservationist cause.

Hamby’s committee submitted its findings to Georgia’s legislature in 1906, and, as expected, money dominated the report. After the obligatory lauding of the beauty of Tallulah Falls, the committee recommended that the state purchase about 1,000 acres of land along the gorge. ‘Many small lots of land, owned by quite a number of parties,’ comprised the thousand acres, but accurately gauging the cost of buying the land was outside the purview of the committee. They estimated that purchasing the tracts would cost the state approximately \$100,000, which they acknowledged might not be available from the state’s treasury. Anticipating that the legislature was not going to provide the necessary funds in 1906, the committee asked to be continued and not disbanded, and for permission to begin inquiring about prices for specific tracts of land. The legislature declined to approve any further action by the committee. Over the next four years, the

¹³⁶‘Tallulah The Terrible,’ *Madisonian* (Madison, Ga.), 12 July 1912.

issue fell out of the public mind, with only the *Athens Banner Weekly* still arguing for a park, and asking the public to “drop their materialistic ideas long enough to allow some sentiment and the real good of the people to have a play.”¹³⁷ The legislature never acted on any of these calls, leading E. Merton Coulter to opine that because of the legislature, “nothing was done and this hopeful movement died.”¹³⁸ Fittingly, legislators in Atlanta – more outsiders, though Southerners – sealed Tallulah Falls’ fate through their inaction.

Though Magid and others had begun to purchase land and make preparations for a dam at Tallulah before the legislature made a decision on creating a park, the hydroelectric developers moved in earnest after Hamby’s resolution failed. The Georgia Power Company, under Elmer Smith’s direction, took the lead in raising the capital necessary for such a large work. One of the goals of the Georgia Power Company at Tallulah was consolidation and elimination of its competitors there, and Smith’s company absorbed all the competitors it could, usually when those companies encountered financial difficulties. This process culminated with the Georgia Power Company’s purchase of the Blue Ridge Electric Company, which controlled all lands of the North Georgia Electric Company, which included the properties formerly held by the Southern Light and Power Company.¹³⁹ By 1911, Smith’s Georgia Power Company was the only large electric company still at Tallulah.

When the time came to start building the dam, Smith contracted with the Northern Construction Company of Michigan, which then sub-contracted with the Northern Contracting Company of New York, to build the Tallulah Falls dam.¹⁴⁰ As the cost for the dam mounted, the Georgia Power Company found itself in the position of many of the

¹³⁷“Tallulah Falls Park,” *Athens Weekly Banner*, 20 November 1908, p. 4.

¹³⁸Coulter, *Georgia Waters*, 42.

¹³⁹*Deeds and Realty Mortgage*, Rabun County, record x85.

¹⁴⁰Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 116-117.

smaller firms it had assimilated: it had neither the available funds nor the prospective consumers to finish the construction.¹⁴¹ Smith's company began negotiations to sell their power to the Georgia Railway and Electric Company of Atlanta. These negotiations led to the consolidation of these two corporations into the entity that would finally be able to make a hydroelectric dam at Tallulah a reality: the Georgia Railway and Power Company.¹⁴²

Like the other electric companies, northerners owned and operated the Georgia Railway and Power Company. Henry M. Atkinson, a native of Brookline, Massachusetts, graduate of Harvard had come to Atlanta in 1886, at the age of twenty-four. He eagerly involved himself in the industrial developments of Atlanta and the rest of Georgia, founding a streetcar line and a railroad. After a few years of running his own line, Atkinson consolidated all the streetcar lines into the Georgia Railway and Electric Company under his control in 1902. This made him a major consumer of electricity and led to the natural alliance with the Georgia Power Company to supply his streetcars with power. Atkinson, seeing an opportunity, realized that his access to credit lines from Northern sources (his original backers included the Cabots and Lodges of Massachusetts, and his backers for the Tallulah Falls consolidation and construction was Drexel and Company of Philadelphia) could provide the necessary capital.¹⁴³ In March 1912, the merger became final and the Georgia Railway and Power Company came into existence with enough money to finish the job, which was already 25 percent complete.¹⁴⁴

Constructing the dam was a massive and expensive undertaking. First, the purchase of land from individual landholders constituted a substantial initial outlay. The

¹⁴¹Crist, *They Electrified the South*, 28.

¹⁴²Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 121.

¹⁴³Crist, *They Electrified the South*, 32; Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 121.

¹⁴⁴Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 132.

Atlanta Power Company's \$108,000 payment to the Moss family was just the beginning. The Georgia Power Company spent thousands of dollars in 1911 and 1912 to secure more land at Tallulah Falls because they had to own land above the falls which was to be flooded for the lake. Some locals held out selling until 1912, but when the dam's construction was well advanced they began to sell to the power company. Some Rabun County residents took advantage of the situation to make a quick profit, buying land from their neighbors and reselling it to Georgia Power at higher prices.¹⁴⁵ However, land purchase expenses paled in comparison to the costs that came with the start of construction.

Tallulah was the largest dam to ever be attempted in Georgia in 1910, and it would create a large man-made lake with a surface area of 63 acres. The engineers picked a spot directly above the Indian Arrow Rapids for the dam, which meant no flow of water to the four major cataracts. This spot maximized the drop of the water through the tunnel and penstocks, generating the most electricity possible. The dam itself was a masonry structure 116 feet tall and 400 feet long. An underground tunnel 6,666 feet long blasted through solid rock took water from the dam to a holding area above the powerhouse, where it fell 608 feet in six penstocks five feet each in diameter. The force of the water moving through the penstocks turned the turbines at the powerhouse, and the five turbines were connected to five 12,000-kilowatt generators. From there, the power was spread throughout 800 miles of transmission wires all over north Georgia, and by six high tension copper wires on 781 steel towers to Atlanta.¹⁴⁶ The cost for all this blasting, construction, materials, and equipment ran into the millions, and this did not include workers' salaries.

¹⁴⁵ *Deeds and Realty Mortgage*, Rabun County, records x203, x204, x226, x227, 228, x230, x236, x245, x254.

¹⁴⁶ *Waterpower Developments in North Georgia*, (Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1924), 1.

Between 1,000 and 1,200 men worked at the construction site. Many men came from out-of-county, or even out-of-state, to work on the hydroelectric power and the company always needed more laborers. Georgia Power reported: "Employment is given to practically every man who applies for a job." During the blasting, several workers died, usually due to accidents with dynamite. A sympathetic commentator noted, "the mortality, when it is considered that from 1,000 to 1,200 are regularly employed at this work, is not regarded as unusually large . . . accidents will happen in spite of precautions taken." In early February the *Gainesville News* reported that a Gainesville undertaker, D.C. Stow, "has been called to the works of the company at the Falls five times since Christmas to prepare for burial the bodies of the many victims of accidents there."¹⁴⁷ While this rate of work site mortality may have been normal or even acceptable, there was no doubt that constructing the dam was a dangerous, as well as an expensive, job.

On September 23, 1913 the first of the generating units at the Tallulah Falls powerhouse went into operation. By April of the following year the last generator was operational and the latent power of Tallulah, now held behind a massive dam, had been harnessed and sent throughout north Georgia. When it began operation, the Tallulah Falls plant was by far the largest generating plant in Georgia, and the largest hydroelectric development in the South.¹⁴⁸ It represented nearly two-thirds of the total generating capacity of the Georgia Railway and Power Company. But it was only the first of a series of dams and power plants that Georgia Railway and Power planned to construct over the next decade in north Georgia. The company built five more dams and three more generating plants on the Tallulah and Tugaloo rivers by 1930.¹⁴⁹ These subsequent developments were made possible by the successful completion of the

¹⁴⁷"Killed in T.F. Tunnel," *Gainesville News*, 8 February 1911, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 143.

¹⁴⁹*Waterpower Development in North Georgia*, 5.

Tallulah Falls project. Though the dams benefited locals in the short run in the sense that they were able to sell land and work on the construction crews, it was the outsiders who controlled Georgia Railway and Power Company that made the profits and controlled the future of the region.

Outsiders, especially the affluent ones who visited and developed Tallulah Falls, determined the region's destiny from the arrival of the railroad on. When the railroad came, it brought outsider-owned hotels and timber companies. More industrialists followed, searching for ways to turn the rushing waters of the Tallulah River into electricity. The power lines and railroads shipped more than electricity and logs from the mountains to the cities, they carried the profits away from the local residents, further limiting their already shrinking economic options. Still, outsiders – whether they were hotel owners or industrialists—were not evil people bent on destroying a natural wonder or a native culture.

Some outsiders brought positive changes to the region, though some their decisions appear shortsighted by today's standards. Tourists and industrialists contributed to the growth and development of Tallulah Falls and all of north Georgia. In 1901 the Athens YMCA established a summer camp near the falls that continues to operate.¹⁵⁰ Some female tourists noticed the lack of a school in Tallulah Falls and Mrs. Mary Ann Lipscomb proposed that the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs raise money to build a school. In 1905, the Federation agreed and the school opened its doors in 1909 – the only school in a ten-mile radius.¹⁵¹ Outsiders did not only take; they also gave to Tallulah Falls.

While the economic options presented to natives may have been limited, these options were more varied than for earlier inhabitants of the mountains. A farming crisis

¹⁵⁰YMCA Camp brochure in Tallulah Falls Folder, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

¹⁵¹Lipscomb, "Developments at Tallulah Falls," 385.

loomed on the horizon for Appalachian farmers after 1880. The soil was depleted, most of the available land was taken, and increased population meant continually shrinking farm sizes. The arrival of the railroad, the timber industry, hotels, and the hydroelectric plant offered a chance to work as a logger, trade with the hotels, and sell unprofitable lands at a decent price. Not all farmers were happy with the new conditions, but whether they chose to remain farmers or become wage laborers, it was their choice. In the end, they typically chose whatever option offered them the greatest opportunity for economic gain.

The contest over the future of Tallulah Falls was part of a larger debate about land use at the turn of the twentieth century. It provided the ground where tourism, industrialization, and conservation came into conflict and into agreement with each other. Scenic preservationists such as Hamby fought against the utilitarians who dominated the conservation movement in the early 1900s. Preservationists failed to overcome the utilitarian ideology at Tallulah Falls and Hetch Hetchy because their appeals to preserve natural beauty for its own sake undersold the economic benefits of tourism. If they had emphasized tourism's potential economic benefits, then the preservationists could have turned the utilitarian ideology against its original proponents. The silence and complicity of the tourist industry, a vital part of the economy in many parts of the New South, allowed utilitarian conservationists and industrialists to appropriate the powerful message of economic benefit. Utilitarian ideology counted the damming of Tallulah Falls as a reasonable application of this utilitarian thought, which held that managed, scientific development of resources was acceptable. Hamby and the preservationists lost their battle to make Tallulah Falls a park because they focused on natural wonders, and, as beautiful as these natural wonders were, the public, both around the falls and throughout the rest of Georgia, was more concerned with profit than with pleasure.

Although locals and outsiders made rational economic choices in their pursuit of profit, they must be held accountable for the impact of these choices. The blind pursuit

of economic gain, though not unique to Tallulah Falls in 1905, does not excuse the industrialists, and, to a lesser extent, the locals from the long-term effects of their decisions. Logging the forest and damming the river destroyed the natural habitats of countless fish and game, removed families from farms they had owned for years, and wrecked one of the most beautiful natural wonders in Georgia. Not even the positive contributions that industrialists made to Tallulah Falls – establishing a school, providing jobs, and so forth – can atone for depriving future generations of a chance to see the falls. Neither can the economic struggles of the local inhabitants absolve them of responsibility for their complicity in the destruction of Tallulah Falls. This destruction occurred even though tourism provided an alternate and more environmentally friendly vision, which would have saved the falls for public enjoyment.

Tallulah Falls did not remain a “source of pleasure, profit, and pride” to all the citizens of Georgia. While the state of Georgia was unable, or unwilling to even attempt, to scrape together \$100,000 to buy lands near the falls, the hydroelectric interests did.¹⁵² Before the Georgia Railway and Power Company finished the Tallulah Falls dam, they had to overcome one last challenge. When the threat to Georgia’s greatest scenic wonder seemed imminent, conservationists once again began to campaign to save the falls. This time Helen Dortch Longstreet of Gainesville, not Robert A. Hamby of Rabun County, led the fight. Once again, the future of Tallulah Falls depended on the actions and concerns of outsiders, but by the time this battle was finished the dam was complete and the falls had vanished.

¹⁵²Wright, *History of the Georgia Power Company*, 114.

CHAPTER 3

“THE UNEQUAL STRUGGLE OF ONE WOMAN”

Eighteen months before the first generating unit went online at Tallulah Falls, the future of the dam seemed secure. The editor of the *Athens Weekly Banner* lamented: “There seems now to be no doubt concerning the destruction of the scenic beauty of Tallulah Falls in order to harness the water-power of the river at that point for commercial purposes.” He rued the fact that the state had missed an opportunity to make the area a park with Hamby’s resolution, but he did not blame the government for this failure. Instead, he placed the fault on the public, declaring that “the people manifested no great interest,” in preserving the falls. Now, with the dam under construction “the desire was great to stop the destruction of the scenic beauty at Tallulah Falls, but the time for effective action was past.”¹⁵³ While this editor was slightly pessimistic, a bitter fight that might have saved the falls was still in progress as he wrote. Yet, in the final analysis he was correct in his assertion that by the time the movement to save Tallulah started, it was already too late.

This Athens editor also failed to comprehend all the possible stumbling blocks that could stop the dam’s completion. Building the dam at Tallulah was not an easy process. From purchasing the land, to arranging mergers among the competing electric companies, the financial aspects were protracted and complex. The actual construction process was no less complicated, involving a huge amount of blasting for a mile plus long tunnel and building a 116-foot-tall dam. Georgia Power employed over a thousand men during the two-year project, and to get the power to its customers in Atlanta it had to erect 781 high-tension power line towers. While the formation of the Georgia Railway

¹⁵³H.J. Rowe, “The Fate of Tallulah Falls,” *Athens Weekly Banner*, 5 January 1912, p. 4.

and Power Company ensured financing was available for the completion of all this construction, the political and legal obstacles still posed a threat.¹⁵⁴

The main political and legal threat came as a result of the work of one determined woman. Helen Dortch Longstreet, the president of the Tallulah Falls Conservation Association (TFCA), wrote, spoke, and otherwise campaigned to convince the state legislature to bring suit to stop the Georgia Railway and Power Company from damming Tallulah Falls. Undermanned and under funded, her campaign's one chance to save the falls was to create a groundswell of support for its preservation. Longstreet, the widow of Lee's famed lieutenant from the Civil War, had enjoyed a long and varied career as a newspaper editor, author, postmaster, and activist by the time she began to agitate for the preservation of Tallulah Falls. She drew from her experience, as well as the cachet of her last name, to rally support to her cause.

Helen Dortch was born to Mary Pulliam Dortch and James Speed Dortch on April 20, 1863 in Carnesville, about thirty miles from Tallulah Falls. Her father, a prominent lawyer in Carnesville, arranged for Helen to receive a first-rate education. She took classes at the Notre Dame Convent in Baltimore and graduated from Brenau College in Gainesville, Georgia. Though this era saw expanded educational opportunities for women, her level of schooling was rare. After graduating, Dortch assumed the editorship of the *Carnesville Tribune*, an anti-Populist newspaper, from her father. As an editor Helen was hailed as a highly successful editor who was well known at a very young age.¹⁵⁵ One commentator called Dortch, "a young lady well and favorably known in

¹⁵⁴ From this point on, Georgia Power and Georgia Railway and Power will be referred to as simply Georgia Power in this chapter. For information regarding the exact timing of their merger and specific actions, see the previous chapter.

¹⁵⁵ Press Service account, "Notable Tributes by Distinguished Southerners, Hereafter HDL Papers.

journalism as a polishable and fearless writer.”¹⁵⁶ Despite this effusive praise, Helen soon left her job as an editor to pursue a position in the state government.

No woman had ever held a statewide office of any kind in Georgia in 1894. In that year, the state government announced its intention to hire a woman as assistant state librarian.¹⁵⁷ Dortch applied for, and received, the position. Eventually Helen decided to challenge the law that relegated a woman’s role to the assistant librarian position and took her fight to the state legislature to have them re-write the law that prevented women from being head librarian. Years later, she recalled that the success or failure of the bill depended on ‘my money and my own unaided efforts,’ because no one helped her in this quest.¹⁵⁸ In 1896, the legislature passed Dortch’s bill, opening the position of state librarian of Georgia to women, and most observers expected she would be the first woman to occupy the slot, but events in 1897 changed the direction of her life.

On September 8, 1897, Helen Dortch wed James Longstreet in the Old Governor’s Mansion in Atlanta. The Civil War general had enraptured Helen for many years. In *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*,¹⁵⁹ Helen’s apologetic for the Longstreet’s actions (or lack of action from his critic’s point of view) at Gettysburg, which she published the same year he died, she wrote: ‘From my childhood he had been the fine

¹⁵⁶*Carnesville Tribune*, 14 October 1891. This quotation is taken from a memorial to James Speed Dortch which was reprinted in the *Tribune*. So while this tribute appeared in the paper that Longstreet edited, she had no hand in its formation.

¹⁵⁷The position of state librarian of Georgia is now the state Law librarian. It first became a paying position in 1847 and was a lucrative public position for most of the nineteenth century. During Jimmy Carter’s governorship, he reorganized state government and the state library was placed under the control of the attorney general. In 1989, another law reduced the focus of the library to strictly law related elements. Many of the books, records, and collections previously held at the state library are presently at the Georgia State University Law Library, the Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at the University of Georgia and the State Archives in Atlanta.

¹⁵⁸Helen Dortch Longstreet, to Governor N.E. Harris, 19 August 1916, HDL papers.

¹⁵⁹ For more information of Helen Dortch Longstreet’s literary techniques before Tallulah Falls, see Sarah E. Gardner, “Blood and Irony: Southern Women’s Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1915,” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1996).

embodiment of my ideals of chivalry and courage . . . he was ever the hero of my young dreams.”¹⁶⁰ To Helen, Longstreet was a heroic and tragic figure; a man that she had idolized for years, and the possibility of marriage to this icon intrigued her.¹⁶¹ James Longstreet died on January 2, 1904 at the age of 83, leaving Helen a widow at the age of forty.

Though a prominent position and well-respected name went a long way in the South in 1904, they did not provide for all of Helen’s needs. James did not leave much of an estate to his widow, so she needed to find some sort of employment to meet her financial obligations. Due to her connections in the Republican Party, mostly through James, she received appointment to be the postmistress of Gainesville after his death. Though she would never become rich as a public servant, Longstreet enjoyed the steady income and the prestige that came as the first woman in Georgia to be a postmaster. In 1909 she served on the executive committee of the National Association of Postmasters and was active giving speeches to postmasters’ associations throughout the South.¹⁶² For Longstreet, working in male-dominated professions such as a newspapers editor, state librarian, or postmistress served as the perfect training for the battle for Tallulah Falls. She learned how to structure a written argument, lobby the state assembly, and make public addresses, all of which would be useful as the leader of the TFCA.

Longstreet’s education and vocations placed her outside the conventional boundaries of the proper Victorian lady that still held sway in the South. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage and others have argued that a woman’s proper role was a highly contested issue in turn-of-century South and these issues came to a head in the debate

¹⁶⁰Helen Dortch Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide* (Gainesville, GA: by the Author, 1904; Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint, 1981), 94.

¹⁶¹Whether she truly loved him, or loved being married to a famous man and cloaking herself in his name is impossible to know for sure. Her later actions and failure to remarry suggest that she Helen did feel a lasting connection to James.

¹⁶²Jesse Parmenter, to D.M. Turner, 21 September 1909, HDL papers.

over suffrage.¹⁶³ Women took a leading role in many other Progressive era movements besides suffrage. For example, Jane Addams opened the Hull House to serve the poor in urban Chicago, while other women continued to advance the cause of temperance. Unlike previous political movements, women helped to lead progressivism, so it was natural to see a women like Helen Dortch Longstreet lead a campaign with a Progressive theme like conservation.

Longstreet was a committed Progressive and the ideology infused her public and appeals. In an advertisement in the July 12, 1912 edition of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Longstreet called on “the men and sons of the men who were true to Georgia when Chickamauga was a field of blood and Kennesaw mountain was a peak of fire,” to join her fight against a “soulless waterpower trust.”¹⁶⁴ In these two statements Longstreet revealed her motivation for leading the fight for Tallulah, and her strategy to lure more support to the preservation of the falls. Her motivation, evinced when she termed Georgia Power a “trust,” came from the part of progressivism concerned with corporate abuses and reforms. Longstreet usually mentioned both the expected gender roles of Southern men or women and the memory of the Civil War in hopes that they would strike responsive chords among the general public. While she succeeded in gaining support from some politicians and other progressive reformers, ultimately she failed to save the falls.

The struggle for Tallulah Falls was the first real preservation movement in Georgia, and even in its failure it set the stage for later environmental efforts. Instead of reprising Hamby’s proposed resolution, the TFCA decided to challenge the construction

¹⁶³W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “White Women and the Politics of Historical Memory in the New South, 1880-1920,” in *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 115-139. For more on the role of women in the Progressive movement see, William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1998).

¹⁶⁴Helen Dortch Longstreet, “LeConte’s Daughter from Far off California Sends Stirring Appeal for Tallulah,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 July 1912, p. 3.

of the dam in a legal arena. This was a strategic decision that flowed from Hamby's failure. He had tried to work through political means, but the state's unwillingness to spend the requisite amount of money doomed his attempt from the start. Georgia maintained the same fiscal discipline in 1912 that it did in 1905, so convincing the state to purchase land and make Tallulah Falls a state park was a long shot. It was even more unlikely because the investment that the power companies had in the land meant they would ask an even higher price. Longstreet and the TFCA decided to pursue the legal route because the TFCA could keep costs down through this strategy. If the TFCA could win the lawsuit, the state would regain the land at Tallulah Falls without having to purchase it.

Before the TFCA could win the lawsuit, they had to convince the state to bring the suit. This lengthy process involved lobbying the state attorney general, governor, and both house of the legislature. Longstreet took the lead in this lobbying effort, but she received assistance from others throughout Georgia who also loved the falls. Many of Longstreet's strongest supporters were females, and they included some prominent women like Rebecca Latimer Felton. Felton, the wife of a former congressman and the leading suffragist in Georgia, served as a vice-president of the association and lent her name and pen to the cause. Though the leadership of the TFCA was predominantly female – women held five of the eight offices – men participated as well. State Treasurer W. J. Speer acted as the association's treasurer as well, and Dr. W. C. Bryant of Cornelia was its secretary. The leadership was also largely from outside of the Tallulah Falls area as only Hunnicutt lived at Tallulah Falls.¹⁶⁵ Both the sex of the leaders of the TFCA and the fact they were not natives played a key role in the tone, strategy, and outcome of the fight. Because the leaders were not native to the region, the battle was between two

¹⁶⁵ Helen Dortch Longstreet, mass mailing to the women of Georgia, 1912, Helen Dortch Longstreet Papers, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, GA (Hereafter HDL Papers).

groups – the TFCA and Georgia Railway and Power – that advanced agendas at the expense of local inhabitants.

Some locals supported the power company, some wanted to preserve the falls, but outsiders defined the locals' possibilities. The TFCA and Georgia Railway and Power Company presented the inhabitants of Rabun County with two clear paths for Tallulah Falls' future. If the power company prevailed, the falls would run dry, but in return there would be some jobs at the generating plant and some industry might come to the region. Should the TFCA win, the falls would be preserved, economic development would be slower in arriving, and the region would continue to rely on agriculture and tourism. In a final irony, though the area's residents were forced to operate in an economic framework established by outside influences, they had the final say about the falls. Non-natives in the TFCA tried to save the falls from the outsiders who owned Tallulah Falls; but in the end it was a jury of Rabun County residents decided the fate of the lawsuit, and ultimately of the dam and the falls.

While the jury had the final word in the battle, the buildup to the lawsuit was as important to the historical significance of the fight as the outcome of the verdict. Mass mailings to prospective supporters, advertisements in Atlanta newspapers, and letters to the editors were the main public relations techniques that both sides employed to promote their take on Tallulah. Conservationists, more specifically the scenic preservationists, and hydroelectric developers engaged in a contest to win the public's hearts and minds through these written pleas. The appeals revealed not only the different ideologies, but also how competing groups appropriated the language of gender, the "Lost Cause," efficiency, and the "New South" to bolster their claims. It was more difficult to make the argument that turning Tallulah into a park was a worthwhile process because the economic impact was less readily visible. Recognizing this fact, conservationists took a different tact: trying to shame people into preserving the falls.

Conservationists resorted to shame due to the prevailing opinions of the day in the South. The dam's advocates had less of a challenge in gaining support because the New South boosters touted industrialization as the key to the region's future and they looked to vast resources of the Appalachian Mountains as a vital cog in this process. As one newspaper editor sympathetic to saving the falls wrote, "This is a commercial, progressive age."¹⁶⁶ The mountain South contained lumber, coal, and water that could all be harvested or harnessed for industrial purposes. They saw the benefits of cheap electricity and claimed that producing the electricity would be a boon to more people than leaving the falls in their natural state. But before the sides could crank up the publicity campaigns, Georgia Power's right to build the dam had to be challenged.

When construction on the dam began in earnest in 1911, the final challenge to hydroelectricity at Tallulah arose in the form of the Tallulah Falls Conservation Association. The looming destruction of the falls brought a group of people that wanted to protect one of Georgia's scenic wonders and a place where many of them had vacationed through the years. When Helen Dortch Longstreet emerged as the leader and principal spokesperson for the TFCA the *Gainesville News* termed her "the moving spirit back of the movement to prevent the commercialization of the falls."¹⁶⁷ As postmistress, Helen had become a devotee of Theodore Roosevelt, the president who had appointed her postmistress of Gainesville, and the progressive policies he advanced: specifically, trust busting and conservation. However, the South of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not a fruitful place for either cause. Helen finally got a chance to put her progressive beliefs to the test in the campaign to save Tallulah Falls.

The exact circumstances of Helen's induction into the TFCA and her assumption of the controls of the organization are murky. It is unclear whether the association was in

¹⁶⁶"Tallulah the Terrible," p 4.

¹⁶⁷"Tallulah Headquarters," *Gainesville News*, 17 July 1912, p. 1.

existence and drafted her to lead them, or if she was always the driving force behind the movement. Writing to Tom Watson in 1914, she claimed, ‘I did not joyously rush into the Tallulah Falls fray. The untutored mountaineers about Tallulah organized what they called the Tallulah Falls Preservation Association and urged me to accept the presidency of it.’ Longstreet, though she sometimes claimed a mountain heritage due to her birth in the foothills of the Appalachians, saw the locals as a group of ‘hillbillies’ needing elite leadership. She continued, ‘I was besieged with appeals from them . . . the call finally seemed a call to service which became a duty, which I could shirk or shoulder.’¹⁶⁸ Even with her elitist viewpoint, evidence supports her contention that a grassroots campaign drafted her into service. It made sense for the ‘untutored mountaineers’ to pick someone like Longstreet as the TFCA’s public face. She was well known throughout north Georgia, had a famous last name, and had contacts around the state. She also had a history of successful agitation in the state legislature (the state librarian bill), which would prove useful in this fight.

As compelling as that reasoning seems, contradictory evidence casts doubt on Helen’s contention that the local inhabitants drafted her to fight their battle. Even a cursory glance at the names of the TFCA letterhead revealed only one person from Tallulah who held an important position in the movement. The other leaders of the group – especially Felton and Speer – were friends and acquaintances of Helen from previous projects. Because neither their livelihoods nor their homes were at stake, their outsider status led them to be less than fully committed to saving the falls. Rather than offering any real help in the lobbying efforts, these leaders served as figureheads and lent credibility to the TFCA. If the locals did ask Helen to lead them, they apparently abdicated all responsibility and leadership to her and allowed her to pick her assistants.

¹⁶⁸Helen Dortch Longstreet, to Thomas Watson, 13 November 1914, HDL papers.

Another group of statements by Helen herself damages her claim to have been drafted. She rarely referred to the Association when writing about the fight for Tallulah, instead she spoke in the first-person. She wrote to the *Atlanta Constitution*, ‘I was making a fight to save Tallulah Falls,’¹⁶⁹ and to a potential supporter she mentioned, ‘the generous women, who, in the past few months have so nobly offered me help.’¹⁷⁰ These references could be dismissed as a natural occurrence of leaders. After all, pastors, presidents, and CEOs often become synonymous with the entity they serve. However, in other letters Helen revealed that she considered the struggle to be hers alone. She told Tom Watson: ‘I am very worn from the struggle I have been making, almost single-handed, against the mighty corporation.’¹⁷¹ In the most enlightening statement of all, Longstreet advised Tom Felder, the Attorney General of Georgia, that after Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration the Tallulah Falls matter ‘will no longer be the unequal struggle of one woman.’¹⁷² It seems unlikely that those ‘untutored mountaineers’ who entreated her to lead them abandoned her so quickly, so either she portrayed herself as a lone fighter against Georgia Power to elicit sympathy or she lied about being drafted to head the fight.

How Longstreet came to head the effort to save Tallulah Falls mattered less than her actions as the president of the TFCA. Her Roosevelt-inspired progressivism found a perfect outlet in this fray. Theodore Roosevelt had popularized two aspects of Progressivism – conservation and trust busting – that came to be synonymous with his presidency. Trust busting sprang from concerns by some in the United States that certain corporations were so large and powerful that they abused the market system. Reformers did not want to destroy capitalism, but restore competition and protect the consumer.

¹⁶⁹Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, to the *Constitution*, Atlanta, 19 December 1911, HDL papers.

¹⁷⁰Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, to Mrs. Turner, 21 June 1912, HDL papers.

¹⁷¹Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, to Thomas Watson, Thomson, 19 December 1911, HDL papers.

¹⁷²Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, to T.S. Felder, Atlanta, 31 December 1912, Tallulah Falls box at Georgia Department of History and Archives, Atlanta, GA (hereafter State Archives).

Roosevelt's staunch advocacy of conservation stemmed from his personal love of the outdoors. He pushed for the creation of national parks and in the West the government purchased land or converted land it already possessed into national parks.

Tallulah Falls gave Longstreet a chance to campaign for conservation and the establishment of a park—a legacy of Roosevelt's administration and evidence of his influence on her. Fortunately for Helen, she had an adversary in the battle that easily fit into her trust busting ideology also. Georgia Power was a large entity with vast resources, which Helen viewed as the Georgian manifestation of a "grand scheme for monopolizing the waterpower of the American nation."¹⁷³ Longstreet rooted the terms she used to describe Georgia Power and its activities in progressivism. She wasted little time in labeling Georgia Power and Railway, "the iniquitous water power trust"¹⁷⁴ which was led by, "a gang of swindlers," "buccaneers," "exploiters," and "thieves." Clearly, Helen viewed this battle in terms of good and evil, right and wrong, with her side being the righteous defenders of Georgia against greedy capitalists.

The first step in defeating the Georgia Power Company was convincing the governor to order a survey of the land around Tallulah Falls. The TFCA believed that the original survey done when the county was first organized in 1820 was inaccurate. In 1911, Longstreet first proposed hiring a surveyor to resurvey the land at no expense to the state, but the Georgia Power Company blocked anyone representing the association from doing so.¹⁷⁵ Georgia Power could block the attempts of a private organization to survey their lands, but they could not stop the government from investigating its claim to the land. Longstreet and other supporters of preserving Tallulah Falls wrote to Georgia's

¹⁷³Helen Dortch Longstreet, to T.S. Felder, 31 December 1912, State Archives.

¹⁷⁴Helen Dortch Longstreet, to Thomas Watson, 19 December 1911, HDL papers.

¹⁷⁵King and Spalding, Atlanta, to T.S. Felder, Atlanta, 30 August 1911, State Archives.

Attorney General Thomas Felder to ask him to recommend that a survey be made.¹⁷⁶ Their lobbying paid off, as Governor Hoke Smith¹⁷⁷ authorized Professor John C. Koch of the University of Georgia, a faculty member in the engineering department, to survey the disputed area in November 1911.¹⁷⁸ Koch completed a preliminary survey within a month, but it did not contain enough information for the attorney general to make an informed decision about whether to bring suit to recover the land. It was mostly estimates and because of weather, Koch was unable to make a blueprint of the disputed plats. In his request of a further report, Felder wrote that Koch's first report "has not that accuracy which would seem to be desired if the original purpose of the survey is to be carried out."¹⁷⁹

Acting Governor John Slaton, responding to the request of Attorney General Felder ordered Koch to conduct a second, more thorough survey. The *Athens Weekly Banner* reported the second excursion "will require about thirty days and will involve an expense of about \$500 to make the survey."¹⁸⁰ To check up on the survey party's progress, Felder joined them "for a day or two," and "expressed delight at the thorough, rapid, accurate manner in which the survey was progressing," upon his return to Atlanta.¹⁸¹ Longstreet and the TFCA were equally pleased with the result of the second survey because it "show[ed] irregularities in the land lines in Habersham and Rabun counties bordering the falls." Felder had promised to recommend that the governor bring

¹⁷⁶Frank Harwell, La Grange, to T.S. Felder, Atlanta, undated, State Archives; Helen Longstreet, Gainesville, to T.S. Felder, 28 August 1911, State Archives.

¹⁷⁷ During the period of the legislative and legal battles over Tallulah Falls, 1911 to 1912, Georgia had three governors. Hoke Smith left to become an U. S. Senator and John M. Slaton replaced him on a temporary basis. Slaton, the President of the state senate, was then replaced by Joseph M. Brown.

¹⁷⁸Hoke Smith, Executive Order, 15 November 1911, State Archives.

¹⁷⁹John M. Slaton, Atlanta, to T.S. Felder, Atlanta, 15 December 1911, State Archives; T.S. Felder, to J.S. Slaton, 16 December 1911, State Archives.

¹⁸⁰"Tallulah Survey Again Ordered," *Athens Weekly Banner*, 5 January 1912, p. 2.

¹⁸¹"University Surveying Party is Back from Tallulah Falls," *Athens Daily Banner*, 8 February 1912, p. 1.

a suit for the recovery of the land should the report warrant it, and to the TFCA at least, the evidence was overwhelming.¹⁸²

Felder and new governor Joseph Brown, the third governor to be in office since the beginning of the surveying process,¹⁸³ dashed Longstreet's hopes. Brown charged Felder with examining Koch's report, prior grants, plats, and laws, and returning with a recommendation on whether the state had any right to the land in the gorge. After mulling the matter over for several months, Felder recommended that the governor not order a suit. Felder told the governor, "It was my opinion that the State did not reserve to itself any of the lands in controversy."¹⁸⁴ Brown received this statement on June 4, and by June 7 newspapers reported his rejection of a suit. He stated, "I have never announced a decision which was more distasteful to me than this," and though he personally thought the destruction of Tallulah Falls was "acalamity," he agreed with Felder's recommendation.

While it appeared that the dream of turning Tallulah Falls into a park was dead, Longstreet and the TFCA quickly adopted a new strategy. She had to convince the state legislature to pass a resolution directing the governor to bring suit. To get the state government's assistance in opposing Georgia Power, she needed to show them that she commanded widespread support. To this end, Longstreet applied a two-pronged strategy. The first prong was reaching the public through newspapers. She placed ads in the Atlanta newspapers in an attempt to rally mass public sympathy for her cause.¹⁸⁵ These ads were expensive, costing over \$2000, which Longstreet claimed to have paid for out of

¹⁸²"Tallulah," *Athens Weekly Banner*, 29 March 1912, p. 7.

¹⁸³ See note 25 for governor information. Joseph M. Brown, son of a war-time governor of Georgia was from the mountains and Longstreet might have expected his support for Tallulah because of this.

¹⁸⁴T.S. Felder, Atlanta, to Joseph M. Brown, Atlanta, 4 June 1912, State Archives.

her own pocket.¹⁸⁶ As the former editor of a small weekly, she realized the power of having small-town editors supporting her cause. In a letter to her friend Rebecca Latimer Felton of Cartersville, Longstreet pleaded: “Stir up your local papers in the interest of Tallulah.”¹⁸⁷ Though Felton wrote an essay concerning Tallulah, there is no evidence that she succeeded in, or even attempted to, stir up local papers. Longstreet also wrote a full-page advertisement appealing directly to editors, terming them the, “guardians of the nation’s citadels,” but she largely failed in rousing smaller papers to support Tallulah.¹⁸⁸

Longstreet also tapped into her connections among Georgia’s elite and began a letter-writing campaign to drum up support and membership in the TFCA. In these letters she honed her ability to target her language to a specific audience to a fine edge. She mined “Lost Cause” mythology for terms and phrases, and equated the fight for Tallulah with the fight against the Yankees. The Lost Cause template fit the Tallulah situation perfectly. The falls were a scenic wonder of Georgia, a divine gift to its people, and it was the negative influences of Northern culture – commercialism and industrialization – that threatened to destroy it. Longstreet made much of the fact that Northern and even Canadian interests bankrolled Georgia Power and that its president

¹⁸⁵These ads resembled actual articles and the papers were supposed to place them near legitimate articles so the reader might think the advertisement was another article.

¹⁸⁶Helen Dortch Longstreet, “Tallulah, the Republic’s Queen of Waterfalls, Appeals to the Weekly Press, Guardians of the Nation’s Citadels,” HDL papers.

¹⁸⁷Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, to Rebecca Latimer Felton, Cartersville, 6 September 1911, Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers, Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

¹⁸⁸Longstreet, “Tallulah, the Republic’s Queen,” HDL papers.

was a native of Massachusetts.¹⁸⁹ History again presented Southerners with an opportunity to fight and destroy the Yankees and preserve the South.

Helen framed the campaign in Lost Cause terminology, but she varied her exact approach depending on the sex of her recipient. A letter sent to women thanked them for “your patriotic expression of interest in the conservation” of Tallulah Falls and closed, “because I am sure you must love Georgia as I love it, and be ready to shed some of your heart’s blood to save Tallulah . . . I make this appeal to your loyalty and pride of country.”¹⁹⁰ This type of language might well have been pulled from an appeal to Southern women as their husbands and sons marched off to fight for the Confederacy. Helen was more explicit in linking Tallulah and the legacy of the Civil War in her correspondence with men. “I was sure that in your veins coursed the unafraid blood of the heroes who have harrowed our soil from Virginia to Texas,” she wrote, “and that when the call was made to your loyalty of country, the response would be the same as your heroic sires made in the fighting sixties.”¹⁹¹ Longstreet painted the picture in clear terms: fighting for Tallulah Falls in 1912 was equivalent to fighting for the Confederacy in 1861. To a culture steeped in Lost Cause mythology, this must have stirred up favorable sentiment for her campaign, even if it failed to create a massive grassroots uprising against Georgia Power.

The second major tack was to remind readers of their expected gender roles in Southern society. When writing to a Mrs. Turner in June 1912, Helen applied pressure to convince her to lend support to the TFCA. Longstreet called Turner “a woman of wealth

¹⁸⁹Longstreet, to Watson, 13 November 1914, HDL papers.

¹⁹⁰Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, mass mailing to women of Georgia, no date, HDL papers.

and influence,” and “a woman of big intellect,” while noting that she did “not find your name on the list of generous women,” supporting the preservation of the falls. She closed, “I have an intuitive knowledge that your heart is not without solicitude for the fate of Tallulah.”¹⁹² When Helen spoke of an “intuitive knowledge,” she reminded Turner of one of a woman’s special gifts – intuition – and the societal assumption that any woman of such great resources and “heart” would naturally support a cause like Tallulah.

While Longstreet’s appeals to women were typically gentle reminders of the duties of a Southern lady, her approach with men was considerably less kind. To Governor Joseph Brown she bluntly stated, “I pin my loyal faith to your unafraid manhood.”¹⁹³ Georgia’s Attorney General heard that “a thousand tongues call to your manhood.”¹⁹⁴ These were not mild rebukes, for she was boldly challenging their honor – a matter of great pride and concern for most Southern men. If these reputedly honorable Southern gentlemen were true men, men like their fathers and grandfathers who had served under her late husband in the Civil War, then they would stand up for her and the people of Georgia against the “waterpower trust.”

Yet another tactic was simply to remind the public about both the beauty and legal facts at Tallulah. Charles Reynolds, an attorney for the association, stressed the legal basis for the TFCA’s proposed suit in a letter to the editor of the *Macon Telegraph*: “The surveyor ran the line to this bluff and stopped—measured this bluff as the river . . . the

¹⁹¹Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, mass mailing to men of Georgia, no date, HDL papers.

¹⁹²Longstreet, to Turner, 12 June 1912, HDL papers.

¹⁹³Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, to Governor Joseph Brown, Atlanta, 4 February 1912, HDL papers.

¹⁹⁴Longstreet, to T.S. Felder, 31 December 1912, HDL papers.

land between the river and the bluff has never been granted and is still the property of the state.” In the same letter, Reynolds reminded readers about the beauty of Tallulah while claiming he was only talking about a legal issue. He argued, “This issue is not whether the corporation proposes a development of benefit to the state, not whether the corporation is consummating the destruction and ruin, or adding to the beauty of Georgia’s mountain scenery, but the vital point is, to whom does this property belong.”¹⁹⁵ Of course, for most Georgians, including Longstreet, ownership of this thin strip of land in the gorge mattered because if the state owned it, the falls would be saved. However, if the power company owned it, they would not. In stressing the legal aspects while mentioning the stakes should the dam be finished, the TFCA could arouse the public’s sentiment in favoring of preserving the falls while allaying any fears of the government confiscating private property. With a legal right to the land, the public could support the state’s action in an era where business interests dominated.

Perhaps the most innovative tactic the TFCA employed was the idea that the tourism industry could bring as much economic development to the area as the dam. This idea was relatively new, as tourism had not yet boomed with the advent of an automobile culture. Within twenty years of the Tallulah Falls battle, travel to national and state parks boomed as more Americans bought cars. While this effect was most prominent in the west, it also played out with the creation and shaping of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.¹⁹⁶ Even in 1912, before the automobile explosion, the editor of the

¹⁹⁵Charles Reynolds, “To Whom Does Tallulah Falls Belong, Is Issue,” *Macon Telegraph*, 3 July 1912, p. 7.

¹⁹⁶ Paul S. Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 24, 30-41; see also, Pierce, *The Great Smokies* and Margaret Lynn Brown, *The Wild East: A Biography of the Great Smoky Mountain*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000).

Toccoa Record found the establishment of a tourist industry worthy of further consideration. As Tallulah Falls was being dammed, he argued Toccoa should build a hotel to provide summer jobs for people during a period when work was difficult to find. The editor asserted that tourists often take an interest in the place where they vacationed, which was another possible benefit to Toccoa. While all these prognostications had already been proven true at Tallulah, the TFCA was still unable to convince the locals that tourism could provide as many opportunities as the dam.

Longstreet tried another tack: she issued a press release stating that there was a strong likelihood that the government would purchase a summer home for the President at Tallulah. With a home and annual presidential trips to Tallulah, the number of tourists visiting the region would mushroom, providing more than enough money and employment to justify preserving the falls.¹⁹⁷ No one took her press release seriously, and the local population never showed interest in promoting tourism over hydroelectricity. The TFCA quickly abandoned the tourism angle when a lack of journalistic response or public interest in the idea proved it a failure. However, Longstreet and the TFCA had briefly utilized a tactic – emphasizing the economic benefits and opportunities of tourism – which a subsequent generation of conservationists would use to great effect in the process of creating the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.¹⁹⁸

Georgia Power did not sit idly by as Longstreet launched her attacks. They responded with a massive publicity campaign, responding to nearly all of the contentions of Longstreet and others. The company utilized appeals to efficiency to garner public

¹⁹⁷Helen Dortch Longstreet, "Tallulah Falls Dixie's Garden of the Gods to Furnish Summer Home for President," press release, Gainesville, 25 May 1912, HDL papers.

support. Developing waterpower was a prime example of efficient development in 1912. A president of Georgia Power's parent company later described the period as, "a time of vigor and optimism in which the dreams of men that the waters of northeast Georgia, then plunging uselessly to the sea, could be yoked and made to serve the people of our State were realized."¹⁹⁹ Waste and usefulness became the buzzwords of the hydroelectric boosters, and they hammered away at the wastefulness of allowing rivers and streams to go unharnessed. The existing tourism industry at Tallulah was inefficient because "more than 99 percent of the population of the State received no benefit whatsoever from the water which since the beginning of time had flowed down the river over the falls to the sea."²⁰⁰ Finally, waterpower was a cheap and clean substitute for fossil fuels. As early as 1924, one hydroelectricity booster argued a point with which many present-day environmentalists would agree: "The burning of coal is wasteful." Referring to the finite supply of coal and the abundance of developable hydroelectricity sites, this waterpower booster continued, "In this way the electric companies are helping to conserve the earth's coal."²⁰¹ The company and its sympathizers made it sound as if failing to harness the power of Tallulah would be criminal, especially since the electricity produced would benefit more people than ever saw the falls as a tourist attraction alone.

¹⁹⁸For more information on the debates and tactics used in the campaign to establish the Great Smoky Mountain National Park see Pierce, *The Great Smokies* and Brown, *The Wild East*.

¹⁹⁹Harlee Branch, Jr., *Georgia and the Georgia Power Company* (New York: The Newcomen Society in North America, 1957), 17.

²⁰⁰Henry M. Atkinson, *The Relation of Electric Power to Farm Progress* (Syracuse: Gaylord Brothers, 1925), 14.

²⁰¹Louis E. Moore, *Electricity: Its Story Simply Told, A Study of its Development and Application to Present and Future Needs in Georgia* (Atlanta: Utilities Information Committee of Georgia, 1924), 6-7.

Efficiency was not the only positive reason Georgia Power gave for the damming of Tallulah. Its spokesmen maintained that the lake created behind the dam would enhance the beauty of the region and add to its tourism. As Henry Atkinson, the founder of the Georgia Power Company, later commented, “while the beauty in and around Tallulah Falls has been transformed, it has not been marred.”²⁰² In fact, as late as 1912 the company’s supporters claimed the dam would not even transform the falls at all. “The water,” they claimed, “will run over the dam on into the channel of the river and that the dam will not disturb the falls.”²⁰³ Later, they backed away from this statement as it became clear that every available gallon of water would be put to use turning the turbines, but they continued to promote the beauty and benefits of the new lake. Improvements to the region’s beauty would follow as the company constructed new roads and walkways to access the lake, and the new lakefront property would attract homebuilders.²⁰⁴ Their contention that the lake would be more beautiful than the falls was a matter of personal preference, but the lake would be more accessible for people to swim, fish, and boat than the falls ever were, and the power company’s advocates included these activities as a part of the increased beauty of the falls.²⁰⁵

Perhaps the best publicity the company received came from newspapers editors in north Georgia who rejected Longstreet’s entreaties to fight for the preservation of the falls. They offered two main points about the effort to save Tallulah. First, they asserted that it was mainly outsiders who were leading and supporting the TFCA, while the local

²⁰²Atkinson, *Farm Progress*, 14-15.

²⁰³*Atlanta Georgian*, 12 July 1912, p. 4.

²⁰⁴Atkinson, *Farm Progress*, 14.

²⁰⁵“Tallulah the Terrible,” p. 4..

people wanted the dam. Second, the area residents wanted the dam because of the economic opportunities electricity would bring. The editor of the only paper in Rabun County, the *Clayton Tribune*, complained, “The protests against this development seems to come mostly from persons outside the county and not directly interested . . . those directly interested in the welfare of our county are very much in favor of the development.”²⁰⁶ Another editor, in nearby Toccoa, Georgia, argued: “The work has progress [sic] too far to be stopped, nor would it be desirable to have it stopped, even though the state should have the right to do so.” This local writer saw a brighter future in store for all of north Georgia thanks to electricity, and urged outsiders to “let the fight stop,” so that the dam could be completed.²⁰⁷

The strongest condemnation of Longstreet and the outsider dominated TFCA came from W. B. Townsend, editor of the *Dahlonega Nugget*. E. Merton Coulter described Townsend as “æcentric,” but his views on Tallulah fit with those of other north Georgia editors.²⁰⁸ Longstreet’s agitation for a survey and a suit angered Townsend. He believed that if her requests were complied with, they “would be a great detriment to the interests of Georgia.” Townsend went on to mention the jobs and other benefits, like improved food and education, the wastefulness of not harnessing the energy of the falls, and the expectation that more tourists would visit the lake than ever visited the falls. His conclusion, in line with the New South commercial spirit of the time, was: “Let us encourage capital in our state instead of trying to drive it away.”²⁰⁹

Neither Longstreet, nor the other members of the TFCA would have characterized their goal as driving business interests out of Georgia. While the preservation advocates

²⁰⁶“Power Development at Tallulah Falls,” *Toccoa Record* (reprinted from *Clayton Tribune*), 21 March 1912, p. 6..

²⁰⁷“Work Done at Tallulah Falls,” *Toccoa Record*, 19 September 1912, p. 10.

²⁰⁸Coulter, *Georgia Waters*, 46.

²⁰⁹W.B. Townsend, *Dahlonega Nugget*, 19 July 1912, p. 2.

may not have viewed the expansion of hydroelectric dams as a blessing, they did not necessarily oppose any waterpower development. The TFCA was only interested in saving Tallulah Falls, and claimed, ‘There are plenty of other waterfalls where they can use and abuse—and wreck and destroy.’²¹⁰ Despite both sides’ extensive publicity campaigns, the future of the suit was still going to be decided by the legislature, not in the papers. With so much at stake, the lobbying of the legislature was contentious, with passions running high on both sides.

All of Longstreet’s effort in raising support would go for naught unless she convinced the legislature to pass the resolution directing a suit. Longstreet came under several personal attacks from agents of the Georgia Power Company, most notably the company’s lead counsel, Jack Spalding. Spalding was the legal architect behind the merger of Georgia Power and Georgia Electric and Railway into Georgia Railway and Power, and continued to serve the company in the legal fight over Tallulah.²¹¹ In letters and speeches throughout Georgia during the surveying process and continuing into the debates over the resolution, he accused Longstreet of having ulterior motives for trying to stop Georgia Power’s development at the falls. In Spalding’s version of events, she was in the employ of a competing power company that also wanted to harness Tallulah Falls.²¹² Spalding cast more aspersions on Longstreet’s character as the legislature came closer to passing the resolution. Longstreet alleged that in testimony before a Georgia House committee in July 1905, Spalding, ‘made remarks in derogation of my integrity,’ and insinuating the TFCA was a scam to get the people of Georgia to send her money.²¹³

²¹⁰Rebecca Latimer Felton, ‘Profuse Generosity of Our State Authorities,’ Rebecca Latimer Felton Papers , Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries.

²¹¹Branch, *Georgia and the Georgia Power Company*, 19.

²¹²Helen Dortch Longstreet, ‘Are You a True Georgian?’ *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 July 1912, p. 7.

²¹³Helen Dortch Longstreet, ‘Not on Trial, Says Mrs. Longstreet,’ *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 July 1912, p. 2..

The power company claimed: “We have not now, and never have had any fear as to the ultimate result,” of a lawsuit.²¹⁴ As early as April, Georgia Power’s president, Preston Arkwright, had been sending letters to the governor asking for a quick decision on the whether the state would bring suit.²¹⁵ Still, Spalding’s attack on Longstreet’s character smacked of desperation to avoid a suit, especially coming as it did after the Senate had already passed the resolution and the House had taken it under serious consideration.²¹⁶ Though the company publicly asked the governor to bring a suit to settle the matter once and for all, they worked against Longstreet’s resolution in the House. Any delay to the construction process made it more difficult for Georgia Power to sell stock and raise money.²¹⁷ As a newly formed company, it needed to allay the concerns of potential investors and having a legal challenge to its most important project reminded investors that this was a risky business. After all, several other electric companies had failed to dam Tallulah, so Georgia Power’s ultimate success was not certain. If the legislature declined the TFCA’s request, the last barrier preventing completion of the Tallulah dam would be removed and investors could rest easy. On the other hand, passage of the resolution would mean more months of waiting for a final decision.

In July the Georgia state senate passed the resolution, and the House followed suit in early August with a vote of 112 for and 19 against.²¹⁸ The resolution directed the governor to have the attorney general sue Georgia Power over the disputed land. The press reported the passage of the resolution as a great victory for Longstreet and the TFCA. To her hometown paper, Longstreet’s ‘indomitable perseverance won the fight

²¹⁴“Power Company Does Not Object to Suit,” *Athens Daily Banner*, 16 July 1912, p. 3.

²¹⁵Preston Arkwright, Atlanta, to Joseph M. Brown, Atlanta, 26 April 1912, State Archives.

²¹⁶“For Courts to Decide on Tallulah Falls,” *Macon Telegraph*, 13 July 1912, p. 2. “Mrs. Longstreet in Lobby,” *Gainesville Eagle*, 18 July 1912, p. 4.

²¹⁷“Power Company Does Not Object to Suit,” *Athens Daily Banner*, 16 July 1912, p. 3.

²¹⁸“Tallulah Falls Goes to Court,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 August 1912, p. 1.

for the conservation of Tallulah Falls.”²¹⁹ This was premature praise, as she had only won a brief reprieve until the case was adjudicated. In another victory for the TFCA, the resolution permitted it to assist in the preparation and litigation of the case, though the state would not compensate the TFCA’s representatives for their time.²²⁰ While this provision made it more likely that the case would be ably tried and amply researched, it complicated the prosecution of the case because of the many people involved.

Attorney General Thomas Felder took responsibility of the case, but Longstreet had little faith in his abilities or his desire to win the case. She informed Felder, “I have honestly arrived at the conclusion that you have been friendly to the waterpower trust which has grabbed the people’s property at Tallulah.”²²¹ In December, she pleaded “I respectfully beg that you will take no steps until I can see you and outline another plan by which you can undoubtedly have the thieves enjoined from further trespassing [sic] on the state’s property.”²²² Her opinion of him was so low that she thought herself, a legal amateur, to be better suited to formulating legal strategy than he was. While Helen was often bold throughout her life, her boldness in pushing for government action and suggesting courses of action blossomed in the Tallulah Falls case. Her bluntness and strategy backfired, as Felder resented a woman giving him orders on matters of government policy, while accusing him of incompetence and bias. This conflict probably contributed to the suit’s failure, though it was not the central factor. Their relationship never improved and she derisively referred to him as an “office boy to the Georgia Railway and Power Company,” after the conclusion of their collaboration.²²³

²¹⁹“Mrs. Longstreet Returns,” *Gainesville News*, 14 August 1912, p. 5.

²²⁰Concurrent Resolution No. 60, Georgia State Senate and Georgia House of Representatives, 17 August 1912, State Archives.

²²¹Helen Dortch Longstreet, Gainesville, to T.S. Felder, Atlanta, 14 May 1912, State Archives.

²²²Longstreet, to Felder, 31 December 1912, HDL papers.

²²³Longstreet, to Watson, 13 November 1914, HDL papers.

While securing passage of the resolution was significant, the focus quickly shifted to winning the court case. This was a daunting task, because previous cases dealing with disputed surveys had been decided in favor of the current owner. The legal presumption was that because the intent of the legislature in original survey was that all the land of the state be surveyed, even if the surveyor stopped his line at the edge of the bluff, it was the same as if he carried it all the way to the river.²²⁴ Longstreet and her legal advisors hoped that in a jury trial, especially one in Rabun County, they could convince the jury to ignore judicial precedent and rule in favor of the state's claim. It is no wonder the power company publicly declared their confidence in victory, because even if the jury ruled in the state's favor, the company had a good chance of reversal on appeal based on legal precedent.

In April 1913 the case went to trial in Rabun County with J. B. Jones of Toccoa as the presiding judge. After the evidence had been presented, the judge's instructions to the jury hinged on a very simple question: did the facts lead the jury to believe all the land had been granted, or did it lead them to conclude the land still belonged to the state? Jones instructed the jury to not be influenced by who the parties in the dispute were, or how they planned to use the property if they won the case. He wanted the jury to focus squarely on the facts to make their decision, and in the end, the facts favored Georgia Power.²²⁵ The jury returned a verdict in the company's favor, which led to an appeal by the state that went all the way to the Georgia Supreme Court. In the October 1913 term, the court heard the case and affirmed the lower court's decision. The justices found no

²²⁴“Tallulah Falls Goes to Court,” p.1.

²²⁵“Charge of the Court,” *State of Georgia v. Georgia Railway and Power Company*, Rabun County Superior Court, April 1913, State Archives.

reason to overturn the company's victory, and with their finding the legal and political challenges to Georgia Power's claim to Tallulah ceased.²²⁶

What had begun with outraged calls against the destruction of Tallulah Falls ended with whimper in the quiet halls of Georgia's Supreme Court. In the intervening two years, a raucous contest for Tallulah's future played out in Georgia's governor's office, legislature, newspapers, and courthouses. All the while, construction continued at Tallulah Falls as the damming of the river pushed forward like an irresistible force. All the effort expended on both sides resulted in the exact outcome the hydroelectricity boosters had predicted in 1910, but that outcome was often in doubt. The Tallulah Falls Conservation Association, out manned and under funded, accomplished more than anyone expected or suspected possible against a powerful and well-connected corporation.

The TFCA had success it did because it picked a highly motivated and capable leader in Helen Dortch Longstreet. She surrounded herself with lawyers and writers dedicated to preserving the falls, and they formulated an ingenious plan to recover the land for Georgia. By eschewing a direct political confrontation with Georgia Power over Tallulah, the TFCA avoided certain defeat. Instead it chose to wage its fight in the two areas it was strongest: the media and the courtroom. In newspapers, letters, and speeches, Longstreet and others tried the carrot and stick approach to gain public support. Shaming people through the use of gender and the Lost Cause was the stick, while the carrot was the possibility of an expanded tourist industry and the ability to visit the beautiful falls in perpetuity if they were preserved. Unfortunately for lovers of Tallulah's cataracts, the TFCA was only successful enough to raise hopes, but not successful enough to save the falls.

²²⁶State of Georgia v. Georgia Railway and Power Company, vol. 141, *Report of Cases Decided in the Supreme Court of the State of Georgia at the October Term 1913, and March Term 1914*, (Stevens and Graham: Atlanta, 1914), 153-158.

Georgia Power prevailed because they had legal precedent and preponderant public opinion on their side. The TFCA's legal argument, though resourceful, had little chance of winning unless the courts reversed earlier interpretations of the law in question. With the legal talent Georgia Power could afford to hire, there was little chance the state would out-argue them in court. Even in the court of public opinion the power company held a distinct advantage. New South ideology favored progress and industrialization, and the majority of Georgians bought this line of thinking in 1911 and 1912. All they had to do was remind the populace of the jobs and industry that electricity created, and most people, upper, middle, and lower class alike, would willingly sacrifice Tallulah Falls.

And so, in 1913 the waters of the Tallulah River were diverted from their natural course and harnessed for the production of electricity. Millions of dollars and thousands of man-hours had been expended in the process, but Atlanta and the rest of north Georgia had more electricity that it could use. Of course, within a few years industries, streetcars, and homes were accounting for all of Tallulah's electricity and Georgia Power was constructing more dams and generating plants in north Georgia along the Tallulah and Tugaloo Rivers. The tourist industry, so vibrant a generation before, vanished and a new type of vacation spot emerged. Second homes and campgrounds replaced hotels and boarding houses. Instead of marveling at the majestic falls, the tourists enjoyed fishing, boating, and swimming in the lake. The falls, as they had existed for centuries, were lost to Georgia; they had been traded for commercial gain. But something else had been gained as well and H. J. Rowe, the editor of the *Athens Weekly Banner* recorded it for posterity: "The only lesson that Georgians will learn will be that in the future when they

have such a treasure to preserve, it will pay them to take the proper steps toward its preservation at the proper time.”²²⁷

²²⁷Rowe, ‘Fate of Tallulah,’ *Athens Weekly Banner*, 5 January 1912, p. 4.

EPILOGUE

On October 28, 1992, the front page of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* pictured Governor Zell Miller on a precipice overlooking the Tallulah Gorge. In the accompanying story, he proudly announced the creation of Tallulah Gorge State Park – Georgia’s newest state park – a joint venture between the state and the Georgia Power Company. The new park included the dam, the lake, the gorge, and 3,000 forested acres surrounding the gorge. Through a new partnership program, known as “shared responsibility,” Georgia Power retained ownership of the land and continued to pay taxes to Rabun County while the state could operate a park on the land. Funding for the park would be divided between Georgia Power and the state, but the state assumed responsibility for managing the park.²²⁸ Great excitement accompanied the possibilities for the park, and outside observers and state officials both thought that it would “surely become one of the more popular parks in the state.”²²⁹

In the spring of 1993, Tallulah Gorge State Park became an official part of the Georgia State Park and Historic Site system. It was a victory for conservationists and nature lovers throughout Georgia, but its establishment also served a purpose for Georgia Power. About the same time, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) was in the process of reviewing the company’s permits to operate its dams in north Georgia, and having the goodwill of the state government would help in dealing with the federal government. Part of the review process included a petition from two conservation groups and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a minimum daily flow through the

²²⁸Charles Seabrook, “State, Ga. Power enter pact to protect site,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 28 October 1992, A1.

²²⁹Elliot Brack, “Hallelujah for Tallulah,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 30 October 1992, J2. John Harmon, “Perilous Park,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 3 November 1994, B1.

gorge, and occasional larger releases for whitewater rafting and kayaking. As was the pattern throughout the earlier Tallulah Falls battle, Georgia Power vehemently opposed any idea that might decrease its possible power output, stating that daily flow and whitewater releases would hurt generating capacity. Unlike earlier events, where the state government opposed Georgia Power's plans, after the establishment of the park, the state agreed with the company's hostility towards renewed flow. The state argued that the releases posed a danger to hikers in the gorge, and could erode the base of support for the Tallulah Gorge Bridge, a four-lane structure beside the dam.²³⁰ Things had certainly changed since the days when the state brought suit to regain the lands in the gorge.

Eventually the FERC, Georgia Power, and the state reached a compromise after a five-year bargaining process. The company agreed to release enough water for kayaking and other whitewater activities five weekends per year in April and November. As a safety precaution, hiking in the gorge during the release weekends was forbidden. The falls returned to a semblance of their former glory during these weekends, and these quickly became must-see events for kayakers around the country. Even people who did not enjoy boating the whitewater came to take in the scenery. With the popularity of the releases, the park and Georgia Power began trumpeting the success of their release plans, conveniently forgetting they had to be forced to start the releases.²³¹

Without a doubt, creating a state park was a public relations coup for both the state and the company. Unfortunately, it came eighty years too late for the town of Tallulah Falls. The period since the completion of the dam had seen the decline of the town. When Miller announced the creation of the park, the town consisted of a private high school, two restaurants, a small motel, and a small park that Georgia Power

²³⁰John Harmon, "State opposes renewal of Tallulah River flow," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 4 December 1992, E1. John Harmon, "DOT says Tallulah Gorge bridge safe," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 19 April 1993, B2.

²³¹Stacy Shelton, "The Rush Is Back," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2 November 1997, D1.

operated.²³² Tallulah Falls never recovered from a fire that raged through the town in December 1921 and destroyed what hotels had survived the arrival of the dam. Lasting economic development was difficult to find in Tallulah Falls after the dam, the demise of the tourist industry, and the fire. For the next seventy years the area was best known for providing the location for two movies: *The Great Locomotive Chase* and *Deliverance*. With Tallulah Gorge becoming a state park, the town had high expectations for the future. Mayor Truett Franklin exemplified this hope when he said, “we hope this will begin the revival of Tallulah Falls.”²³³

These are the final ironies of the story of Tallulah Falls. In the 1990s, the area’s residents looked to a state park and tourism to provide an economic boon to the community. Eighty years earlier, locals rejected tourism and cast their lot with hydroelectric development and while that seemed a wise decision at the time, it did not lead to the prosperity that they had hoped. In the process they sacrificed the major tourist attraction of earlier years, and so the park was denied one of its greatest draws except for a few weekends a year. Even the “shared responsibility” method of running the park was ironic. The state seriously attempted to make the area a park twice, and once Georgia Power’s ancestor strenuously opposed the movement. It took the actions of Georgia Power to finally make the dreams of Hamby and Longstreet come true, though not in the exact manner the two conservationists had envisioned.

The true lesson of Tallulah Falls is not the fact that in the end it finally became a park. Neither is it the language each side used to make their case to the public for preservation or development and what that reveals about the period. Nor is it that the fight for Tallulah was the first real environmental movement in Georgia and that the

²³²Gerry Yandel, “With park on the way, Tallulah Falls may rise again,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 4 November 1992, C4.

²³³John Harmon, “Town had 17 hotels—then dam was built,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 26 November 1992, E18.

TFCAs utilized techniques decades ahead of their time. Though all these facts are important, the true lesson is what the battle can tell us about today's battle over energy exploration and development. When the decision over drilling in ANWR is finally made, it should be made with due care. At Tallulah Falls, the demand for progress and energy drowned out the voices crying for preservation of a natural wonder. Once the dam was built, the falls disappeared and the region's beauty was diminished, and the people at Tallulah Falls and north Georgia did not receive the benefits they had expected. Similarly, if the advocates of drilling in ANWR, or proponents of mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia have their way the landscape will be forever altered, and for amounts of oil and coal insufficient to even dent America's energy needs. Perhaps, after careful consideration, the public will choose to support drilling in ANWR or mountaintop removal, but people should look beyond short-term economic gain to the long-term environmental effects of these types of developments. Because as the fate of Tallulah Falls illustrates, sometimes what is lost to progress is not worth the cost.

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