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"A TOUGH LITTLE PATCH OF HISTORY": ATLANTA'S MARKETPLACE FOR *GONE WITH THE WIND* MEMORY

By

JENNIFER W. DICKEY

Under the Direction of Clifford M. Kuhn

ABSTRACT

Since the 1936 publication of *Gone with the Wind* and the 1939 release of David O. Selznick's film version of the book, the city of Atlanta has been associated in the public mind with Margaret Mitchell's tale of the Old South, the Civil War and Reconstruction. The work of Mitchell and Selznick created images that shaped the public's understanding of southern history and of Atlanta's identity.

This dissertation examines a series of attempts to capitalize on the fame and popularity of *Gone with the Wind* in museums in the Atlanta area. Focusing on the interpretive efforts of three entities—the Atlanta History Center, Clayton County, and the Margaret Mitchell House, Inc.—this study reveals the problematic nature of Mitchell's and Selznick's work and the impact that the book and film have had on shaping Atlanta's identity and the public memory of the South.

INDEX WORDS: American South, Georgia, Atlanta, Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind, Tourism, Public History, Museums

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by

JENNIFER W. DICKEY

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2007

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Jennifer Word Dickey
2007

"A TOUGH LITTLE PATCH OF HISTORY": ATLANTA'S MARKETPLACE FOR *GONE WITH THE WIND* MEMORY

by

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I credit my sister, Angela Dickey, with making me aware of *Gone with the Wind* when we were children and inspiring an interest in Margaret Mitchell's very complicated, popular, and polarizing work. She remains amazed that I have managed to formulate a

doctoral dissertation out of this childhood fascination, but she has encouraged me every step of the way. My dearest friend, Kathy Knapp, read this manuscript countless times and enthusiastically accompanied me on multiple visits to all the *Gone with the Wind* memory sites that are the subject of this study. Her kindness and patience know no bounds. My mother, Ouida Dickey, also suffered through countless readings of the manuscript. She was relentless in her editing as well as in prodding me along. She remains the person I most admire. It is to her that I dedicate this dissertation.

In spite of all the help I have received along the way, the end product is mine alone. I take full responsibility for any errors or misstatement of facts contained herein.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iv

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1–THE LITTLE WOMAN, THE BIG BOOK, AND THE CITY TOO BUSY TO HATE..... 26

CHAPTER 2–AROUSING AN INTEREST IN HISTORY 45

CHAPTER 3–THE ROCKY ROAD TO TARA 84

CHAPTER 4–"IT MIGHT NOT BE TARA"..... 128

CHAPTER 5 – THE HOUSE OF BROKEN DREAMS 154

CHAPTER 6–THE HOUSE SHALL RISE AGAIN..... 184

CHAPTER 7–THE POWER OF THE STORYTELLER..... 209

BIBLIOGRAPHY 220

INTRODUCTION

> If Atlantans were to speak of "The Good Book," they would, in all probability, mean the Bible. When they speak of "The Book," there's no question. They mean *Gone With the Wind*.
>
> Celestine Sibley[1]

"It's a tough little patch of history, and for some reason is intent on survival," wrote journalist Boyd Lewis in July 1996 several weeks after the newly restored Margaret Mitchell House burned a mere forty-six days before its planned grand opening.[2] Lewis's comment was not just a clever turn-of-phrase. The physical space in which Mitchell had written *Gone with the Wind* had been spared from destruction by fire for the second time in two years. Although most of the building had collapsed around it, the apartment that Margaret Mitchell referred to as "the Dump" remained largely unscathed. The apartment's resilience was most likely attributable to its location in the basement, but for fans of *Gone with the Wind*, the Dump's ability to fend off the flames that consumed the upper floors of the building added to the mystique of the place where Mitchell wrote the book between 1926 and 1932.

Since the publication of Margaret Mitchell's book in 1936, the city of Atlanta has alternately embraced and shunned its connection to *Gone with the Wind*. Until Atlanta hosted the summer Olympic Games in 1996, the December 1939 premiere of the film version of *Gone with the Wind* was still heralded as the city's greatest moment in the national spotlight. The association with Mitchell's backward-looking novel, however, often proved to be an embarrassment to city boosters who were focused on the future of

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[1] Celestine Sibley, *Peachtree Street USA* (Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 1986), 93.
[2] Boyd Lewis, "The Phoenix Effect," *The Atlanta Journal*, 8 July 1996, 7A.

Atlanta. Even as Mitchell was pecking out her thousand-page novel about Atlanta's past on a Remington typewriter during the mid-1920s, civic leaders adopted "Forward Atlanta" as the city's slogan.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the Atlanta metropolitan area experienced explosive growth, more than doubling in population from 1.4 million to over 4.2 million between 1970 and 2000 and expanding to include twenty counties.[3] Along with this growth came growing pains as the city struggled to accommodate its burgeoning population and wrestled with its identity. Civic leaders adopted a new slogan, "Come Celebrate Our Dream," as an invitation to the world while the city prepared to host the 1996 summer Olympics. Much to the dismay of some civic leaders, a significant component of that identity was Atlanta's association with *Gone with the Wind*, which throughout the late twentieth century proved to be both a boon and a burden for the city that seemed to be constantly struggling to reinvent itself.

Boyd Lewis's description of the apartment in which Margaret Mitchell wrote *Gone with the Wind* as "a tough little patch of history" was apt, but perhaps the same could be said of *Gone with the Wind*. Whether it is good history or bad history, *Gone with the Wind* remains a part of the southern historical landscape—a tough little patch of history from which the city of Atlanta has found it difficult to disassociate. What follows is an exploration of that enduring power and the role of local museums in perpetuating the marketplace for *Gone with the Wind* memory.

During the course of this study, I encountered what appeared to be a *Gone with the Wind* generation gap when one of my most culturally literate students admitted that

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[3] Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996), 75.

she had never read *Gone with the Wind* nor had she seen the movie. I began pondering another seemingly irrepressible symbol of southern whiteness, Elvis Presley, whose popularity has waned periodically in the decades since he burst forth into the national consciousness. In 2004 Elvis raked in over $30 million, making him once again one of the top earners on the *Forbes Magazine* list of dead celebrities.[4] *Gone with the Wind*, I mused, is not unlike Elvis. Its popularity ebbs and flows, but its characters and settings are so ingrained in our national consciousness, such a part of our collective memory, that, love it or hate it, *Gone with the Wind* is part of our national story that seems likely to carry forward well into the twenty-first century, whether or not people read the book or see the film. As a former colleague at the National Park Service once said, "I think *Gone with the Wind* has legs."[5]

"The Greatest Publishing-Viewing Extravaganza of All Time"

Historian Willie Lee Rose described *Gone with the Wind* as "the greatest publishing-viewing extravaganza of all time."[6] Within a year of its publication, Margaret Mitchell's novel sold more than 1.7 million copies, was named by the American Booksellers Association as the best fiction of the previous year, and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Reviews for the book varied widely from a characterization of the book by Malcolm Cowley, assistant editor of *The New Republic*, as "an encyclopedia of the plantation legend" to *New York Post* reviewer Herschel Brickell's assessment that *Gone with the Wind* was "far and away the best novel that has ever been written about the

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[4] "Top Earning Dead Celebrities," *Forbes*, https://www.forbes.com.
[5] Bob Blythe, conversation with author, 7 July 2004.
[6] Willie Lee Rose, "Race and Region in American Historical Fiction: Four Episodes in Popular Culture," *Slavery and Freedom*, ed. William Freehling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 130.

Civil War and the days that followed."[7] The public embraced *Gone with the Wind* like no other work of fiction before or since. The book spurred Atlanta's first tourist boom of the twentieth century in 1937 when tens of thousands of visitors came to Atlanta looking for Tara, Mitchell's fictional plantation. The Atlanta Historical Society reported as many as 100 requests a day for directions to fictional and historical locations from the book. The Atlanta Convention Bureau responded to the tourist invasion with the publication of maps and brochures that highlighted Civil War-related sites around the city.[8]

By the time the film version of *Gone with the Wind* was released in 1939, Atlanta's identity was so inextricably linked to Mitchell's work that producer David O. Selznick felt compelled to bypass New York and Los Angeles for the film's premiere in favor of a gala opening in the very city that was the setting for much of the action. Thus began Atlanta's long and sometimes torturous relationship with *Gone with the Wind*, a fictional work that, according to author Tony Horwitz, has "done more to keep the Civil War alive, and to mold its memory, than any history book or event since Appomattox."[9] The impact of Mitchell's work in shaping the collective memory of war and Reconstruction was recognized in 1965 when Mitchell was awarded posthumously the Shining Light Award. Sponsored by the Atlanta Gas Light Company to honor the state's most outstanding leaders, the Shining Light Award was given to Mitchell for her "contribution in portraying Atlanta and the historic South to the world."[10]

By the late twentieth century, Atlanta's association with Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind* had become somewhat problematic. Although the book continued to

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[7] Darden Asbury Pyron, *Recasting: "Gone with the Wind" in American Culture* (Miami: Florida International University, 1984), 19.
[8] Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*, 42.
[9] Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 296.
[10] Shining Light Award Plaque, Margaret Mitchell House, 1965.

sell at a rate of over 35,000 copies per year, the image of "Atlanta and the historic South" that Mitchell's work portrayed was no longer something celebrated in Atlanta. As civic leaders prepared their final presentation to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1990, they discovered that the "one image of Atlanta that was known to virtually all IOC members was Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*." This association, which had served as a tourist boon for Atlanta in the first half of the century, now posed a problem. Atlanta's bid team feared that this "ode to the majesty of the Old South and slavery . . . might present a politically incorrect image." Ultimately a clip from Selznick's film version of Mitchell's book was edited out of Atlanta's video presentation to the IOC.[11]

It was not only on the international scene that Atlanta's identification with *Gone with the Wind* was considered problematic. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, attempts to memorialize Mitchell's work in her hometown met with equal doses of unabashed animosity and unbridled enthusiasm. Most controversial were the many attempts to restore to its former glory and open as a museum the home in which Mitchell lived while writing most of *Gone with the Wind*. The battle over what became known as the Margaret Mitchell House raged for more than a decade and made headlines around the country.

Less controversial was the series of exhibits staged by the Atlanta History Center, the city's premiere history museum, that attempted to interpret *Gone with the Wind* as a cultural phenomenon. Nestled in the heart of the wealthy north Atlanta neighborhood of Buckhead and funded largely by private donations, the Atlanta History Center did not receive the same scrutiny to which the Margaret Mitchell House was subjected; but its

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[11] Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 512.

exhibits represent the difficulties of interpreting a much-beloved, yet often maligned fictional work for the general public.

South of Atlanta, rural Clayton County embraced its identity as "the Home of *Gone with the Wind*," a moniker bestowed upon the county in the late 1960s by Margaret's brother, Stephens Mitchell, who inherited control of Margaret's estate following her death. Desperate for economic development, Clayton County, which served as the site of Mitchell's fictional plantation, Tara, flirted with several attempts to build a *Gone with the Wind*-related theme park before finally settling on a more modest *Gone with the Wind* Historic District that included a welcome center/museum devoted to *Gone with the Wind* and a relocated antebellum home. Much like the Atlanta History Center, Clayton County's Road to Tara Museum and its Stately Oaks plantation have failed to generate the level of publicity and controversy that surrounded the restoration of the Margaret Mitchell House, but the Clayton County version of history presented at these sites remains compelling as an example of the attempts by communities to create and celebrate a fictional past in the face of economic restructuring and cultural change.

These three sites, the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum, the Atlanta History Center, and the Clayton County *Gone with the Wind* Historic District make up the bulk of what Margaret Mitchell House founder Mary Rose Taylor once described as the "increasingly competitive marketplace for *Gone with the Wind* memory" in the Atlanta area.[12] While the Margaret Mitchell House is devoted to interpreting the life of Margaret Mitchell and her most famous work, the Clayton County *Gone with the Wind* Historic District draws heavily on the romanticized past of the Old South, and the welcome center/museum concentrates primarily on David O. Selznick's film version of *Gone with*

[12] Mary Rose Taylor address to the Atlanta Rotary Club, 12 January 2004.

the Wind. At its museum facility in Buckhead, the Atlanta Historical Society with its broader mandate to present "the stories of Atlanta's past, present, and future in a variety of engaging and exciting ways," has staged multiple exhibits about *Gone with the Wind* ranging from celebratory to exploratory.[13]

In his dissertation, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," Rodger Lyle Brown notes: "When people refer to this thing called 'Gone With the Wind,' they tend to merge the novel with the movie, ultimately referring to neither, but rather to a set of characters, place names, and vague and various assumptions of southern history and culture."[14] Mitchell's book and Selznick's film created a set of images about the South that continue to dominate interpretive programs at antebellum house museums throughout the region. Mitchell's characters have become icons that, thanks to Selznick's film, are recognized around the world. Images from the film have been powerful enough to shape architectural styles, and the book and film have added a number of catch phrases to the American lexicon. In 2006, The American Film Institute ranked three quotes from *Gone with the Wind* in its list of top 100 movie quotes, with Rhett Butler's famous exit line from the film version of *Gone with the Wind,* "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn," ranked number one.[15]

Atlanta is littered with businesses that draw on the iconic status of *Gone with the Wind* and its characters, such as the antique and collectible shop Scarlet Loves Rhettro, a

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[13] *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia and the South*, Vol. XLIII, No. 2, Summer 1999, 2.
[14] Rodger Lyle Brown. "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1998), 35. Brown's dissertation focused on the attempts to build a historical or commercial attraction based on *Gone with the Wind* in suburban counties around Atlanta. Central to all these efforts were the attempts to recreate a version of Tara, the fictional plantation owned by the O'Hara family. All of the attempts studied by Brown ultimately failed, although he could not identify a common reason to explain the failures. Brown's study deals primarily with "cultural tensions and political mechanics." None of the projects Brown explored ever came to fruition; therefore, he does not delve into interpretive issues associated with completed exhibitions.
[15] "AFI's 100 Years . . . 100 Movie Quotes," http://www.afi.com.

bridal shop called Ms. Scarlett's on Peachtree, a restaurant named Pittypat's Porch, and the Tara Theater, not to mention the plethora of streets and businesses named "Tara" in Clayton County. The iconic status of Mitchell's characters extends well beyond the city of Atlanta, and more than seventy years after its publication, *Gone with the Wind* remains thoroughly imbedded in American culture. Indeed, Mitchell's book and the ensuing film produced by David O. Selznick have melded with broader forces of southern history, southern mythology, and marketing to become a cultural phenomenon.

Thematic and Theoretical Framework

Several broad currents undergird this study of the development of the competitive marketplace for *Gone with the Wind* memory in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Interpretations of southern history underwent a sea change during the twentieth century. Margaret Mitchell began writing her book shortly before this shift began to gather momentum, and an understanding of that historiography is vital to understanding Margaret Mitchell's perspective on the past. The concept of collective or social memory is fundamental to understanding how works such as *Gone with the Wind* draw on and reinforce public perceptions of an agreed-upon version of history, and, sometimes, a mythology. The field of public history focuses on how such histories and mythologies are crafted. Historian Michael Frisch uses the term "A Shared Authority" to describe this process, noting that "in public history, approaches to related issues of authority—scholarly and intellectual authority—define much of the landscape."[16] The development of historical consciousness in the American South and the manifestation of that consciousness through public sites of commemoration have been a topic of much

[16] Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xxi.

scholarly work in recent years, and an understanding of that history is vital to understanding the issues and controversy surrounding the development of *Gone with the Wind* commemorative sites in Atlanta. The development of the city of Atlanta itself is also a vital component of the story. This study examines the struggle surrounding the commemoration of Margaret Mitchell in her hometown and her contribution to southern historical consciousness and identity.

Mitchell's book in many ways stands as a metaphor for the changing interpretations of Southern history throughout the twentieth century. Upon its publication in 1936, *Gone with the Wind* was advertised in the *American Historical Review* as "the greatest historical novel ever written by an American."[17] In a review in the *William and Mary College Quarterly*, Glenwood Clark heralded the book for its "historical accuracy, timeliness, and central theme" and declared that Mitchell had presented "a truthful picture of the South as it was during the single decade covered by the novel."[18] Clark explained that the decade about which Mitchell wrote was extraordinarily important because it was during this time, 1860 to 1871, that "a social-economic regime of great beauty crashed to its ruin amid the thunder of war and a new order was getting itself born even while the South lay prostrate under the armies of its conqueror."[19]

By contrast, African American scholar L. D. Reddick took issue with the racial bias of Mitchell's work in his review published in the July 1937 issue of the *Journal of Negro History*. Reddick commented that the book was "no doubt, honestly written," but

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[17] *American Historical Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1, October 1936, vii.
[18] G. Glenwood Clark, review of *Gone with the Wind*, by Margaret Mitchell, *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*, Second Series, Vol. 17, Issue 1 (January 1937), 131.
[19] Ibid., 132.

it was also "written with a passionate sectional and racial bias."[20] Reddick further noted that, although *Gone with the Wind* "could be documented with quotations from the works of Phillips, Burgess, Hamilton, Thompson, and their followers, even this is little more than the documentation of the fact that these 'histories' have issued from the same sectional and racial chauvinism."[21] U. B. Phillips, John W. Burgess, Joseph de Roulhac Hamilton, and Mildred Thompson were all colleagues at Columbia University where, during the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, Reconstruction scholar William A. Dunning shaped what became the national narrative regarding Reconstruction. According to Dunning, African Americans were incapable of governing themselves or others and were inherently inferior to whites. As historian Eric Foner summarized in his late-twentieth-century history of the Reconstruction era, according to the Dunning school, "Reconstruction was the darkest page in the saga of American history."[22] Dunning's protégés were prolific in their writings on the Reconstruction era, and the Dunning School interpretation dominated history textbooks into the middle of the twentieth century.

Margaret Mitchell, a middle-class white woman writing in the 1920s, reflected the prevailing trends in southern historiography. These trends reinforced the "lost cause" mythology that had developed during the Reconstruction period of the nineteenth century and continued to dominate the discourse throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In his 2002 book, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, historian David Blight chronicled the rise of that "lost cause" mythology, which became the

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[20] L. D. Reddick, review of *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* by William Sumner Jenkins; *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Jul. 1936), 366.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), xii.

dominant view of the Civil War and Reconstruction and prevailed as the national narrative in the United States. Blight argued that the perceived necessity for reunion between North and South trumped all other issues in the wake of the Civil War and led to a deliberate effort to subvert the issues of slavery, emancipation, and southern culpability in favor of a reconciliationist vision. As Blight so eloquently explained, the story of Civil War memory in America "is a story of how in American culture romance triumphed over reality, sentimental remembrance won over ideological memory."[23]

This "whitewashed" version of southern history disregarded or denigrated the role of blacks in the South, a problem that W. E. B. DuBois addressed in his 1935 book, *Black Reconstruction in America*. In 1936 DuBois was heralded as a "merciless critic" and "constructive historian" by Atlanta University historian Rayford Logan in *The Journal of Negro History*. Logan commended DuBois for throwing "open to discussion, and to fiery debate, what was once considered a closed chapter."[24] White historians failed to embrace DuBois' work in the late 1930s, although he would later receive recognition for his remarkable attempt to provide a more balanced view of the events that followed the Civil War.

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement that swept across the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, criticism of the stereotypical racist portrayal of blacks in *Gone with the Wind* became commonplace. As African Americans successfully reclaimed their past, the historiography of the South began to reflect this change. Historian John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom*, first published in 1947, was "the most competent,

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[23] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2002), 4.
[24] Rayford Logan, review of *Black Reconstruction* by W. E. B. DuBois, *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan. 1936), 61-63.

balanced, and scholarly summary of the Negro's role in America that has appeared," according to historian William B. Hesseltine of the University of Wisconsin.[25] In 1951 Louisiana State University published C. Vann Woodward's contribution to its multi-volume *History of the South* series, *Origins of the New South*, in which Woodward surveyed "the ruins and issues of reunion" and evaluated "the establishment of a free economy and system of caste" that evolved in the South between 1877 and 1913. Although his focus was the post-Reconstruction period, Woodward's book was partly an answer to the "clarion call" issued in 1940 by Woodward's former adviser, H. K. Beale, for "the rewriting of Reconstruction history as it had been presented by Burgess, Dunning, and a generation of their students according to the conclusions of the unreconstructed slavocrats."[26] More than three decades later, historian Eric Foner rewrote the history of Reconstruction with the publication of *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. Historian Leon Litwack noted, "The contrast between the silence that greeted DuBois's scholarship and the critical acclaim lavished on Eric Foner's *Reconstruction* more than half a century later dramatizes significant changes in scholarly if not in public attitudes."[27]

Black empowerment and a re-visioning of southern history laid the foundation for the controversy that surrounded the efforts to restore the site where Mitchell wrote her novel. In a bit of serendipity, about the same time the Margaret Mitchell House opened in 1997, Alice Randall wrote what her publisher would later describe as a parody of *Gone with the Wind* entitled *The Wind Done Gone*. In Randall's book, the heroine is the

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[25] William B. Hesseltine, review of *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes* by John Hope Franklin, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Oct. 1948), 155-156.
[26] W. M. Brewer, review of *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* by C. Vann Woodward, *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Apr. 1952), 204-206.
[27] Leon F. Litwack, review of *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* by Eric Foner, *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Feb. 1990), 131-134.

mulatto love-child of Gerald O'Hara and one of his slaves. Randall's tale of the "Old South" turned Mitchell's view on its head. Randall's publisher successfully defended her right against the Mitchell estate to publish her book, and she was promptly invited to speak at the Margaret Mitchell House as part of the literary series that the museum had established in an effort to provide more credibility to the site. Randall's appearance would prove to be a watershed moment for the Margaret Mitchell House.

In the late 1970s, historian Darden Pyron assembled a collection of essays that addressed what *Gone with the Wind* meant for southern history. The resulting anthology, entitled *Recasting: "Gone with the Wind" in American Culture*, featured articles by authors and historians that offered "close, fresh readings of the text itself" and also reflected "contemporary concerns of modern scholarship, particularly issues about race and sex or gender."[28] Pyron later published *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell,* which has come to be considered the definitive biography of Margaret Mitchell. *Southern Daughter* explores Mitchell's life from her childhood pony rides with Confederate veterans to her death in 1949. In a brief epilogue, Pyron recounts how, in 1986 upon the fiftieth anniversary of the book's publication, the flurry of publicity surrounding the occasion "rather embarrassed Mitchell's native city." Pyron points out that, "even in her lifetime, many Atlantans had not known exactly what to do with Margaret Mitchell," and the problem seemed to grow with time.[29] This embarrassment and bewilderment over Mitchell's legacy goes to the heart of this research project, which examines how that legacy has been enshrined for public consumption in her hometown.

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[28] Pyron, *Recasting: Gone with the Wind in American Culture*, ix.
[29] Darden Pyron, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 594.

While the debate surrounding the public perception and reception of *Gone with the Wind* serves as a reflection of the prevailing historiographical scholarship throughout the twentieth century, the development of museum exhibitions interpreting *Gone with the Wind* offers a case study of the power and flexuous nature of collective memory and the importance of place for public memorials. In his 1996 work, *Realms of Memory*, Pierre Nora posited that the study of the history of memory, which was entering a second wave, was "less interested in 'what actually happened' than in its perpetual re-use and misuse, its influence on successive presents; less interested in traditions than in the way in which traditions are constituted and passed on."[30]

The first wave of memory study was begun by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who perished in a Nazi concentration camp in 1945. Halbwachs was considered the founding father of the sociology of memory with the 1925 publication of *On Collective Memory,* in which he argued that "human memory can only function within a collective context."[31] Forty-one years later, Frances Yates related the art of memory to the history of culture in her classic work, *The Art of Memory*. But it was not until the publication in the 1980s of *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (translated into English in 1996 as *Realms of Memory)*, a seven-volume collection of essays edited by Pierre Nora, that the history of memory became truly fashionable.[32]

Among the second wave of memory historians in the United States is Fitzhugh Brundage, whose 2000 work, *Where These Memories Grow*, takes on the formidable challenge of "history, memory, and identity in the American South." Beyond a basis for

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[30] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past, Vol. 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xxiv.
[31] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925/1992).
[32] Patrick Hutton, "Mnemonic Schemes in the New History of Memory," *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, #3 (October 1997), 380.

individual and collective identity, the study of memory offers insight into the values of a society and power relationships. As Brundage explains, by paying attention "to what kind of history southerners have valued, what in their past they have chosen to remember and forget, how they have disseminated the past they have recalled, and to what uses those memories have been put," scholars can compile a "history of remembering" that offers insight into a society's past that might otherwise remain obscured.[33] Brundage expounded upon the relationship between memory and southern history with his 2005 book, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, in which he explored the role of race in shaping collective memory and public spaces in the South. As Brundage noted, "The civic landscape of the South looks the way it does because of both persistent inequality etched and erected in public spaces and dogged efforts to revise the same terrain."[34]

Certainly an exploration of the issues surrounding the Midtown landscape that constitutes the Margaret Mitchell House is revealing. Few memorial sites in the United States provoked such heated public debate as that which surrounded the Margaret Mitchell House in the 1980s and 1990s; and, although opponents of the house often cited racial issues for their opposition, the debate did not always divide neatly along racial lines. The house offers a case study of attempts to reframe historical memory, and the alliances that formed during the process were sometimes surprising. Likewise, attempts to memorialize Margaret Mitchell in Clayton County, particularly the debate that emerged over the imposition of a special sales tax to fund a *Gone with the Wind*-related

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[33] Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 3.
[34] Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 7.

attraction, and attempts to eliminate the memory of *Gone with the Wind* by changing street names offer interesting perspectives on how the past can be used to shape the landscape and the future.

Collective memory is a theme that resonates throughout the fields of public history and historic preservation, and literature in those fields often focuses on the connection between memory and the power of place. In the early 1990s, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen began conducting a study of how Americans understand and explore the past. The results of this study, published in 1998 under the title *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, revealed that Americans were keenly interested in the past, and that museums and historic sites were considered the most reliable sources of information about the past. According to Rosenzweig and Thelen, "people who talked with us trusted history museums and historic sites because they transported visitors straight back to the times when people had used the artifacts on display or occupied the places where 'history' had been made."[35] This notion of the evocative power of place certainly is part of the equation at two of the sites that are the subject of this dissertation, Clayton County and the Margaret Mitchell House.

At a recent panel discussion on the future of history museums in the United States, Louisiana State Museum executive director David Kahn remarked that, in spite of the proliferation of new technologies that might lead to the demise of history museums, he believed visitors would keep coming to museums "because they want to see the real thing, and because we tell the truth."[36] Kahn was speaking somewhat tongue in cheek, of

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[35] Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 105.
[36] David Kahn, American History Museums Panel Session, American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, January 5, 2007.

course, having just been reminded of the Rosenzweig and Thelen study that revealed the high level of trust inspired in the general public by museums and historic sites, but his point is well taken. Along with the evocative power of an artifact or a place where history happened comes a burden—that of providing visitors with an honest and balanced interpretation of the past.

Focusing on the urban environment, Dolores Hayden explains the power of place as "the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory."[37] The Margaret Mitchell House is quite ordinary from an architectural and aesthetic point of view, yet the place is powerful because of events that transpired there. This effect was evident during the 1996 Olympics in the wake of the fire that almost completely destroyed the house. Even though the structure itself was a charred ruin, visitors came to see the "place" where Mitchell had written her book. A similar phenomenon is evidenced in Clayton County, which claims to be the home of *Gone with the Wind*, and at the Clayton County Welcome Center, where visitors frequently inquire about the location of Mitchell's fictional plantation, Tara. Scattered throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area are historical markers that chronicle the story of the Battles of Atlanta and Jonesboro, two conflicts that the Confederacy lost during the Civil War. It is this idea that Hayden explores in her book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. As Hayden notes, "even bitter experiences and fights communities have lost need to be remembered—so as not to diminish their importance."[38]

Historian David Goldfield engages in the debate of history and memory in the South in his book *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern*

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[37] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996), 9.
[38] Hayden, 11.

History. Goldfield offers a comprehensive look at how memory has shaped and is still shaping the South as he looks at such issues as evangelical religion, gender roles, and race relations. Goldfield argues that the battle for southern history and the South continues in museums, public spaces, literature, and the minds of southerners. Certainly the events surrounding these *Gone with the Wind*-related sites in Atlanta seem to support his argument.

The issue of slavery was no small component of southern history. However, when Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small began researching their book, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology of Southern Plantation Museums*, they discovered that slavery remains an inadequately discussed topic in museums throughout the South. Although the body of literature on slavery is massive, the sites at which the history of enslaved people could be told largely fail to grapple with the topic. Eichstedt and Small toured plantation sites throughout the South in search of museums that incorporated African-American stories in their presentations only to find that these plantation museums were overwhelmingly "white-centric."[39] As the two authors note, "The work that museums large and small engage in is the building of identity, cultural memory, and community." Because most plantation museums in the state of Georgia are controlled by a white, upper-class or upper-middle-class subset of the population, Eichstedt and Small discovered that the identity and cultural memory that these museums promoted and perpetuated was most often "framed through references to the movie *Gone with the Wind* and to the romance and nostalgia that the movie evokes."[40]

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[39] Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology of Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 4.
[40] Eichstedt and Small, 6.

In *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family*, Gary Pomerantz explored the development of the city of Atlanta through the history of two of the city's most prominent political families—one from each side of the color line. Pomerantz's book reveals how the city of Atlanta rose from the ashes of the Civil War, devolved into a segregated city, and eventually emerged as a model of racial cooperation for other southern cities. Pomerantz was no Pollyanna about Atlanta—he recognized that race relations played a major role in Atlanta's past, present, and future. Writing about Margaret Mitchell, Pomerantz noted that Mitchell's "racial views typified those of Atlanta's white patricians accustomed to having black servants and thinking of blacks as a subservient race."[41]

Mitchell herself vigorously refuted that she was racist, a subject about which she wrote at great length in a letter to *Macon Telegraph* journalist Susan Myrick during the time when Myrick served as a consultant to the film in Hollywood. Mitchell reminded Myrick how she and "all her folks feel about Negroes," having fought for education and medical care on their behalf. Mitchell lamented that "Radical and Communist publications, both black and white," considered *Gone with the Wind* an "insult to the Race," noting that her liberal use of the terms "Nigger" and "darkey" had a historical basis.[42]

Margaret Mitchell was born and raised in Atlanta, and the city shaped her identity, much as her book would later shape the identity of the city. Darden Pyron's biography of Mitchell, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell*, explored this symbiotic relationship. Recounting how "tradition yowled against the future" and

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[41] Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family*, 136.
[42] Richard Harwell, ed., *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind" Letters, 1936-1949,* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976), 273.

"Victorian propriety jousted with the black subculture for the city's soul [while] transient crackers snarled at both sides," Darden posits that "the young Margaret Mitchell imbibed these contradictions, and they in turn defined and exaggerated the conflict in her own life and values."[43]

In an essay entitled "How Black Was Rhett Butler?" historian Joel Williamson further explores how Margaret Mitchell was shaped by the Atlanta society into which she was born, and notes that Mitchell "grew up in a white Georgia world very much pervaded by a fear of the black beast rapist."[44] Mitchell "was not content with joining the southern white society and living by its rules, but she was also not ready to leave it," explains Williamson, adding that she was "a woman who danced on the edge of her culture."[45]

Sites of Remembering and Forgetting

Each of the three sites where *Gone with the Wind* is interpreted and presented to the public represents an attempt to capitalize on the fame and popularity of Mitchell's work and, in some cases, attempts to mitigate the misperceptions perpetuated by both the book and the film. This dissertation will explore the history of these sites—how and why they were developed—and the impact that they have had on shaping Atlanta's identity and the public memory of the Old South more than half a century after the publication of Mitchell's book.

The frequency with which the Atlanta History Center (AHC) has drawn on *Gone with the Wind* as a subject for exhibitions is a testimonial to the continued drawing power of the book and the film. The AHC's *Gone with the Wind* -related exhibits always

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[43] Darden Pyron, *Southern Daughter*, 6.
[44] Joel Williamson, "How Black was Rhett Butler?" *The Evolution of Southern Culture*, ed. Numan Bartley (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 97.
[45] Ibid., 95 & 105.

generate a great deal of publicity and draw large crowds. With each exhibit, the AHC attempts to go beyond a superficial celebration of the book and film that put Atlanta on the map and explore the fictional work against the backdrop of history.

The Clayton County *Gone with the Wind* Historic District dramatically illustrates the power of place to evoke a sense of romance and nostalgia, even if those sentiments are based on fiction. As the setting for much of the action in the book, Clayton County represents the place where things happened, even if they happened only in the imagination of Margaret Mitchell. Here fact and fiction are so thoroughly commingled that the lines are not merely blurred—at times they disappear altogether.

The home in which Margaret Mitchell wrote her epic novel of the Old South, now known as the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum, became symbolic of the "lost cause" mythology that characterized southern history throughout the first half of the twentieth century. It also became symbolic of the spirit of Atlanta in the wake of repeated attempts to destroy any vestiges of the building in which Mitchell wrote her book. An exploration of the battle that raged around this particular site offers insight into the role of memory in constructing a usable past and the power of place in the creation of memorial sites.

The AHC and the Clayton County *Gone with the Wind* Historic District have been far less controversial than the Margaret Mitchell House, which became a lightning rod for praise and criticism of the book, the film, and the resulting cultural phenomenon. The Margaret Mitchell House was, after all, the site of the creation of the book that spawned the film that spawned the phenomenon. Here the battle over the establishment of a memorial to Mitchell was fought for over a decade with pen and ink and fire. As Rodger

Lyle Brown noted, "battles over history take place in the popular mind in the form of battles over symbols," and the Margaret Mitchell House came to symbolize all that was considered good and bad about Mitchell's work and the images it created.[46]

The preservation and presentation of the site where Margaret Mitchell penned her award-winning novel, *Gone with the Wind*, stimulated a very hostile and very public debate about the appropriateness and value of Mitchell's contribution to Southern history. Interpretations of Mitchell's work at the AHC have been popular favorites; however, the exhibits have also reinforced the image of the AHC as a bastion of elite, white southern history. In rural Clayton County, history is contextualized in terms of Mitchell's fictional work. At each location, the past has been reconstructed to suit a particular market—visitors hungry for a glimpse of a past that inspired "the greatest publishing-viewing extravaganza of all time."[47]

Historian David Lowenthal posited, "The creed of heritage answers needs for ritual devotion, especially where other formal faith has become perfunctory or mainly political."[48] That *Gone with the Wind* has become like a religion among its most ardent fans is hardly a revelation. These self-proclaimed "Windies" read the book and watch the film repeatedly and devote a great deal of their time to collecting *Gone with the Wind* paraphernalia. Like pilgrims to the Holy Land, they come to the most sacred site in the *Gone with the Wind* universe, the building where Mitchell wrote the book. These same pilgrims are drawn to the AHC where they frequently inquire about the location of Tara, the O'Haras' fictional plantation. Often they are directed to the home of this fictional

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[46] Rodger Lyle Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 12.
[47] Rose, "Race and Region in American Historical Fiction: Four Episodes in Popular Culture," 130.
[48] David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

plantation, Clayton County. Visitors are encouraged to purchase a $34.95 "Premiere Pass," which includes entry to two out of the three sites in this *Gone with the Wind* triangle. If their comments are to be believed, these visitors walk away from these three sites without a changed perception of the Old South or the New South.

Rather than trying to shape some vague notion of collective memory, Mitchell always claimed to be writing merely about "people who had gumption and the people who didn't."[49] This novel about gumption is second only to the Bible as the best-selling book in history, a fact that loyal fans and museum exhibits often cite to reinforce the importance of Mitchell's work. The sheer popularity of Mitchell's work has given it credence far beyond what any revisionist historian can counteract with new interpretations based on historical evidence. Indeed, despite their lack of professional credentials, Mitchell and David O. Selznick have played the role of public historians, interpreting this period of American history on a scale well beyond that of scholars in the field. These sites in Atlanta that are the subject of this study represent a re-interpretation of this history as the sites attempt to interpret Margaret Mitchell's work for new generations.

Organization/Chapter Outlines

Chapter One provides the historic context for the development of the three sites that are the focus of this study. This chapter provides the backdrop against which Margaret Mitchell penned her epic novel and the narrative within which the public placed Mitchell's work. The reception and impact of Mitchell's work and Selznick's film are

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[49] Richard Harwell, ed. "*Gone with the Wind" as Book and Film*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 38.

explored with a particular focus on how the city of Atlanta dealt with its new-found status as an emblem of both the Old South and the New South.

Chapter Two delves into the various exhibits produced by the Atlanta History Center related to *Gone with the Wind*. Between 1980 and 2004, the AHC hosted eight exhibits related to the book or the film and flirted with creating a permanent *Gone with the Wind* exhibition. Several of the exhibits represent noble attempts to contextualize Mitchell's fictional work, although surveys indicate an unwillingness on the part of visitors to change their perceptions of the Old South that remain grounded in a romanticized notion perpetuated by the book and film.

Chapter Three explores the veracity of Clayton County's claim to fame as "The Home of *Gone with the Wind*," a moniker bestowed upon the county by Margaret Mitchell's estate in 1969, and how the county has exploited this designation. Particular attention is paid to the county's plans for economic development through attempts to create a multimillion-dollar *Gone with the Wind* attraction in Clayton County. In a strange twist of fate, the façade of Tara from the 1939 film version of *Gone with the Wind* plays a role in the Clayton County story. The modest *Gone with the Wind* attraction that did come to fruition, The Road to Tara Museum, serves as the welcome center for the city of Jonesboro and the interpretive center for the county's *Gone with the Wind* connection.

Chapters Four through Six recount the saga of "the Dump," the tiny apartment in Midtown Atlanta where Margaret Mitchell wrote *Gone with the Wind*. The Dump became a symbol of both all that was wrong with and all that was right about Mitchell's work. It was here, at the site of the creation of *Gone with the Wind*, that the most fierce

and public battle raged in the late twentieth century over the legacy of Mitchell and her work.

The conclusion explores the meaning of these *Gone with the Wind* interpretive sites more than seventy years after the book's publication and how the sites cooperate and compete with each other in "the increasingly competitive marketplace for GWTW memory." The sites encountered in this project are evaluated in relation to the myth of southern history, which Mitchell helped perpetuate, and in light of more recent scholarship that has re-visioned southern history in a broader context. The role played by these sites individually and collectively in shaping collective memory and the identity of Atlantans and southerners is explored.

The conclusion places these case studies in the broader context of the role of museums in building cultural identity, memory, and community. Although Atlanta's identification with *Gone with the Wind* predates the MMH, the AHC, and the Clayton County *Gone with the Wind* Historic District, these three sites have been instrumental in carrying this identity into a new century. *Gone with the Wind* "is folklore now, a part of the culture," as James Boatwright noted in an essay in *The New Republic*, and "nothing with so much aggressive presence can be insignificant."[50] The aggressive presence of *Gone with the Wind* in Atlanta is a response to the public appetite for all things *Gone with the Wind*, but it also perpetuates the folklore and solidifies Atlanta's connection to its past, be it fact or fiction.

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[50] James Boatwright, "Totin' de Weery Load," "*Gone with the Wind" as Book and Film*, ed. Richard Harwell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 212.

CHAPTER 1–THE LITTLE WOMAN, THE BIG BOOK, AND THE CITY TOO BUSY TO HATE

> That day I thought I would write a story of a girl who was somewhat like Atlanta—part of the Old South; part of the new South; [how] she rose with Atlanta and fell with and how she rose again. What Atlanta did to her; what she did to Atlanta.
>
> Margaret Mitchell[1]

Upon meeting Margaret Mitchell during the Atlanta premiere of the film version of *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, Clark Gable allegedly remarked, "So you're the little woman who wrote the big book," perhaps a sly reference to a similar comment made by Abraham Lincoln to Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in 1862.[2] A mere four feet, eleven inches tall, Mitchell's small size and short life belie the impact that she had on her hometown of Atlanta. A 1942 guidebook to Atlanta written by the Georgia Writers' Project, working under the auspices of the Works Project Administration, reported, "Since the publication of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* and the extraordinary publicity given the city by the world premiere of the motion picture, an increasing number of people have wanted to know more about Atlanta."[3] The writers posited that,

> in the minds of many American citizens, tradition is the very essence of the South. They expect to find it both as a grace and a disaster, sometimes flowering as fine living and exquisite manners, sometimes wrapped like a vine about an entire community and strangling all the best energies of progress. This picture takes into account only two aspects: on the one hand magnolias, black mammies, fried chicken, and beautiful belles; on the other cornbread with fat-back and lackadaisical farmers. To both these preconceptions Atlanta is its own best refutation. . . . This city of big

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[1] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind" Letters, 1936-1949*, xxxi.
[2] Bo Emerson, "The Dump nearly ready for guests," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 22 March 1996, 5E.
[3] Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Georgia, *Atlanta: A City of the Modern South* (New York: Smith & Durrell Publishers, 1942), vi.

> stores, of smoking factories, of handsome modern residences, is truly a city of the modern South.[4]

This passage captures the dichotomy of Atlanta in 1942, and to some extent, in the present day as well. The self-declared capital of the New South, Atlanta is a city with a conflicted identity. That identity has been shaped by many forces, including the book and film versions of *Gone with the Wind*.

The Little Woman

A native Atlantan, Margaret Mitchell was born in 1900 to Eugene and May Belle Mitchell. Margaret was two and a half years old when her parents purchased a thirteen-room Victorian home on Jackson Street practically in the shadow of her maternal grandparents' home. Here Margaret would spend her formative years surrounded by an extended family. By age six she had learned to ride a horse and spent most of her afternoons riding her pony with a "motley crew" of Civil War cavalry veterans who captured Margaret's imagination with their tales of the war.[5] In later years, Mitchell explained that "she was raised up on" the Civil War, which served as the historical background for her book, and recalled "that day when I sat down to write I did not have to bother about my background for it had been with me all my life."[6]

Margaret and her older brother Stephens Mitchell also spent a great deal of time at the home of their maternal great-grandparents in Clayton County. At the Fitzgerald Farm, where Margaret and Stephens spent most of their summers, the children were entertained with stories about the Civil War and Reconstruction. Mitchell often joked that she heard so many tales of the war during her childhood that she was ten years old

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[4] *Atlanta: A City of the Modern South*, v.
[5] Pyron, *Southern Daughter*, 30.
[6] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind Letters," 1936-1949*, xxx.

before she realized that the South had lost the war and that the events about which these former members of the "thin gray line" talked so animatedly had not happened shortly before she was born.[7]

The background for her book was gleaned from other sources as well. Margaret's father, Eugene, was an attorney by trade but a historian at heart. He devoted a great deal of his time to promoting literacy among the city's youth as a trustee of the public library and was a founder and sponsor of the Young Men's Library Association. He was also a founding member of the Atlanta Historical Society. In keeping with his standing as a leader of white society in Atlanta, Eugene Mitchell constructed a new house at 1149 Peachtree Road, and in 1912 the Mitchell family moved to the new residence on the north side of Atlanta.

Margaret was encouraged to read and write from a very young age, and by the age of sixteen she had produced a number of plays, short stories, and even a novella, which would be published in 1996 fifty years after her death. One of Mitchell's favorite authors in those years was Thomas Dixon, and his book *The Traitor: A Story of the Fall of the Invisible Empire* served as the basis for at least one of Mitchell's plays. *The Traitor* was a part of Dixon's famous trilogy of Reconstruction, which also included *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*. It was Dixon's work that formed the basis for D. W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*.

Following her graduation from Washington Seminary, a private girls' school in Atlanta, Mitchell attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Mitchell was unhappy at Smith, and following the death of her mother in the influenza epidemic of

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[7] Pyron, *Southern Daughter*, 35.

1919, she returned to Atlanta, ostensibly to help care for her father, who was devastated by the death of his wife.

Mitchell claimed she came home "to keep house and keep my family and home intact and take Mother's place in society."[8] Mitchell's society debut was hardly the smooth affair her mother had envisioned. Her debutante year, which began in 1920, was chronicled in the *Atlanta Journal*, and Atlanta society was duly scandalized by her behavior. Not only did Mitchell engage in political debate, she announced that she intended to get a job and that marriage "was not essential to salvation." The crescendo came with Mitchell's performance of the Apache dance at a charity ball in the Georgian Terrace in March of 1921. *Atlanta Journal* society editor Medora Field wrote that Mitchell "created a sensation among the mid-Victorians with her Apache dance," but in polite society, such a sensation was scandalous. The Junior League refused to admit Margaret Mitchell to its ranks, a slight about which Mitchell made light, but which no doubt heightened her disdain for polite society and ladylike behavior. Mitchell continued to break the debutante mold when she married and less than a year later divorced a ne'er-do-well named Berrien "Red" Upshaw and then got a job as a reporter at the *Atlanta Journal*.[9]

The Big Book

In 1925, the year she married John Marsh, Mitchell was forced to retire from the *Atlanta Journal* for health reasons. Having read every book her husband could bring her from the library, Mitchell sat down to write one day in 1926. The year before, she and Marsh had moved into a small, basement apartment at the corner of Tenth and Peachtree

[8] Ibid., 104.
[9] Ibid., 107-108.

Streets. Mitchell promptly named the apartment "the Dump." The Marshes spent the next seven years in the Dump, which became "the gathering place of many of Atlanta's brightest minds," according to Mitchell's *Atlanta Journal* colleague William Howland. It was while living in the Dump that Mitchell began writing *Gone with the Wind*.[10]

Three years after the Marshes had moved out of the Dump and into more spacious quarters on Seventeenth Street, Mitchell met editor Harold Latham from publisher Macmillan & Company as he toured the South in search of manuscripts worthy of publication. Mitchell gathered up the scattered pieces of her massive manuscript, which she had carelessly stored in envelopes around her apartment, and delivered them to Latham at the Georgian Terrace Hotel shortly before he departed the city. Mitchell almost immediately regretted her decision to share her manuscript with Latham and cabled him that she had changed her mind, but the wheels were in motion. Following the conclusion of contract negotiations with Macmillan in the summer of 1935, Mitchell began editing her work for publication.

After its release on June 30, 1936, *Gone with the Wind* became an immediate bestseller. It was chosen by the Book of the Month Club as its selection for July, and by the end of the first month, 201,000 copies were in print. The book took Atlanta and the nation by storm, and its diminutive author became the toast of the town. Mitchell was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1937 as sales of her book approached two million.

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[10] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind" Letters, 1936-1949*, xxix.

Selznick's Folly

Less than a month after the book was published, movie mogul David O. Selznick bought the motion picture rights for $50,000, a record sum for a book by a first-time author. He then began the long process of adapting Mitchell's 1,037-page novel for the screen. Selznick hired screenwriter Sidney Howard to craft the script. Although Howard would be credited as the screenwriter on the film and received an Academy Award for his efforts, at least seventeen different writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Atlanta historian Wilbur Kurtz, and Selznick himself, worked on the script throughout the production process. So many changes were made to the script after shooting began, that the final assemblage of pages that were shot became known as "the Rainbow Script" because each revision was printed on different colored paper.[11] Much of the dialogue in the film was taken directly from Mitchell's book.

In an effort to maintain interest in *Gone with the Wind* throughout the three years that it took Selznick to shepherd the work from book to film, the producer engineered a nationwide talent search for Scarlett O'Hara. Much as he planned, the talent search kept interest in the celluloid version of *Gone with the Wind* at a fever pitch. Even Margaret Mitchell, who adamantly refused to get involved with the production of the film or its casting, got dragged into the madness, as she mentioned in a letter to Sidney Howard in November 1936. "From the minute the news of the movie sale broke, I have been deviled by the press and the public for statements about who I wanted in the picture, who I wanted to do the adaptation, where I wanted it filmed," wrote Mitchell, adding, "When I sold the book to the Selznick Company, I made it very plain that I would have nothing

[11] Harwell, "*Gone with the Wind" as Book and Film*, p. xx.

whatsoever to do with the picture, nothing on backgrounds, costumes, continuity."[12] Mitchell did offer to take Howard and story editor Kay Brown on a tour of old houses in the region, but confirmed her intent to stay out of the filmmaking process, about which she admitted she knew nothing and seemingly had no interest in expanding her knowledge.

According to her letters, which chronicle the aftermath of the book's publication, Mitchell was constantly subjected to requests from acquaintances and strangers who thought they were exactly right for the role of Scarlett O'Hara. Mitchell was also frequently questioned about the location of her fictional Tara, which she claimed she deliberately placed in a landscape that existed only in her imagination. In a letter to the wife of the *New York Post* book reviewer Herschel Brickell, Mitchell wrote, "When I say I made it up, they refuse to believe because they've seen so many people who've seen Tara and they think I'm pretty ungracious not to direct them there."[13]

Principal filming ran from December 1938 to June 1939, with re-shoots lasting until November of that same year. The film became known as "Selznick's Folly" as the production churned through three different directors and ran over budget. Halfway through production, costs on the film had exceeded the $2.5 million budget, forcing Selznick to seek additional funding to complete the film. The final cost was estimated to be over $5 million, but what critics had deemed to be "Selznick's Folly" quickly proved to be Selznick's Triumph after the film premiered in Atlanta on December 15, 1939.

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[12] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind" Letters, 1936-1949*, 93-94.
[13] Ibid., 63.

Selznick's March

As early as the spring of 1937 Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield began his campaign for Atlanta to serve as the site of the *Gone with the Wind* film premiere. In a letter to David O. Selznick in March 1937, Hartsfield promised Selznick "that the city government and the entire city of Atlanta would join in this movement to make [the premiere] of nationwide importance." After almost two years of debating the merits of an Atlanta premiere, Selznick decided that he didn't think "the South would ever forgive either MGM or us if we held it any place else," and in February 1939 he notified Hartsfield that the film would make its debut in Atlanta. There were many obstacles to negotiate in this segregated southern city, and as historian Matthew Bernstein noted, "Selznick and his minions were scared to death of blundering into the film's Atlanta premiere." Selznick's minions began planning for the grand event, however, prompting his assistant Kay Brown to write "Sherman's March through Georgia will be nothing compared with Selznick's!"[14]

The issue of race loomed large on the list of problems that Selznick and his assistants encountered as they planned the premiere. *Gone with the Wind* featured a large cast of black actors, but the film was set to debut in a theater, the Loew's Grand, that did not allow black patrons. In fact, African Americans in Atlanta would not be able to see the film until April 1940 when it opened at a "colored" theater, the Bailey's Royal.[15] Selznick engaged in correspondence with Robert Willis, a member of the Atlanta University Players, who expressed dismay about rumors that "the Negro is excluded from participation in the celebration of the Premiere of GONE WITH THE WIND." Willis

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[14] Matthew Bernstein, "Selznick's March: The Atlanta Premiere of Gone with the Wind," *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia and the South*, Vol. XLIII, No. 2, Summer 1999, 7-8.
[15] Ibid., 18.

invited Selznick and the cast to make an appearance before the Atlanta University Players, stating that acceptance of the invitation would "show the Negro that the film people are aware of their Negro Public and appreciate them."[16]

The question of participation of the African American cast members in the premiere festivities was largely taken out of Selznick's hands by city officials and local laws and customs which forbade integration of public spaces. The exclusion of the African American cast members from the premiere and the possible ramifications of their exclusion caused Selznick great angst. He responded to Willis that although he was unable to accept the invitation to appear at Atlanta University, "the feelings of myself and our company toward the Negro race are the friendliest possible." He had gone "to great pains to make sure that the production of 'GONE WITH THE WIND' would give no offense to the Negroes."[17]

Selznick forwarded Willis's letter to his assistant, Kay Brown, who was helping to coordinate arrangements for the premiere. Selznick expressed concern about the "Negro" situation, explaining "it is a very delicate matter to handle the Negroes in the friendly manner that I feel very strongly should be ours, and yet do it in a way that is in keeping with the very delicate Southern attitude toward them. I think that we are going to have an enormous Negro audience for 'Wind' and personally my feelings are very kindly towards the Negroes. For both these reasons, I am hopeful that anything we can do to demonstrate our friendliness, and any courtesies we can extend to Negroes should be most carefully handled."[18]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

Selznick and his all-white entourage of stars began arriving in Atlanta a few days before the premiere of the film. The *Atlanta Constitution* reported on the arrival of each actor and the film's producer and the flurry of activities surrounding the film's premiere. Among the events included were the Junior League Ball, an antebellum-themed extravaganza, and the parade of stars, which elicited the headline "Rhett Butler at Five Points!"[19] In reporting on the Junior League Ball, the *Constitution* failed to mention that Margaret Mitchell, who had been shunned by the Junior League years earlier, declined her invitation to attend the gala affair.

In its glowing recapitulation of the ball, the *Constitution* also overlooked the performance of the Ebenezer Baptist Church choir, which the *Atlanta Daily World*, one of the city's black newspapers, reported "drew long rounds of applause" for their performance of four religious numbers, each of which "swelled the hearts of the hundreds of lucky white persons attending the gala affair."[20] The choir was directed by L. B. Byron and Alberta Williams King, wife of the Ebenezer pastor and mother of one of the choir members, ten-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr. The following night, a forty-five-member choir from the Big Bethel AME Church performed over a dozen songs, including a number of Negro spirituals, in front of the Loew's Grand Theater for the 2,000 white patrons who had paid $10 each to see the world premiere of the film.[21]

According to the *Atlanta Daily World*, the participation "by colored people during the celebration" was varied, ranging from the two choir performances to service as carriage drivers dressed in costumes from the 1860s. The paper also reported that "Some three hundred colored men and boys will be used to move chairs off the floor of the

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[19] *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 December 1939, 1.
[20] "Ebenezer Choir Scores at Gala 'GWTW' Ball," *Atlanta Daily World*, 15 December 1939, 1.
[21] "Big Bethel Crowd Thrills Thousands," *Atlanta Daily World*, 16 December 1939, 1.

auditorium" prior to the Junior League Ball.[22] None of the "colored actors" would "participate in the colorful premiere," noted reporter William Fowlkes, although he added that Hattie McDaniel, who played the character Mammy, was reportedly "the standout colored actor" in the film.[23]

While the *Atlanta Daily World* reported on the participation of African Americans in the premiere events, the *Atlanta Constitution* focused more on the pageantry, with no mention whatsoever of the racial undertones that surrounded the whole affair. The December 13, 1939, issue of the *Constitution* announced that a group of Hollywood motion picture critics who had seen a sneak preview of the film declared the picture "superlative, for want of a proper adjective." According to the critics, "The picture is a study in photographic beauty." A critic from the *Los Angeles Times* predicted that the film would "sweep in practically all awards of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences" and declared that "Selznick International organization has scored a lasting triumph for the screen."[24]

Gone Mad with the Wind

On December 14, 1939, the *Atlanta Constitution* issued a special "Gone with the Wind" Souvenir Edition of the paper. The front page featured a pen-and-ink drawing of the film version of Tara and the following text from the foreword of the screen version of *Gone with the Wind*:

> There was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South . . .
> It was the last tableau of Feudal Days, the last ever to be seen of Knights
> and their Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave . . .

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[22] William Fowlkes, "Thousands to See Colorful Parade," *Atlanta Daily World*, 14 December 1939, 1.
[23] Ibid., 6.
[24] "G.W.T.W. 'Tops' With the Critics," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 December 1939, 1.

> Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered, a Civilization gone with the wind.[25]

These words, written by screenwriter Ben Hecht specifically for the film, were modified slightly for the opening credits of the film, with the awkward "last tableau of Feudal Days" replaced by "Here in this pretty world Gallantry took its last bow. . . ." Hecht's words set a nostalgic tone for the film that was far different from that of Mitchell's book, which, while problematic in many ways, was almost completely lacking in nostalgia for the days and ways of the Old South. According to Richard Harwell, Mitchell herself reportedly flinched at the opening credits, feeling that "Hecht's flowery, rolling titles lent a false note to her story and was dismayed that the upcountry life she had written about was seen through the camera's lens as that of a mannered enclave of a civilization that would have rivaled Blenheim Palace," but then she was swept away by the spectacle of Selznick's production.[26]

The "Souvenir Edition" of the *Constitution* represented a remarkable collection of *Gone with the Wind* propaganda, from articles recounting the storyboarding phase of the film's production to advertisements from a variety of businesses hoping to capitalize on *Gone with the Wind* mania. An advertisement for the Davison-Paxson department store declared, "Just up the street from us lived Scarlett and Aunt Pittypat," noting that the store's location was very near the site of the fictional Aunt Pittypat's fictional home in Mitchell's book.[27] The First National Bank of Atlanta reminded readers that "this Bank helped rebuild Atlanta," explaining, "when in the months following the Civil War, Atlanta was busy rebuilding with lumber from Scarlett's Decatur Road saw mill, the First

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[25] *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 December 1939, 1.
[26] Harwell, "*Gone with the Wind" as Book and Film*, 170.
[27] Davison-Paxson Co. advertisement, *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 December 1939, 3C.

National was already busy serving Atlanta."[28] In an article entitled "Atlanta Should Be Proud of Tribute to South," journalist Robert Quillen wrote:

> If ever a newspaper, a city, a state, and a people had reason to make holiday in celebration of good fortune, you all are justified in doing it now. 'Gone With the Wind' is more than a great historical novel. It is an embassy of good will, a healer of ancient wounds, and the best publicity any section has obtained since a Yankee poet gave Paul Revere immortality for another man's ride.
>
> 'Gone With the Wind,' by the simple expedient of telling the truth, has won the admiration and affection of all America, made a new generation feel its kinship with ancient heroes, and thus has done more than any other single influence in the last 75 years to erase sectional lines and make us one nation.

Quillen's effusive praise of Mitchell's book as an eraser of sectional conflict seems ridiculous in retrospect, but in 1939, when African Americans were considered, at best, second-class citizens, such a concept might have seemed probable to a white man from the South.

Reverend John Clarence Wright, formerly of the Tuskegee Institute and later the minister of the First Congregational Church in Atlanta, had a different view on *Gone with the Wind* and the hoopla surrounding the film, which he expressed in the *Atlanta Daily World* the day after the premiere:

> Atlanta put on a great show this week culminating in the grand World Premiere of the Picture, "Gone With the Wind," based upon what, if Atlantans have their way, will be the immortal novel of Margaret Mitchell by the same name. . . .
>
> The lavishly decorated streets, the strollers in period costumes, the columns of comment and information in the newspapers, the hours of special announcements over the air and the high pitch of excitement and expectancy, all of this aroused in the populace, have given the city the air of a place held captive by some magnificent obsession, intoxicated by an overmastering impulse. Verily Atlanta has "gone mad with The Wind."

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[28] First National Bank Atlanta advertisement, *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 December 1939, 2.

> As a spectator "within the veil," my thoughts are too completely out of harmony with Atlanta's golden event, to be expressed with propriety at this time. It was not reassuring, to say the least, to see with what unfeigned eagerness and enthusiasm advantage was taken of an incident so intrinsically prosaic and inconsequential as the premiere showing of a motion picture version of an interesting historical novel to bring back to life an era which all true Americans would like to push farther and farther back into the forgotten past. The celebration of the past three days, and the preparations made for it, tend to confirm, what thousands have firmly believed, that at heart the South is still the Confederacy. The stars and bars are still dear to them; Dixie is still their national anthem; and the black man is most acceptable when he approximates most nearly the role of the white man's chattel. Henry Grady's spirit must have been in the mood of humble and disillusioned apology as it looked down upon the decorations, jubilant crowds, and the lighting of the eternal light of the Confederacy, for having said "There was a South of Secession and Slavery, but that South is dead."
>
> The new South he envisioned is constantly crowded out of its seat at the banquet of progress and democracy, by the ghost of slavery and a Bourbon aristocracy that "will not down." It stalked through the streets of Atlanta as it does through the pages of Margaret Mitchell's book, unfurling the flag of the Confederacy and calling for the rebel yell.
>
> It banned one hundred thousand citizens of the metropolis from any part in its greatest celebration except as props to make more authentic the scenes and the period brought back to life. As I listened to the voices of a group of Atlanta singers from one of our largest colored churches, lending color and atmosphere to a scene depicting the South of "slavery and secession," I cold hear nothing but the hiss of the slave driver's whip and the clanking of the chains that held their forefathers in bondage. That bondage persists to a greater degree than we are always aware of. Too frequently we are thought of today with concern and affection only as a part of the Southern scene—like waving fields of cotton, grand colonial mansions, magnolias in bloom, and fragrant mint-juleps.
>
> As Atlanta goes mad with the Wind, one hundred thousand of her citizens should become more thoughtful than ever of the course that must be pursued to gain their rights as free men and citizens in a land where the spirit of secession and slavery still lives.[29]

Wright's assessment stands alongside that of historian L. D. Reddick in its frank criticism of Mitchell's work and the mythology that it perpetuated. But the voices of

[29] John Clarence Wright, "Gone Mad With the Wind," *Atlanta Daily World*, 16 December 1939, 2.

Wright, Reddick, and other critics of the book and film versions of *Gone with the Wind* were largely drowned out by the Scarlett and Rhett mania that swept the nation during the dark days of the Great Depression and into World War II.

Margaret Mitchell became an instant celebrity upon the publication of her book, but she did not wear her fame well. The tedious process of editing the manuscript for publication followed by her insistence upon writing thank-you letters to all the critics who praised her novel led to a bout of temporary blindness and a period of reclusive behavior. For the rest of her life, Mitchell shunned the spotlight. She was bombarded with requests for public appearances, which she routinely declined. In a letter to educator Martha Berry in November 1939 Mitchell offered the following explanation for her refusal to make personal appearances:

> Since the week "Gone with the Wind" was published in 1936, I have made no speeches, talks or formal visits anywhere. With the many demands that are made on you, you can understand the situation in which I was placed as a result of the popularity of my novel. It brought, and still brings, me many invitations to visit schools and other institutions and to speak before organizations of every kind—so many, in fact, it would be humanly impossible for me to accept them all. I am most grateful for the amazing kindness people everywhere have shown my book and me, but I could not possibly accept all the invitations. If I had attempted to pick and choose, I would have been in the position of slighting many kind people while favoring others. So, I had to adopt the policy of declining all invitations. This has not been a happy situation for me. It has cut me out of a great deal of pleasure in meeting with good friends and making new friends, but there seemed no other course for me to take.[30]

Rather than basking in the bright light of fame, Mitchell chose to operate behind the scenes and use the fortune she reaped from the success of *Gone with the Wind* for a variety of charitable causes. She became an active supporter of the Red Cross relief efforts during and after World War II, and she supported the reconstruction of the French

[30] Margaret Mitchell Marsh to Martha Berry, 7 November 1939, The Martha Berry Collection, Subject File Correspondence Series, Berry College Archives, Memorial Library, Berry College, Mount Berry, Georgia.

town of Vimontiers following the war. She helped fund emergency clinics for blacks and whites at Grady Hospital, and she established a scholarship for African American students to attend medical school at Morehouse College.[31] She sponsored a creative writing program at the Atlanta Penitentiary. She also fought tirelessly for the enforcement of U.S. copyright law in foreign countries, a cause in which she had a vested interest as illegal foreign-language editions of *Gone with the Wind* began to appear around the world. Her brother, attorney Stephens Mitchell, helped her fight the copyright battles during her lifetime and continued the crusade after her death.[32]

Throughout the last decade of her life, Mitchell witnessed the death of her father and the near-death of her husband, John Marsh, who suffered a major heart attack in 1944. She herself suffered from a variety of ailments, many of which related back to an injury she received in a horseback riding accident in her youth. In August 1949, Mitchell was struck by a car while crossing Peachtree Road not far from the home in which she had grown up. She died five days later from her injuries. At Mitchell's request, her husband and her brother destroyed most of the original *Gone with the Wind* manuscript, saving only enough pages to enable them to resolve any debates over authorship of the novel. The house in which she had grown up on Peachtree Road was torn down, also at Mitchell's request. She wanted no memorials or shrines to her memory. Margaret Mitchell was buried in one of Atlanta's oldest cemeteries in a plot near that of her parents. Three years later her husband John died of a heart attack and was laid to rest next to her at Oakland Cemetery.

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[31] "Margaret Mitchell's Renewed Role as Benefactor of Morehouse College," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 36, Summer 2002, 58.
[32] Pyron, *Southern Daughter*, 422-423, 449-452.

The City Too Busy to Hate

The city of Atlanta mourned the passing of Margaret Mitchell a mere decade after the city had celebrated the world premiere of the film version of her book—a moment in time that until the 1990s was often cited as Atlanta's finest. Ironically, thanks to Mitchell's book and Selznick's film, Atlanta became associated in the public mind with the moonlight-and-magnolia mythology of the Old South—an image that civic leaders constantly strove to suppress. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, city leaders worked diligently to establish Atlanta as a modern metropolis with an eye firmly on the future. During Margaret Mitchell's lifetime, the population of Atlanta more than tripled, largely as the result of a concerted effort by civic boosters to promote Atlanta as a prime destination for commercial activity. At about the same time that Mitchell was writing her epic about the nineteenth-century destruction and resurrection of Atlanta, the city was experiencing another period of remarkable growth. In 1925, city leaders launched a nationwide promotional campaign called "Forward Atlanta" that succeeded in drawing over 700 new businesses and thousands of jobs to the city over the next four years.[33]

City leaders continued to work to create an image of Atlanta as a progressive, modern city during the Depression and throughout the 1940s. In 1959 Mayor William B. Hartsfield, who as mayor in 1939 had presided over the festivities surrounding the *Gone with the Wind* film premiere, declared Atlanta to be "a city too busy to hate." During the next few years, Atlanta quietly began a modest school desegregation program, devoid of the violence and drama that surrounded integration efforts in other southern cities. The

[33] Darlene Roth and Andy Ambrose, *Metropolitan Frontiers: A Short History of Atlanta* (Atlanta: Longstreet Press, 1996), 97.

apparent ease with which Atlanta moved toward integration in its schools and public facilities boosted the city's image and garnered a great deal of favorable national press and a commendation from President John Kennedy.[34]

Despite its image as a cradle of racial harmony, Atlanta remained a *de facto* if not *de jure* segregated city. White flight in the 1950s and 1960s left the inner city with a black majority, and efforts to integrate the public school system were essentially abandoned. In 1973 the city of Atlanta elected its first black mayor, Maynard Jackson. The corporate power structure of the city remained in white hands, but political power now lay with the black community that made up the majority of the city's population.

As city boosters began their campaign in 1987 for Atlanta to serve as the host city for the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, the image of the city promulgated some sixty years earlier during the *Gone with the Wind* premiere was noticeably absent. Although Atlanta's association with Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind* formed the basis of the image with which all the members of the International Olympic Committee seemed most familiar, the city's Old South roots were eschewed in favor of an image of Atlanta as "a miracle modern city," in the words of Mayor Maynard Jackson.[35] In the campaign to host the Olympics, there was little mention of the city's past other than to establish that the past was a burden to be overcome. Ironically, Mitchell's fictional heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, had loved Atlanta because the city "was a mixture of the old and new in Georgia, in which the old often came off second best in its conflicts with the self-willed and vigorous new."[36]

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[34] Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 48.
[35] Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: A Saga of Race and Family*, 513.
[36] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Scribner, 1939), 143.

Throughout the twentieth century, Atlanta became notorious for the triumph of its self-willed and vigorous new at the expense of the old. But even as civic leaders mounted campaigns to promote Atlanta as progressive and modern, an effort to establish an institutional memory for the city was underway. One of the first attempts to establish this institutional memory began in 1926, when Eugene Mitchell and several other prominent white citizens established the Atlanta Historical Society.

CHAPTER 2–AROUSING AN INTEREST IN HISTORY

> No one, except the Atlanta Historical Society, of which my father is president, is going to get me to rise swaying to my feet, grasping at the table edge for support. And they've showed a laudable desire not to hear a few words from me.
>
> Margaret Mitchell[1]

Chartered in June 1926, the Atlanta Historical Society (AHS) was the creation of a group of white Atlanta blue bloods who set as the organization's mission "to promote the preservation of sources of information concerning the history of the City of Atlanta and the State of Georgia; the investigation, study and dissemination of such history, and to arouse in the friends and citizens of Atlanta an interest in its history."[2] Attorney Walter McElreath led the charge for the creation of the AHS, and among its charter members were many of the city's leading white citizens, including Eugene Mitchell. An attorney by trade, Eugene Mitchell dedicated a great deal of his time to public service of the sort expected of a man of his social status—he served on the Atlanta School Board and as president of the Atlanta and Georgia Bar Associations, and he worked tirelessly on behalf of Atlanta's libraries, helping found the Young Men's Library Association and establishing the basis of the Atlanta Public Library's Georgiana Collection. In addition to serving as a founder of the AHS, Mitchell also served a term as its president and as editor of the Society's journal.

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[1] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind" Letters, 1936-1949*, 10.
[2] Franklin Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events, Vol. II* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1969), 823.

Mitchell had an abiding interest in history, a hobby that he pursued with great vigor throughout his life, producing "fact-heavy records of Atlanta's past."[3] He passed his passion for history on to his two children, Stephens and Margaret. The same year that Eugene Mitchell and Walter McElreath helped launch the AHS, Mitchell's daughter, Margaret, began writing her own version of Atlanta's history, and although her work was one of fiction, Margaret Mitchell's account of the Civil War and Reconstruction would shape the world view of Atlanta for generations to come.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the AHS became the unofficial repository of *Gone with the Wind* memory and memorabilia in Atlanta, and the AHS regularly relied on *Gone with the Wind* to draw crowds to its Buckhead headquarters, staging eight *Gone with the Wind*-related exhibits between 1972 and 1996. Almost always the subject of positive reviews and a generator of throngs of faithful fans of the book and the film, the AHS's exhibits ranged from mere displays of art work associated with the film to in-depth looks at the historical basis for Mitchell's work. The AHS and *Gone with the Wind* developed a synergistic relationship over the years, and this chapter examines how that relationship reinforced many of the stereotypes about the AHS and about *Gone with the Wind*.

Playground of the Patricians

At the time of its creation in 1926, the AHS was conceived of as an amateur organization created by the city's leading white citizens to help preserve the historical memory of the self-proclaimed capital of the New South. As the home base of Henry Grady and a major transportation hub for the entire Southeast, since the late nineteenth

[3] Pyron, *Southern Daughter*, 37.

century Atlanta had been on the forefront of the movement heralded by Grady as part of "a South of union and freedom" which was "thrilling with the consciousness of growing power and prosperity," and in which "the relations of the Southern people with the Negro are close and cordial."[4] Fundamental to the New South doctrine, of which Grady was one of the leading spokesmen, was the idea that the South had abandoned its previous economic model of a plantation system based on slave labor for a system based on small farmers, industry, and freedom. Freedom, however, did not mean equality, and Grady, as well as other spokesmen for the New South, promulgated a society in which the "'Anglo-Saxon' had been designated to play the role of superior."[5]

Atlanta's leaders had established the city as a beacon of progressivism and opportunity; and the city, which had been almost completely destroyed during the Civil War, had resurrected itself, boasting a population of almost 90,000 by the turn of the century. Atlanta adopted the phoenix as its official symbol in 1887 and modified the city seal to include the city's new motto, "Resurgens," along with the irrepressible bird of Egyptian mythology that rose from the ashes.[6] The city's population continued to increase dramatically, reaching 150,000 by 1910. There were difficulties along the way, to be sure, sometimes with tragic consequences. During 1906, a heated gubernatorial campaign coupled with unfounded, incendiary articles in local newspapers about black rapists in the city led to a race riot in which dozens of African Americans were killed. The 1906 Race Riot made the national news and raised questions about the "close and cordial relations" between the races in Atlanta. The murder of fourteen-year-old Mary

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[4] Henry Grady, "The New South Speech," http://www.anselm.edu/academic/history/hdubrulle/CivWar/text/documents/doc54.htm.
[5] Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 137.
[6] Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 23.

Phagan in 1913 and subsequent trial and lynching of Leo Frank, the Jewish superintendent of the factory where Phagan worked, in 1915 brought more negative publicity to Atlanta. Yet Atlanta continued to grow and prosper throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, albeit as a segregated city. Atlanta had become a Mecca for African Americans, and within the segregated city, the African American community developed its own businesses and power structure; but as anthropologist Charles Rutheiser noted, "As elsewhere in the *fin de siècle* South, Atlanta's public sphere was a blindingly whitish orb."[7]

The founders of the AHS were members of this blindingly whitish orb who guided Atlanta through the early decades of the twentieth century. Boosters all, these citizens periodically dedicated their spare time to creating an institutional memory for the city through their work with the Historical Society. The AHS met irregularly during the first decade of its existence, and its membership was by invitation only. With no full-time employees or permanent location, the organization's efforts to collect historical items and documents were somewhat limited. The founders of the society remained enthusiastic, however; and in 1936, the AHS hired its first full-time employee, Ruth Blair. A founding member of the AHS, Blair had long served as the director of the Georgia Department of Archives and History. She was hired to serve as the executive secretary of the AHS, and a headquarters for the organization was established in the Biltmore Hotel.[8]

Despite hiring a trained professional to curate its holdings and establishing a home base, the AHS remained the "playground of patricians," as Andrew Reisinger

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[7] Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 23.
[8] Garrett, *Atlanta and Envrions*, 824.

noted. The organization was essentially "a quaint social club" at which its members socialized and were entertained through educational presentations several times a month.[9] The AHS periodically organized essay contests in an attempt to engage the public in discussions about Atlanta's history, and it published a newsletter that featured articles dealing with issues such as race relations and women's history, although the level of scholarship was decidedly amateur.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the AHS continued expanding its operations, outgrowing its home at the Biltmore Hotel. Following a number of moves in the 1940s, the AHS found what would become its permanent home in 1965 when it acquired the Edward Inman estate in Buckhead, a wealthy community on the north side of Atlanta. The centerpiece of the twenty-three-acre Inman estate was the Swan House, a Second Renaissance Revival-style masterpiece designed by famed Atlanta architect Philip Trammell Schutze in 1928 for the Edward and Emily Inman family.[10] Edward Inman died just three years after completion of the Swan House. Inman's wife, Emily, continued to reside in the home, and in the later years of her life, she began discussions with board members of the AHS about the possible acquisition of the property by the Historical Society. Fortuitously, in 1965 the AHS inherited $5 million from the estate of attorney and former state legislator Walter McElreath, one of the AHS founders. Following the death of Emily Inman that same year, the AHS acquired the Inman

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[9] Andrew Reisinger, "The Atlanta Historical Society: From Birth to the New Millennium," (master's thesis, Georgia State University 2005), 30.
[10] "Swan House, Atlanta: A National Register of Historic Places Travel Itinerary," http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/swa.htm.

property.[11] The organization now had an uptown headquarters that reflected its patrician roots.

Ironically, the move to tony Buckhead was not supported unanimously by members of the AHS board. Some members felt that the organization should move closer to downtown Atlanta where it could serve as a destination for tourists and school groups interested in learning about Atlanta's history. Fears also arose about the Society's ability to manage the Swan House and its attendant grounds. One member who opposed the move was Margaret Mitchell's brother, Stephens Mitchell. Supporters of the acquisition prevailed, however, and the AHS moved into the Swan House in 1967. Considered one of the finest homes ever designed by Philip Schutze, the Swan House became a major attraction for the AHS. In addition to the main house, which came with furnishings intact, and its landscaped gardens, the estate included a garage and servant's quarters. The outbuildings were renovated to house a restaurant and gift shop. The first floor of the main house was opened as a house museum, while the basement housed the Society's archives and library, and the second floor served as administrative space for the AHS.[12]

The AHS had barely settled into its new headquarters in Buckhead when one of its board members offered to buy and relocate to the AHS property, an 1840s farm house. Known as the Tullie Smith house, this nineteenth century, "plantation plain" house with its weatherboard siding and simple front porch was considered representative of the homes built in the north Georgia area during the antebellum period. The AHS would begin to refer its guests who inquired into the whereabouts of Tara to the Tullie Smith

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[11] Reisinger, "The Atlanta Historical Society: From Birth to the New Millennium," 39.
[12] Ibid., 91.

house as being a reasonable facsimile of the fictional plantation described by Margaret Mitchell in *Gone with the Wind*.

"A Belief in its Vision of Itself"

The acquisition of the Tullie Smith house enabled the AHS to present to the public a plantation home reminiscent of the antebellum period in North Georgia, albeit in a setting devoid of any of the vestiges of slavery. Costumed re-enactors offered tours to visitors through the house and outbuildings of the relocated plantation home, and an effort was made to convey some sense of the rustic nature of Atlanta and its environs on the eve of the Civil War. Since many of the visitors to the AHS had a keen interest in *Gone with the Wind*, no doubt some of them walked away disappointed to learn that Tara more closely resembled the Tullie Smith farm than the grand, columned mansion presented by David O. Selznick in the film version of Mitchell's story.

Mitchell herself was well aware that the plantation homes of north Georgia were, mostly a ramshackle lot, as she repeatedly reminded her friend Wilbur Kurtz during the time he served as the technical consultant on the film. In December 1938 Mitchell wrote to Kurtz that she "read with interest the news that Tara would have columns and I was sorry to hear it, although I suppose it was only to be expected. When the picture is shown I am afraid the reporters may ask me 'did Tara have columns?', and I will have to reply truthfully that it had no columns at all."[13] Three months later in another letter to Kurtz who was still on set in California, Mitchell complained about the Georgia World's Fair Commission's claiming its columned mansion that served as the Georgia exhibit building was a replica of Tara. Mitchell was "incensed" by this and told Kurtz, "If they had

[13] Margaret Mitchell to Wilbur Kurtz, 16 December 1938, GWTW Misc., GWTW 1989, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

consulted with me beforehand I would not have given my permission and would have told them that Tara had no columns, no architectural plan and was very ugly." Mitchell added that she got "sicker and sicker of the damned columns people wish to put on every Southern house and no one is ever going to put columns on Tara with my consent while I have a breath left in my lungs." Aware that the movie version of her fictional plantation would have columns, Mitchell admitted that, having sold the picture rights "lock, stock, and barrel," she had no right to intervene, although she hoped that Kurtz had done his best to prevent the columns from being added to the building. Mitchell concluded, "if I am asked by reporters about whether it is the Tara of my mind, I will say no, that it is completely wrong."[14]

Mitchell was not alive to witness the AHS's attempt to rectify the misperceptions promulgated by the film version of her novel; but Stephens Mitchell was alive and well and an active member of the AHS, much as his father had been. So, too, was Franklin Garrett, Margaret's historian friend who served as co-editor of the AHS's journal with Stephens Mitchell in the mid-1950s. A longtime member of the AHS, Garrett was named executive director of the organization in 1968, and it was under his leadership that the AHS began planning to expand its operations further. In 1972 the AHS embarked on a capital campaign to raise $2 million for the construction of a new 32,000-square-foot building that would house the library, archives, and administrative offices of the Society. The new facility would also feature an auditorium and an exhibition gallery. With a membership still dominated by Atlanta's old families with philanthropic connections, the AHS managed to raise more than its target $2 million within a year. Construction soon

[14] Margaret Mitchell to Annie Laurie and Wilbur Kurtz, 11 March 1939, GWTW Misc., GWTW 1989, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

began on the new building, which would be called McElreath Hall in honor of founder Walter McElreath.

It was in the atrium of McElreath Hall in late 1979 that the AHS staged its first exhibit devoted solely to *Gone with the Wind*, an exhibit entitled "Gone With the Wind Revisited." Planned to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the film premiere in Atlanta, the exhibit, which ran from November 1979 through January 1980, was apparently the brainchild of David O. Selznick's son, Daniel Selznick. In a letter dated July 17, 1979, AHS assistant curator Louise Shaw wrote to Selznick thanking him for "suggesting a Gone With the Wind fortieth anniversary exhibition at the Atlanta Historical Society." Both the board members and staff of the AHS were "quite excited about such a prospect," wrote Shaw, adding that the planned exhibit would contain items from the AHS collection and from the collection of Herb Bridges of Sharpsburg, Georgia, who reputedly owned "the largest GWTW collection in the world."[15]

The AHS collection included items donated to the AHS by the widow of Wilbur Kurtz, Margaret Mitchell's friend who served as a technical consultant on the film set during the production of *Gone with the Wind*. Among the Kurtz collection were the shards of the vase that Scarlett shattered against the fireplace after her frustrating encounter with Ashley Wilkes at Twelve Oaks near the beginning of the film, a collection of photographs, the letter that Captain Butler wrote to Melanie Wilkes when he returned her wedding ring, and a tin box of red clay that Kurtz took with him to California so that the filmmaker could match the color of "the red earth of Tara" on the set with real Georgia clay.

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[15] Louise Shaw to Daniel Selznick, 17 July 1979, AHS, AHC-GWTW 1979, file in the possession of Don Rooney.

The AHS Newsletter of November/December 1979 reminded readers that "the city's most remembered image-maker was unveiled for all the world to see at a gala premiere on December 15, 1939, at the late, great Loew's Grand Theatre. In recognition of the fortieth anniversary of the premiere of 'Gone With the Wind,' the Society will present a special holiday exhibit focusing on the impact and continuing popularity of the film." The exhibit offered visitors "a representative sample of materials related to the making of the film, the premiere, and the changing image distributors have sought to project as the film has been released time and time again." The newsletter invited readers to "Come relive the excitement of the 'Gone with the Wind' premiere" at an exhibit that promised to "be one more highlight of your holidays."[16]

The fortieth anniversary of the film's premiere was also celebrated at the American Film Institute in Washington, D.C., the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the Los Angeles Museum of Art in December 1979.[17] Although Atlanta had been the site of the original 1939 premiere and the home base for much of the action in the film, the only public appearance by one of the surviving major cast members, Olivia de Havilland, who played Melanie Hamilton Wilkes, was at the American Film Institute. Atlantans had to settle for a lecture by collector Herb Bridges, who was by this time renowned for his collection of *Gone with the Wind* artifacts. Always cognizant of their mission to disseminate the history of Atlanta to the public, staff members of the AHS prepared a teacher's guide to go along with the fortieth anniversary exhibit. The guide included trivia about the film and concluded with suggested activities for students,

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[16] "Holiday Exhibit Recalls GWTW Movie Premiere," *Atlanta Historical Society Newsletter*, Vol. 10, No. 7, November/December 1979, 2.
[17] "40th Anniversary of GWTW Film Version," *Hobbies—The Magazine for Collectors*, December 1979, 93.

including the suggestion that teachers have students "read the book in class and compare this to the film's memorabilia and long history of commercial exploitation."[18] Such attempts to differentiate the book from the film reinforced the notion that the book presented a factual history of Atlanta and its environs during and after the Civil War, while the film represented a more nostalgic view.

The response to the fortieth anniversary exhibit was positive, and the AHS decided to capitalize on this latest epidemic of "Scarlett Fever" by including one of the costumes worn by Vivien Leigh in the film in a new exhibit entitled "Atlanta Women from Myth to Modern Times," which opened in April 1980. The costume included in the exhibit was the green velvet dress that Scarlett O'Hara made, over the protests of Mammy, from Ellen O'Hara's portière. Invitations to the exhibit opening announced a special lecture entitled "Scarlett Wears Green" by Elizabeth Ann Coleman, Curator of Costume and Textiles from the Brooklyn Museum. The "incomparable gown [Scarlett] wore to win the affections of Rhett Butler and the money to pay the taxes on Tara" was on loan to the AHS from Daniel Selznick, and according to the AHS press release, "the gown symbolizes the spirit of survival of Atlanta women during the early days of Reconstruction. 'The gallantry of Scarlett O'Hara going forth to conquer the world in her mother's velvet curtains and the tail feathers of a rooster' is representative of a whole generation of Atlanta women who moved beyond the crinolines and parasols of the Old South and gallantly faced a new era."[19]

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[18] "Gone with the Wind Revisited: The Film's First Forty Years," AHC, GWTW 1979, file in the possession of Don Rooney.
[19] "'Gone with the Wind' Costume Comes to Atlanta . . . ," Press Release, April 22, 1980, AHC, GWTW Misc., Scarlett Wears Green, file in the possession of Don Rooney.

It would be another six years before the AHS staged another major *Gone with the Wind* exhibit, and the occasion was an auspicious one—the fiftieth anniversary of the book's publication. By this time, fans of *Gone with the Wind* seemed to recognize the AHS as the keeper of the flame of *Gone with the Wind* memory and the place to go if one had *Gone with the Wind* -related wares to display or needed *Gone with the Wind* -related material, as was indicated by a request in June 1986 from Fred Schultz, Assistant Editor of *Civil War Times Illustrated*. Schultz's magazine was publishing an article in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Gone with the Wind*, and he needed photographs of some "items related to Margaret Mitchell and the book." Entitled "Golden Anniversary of a Civil War Classic," the *Civil War Times Illustrated* article credited Mitchell with almost accomplishing "what the armies of the Confederacy failed to accomplish on the battlefields" by seeing to it "that the South came to life again in 1,037 pages of a remarkably popular novel."[20]

More than a year and a half earlier in December 1984, inveterate *Gone with the Wind* collector Herb Bridges stopped by the AHS offices in Buckhead to drum up enthusiasm for an exhibit marking the debut of Margaret Mitchell's book. Bridges met with the executive director of the AHS, John Ott, to encourage the production of such an exhibit and offer pieces from his own *Gone with the Wind* collection for the cause. Ott seemed grateful for Bridges's offer of assistance, although his follow-up letter betrayed his Yankee roots when he mentioned that he would make his staff "aware of the date." No doubt the staff members at the AHS were aware of the impending anniversary. In the same letter Ott expressed little optimism that a commemorative stamp might be issued in

[20] Fred L. Schultz to Kathy Dixson, 5 July 1986, AHS, GWTW Misc., GWTW Spring 1986, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

honor of Mitchell, perhaps revealing his muted enthusiasm for getting bogged down in activities that celebrated what by this time was beginning to be perceived as a racist work that romanticized the Old South.[21]

A native of Canada who was raised in Philadelphia, Ott was hired to head the AHS in 1983. Unlike his predecessors in the executive director's position, Ott had academic training in museum studies as well as more than ten years of experience as a museum director, having served in that capacity at the Hancock Shaker Village in Massachusetts. Apparently Ott's experience and expertise outweighed his northern roots. When Ott was asked by board member Beverly DuBose if he could "pump life into a stodgy, old, white historical society," Ott jumped at the chance to do just that. Ott might have underestimated just how stodgy, old, and white the AHS was. In his second week on the job, he was told, "You can be our friend, but you can never be one of us."[22] Not easily discouraged, Ott took seriously DuBose's challenge to pump life into the organization, and he began an effort to broaden the Society's constituency beyond the white upper crust that had been the mainstay of the organization since its founding almost sixty years earlier.

In an effort to improve and professionalize the image of the institution, Ott spearheaded the effort to achieve accreditation of the AHS by the American Association of Museums (AAM). Accreditation was granted in 1985, and the next year the AHS opened a branch office in downtown Atlanta, the Atlanta History Center Downtown (AHCD), in an attempt to appeal to the tourists and denizens of downtown who found it inconvenient or downright daunting to make their way to the Buckhead headquarters.

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[21] John Ott to Herb Bridges, 18 December 1984, AHC, GWTW Misc., GWTW Spring 1986, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[22] Reisinger, "The Atlanta Historical Society: From Birth to the New Millennium," 49.

Many of the exhibits in the downtown location focused on African American history, an audience that Ott and other staff members at the AHS felt had long been underserved by the organization.

Changes were clearly afoot at the AHS, but the organization had not abandoned its roots. Curator Kathy Dixson began working on the *Gone with the Wind* fiftieth anniversary exhibition, although without the cooperation of Herb Bridges, who loaned pieces of his collection to Rich's Department Store for display in its downtown location. The AHS exhibition instead borrowed heavily from an exhibit staged earlier in the year in the city of Madison, Georgia. Retired University of Georgia archivist and ardent *Gone with the Wind* collector Richard Harwell had loaned artifacts from his collection to the Madison-Morgan County Cultural Center in Madison for an exhibit entitled "The Big Book: Fifty Years of *Gone With the Wind*," which was on display during the spring of 1986. The AHS was able to use the same materials as those used in the Madison exhibit and augment it with a few choice artifacts, such as the typewriter table and chair that Mitchell used while writing much of the novel and the clipboard on which she edited the manuscript.

The AHS exhibition opened in mid-June and was part of a series of city-wide festivities held in honor of the anniversary, including a public ceremony to commemorate the Margaret Mitchell stamp, a one-cent definitive stamp issued on June 30, 1986. The AHS Newsletter reported that "Since the publication of *Gone with the Wind*, the Society archives has collected a variety of material related to the author, her epic, and the movie which premiered on Peachtree Street. A recent review of our holdings indicates the

impact of the story on Atlanta and the world."[23] According to Richard Harwell, *Gone with the Wind* "made Atlanta and Georgia familiar place-names to the rest of the world. By informing readers about the American Civil War, it convinced Europeans that the United States had a history of its own. If Margaret Mitchell's novel perpetuated a myth, it made lasting a region's belief in its vision of itself."[24]

The golden anniversary exhibit celebrating fifty years since the Big Book's publication was short-lived, remaining on display in the atrium of McElreath Hall for only a month, but it seemed to be a big draw for the AHS. In July of 1986 curator Kathy Dixson wrote to Richard Harwell that "most of the people who come to the historical society now want to see the exhibit first, and many don't care about anything else. I think you could call it a hit."[25]

The New Way

As the "Windies" flocked to the AHS to see what was described in the AHS newsletter as a "small exhibit," executive director John Ott continued his efforts to change the AHS from within. With more than 6,000 members and over 100,000 visitors a year, the AHS could be termed successful by several measures, but Ott and some members of the board of trustees still felt that the institution did not tell the whole story of Atlanta's history.[26] In January 1987 Ott and the board of trustees prepared a five-year plan for the AHS that was aimed at broadening the Society's appeal "by marketing to the entire metro Atlanta area, thereby extending both its geographic and ethnic market."

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[23] "GWTW is focus of atrium exhibit," *AHS Newsletter*, Vol. 17, No. 3, May/June 1986.
[24] Richard Harwell, Brochure from exhibition "The Big Book: Fifty Years of *Gone With the Wind*" at the Madison-Morgan County Cultural Center, April 4–May 25, 1986.
[25] Kathryn Dixson to Richard Harwell, 8 July 1986, AHS, GWTW Misc., GWTW Spring 1986, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[26] Actor Cordell, "Society searching for Atlanta's artifacts," *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 February 1987, A11.

Dubbed the Unicoi Plan (Unicoi was a Cherokee word that meant "the new way") after the state park location where Ott and the board held their off-site meeting to come up with the strategy, this "New Way" would "present the entire story of Atlanta's history in a variety of exciting ways to an increased number of visitors."[27] The plan also included a multimillion-dollar capital campaign to raise money for the construction of a new building that would house a number of signature and temporary exhibits that, in keeping with currents in the historical profession, would appeal to a broader segment of the city's population.

One of the first attempts to capitalize on this new, more inclusive vision was an exhibition in honor of the city's 150th birthday entitled "Atlanta Resurgens." Envisioned as a chronological history of the city's first 150 years told through a focus on eight neighborhoods, the exhibit promised to "touch on everything from who was the most famous mayor of Atlanta to the average poor worker at the turn of the century." One of the eight neighborhoods featured in the exhibit was Auburn Avenue, home to many of the leaders of Atlanta's black community and the center of the city's 'black renaissance' in the 1920s.[28] The exhibit was a "tribute to the real people of Atlanta, past and present, who have always been a part of this great city," declared exhibit designer Vince Ciulla.[29] A representative sample of the city's power brokers was on hand, with all of Atlanta's living mayors in attendance, including sitting mayor Andrew Young, his predecessor and first black mayor of the city, Maynard Jackson, as well as Jackson's predecessors Sam

[27] Reisinger, "The Atlanta Historical Society: From Birth to the New Millennium," 52.
[28] Cordell, "Society searching for Atlanta's artifacts," A11.
[29] "Tribute to past is present for city's 150th," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 October 1987, C1.

Massell and Ivan Allen, Jr.[30] "Atlanta Resurgens" also included images and artifacts from the 1939 premiere of *Gone with the Wind*, still considered to be one of the highlights of Atlanta's history, and an exhibition celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the premiere loomed as the next big project for the AHS.

In February 1989 Turner Home Entertainment, the owner of the film rights for *Gone with the Wind*, announced the formation of a *Gone with the Wind* Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Executive Committee in conjunction with Historical Jonesboro, Inc. According to the press release, the committee included "ten of the city's leading citizens and executives who are dedicating their time and talents to planning a spectacular series of events designed to involve the city and its surrounding counties in the national celebration." Among the committee members was Franklin Garrett, who now served as the historian for the AHS. Turner Home Entertainment President Jack Petrik declared, "Fifty years ago, the world met in Atlanta and joined together in a celebration of one of the film industry's greatest achievements. Therefore, it is only fitting that we come together again and pay tribute to the individuals, businesses and organizations which gave the world such a lasting and measurable treasure."[31]

By May 1989 the "*Gone With the Wind* Collector's Newsletter," a quarterly publication for which Herb Bridges served as adviser and hardcore "Windy" John Wiley served as editor, announced a tentative list of activities planned for the anniversary celebration. Among the celebratory events were screenings of the film in June at the Fox Theater in Atlanta, a *Gone with the Wind* weekend in Clark Gable's hometown of Cadiz,

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[30] Martha Woodham, "Impromptu birthday song warms 'Resurgens' exhibit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 October 1987, G1.

[31] Lisa Martin, "T.H.E. Announces formation of GONE WITH THE WIND 50th Anniversary Celebration Committee for Atlanta Community," Turner Home Entertainment Press Release, 10 February 1989, AHS, GWTW Misc., PR Data/External Printing, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

Ohio, and a meeting in Atlanta of Collectors United, a doll collector's organization, with a scheduled outing to the home of Betty Talmadge in nearby Lovejoy, Georgia. Talmadge, the ex-wife of former governor and U.S. senator Herman Talmadge, had become something of a legend in GWTW circles following her acquisition in 1979 of the movie-set façade of Scarlett O'Hara's plantation, Tara. Talmadge also claimed that her Lovejoy plantation was the inspiration for Twelve Oaks, the home of Ashley Wilkes in *Gone with the Wind*. The Collector's Newsletter also mentioned several exhibitions planned for later in the year—one at the Madison-Morgan County Cultural Center featuring items from the Herb Bridges collection, and another at the AHS entitled "*Gone With the Wind*: The Facts About the Fiction." According to the newsletter, the AHS exhibit would also feature pieces from Bridge's collection as well as items from the David O. Selznick Archives at the University of Texas at Austin. The newsletter also reported that the AHS would offer a "preview" to its major exhibit beginning in June 1989 with a display of watercolor illustrations done by John Groth for a 1968 edition of the book.

Wiley's newsletter included several potentially controversial pieces, not the least of which was a column entitled "GWTW Chronology" that offered a recapitulation of the events related to the film's production. Of note was a memo from David O. Selznick to story editor Val Lewton in which Selznick bemoaned "the loss of the better negroes being able to refer to themselves as 'niggers' and other uses of the word 'nigger' by one negro talking about another." Wrote Selznick, "All the uses that I would have like to have retained do nothing but glorify the negroes, and I can't believe that we were sound in having a blanket rule of this kind." Lewton replied to Selznick that "The chief source of

negro anxiety in regards to this book is their dislike of being shown as slaves, and their special abhorrence of the thought that such slaves as Mammy and Pork would prefer to be slaves rather than free. They take this as a slur upon their race."[32] This exchange indicates some degree of awareness, at least on the part of Lewton, that *Gone with the Wind* presented a racist and offensive portrait of its African American characters.

Eye-opening though this exchange may be, it was the announcement that the AHS was opening an exhibit featuring items from Herb Bridges's collection that caused outrage among the Windies. Wiley had gotten his information about the exhibit from Don Rooney, AHS Curator, and Herb Bridges himself. Rooney's early correspondence to Wiley made no mention of Herb Bridges or his collection, even though Wiley's initial inquiry to Rooney indicated he had been informed of the impending exhibit by Bridges. Apparently Bridges had failed to mention to Wiley that two other GWTW collectors, Tina Jakes and Jim Swords, were also contributing items to the exhibit. Wiley's citation of Bridges as a contributor to the exhibit incensed Jakes and Swords, and Rooney moved quickly to pacify them with a letter to Wiley advising him that, "In addition to the collection of Herb Bridges, as mentioned in the newsletter, we are delighted to include artifacts and memorabilia from the collections of Jim Swords of Jonesboro and Tina Jakes of Atlanta." Rooney explained that the AHS was "very sensitive toward crediting its lenders," and that early press releases had not mentioned any of the donors by name because not all of them had yet been confirmed. The AHS felt that if "one lender is credited, they all be credited," added Rooney, so that the lenders would continue to make

[32] John Wiley, ed., "Gone With the Wind Collector's Newsletter," Vol. II, NO. 3, May 1989, AHS, GWTW Misc., PR Data/External Printing, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

their collections available.[33] Wiley later apologized for the mistake, explaining that he had broken "the cardinal rule of journalism" by assuming that Herb Bridges was the only individual contributor to the exhibit. He offered to print a correction in the next issue of the newsletter.[34]

Tina Jakes and Jim Swords remained unhappy with both Wiley and Bridges, and in August 1989 Jakes wrote to AHS executive director John Ott on behalf of herself and Swords to express their displeasure. Although both Jakes and Swords had "no objection to working with Mr. Bridges," she explained, "it is unfair for him to lead or insinuate to people that he will be sole exhibitor of the upcoming GWTW exhibit." Jakes cited as proof of Bridges's treachery John Wiley's newsletter and a flyer for a *Gone with the Wind* convention, both of which announced the exhibit with Bridges as the sole individual contributor. Jakes added that both she and Swords had "been very careful to mention Herbs' [sic] name in connection with the exhibit as well as giving credit to AHS and to University of Texas," and they expected Bridges to do the same. Further, she said, Wiley had "no excuse to continue claiming that Mr. Bridges is sole exhibitor, as I myself called Mr. Wiley and politely informed him of the involvement of all other parties, which he obviously chose to ignore." Jakes requested that Bridges be asked to "cease and desist claiming sole credit for this exhibition" in order that she and Swords might preserve their positions as collectors. Jakes and Swords refused to sign any loan forms with the AHS until this issue was resolved.[35]

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[33] Don Rooney to John Wiley, 19 May 1989, AHS, GWTW Misc., PR Data/External Printing, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[34] John Wiley to Don Rooney, 24 July 1989, AHS, GWTW Misc., PR Data/External Printing, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[35] Tina Jakes to John Ott, 22 August 1989, AHS, GWTW Misc., PR Data/External Printing, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

Jakes also wrote a letter to Bridges directly, including a copy of her letter to Ott, asking him for an explanation of why he continued to claim full credit for the exhibit. Jakes alluded to past squabbles between Bridges and Swords, but she reminded Bridges that in spite of the friction in the past, "the fiftieth anniversary is not time to be having hard feelings." Admitting that they had not been "the best of friends," Jakes admonished Bridges that past conflicts provided "no cause for [Bridges] to do something like this." Lamenting that people kept insisting that they get involved with one another when it was so disagreeable to all parties, Jakes pleaded with Bridges for a truce so that the exhibit could go forward as planned.[36] This furor surrounding what to outsiders might seem to be a minor slight revealed the competitive nature of the *Gone with the Wind* collectors and the preeminent position of Herb Bridges in *Gone with the Wind* fandom circles. Bridges was well known for possessing one of the largest collections of *Gone with the Wind* artifacts and memorabilia, and the mere mention of his name in association with an exhibit guaranteed an audience of faithful Windies for a viewing.

In spite of all the controversy surrounding who was supplying what for the exhibit, Don Rooney and other staff members at the AHS worked diligently to produce an exhibit that was both celebratory and grounded in the facts. The title chosen for the exhibit was "GWTW: The Facts About the Fiction," and Rooney actively pursued several significant artifacts from a number of other individuals, including a coat worn by Clark Gable as Rhett Butler, which was donated to the AHS, and the door from the Tara façade, which was loaned to the AHS by Betty Talmadge. Opening on December 13, 1989, the exhibit featured costumes, set pieces, photographs, collectibles, and other rare

[36] Tina Jakes to Herb Bridges, 23 August 1989, AHS, GWTW Misc., PR Data/External Printing, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

memorabilia related to the film and offered visitors background information on Margaret Mitchell and the writing of the book, production of the film, the movie premiere, and the long-lasting, worldwide impact of *Gone with the Wind*.[37]

The exhibit included three main sections—the premiere, the production, and the legacy. Visitors entered beneath a mock theater marquee where they were immersed in the hoopla surrounding the 1939 premiere. Among the items on display was the evening coat worn by Margaret Mitchell for the occasion and photographs from the event. Also featured was a short film made by Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield during the premiere that tracked the events surrounding the gala event. In an effort to temper the perception that everyone in Atlanta was delighted about the film's premiere, the curator included quotes from local black clergymen who were opposed to the romanticized images of the Old South promulgated by *Gone with the Wind* and who spoke out against the book and film during the premiere. The production section featured costumes from the film and a chronicle of the production process. The final section focused on the pervasiveness of *Gone with the Wind* as it went on to become a worldwide phenomenon. Several significant artifacts included the door from the Tara set, on loan from Betty Talmadge, the portrait of Scarlett that hung in Rhett's bedroom, on loan from the Margaret Mitchell Elementary School, and pieces of the broken vase that Scarlett shattered against the fireplace, a part of the Kurtz Collection donated to the AHS in the 1970s.[38]

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[37] "Gone with the Wind" 50th Anniversary Celebration Week, AHS, GWTW Misc., PR Data/External Printing, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[38] Paula Crouch Thrasher, "Behind the eternal illusion of 'GWTW'," *Atlanta Journal*, 29 December 1989, D1.

In the December 29, 1989, issue of the *Atlanta Journal*, staff writer Paula Crouch Thrasher credited the exhibit with going "behind the eternal illusion of 'GWTW'," and sorting facts from fiction. As examples, she cited the transformation of Tara from the "hardy but modest wood structure" described by Mitchell to the "stately brick Tara [which] rose from the red Georgia soil complete with a broad portico and four massive brick columns." Thrasher noted that visitors to the AHS exhibit, "'Gone With the Wind': The Facts About the Fiction," would be treated to such tidbits as Mitchell's correspondence with Wilbur Kurtz in which she expressed horror at the transformation of Tara. Visitors should plan to spend at least one-and-a-half hours viewing the exhibit and watching the fifteen-minute video, advised Thrasher, noting it was the "sorting of truth and legend that makes the exhibit so absorbing."[39] The success of this approach of interpreting *Gone with the Wind* and southern history as a "sorting of truth and legend" inspired the staff of the AHS to return to this technique for future exhibitions. *Gone with the Wind* was a magnet that could be used to draw in visitors, noted Don Rooney, and it offered the AHS an opportunity to dispel some of the myths and misperceptions that the book and film had long perpetuated, as well as a chance to change perceptions about the AHS.[40]

The celebration surrounding the anniversary of the premiere lasted for a week, with the highlight being the "re-premiere" of the film on the anniversary date, December 15, at the Fox Theater. The site of the original premiere, the Loew's Grand Theater, had burned in 1978, and the Fox was the last remaining theater in Atlanta that seemed spectacular enough to host such an event. AHS Historian Franklin Garrett weighed in on

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Don Rooney, telephone conversation with author, 7 June 2007.

the celebration, saying, "I don't think we're overdoing it. You've got to take advantage of your assets."[41]

The "Facts Behind the Fiction" exhibit proved extremely popular, bringing droves of visitors to the AHS, according to exhibit curator Don Rooney. The AHS experienced "a quantum leap in memberships because people came to see the exhibit," said Rooney.[42] The Society was the beneficiary of "excellent television coverage on 'Good Morning America,' 'The Today Show,' and the BBC in Great Britain," in addition to several local news broadcasts, noted Rooney, and print media "from coast to coast" had praised the exhibit.[43]

The anniversary festivities made national news, but not all accounts of the event were celebratory. Georgia state representative and civil rights veteran Tyrone Brooks told Gannett News Service reporter Mark Mayfield, "I don't object to those who want to be a part of this, but you certainly won't find much interest in the African-American community here. We don't have anything to celebrate. We have more important things to do. We'd rather be out clothing the homeless and feeding the hungry."[44] Brooks was not the only skeptic. Reverend Joseph Roberts, Jr., pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, whose choir members had appeared in slave garb for a performance at the 1939 premiere ball, declined to have the current Ebenezer choir participate. Explained Roberts, "It's a great old classic, but it is an affront to us, and I felt that with what has

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[41] Thrasher, "Behind the eternal illusion of 'GWTW'," D1.
[42] Don Rooney, telephone conversation.
[43] Don Rooney to Lisa Martin, 5 January 1989, AHS, Facts About the Fiction, Correspondence, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[44] Mark Mayfield, "Atlanta looks back on 'GWTW'," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 14 December 1989, C4.

happened in the civil rights movement and especially what has emanated from this church under Martin Luther King, Jr., people have a different status now."[45]

Disputed Territories

Even while staging back-to-back *Gone with the Wind* -related exhibits, the AHS continued pursuing the new vision articulated in the Unicoi Plan. Fund-raising efforts soon began, and by June 1990 the AHS had raised over $11 million. Central to the expansion plans was the construction of a new building that would house the Museum of Atlanta History. Part of the original fund-raising strategy involved a request of a gift of $750,000 from Ted Turner, owner of the Turner Broadcasting Corporation and a self-proclaimed fan of Mitchell's work. Two of Turner's children, Rhett and Beauregard, were named for characters in *Gone with the Wind*, and his company also owned the film rights to the movie, having acquired MGM/UA Entertainment Co. in 1986. The $750,000 gift would provide a dedicated *Gone with the Wind* gallery in the new museum building and permit Turner to name the gallery. The "*Gone with the Wind* Gallery" would be approximately 1,000 square feet and would house a permanent exhibit that illustrated "the fictionalized view of the Old South created by the movie made from Margaret Mitchell's book." The exhibit would also explore "the global phenomenon that 'Gone with the Wind' has become," according to a strategy memo prepared for board member Beverly DuBose, who was given the assignment of approaching Turner for the money.[46] The Ted Turner "Gone with the Wind Gallery" never came to fruition, but plans for the Museum of Atlanta History continued apace.

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[45] Ronald Smothers, "Blacks avoided 1939 premiere," *New York Times*, 16 December 1989, Sec. 1, 13.
[46] Strategy memo for Bo DuBose to discuss with Ted Turner, 22 January 1990, AHS, GWTW Misc., GWTW Subcommittee, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

The new plan led board members to rethink the institution's name. The Atlanta Historical Society moniker connoted all of the stereotypes that the organization was trying to shed, namely that it was an old, stodgy organization of upper-crust white folks interested in preserving and presenting their own history. The organization had grown well beyond its initial blue-blood roots, and a new name was in order that reflected that broader mission and constituency, even if its Buckhead location still lent the institution an air of elitism. Additionally, there was an interest in having the city put up signs directing traffic to the AHS's Buckhead location, and a name that indicated a destination rather than an organization was in order for such signage. The name Atlanta History Center (AHC) was chosen for the AHS's headquarters location, and construction on the new 83,000 square-foot Museum of Atlanta History began in the spring of 1991 just as executive director John Ott, who had been instrumental in the development of the expansion plans, submitted his resignation.[47]

While construction on the new facility was underway, another *Gone with the Wind* -related exhibit was mounted in McElreath Hall. "Scarlett fever" seemed to be sweeping Atlanta in the wake of the anniversary celebration. Two new GWTW-related books—Darden Pyron's biography *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell*, and Alexandra Ripley's sequel to Mitchell's book, *Scarlett*—were scheduled for release in September 1991. Atlanta's marketplace for *Gone with the Wind* memory was beginning to heat up as well. In Midtown Atlanta, the effort to restore the building in which Mitchell lived while writing *Gone with the Wind* gathered steam under the direction of Mary Rose Taylor, a former television news anchor, who had taken over the nonprofit organization trying to "save the Dump."

[47] Reisinger, "The Atlanta Historical Society: From Birth to the New Millennium," 54.

The AHC chose to capitalize on the wave of "Scarlett fever" with an exhibit entitled "On the Set of GONE WITH THE WIND: Photographs by Fred A. Parrish," which featured more than thirty photographs taken on the set of *Gone with the Wind*. Fred Parrish served as the official still photographer for the film, and he compiled the "most complete scene-by-scene coverage ever given a motion picture" between 1938 and 1939, shooting more than 10,000 photographs.[48] Also included in the exhibit were letters and documents relating to Parrish and the film and the camera that was used by Parrish to take the studio portraits of the stars.

The official press release from the Atlanta History Center tempted readers with details of the exhibit, which would remain on display for a year, and a reminder that "Many 'Gone With the Wind' items will be for sale in the museum shop in McElreath Hall." Among the souvenirs offered were posters of Scarlett O'Hara, Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh paper dolls, *Gone with the Wind* tote bags, and two different wristwatches featuring Scarlett and Rhett, available exclusively at the AHC Museum Shop. A number of *Gone with the Wind*-related books were also on sale, including Ripley's just-released sequel and a commemorative booklet from the previous exhibit, "Gone With the Wind: The Facts about the Fiction."[49]

On the same date as the press release about the photographic exhibit, another press release announced a lecture by Darden Pyron at the AHC, followed by a book signing of his new biography of Margaret Mitchell. The announcement promised juicy revelations about the little woman who wrote the big book, including "personal, cultural

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[48] "On the Set of GONE WITH THE WIND: Photographs by Fred A. Parrish," Press Release Fact Sheet, 16 August 1991, AHC, GWTW Subcommittee, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[49] "On the Set of GONE WITH THE WIND: Photographs by Fred A. Parrish," Press Release, 16 August 1991, AHC, GWTW Subcommittee, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

and historical influences on Gone With the Wind."[50] The AHC had clearly hitched its wagon to *Gone with the Wind*, which had proved to be a big draw for the institution.

The AHC would drew on *Gone with the Wind* again in 1994 when it mounted an exhibit entitled *Disputed Territories: Gone With the Wind and Southern Myths*. Originally conceived as an exhibit with a much broader focus under the title *Disputed Territories: Myth, Mystery, and Memory in Atlanta History*, the exhibit plan was reworked after the AHC's application for a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) was rejected. The initial concept involved three different historical topics—the myth of the Old South as it had played out in Atlanta, the mystery of the 1913 Mary Phagan/Leo Frank case, and the role of Atlanta in the civil rights movement. The exhibit plan was quite ambitious, but for several of the NEH reviewers, the plan seemed to present "an overly negative view of Atlanta's history" and the title seemed misleading. Reviewers also criticized the lack of information about exhibition-related programs and supporting materials.[51] The AHC staff went back to the drawing board and developed a new "Disputed Territories" exhibit that focused more specifically on *Gone with the Wind*. The new exhibit explored the myths of southern history that *Gone with the Wind* reinforced and that underpinned Mitchell's work.

"Disputed Territories" drew on current scholarship and was on display in the new Atlanta History Museum building from May to December 1994. The exhibit addressed three issues—the whereabouts and the reality of Tara, women's roles in the mid-1800s, and the role of slaves and free blacks in the Atlanta area. The brochure for the exhibit

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[50] "Author Darden Asbury Pyron to Speak at the Atlanta History Center," Press Release, 16 August 1991, AHC, GWTW Subcommittee, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[51] David Martz to Richard Beard, 25 February 1993. AHC, GWTW Misc., Disputed Territories-Inactive, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

informed visitors that "Mitchell's book, *Gone with the Wind*, and the film adaptation of her novel have done more to shape popular perceptions of what life was like in antebellum and Civil War Atlanta than any historical analysis of the city, the region, or its people." The fundamental premise of the exhibit—to determine the accuracy of those popular perceptions through "a juxtaposition of the images from the book and film with historical photographs, documents, diaries, and letters drawn from the Atlanta History Center Library/Archives"—allowed the AHC to draw on its rich collection of *Gone with the Wind*-related materials as well as other items from its collection that dated to the mid-nineteenth century.[52]

Each section of the exhibit opened with a question, and the first question the exhibit addressed was "Where was Tara?" Mitchell's description of "a clumsy, sprawling building" that "had been built according to no architectural plan whatsoever" was contrasted with the white-columned mansion featured in the movie. Mitchell's horror at the realization of what Hollywood was doing to her clumsy building was expressed in the following quotation from a letter Mitchell wrote to journalist Virginius Dabney in 1942:

> I believe that we Southerners could write the truth about the ante-bellum South, its few slaveholders, its yeoman farmers, its rambling, comfortable houses just fifty years away from log cabins, until Gabriel blows his trump—and everyone would go on believing in the Hollywood version. The sad part is that many Southerners believe this myth even more ardently than Northerners. A number of years ago some of us organized a club, The Association of Southerners Whose Grandpappies Did Not Live in Houses With Columns.[53]

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[52] "Disputed Territories: *Gone with the Wind* and Southern Myths," Exhibit brochure, 5 May 1994, AHC, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[53] "Disputed Territories" exhibit text, p. 1, GWTW Misc., Disputed Territories, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

Photographs of real antebellum homes from the Atlanta area offered a glimpse of the reality of planter life in north Georgia in the mid-nineteenth century—a reality that more closely resembled Mitchell's description of Tara than of that conjured up by David O. Selznick for the movie. Some of the photographs were taken by Wilbur Kurtz when he and Mitchell embarked on a tour of historic homes in the area prior to a scouting visit by the film's first director George Cukor. Mitchell herself appeared in one of the photographs, having inadvertently wandered into frame. Also on display was Kurtz's journal, which he kept during the film's production, and which offered the following explanation for the addition of columns, at least on Twelve Oaks:

> Cukor was inclined to think Twelve Oaks should be a rich-looking place, should have a lot of that favorite soup known as "glamour"—certainly not Westover on the James, but that sort of columned grandeur that would denote a family that had its roots in Virginia. Since the house is, after all, pure fiction, and since 'tis our only chance to spread on the Old South, it was deemed by both Mr. S and Mr. C that something really nice is here indicated.[54]

Kurtz's willingness to let Selznick and Cukor "spread on the Old South" likely raised Mitchell's hackles. The inclusion of the journal in the exhibit, along with the photographs of historic houses from the area, perhaps gave pause to generations of visitors raised on white-columned replicas of Tara and Twelve Oaks that had come to symbolize the mythological Old South.

The second question addressed by the exhibit "Was Scarlett a Lady?" featured a display of the many layers of unwieldy undergarments that "ladies" were expected to wear in the antebellum period, along with newspaper advertisements, photographs, and excerpts from diaries. Southern ladies were expected to be devoted wives and mothers with no thought of working outside the home, all roles that Scarlett O'Hara rejected.

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[54] "Disputed Territories" exhibit text, p. 14.

The final question posed by the exhibit was "How True to Life Were the Slaves in GWTW?" Using excerpts from city statutes and newspapers along with WPA slave narratives, this section presented the diversity of the slave experience, demonstrating that just as the "happy darky" myth was untrue, so, too, was the myth that all slaves were beaten and brutalized.

Between October 1993 and February 1994, more than a thousand visitors to the exhibit were given an opportunity to comment on what they saw through an informal survey conducted by the AHC. The survey card given to visitors asked four questions—What comes to mind when you think of *Gone with the Wind*? Does *Gone with the Wind* accurately portray the South? Does *Gone with the Wind* accurately portray Atlanta? How many times have you read the book and seen the movie?

More than half of the respondents agreed that *Gone with the Wind* accurately portrayed the South and Atlanta, a disturbing finding given that these visitors had just walked through an exhibit designed to prove otherwise. Among the 1,337 visitors who completed the survey, thirty-four percent of the respondents had never read the book, although several noted that they had read it multiple times. On average, the respondents had read the book 2.04 times. By comparison, the film had been viewed 4.06 times per person.[55] Reflecting on the visitor response to the exhibit, Don Rooney recalled that some of the visitors commented on the AHC's technique of "tricking people into learning something by using *Gone with the Wind* as a tool to explore a stereotype." Much as the institution had done a few years earlier with its "Facts about the Fiction" exhibit, noted Rooney, "we used the subject of *Gone with the Wind* to draw them in, and then we

[55] "Disputed Territories: Gone With the Wind and Southern Myths" Informal Survey Results, 7 March 1994, GWTW Misc., Disputed Territories, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

knocked them over the head and said things like 'slavery is more complex than it was portrayed in Hollywood'."[56]

"Disputed Territories" received a great deal of press, with articles appearing in *U.S. News & World Report* and the *London Times* in addition to local publications in the Atlanta area. For *U.S. News & World Report*, reporter Jill Jordan Sieder wrote that "a few eyebrows were raised last week when the Atlanta History Center opened an exhibit debunking much of GWTW's moonlight-and-magnolias mythology," given that "Atlanta for years has managed to cash in on the craving for Southern icons generated by Margaret Mitchell's book and MGM's film." Sieder noted that although "many Atlantans see a seminal tale of the South's never-say-die spirit in images of Scarlett trading with carpetbaggers and running a sawmill, nothing on record supports her Reconstruction-era feminist heroics," with city documents instead showing white women working in traditional jobs such as teaching and sewing and a general "disdain for work outside the home. History has proved, however, that Scarlett was right to declare tomorrow another day."[57]

In an article focused primarily on the impending debut of the television version of Alexandra Ripley's sequel, *Scarlett*, the *London Times* noted that AHC curator Andy Ambrose found that the exhibit's visitors were "fascinated by the way Scarlett's outrageous behavior differs from pious prescriptions in sermons, cookbooks, and the ladies magazines of the time."[58] Apparently this fascination by visitors did not translate

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[56] Don Rooney, telephone conversation.
[57] Jill Jordan Sieder, "Tearing Down Tara," *U.S. News & World Report*, 16 May 1994, 18.
[58] Kate Muir, "Why we do give a damn," *London Times*, 9 November 1994, GWTW Misc., Disputed Territories, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta

into an understanding that, in the Reconstruction South, women did not behave like Scarlett, if the results of the AHC's informal survey are to be believed.

For the Atlanta weekly publication *Creative Loafing*, Rodger Lyle Brown noted that one of the most interesting things about the exhibit was the attention that it had received from the national press, citing Sieder's review for *U.S. News & World Report* and a review in the *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* that declared "Museum's exhibit debunks the myths of 'GWTW'." Brown described the exhibit as "modest" and "cautious," admitting that although "*Gone With the Wind* has the status of holy writ for many people, and, granted, it has done more than any other single work to shape popular perceptions of the Old South, . . . questioning the historical veracity of the book and movie is not just another P.C.-come-lately gesture by revisionary multiculturalists." Brown cited early critics of Mitchell's work, such as Malcolm Crowley, who proclaimed the book "an encyclopedia of the plantation legend" as an example of the criticism to which *Gone with the Wind* had been subjected. Brown went on to commend the AHC for its "Socratic method" approach in "Disputed Territories," which he claimed "introduces the public to some of the challenges faced by historians" as they reviewed and evaluated historical records. Such an exhibit required "more effort on the part of the viewer," offered Brown, adding that "the jury is still out on how many people are willing to do the work." By affording visitors the opportunity to measure the legends against the facts, the exhibit "open[ed] up the space between fact and fiction where culture operates to manufacture myths," explained Brown.[59] Again, the informal survey indicated that less than half of the visitors were willing to do the work necessary to evaluate the fictional work in light of the historical facts.

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[59] Rodger Lyle Brown, "Tara Incognito," *Creative Loafing*, 11 June 1994, 31.

A Worldwide Fascination

"Rumors, Rumors! I have heard various rumors about the next Disputed Territories," wrote exhibit designer Lynn Watson-Powers to AHC Education and Interpretation Director Darlene Roth in September 1995, less than a year after the closing of the "Disputed Territories" exhibit. "Could you please tell me the current status of this exhibition, i.e., are we planning to resurrect this exhibition or are we planning to create a new exhibition on GWTW? Or what?" continued Watson-Powers with a sense of urgency that reflected the pressure of Atlanta's impending date with destiny as it hosted visitors from around the world for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Staff members at the AHC, like most entities in the Atlanta area, were busily planning how to welcome the world, and there seemed to be general agreement that some sort of *Gone with the Wind*-related exhibit was in order. The Herb Bridges collection, noted Watson-Powers, was "not scheduled to be on view anywhere during the Olympics" and might be made available to the AHC.[60]

Unbeknownst to Watson-Powers, Bridges was already in negotiations with the AHC regarding his collection, having met with new AHC director Rick Beard in May to discuss the possibility of the AHC's purchasing his collection. According to notes from the meeting, Bridges was not interested in selling his entire collection, but was in search of a permanent home for at least some of his collection. Bridges had been collecting *Gone with the Wind* artifacts and memorabilia for twenty-eight years, and his collection, which contained copies of the book in every language ever published, several seats removed from the Loew's Grand Theater, and original costumes worn by Clark Gable

[60] Lynne Watson-Powers to Darlene Roth, 28 September 1995, GWTW Misc., GWTW Exhibit Spring 1996, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

and Vivien Leigh during filming, was widely considered to be unsurpassed. Bridges had tried to negotiate a deal for the display of items from his collection with Patsy Wiggins, owner of the Road to Tara Museum, which opened in the basement of the Georgian Terrace Hotel in 1993, but he and Wiggins could not agree on the financial arrangements, so his collection remained tucked away near his Sharpsburg, Georgia, home. Bridges' main concern seemed to be that the collection be on display and be properly protected while generating some revenue for himself and his family.[61] In a letter to Rick Beard written following their meeting, Bridges wrote, "It has long been my dream to have the Collection properly displayed in a permanent setting in Atlanta. I hope we may persue [sic] this matter and, one day, have a permanent GWTW attraction at the History Center."[62]

Nine months later Beard and Bridges were still negotiating. Beard had developed a plan that hinged upon receiving a $3 million gift from the sons of Stephens Mitchell who had inherited the copyright to *Gone with the Wind* following the death of Margaret Mitchell, her husband John Marsh, and her brother Stephens. The $3 million would be used to set up an endowed fund, from which Bridges would receive $75,000 annually with the balance of the annual income generated by the endowment to be used for the care and exhibition of the collection. Title to the collection would pass to the Atlanta Historical Society. The weak link in the strategy seemed to be the plan to solicit a gift from the Mitchell brothers, in particular Joseph Mitchell, who had in the past refused to give money to the AHS. Apparently Joseph was still peeved on his father's behalf over

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[61] Notes from meeting with Herb Bridges, 11 May 1995, GWTW Misc., GWTW REB, 1995-96, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[62] Herb Bridges to Rick Beard, 11 May 1995, GWTW Misc., GWTW REB, 1995-96, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

the AHS's decision to move the Society's headquarters to Buckhead back in the 1960s, a move that Stephens Mitchell had opposed.[63] Overcoming Joseph's antipathy towards the institution proved to be an insurmountable task, and the transfer of the Herb Bridges collection to the AHC never came to pass.

A new *Gone with the Wind* exhibit was in the works, however. Rick Beard vetoed the plans to recreate the "Disputed Territories" exhibit, wanting a different spin on *Gone with the Wind* for the new exhibit. By late fall 1995, several different options were still under consideration, including a new *Gone with the Wind* and Southern Myths exhibit that relied more on three-dimensional artifacts and less on archival documents, a smaller form of the previous "Facts about the Fiction" exhibit, or a display of the Herb Bridges collection.[64] That two out of three of these ideas represented resurrecting previous exhibits with slight modifications is likely due to the short time frame that the staff had to put together the exhibit, but it might also indicate that the AHC had just about run out of fresh ideas on how to present *Gone with the Wind* in a historical context. Short time frame and recycled ideas aside, the AHC pressed forward, feeling great pressure as the preeminent history museum in the city to deliver a *Gone with the Wind* exhibit. The competition for the attention of *Gone with the Wind* fans during the Olympics looked as if it was going to be formidable, with the Road to Tara Museum fully operational and the transformation of the Dump into a museum known as the Margaret Mitchell House well underway.

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[63] Rick Beard to Hal Clarke, Herb Bridges, 30 January 1996, GWTW Misc., GWTW REB, 1995-96, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[64] Costume/Textile Gallery during the Olympics, GWTW Misc., GWTW Exhibit Spring 1996, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

By early February 1996 a decision had been made, and a press release announcing the exhibit "*Gone with the Wind*: A Worldwide Fascination" was sent out. The exhibit explored "the world's fascination with *Gone with the Wind* and the industry it generated."[65] Scheduled to open in June 1996 and run until January 1998, the exhibit recycled many of the artifacts displayed in previous exhibits, such as the broken vase, the portrait of Scarlett O'Hara from Rhett's bedroom, the door of Tara, and Mitchell's writing desk and chair. Divided into three sections—the book, the movie, and the industry—the exhibit began with the story of Mitchell and her book. The second section offered details, artifacts, and images from the film production. The final section explored product tie-ins generated by *Gone with the Wind*. Such product tie-ins were a rarity in the 1930s, and *Gone with the Wind* was one of the first films to foster such a proliferation of related merchandise, from chocolate bars to hair pins.

Although "A Worldwide Fascination" presented a factual story of the development of the book and film, it was a decidedly celebratory exhibit. A compilation of visitor comments from the summer of 1996 indicated that the modest exhibit left visitors wanting more. One individual wrote, "That's it? I thought it would be huge. This seems more like an introduction than a full exhibit." Another visitor commented, "Too short, not much to see beyond some pieces of memorabilia," while another wrote, "Frankly, from the way this has been promoted, I expected something grand. Please upgrade and expand this exhibition so that in future years it will be more comprehensive." Not all of the comments were negative. One visitor expressed her delight at being able "to revisit an era that has Gone with the Wind," and many visitors

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[65] *Gone with the Wind*: A Worldwide Fascination, Press Release, 2 February 1996, GWTW Misc., GWTW Press, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

thanked the AHC for putting on display a tribute to their favorite book or film.[66] Disappointed though many of the visitors might have been, the AHC's exhibit was a major attraction for *Gone with the Wind* aficionados during the Olympic Games. Part of this success was because the AHC's principal competition for *Gone with the Wind* fans, the Margaret Mitchell House, burned to the ground in May 1996, just a few weeks before its planned grand opening.

"A Worldwide Fascination" would be the last exhibition at the Atlanta History Center focused primarily on *Gone with the Wind*. The following year, the reconstructed Margaret Mitchell House finally opened to the public and immediately became the in-town destination for *Gone with the Wind* fans. Under the leadership of director Rick Beard, the AHC had made an effort toward shedding its elitist image, but at the time of Beard's departure in 2002, the history center was still "tethered to its Buckhead image as a plutocrat's playground," as noted by *Atlanta Journal/Constitution* reporter Tom Sabulis.[67] In 2003, the board announced the hiring of Jim Bruns, former director of development and founding director of the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C. An experienced fund raiser who had brought in more than $70 million in less than ten years at his previous job, Bruns was envisioned as the savior for the History Center. His fund-raising prowess was expected to enable the AHC to expand its facilities and broaden its audience through diverse programming and exhibitions. Expansion plans included the

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[66] Summary of visitor comments for the exhibition "Gone with the Wind: A Worldwide Fascination," GWTW Misc., GWTW Exhibition Worldwide Fascination, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.

[67] Tom Sabulis, "History center's top gun: Jim Bruns brings a double-barreled reputation as an academic and fund-raiser to evolving Atlanta institution," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 31 August 2003, KS1.

addition of a wing to house an exhibit celebrating the Centennial Olympic Games that were held in Atlanta in 1996.[68]

In 2004 Jim Bruns and the AHC board were presented with an unexpected expansion opportunity when Mary Rose Taylor, executive director of the Margaret Mitchell House in Midtown Atlanta, approached Bruns about a merger of the two organizations. Announced in July 2004, the merger of the Margaret Mitchell House and the Atlanta History Center was touted as "a marriage made in Old Atlanta heaven."[69] Through its merger with the Margaret Mitchell House, the AHC reclaimed its unofficial position as the principal guardian of Mitchell's legacy.

Meanwhile, two years after Atlanta hosted the Olympics, The Road to Tara Museum, which had moved from Midtown Atlanta to Stone Mountain, settled into what seemed to be a more permanent home at the Clayton County Welcome Center in Jonesboro. Officials in Clayton County had long cherished its image as "The Home of *Gone with the Wind*," an honor bestowed upon the county in the 1960s by Margaret Mitchell's brother. Securing The Road to Tara Museum seemed to signal that the county had finally succeeded in establishing a viable tourist attraction related to *Gone with the Wind* and made Clayton County a serious competitor in the marketplace for *Gone with the Wind* memory.

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Tom Sabulis and Jim Auchmutey, " 'GWTW' house pairs up with History Center," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 21 July 2004, A1.

CHAPTER 3–THE ROCKY ROAD TO TARA

> When I wrote of Tara I went to great pains to describe a house which had never existed in Clayton County.
>
> Margaret Mitchell[1]

Atlanta became inextricably linked with *Gone with the Wind* following the publication of the book in 1936 and the release of the film in 1939, but it was south of Atlanta in rural Clayton County that the first sustained efforts to create a memorial tribute to Mitchell's work began in the 1960s. Although she always claimed that the specific buildings and locations mentioned in the book were creations of her imagination, Mitchell offered enough references to Clayton County and its county seat of Jonesboro to put the town on the map for *Gone with the Wind* pilgrims who traveled to Georgia in search of Scarlett and Tara. For three decades, private citizens and civic leaders in Clayton County wrestled with what to do with this legacy. Their efforts and outcomes offer a glimpse into the power of place and the struggle for identity in a suburban community on the outskirts of Atlanta.

Margery Middlebrooks, the manager of the Clayton County Savings & Loan, was one of the first residents of Jonesboro to launch a campaign to recognize Clayton County's connection to *Gone with the Wind* in the 1960s. Although Middlebrooks' persuasive powers swayed Stephens Mitchell to support the cause, her grand dream of developing a Tara-themed attraction in Clayton County was never fully realized. Almost two decades later, developer Richard Chatham, a director of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce, began another campaign to establish a *Gone with the Wind* tourist complex. Armed with the backing of the local and state governments, Chatham

[1] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind Letters," 1936-1949*, 105.

channeled his energies into advocating a temporary sales tax increase to fund the complex. His effort represented the most comprehensive attempt to establish a bona fide tourist attraction in Clayton County based on *Gone with the Wind*. Chatham's crusade ultimately failed, and although there were other attempts to develop *Gone with the Wind* theme parks in the area, Clayton County officials eventually settled on a less ambitious venue for celebrating its connection to Tara.

In his book *Possessed by the Past*, historian David Lowenthal described heritage as "domesticating the past to enlist it for present causes."[2] In Clayton County, Georgia, the present cause was economic development, and in pursuit of this cause, the lines between fact and fiction became blurred as local citizens combined a fictional past with history to develop a heritage. The struggle to build Tara in the second half of the twentieth century at times seemed to consume civic leaders. Bizarrely, throughout the various campaigns to build a simulacrum of Tara in Clayton County, the movie-set façade of Tara from Selznick's 1939 film version of *Gone with the Wind*, moved in and out of Clayton County like a set-piece for a traveling play that was never staged. Purchased in 1979 by Betty Talmadge, the ex-wife of Senator Herman Talmadge, the Tara façade's journey from Hollywood to Clayton County is the stuff of legend among *Gone with the Wind* fans, and it is with the journey of this plywood and papier mâché monstrosity from Los Angeles to Atlanta that this chapter begins.

Pieces of the True Cross

In 1959 Southern Attractions, Inc., an Atlanta corporation headed by local attorneys Julian Foster and Robert Troutman, purchased the plywood and papier mâché

[2] Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, xv.

Tara from Desilu Studios with plans to relocate the façade to the Atlanta area as the centerpiece for a tourist attraction called the Tara Plantation. A tentative site on the old Tara Road had been identified for the attraction, and a grand celebration of the arrival of Tara was planned for June 1, 1959. Disassembled and loaded into two trucks in Los Angeles, the plywood Tara made its way across the country, arriving on schedule in front of the state capitol, where it was greeted by "pretty girls in full dress of Confederate days, a Dixie music band in Confederate uniforms, and the governor himself, who declared that it was 'only fitting and proper that Tara should be established on the soil from which it sprung.'"[3] Admitting that although he knew Tara was fictional, Governor Ernest Vandiver reminded the assembled crowd that Tara "is a reality to many, and it is with a great deal of pride and pleasure that we welcome Tara home."[4]

Unfortunately for Foster, Troutman, and the many *Gone with the Wind* fans who were hungry for a glimpse of Tara, the "curmudgeonly guardian of the temple" Stephens Mitchell refused to grant permission to Southern Attractions for the use of the name Tara or any likenesses from his sister's work. Much like his sister Margaret, Stephens Mitchell was dismayed by the white-pillared mansion that David O. Selznick had presented to the world as Tara, home of the O'Hara family in the film version of *Gone with the Wind*. Echoing his sister's sentiments, Stephens Mitchell repeatedly told would-be purveyors of *Gone with the Wind* attractions that the Hollywood Tara bore little resemblance to the building his sister envisioned when she wrote her book, often quoting Margaret's description of Tara as a "clumsy, sprawling building" that was "built

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[3] "Tara Gets Bright Reception by Governor, Beauties, et al," *Atlanta Journal*, 1 June 1959, 13.
[4] "Tara Vans Welcomed at Capitol," *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 June 1959, 6.

according to no architectural plan whatever."[5] Mitchell's refusal to grant a license to Southern Attractions proved the death knell for Foster's and Troutman's Tara Plantation, and Julian Foster put the plywood Tara into storage in a barn in Alpharetta, a suburb north of Atlanta, where it would remain for the next twenty years.

After seeing a newspaper article in 1979 about the Tara façade, Betty Talmadge contacted Foster and offered to buy the relic. Foster's selling price was reportedly in the low six figures, but Talmadge refused to buy Tara sight unseen. She demanded that Foster show her the façade, and she and Foster embarked on a circuitous drive into the country to the barn where Talmadge was shown "a bunch of papier mâché bricks and weatherbeaten [sic] doors and windows." It was, recalled Talmadge in 1985, in terrible condition; but it retained its value as a sacred piece of *Gone with the Wind* memorabilia because "Scarlett and Rhett had touched it."[6]

Valuable though Talmadge thought the fake Tara was, she was not prepared to pay Foster's asking price of $175,000. Several days after their drive in the country, Talmadge counter-offered $5,000, which Foster accepted. Before the deal was sealed, however, Foster committed suicide, leaving Talmadge with no written documentation of their agreement. Although Foster's widow agreed to go ahead with the deal, neither Talmadge nor Mrs. Foster could recall the exact location of the barn in which the set piece was stored. Mrs. Foster eventually located a cancelled check that indicated the

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[5] Jim Auchmutey, "'Tara' shrine blowin' in the wind for decades," *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 January 1985, A1. Margaret Mitchell's descriptions of Tara appear on pages 48 and 57 of the Scribner hardback reprint edition of *Gone with the Wind*.
[6] Auchmutey, " 'Tara' shrine blowin' in the wind for decades," A1.

barn's address, and Betty Talmadge retrieved the remnants of Tara, which she then stored in a barn on her farm in Lovejoy.[7]

In her divorce from Senator Talmadge in 1978, Betty succeeded in retaining control of the Talmadge family plantation in Lovejoy, which she claimed was Margaret Mitchell's inspiration for Twelve Oaks, the home of Ashley Wilkes, in *Gone with the Wind*.[8] Talmadge pointed to a 1973 article by Linda Greenhouse in the *New York Times* as giving credence to her claim that she was living in the "real Twelve Oaks," although Greenhouse offered no real evidence to support this assertion other than her repetition of the statement that the "Talmadge home is believed to have been Margaret Mitchell's model for Twelve Oaks."[9] Suspect though Talmadge's claim was, she capitalized on the plantation's antebellum past (it was constructed in the late 1830s) and its location just south of Jonesboro to lure *Gone with the Wind* fans from near and far. As author Tony Horwitz recounted in his 1998 book, *Confederates in the Attic*, Talmadge parlayed her experience serving as a hostess for her Senator ex-husband into a paying avocation, hosting "Magnolia Suppers" that featured dishes named after the main characters from *Gone with the Wind*.[10]

Shortly after she purchased the papier mâché and plywood Tara from the widow of Julian Foster, Talmadge purchased what many *Gone with the Wind* fans had come to know as the "real Tara"—a "ramshackle, five-room house," known as the old Fitzgerald

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[7] Ibid.; Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 303-304; Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 85-87.
[8] Patricia Sullivan, "Betty Talmadge Dies; Outspoken Senate Ex-Wife, *Washington Post*, 11 May 2005, B06.
[9] Linda Greenhouse, "The 'Real' Tara Inspires Visions of Scarlett and Rhett," *New York Times*, 25 November 1973, 533.
[10] Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 302.

place, that once belonged to Margaret Mitchell's great-grandparents.[11] Threatened with demolition to make way for a new housing development off Tara Road, the old Fitzgerald house and its outbuildings, a barn and a kitchen, were relocated to the grounds of Talmadge's Lovejoy plantation. Betty Talmadge had scored a *Gone with the Wind* trifecta—she now owned the "real Tara," the fake Tara, and the alleged inspiration for Twelve Oaks.

The "Home of *Gone with the Wind*"

The campaign to establish a bona fide connection between *Gone with the Wind* and Clayton County began in earnest more than a decade before the plywood Tara arrived at Betty Talmadge's Lovejoy plantation just south of Jonesboro. In 1966 Jonesboro resident Margery Middlebrooks approached Stephens Mitchell about staging a *Gone with the Wind* historical pageant. A co-founder of the Clayton County Savings & Loan Association, Middlebrooks was active in a variety of civic activities in Jonesboro, including the Recreation Association and the Tourist, Historical and Beautification Committee.[12] Inspired by a visit to Scottsdale, Arizona, which promoted itself as "the most western city," Middlebrooks decided that Jonesboro could be promoted as "the most southern city." For Middlebrooks, nothing was more southern than *Gone with the Wind*, so she contacted Stephens Mitchell about using *Gone with the Wind* to promote tourism in Clayton County. Mitchell had been notoriously stingy about granting license for anyone to use his late sister's work, but Middlebrooks persuaded him that, as the scene of much of the action in *Gone with the Wind*, Clayton County should be entitled to claim the

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[11] Auchmutey, "'Tara' shrine blowin' in the wind for decades," A1.

[12] Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 85; "Margery Middlebrooks-Butler," Obituary, *Clayton News-Daily*, 2 January 2004.

title "The Home of *Gone with the Wind*" and to stage a historical pageant in the county seat of Jonesboro in honor of Mitchell's epic.[13]

Although Middlebrooks's enthusiasm convinced Stephens Mitchell to grant a license to celebrate its connection to *Gone with the Wind*, the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce was unconvinced that celebrating its antebellum past was a way to promote a bright future. The Chamber decided not to go forward with the *Gone with the Wind* pageant; and in 1968, Middlebrooks redirected her efforts into establishing a preservation organization, Historical Jonesboro, that would be "dedicated to the preservation of Clayton County's rich historical heritage as 'The Home of *Gone With the Wind*.'" She also led the movement for the Clayton County Federal Savings and Loan to construct its new Jonesboro headquarters in the Greek Revival style. Middlebrooks orchestrated a two-week, grand-opening celebration of the new building complete with ladies in antebellum costumes and a display of *Gone with the Wind* memorabilia from the world-renowned collection of Herb Bridges. The Savings and Loan offered Historical Jonesboro office space in its new building and established two paid positions in support of the preservation organization.[14]

Margery Middlebrooks' modest preservation organization soon boasted 300 members including U.S. Senator Herman Talmadge. She continued to receive support from Stephens Mitchell, who attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Savings and Loan in April of 1969 and declared, "I want Clayton County to have the name of 'Home of *Gone with the Wind*.' I have wished for this promotion for a long time, because it [Clayton County] is the home of *Gone with the Wind*. This would have been pleasing to

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[13] Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 71-75.
[14] Ibid. 62.

my late sister, Margaret."[15] As Middlebrooks began new efforts to create a *Gone with the Wind*-themed attraction in Jonesboro, Stephens Mitchell wrote her a letter of support that carried with it warnings about the pitfalls associated with memorializing his sister's work, reminding Middlebrooks that

> the main idea is to keep everything in good taste. I would not want statues and markers, etc., unnecessarily puffing Margaret Mitchell Marsh's fame. . . . She did not want to be eternally over-praised and over-puffed. She thought it bad taste. She wanted everything authentic. She wanted everything true to historical facts. She did not want places of her relatives connected with her book. She wanted nothing commercial. She would have been proud of a good museum, and an accurate replica of Tara in a pretty park, a pageant which was done in a proper professional manner.

Although he had granted Clayton County permission to claim the name "Home of *Gone with the Wind*," Mitchell retained the right to "hold some supervision over any productions or buildings," adding that "Historical Jonesboro, Inc., may, in future years, fall into hands of which I did not approve."[16]

Having received the blessing of Stephens Mitchell to use the county's connection to *Gone with the Wind* as a basis for promoting the county, Historical Jonesboro began an architectural survey of downtown Jonesboro and soon established a local downtown historic district that was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. Among the reasons listed for inclusion on the National Register was the town's "setting for much of Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone With the Wind*."[17] Historical Jonesboro also purchased the old county jail, negotiated a lease with Southern Railway for the use of the abandoned train depot, and established the Margaret Mitchell Memorial Center. The focal point of the Memorial Center was the antebellum Whitmall P. Allen house, Stately

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[15] Exhibit at the Road to Tara Museum, Jonesboro, Georgia, visited by author, 18 July 2006.
[16] Stephens Mitchell to Margery Middlebrooks, 19 August 1970, quoted in Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 78.
[17] National Register of Historic Places NRIS database, http://www.nr.nps.gov/

Oaks, which was moved from its original location north of the city to a new location just off Main Street in downtown Jonesboro.[18] Efforts to restore Stately Oaks consumed much of the time and energy of Historical Jonesboro for the next decade, and the organization ceased to be a leader in the broader effort to establish a *Gone with the Wind* attraction in Clayton County.

Almost a decade later when developer and Chamber of Commerce director Richard Chatham began a campaign to capitalize on the county's *Gone with the Wind* connection, Historical Jonesboro cried foul, citing the 1970 letter from Stephens Mitchell to Margery Middlebrooks that indicated his permission for Historical Jonesboro to create "a good museum, and an accurate replica of Tara in a pretty park." Historical Jonesboro had put its museum project on hold while the organization raised funds for the restoration of Stately Oaks, but the preservation organization fully intended to develop a museum that, in keeping with Stephens Mitchell's wishes, grounded his sister's fiction in fact.[19] According to the leaders of Historical Jonesboro, their organization had the exclusive right to develop a *Gone with the Wind* attraction in Clayton County, and Chatham's campaign to build a separate Tara attraction violated the agreement between Mitchell and Historical Jonesboro.

Chatham adopted a "big-tent" philosophy for his *Gone with the Wind* project, inviting the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce and Historical Jonesboro into the fold, along with Betty Talmadge, who still had the plywood Tara stored in her barn. He also contacted the executors of Stephens Mitchell's estate, whom he believed to be the final authority for granting permission for the use of *Gone with the Wind* as part of a

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[18] Joseph Moore, *A History of Clayton County, Georgia* (Roswell, Georgia: H.H. Wolfe, 1983), 72.
[19] Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 94.

tourist attraction following the death in 1983 of Stephens Mitchell. Chatham failed to contact directly Stephens Mitchell's sons, Eugene and Joe, who were the principal heirs of the *Gone with the Wind* copyright. When news broke of Chatham's proposed *Gone with the Wind* museum in Clayton County, Joe Mitchell announced that such a museum would be built "over my dead body." According to Joe, no one had contacted him or his brother about this proposed museum, and they both preferred that any memorial to their aunt be operated by the National Park Service at the Midtown Atlanta apartment where she wrote the book.[20] The apartment was presently boarded up and the entire building was on the brink of collapse, having been abandoned for almost seven years and damaged by fire and water in the early 1980s. Chatham eventually was able to allay Joe Mitchell's concerns after assuring Mitchell that the proposed *Gone with the Wind* complex would be dignified and in good taste in keeping with the agreement that Stephens Mitchell had reached with Historical Jonesboro in 1970.

As word about the proposed "GWTW museum" in Clayton County seeped into the local newspapers, the project became a topic of debate. Ted Sprague, director of the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau claimed that "Not capitalizing on 'Gone With the Wind' has been a huge mistake. It's so important to capture the unique history of your area. Properly done, something like this could make so much difference in the level of tourism. I think it would be the extra spark," adding that there was nothing wrong with playing to expectations, "even inaccurate ones," if such a strategy brought more tourists to the area. "I could see us have a 'GWTW' setting, something that feels like a plantation, with a restaurant and clips from the movie and maybe some kids dressed up like Rhett and Scarlett," said Sprague. Comparing Atlanta to Dallas, Texas, Sprague

[20] Auchmutey, "'Tara' shrine blowin' in the wind for decades," A1.

noted that Atlanta was lucky to have such a pedigree when "all Dallas has is the Cowboys and that TV show. Compared to them, we have a real class act."[21]

Although the classiness of the proposed Clayton County attraction was a subject of some disagreement, what Atlanta had as a "tribute to *Gone with the Wind*" from 1980 to 1982 could hardly be deemed a "class act." During that time souvenir seller Austin McDermott operated a storefront gallery in downtown Atlanta where he sold *Gone with the Wind* souvenirs such as bricks from the ruins of the Loew's Grand Theater, refrigerator magnets, and toilet seats. According to McDermott, who weighed in on the debate surrounding the Clayton County project, the most important part of any *Gone with the Wind* memorial project was "keeping the dignity of the work." When questioned about the dignity of the commodification of *Gone with the Wind* into such products as toilet seats, McDermott explained that "everything connected with 'GWTW' in some way keeps the mystique alive."[22]

The mystique seemed to have a life of its own, at least for outsiders who came to visit Atlanta. Jack New of the Gray Line tour bus company reported that the first question he always got was "Where's Tara?" Although the standard answer by Gray Line employees was that Tara was fictional, the tour company did offer a tour of antebellum homes in Covington and Madison, Georgia. Known as "*Gone With the Wind* Country: The Area that Sherman Refused to Burn," the tour proved to be the company's most popular excursion, especially among Japanese visitors.[23]

Richard Chatham intended to capitalize on the unrequited love of Atlanta's visitors for all things *Gone with the Wind*, and in July 1985, he announced that a joint

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

task force of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce and Historical Jonesboro was prepared to move forward with the construction of a $15 to $20 million "memorial center" that would be located on twenty-five acres of land that had once been part of the Fitzgerald plantation, the home of Margaret Mitchell's great-grandparents. Chatham revealed a preliminary plan for the complex that included two versions of Tara—one modeled after the "scaled-down Tara of the book," and the other a replica of the movie version. A third building included an exhibition center. The project was slated for completion in time for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the release of the motion picture in December 1989.

A feasibility study conducted by Davidson-Peterson, a tourism and travel research firm, had determined that the project was viable and would draw 520,000 to 759,000 tourists a year to Clayton County.[24] According to the report prepared by Davidson-Peterson, "Margaret Mitchell's story—the book itself—begins the process whereby people create in their minds' eye an image of elegance, vastness, grandeur, a lifestyle that may not have existed. The movie carried this image forward. That this image was never reality or that the scene people imagine never existed is not important in today's marketplace."[25] That the images created by Margaret Mitchell and David O. Selznick were "never reality" might have been a revelation to devotees of the *Gone with the Wind*-based tourism cause; equally as revelatory was the statement that portraying reality was not important. Such willingness to gloss over the reality of life in the South before, during, and after the Civil War in Clayton County stands in direct contrast to the efforts

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[24] Bert Roughton, "$15 million GWTW center planned in Clayton County," *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 August 1985, A1.
[25] Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 97.

at the Atlanta History Center, where repeated attempts were made to contrast Mitchell's and Selznick's creations with the historical reality.

In his press conference held at Clayton Junior College, Chatham offered a bevy of evidence to support his claim that Clayton County was the rightful place for a *Gone with the Wind* attraction including a testimonial from local historian Joseph Moore, who cited references to Tara's location from Mitchell's book, and a video clip from the movie in which Scarlett signed a check made out to the Clayton County Tax Collector for the back taxes on Tara. Chatham's hard sell was not merely window dressing for his press conference. In nearby Coweta County, Carolyn Busby, president of Dunaway Gardens Restorations, Inc., announced plans to build a *Gone with the Wind* attraction at Dunaway Gardens, the now-abandoned former estate of actress Hetty Jane Dunaway near Newnan, Georgia. "We've got just as much claim to Tara as they do in Clayton County," claimed Busby, although the principal basis for her claim seemed to be that the amphitheater at Dunaway Gardens was named after actress Vivien Leigh, who played Scarlett O'Hara in the film version of *Gone with the Wind*. Chatham remained firm in his position that "Tara needs to be created, and from a historical point of view, that creation must be in Clayton County," adding that Clayton County did not "want to get into a competition role; we are merely stating the facts."[26]

As the groups in Clayton and Coweta Counties launched their respective campaigns to build Tara, Betty Talmadge negotiated with both parties for the sale of the "real Tara" and the fake Tara, both of which were still sitting on her Lovejoy plantation. Negotiations with the Clayton County group fell apart when it was unwilling to meet Talmadge's price for the papier mâché and plywood Tara, so she turned her energies

[26] Roughton, "$15 million GWTW center planned in Clayton County," A1.

toward the Coweta project. Chatham seemed matter of fact about his organization's failure to land this authentic piece of *Gone with the Wind* memorabilia, noting that he had inspected the façade and found that the remaining pieces were "not enough to re-create the front of Tara." He added that the old Fitzgerald house, considered to be the real model for Tara, was still available for sale, and his group might attempt to buy it.[27]

As the fiftieth anniversary of the book's publication approached in the summer of 1986, Chatham hoped to ride the wave of renewed enthusiasm for Mitchell's book to move the project forward. Macmillan Publishing Company had just reissued a hardback version of *Gone with the Wind*, which quickly climbed to number ten on the *New York Times* hard-cover best-seller list, and Atlanta and Clayton County planned a golden jubilee designed to draw tens of thousands of visitors to the area.[28] According to Chatham, the past year had been devoted to making the case for Clayton County as the rightful location for a *Gone with the Wind* attraction, and the upcoming golden jubilee would jump-start the fund-raising efforts to make Chatham's dream of a *Gone with the Wind* attraction in Clayton County a reality.

The impending anniversary celebration drew national coverage with all three major networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, sending reporters to Clayton County in June 1986. The Chamber of Commerce's coordinator of *Gone with the Wind* anniversary activities, J. D. Coleman, noted, "This is a very big deal outside of Clayton County." Both NBC and ABC broadcast segments from Stately Oaks, the restored home owned by Historical Jonesboro. On NBC Nightly News, Clayton County Superior Court judge and Civil War buff Joe Crumbley explained to a national audience that "there weren't any

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[27] Pat Murdock, "Chamber seeks support for Tara museum," *Atlanta Journa*, 3 April 1986, I3.
[28] Edwin McDowell, "'Gone With the Wind' Best Seller Again at 50," *New York Times*, 24 June 1986, C13.

two-story, columned mansions" in ante-bellum Clayton County, an argument that Margaret Mitchell had made in vain fifty years earlier.[29]

"It is no exaggeration to say the eyes of the world will be on Clayton County and Atlanta this week," wrote *Clayton News/Daily* publisher Bill Wadkins on June 20, 1986. Wadkins welcomed "the spotlight of international attention during the much-anticipated Gone with the Wind 50th anniversary celebration," and reminded residents that visitors would be there "to share a portion of our history–both real and imaginary–in this land of Tara."[30]

As Clayton County braced for the expected deluge of visitors, Richard Chatham believed Clayton County was "fixing to hit oil."[31] The well proved to be dry, however, with the fiftieth anniversary celebration described as "overall a lackluster affair."[32] Guests at the ball expressed dismay that the caterers ran out of food early in the evening, a development that led to an overall sense of dissatisfaction with the whole affair. [33] Ticket sales, which had been predicted to top 1,000, fell far short of expectations; only about 500 people showed up for the gala event. Commenting on the poor attendance at the ball, attendee Rick Neal theorized that Atlantans did not celebrate *Gone with the Wind* "because it offends blacks. That whole attitude popped up in the sixties, but if you read 'Gone With the Wind' you know that most blacks in the book are stronger than the whites."[34]

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[29] Jeff Whitfield, "'Gone With the Wind' Celebration Attracts Major Television Networks," *Clayton News-Daily, Gone With the Wind Supplement*, 19 June 1986, 1.
[30] Bill Wadkins, "Eyes of the World Are on Clayton This Week," *Clayton News-Daily, Gone With the Wind Supplement*, 20 June 1986, 2.
[31] Julie Miller, "Celebration brings home 'Gone With the Wind'; Interest grows nationwide but lags in Clayton," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 June 1986, I4.
[32] Howard Pousner, "Salute to 'GWTW' called disappointing," *Atlanta Journa*, 29 June 1986, A2.
[33] "Festive Tara Ball Begins Celebration Here," *Clayton News-Daily*, 23 June 1986, 1.
[34] "Young Attends Clatyon's Tara Ball," *Clayton News-Daily*, 23 June 1986, 3.

Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young attended the Tara Ball and jokingly declared that he was there "just to make sure the hoop-skirted and Confederate-uniformed crowd was integrated." Young admitted that he had recently bought a copy of the anniversary edition of the book as a gift for a friend and planned to buy one for himself as well. Responding to criticism that his administration had not wholeheartedly supported the fiftieth-anniversary celebration, Young explained that he felt that since Clayton County claimed to be the home of Tara and *Gone with the Wind*, the community deserved to be the center of the festivities. The city of Atlanta had also been preoccupied with two other major events—the first celebration of a national holiday in memory of Martin Luther King, Jr., in January 1986, and the Coca-Cola centennial. Commenting on the overarching message of Mitchell's book, Young stated, "'Gone with the Wind' is really about a triumph of people over war, and I think we can celebrate it now because we have triumphed over that past. We can celebrate that the nation is reunited, not only geographically, but Atlanta can celebrate because it is reunited racially."[35]

One member of the committee who worked with Richard Chatham to "give physical form to the fictional world of 'Gone With the Wind'," Fulton County Commissioner Michael Lomax, commented that "What we are re-creating is the mythology of the South," and such a recreation was something about which he had "some misgivings."[36] Despite his misgivings, Lomax, the lone African American serving on the Clayton County committee that was trying to parlay Mitchell's work into a tourist attraction, believed that the Atlanta metropolitan area could "make room for a little

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[35] Keith Graham, "Beyond racial considerations Blacks view 'GWTW' same way as whites," *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 June 1986, D1.
[36] Dudley Clendinen, "'Gone With the Wind': Atlanta's Bigger Reality," *New York Times*, 3 July 1986, A10.

Margaret Mitchell."[37] Lomax was not the lone skeptic about the potential for such a development. The committee raised a mere $21,000, an amount far short of its goal of $375,000.[38]

The Taxes on Tara

Undaunted by the committee's failure to drum up significant financial support, Richard Chatham pressed forward with his campaign to build what was now being called a *Gone with the Wind* historic center, reminding everyone that "it is our inherent right to have Tara here because Margaret Mitchell placed it here."[39] Clayton County officials lobbied the state legislature to pass a local option, one-percent, multi-purpose sales tax that would fund several projects for the county. Governor Joe Frank Harris signed the bill allowing the creation of a tourism authority in Clayton County and authorizing the temporary sales tax increase in April 1987, and the stage was set for a county referendum on a one percent sales tax that Chatham claimed would generate the $20 million needed to construct the *Gone with the Wind* historic center, which Chatham explained was "Not Six Flags over Tara," but rather "a true museum."[40] The new tourism authority launched a $50,000 publicity campaign designed to drum up support for the referendum, which also included $7 million for recreational facilities and library books. Local media were saturated with information on the *Gone with the Wind* project, which somewhat ambitiously was projected to attract 600,000 visitors each year and generate about $55 million in revenue while creating about 2,000 jobs in Clayton County. Clayton County

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[37] Graham, "Beyond racial considerations Blacks view 'GWTW' same way as whites," D1.
[38] Pousner, "Salute to 'GWTW' called disappointing," A2.
[39] Julie Miller, "Clayton will seek tax to give Tara a novel home," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 17 January 1987, B1.
[40] Brown, "Tara Infirma: The Troubled History of a Southern Theme," 139-141. Lee Dancy, "County moves one step closer to Tara," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 23 April 1987, K5.

voters were deluged with billboards, posters, yard signs, and mailings that explained how the $30 million raised by the tax increase would be spent and what the projected benefits would be to Clayton County.[41]

As chairman of the Clayton County Tourism Authority, Richard Chatham launched the campaign for the Tara tax at the site of the proposed development located on Tara Road just off Tara Boulevard.[42] The land had once belonged to Phillip Fitzgerald, Margaret Mitchell's great grandfather, and was the former site of the Fitzgerald house, which had been purchased and moved by Betty Talmadge a few years earlier. Following the event Chatham claimed, "The general level of excitement about the project is overwhelming," adding that "people from around the world will come to Clayton County to see 'Tara'." The campaign for the Tara tax was built around the theme of "Jobs! Revenue! Tourism!" Signs proclaiming this theme were distributed to residents for display in their yards and store windows. The tax, which would increase the county sales tax from 3 percent to 4 percent for a maximum of thirty months, would enable "a better quality of life for our children" according to Chatham, who explained that the county would "benefit immensely from the tourism dollars generated by the center."[43]

For the next month, Clayton County's local newspaper, the *Clayton News/Daily*, featured almost daily articles and editorials about the Tara tax, which was often referred to as the "GWTW referendum." In a letter to the editor, Jonesboro resident Randy LeGrand, a supporter of the tax, pondered just what exactly was gone from the Clayton

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[41] Dancy, "County moves one step closer to Tara," K5.
[42] Lee Howell, "Conference at Fitzgerald Site to Kick off Tax Vote Push," *Clayton News-Daily*, 1 September 1987, 1.
[43] Lee Howell, "Sales Tax Backers Launch Campaign," *Clayton News-Daily*, 3 September 1987, 1.

County that Margaret Mitchell depicted in her book, noting that although states rights were surely "gone with the wind," the values and faith in God, family and country that undergirded Mitchell's "lost world" were very much intact. In fact, LeGrand noted, "There are no finer God-loving patriots anywhere in the world." Southerners also maintained their "zest for simpler times and conservative values," claimed LeGrand. Scarlett's marriage and "her beloved Tara" were surely gone, he added; but the planned memorial to Mitchell, which would be funded by tax dollars, would serve as a "reminder that this region is deeply rooted in ideals and beliefs that help make America strong and that the rights of individuals (and states) are paramount."[44]

The GWTW Referendum was endorsed by the Jonesboro City Council in mid-September, but the council's endorsement did not quell the debate.[45] In a letter to the editor on September 17, 1987, Jonesboro resident Bob Flowers protested the sales tax because he felt that it would "allow a small group of individuals, such as brokers and barons of the county, to use our seed money to make profits for only a few to rule the roost." Flowers was a fan of Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*, having read the book three times and seen the movie many times, but he felt that the proposed sales tax revenue generated by the Tara tax would only benefit a few wealthy individuals who controlled the levers of power in the county.[46] Another Jonesboro resident, Nancy Davis, opposed the tax because she feared the influx of visitors, projected at 600,000 a year, that would pour into Clayton County. Like Flowers, Davis also felt that the Tara project would line "a few select pockets" at the expense of the taxpayers. She also raised an

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[44] Randy LeGrand, "Meaning of GWTW," *Clayton News-Daily*, 10 September 1987, 4.
[45] Jim Grimes, "Jonesboro Council Urges 'Yes' Vote in *GWTW* Referendum," *Clayton News-Daily*, 16 September 1987, 1.
[46] Bob Flowers, "Sales Tax Backers Want Personal Gain," *Clayton News-Daily*, 17 September 1987, 5.

ethical argument, asking "how morally right is it to perpetuate and glorify a way of life that was very basically wrong to start with (slavery). This is an insult to our progress in the area of Civil Rights."[47]

Several days after the *Clayton News/Daily* printed the letters from Flowers and Davis, managing editor Jim Grimes penned an article firmly endorsing the Tara tax. The challenge for Clayton County, according to Grimes, was to make the county a destination rather than a bedroom community for Atlanta or a place that people passed through on their way to somewhere else. Grimes reminded readers that "One of America's most successful cultural exports has been the myth of the Ante-Bellum South embodied in the novel and, probably more importantly, the film *Gone With the Wind*, which was why nearly everyone who's lived and worked in Clayton County for any length of time has at least one story of some visitor here asking the way to Tara, and having to tell them that there is no Tara." County leaders were working hard to change that, noted Grimes, by creating a Tara complex that would serve as a "cultural center, a place that will be the focus of discussion and exploration of that particular aspect of American culture that Tara's myth and *Gone With the Wind* so successfully symbolize." Grimes explained his use of the term "myth" as "a cultural artifact which represents a yearning for a certain kind of gracious and relaxed way of life, which probably never actually existed among the ante-bellum gentry, but which nonetheless seems real through the novel's idealization."[48] Grimes made no mention of the fact that this "gracious and relaxed way of life," whether real or fictional, was built on the backs of slave labor.

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[47] Nancy Davis, "Opposed to Tax," *Clayton News-Daily*, 18 September 1987, 4A.
[48] Jim Grimes, "Tara Project Key To Clayton Future," *Clayton News-Daily*, 21 September 1987, 4.

Grimes and the city council were not alone in their support of the tax. Local civic clubs joined business organizations and many influential individuals in Clayton County to endorse the Tara tax. Clayton County Tourism Authority Chairman Richard Chatham was optimistic about the outcome of the upcoming vote, and he had a "GWTW hotline" set up at the Chamber of Commerce to answer questions about the details of the tax. Chatham and other members of the Chamber made personal appearances at organizations around the county in an effort to bolster support for the tax, and their efforts appeared to be paying off as local arts organizations, Parent/Teacher Associations, the Board of Realtors, the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, and the Junior League all endorsed the tax. Associate editor Lee Howell noted that "the only organized opposition the referendum's supporters have found in any group has been a strong negative vote registered in a straw poll at an August meeting of the Clayton County Republican Party's county committee," although Chatham claimed that "some individual Republican activists and GOP political leaders have been supportive" of the tax.[49]

Local historian Joseph Moore, a past commandant of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans and former executive director of Historical Jonesboro, threw his support behind the Tara tax, explaining that

> the legitimacy of the present Tara Project in Clayton County derives from the point that *Gone With the Wind*, book and film, has become an integral fact of our history and as such, it is as much to be reckoned with as any other historical fact. Clayton County may not have any truly grand antebellum houses to parade before the public, but it does have *Gone With the Wind* itself, which as artful literature and film, stands entirely on its own legs. And if a segment of the public is drawn to it by the mythological aspect—the need for a little place in the mind where harsh reality can give way to a little dreaming—surely that is no different in

[49] Lee Howell, "Many Major Groups Endorse Tax," *Clayton News-Daily*, 22 September 1987, 1.

> principle from the diversions sought by devotees of professional sporting events or admirers of America's Old West.[50]

Moore's belief in the magical power of a Tara attraction to transport visitors to "a little place in the mind where harsh reality can give way to a little dreaming" brings to mind the nostalgic words, written by Ben Hecht, that scrolled across the screen at the beginning of the film recalling the "land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South" where "Gallantry took its last bow." Such nostalgia over this scene which the Tara project promised to evoke surely represents the essence of the problematic nature of *Gone with the Wind*—that for a large segment of the southern population, the Old South of the past was a far more "harsh reality" than the present.

Another supporter of the Tara project, Betty Stroup, recalled that four years earlier when she served as an organizer for a large national convention in Atlanta, convention goers were amazed and disappointed to learn that there was no major *Gone with the Wind*-related attraction in the Atlanta area. Stroup reminded Clayton County residents that "Atlanta and GWTW are synonymous to the world—as Jonesboro and Tara are one," and pleaded with local voters not to "let Clayton County's birthright be usurped."[51]

Five days before the vote on the Tara tax, the *Clayton News/Daily* ran "pro tax" and "con tax" articles side by side. Richard Chatham authored the article in support of the tax. His approach was a question-and-answer format based on the most frequently asked questions he had encountered during his travels around the county to lobby for passage of the tax. Chatham cited the ongoing popularity of *Gone with the Wind*, both

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[50] Joseph H. H. Moore, "Tara Project Honors Dream and Fact," *Clayton News-Daily*, 23 September 1987, 4A.
[51] Betty Stroup, "Support Tara Project," *Clayton News-Daily*, 24 September 1987, 5.

book and film, as justification for creating the *Gone with the Wind* Center that would be an economic boon to Clayton County. Addressing the question of why a private donor could not fund the project, Chatham explained that although several private donors had expressed an interest, the Mitchell family had "forbidden gross commercialization of Margaret Mitchell's name and that of *Gone With the Wind*," and that the family only approved the project after they saw the plans and were assured that the center would be a not-for-profit endeavor. Furthermore, Chatham added, several potential donors observed that "this was a self-help project so the people that it was going to help the most, the people of Clayton County, should be willing to make the investment." Chatham reminded readers that the people of Clayton County would own the center and would control the land around it, and that "there would never be another chance to have *Gone With the Wind* in Clayton County."[52]

The opposing view was represented by Stan May, a former executive vice president of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce, who argued that the project as proposed was not in the best interest of the people of Clayton County. Although May recognized the value of Clayton County's *Gone with the Wind* connection, he was "a firm believer in the free enterprise system" and that an endeavor such as the *Gone with the Wind* attraction should be funded by private investors, not the people of Clayton County. May's opposition stemmed from his belief that the best government was a limited government that provided basic services to its people and operated within its budget

[52] Richard Chatham, "Pro – A Yes Vote on Oct. 6 is Key to Prosperity for Clayton County," *Clayton News-Daily*, 1 October 1987, 4.

without "the crutch" of a special-purpose sales tax, which he feared would never go away once it was implemented.[53]

Atlanta Constitution reporter Carole Ashkinaze posed a more philosophical question for Clayton County residents—whether it was worth "$23 million for the chance to view the hard times and human suffering that inspired 'Gone With The Wind' through the rose-colored glasses of wistfulness and nostalgia." Noting that "the 25-acre complex would boast a bizarre blurring of fact and fiction," Ashkinaze reminded readers that there was "nothing remotely 'historic' about an antebellum plantation without slaves; it was slavery that permitted Scarlett O'Hara and many of her contemporaries to be treated like royalty–only to be plunged into a war that would transform them forever. To omit any overt presence of slavery, to in effect look the other way, is unintentionally to glorify the exploitation it made possible instead." A proper response to tourists who asked, "Where is Tara," posited Ashkinaze, was perhaps "Nowhere, but in the fertile imagination of its late author."[54]

Ashkinaze's article was one of the few that questioned the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of the proposed *Gone with the Wind* project. Much of the debate about the "Tara tax" centered around the appropriateness of public money funding what was perceived as a private undertaking, even though what was now being called the *Gone with the Wind* tourism park would, in fact, be a nonprofit entity that was projected to benefit the county through increases in jobs, revenue, and tourism. According to *Clayton News/Daily* associate editor Lee Howell, an avid supporter of the tax, local voters would

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[53] Stan May, "Con – Tara Project a Job for Private Enterprise, Not Local Government," *Clayton News-Daily*, 1 October 1987, 4.
[54] Carole Ashkinaze, "Tara through rose-colored glasses? No," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 September 1987, A10.

"either bring the hopes and dreams of countless people to reality–or they would send those dreams to the junk heap." Apparently the proposed *Gone With the Wind* historical center carried all the hopes and dreams for a brighter future for the residents of Clayton County, and if they did not act fast, the "group of activists over in Coweta County" might snatch this great dream right out from under the good citizens of Clayton County.[55]

On the eve of the vote on the Tara tax, *Clayton News/Daily* managing editor Jim Grimes informed readers that he intended to vote "yes" on the tax referendum because he feared that a south-side suburban community like Clayton County on the edge of an economically vibrant city like Atlanta would find itself "washed away by the very economic good fortune" it courted if the county did not do something to establish its own identity. Clayton County needed "a focus for its identity," explained Grimes, "and Tara can be that focus," adding, "I've come to realize that there's more to this Tara thing than historical preservation or nostalgia. The image resonates deeply among people who have no knowledge or interest in history and no Southern roots to be nostalgic about. 'Gone With the Wind' has gone beyond its origins and seated itself deep in America's and the developed world's cultural dreamscape." Grimes noted that "one can sense the power of that mythic image like the electricity in the air before a gathering thunderstorm, but, like Benjamin Franklin, . . . we need a kite to draw this bit of zeitgeist into our jar." The Tara project could be the "kite" for Clayton County, explained Grimes, and that was why he was voting "yes."[56]

The month-long public debate over the Tara tax seemed to galvanize the residents of Clayton County; and on October 6, 1987, over 15,000 voters, a record for a special

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[55] Lee Howell, "Dreams Riding on Tax Referendum," *Clayton News-Daily*, 4 September 1987, 4A.
[56] Jim Grimes, "Tara Myth is a Community Resource," *Clayton News-Daily*, 5 October 1987, 4.

election, reported to the polls to vote on the special-purpose sales tax. The tax was rejected by a two-to-one margin. Supporters of the tax were "shocked and saddened," and one resident reported being "a little embarrassed" for the county by the voters' inability to recognize the bright future that the Tara project represented. Richard Chatham commented that "there were circumstances that arose that . . . I don't think we could have done anything about," referring to a sharp property tax increase that had been recently imposed on Clayton County homeowners.[57]

Reflecting on the reasons for the defeat, one supporter of the tax commented, "Too many people voted," an opinion shared by state representative Frank Bailey, who added, "I knew we were in trouble when I saw [the turnout] go over 10,000."[58] The perils of democracy and high voter turnout aside, the campaign for the sales tax increase was most likely overtaken by an event outside the control of the tourism authority, the dramatic increase in property tax assessments in Clayton County, the first such increase in fourteen years, which was imposed four months before the sales tax referendum. "People are getting tired of taxes," explained Forest Park City Councilman Willard Craddock.[59] An editorial in the *Clayton News/Daily* offered that whether voters rejected the Tara tax because they opposed a tax increase in principle or because they distrusted county government, the rejection "arose from a deeply felt, grass roots opposition" with more than 10,000 voters proclaiming "Frankly, we don't give a d--- about Tara, tourism, soccer fields or library books."[60] The defeat of the referendum killed any hope of public

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[57] Jim Grimes, "I'm a Little Embarrassed," *Clayton News-Daily*, 7 October 1987, 1.
[58] Ibid., 17A.
[59] Lee Dancy, "No tomorrow for Tara," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 October 1987, I1.
[60] "So, What Next?" *Clayton News-Daily*, 7 October 1987, 4A.

funding for a large-scale *Gone with the Wind* attraction in Clayton County, but civic leaders were not yet ready to give up their hope of developing tourism around Tara.

Meanwhile, Dunaway Gardens Restoration continued its efforts to create a Tara attraction in Coweta County. Feeling that the organization had adequate funding lined up to insure its success, Betty Talmadge made a deal for the sale of the Tara façade and the old Fitzgerald house to the group. The plywood Tara was packed up and shipped to Newnan, where it would remain in storage for the next year. When a group of Japanese investors pulled out their support for the project, the Dunaway Gardens group began to retrench, and in August of 1988 Betty Talmadge retrieved the plywood Tara from Coweta County and returned it to storage on the Lovejoy plantation.[61] Talmadge expressed her frustration at not being able to get a financial commitment from anyone for the restoration of the façade, telling *Atlanta Constitution* reporter Rebecca McCarthy, "I've been trying to get someone to invest in this for ten years, but so far it hasn't materialized." Noting that Talmadge lived in the alleged inspiration for Twelve Oaks, which faced the deteriorating house that was supposedly the model for the book version of Tara, McCarthy posited that "restoring the structure could result in an antebellum hall of mirrors, with the book Tara and the movie Tara facing the book Twelve Oaks." Talmadge seemed to appreciate the value of her accumulation of *Gone with the Wind* houses, telling McCarthy, "If having them all together isn't marketable, I'll eat my hat. People are looking for a little romance, and I got it."[62] A year after she reclaimed the plywood Tara from Dunaway Gardens, Talmadge pulled the front door of the "movie

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[61] Actor Cordell, "'GWTW' Set Gone With the Movers," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 October 1988, B5.
[62] Rebecca McCarthy, "Tara-struck tourists hunt in vain for the real thing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 December 1989, K6.

Tara" out of storage and spent $6,000 restoring it for display at the Atlanta Historical Society's fiftieth anniversary celebration of the movie.[63]

Hoop Skirts and Hoopla

As the sound and fury surrounding the failure of the Tara tax referendum abated, Historical Jonesboro continued its efforts to establish Jonesboro as a tourist destination. In September 1989 the organization celebrated the opening of a history museum in the Old Jail, a building Historical Jonesboro had purchased more than a decade earlier. The grand opening was held in conjunction with the 125th commemoration of the Battle of Jonesboro, a decisive battle that took place between August 31 and September 1, 1864, during Sherman's siege of Atlanta. Barbara Emert, president of the Frankie Lyle chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which co-sponsored the commemoration, seemed relieved that the museum had come to fruition. She was "concerned that nothing would happen after GWTW failed," she said, adding that "Maybe it was too grandiose. But I'm convinced more and more every day that we're missing the boat." Visitors came from all over the world to Jonesboro's welcome center in the old train depot "looking for a piece of Southern history and wanting to know where Tara is" said Emert, adding that if the romance of *Gone with the Wind* could draw tourists in, "historians can educate them on the facts. A lot of the fact in the fiction is based in Jonesboro." Emert was also quick to note that the commemoration of the Battle of Jonesboro was not a celebration but a more somber occasion—"There were 4,000 killed and wounded at the Battle of Jonesboro; and we did lose the war," she explained.[64]

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[63] Actor Cordell, "'Restored Tara is a Dream for Now," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 October 1989, E12.
[64] Gary Hendricks, "Jail Museum Marks Battle of Jonesboro," *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 September 1989, C1.

With the opening of the museum in the Old Jail, Jonesboro was beginning to develop a critical mass of sites for tourists interested in the Civil War, even if it still lacked a specific *Gone with the Wind* attraction. On the south side of town stood Stately Oaks, the restored antebellum mansion operated by Historical Jonesboro, the Old Jail/Clayton County History Museum in downtown, and on the north edge of town, the Confederate Cemetery, where the graves of as many as 1,000 unidentified Confederate soldiers were laid out in the shape of a Confederate battle flag. All of these sites would be featured as part of the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the *Gone with the Wind* film premiere in December 1989.

The county commission assigned the responsibility for tourism promotion to the Chamber of Commerce as preparations began for the anniversary celebration.[65] The Chamber's efforts were to be funded by 2 percent of the local hotel-motel tax, and the fiftieth anniversary of the film premiere seemed to offer yet another great opportunity for Clayton County to exploit its *Gone with the Wind* connection. With the memory of the "lackluster" celebration of the book's publication still fresh in their minds, city boosters in both Atlanta and Clayton County banded together to orchestrate an event that would "recreate the excitement that happened 50 years ago," according to celebration coordinator Lisa Martin.

Local corporate heavyweights Coca-Cola, Delta Airlines, and Turner Home Entertainment, all of which had not participated in the 1986 publication anniversary celebration, came on board as sponsors of the premiere anniversary celebration. Included in the weeklong celebration were tours of Stone Mountain, home of the world's largest

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[65] Gary Hendricks, "County, Chamber Officials Ratify Agreement on Tourism," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 May 1989, K14.

Confederate Memorial carving; an antebellum ball; visits to the Atlanta History Center; a Black Heritage Tour that included stops at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta University, and the Herndon Home; candlelight tours of Stately Oaks; and special bus tours of Jonesboro that included a stop at Lovejoy plantation for a visit with Betty Talmadge. Although Talmadge did not roll out the entire plywood Tara for the occasion, she loaned the door of the plywood Tara to the Atlanta History Center for display in its exhibit, "Gone With the Wind: The Facts about the Fiction." Also on the calendar was a Parade of Stars motorcade from the CNN Center in downtown Atlanta to the Fox Theater for the "re-premiere" of the film.[66]

The antebellum ball, which was to be held in the Georgia International Convention Center in the Clayton County city of College Park, was to be a highlight of the event for Clayton County *Gone with the Wind* boosters. The proceeds from the event would help "keep the dream alive" for a Tara tourist attraction in Clayton County, according to Chamber of Commerce President Phil Mellor, who noted that if all 3,000 tickets for the ball were sold, $70,000 would be raised towards the construction of some sort of Tara replica in Clayton County.[67] At the ball, a full-scale Tara façade served as the backdrop in the 40,000-square-foot trade center where some 1,500 costumed guests danced the night away. Although ticket sales fell significantly short of the 3,000 that Phil Mellor had anticipated, the gala event, which featured ten surviving cast members from the film, including Butterfly McQueen, received generally positive reviews.[68] According

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[66] Steve Murray, "Atlanta Births a 'GWTW' 50th Celebration," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 October 1989, L7.
[67] Gary Hendricks, "Clayton Ball Honors 50 Years of GWTW," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 November 1989, D3.
[68] Lindsey Kelly and Abby Holbert, "Frankly My Dear, It Was a Blast," *Clayton News-Daily*, 15 December 1989, 1.

to the *Atlanta Constitution*, the majority of the attendees were natives of Clayton County.[69]

Going for the Gold

With the announcement in 1990 that Atlanta would host the 1996 Olympic Games, Clayton boosters saw this as a new opportunity to increase tourism and develop some sort of *Gone with the Wind*-related attraction. The Clayton County Chamber of Commerce created a new entity, the Clayton County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CCCVB) to handle tourism promotion for the county. One of the first efforts meant to draw in potential visitors was a program that included signs proclaiming "Welcome to Clayton County—The Legendary Home of *Gone With the Wind*." The signs featured silhouettes of Scarlett and Gerald O'Hara gazing up the hill towards Tara. Designed to promote "the county's association with 'Gone With the Wind' and the things that are near and dear to our hearts," according to county commission chairman Dal Turner, the four-by-three-and-a-half-foot signs were placed on each of the twelve major thoroughfare entrances to the county.[70] Smaller metal signs along roadways leading into downtown Jonesboro pointed visitors to "*The Gone With the Wind* Historic District."

In August of 1992 CCCVB director Gary Greenhut unveiled new plans for a *Gone with the Wind*-themed attraction designed by Leisure and Recreation Concepts (LARC), a Dallas, Texas-based amusement park consulting, design, and management company. The $22 million, 200-acre park, which was to be located near the intersection of interstates 75 and 675, was described as "part high-tech homage to the 1939 movie and

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[69] Steve Murray, "Hoop skirts and hoopla highlight ball," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 December 1989, F3.
[70] Gary Hendricks, "Signage welcoming visitors to Clayton County," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1992, I1.

part history lesson." Designed to attract "mature visitors while offering something for all ages," according to LARC president Michael Jenkins, the central focus of the park would be Tara, based on the façade from the movie, complete with talking holograms of Rhett and Scarlett. Visitors could learn about how cotton was grown, ginned and woven into cloth at this working plantation, and in an attempt at realism, the plantation complex would include slave quarters. Visitors could also experience "the chaos and panic of the burning of Atlanta scenes from the film" on one of the park's "dark rides." Family fun indeed! The park promised a melding of fact and fiction—indulging "fantasies of Hollywood's romanticized South while setting visitors straight on the red-clay reality that inspired Margaret Mitchell," said Jenkins. Gary Greenhut projected that more than 800,000 visitors a year would be willing to pay $10.95 to visit the park, and he explained that in order to have the park fully operational for the 1996 Olympic Games, an investor would need to be identified within the year.[71]

In December 1992 it seemed that the CCCVB's prayers might be answered when developer Mark Driscoll of Georgia Holdings, Inc., announced that his company had received a license from Turner Home Entertainment, which owned the rights to the 1939 film, and he intended to build an attraction called "*Gone With the Wind* Country," which he was considering locating in either Clayton, Douglas, or Henry County. All three counties marshaled their forces and began campaigning to land Driscoll's attraction, which he promised would "offer a historically accurate reflection of the times depicted in Margaret Mitchell's novel." Clayton County officials vowed to do "whatever it takes" to make sure that Driscoll built his homage to Tara in the county where Mitchell herself had imagined it. Meanwhile, Henry County officials pointed out that the proximity of their

[71] David Goldberg, "For Tara dreamers, it's now or never," *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 August 1992, B1.

site to the interstate made it more practical, while Steve Weatherby of the Douglas County Development Authority extolled the virtues of the former town of New Manchester as the ideal site for the attraction. A thriving mill town before the Civil War, New Manchester was captured by the Union army during the Battle of Atlanta and its entire population shipped to the North. All that remained of the town was the skeleton of the textile mill, which was now part of a state park. New Manchester fit the theme of the park, said Weatherby, "a town and civilization that was gone with the wind."[72]

As the competition among the three counties to become the home of this latest *Gone with the Wind* attraction heated up, efforts were underway by another nonprofit group in Atlanta to restore the Dump, the apartment building in which Margaret Mitchell had lived while writing her book. This flurry of activity to memorialize Mitchell and the Old South proved bewildering to *Atlanta Journal/Constitution* columnist Lewis Grizzard, who reminded readers that the Georgia state flag, which was adopted in 1956 and included the old Confederate battle banner, was also a symbol of the Old South, as were the Cyclorama and the giant carving of Robert E. Lee and other Confederate generals on the side of Stone Mountain. All of these were symbols of "our rebel days and ways," noted Grizzard, yet only the flag seemed to provoke real outrage, while hardly anyone gave a "fiddle-dee-dee about a $30 million theme park or a restored home—both of which would assure old times are not forgotten."[73] Grizzard was right on one point—the controversy surrounding the Georgia state flag had reached a frenzy as Atlanta prepared to welcome the world for the 1996 Olympics. The flag became symbolic of all that was wrong about the South. But the assorted proposed *Gone with the Wind*-related attractions

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[72] Gary Hendricks, "Boosters play 'Tara's Theme," *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 December 1992, C1.
[73] Lewis Grizzard, "Frankly, my dear, I don't understand," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 January 1993, C1.

and other remnants of the South's rebel ways were not without their detractors as well, and members of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) seemed unsure how to incorporate this prickly past into Atlanta's image as "the human rights capital of the world," an image ACOG promoted on the basis of the city's central role during the Civil Rights movement.[74]

As debate raged over what image Atlanta was going to project to the world in 1996, a former employee of the Atlanta Historical Society quietly opened what would become the largest permanent display of *Gone with the Wind* memorabilia in the basement of the Georgian Terrace Hotel in Midtown Atlanta. The Georgian Terrace had its own *Gone with the Wind* connection, having served as the host hotel for the film's stars during the 1939 premiere. Patsy Wiggins began working at the Atlanta Historical Society archives in 1969, and it was during her fifteen years at the archives that she became an expert on Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*. After receiving an inheritance in 1993, Wiggins was able to achieve her dream of opening Atlanta's first permanent *Gone with the Wind* museum, The Road to Tara, in a 6,000-square-foot space in the basement of the Midtown hotel in which the film's cast members had stayed during the 1939 premiere. Aware that the marketplace for *Gone with the Wind* memory in Atlanta was heating up with the efforts to restore the Dump and the competition for the *Gone with the Wind* Country theme park in full swing, Wiggins claimed, "We're not competing with anyone; our museum will only enhance other efforts."[75] Artifacts on display included rare and foreign editions of the book, some of Margaret Mitchell's childhood writings and letters, as well as costumes, dolls, and movie memorabilia, much

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[74] Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 229.
[75] Alan Patureau, "The Road to Tara was a long one, but Atlanta gets 'GWTW' museum," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 December 1992, D1.

of which was on loan from other collectors.[76] One collector who made no contributions to the Road to Tara's exhibits was Herb Bridges. Apparently Bridges and Wiggins had been unable to come to a financial agreement.[77]

Shortly after the Road to Tara museum opened in the Georgian Terrace, developer Mark Driscoll announced that Douglas County would be the home for *Gone with the Wind* Country. The park would "portray the elegance of the antebellum South without ducking the fact that slavery formed the basis of that lost culture" said Driscoll, promising that the park would have slave quarters and would "give equal time to the racial issue," although, stressed Driscoll, the development would be "an entertainment park based on the greatest motion picture of all time." Earl Shinhoster, southeastern regional director for the NAACP, commented, "There is nothing about the proposed park that would make it a racial flashpoint. We must remember that 'Gone With the Wind' is fiction, showing things like the slaves wanting to stay and put out the fires, and all that was a figment of Margaret Mitchell's imagination." In what seemed to be a case of sour grapes, Clayton County Commission Chairman Crandle Bray commented, "I'll be surprised if it is built."[78] Bray's statement would prove to be prophetic.

Clayton County was out of Mark Driscoll's GWTW sweepstakes, but county leaders refused to abandon the idea of a *Gone with the Wind* attraction in what they felt was the rightful home for Tara. The county acquired a 195-acre park in 1994 that included Atlanta Beach, a water park that would serve as the beach volleyball venue during the 1996 Olympics. The local tourism authority decided that a "Tara-like center"

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[76] Patricia Puckett, " 'Road to Tara' showcases Mitchell mystique," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 June 1993, N5.
[77] Patureau, "The Road to Tara was a long one, but Atlanta gets 'GWTW' museum," D1.
[78] Gary Hendricks, "'GWTW' theme park to portray all aspects of Tara life," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 October 1993, H1.

should be the focal point for the park, and that funding should come from private investors. "If we have Tara, they will come," said tourism authority member Lee Fincher, alluding to the almost miraculous appearance of throngs of visitors in the 1989 movie "Field of Dreams." Amusing though it might have been to have a beach volleyball court adjacent to Margaret Mitchell's imaginary plantation, such a sight was not to be. The venue contract that Clayton County signed with ACOG prohibited such commercial promotion at the venue or on adjoining property.[79] Once again the county's plan to capitalize on what its leaders felt was the county's rightful heritage was thwarted by outside forces.

"This is Graceland!"

Clayton County might not have been able to create a full-blown Tara attraction in time for the 1996 Olympic Games, but that did not stop Peter Bonner, a local Civil War re-enactor, from suiting up in Confederate regalia and offering walking tours designed to make "*Gone with the Wind* come alive" in downtown Jonesboro during the festivities. A professional storyteller and amateur historian, Bonner had already turned his passion for history and the Civil War into a full-time career. He made frequent appearances at local festivals, worked as a storyteller, and made commercials and historical recordings. As the media and visitors descended on Atlanta in preparation for the Olympics, many of them came to Clayton County looking for Tara; and Bonner, who had been giving *Gone with the Wind* tours in Jonesboro for several years, was suddenly in great demand.[80]

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[79] Manuel Marlon, "Old idea not forgotten: If we build Tara, they will come," *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 June 1995, I5.
[80] Helen Holzer, "Civil War ghosts thrive in historians' lively tales," *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 June 1996, I7.

On the day of the Olympic opening ceremonies, the *Atlanta Constitution* featured two articles about *Gone with the Wind* sites in the Atlanta area. Kim Arculeo from the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB) told reporter Don O'Briant that "callers are very disappointed when they are told that Tara was fictional," then added, "we also tell them that there are sites around the city that are very 'Gone With the Wind'-like." Among the "Gone With the Wind"-like sites to which the ACVB directed visitors were the ruins of the Margaret Mitchell House, the Dump in which Mitchell lived while writing the book that had recently burned to the ground for the second time; the Road to Tara Museum; the Atlanta History Center, which was hosting the "Gone With the Wind: A Worldwide Fascination" exhibit; Stately Oaks in Jonesboro; and Betty Talmadge's Lovejoy Plantation. South of Clayton County in the tiny town of Concord, Georgia, K. C. Bassham, the proprietor of Inn Scarlett's Footsteps, a bed and breakfast with a *Gone with the Wind* theme, pondered Atlanta's failure to capitalize on its *Gone with the Wind* connection. These international visitors "aren't coming to see skyscrapers," said Bassham, and "for the next 20 days, we're going to give them their dream so everyone can pretend they're Scarlett and Rhett and that the romance is still alive."[81]

A diehard *Gone with the Wind* fan, Bassham had moved to Georgia from Ohio in the early 1990s after buying the white-columned mansion in Concord, which she opened as a bed and breakfast. Bassham decorated the house with reproduction costumes, prints, and collectibles from the book and movie, but her latest acquisition was too big, or perhaps too deteriorated to put on display—the plywood and papier mâché Tara which she had recently purchased from Betty Talmadge. The door to Tara was still on loan to

[81] Don O'Briant, "All roads don't lead to disappointment for GWTW fans," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 July 1996, T1.

the Atlanta History Center, but K. C. Bassham was now the proud owner of most of the rest of the façade, which was described as "unrestorable pieces of wood and plaster." Bassham planned to cut the unrestorable pieces into one-by-three-inch strips, encase them in Lucite in front of a color picture of the movie Tara, and sell them for $199 each, complete with a certificate of authenticity. A percentage of the proceeds would be donated to the Clayton County Historical Society and the Margaret Mitchell House, explained Bassham, who was already taking orders for the little nuggets. "Sharing Tara with the world will preserve it forever. This is the real thing, and I have no doubt that collectors from Tokyo, London, Madrid, and all over the world will rally to the cause," said Bassham, adding that although she cherished all her collectibles, they were mere copies, whereas "The Tara façade is the real thing."[82]

Any hope of the plywood Tara's rising again as the centerpiece of a *Gone with the Wind* attraction had vanished, much like the millions of visitors who descended on Atlanta for a few weeks in July and August of 1996. Much of the city seemed shell-shocked in the wake of the Olympics as the anticipated throngs of visitors outside of the downtown area failed to materialize. The Road to Tara Museum was one of the casualties. "People had trouble finding us, because the museum was located in the basement," said curator Darenda Motley, adding that, "because this is a historic building, we weren't able to put a big sign out front." On top of the unfulfilled expectations for a spike in visitors during the Olympics, Patsy Wiggins lost her lease when the Georgian Terrace was sold. Wiggins was forced to close the museum in Midtown, but she soon found a new home, a recently renovated antebellum house in the shadow of the world's

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[82] Don O'Briant, "'Gone with the Wind' buff puts bits of Hollywood's Tara up for sale." *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 August 1996, D4.

largest Confederate memorial at Stone Mountain Park. Locating the Road to Tara Museum on the grounds of the Stone Mountain Park would be the "perfect marriage," said Motley.[83] The marriage proved short-lived. In December 1997, after just ten months at its new location, the Road to Tara Museum was evicted from the site when the state of Georgia decided to privatize Stone Mountain Park.

What initially seemed like the death blow for Patsy Wiggins's Road to Tara operation was seen as an opportunity by Clayton County vice president for conventions and tourism Stacey Dickson, who negotiated a deal for Wiggins to bring her "Road show" to the newly restored railroad depot in downtown Jonesboro. Finally it seemed that Clayton County was going to have a real "'Gone With the Wind' hook," said Dickson. "We don't have anything for anyone to see when they get here. It's kind of a battle the county's been fighting a long time. It gives us a trackable attraction, to see how much interest there really is for that type of attraction." The Road to Tara Museum, which had occupied 6,000 square feet in its original location in Midtown Atlanta, would now be squeezed into 1,600 square feet. Despite the small exhibit space available at the Jonesboro depot, Wiggins seemed excited about the new location. "The area down there certainly is 'Gone With the Wind' country," said Wiggins.[84]

The Road to Tara Museum became the focal point of tourism in Clayton County. It also became a place where fact and fiction commingled to the point where casual visitors were hard pressed to distinguish one from the other. The city of Jonesboro eventually bought the Road to Tara Museum from Patsy Wiggins and renovated the exhibits to include an impressive display of Herb Bridges's vast *Gone with the Wind*

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[83] Richard Eldredge, "'Road to Tara' gets rerouted," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 December 1996, C2.
[84] Anne Cowles, "Museum for 'Tara' to settle in Jonesboro," *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 March 1998, D6.

collection. Included were seats and a ticket window from the Loew's Grand theater where the film premiered in 1939, along with costumes and other artifacts from the film. Selections from Bridges's book collection in a variety of languages, along with movie posters from around the world, were also on display. Upon entering the museum, visitors were introduced to the Atlanta Campaign of the Civil War as follows:

> Born of a railroad, Atlanta grew as her railroads grew, and by 1862 (the year that Scarlett came to visit Aunt Pittypat) the young city sprawled about Union Station.[85]

In cases near the end of the *Gone with the Wind* exhibit were artifacts related to Jonesboro's history, most notably from the Civil War period.

The depot also became the home base for Peter Bonner's *Gone with the Wind* driving tour. Visitors were invited to drive along in their own cars, following either Bonner or his alternate tour guide, "Catfish" Schrader, to a series of locations around downtown Jonesboro where everyone would alight and be regaled by tales that, according to Bonner and Schrader, formed the basis for Mitchell's book. According to Bonner, just about everything in Mitchell's book was true and it all happened in Jonesboro. From the birth of Melanie Wilkes's baby, which allegedly happened in front of what is now a Wachovia Bank branch, to the assault on Scarlett O'Hara Kennedy in Shantytown, which Schrader claimed took place near the modern-day Jonesboro Housing Authority, Bonner and Schrader maintained that the events about which Mitchell wrote all took place within walking distance of downtown Jonesboro. "In the book, the story is thirty miles long over thirty years," explained Schrader, while "in real life, it was one

[85] Exhibit panel at the Road to Tara Museum in the railroad depot, Jonesboro, Georgia, visited by author on 15 June 2004.

block and one week long."[86] Bonner begrudgingly admitted that the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta did have some basis for claiming to be "a true site" because, after all, that was where Mitchell wrote the book, but he argued that the Margaret Mitchell House was "now all about Southern literature," adding, "They've sort of shied away from *Gone with the Wind*," in a tone that implied the Mitchell House had strayed from its true purpose. Jonesboro, however, remained "a true site for pilgrims," according to Bonner, who exclaimed, "This is Graceland!" citing the home of Elvis Presley as the standard by which the purity and authenticity of a tourist site's Southernness should be measured.[87]

A decade after the 1996 Olympics, Clayton County continued to wrestle with its past while planning its future. Although the Road to Tara museum welcomed over 20,000 visitors a year to downtown Jonesboro, Gene Hatfield, chairman of the county tourism authority and Clayton State University historian beleived, there were "opportunities beyond Scarlett O'Hara and Tara Plantation. That's by no means all we have in tourism."[88]

Scarlett and Tara might not have been all that Clayton County had, but these figments of Margaret Mitchell's imagination had remained central to plans for tourism promotion in Clayton County for almost half a century. In the wake of several economic setbacks following the near-bankruptcy of Delta Airlines, the closing of Ford Motor Company's Hapeville plant, and the announcement of the closing of Fort Gillem, county officials reiterated the importance of tourism as a vital component of Clayton County's economic development strategy. In February 2006 interim economic development

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[86] "Catfish" Schrader, tour taken by author, Jonesboro, Georgia, 26 June 2004.
[87] Peter Bonner, conversation with author, Jonesboro, Georgia, 15 June 2004.
[88] Justin Boron, "Clayton losing its tourism director," *Clayton News-Daily-Online*; 11 May 2006, http://www.news-daily.com.

director Robin Roberts reminded county commissioners that economic development was not just about luring big industry into Clayton County but should also include tourism. A hot topic that held promise for boosting tourism to Clayton County was a proposed commuter railroad that would bring tourists to Jonesboro's welcome center and Road to Tara museum.[89] The rail line, originally envisioned as part of an overall strategy to help alleviate commuter traffic from Atlanta's traffic-clogged highway system, was also expected to serve as a fast and convenient way for tourists to travel the fifteen miles from downtown Atlanta to Jonesboro, where they could experience "the heart of the true South."[90]

Missing from almost all of the public debates that swirled around creating Tara in Clayton County was any meaningful discussion of the racial issue that formed the foundation of both the real and imaginary Old South. In November 2005 a group of Clayton County residents, led by Bob Hartley, an African American resident who was running for the state legislature, proposed renaming Tara Boulevard after the late Rosa Parks who had died several weeks earlier. Hartley suggested that the practice of naming streets and subdivisions "after plantations and allusions to the Old South, while not necessarily offensive, deserve[d] some reconsideration given the county's predominantly black population." Although Hartley claimed that he did not want the discussion to be a racial issue, it was "hard to keep race out of Clayton County issues."[91] The demographics of Clayton County had certainly changed over the last two decades of the

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[89] Justin Boron, "Economic Development Strategy laid out," *Clayton News-Daily-Online*; http://www.news-daily.com.
[90] The Official Clayton County Convention and Visitors Bureau web site; http://www.visitscarlett.com.
[91] Justin Boron, "Local group pushes to rename Tara Boulevard," *Clayton News-Daily-Online*; http://www.news-daily.com.

twentieth century from 90 percent white in 1980 to less than 40 percent white in 2000.[92] Yet Hartley's appeal for a name change did not seem to resonate with the residents of Clayton County, at least not with many of the business owners whose operations were based on Tara Boulevard. The majority of entries on a blog on the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* website opposed changing the name on the basis that such actions would merely cost the taxpayers and business owners along Tara Boulevard money.[93] This pragmatic approach to such a memorial project harkened back to the wholesale rejection of the Tara tax almost twenty years earlier when voters stood firm against the proposal to increase their taxes.

For all the press given to discussions of *Gone with the Wind* and Clayton County's heritage, frank discussions of race and slavery were few and far between. Much of the debate in Clayton County centered on financial issues and questions about the proper role of government. Although the issues of the county's history and identity permeated the press, the discussions almost always centered on the fictional world created by Margaret Mitchell rather than the real world of yeoman farmers, small planters, and slaves who inhabited Clayton County in the mid-nineteenth century. And although there always seemed to be a few determined citizens who continued the crusade to create a likeness of Tara in the imaginary land of *Gone with the Wind*, most of the county's residents seemed more concerned with the future than the past.

North of Jonesboro in the city of Atlanta a much more heated debate surrounding the meaning and legacy of *Gone with the Wind* arose as efforts to restore the house where Margaret Mitchell wrote her book began to gather steam. And much as the fictional

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[92] Maureen Downey, "Black Schools, White Schools," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 22 June 2003, 1E.
[93] "Should Tara Boulevard be renamed?"; http://www.ajc.com/blogs/content/shared-blogs/ajc/town-talk/entries/2005/11/16/should_tara_bou.html.

Scarlett found her greatest success in the boomtown of Atlanta, so, too, would Scarlett's legacy reach its apex in the city at the very site where she was first created by Margaret Mitchell in 1926.

CHAPTER 4–"IT MIGHT NOT BE TARA"

Life was never dull in "The Dump."
William S. Howland[1]

While the Atlanta Historical Society was establishing itself as a significant *Gone with the Wind* interpretive site and the leaders of Clayton County were plotting an economic development strategy that revolved around *Gone with the Wind*, in Midtown Atlanta the struggle to "Save the Dump," the apartment in which Margaret Mitchell wrote the book, began in earnest. Much as in Clayton County, economic development and political forces played a major role in the saga surrounding the Dump. Unlike the campaign to build Tara in Clayton County, the campaign to save the Dump was successful, and the debate surrounding the project included frank discussions of racial issues and of the problematic nature of Mitchell's work. As the site of the creation of *Gone with the Wind*, the Dump bore a burden unlike that of either the Atlanta History Center or Clayton County. Ironically, that burden, best described as the power of place, served the Dump well as the struggle to save this "tough little patch of history" unfolded during the last two decades of the twentieth century.

The building itself at the corner of Peachtree and Tenth Street in Midtown Atlanta was a rather nondescript, late nineteenth-century, Tudor Revival-style house, noticeable primarily because it was an anomaly nestled among the glass-and-steel high-rise buildings of the Peachtree Street corridor. The symbolism of the building is disproportionate to the building's footprint, however. The Dump has been alternately described as a "site of pilgrimage" and "an insult of monumental proportion to the

[1] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind Letters" 1936-1949,* xxx.

African-American community." It is both these things and more, and these many identities coexist uneasily within the confines of the space now known as the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum. Perhaps the only thing more interesting than this conflicted identity is the story behind the creation of this site. It is a story that played out on the local and national stages for over a decade, and it serves as a case study for an examination of issues related to authenticity, identity, creation of historical narrative, and the power of place.

What follows is a detailed account of the struggle to create the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum. In his book *A Shared Authority*, Michael Frisch notes that such projects are often perceived by scholars as mere "shavings on a workbench of scholarship, means to the end of a finished product useful for thoughtful reflection on issues of broad significance, rather than the base for such reflection themselves." Frisch argues that "a strong case can be made for the proposition that more may be learned from studying the process than from a focus on the position to which it has brought us."[2] This micro account of the process is instructive in that it reveals how history is "produced."

A physically dark but intellectually bright place

The apartment in which Margaret Mitchell wrote *Gone with the Wind* was a 650-square-foot space in the basement of a building at the corner of Tenth and Peachtree Streets in Midtown Atlanta. Described by fellow *Atlanta Journal* reporter William Howland as "a physically dark but intellectually bright small apartment," Mitchell referred to the apartment as "the Dump."[3] Built as a single-family residence by Cornelius Sheehan, a postal inspector, the building at 806 Peachtree Street was located in the heart

[2] Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xv.
[3] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind" Letters, 1936-1949*, xxix.

of one of Atlanta's most fashionable residential districts at the time of its construction in 1898. Within ten years, Sheehan had moved out, and commercial development had moved in along the Peachtree corridor around Tenth Street. Between 1913 and 1919, the house was moved to the back of the corner lot, reoriented toward Crescent Avenue, and converted into ten apartments. Mitchell and her husband, John Marsh, moved into Apartment One in 1925. The Dump consisted of two main rooms, a living room and a bedroom, plus a bath and tiny kitchen. A door in the living room opened onto the porch that had been added to the building when its orientation was changed from Peachtree Street to Crescent Avenue.

Mitchell and Marsh paid $17 a month for the basement apartment in 1925, and the bulk of *Gone with the Wind* was written during Mitchell's seven-year tenancy there. Beneath the glow of a bay window, Mitchell pecked out over 1,000 pages on a portable Remington typewriter. She then stashed away the pages in envelopes. In 1932 Mitchell and Marsh moved out of the Dump and into a larger apartment on Seventeenth Street where they were residing in 1935 when Harold S. Latham, an editor from Macmillan & Company, came to Atlanta in search of manuscripts by southern writers. On a whim, Mitchell handed over to Latham the very rough and incomplete first draft of the novel that she had worked on for almost ten years. So large was the stack of seventy brown envelopes that Latham was forced to acquire additional luggage to accommodate the unfinished manuscript.[4] Lois Cole, an editor at Macmillan, recalled that Mitchell's manuscript was "physically, one of the worst manuscripts I have ever seen." Entire chapters, including the first chapter, were missing, while there were multiple versions of some scenes. Cole and the other readers disliked the tentative title of the novel,

[4] Pyron, *Southern Daughter*, 305.

Tomorrow Is Another Day, as well as the name of the heroine, Pansy O'Hara.[5] Despite these shortcomings, the editorial staff at Macmillan decided to take a gamble on Margaret Mitchell's novel, and a year later, following many revisions and a few name changes, the lead character became Scarlett, and the title became *Gone with the Wind*. Mitchell's book debuted as a bestseller in June 1936, an honor hastened by its selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club for July 1936.[6] Mitchell became an instant celebrity, and her book made Atlanta world-famous; but the juggernaut unleashed by the book's publication paled in comparison to that which would accompany the making and release of the film produced by David O. Selznick.

Although she attended the film premiere, Mitchell shunned the limelight for most of her life. She never wrote another book, but she did attempt to respond to the thousands of fan letters that she received after the book's publication. Mitchell was so determined that she not be canonized that she left instructions for her husband, John Marsh, and her brother, Stephens Mitchell, to destroy any artifacts she left behind after her death. Both of the men carried out her requests after she was struck by a car and killed in August of 1949. Marsh destroyed most of her original manuscript, and Stephens Mitchell had demolished the house at 1149 Peachtree Street in which he and Margaret had grown up.[7]

The Campaign to Save the Dump

By the late 1970s there was barely a physical trace of Margaret Mitchell or *Gone with the Wind* anywhere in Atlanta. The Loew's Grand Theater, at which the film had

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[5] Harwell, *Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind" Letters, 1936-1949*, 59.
[6] Ibid., xv.
[7] Bo Emerson, "The Dump is Reborn," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 May 1997, 12F.

premiered, was destroyed by fire in 1978; and the apartment building in which Mitchell had written the book was vacant and boarded up. The last resident, Boyd Lewis, had moved out in 1978. In the early 1980s a fire on the third floor damaged the roof, and water damage caused the building to deteriorate rapidly. The Midtown Atlanta neighborhood that had been a center of bohemian culture in the 1920s became an area in which, according to *Atlanta Constitution* reporter Alan Sverdlik, "street crime flourished and a strip of seedy bars and bathhouses dominated the nightlife." Male prostitutes had become a "fixture of the neighborhood," as had vacant lots and boarded up buildings.[8] Yet this area sandwiched between downtown Atlanta and Buckhead was poised on the cusp of a renaissance.

In the mid-1980s, developer Trammell Crow Co. purchased the property surrounding the intersection of Tenth Street and Peachtree Street, and following the demolition of several buildings on the east side of Peachtree, began construction of a new high-rise office tower just across from the Dump. Trammell Crow was still debating the disposition of its property on the west side of Peachtree Street, where the Dump was located, when Deborah James arrived on the scene.[9] James had first read *Gone with the Wind* when she was eleven years old, and by the time she moved to Atlanta in 1980, she had read the book a dozen times. James contacted the Atlanta Historical Society shortly after she moved to Atlanta in an effort to find information about Margaret Mitchell's former residences.[10] The Historical Society directed James to three apartment buildings in Midtown. It was the Dump that captured James's imagination. She formed a

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[8] Alan Sverdlik, "The Changing Face of Midtown," *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 December 1987, 1B.
[9] Tom Walker, "Monolithism yielding," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 May 1986, 1C.
[10] Sam Heys, "Not just tilting at a 'Wind' mill," *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 December 1985, B1.

nonprofit organization, Margaret Mitchell Museum, Inc., and began a campaign to convert the derelict property into a museum in honor of Mitchell.[11]

Despite her best efforts and a favorable $1-a-year lease deal from Trammell Crow, James was unable to raise enough money to restore the house, and she abandoned the cause in 1986. Soon thereafter, Midtown resident John Taylor organized a new group, Mitchell House, Inc., in an attempt to stave off demolition of the Dump, which appeared imminent by December 1987. In October 1987 the Trammell Crow Co. had requested a demolition permit for the building that had become known as "Margaret Mitchell's Dump." Trammell Crow's marketing director John Decker cited a study done by Margaret Mitchell Museum, which "concluded that the building would be too costly to restore and likely would attract too few visitors" to bolster the company's argument for the demolition permit. "You're talking about a fairly remote situation," said Decker. "They would not only have to restore it but also endow it. Having a restored building sitting on the property without a staff or facilities for the museum in it is nothing. The ticket is not the $650,000 or $700,000 that has been bandied about to restore it but more like $2 million."[12]

Mayor Andrew Young, who had become known as the "wrecking ball" mayor because of his proclivity for issuing demolition permits, seemed an unlikely ally for Taylor and the other preservationists intent on saving the Dump. Indeed, Young was reported to have said "I really don't give a damn" when he first learned that Trammell Crow officials had applied for a demolition permit. The Atlanta Convention and

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[11] Alan Patureau, "Margaret Mitchell's 'Dump': Trash or Treasure?," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 September 1991, B1.
[12] Ron Taylor and Susan Wells, "Despite pledges, demolition nears for 'The Dump'," *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 December 1987, A1.

Visitor's Bureau's endorsement of the restoration of the house as a tourist attraction, combined with a flurry of publicity about the pending demolition, prompted Young to change his mind, and he agreed to grant a six-month grace period to allow Mitchell House to attempt to raise enough money to restore the building.[13]

Support came in from a variety of sources. The Jack Daniels Distilleries in Lynchburg, Tennessee, pledged a percentage of its January 1988 sales receipts in Atlanta to the cause. The Metropolitan Foundation of Atlanta offered a $10,000 grant, and a Japanese businessman in Atlanta agreed "to head a steering committee endeavoring to raise money from foreign investors for the campaign."[14] The plight of the Dump soon reached a national audience as *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* newspapers carried stories about the imminent demise of the building and its historic association with Mitchell.[15] Even the mayor, who publicly "held out little hope that 'an angel' with a large amount of cash would appear," contributed to the media blitz when he appeared on ABC Nightly News to talk about efforts to save the building. Young explained that, "when a national network says they'll give you 90 seconds on the nightly news, that's $100,000 worth of publicity. If there still is no response . . . we don't need to linger long. If nothing happens within the next week or so, I guess the house is gone with the wind."[16]

Mayor Young remained publicly skeptical about the future of the Dump, noting that "when people hear me talking about the Mitchell House, they think I'm talking about

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[13] Jim Auchmutey, "Status Report on Several Notable Buildings in City," *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 May 1989, D4.
[14] Susan Wells, "Mitchell house 'gone with the wind,' without an 'angel,' Young says," *Atlanta Journal*, 6 January 1988, A1.
[15] Marc Ric, "Group Fights to Save Apartment 'Gone With the Wind' Author Called 'The Dump'," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1988, 14. "'Gone With Wind' and a New Battle," *New York Times*, 18 September 1988, A58.
[16] Wells, "Mitchell house 'gone with the wind' without an 'angel,' Young says," A1.

Tara or some beautiful Southern bungalow where she lived and wrote. It isn't either of those. If it was, I'd be out beating the bushes myself for someone to restore it. But that place was a slum when she lived there, and no one has put much money into it since." Furthermore, explained Young, "we have tried so hard to get developers to come into downtown Atlanta that I hate to hassle them once they decide to come in. They have made a major investment in an area that was once one of the most blighted areas of town."[17]

The public began weighing in on the issue as weekly articles about the fate of the Dump began appearing in the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution*. Conservative columnist Dick Williams argued that the Dump was "not a symbol of Atlanta or the New South," and posited that "'Gone With the Wind' exists in the mind, not in a place. It never was and never will be." Williams credited "the last century's nonpareil arsonist, Gen. William T. Sherman" with destroying anything that might have been worth preserving in Atlanta, and argued "that the sparkling new 999 Peachtree Building of Trammell Crow Co. is more a symbol of Atlanta and a healing South than 'the Dump' the same firm has applied to demolish." Mitchell House architectural consultant Richard Rauh responded that although the house lacked architectural merit, it was the only place "where visitors could feel the creation of the novel that has sold 26 million copies," insisting that "to feel what sparked Ms. Mitchell's genius, visitors must see the surroundings and walk the same steps." Williams responded to Rauh that "a writer like Mitchell lives in her work, not her workplace," concluding that "if 'the Dump' is

[17] Ibid.

dumped, we will still have the book and the romance. And Atlanta will continue as did Scarlett – conquered, but unconquerable."[18]

Just south of Atlanta in Clayton County, local tourism officials appealed to Mayor Young to support the preservation of the Dump. Embroiled in their own struggle to create a *Gone with the Wind* tourist attraction, the Clayton County Tourism Authority believed that preservation of the Dump would help draw tourists for their own "Tara project," for which $23 million in public funding had been sought through a special-use sales tax referendum. Although Clayton County taxpayers soundly defeated the referendum, and plans for the project were put on hold, authority members did not give up hope. County leaders maintained that the Dump and a Tara project in Clayton County would create a synergistic effect. As authority member Herman Barnard stated, "I think it's a fact that tourists come to Atlanta looking for things to do, and they'll be taken to 'the Dump' and they'll say 'what else is there relating to Margaret Mitchell?'" Phil Mellor, executive vice president of the Clayton County Chamber of Commerce lamented, "It's just a matter of time before, in another generation, the memory of 'Gone With the Wind' in Atlanta will be gone."[19]

It was not just the "memory of Gone with the Wind" that was threatened by the wrecking ball in Atlanta. Throughout the city of Atlanta, developers demolished buildings to make way for surface parking lots and new development. Preservationists considered Mayor Andrew Young a major facilitator of the demolition derby that swept through the city in the 1980s. Ironically, he would prove to be one of the saviors of the Margaret Mitchell House.

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[18] Dick Williams, "'The Dump' isn't symbol of Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 January 1988, D1.
[19] David Penly, "Tourism officials ask Young to help rescue Margaret Mitchell's 'Dump'," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 January 1988, I9.

While *Atlanta Constitution* columnist Martha Woodham lauded "Mayor Andy 'Wrecking Ball' Young" for "stalling, waiting for a 'knight in shining armor' to appear" in the wake of the wave of national publicity about the house, an unexpected voice of opposition arose from longtime *Constitution* columnist and former friend of Mitchell, Celestine Sibley.[20] Sibley explained that although "it was hard for her not to line up with preservationists on almost anything they undertake," and while she offered her "utmost support" for most projects undertaken by the preservation community in Atlanta, "there was no way I could even straddle the fence on saving 'the Dump.' I had already been on two television programs saying, in effect, let'er go. Bring in the bulldozers." Sibley elaborated on her "Philistinic views" by explaining that she "wouldn't preserve for sightseeing tourists or the blatantly curious any place where Margaret Mitchell lived and worked for the reason that [Mitchell] loathed and despised the idea so much. She took elaborate pains to make sure that there would be no musty old museums devoted to her, putting a provision in her will that all of her papers and most of her manuscripts be destroyed."[21]

Sibley's column elicited a flurry of responses, few of which, she noted, were charitable. About a week later, she restated her position, that she was "opposed to saving what she called 'the Dump' because Margaret Mitchell herself told me on several occasions that she wanted no museums or landmarks preserved in her memory," and added, "Most of the people who knew Peggy Mitchell favor abiding by her wishes." Sibley reminded readers that Mitchell had always hoped "that she might be remembered for her book," and that no other memorial was necessary. Sibley cited a letter from

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[20] Martha Woodham, " 'The Dump' doomed if wind doesn't shift," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 January 1988, G1.
[21] Celestine Sibley, "Let's not ignore author's wishes," *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 January 1988, B1.

Mitchell House president John Taylor in which Taylor assured Sibley that the apartment would be restored not as some "stuffy museum," but "as a site of hope and encouragement to aspiring writers, that in these humble beginnings, with no word processor or other gadgets of the '80s, the best selling novel of all time was born." Sibley responded that she did not "believe there's an aspiring writer alive who isn't aware that William Shakespeare and William Faulkner and Eudora Welty and Carson McCullers and John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway made do without computers." And while she agreed that "seeing a place where a successful author worked is undoubtedly interesting," she added that she had seen "where Beethoven played the piano, and my musical expertise hasn't advanced beyond 'Chopsticks'." Sibley concluded that while others could help the project along if they chose, she felt "a little sick" and vowed to "withdraw from the fray" surrounding the debate about the Dump. [22]

Meanwhile, property owner Trammell Crow claimed that the mayor's failure to sign the demolition permit was "an unconstitutional taking of property" and demanded that the city pay $136,000 in damages, plus an additional $1,000 per day until the demolition permit was signed. The mayor and officials with Mitchell House were not surprised by the legal action, according to architect Richard Rauh, but felt certain Trammell Crow officials would be persuaded to withdraw their suit if fundraising efforts and negotiations were allowed to continue. Mayor Andrew Young was pleased with the support raised by Mitchell House, according to John Taylor, who claimed that the group had over $850,000 in pledges and in-kind services. Support for preservation of the Dump came in from the state capitol, too, as State Senator Paul Coverdell, whose district

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[22] Celestine Sibley, "Sentiment runs strong for, against 'Dump'," *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 January 1988, H1.

included Midtown Atlanta, introduced a resolution "encouraging preservation of the Mitchell house," which was "a treasured part of Atlanta's history."[23]

Debate about the fate of the Dump continued into February 1988, and the *Atlanta Constitution* continued to keep the public abreast of what seemed to be the most minute details on the subject, reporting that in an informal poll of sixteen tourists conducted by the Grey Line tour bus company, almost 70 percent of the group said they would be willing to pay to visit a restored Margaret Mitchell House.[24] Days later an article appeared in which Margaret Mitchell's nephews, her only remaining heirs and keepers of her estate, publicly lent their support to the effort to create a museum out of the Dump. Nephew Eugene Mitchell explained that "Knowing her sense of humor, I wonder if she would be laughing to know that the one house she ever lived in that people want to restore is this rather unpretentious little basement apartment. But if it's done properly, I think it would be fine." Eugene's brother Joe, who had previously stated that a memorial center to his aunt in Clayton County would be built "only over my dead body," agreed that a museum at the Dump, "as long as it would be done in such a way not to cheapen the book or the picture of my aunt's work," would meet with his approval.[25] The *Constitution* further reported that the Save the Dump campaign was "picking up steam," citing the earlier endorsement by the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau and a "commitment from the National Homebuilder's Association for hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of building materials." Visitor's bureau vice president Judy Kelner reminded readers that the question the bureau was asked most often was "what about

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[23] Susan Wells, "Mayor won't allow razing of 'Dump'; developer sues," *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 January 1988, A1.
[24] Actor Cordell, "Tiny band of tourists votes to save 'Dump'," *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1988, C1.
[25] Susan Wells, "Margaret Mitchell's heirs back house restoration," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 February 1988, C1.

Margaret Mitchell?" The Junior League agreed to help with staffing of the museum once construction was completed, and according to Junior League historian Lillian Clarke, Trammell Crow managing partner Donald Childress seemed "very receptive" to the idea of a tribute to Margaret Mitchell, although Childress seemed to want to keep the location of such a tribute open for discussion.[26]

As Trammell Crow's lawsuit worked its way through the system, an initiative was underway in city government that would have major ramifications for the Dump. The near-demolition of the Fox Theater in 1975 had sparked a preservation movement in Atlanta and led to the creation of the Atlanta Urban Design Commission (UDC), a committee charged with helping protect the city's historic districts. Another wave of protest erupted in late 1985 when a developer demolished the Pershing Point Hotel. The unexpected demolition of a much-loved building that stood at the intersection of Peachtree and West Peachtree Streets for sixty years made clear that the city's preservation ordinance had serious weaknesses and offered little protection to individual buildings in the city. Mayor Andrew Young had routinely flouted the UDC's recommendations regarding demolition permits, overriding ten out of twelve of the commission's recommendations that permits be denied. In the spring of 1986, the mayor vetoed the City Council's approval of the UDC's request for a moratorium on demolition permits until a new survey of historic buildings could be conducted. Despite his willingness to let the wrecking ball swing, the mayor agreed that the city needed a system that would eliminate the "building-by-building bickering" that dominated the preservation/demolition debate in Atlanta. A panel was convened with representatives from city government and the preservation and business communities to develop a

[26] Ibid.

solution to the "wanton demolition" and "parking lot-itis" that left the city with a streetscape described by an out-of-town journalist as "gap-toothed."[27]

Over a period of ten months, the panel negotiated a compromise between developers and preservationists that led to the establishment of the city's "first effective preservation plan." Integral to the plan was the creation of a landmark designation system. Commenting on his role in the process, Mayor Young, who had participated in the panel sessions throughout the ten-month period, stated, "I provoked a debate. You know, we never would have had a civil rights bill without a Bull Connor." Himself a leader in the civil rights movement, Young's comparison of himself to Bull Connor was perhaps more ironic than his presiding over the creation of the city's first effective preservation ordinance.

The key component of the ordinance that would eventually help save the Dump was the landmark designation provision. According to the ordinance, in order for a developer to secure a permit for the demolition of a landmark building, "the developer would have to convince an appointed tribunal that leveling the structure and rebuilding would be the only way to make an acceptable profit." Atlanta Preservation Center Director Eileen Segrest commented that "the landmark buildings are going to be difficult, if not impossible, to tear down."[28] Among the first round of landmark nominations approved by the City Council in 1989 was the building known officially as the Windsor House Apartments, but more familiar to the public as "Margaret Mitchell's Dump."

By December 1989, officials at Dump owner Childress/Klein, a new company formed by three former executives of Trammell Crow, had all but ceded defeat.

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[27] Jim Auchmutey, "City's Preservation Plan Finds Common Ground with Development Fans," *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 August 1988, D1.
[28] Auchmutey, "City's Preservation Plan Finds Common Ground with Development Fans," D1.

Spokesman John Decker claimed, "We're the guys in the white hats now, not the black ones," citing his company's hope that preservationists and the city could find the millions needed to restore the building and develop a Margaret Mitchell museum on the site. The lawsuit was "way on the back burner now" according to Decker, but he added that "it may be pressed again if preservation efforts fall through."[29] Although much of the Dump's survival can be attributed to the city's new preservation ordinance, the cooling off of the real estate market in the Midtown area also contributed to the Dump's salvation. Abandonment of plans for a shopping mall across the street from the Dump by a developer after the lots had been cleared resulted in a vacant lot to the north of the Dump, and the development pressure of the mid-1980s eased as the bottom fell out of the Atlanta real estate market.

Childress/Klein's lawsuit was finally resolved in January 1990 when the U. S. District Court refused the company's demolition permit. Citing the 1978 Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Penn Central Transportation Co. vs. City of New York*, Judge Horace T. Ward ruled that the "city ordinance that allowed the Mitchell House to be placed on the city's list of protected historic properties" was "a permissible and legitimate governmental goal able to survive constitutional attacks."[30] Listing of the property as a historic landmark did not represent a "taking" of the property from Childress/Klein because the company could still "make money off it as an apartment building or tourist site."[31]

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[29] Alan Patureau, "With a little luck, 'The Dump' may rise again," *Atlanta Journal*, 10 December 1989, K6.
[30] The 1978 Supreme Court decision in *The Penn Central Transportation Co. vs. City of New York* case established the basis for constitutional takings analysis and upheld the authority of local governments to designate historic landmarks and to preserve the built and natural environment.
[31] Michell Hiskey, "Developer loses lawsuit to get demolition permit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 January 1990, D3.

The apparent victory of achieving landmark status and final resolution of the lawsuit did little to loosen the city's or state's purse strings or to stave off demolition by neglect, which seemed imminent in early 1990. The pledges of money and in-kind support that had been forthcoming when it appeared that the wrecking ball was about to swing appeared to evaporate now that the building's future seemed secured by its landmark designation. The roof, which had been damaged in a minor fire on the third floor, leaked, and vagrants routinely broke into the building, which was boarded up with sheets of plywood. At the end of 1989, Mitchell House claimed to have only about $20,000 in its coffers.[32] The debate that had focused largely on the issues of the architectural merits of the building, whether Margaret Mitchell herself would have wanted such a shrine, and the power of place, was about to shift dramatically to engage a broader segment of the population in a very public discussion about issues of race and the shaping of identity and collective memory.

A Story about "Gumption"

In an autobiographical sketch that Margaret Mitchell penned in September 1936, she offered the following summation of her book, *Gone with the Wind*:

> If the novel has a theme it is that of survival. What makes some people able to come through catastrophes and others, apparently just as able, strong and brave, go under? It happens in every upheaval. Some people survive; others don't. What qualities are in those who fight their way through triumphantly that are lacking in those who go under . . .? I only know that the survivors used to call that quality 'gumption.' So I wrote about the people who had gumption and the people who didn't.[33]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Harwell, *Gone With the Wind as Book and Film*, 38.

Critics and fans alike might dismiss Mitchell's simplified description of what has become the bestselling novel of all time, but the theme of survival and Mitchell's life story resonated with former television news anchor Mary Rose Taylor (no relation to Mitchell House president John Taylor). Alternately described by the press as a "socialite" or a "steel magnolia," Taylor had observed the struggle to create a museum of the Dump unfold in the late 1980s.[34] According to Taylor,

> I read about the Margaret Mitchell House in the newspaper, and I thought "Oh my God, Margaret Mitchell lived here, she wrote GWTW there." It wasn't part of my consciousness. I had never read the book. As soon as I read the article, I called everybody up in the article and invited them over. It was Sunday. I invited them over for tea that afternoon. I can't say that John Taylor was at that meeting. Eileen Brown [Segrest] was definitely there. She was the founder of the Atlanta Preservation Center. And so I had them all over and I asked them, what I was curious about was why the house hadn't been saved. But they couldn't explain it to me.
>
> I spent the next three years researching Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, and why the house hadn't been saved. Along the way I talked with probably 100 people across the United States. I read everything I could on Margaret Mitchell, and I began reading everything I could about that period of history because again it ties into the civil rights movement, which was my passion. Not about the Civil War, but about segregation. And I became fascinated.
>
> And so it became a passion, and in 1990, I researched the two organizations that were involved in trying to save the house and one of them was legal and one of them wasn't. The one that was legal had been started by Deborah James in 1985, but by the end of 1985, she had essentially closed shop and turned it over to the Mitchell House group headed by John Taylor.[35]

Raised in Greensboro, North Carolina, Mary King enrolled in the University of North Carolina (UNC) in 1963. While a student at UNC, King participated in student government and the civil rights movement. She also met author Tom Wolfe when he

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[34] Emma Edmunds, "There's Something about Mary," *Atlanta Magazine*, October 1998, 114.
[35] Mary Rose Taylor, interview by author, Atlanta, Georgia, 25 May 2007.

came to the campus as a featured speaker, and she began dating a Duke University student named Charlie Rose. Mary King and Charlie Rose married in 1968 and moved to New York, where Charlie began working for a bank and Mary got a job as a researcher for a new program at CBS called *60 Minutes*. Six years later Mary Rose became friends with veteran television journalist Bill Moyers when she co-produced a documentary for PBS on world hunger. Moyers soon hired Charlie Rose as the managing editor for the PBS series *Bill Moyers International Journal*, while Mary continued working as a producer for PBS and the BBC. In 1980, Mary and Charlie Rose divorced, and Mary moved to Atlanta to work as a reporter at the local NBC affiliate, WXIA.[36]

Mary Rose met Atlanta real estate developer C. McKenzie "Mack" Taylor three years after she moved to Atlanta. She soon married Mack Taylor and retired from broadcasting. Not someone to sit idly by, Taylor became a professional volunteer, serving on civic boards and as a board member of several nonprofit organizations. While serving on the Atlanta History Center board, Taylor became acutely aware of the city's aversion to embracing all of its history, noting "We were so focused on becoming a city to be reckoned with in banking and business circles that we wanted to disassociate ourselves from our history. Therefore, the whole focus was on the New South. The Uncle Remus stories, Margaret Mitchell, the Civil War—all of those were perceived to be politically incorrect to talk about." What intrigued Taylor about Margaret Mitchell was the author's life story, of which *Gone with the Wind* was a part, and of the impact that the city had on Mitchell and vice versa.[37] Although Taylor had never read *Gone with*

[36] Edmunds, "There's Something about Mary," 61.
[37] Edmunds, "There's Something About Mary," 114.

the Wind, she was keenly aware of its impact, and in Taylor's opinion, Margaret Mitchell was "Atlanta's most famous export since Coca-Cola."[38]

Determined to rescue the Dump from oblivion, Taylor became chairwoman of a new nonprofit organization, Margaret Mitchell House, Inc., which was created from the remnants of the previous nonprofits that had attempted to save the Dump. Reflecting on how the new organization was created, Taylor recalled,

> I let it be known that the Mitchell House group wasn't legal and I reached out to David Golden, who is an attorney for the arts and has remained our attorney all these years. He's with Troutman Sanders. And I got David and Deborah together and my idea was we would force a merger between the two groups. I had gotten Deborah to call a meeting of her group. She never had critical mass, but she had some interesting women, including Eileen Brown. I pitched the idea that we could merge the two groups so we could force the bad guys out and the good guys could have control over the group. It was a bit of smoke and mirrors.
>
> I had David come to the meeting and they were scared to death because none of them wanted to pay back taxes, and this would save them. So suddenly Richard's agenda was not important anymore. It became the tax consequences. But what in fact did happen was that rather than just taking over Deborah's 501(c)3 David filed for another 501(c)3, Margaret Mitchell House, Inc. The same day we merged, they elected me chairman of the group. And that was in November 1990. It was Margaret Mitchell's birthday, November 8. Deborah's group became the vehicle for forcing the bad guys out, but didn't actually become the 501(c)3 that we used. We created a new one.[39]

The "bad guys" to whom Taylor referred were members of the Mitchell House group, led by architect Richard Rauh, who were campaigning to restore the house to serve as a headquarters for the Home Builders Association of Georgia (HBAG). Fearing that allowing the HBAG to gain control of the house would mean losing all possibilities of developing interpretive programs at the site, Taylor engineered what could best be

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[38] Alan Patureau, "Margaret Mitchell's 'Dump': Trash or Treasure?" *Atlanta Journal*, 16 September 1991, B1.
[39] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.

described as a coup from within and soon found herself at the helm of the new organization charged with saving the Dump.[40]

The fundraising efforts of both the earlier organizations had fallen far short of their goals, and in the spring of 1991, Taylor reported that the sum total of available funds was $10,000, all of which was consumed by roof repairs and debris removal. The preservation and memorialization effort had its fair share of critics, many of whom, as *Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution* columnist Alan Patureau described in September 1991, were outspoken. "Anti-Dumpsters claim saving it would defy Mitchell's abhorrence of memorials," wrote Patureau, while others claim "the structure is an embarrassment to Atlanta and an affront to blacks." One of those opponents was state Representative Mabel Thomas of Fulton County, who proclaimed, "The house may have some historic associations, but African-Americans shouldn't help restore and glorify it. We don't need another symbol of past injustices."[41] Taylor attempted to counter such protests by touting Mitchell's charitable efforts during World War II and publicizing Mitchell's financial support of African American medical students at Morehouse College. One of the recipients of Mitchell's benevolence, Dr. Otis Smith, was named to the board of the Margaret Mitchell House.

Opposition came from the white community as well. Retired *Atlanta Journal* editor Jack Spalding said, "She would laugh this project out of town. She was a witty, irreverent person, not given to burning candles at shrines. As soon as she got a little money, she moved out." Clayton Farnham, a local attorney and preservation activist, expressed outrage over the "misplaced efforts . . . to save the ridiculous non-building that

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Patureau, "Margaret Mitchell's 'Dump': Trash or Treasure?" B1.

Margaret Mitchell cordially hated." Conversely, author and Margaret Mitchell biographer Darden Pyron commented, "If Faulkner had lived at [the Dump], you better believe Margaret Mitchell would want to save it." Mary Rose Taylor added, "Who knows what Margaret would have wanted if she hadn't died in a traffic accident 42 years ago? People change their minds. She had already given up thinking of 'Gone With the Wind' as her property. . . . She said the book belonged to Atlanta. Perhaps because the book was born there, of all the houses where Margaret lived, this might be the one place she would say belonged to Atlanta, too."[42]

Taylor set the wheels in motion to raise the estimated $2 million necessary to restore the house and open it as a museum. Her first fund raiser of the "Save the Dump" campaign was a screening of *Gone with the Wind* at the Fox Theater in Midtown. Taylor hoped to raise $80,000 at the event that opened with a seventeen-minute video, entitled "It Might Not Be Tara." The video featured interviews with several southern writers, some of Mitchell's acquaintances, former mayor Andrew Young and then-current mayor Maynard Jackson, all of whom pleaded the case for memorializing Margaret Mitchell and citing the Dump as the place for that memorial.[43] The video equated Margaret Mitchell's Dump with the homes of William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Carl Sandburg, and invoked the ghost of William T. Sherman, admonishing Atlantans not to follow in Sherman's footsteps by destroying this "little place" where Peggy Mitchell wrote her "big book." In his contribution to the video, Andrew Young opined:

> Going around the world talking about Atlanta for the Olympics and nobody knew where Atlanta was. Nobody knew anything about Atlanta, and you had to say *Gone with the Wind* or Martin Luther King to get anybody's attention. Atlanta isn't *Gone with the Wind*, but neither is Atlanta just Martin Luther King. But

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

> Atlanta is the coming together of the tradition of Margaret Mitchell and Martin Luther King, put in place in national policy by Jimmy Carter, and now influencing the whole world. Over a million people a year come to the King Center, and we don't even publicize it. I think the potential for the Margaret Mitchell House is just as great if it's properly developed, because everybody in the world knows *Gone with the Wind*. I like the proposal to restore this house as it was, place it in a park that allows people to come to get some sense of how our history was made. It doesn't have to be fancy; it only has to be as it was for her. I guess I began to realize that we ought to preserve history as it actually is. That it's much better to have a restoration of the place where most of *Gone with the Wind* was created actually than to go ahead and try to recreate Tara somewhere.[44]

Atlanta historian and acquaintance of Margaret Mitchell, Franklin Garrett, compared the Dump to "the log cabin Lincoln was born in. It had no particular distinction except that he was born there. And this house certainly has no architectural distinction that I've been able to discover, but it's where this book was written."[45] Author William Diehl commented, "I think that certainly the fame that she has brought to that city deserves recognition beyond just her name and the book she wrote. I think to tear down the house where it was written would be wrong to do." Mitchell's cousin Lillian Deakins added, "I really don't think that probably by now she would object to the Dump being renovated and made into a museum."[46]

Author after author offered testimonials about the importance of place in the creative process, and the power of place to evoke a sense of the past. Josephine Humphreys exclaimed, "Gosh! A human being actually lived here, lived in this house!" Mitchell biographer Darden Pyron explained, "It gives you something of a sense of, dare I say it, the holy, or something that's semi-sacred. The act of creativity and so forth. And with Margaret Mitchell, it seems like to me it's, that place, the Dump itself, or the apartment on Crescent Avenue, is particularly important because it speaks again to the

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[44] Script for "It Might Not be Tara," AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

special circumstances of a woman writing." Author Anne Rivers Siddons testified, "The place you write your first book is a very special thing. It's a fountainhead and a wellspring. I think the world almost demands that we have something for her. The writer becomes a living person there. I don't think it's being in the presence of something holy necessarily, but it is being in the presence of something very human." Evoking the power of place, former mayor Ivan Allen, Jr., noted, "It's a very valuable addition to the history of the city and I'm sure that it will mean a great deal to a large number of people as they come here to see where the homeplace of Margaret Mitchell and the birth of *Gone with the Wind* was." Mayor Maynard Jackson added, "No matter what anybody says, it's important for us to preserve our history, to preserve this house."[47]

Although Taylor had been able to secure the support of Mayor Maynard Jackson as well as former mayors Andrew Young, Sam Massell, and Ivan Allen, Jr., mayoral support did little to fill the coffers of Margaret Mitchell House, Inc. When the announcement in 1990 that Atlanta would host the 1996 Summer Olympics sent the city of Atlanta into a giddy frenzy and new construction erupted all over town, the Margaret Mitchell House project became "a cultural stepchild" according to Taylor. "Business leaders had doubts about marketability," explained Taylor, and there was a growing concern that the shrine would "offend Atlanta's black community in the same way that support for a Confederate memorial might." Earl Shinhoster, Southeast regional director of the NAACP, claimed that the black community supported the project as long as it did not get "public funds that could be used for more pressing needs, like housing and education." Shinhoster added, "Gone With the Wind is fiction, not fact. I don't see

[47] Ibid.

Margaret Mitchell and the restoration of her house being viewed as a monument to the Confederacy."[48]

As if the racial issues associated with Mitchell's legacy were not enough, Taylor was beginning to feel the pressure imposed by a free-market economy as developers hungrily eyed the corner lot at Peachtree and Tenth Streets. Following the economic downturn of the late 1980s, Midtown Atlanta began experiencing another revival, as high-rise hotels and office buildings erupted along the Peachtree corridor. The Dump occupied a prime piece of real estate that was still owned by Childress/Klein right in the heart of that corridor. Still Taylor continued her campaign to save the Dump.

In September of 1994 the Dump was still a dump, but Taylor was optimistic that its inclusion in the annual Piedmont Arts Festival, which drew more than a million visitors to nearby Piedmont Park, would raise the restoration project's profile. An exhibit by artist Ritsuko Taho consisting of 40,000 inflated latex gloves containing tiny sheets of paper on which were written the "hopes and dreams" of local residents was attached to the roof of the house for the festival.[49] In the wee hours of the morning of September 17, 1994, the house and the exhibit went up in flames. When the blaze was extinguished, the top two floors of the building were gone, although the exterior brick wall on the north side of the building still stood. Mary Rose Taylor, who was on the scene surveying the damage, commented, "What stunned me, standing there, was that the house had not burned to the ground. The brick was still standing. It reminds me of the indomitable spirit of Margaret Mitchell. I think that spirit lives on in that house. It's refusing to fall

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[48] Tom Watson, "'Gone with the Wind' down in the dumps," *USA Today*, 5 January 1994, 8A.
[49] Gary Hendricks, "Sightseers flock to see 'The Dump'; Police stepping up patrols after reports of pilfering," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 September 1994, D1.

down." Taylor added that she remained "committed to pursuing the reconstruction" of the house.[50]

By mid-morning, curious spectators had begun to flock to the site of the charred ruin, and the specter of Mitchell holding up the walls did not deter looters who flocked to the scene to gather up bricks and tile from the piles of debris. It seemed the almost total destruction of the house had finally gotten the public's attention. A busload of Japanese tourists unloaded at the site, and while some of them took pictures of the ruins, "others stood quietly, as if paying their last respects to the building." Playwright Melita Easters Hayes remained optimistic, stating that she hoped a memorial to Mitchell and her work would "arise out of the flames which destroyed 'The Dump,'" and historian Franklin Garrett, who visited the site, declared, "I'm of the opinion right now that it can be restored. I'm not giving up hope on it." On a more somber note, former Dump resident Boyd Lewis remarked, "Atlanta has killed all of its puppies, has done away with its history. I'm very sorry to see it go."[51]

Commenting on the fire as well as the fate of her exhibit, artist Risuko Taho said, "At first I was very sorry," but after recalling the "purifying role" of fire in some cultures, she added, "We had 40,000 dreams on the roof. I think that kind of fire could be seen as an indication that the dreams could come true."[52] By Monday, the story of the fire had hit the national news. In *USA Today*, Mary Rose Taylor declared, "My commitment to see this project through is as strong as it ever has been. We cannot let what little history remains in Atlanta slip through our hands." The restoration project would now be a

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[50] R. Robin McDonald, "A Landmark Lost," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 September 1994, F4.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

reconstruction project, Taylor announced, adding, "We're undaunted. We're moving forward."[53] Taylor's dream was about to come true.

[53] Tom Watson, "'Gone With The Wind' landmark goes up in smoke," 8A.

CHAPTER 5 – THE HOUSE OF BROKEN DREAMS

> Atlanta these days was like a giant plant which had been cut to the ground but now was springing up again with sturdier shoots, thicker foliage, more numerous branches.
>
> Margaret Mitchell[54]

Mary Rose Taylor had been working with Jerry Attkisson of the FJB Corporation, a real estate investment company that specialized in brokerage and development in the Midtown area, to attract a corporate sponsor for the Margaret Mitchell House before the fire broke out on September 17. On September 19, Attkisson sent Taylor a memo congratulating her on her plucky response to the fire, and began outlining some ideas for how to capitalize on the disaster. Attkisson reported that, "while the fire is fresh in the media," he sent faxes to several companies about the local print coverage. He asked Taylor to provide him with information on "other media coverage that would show a potential donor the attention generated by the fire," both print and video, which he felt could "make a convincing case as to the publicity that could come as a result of a corporate sponsor stepping forward."[55] In just over a week, Attkisson again wrote to Taylor, announcing that he had "a representative of a multinational corporation who would like to come to Atlanta next week and meet concerning underwriting the cost of reconstructing the Margaret Mitchell House." Attkisson assured Taylor that although the representative, Bernhard Harling, "asked that the identity of his company be kept confidential" for the time being, "the interest is real and the ability to fund the project is

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[54] Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, 661.
[55] Jerry Attkisson to Mary Rose Taylor, 19 September 1994, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9

not a question. The company's name is immediately recognizable and this call came to me unsolicited after initially being told they had no immediate interest."[56]

Taylor responded favorably to what must have seemed like manna from heaven, and on October 2 Attkisson faxed over more details about the upcoming meeting with the as-yet-unidentified potential donor. Attkisson requested that Taylor have the architect who had done the design for the proposed restoration at the meeting to "reinforce the fact that the plans are far along and that the fire is not a major change in the plans." He noted that the company was contemplating an Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) sponsorship that would cost between $15 and $20 million dollars plus another $100 million in promotion and advertising. Underwriting the reconstruction effort at the Margaret Mitchell House, by comparison, was now projected to cost just over $4 million, including the purchase of the entire block on which the building was located. "I am sure you are a master of painting the benefits of this alternative," wrote Attkisson, adding that they needed "to paint a picture of the exposure and good will that will be gained by his company beginning with the announcement and climaxing when the House is officially opened during the Games as well as afterwards with the legacy of being named the sponsor of the House."[57] The meeting with Bernhard Harling of Germany's Daimler-Benz was scheduled for early that same week.

Harling had some concerns about the viability of the Margaret Mitchell House as a tourist attraction following his initial meeting with FJB and representatives from the Margaret Mitchell House. Those concerns, which were addressed in a report produced by FJB on October 5, ranged from the perceived apathy for the restoration of the house

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[56] Jerry Attkisson to Mary Rose Taylor, 27 September 1994, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.
[57] Jerry Attkisson to Mary Rose Taylor, 2 October 1994, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.

by the local community to potential racial tensions that might be exacerbated by the creation of a memorial to Margaret Mitchell. FJB explained that although there had "been tremendous interest from corporations, individuals, the City of Atlanta and the State of Georgia," the "proper fit" of a donor for the Margaret Mitchell House had not been found. Several examples of potential donors, including a group of Hollywood executives and Ted Turner, were listed along with explanations as to why these donors were deemed unsuitable. A common thread seemed to be that most of the donors who were willing to underwrite the restoration/reconstruction wanted to use the property for their own private purposes with limited or no access for the public.[58]

According to Taylor, the prospective American donors also wanted to retain editorial control of the interpretive programs at the Margaret Mitchell House, a phenomenon she experienced in her years working for PBS when sponsors tried to dictate program content. Such a solution was clearly no solution for Mary Rose Taylor and the board of the Margaret Mitchell House, who envisioned a historic site that would serve as a "tourist and educational magnet." Daimler-Benz's offer of financial support without imposing editorial control appealed to the board members of the Margaret Mitchell House.[59] FJB's report touted the "diverse leadership" and commitment of the Margaret Mitchell House board and explained that, "Until now, Southerners have seemed embarrassed by their past and were more likely to embrace the 'New South' in an attempt to become like other cities in America. It is only a recent phenomenon, now that most of

[58] Lisa Frank to Mary Rose Taylor, 6 October 1994, AHS, MMH papers, Box 9, 1.
[59] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.

our historic buildings have been demolished, that today's generation of leaders are committed to preserving them."[60]

On the issue of racial tensions associated with the project, the FJB report explained:

> One of the strong messages behind this museum will be to separate the story told in Margaret Mitchell's book and the Hollywood stereotypes, written by screenplay writers portrayed in the movie.
>
> Though African Americans may want to avoid all memories of the tragic history that their ancestors endured as slaves, this period has a deeper relevance for today. Viewing this historical novel as a measuring stick, it is remarkable how far race relations in the American South have come in the last 100 years.
>
> The indomitable spirit and determination of the book's heroine Scarlett O'Hara can serve as inspiration to any young person of the '90s, from Japan to Zimbabwe. This hope for a new life beyond the dying era that was forever 'gone with the wind,' is what has captivated the imagination of readers worldwide.
>
> The black leadership of the City of Atlanta has fully embraced the project, especially recognizing the positive economic impact it will have in boosting the region's tourism industry. Former mayors Andrew Young and Maynard Jackson and current mayor Bill Campbell are all strong supporters.
>
> It is well documented that the most frequently asked question from domestic and international tourists in Atlanta is, 'Where can I go to learn about Margaret Mitchell and Gone with the Wind?' When visitors find their way to the dilapidated structure where the world famous novel was written, they are deeply disappointed. Several thousand tourists each year make the pilgrimage to the sorry site regardless.[61]

The report reminded Harling that October 1994 was "a rare moment of opportunity for the right corporation to unselfishly preserve Margaret Mitchell's place in history," and that the corporation that dared to take on the challenge would "be linked with her story of hope for the future and the power of one individual to overcome adversity and remain proud of their origins, whatever they may be. The worldwide

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[60] Lisa Frank to Mary Rose Taylor, 6 October 1994, 2.
[61] Ibid., 2-3.

goodwill generated from this effort in the international and domestic media" would "be an added bonus."[62]

Jerry Attkisson and Lisa Frank of FJB continued to court Daimler-Benz throughout the months of October and November. Mary Rose Taylor recalled a key moment in the negotiations being a chance encounter between Daimler-Benz officials and former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson. In town to discuss a variety of potential Olympic sponsorship opportunities, Daimler-Benz officials bumped into Jackson, who was committed to historic preservation in Atlanta, as he was leaving the South City Kitchen restaurant in Midtown. When asked by the Daimler-Benz cadre what he thought about the effort to save the Margaret Mitchell House, Jackson responded, "It was a priority of my administration. Anyone who travels the world understands why we need to save that house." This serendipitous encounter went a long way towards quelling the company's initial fears about racial tensions and, according to Taylor, helped "close the deal" with Daimler-Benz.[63]

Following the endorsement by the former mayor, Daimler-Benz officials began focusing on practical issues, such as how quickly the land could be purchased and when the reconstruction could begin. Childress/Klein had taken out a loan against the property with Fuji Bank, and Daimler-Benz executives feared that the land purchase might become overly complicated and drawn out. Attkisson suggested that Taylor approach Childress/Klein with an offer to purchase the land in order to secure Childress/Klein's willingness to sell and to nail down the amount. The property in question did not involve only the Margaret Mitchell House but also the entire block between Peachtree Street and

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[62] Ibid., 4.
[63] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.

Crescent Avenue south of Tenth Street. Included on the lot was another building, which was leased to several small businesses and the Atlanta Police Department. Attkisson recommended that Daimler-Benz purchase the entire 33,000-square-foot block, the market value of which was estimated "at best half of what it was five years ago," and noted that the value of the land would increase dramatically once reconstruction began.[64]

Attkisson began preparing a formal presentation for the November meeting of the Daimler-Benz board of directors, citing the investment in the Margaret Mitchell House as a mechanism for building public awareness of "Daimler-Benz as a global company and not just a German manufacturer of automobiles." Daimler-Benz had recently made a considerable investment in the Southeast with the construction of a sports utility vehicle plant in neighboring Alabama, and an investment in the Margaret Mitchell House (MMH) presented "an opportunity to tell the story of the New South that has arisen" in a market where the automaker wanted to establish itself. "Unlike a typical ACOG sponsorship with benefits running through the end of 1996 at best, restoring the MMH offer[ed] a permanent legacy for Daimler-Benz," setting the company "apart from the rest of the pack of Olympic sponsors." The total projected cost of the project, including purchase of the entire block and the reconstruction of the house, was projected at slightly over $5 million.[65] Attkisson completed his first draft of the presentation and faxed it to Mary Rose Taylor and Bernhard Harling on November 7, 1994.[66]

Bernhard Harling acknowledged receipt of Attkisson's "masterpiece" on November 11 with the good news that the numbers mentioned in Attkisson's proposal "greatly improve the chances for a passage of a 'Margaret Mitchell House bill' within

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[64] Jerry Attkisson to Mary Rose Taylor, 2 November 1994, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

Daimler-Benz." Harling added that a "welcoming letter" from Mayor Bill Campbell "would greatly contribute towards doing away with the still prevalent concern that a foreign company might cause embarrassment when trying to salvage a national/local icon." The letter should include a statement that "the Atlanta community and, in particular, the leading political and public opinion makers would embrace such an endeavor and would welcome Daimler-Benz as a, so to speak, 'honorary citizen.'"[67] Taylor, who had worked on Bill Campbell's mayoral campaign in 1993, appealed to the mayor for a letter of support, and Campbell, seeing the potential economic benefit of the undertaking, obliged with a letter that satisfied Daimler-Benz officials.[68]

Meanwhile, employees of the Margaret Mitchell House began preparing a formal business plan. The following were listed as the goals of the Margaret Mitchell House:

1) To restore the house and preserve the apartment where Margaret Mitchell wrote the book, Gone With The Wind (the "Book").
2) To use the structure at 10th and Peachtree streets to accommodate and educate visitors and to ensure the continuation of this city landmark as a permanent historical and cultural attraction in Atlanta.
3) To collect and assemble the historical memorabilia regarding the Book, its author and her apartment and neighborhood for exhibit in museum space within the renovated building.
4) To promote discussion groups, panels, forums, lectures, and other activities that shall foster and promote the study and research relative to the Book and its impact upon Atlanta, the South, and the World.
5) To celebrate the contribution of southern writers to the rich literary history of the region and the country.
6) To oversee the management of the organization and the daily operation of the facility.

Noticeably absent from this list was any mention of the film version of *Gone with the Wind*. According to Taylor, she and other members of the board felt the need to save the house and "secure a foothold in the marketplace with the author and the book. The

[67] Bernhard Harling to Mary Rose Taylor, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.
[68] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.

movie was simply an add-on" that could be addressed later.[69] Among the members of the board of trustees listed in the plan were broadcast executives, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, educators, politicians, members of the Atlanta City Council, a cousin of Margaret Mitchell, and author Tom Wolfe, a longtime friend of Mary Rose Taylor. Almost 50 percent of the board members were African American.[70] Deborah James and John Taylor, founders of the first two nonprofits that attempted to save the Dump, were also listed as trustees.[71]

The rationale for restoring the Margaret Mitchell House revolved around the "name recognition, global attention, and interest afforded Atlanta by Margaret Mitchell's Gone With The Wind," which was described as "a priceless community asset which must be protected and invested." Additionally, restoration of the house would "be a boost to the Atlanta tourist industry." According to the plan, the house represented "an opportunity to define the city's soul and the character of its people" by "telling the story of the old and the new Atlanta." The *Gone with the Wind* story, "placed in an historic and educational context," could "serve as a useful measure for race relations in Atlanta." The architectural history of the building, which reflected the changing face of Midtown from the late 1800s into the mid-1900s, was cited as contributing to the value of the site as a tourist attraction. While tourism and historic preservation were considered "reasons enough for restoring the Margaret Mitchell House," the coming of the Olympics in 1996 offered the "opportunity to leverage worldwide interest in the Gone With The Wind phenomenon," a chance to "touch the hearts and minds of visitors all over the world by

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[69] Mary Rose Taylor, e-mail message to author, 9 June 2007.
[70] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.
[71] Draft of Margaret Mitchell House, Inc., Business Plan Reconstruction/Restoration Project, 21 November 1994, AHS, MMH papers, Box 9, 1-6.

carrying them back to where it all began." The plan mentioned the fund-raising extravaganza from 1991 as being the pivotal event that "permanently laid to rest the question, 'Why save the house?' and replaced it with 'How?'"[72]

The 1994 business plan outlined the proposed visitors' experience, which would include a viewing of the 1991 video, "It Might not Be Tara," followed by a visit to Mitchell's apartment on the ground floor. Visitors would "step back in history and experience Margaret's living quarters just as she did while writing her novel." Upon leaving the apartment, visitors would enter a 1,000-square-foot exhibit space which would feature displays on "the life of Margaret Mitchell, the history of the neighborhood, the evolution of the novel, and the subsequent impact of the novel on Margaret Mitchell's life." Visitors would exit through the gift shop.[73] The plan noted that the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau reported it received almost "1,000,000 inquiries a year concerning Margaret Mitchell and attractions related to 'Gone With The Wind,'" and that the city hosted almost 15,000,000 non-convention-related visitors a year. Although such numbers hardly seem plausible, Taylor and the board used these figures to project first-year visitation of around 100,000. An admission charge of $3 per person was suggested.[74] The plan explained that the house itself, located on the northern third of the block, had actually been donated to The Margaret Mitchell House, Inc. earlier in the year, so the projected costs to complete the project included "restoration of the house and the purchase of the remaining two-thirds of the block for future development." The total cost was not expected to exceed $4.3 million.[75]

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[72] Ibid., 7.
[73] Ibid., 9.
[74] Ibid., 13.
[75] Ibid., 14.

The final proposal that was presented to Daimler-Benz recounted the phenomenal popularity of *Gone with the Wind*, both the print and film versions, and the paucity of historic sites in Atlanta. Daimler-Benz was in the rare position "to return a part of Atlanta's history to its citizens by choosing an unusual project that goes beyond the ordinary corporate involvement with the 1996 Olympics."[76] In return for its support, Daimler-Benz would be the recipient of "unique public relations benefits before and long after the games." The proposed "strategically orchestrated promotional concept" was declared to be "the equivalent of millions of dollars spent on traditional advertising," but "The real benefit" would be "the ability to use the rights to the name, *Gone With the Wind*, in Daimler-Benz promotions," a perk projected to be "worth millions of dollars." Daimler-Benz was promised the rights to the phrase "The Margaret Mitchell House, Birthplace of Gone With the Wind," and the Daimler-Benz logo would "be permanently displayed in a prominent location on the property as well as on all publications referring to the Margaret Mitchell House."[77] In addressing the ever-present issue of race, the presentation stated, "Atlanta's black population, led by Mayor Campbell, his predecessor Mayor Maynard Jackson and the former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young, are all strong advocates for the reconstruction."[78]

In December 1994, the *Atlanta Constitution* announced that "the maker of Mercedes Benz cars is negotiating to buy and restore 'The Dump'." Mary Rose Taylor confirmed that Daimler-Benz was "the most serious of three potential corporate sponsors of the renovation," and Bernhard Harling stated that his company's intent was "to be able

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[76] FJB Corporation, "The Margaret Mitchell House, Atlanta, Birthplace of *Gone With The Wind*, Präsentation für die Daimler Benz AG, Atlanta, November 1994, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, 4.
[77] Ibid., 11.
[78] Ibid., 7.

to produce a finished Margaret Mitchell museum and 'give it' to the people of Atlanta," adding that the house would "probably not turn into a national monument, but it is something sacred."[79]

By January 1995 Bernhard Harling and Mary Rose Taylor began negotiating an interim funding commitment that would enable work to begin on the site. Taylor had signed a contract with Don Childress to buy the block on which the Dump was located for $1.75 million based on Daimler-Benz's preliminary commitment to fund the reconstruction. Harling pledged that the company would contribute $150,000 for the down payment on the contract and for rubble removal and stabilization of the structure.[80]

In late January of 1995, the *Atlanta Constitution* announced that work would begin the next week on debris cleanup which would enable Daimler-Benz and the Margaret Mitchell House to determine the full cost of renovating the Dump.[81] As construction crews began cleaning away the debris from the site, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that, "depending on cost and other factors, Daimler-Benz may pay for the entire project," with a decision "expected in 60 days." There was hope, wrote reporter Bo Emerson, that "the Margaret Mitchell house might rise again." Mary Rose Taylor once again weighed in on the importance of the site for Atlanta, explaining that Mitchell was the "true Southern female archetype for whom Scarlett O'Hara [was] mistaken," and it was "time to get [Southern] history out of the closet, warts and all." Taylor countered critics who focused on Mitchell's legacy as "a racially charged reminder of the antebellum world that the novel mythologized," by arguing that Mitchell was, in fact, "an

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[79] Bo Emerson, "Foundation president confirms 'Dump' deal is brewing," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 December 1994, D5.
[80] Bernhard Harling to Mary Rose Taylor, 11 January 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.
[81] "Mercedes maker revs up drive to save 'The Dump,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, 27 January 1995, A3.

early feminist and an emblem of racial cooperation," and cited the author's efforts to finance anonymously the education of black medical students in the 1940s.[82]

Mary Rose Taylor was "no hothouse flower," noted Emerson, who recounted her ability to play "hardball politics" and her resolve that "helped her overcome entrenched opposition to the effort to save the Mitchell house." Daimler-Benz spokesman Bernhard Harling added that Taylor had a "combination of compassion, emotion and business brains," and her "formidable salesmanship" had helped draw Daimler-Benz to the project.[83] Out of the public eye, Harling wrote to Taylor and Attkisson that "there is the continuous challenge of making Atlanta and all constituencies aware of the validity of the MMH project and its potential for a meaningful contribution towards a refined perception of the South, now very much shaped by ignorance and clichés."[84]

Not everyone seemed to agree that the Margaret Mitchell House was the project that would help create such a "refined perception of the South." On February 15, 1995, Mary Rose Taylor received a letter allegedly from the management and staff of WRAS radio, the Georgia State University student-run radio station, protesting the renovation of the Dump, stating:

> We the undersigned students of Georgia State University stand united in our opposition to the renovation of the Margaret Mitchell project on Peachtree Street, Atlanta, on the grounds that her book Gone with the Wind and the movie based on her work are politically and racially inflammatory and an embarrassment to the citizenry of the City of Atlanta. We therefore reject and resent any effort on the part of the government or private interests to perpetuate her memory by erecting a museum that glorifies her warped perspective, and demand that renovation cease and desist and the remnants be swept away with the wind.[85]

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[82] Bo Emerson, "She Gives a Damn." *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 February 1995, B1.
[83] Bo Emerson, "She Gives a Damn," B1.
[84] Bernhard Harling to Mary Rose Taylor, 28 February 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Daimler-Benz.
[85] WRAS 88.5 Management and Staff to Whom It May Concern, 15 February 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.

Mary Rose Taylor responded to the letter by faxing a copy to WRAS program director Shachar Oren, who promptly responded that the letter, which was written on outdated letterhead stationery, did not, in fact, represent WRAS. The letter "is not an official letter; it is a fake letter," wrote Oren, explaining that none of the thirty-five signatures on the letter represented current employees or volunteers at the station.[86] Genuine or not, the letter expressed concerns that had been and would be recurring issues throughout the campaign to save the Dump.

As the debris began to disappear, officials from Daimler-Benz and the Margaret Mitchell House began to finalize plans for the reconstruction. In mid-March 1995 an announcement was made that Daimler-Benz was donating "$5 million to buy and renovate the former home of 'Gone with the Wind' author Margaret Mitchell in time for the 1996 Olympics," putting to rest "months of speculation and rumors" that had swirled around the project. Bernhard Harling explained, "We will be providing the funding to help realize a dream. We also have an interest in being represented during the Olympics, but at the same time we have been looking for something that would make us a good corporate citizen. We are looking at the possibility of putting up a tent for VIP guests which would be temporary, but the house itself and the surroundings are sacrosanct."[87]

Two days following the announcement, an editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution* stated that even though "People who knew Mitchell say she would be appalled at efforts to save the Dump and make it into a Margaret Mitchell museum . . . and she explicitly said she opposed creating anything resembling a shrine to her or her book, alas, it is happening, and Mitchell herself is at least partly to blame. If she had not written a book

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[86] Shachar Oren to Mary Rose Taylor, 21 February 1995, AHS, MMH, Box 9.
[87] Lyle V. Harris, "Daimler-Benz will donate $5 million to restore 'Dump'," *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 March 1995, H2.

that became so hugely successful worldwide, a book that spawned one of the most famous movies ever made, and one that is so representative of Atlanta in the minds of millions of people, all this wouldn't be necessary." African American editorialist John Head went on to thank "Daimler-Benz, Mitchell House, Inc., and Scarlett, Rhett and the rest of the gang" for making the project happen "without public money being spent."[88]

"Race and Power Stuff"

Towards the end of March 1995, Daimler-Benz CEO Edzard Reuter received a letter from former U.S. Olympian Anita DeFrantz. Frequently described as "one of the most powerful women in the Olympic sports movement," DeFrantz's bronze-medal performance at the 1976 Montreal Games in women's rowing had given her standing to mount a highly visible legal action against President Jimmy Carter's boycott of the 1980 Olympics. Although DeFrantz's lawsuit, which attempted to have the boycott overturned, was unsuccessful, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded her the Olympic Order medal. DeFrantz went on to serve as vice president of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, where she played a lead role in defusing a boycott planned by forty-three African nations in response to the inclusion of South African runner Zola Budd on the British Olympic team. In reward for her efforts, DeFrantz was granted a lifetime membership on the IOC, becoming the first American woman and first African American to serve on the committee.[89] Descended from slaves in Louisiana, DeFrantz took issue with Daimler-Benz's decision to fund the Margaret Mitchell House reconstruction, writing as follows:

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[88] John Head, "'Dump' restoration gets into gear," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 March 1995, R2.
[89] "Anita DeFrantz, Rowing," *Sports Illustrated*; http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/siforwomen/top_100/56/.

> I thought for a long time before writing this letter and I concluded that I simply had to make the following comments. It deeply disturbs me that Daimler Benz, as a corporation, is putting so much money into the rebuilding of the house where Margaret Mitchell wrote her book, Gone With The Wind. While many people consider the book a remarkable romantic novel, both the book and the movie to me represent a horrific chapter in American history. Of course, this is the period during which time my ancestors were enslaved by the people of the South. The book and the movie romanticize this and continue the stereotype of African-American people as being unable, or unwilling, to be human.
>
> It is for that reason that I am dismayed that Daimler Benz has, in essence, bought into supporting this misrepresentation. I can appreciate that the property is attractive due to its location. However, bringing back from the ashes one who wrote so fervently of the bygone period when people were enslaved seems not to be an appropriate corporate image.
>
> I recognize that this letter is unlikely to change your activities at the site but I wanted you to know that not everyone thinks it is a good idea.[90]

Reuter's response to DeFrantz is unknown, but it must have certainly given him pause that someone of DeFrantz's standing in the Olympic community opposed the project. Nevertheless, Reuter proceeded to sign the agreement for Daimler-Benz to underwrite the development and restoration costs of the Margaret Mitchell House on March 31, 1995. In the Daimler-Benz press release, Reuter explained:

> The Southeast is one of our centers of business operations. . . . About 6,000 Americans will be part of the Daimler-Benz family by 1997 in just this one region of the U.S. That in itself is reason enough for our social and cultural involvement in Atlanta, the growing business capital of the South. When we go where the markets are, we go as fair business partners, and also as friends; friends who want to know more about the traditions, history and social structures of the people we work with and the countries we work in. This is the philosophy behind our support of the Margaret Mitchell House.

Mary Rose Taylor added, "The restored house will be open to people from all over the world, so that they can learn more about Margaret Mitchell – a woman who courageously championed human rights." The press release included a statement

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[90] Anita DeFrantz to Edzard Reuter, 15 March 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.

regarding the support the project received locally in Atlanta from both the mayor and the Executive Committee of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center, which had recently "passed a resolution expressing its confidence in and support of the Margaret Mitchell House project and its patron." According to the press release, a letter from the King Center to Daimler-Benz "stressed the significance of Margaret Mitchell and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the history of human rights."[91]

In Atlanta, as Mary Rose Taylor and Margaret Mitchell House vice chairman Otis Smith prepared to leave for Stuttgart to meet with Reuter, an article appeared in the *Atlanta Journal* revealing the largesse that Mitchell had bestowed upon the black community in the 1940s. The article recounted how Smith had been "on the verge of dropping out of medical school when an anonymous benefactor stepped in and paid his tuition." Thirty-five years later, Smith, who became one of the first licensed African American pediatricians in Georgia, learned that Margaret Mitchell was the anonymous benefactor who funded his education as well as the education of more than twenty other Morehouse College medical students in the 1940s.

Mitchell was presumably motivated to support medical students at Morehouse after she had difficulty finding a white doctor or hospital willing to treat her black maid, Carrie Holbrook, who was stricken with cancer. In her letters to Morehouse president Benjamin Mays, Mitchell specified that she wanted the students whom she sponsored to practice medicine in Georgia, noting that "Georgia is a huge state and it is poor. It is poor in Negro doctors. I want to better my own state." Smith explained Mitchell's reluctance to have her benevolence made public because "She was an extremely private

[91] Daimler-Benz Press Release, "Daimler-Benz to sponsor restoration of the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta, Georgia," 31 March 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.

person and her generosity toward black medical students would not have been well-received in the political climate of the'40s. She was trying to protect her conservative Atlanta family from possible criticism." Commenting on charges that Mitchell was a racist and that her book glorified the Old South, Smith stated that he did not believe Mitchell was a racist, adding "Her book describes life the way it was then. We may not like it, but that's history."[92]

In an attempt to bring this "history" to life, Mary Rose Taylor engaged the services of the well-known exhibit-design firm Staples & Charles of Alexandria, Virginia. Established in 1973, Staples & Charles claimed a long and impressive list of clients, including the Coca-Cola Company, the Smithsonian, and The Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas, Texas. According to company founder Barbara Charles, the company was hired in January 1995 "to do the interpretive planning and design for a permanent exhibition at MMH that included the 'Dump.'"[93] Curator Jane Webb Smith was sent to Atlanta to work with Taylor and the staff of the Margaret Mitchell House on the planned exhibition. A memo from Smith to Barbara Charles foreshadowed the troubles to come—"Mary Taylor was, of course, wound up and still thinks that since I'm from Atlanta that I have some bias about Margaret Mitchell," wrote Smith. The implication was that Smith did not appreciate Mitchell's contributions to her hometown and might not have the ability to look critically at the issues that Taylor felt needed to be addressed in the interpretive plan.[94]

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[92] Don O'Briant, "The Mitchell Connection: 'GWTW' author's gift helped Dr. Otis Smith, other black Georgians finance their education, " *Atlanta Journal*, 29 March 1995, 1B.
[93] Barbara Charles, e-mail message to author, 1 July 2007.
[94] Jane Webb Smith to Barbara Charles, 23 March 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13.

Reporting on a meeting held on March 22, 1995, at the Margaret Mitchell House headquarters, Smith noted that the overriding concern of the Margaret Mitchell House representatives (Taylor was not at the meeting), was that "the misperception of the book, primarily shaped by the movie but also by racist accusations, needed to be cleared up." The underlying question discussed at the meeting was whether Margaret Mitchell "was racist or paternalistic." Smith noted that all the Margaret Mitchell House staff "naturally say that she was not." According to Margaret Mitchell House staff member Marianne Walker, *Gone with the Wind* "was about people who had gumption versus people who don't have gumption," and that was the main theme that should be explored in the exhibit.[95]

By mid-April, Smith reported that Mary Rose Taylor (MRT) was "not happy, not satisfied, not paying bills." Taylor's reasons were manifold, ranging from questions about Smith's competency to issues of professionalism and charges of Staples & Charles "overstepping its bounds" by trying to interfere with plans for the interior of the apartment, which Taylor viewed as beyond the scope of work for which Staples & Charles had been hired. In a meeting in April 1995 Taylor reminded Smith that "this was MRT's project," and that the company was "not listening to what MRT wants," and was "focusing on its own agenda, not MRT's."[96] Notes about Taylor's unpredictability and the difficulty of dealing with someone so single-minded appeared throughout the Staples

[95] Ibid.
[96] Jane Webb Smith, Notes from Discussions with Mary Rose Taylor, 19 April 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13.

& Charles correspondence.[97] Barbara Charles later recalled, "For a while we seemed to be on the same wavelength, and then it blew up."[98]

As the exhibit design phase continued, Mary Rose Taylor became increasingly frustrated over what she perceived as the inability of Smith to grasp the importance of the racial issues surrounding Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*. Reflecting on the struggle over the interpretive focus, Taylor recalled how she agonized over how to communicate her perspective to Smith. Attempting to convey to Smith how polarizing *Gone with the Wind* could be, Taylor called on one of the Margaret Mitchell House's most outspoken critics, author Pearl Cleage, for assistance. Taylor had never met Cleage, and Cleage, who was reluctant to get involved, responded "Mary, you know I oppose the house, and I don't know what I can add." Taylor persisted, answering Cleage's protest with a crisp "Believe me, you can add."[99]

The meeting, which took place at Gorin's café, was "unnerving" according to Smith, who recalls that Pearl Cleage's message was "basically blacks are angry" about the Margaret Mitchell House and *Gone with the Wind*.[100] The meeting eventually took on "mythological proportions" and became a turning point in the development of the exhibit for the Margaret Mitchell House according to Smith. Prior to the meeting, Smith recalled, she had been merrily working on an exhibit entitled "Peggy's World," which focused on Atlanta during the period in which Mitchell wrote *Gone with the Wind*. A component of that world was segregation, a subject that Smith planned to deal with,

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[97] Trip Report – Barbara Charles, 7 July 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13.
[98] Barbara Charles, e-mail message.
[99] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.
[100] Jane Webb Smith, e-mail message to author, 2 July 2007.

although not in as detailed a fashion as Taylor thought was needed.[101] According to Smith, after the meeting with Cleage the focus became "all race and hatred and anger and, [Smith's] personal favorite, WHITE FEAR all the time. Mary wanted me—then a 45 year old white preppy girl from Buckhead—to run down to Sweet Auburn and stand on a street corner and interview black people about what they thought about Margaret Mitchell," recalled Smith.[102] Smith perceived that Cleage was chastising Taylor for not talking to the proper people within the black community. "By the time Pearl Cleage showed up at Gorin's," said Smith, "the black community had already spun itself into a tizzy about this thing."[103]

Taylor, whose memory of the meeting was different than Smith's, recalled that she and Cleage did engage in a "spirited but cordial" discussion about the Margaret Mitchell House. Acknowledging that the substance of the discussion was the importance of dealing with the issue of race and how the black community perceived Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*, Taylor stated that Cleage confirmed the message that Taylor had been trying to convey to Smith all along—that the discussion of race mattered in this exhibit, and that some segments of the black community were enraged. "When I found people like Pearl who were willing to talk to me about these issues," Taylor said, "it reinforced that we were on the right track."[104] Although Cleage did not recall the specifics of the discussion with Taylor and Smith, she did state that she had "several

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[101] Jane Webb Smith, telephone interview by author, 3 July 2004.
[102] Jane Webb Smith, e-mail message to author, 2 July 2007.
[103] Jane Webb Smith, interview.
[104] Mary Rose Taylor, telephone conversation with author, 7 July 2007.

conversations with Mary Rose Taylor," and although they did not always agree on things, their conversations were "very cordial and the discussions never acrimonious."[105]

Taylor called on Cleage for this particular task, she recalled, because "Pearl has a silver tongue, and she has a pleasant expression when she speaks. Her body language is not threatening. Her words are penetrating. She was a public literary figure." Taylor had earlier approached Cleage's ex-husband, college professor and former Fulton County commissioner Michael Lomax, about writing two separate critiques of the book and the movie for touch-screen computer displays in the Margaret Mitchell House Visitors Center. Lomax refused to write separate criticisms because he "considered them to be one and the same because in the public's mind they were one."[106] Although Lomax tentatively agreed to write a single critical review of *Gone with the Wind* for the Visitors Center, Taylor's plans for such a display were eventually overtaken by events beyond her control.

By July a revised interpretive outline for the Margaret Mitchell House was ready. The focus on the first floor of the house, where visitors entered the building, was to be on the history of the neighborhood and the house. Included was a video that focused on the theme of "A Place to Write." The video was envisioned as a crowd-control device that would enable docents to send visitors downstairs to the apartment in small groups. The apartment was to be furnished much as it was during Mitchell's residency there.[107] Local preservation consultant Tommy Jones had been engaged to cull through Margaret Mitchell's letters and papers for descriptions of her home and its furnishings. He had developed an extensive and detailed list based largely on her correspondence. Mitchell

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[105] Pearl Cleage, e-mail message to author, 6 July 2007.
[106] Mary Rose Taylor, e-mail message to author, 7 June 2007.
[107] Revised Interpretive Outline for Margaret Mitchell House, 27 July 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13.

was a prolific letter writer, and her letters often contained minute details about her furnishings and décor, including the description of a scandalous print of Casanova, which hung next to the bed.[108] Beyond the apartment, visitors encountered a four-part exhibit designed to contextualize Margaret Mitchell and her work. The first section focused on the writing and publication of *Gone with the Wind*, while the second offered a biographical sketch of Margaret Mitchell, including details about her philanthropic endeavors. The third section, entitled "Facts Behind the Fiction," addressed issues of historical accuracy in *Gone with the Wind*, from a look at individual characters to places, events, and broad issues such as slavery and plantation life. The final section dealt with the "Power and Influence of the book."[109]

Staples & Charles continued revising the plans into the fall of 1995. By October, Mary Rose Taylor was still offering suggestions for improvement in the exhibit, noting that "our primary audience is Atlanta (and the South). By definition this is two realities and both must be represented throughout the exhibit. How we deal with the race issue will be the most important challenge of this exhibit; it has been and will continue." Taylor suggested changing a section called "Scarlett's world" into something called "Scarlett and Mammy's world" in an effort "to put the period of the book in an historical context that is appropriate for Atlanta."[110]

Taylor continued trying to shape the message throughout the rest of 1995, although Barbara Charles recalled that "if Taylor had an 'interpretive vision,' I never understood it." The exhibit-design process required getting "to a point where the interpretation has a shape that can be developed into a design," explained Charles. "The

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[108] Tommy Jones, Interim Report, AHS, MMH, Box 13.
[109] Revised Interpretive Outline for Margaret Mitchell House.
[110] Mary Rose Taylor to Jane Smith and Barbara Charles, 24 October 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13.

process forces a clarification of vision. In this case, I think the process made Ms. Taylor uncomfortable. As a result we were not able to move the project from extended outlines to design."[111]

In January 1996 Margaret Anne Lane, the new executive director at the Margaret Mitchell House, terminated the contract with Staples & Charles. Lane herself was soon dismissed from the Margaret Mitchell House, and Taylor resumed the role of executive director. A letter to Taylor from her friend, author Bernestine Singley, reveals much of the frustration that Taylor experienced in her relationship with Staples & Charles. Following up on an earlier conversation with Taylor, Singley wrote:

> Have you thought anymore of including the whole story of hiring *crème de la crème* exhibit planners who, even for $100k, couldn't figure out how to use their professionalism to transcend their racial blindness and do what they were paid to do? Every time I think about our conversation, I am astonished at how perfectly your experience with them summarizes "the problem."
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> First, of course, is the fact that they were hired in the first place with no thought of what people they had working for them with the required sensibilities/sensitivities (i.e., black folk or white folks with extremely highly evolved racial consciousness) to get the job done. To me that would mean finding out what black folk they had to work on the exhibit or at least what black folk they intended to contract with to fill the void.
>
> The assumption, I'm sure, was that since they were "the best," they could do what needed to be done. But, again, how could you make a determination about whether they were "the best" for this kind of project without first finding out if they had a track record specifically with black history exhibits (as they obviously didn't)?
>
> When it was clear that they didn't even see their lack of capacity as a problem (as they obviously didn't until you raised the issue) and took no affirmative steps to resolve it even after you raised it over and over, why didn't you fire them?
>
> I know the issues of time and money drove a lot of the decision to keep them on. But do you think you would have been nearly as hands-off initially and as tolerant subsequently if they hadn't been so establishment? Ironically, it's the establishment credentials, I would argue, that should have scared you away from

[111] Barbara Charles, e-mail.

> them at the outset, or at least made you wary enough to ride herd on them from day one.
>
> This is not to beat up on you about your decisions. It is to help you examine how your own decisions and follow-up reflect how those of us who have learned to think and behave differently still show way too much deference to those who represent white power, white prestige and the white establishment.
>
> Your assumptions about the company and your deference to the planners definitely played into the project not going where you wanted it to. This race and power stuff is very difficult to work through, as you already know. Our roles in it require that we turn the blinding light of critical analysis on ourselves at least as often as we shine it on the other players around us.[112]

Singley's letter highlighted Taylor's complicated relationship with "the establishment" of which she was part and to which she was also opposed. As the wife of one of Atlanta's wealthiest real estate developers, Taylor circulated among the city's white elite and served as a volunteer on boards in a capacity befitting her social status. As the executive director of the Margaret Mitchell House, Taylor alternately played the role of establishment insider and outsider as circumstances dictated.

Taylor and Singley were longtime friends and had shared many conversations over the years about "feminism and race relations." According to Taylor, Singley initially "supported the idea of the MMH. Then peer pressure caused her to question it and back away. Then she would become enthusiastic again. Then she would back away. There have been times when she called me up and literally screamed at me with anger because of the conflict she felt," recalled Taylor, adding that "understanding and being sensitive to the conflict wherever it came from sharpened my antenna for navigating the mine-filled road to opening the house to the public."[113]

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[112] Bernestine Singley to Mary Rose Taylor, 24 December 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13.
[113] Mary Rose Taylor, e-mail message to author, 7 June 2007.

Dissatisfied with the exhibit proposals produced by Staples & Charles, in March of 1996 Mary Rose Taylor began working on her own version of an exhibit script. Taylor's plan followed the same basic outline as that previously discussed with Staples & Charles. Visitors were presented with background information on the neighborhood and the house as they entered the main floor of the building before descending to the basement, where they entered Apartment One, the former home of Margaret Mitchell and John Marsh. Taylor's explanation of this section of the tour indicated that visitors would be allowed to wander through at their leisure, soaking up the atmosphere of the tiny apartment filled with furnishings that matched the descriptions found in Mitchell's letters.

In an attempt to create an atmosphere that evoked the feeling that visitors had walked into the apartment the morning after a great party, the apartment was in a state of disarray—"the cushions on the couches are messed, ash trays overflowing, and drink glasses are scattered about," as if "the gang was here the night before." Docents would be stationed in each room to tell the story of what Mitchell's and Marsh's life was like in the Dump, with the "execution . . . done in a way that allows the visitor to let his own imagination fill in the gaps."[114] As visitors transitioned from the apartment into the exhibit gallery beyond via a passageway from the kitchen porch, visitors would see a visible reminder of the two earliest incarnations of the building—the Sheehan era and the Crescent Avenue Apartments era—visible in the exposed brick walls along the passageway.

It was beyond this passageway that Taylor envisioned "a big surprise" for visitors, as exhibits revealed the complex and often contradictory life of Margaret Mitchell. Using

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[114] Mary Rose Taylor, "The Margaret Mitchell House Exhibit," 3 March 1996, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 13, 5.

the book as a metaphor for Mitchell's life, Taylor proceeded to tell the tale of Mitchell and Atlanta, how the two were inextricably linked, and how misperceptions have permeated public knowledge about both. A detailed biography of Mitchell was proposed, including her early forays into writing, her childhood days spent listening to tales about the Civil War, and the shocking revelation for her at age ten that the Confederates had actually lost the war. Visitors would learn about how Mitchell protested having to attend class with a black student at Smith College, and her brief stint as a reporter, and her two marriages—the first one unhappy, followed by a second, more suitable match to John Marsh. Very little of the exhibit would focus on the actual writing of *Gone with the Wind*, but a great deal of space was devoted to the impact of the book on Mitchell's life. Race became an increasingly important issue following the 1939 release of David O. Selznick's film version in which "Nostalgia replaces the history as Margaret Mitchell wrote it," according to Taylor.[115]

The balance of the exhibit focused on the last decade of Mitchell's life and her various philanthropic undertakings. A separate exhibit in an adjacent space would elaborate on Mitchell's creative process and the legacy of *Gone with the Wind*. The primary focus would be on the book, rather than the film, which, according to Taylor's script, had "both positive and negative consequences." While the film "reinforces GWTW as a cultural phenomenon . . . it also perpetuates the image of the South and of Atlanta as a freeze frame of the Antebellum South." This distinction between the "nostalgia" of the movie and the "history" of the book would be made clear by presentation of the opening lines of both works.[116] According to Taylor, this part of the

[115] Ibid., 18.
[116] Ibid., 31.

exhibit would make clear that "the movie reinforces the criticism that the Blacks in GWTW were racial stereotypes . . . bit players on the white man's stage of human drama."[117]

The exhibit galleries concluded with a brief section on "The Geography of *Gone with the Wind*," which reminded visitors that Midtown was Mitchell's neighborhood—that she "grew up, married, divorced, remarried, wrote GWTW, turned over her manuscript, was run down by a taxi, and had her funeral service all within just four blocks of the Dump." A small world indeed, and the visitor's "insatiable curiosity about place" could be satisfied here like nowhere else. Visitors would be shown maps that helped them locate places of significance to Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*, both real and imaginary.[118]

The battle with Staples & Charles and developing exhibits for the house were not the only struggles that consumed Taylor's time in the fall of 1995. The final plans for the Margaret Mitchell House included the renovation of the building located on the southern end of the block to accommodate a visitors' center and gift shop. That building was still occupied by a police precinct and a number of small businesses including a tailor and two restaurants. Le Thi Hang, owner of Cha Gio, a Vietnamese restaurant in the building, told *Atlanta Constitution* reporter Bo Emerson that his restaurant was "gone with the wind" after twenty years.[119] Mani Roy, owner of Touch of India restaurant, was in shock about the developments that seemed to have caught him off guard. Roy reported being excited when he heard that Daimler-Benz was going to renovate the Margaret Mitchell House. He had visions of the site becoming a hot tourist destination that would draw

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[117] Ibid., 32.
[118] Ibid., 37.
[119] Bo Emerson, "Raising the Dump," *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 September 1995, 1C.

customers to his restaurant and he "even bought a Mercedes-Benz" to celebrate what he thought was a godsend. Then came the news that he had to move out of the building where his restaurant had been located for thirteen years. Roy was so mad, he said, that he planned to sell his car.[120]

Tailor Henri Davenporté offered no comment to the local paper. Instead he took his complaint directly to Daimler-Benz executive Bernhard Harling, to whom he wrote, "The bottom line is that Mercedez-Benz may have put me out of business." Davenporté recounted how he had been given two months to vacate the building in which he had operated his shop for six years. He had not been able to find a new location and was forced to sell most of his inventory of materials and supplies at a deep discount in order to pay his creditors. Asking Harling for an explanation as to "why my little shop is so crucial to whatever activities [Daimler-Benz] has planned for next summer," Davenporté added, "When the dust clears from all of this, some will say it was ironic that someone like me—an African-American—was forced out of business due to renovations to the neighborhood around the home of a woman whose stories glorified the South at a time when African-Americans were known as 'slaves.' Unfortunately, I will have little response but for the fact that one man's irony is another man's misfortune." Davenporté chose not to talk to the media about his situation, although several reporters had apparently contacted him. He preferred to deal directly with the entity that he felt was forcing him out of business.[121]

Harling apparently passed Davenporté's letter along to Mary Rose Taylor, who responded to Davenporté directly with a handwritten note in which she expressed regret

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[120] Mara Rose Williams, "Two restaurants dumped in rehab of 'the Dump'," *Atlanta Journal*, 5 October 1995, D11.
[121] Letter from Henri Davenporté to Bernhard Harling, 20 September 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.

over the situation and commended Davenporté for his professionalism in his dealings with the Margaret Mitchell House. Taylor offered, "as both a neighbor and a friend," to "extend some courtesy to" Davenporté, and concluded that she hoped there was something she could do to ease his transition.[122]

Throughout the fall of 1995 and into the winter and spring of 1996, work continued at a feverish pace on the reconstruction of the house. In March 1996 author Tom Wolfe, a longtime friend of Mary Rose Taylor, wrote her a letter congratulating her on what appeared to be the imminent completion of the reconstruction effort. "More than once you must have felt like you were Scarlett trying to save Tara," wrote Wolfe, adding "I'm not suggesting that you even considered most of her techniques." Wolfe reported that he had recently read *Gone with the Wind* and Darden Pyron's biography of Margaret Mitchell, *Southern Daughter*, in tandem, and that had him reflecting on her accomplishment. "I think you have done an extremely important thing in saving the house," wrote Wolfe. "It is not only Atlanta's most important literary monument . . . it is also the greatest single American monument to the Writer's Dream: the dream of rising up from out of obscurity and lighting up the sky with a brilliant piece of literary work."[123]

Wolfe's congratulations proved to be premature. On May 12, 1996, less than two months before the grand opening of the house, the Margaret Mitchell House lit up the sky in a different fashion when arsonists struck again. The damage from the second fire was far more extensive than from the first fire, with only Mitchell's tiny ground-floor apartment spared extensive damage. Walking through the rubble after the fire, architect Gene Surber exclaimed, "It's incredible that her apartment escaped unscathed." *Atlanta*

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[122] Note from Mary Rose Taylor to Henri Davenporté, 17 October 1995, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.
[123] Letter from Tom Wolfe to Mary Rose Taylor, 31 March 1996, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.

Constitution reporter Virginia Anderson described the house as "a charred ruin, with beams dangling from ceilings and insulation hanging in clumps," adding that "Mitchell's bottom-floor apartment had only water damage." Mary Taylor decried the destruction, proclaiming that the Margaret Mitchell House "would have allowed for the first time for people to touch the soul of this city." Taylor invoked the image of the symbol of Atlanta, declaring that "like the Phoenix, we shall rise again, too."[124]

[124] Virginia Anderson, "Margaret Mitchell House Burns," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 May 1996, 1B.

CHAPTER 6–THE HOUSE SHALL RISE AGAIN

If the first fire had been a blessing, generating international publicity and helping reel in the Daimler-Benz sponsorship, the second fire was a catastrophe. Costs escalated as the Margaret Mitchell House was required to hire security guards to stand watch "24 hours a day at the charred ruins." Mary Rose Taylor conceded that the building would not be ready before the Olympics, but she announced plans for the restoration of the commercial building on the south end of the block, including a "small visitors center and historical exhibit" about Margaret Mitchell. Taylor explained, "We are not attempting to take the exhibit designed and written for the house and put it in the south end. It won't translate. We will not be getting into the story of Margaret Mitchell's life nor setting the story of her life against the landscape of Atlanta history during the period in which she lived." Taylor added that Daimler-Benz had canceled plans to put its Olympic hospitality center on the south end of the property because "They don't think it's in good taste. The time to celebrate is when we finish rebuilding."[1]

The story of the second fire was covered by Rick Bragg of *The New York Times*, who reported that "While the Old South is exactly what many Olympic visitors expect to find in Atlanta in July, what they will get is the Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, glass-and-steel skyscrapers and Los Angeles-class freeway traffic." The Margaret Mitchell House represented one of the last few connections to the city's past that would resonate with visitors interested in Mitchell and the world she created. "Tara never was," wrote Bragg. "Rhett Butler was a writer's fancy. And now the city's only visible

[1] Robin McDonald, "By the charred 'Dump,' Mitchell exhibit planned for the Games," *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 May 1996, 1C.

connection to 'Gone With the Wind,' the Mitchell House, is a hulk of burned timber and scorched bricks, again." The Margaret Mitchell House was the "dream of some preservationists to offer visitors a glimpse of Atlanta the Southern city, in defiance of the corporate image of Atlanta as an international one." Bragg noted that it was this glimpse of "the Old South that many Olympic visitors will want," and quoted Mary Rose Taylor as she reflected on the "great irony" that "the primary thing they come looking for is the one thing Atlanta chose not to give them." Taylor recounted the struggle she and others had faced in their effort to save the house, saying, "I am stunned by the fear and trepidation that the people in the tourist industry have. They tell me we can't talk about the Civil War. We go back comfortably to the civil rights movement, but we can't talk about the Civil War."[2] It was not the Civil War per se that seemed to be a forbidden topic of conversation for Atlanta boosters, but rather the racism of the romanticized version of the Old South that conflicted with the city's modern image.

Atlanta mayor Bill Campbell toured the site of the charred ruin the day after the fire and declared that the city would contribute$10,000 towards reconstruction of the house and another $1,000 towards the reward fund for any tips that led to the capture of the arsonist responsible for what he described as "a despicable act." He pledged the city's support for the reconstruction effort, and invoked the image of General William T. Sherman, reminding Atlanta's citizens, "We've been scarred by fire in the past, we've risen from it, and we'll go forward again."[3]

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[2] Rick Bragg, "An Aging Atlanta Treasure Struggles for Its Survival," *New York Times*, 17 May 1996, A12.
[3] Bo Emerson, "City, carmaker vow to rebuild Mitchell home," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 May 1996, C1.

The mayor's reaction elicited a dramatic and impassioned response from author Pearl Cleage, whose editorial appeared in *The Atlanta Tribune* on June 1, 1996. Under the headline "Going, Going, Gone," Cleage wrote:

> I must now rise in the name of our ancestors and say something for the record: I was not sorry to see The Margaret Mitchell House burn to the ground. I don't know who did it. I've never advocated arson, and I was out of town when the blaze ignited. But, I was, in fact, delighted that someone had taken direct action against what I consider to be an insult of monumental proportions to African-American people specifically and to thinking people of any race who abhor the fact and the legacy of white American enslavement, breeding, torture and murder of millions of African people, both during the Middle Passage and once they reached these Southern shores to be sold like cattle and bred like hogs, subjected daily to rituals of decadence and dehumanization that we can only imagine.
>
> I am amazed at the widespread assumption that we are all supposed to be devastated by the damage to the building where Margaret Mitchell crafted her best-selling story of white supremacy. I am offended by the mayor's pledge of $10,000 of our tax dollars to rebuild the edifice and confused by his assertions that: "We've been scarred by fire in the past; we've risen from it, and we'll go forward again."
>
> He can't be talking about the burning of Atlanta at the end of the Civil War, can he? He can't be talking about that time Gen. Sherman marched through Georgia as part of the effort to defeat the Confederacy, and with it, the institution of slavery, can he? He can't mean we're supposed to be sorry about that fire, can he? Can we?
>
> Of course we can't, unless the frenzy of our Olympic preparations has resulted in the losing of our collective African-American mind. If we remember the legacy of Nat Turner and his firey revolt against the slave system, sorry should be the furthest thing from our minds. We should rejoice in the destruction of such a blatant monument to white supremacy.
>
> In spite of the self-righteous editorials and the calls for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrator, we should reject all efforts to make us believe that "Gone With the Wind" is a book we should treasure, honor, respect, and cherish. We should celebrate the fact that the place where it was written won't be able to open its doors to thousands of visitors during the Olympics. We should be pleased that they won't be tainted by the book's glamorization of our human bondage and its glorification of the slave-owning Miss Scarlett as if she was worthy of our affection and loyalty.

> We don't have to be sorry. We don't have to like Miss Scarlett. We don't have to like "Gone With the Wind." We don't have to respect Margaret Mitchell anymore than we have to respect Joseph Goebels, Hitler's favorite PR man. Good propaganda is deserving of respect only from those who are served by the myths it creates, and I don't know about you, but I don't think the servile, brainwashed, self-hating black characters presented in "Gone With the Wind" are serving any interests of mine that I can think of at the moment.
>
> But maybe it's just me. Maybe I've missed something here. Maybe I misunderstood Malcolm X when he said that if the master's house caught on fire, the slave with any sense prayed for a wind. Maybe Nat Turner's dream of blood on the cotton didn't mean what he thought it meant. Maybe crushing the Confederacy shouldn't rate right up there with the defeat of the Nazis as something human beings should celebrate with all the strength of our common humanity. I could be wrong, but I don't think so.
>
> I think the problem is that, once again, we're being buffaloed by the mistaken notion that we have to share the pain of people whose interests couldn't be more different from ours if they had large horns growing out of the center of their foreheads and ate their young. If there is a group of passionate people who want to honor Margaret Mitchell and regard "Gone With the Wind" as a classic, they are free to do so, but that has no more to do with me as a conscious African-American than the people who wear those antebellum outfits on Confederate Memorial Day or those who continue to defend the state flag.
>
> I don't have to celebrate with them when their ceremonies go well. I don't have to commiserate with them when their monuments to the blood-soaked institution of slavery burn to the ground. But, I am required by the reality of our ancestor's torment to be outraged when black-elected officials offer the money to rebuild. Seems to me their time could be better spent praying for a wind.[4]

Although the subject of slavery and Mitchell's glorification of the Old South had been a recurring argument against the restoration of the Dump, no one had articulated the case quite like Cleage, nor had anyone devoted an entire article to the argument. Cleage's willingness to express her outrage catapulted her onto the national stage of the debate surrounding the Dump. Journalist Patti Hartigan of *The Boston Globe* reported on the controversy surrounding the Margaret Mitchell House, claiming the struggle "tells a lot about this city's continuing search for its identity." Hartigan quoted from Cleage's

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[4] Pearl Cleage, "Going, Going, Gone," *The Atlanta Tribune*, 1 June 1996, 32.

Tribune editorial, and added the following additional comments from Cleage: "All of the things that romanticize Scarlett do not change the fact that people were bought and sold and bred like cattle. There is no such thing as a good slave owner."[5] Acknowledging the "novel's global appeal," Hartigan seemed to pin much of the blame for this romanticization of Scarlett and the Old South on the film version of *Gone with the Wind*, seemingly absolving Mitchell of complicity. Cleage clearly disagreed with this position, stating that "As a conscious black American, I don't have to honor Margaret Mitchell or love Scarlett O'Hara."

Surprisingly, Mary Rose Taylor was privately delighted by the attack from Cleage. "It was fabulous!" Taylor recalled, adding that "Pearl is so brilliant. She is what she is, and that's what makes for great dialog. When the positions are clearly carved out, it makes for great debate. People said to me, 'Mary, you must be so depressed,' and I said 'No! I'm not at all!' That's what the Margaret Mitchell House is all about."[6] Taylor acknowledged that in the beginning "no foundation or corporation would touch the project because of the racial overtones." According to Taylor, the museum would use the controversy and the novel's enormous popularity to draw in visitors to the site, which would include a "center for education on race relations." Taylor reminded readers that 50 percent of the board of the Margaret Mitchell House was African American, and it was Mitchell's legacy as a supporter of black medical students at Morehouse College that would "infuse the spirit of the museum."[7]

In addition to Pearl Cleage's unequivocal condemnation of the Margaret Mitchell House and its symbolism, *Atlanta Constitution* columnist Rheta Grimsley Johnson, who

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[5] Patti Hartigan, "Atlanta debates its Scarlett past," *The Boston Globe*, 24 July 1996, G1.
[6] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.
[7] Patti Hartigan, "Atlanta debates its Scarlett past," G1.

had publicly condemned the fire, received an anonymous missive that stated, "Regardless of the intentions of Margaret Mitchell, her book has become a symbol of those who want to cling to the past. Regardless of Butterfly McQueen's genuinely progressive personal views, her portrayal in the film version of 'Gone With the Wind' was profoundly tragic for all of us who seek dignity and respect. . . . Don't you see any irony in a German manufacturer, whose country's elite is still trying to distance themselves from complicity with the Nazi regime's crimes, wooing those who busy themselves with preserving 'the best' remnants of the Confederacy as symbolized by the Dump?!" Johnson agreed with the anonymous writer that "Slavery was the greatest crime, and there is irony that a foreign concern would be the one to write the checks for an Atlanta landmark." She also agreed that "the 1939 movie dealt in some tired, sad stereotypes," but added that the "love portion of Margaret Mitchell's love story is unsurpassed" and a "part of American culture."[8] A local Daimler-Benz executive in Atlanta forwarded a copy of Johnson's column to Bernhard Harling, noting that it was "absolutely outrageous to publish something like that," presumably referring to the excerpts from the anonymous letter that Johnson had quoted.[9]

The executive director of the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, Greg Paxton, weighed in on the matter with his own letter to the editors, stating "The latest tragedy at the Margaret Mitchell house has again raised questions about the appropriateness of restoring the primary building where the best-selling novel of all time was written." While Paxton acknowledged that "those who have reservations about this restoration have raised legitimate issues," he posited that "none of these arguments

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[8] Rheta Grimsley Johnson, "Condoning 'Dump' Fire is condoning censorship," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 June 1996, 1B.
[9] Michael Koβ to Bernhard Harling, 3 June 1996, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.

undermine the international historical significance of this site or the resonance in the human spirit that Mitchell's words, penned at this location, have evoked throughout the world." These arguments, according to Paxton, "underscored the vital importance of this last major tangible link with the author and this work of fiction." Paxton elaborated that "it is precisely because this building and [Mitchell's] work evoke such strong responses now that it should be preserved for the future. Properly interpreted, historic sites reflect a variety of perspectives, but most of all they provide insight on who we were and who we have become. The Mitchell house can offer the best opportunity to address the misconceptions and truths that 'Gone With the Wind' has created in the public's mind." Paxton then stepped down from his philosophical perch to offer a pragmatic reason for reconstructing the Dump—Atlanta desperately needed more historic attractions to tempt visitors to extend the length of stay in the city, reminding readers that the Dump represented the "authentic historic form" of "one of the best known aspects of Atlanta."[10]

In July 1996, shortly before the Olympics began, CNN writer and former Dump resident Boyd Lewis offered his thoughts on the saga of the Dump, declaring that Apartment One, which had "survived the third deliberately set fire in less than 10 years, even though everything around it had been gutted" was "a tough little patch of history, and for some reason is intent on survival." Lewis lauded Mary Rose Taylor for grasping "the indomitable motif of the phoenix and the idea that when you're slapped down, you don't lie there whimpering," noting that this was the central theme of Mitchell's book, not "simple-minded nostalgia for gray-suited cavaliers and their hoop-skirted, fiddle-dee-dee belles supported on the backs of slave labor." Lewis challenged Atlantans to go

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[10] Gregory Paxton, "Mitchell's house is needed to attract and keep visitors," *Atlanta Journal*, 14 June, 1996, 21A.

"mingle with the crowds who will be drawn to the charred hulk and ask them" why Mitchell's story about Atlanta appealed to them, predicting that "only then, will Atlanta know what has been going on under their noses and out of their hearing for the last 60 years as relates to this book and its meaning."[11]

As the debate raged in print, Mary Rose Taylor and Bernhard Harling offered a unified front regarding the reconstruction project. Harling declared that "the funds are there" for the reconstruction, and that "money was not an issue." Daimler-Benz remained "committed to the project," according to Harling, in spite of the fact that Daimler-Benz's plans to use the site as a hospitality center had been scuttled by the fire.[12] Behind the scenes the excitement that had surrounded the impending opening gave way to a bunker mentality, as representatives from Daimler-Benz and the Margaret Mitchell House began developing a plan to cope with the disaster. The Atlanta-based public relations firm NewSouth, Inc. proposed a communication strategy that included using "the site as a dramatic illustration of the tragedy" by leaving the "exterior fire damage as visible as possible to underline how recently it happened." The long-term message that the site was to convey was presented as follows:

> Margaret Mitchell lived in this house when she wrote "Gone With the Wind." She and her book are very different than the attitudes projected in the movie version of the book. Come find out why.

This was contrasted with the interim message, for which the following was proposed:

> Margaret Mitchell lived in this house when she wrote "Gone With the Wind." It burned for the second time May 12, 1996, and we are once again rebuilding it. We need your help.

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[11] Boyd Lewis, "The Phoenix Effect," *Atlanta Journal*, 8 July 1996, 7A.
[12] Bo Emerson, "City, carmaker vow to rebuild Mitchell home," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 May 1996, C1.

In addition to this blatant plea for donations, the strategy included plans for a site exhibit that told "the story of the tragedy . . . through the use of large-scale photography composites and headlines." An estimated 100,000 international visitors per day were projected to pass by the site during the Olympics, and those visitors would be encouraged to follow the exhibit through to the Museum Shop, where another exhibit would enlighten them about Margaret Mitchell and offer them a chance to "buy a souvenir, and maybe even get something to drink."[13] In the margin of NewSouth's proposed strategy, Mary Rose Taylor wrote, "make smart choices—no smoke and mirrors."[14]

A new agreement was drawn up between Daimler-Benz (DBNA) and Margaret Mitchell House (MMH). Known as the "Fire Agreement," which became part of the original "Contribution Agreement," the document laid out the revised plans for the use of the property following the fire. Daimler-Benz restated its commitment to rebuilding the house and added that the company was "prepared to donate additional funds for design and construction" that would be used to make the commercial building on the south end of the property usable as a visitors center and exhibit space.[15]

Daimler-Benz designated additional funds of $350,000 for the renovation of the commercial building, and in order to make the July 12 deadline, a "crisis schedule" for all the work was developed. Additionally, Daimler-Benz budgeted $150,000 for "exhibit work," although the Margaret Mitchell House was directed to identify the money as a donation to support Margaret Mitchell House activities, not the exhibit work for which it was designated. The agreement stated that the intent of Daimler-Benz's donation was "to

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[13] Bob Allen to Bernhard Harling re. Communication Strategy, 21 May 1996, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Fire Agreement letter from Bernhard Harling to The Margaret Mitchell House, Inc., 6 June 1996, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, 1.

motivate others to join as contributors to MMH," perhaps a sign that Daimler-Benz had almost reached the end of its charity with regard to the institution. The agreement also specified that "a logo identifying DBNA's contribution to the House, to be approved by DBNA and MMH, shall be displayed on all written and graphic promotional materials for the House (including MMH letterhead, mailings, brochures, posters not-for-sale, etc.)." Mary Rose Taylor was directed to coordinate and consult with Bernhard Harling on all press releases or written statements to the public.[16]

Throughout the Olympics, tourists flocked to the site of the rubble, eager to catch a glimpse of what was left of the place where *Gone with the Wind* was born, although the number of visitors never approached the 100,000 a day projected by NewSouth. An exhibit in the former commercial building that had been transformed into a visitor's center offered some historic context for the site. An interpretive panel on the corner of Peachtree and Tenth streets also offered visitors some background on Mitchell and her former residence.

The Washington Post reported that Olympians from around the world were "making it a point to visit the house," recounting the story of two French athletes who ventured by the ruins. French diver Julie Danaux told reporter William Gildea that Mitchell's book was what her parents "thought of first when they thought of Atlanta." News of the second fire had made the papers in France, too, and what Danaux wanted to see most in Atlanta was "what was left of the house." French race-walker Nathalie Fortain, who accompanied Danaux to see the ruins, explained that "It is very simple – everyone knows 'Gone With The Wind' in France. It is very popular. I believe it is the

[16] Fire Agreement letter from Bernhard Harling to The Margaret Mitchell House, Inc., 6 June 1996, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, 5.

most famous American novel we know in Europe." Fortain added, "It's a revelation to see where Margaret Mitchell was inspired to write this large novel in this small space." Gildea reported that Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who since March 1996 had been serving on his native South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, had also visited the site.[17]

It would be almost a year before the reconstruction of the Margaret Mitchell House was complete. Throughout that time, the relationship between the Margaret Mitchell House and Daimler-Benz deteriorated. Mary Rose Taylor recalled that the second fire created a great deal of tension between the Margaret Mitchell House and Daimler-Benz. The automaker seemed unprepared for the controversy that seemed to swirl constantly around the Margaret Mitchell House. While Taylor and the Margaret Mitchell House board were "prepared for demonstrations and even welcomed them," according to Taylor, the "racial rumors that surrounded the second fire in particular were an embarrassment to Daimler-Benz's new chairman, Jurgen Schremp." Despite Taylor's "openness with Daimler-Benz on all matters regarding race, the new chairman did not share the mindset of his predecessor [Edzard Reuter]. In the end," reflected Taylor, "I was almost grateful that the fire protected them from further embarrassment."[18]

A year after the second fire when the Visitors Center sign was repainted in preparation for the May 1997 opening, Daimler-Benz's name was left off. This omission displeased Bernhard Harling. Mary Rose Taylor wrote to Harling that she was "stunned by his reaction," noting that it was her understanding that Daimler-Benz's name "would be on the House and that the name on the Visitors Center could be used to raise the funds

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[17] William Gildea, "Beloved Book, Film Stir a Pilgrimage," *The Washington Post*, 27 July 1996, C5.
[18] Mary Rose Taylor, e-mail message to author, 7 June 2007.

to finish the Visitors Center and to create and fabricate the exhibits inside it." Taylor went on to remind Harling how the museum's expenses had spiraled out of control, with security increasing from $10,000 to $60,000 and insurance premiums rising to more than $45,000.[19] An accounting done in April 1997 indicated that Daimler-Benz had contributed in excess of $5 million to the Margaret Mitchell House.[20]

As planning moved forward towards the grand opening scheduled for May 16, 1997, Margaret Mitchell House staff put together a business plan for life after Daimler-Benz. The plan proposed opening the house and visitors center to the public on "a limited basis as soon as funds are released and we are able to hire staff." The staff would be largely part time, a strategy that would keep wage and benefit expenses down, and the site would cater to tour groups and rentals. Facility rentals were envisioned as the principal source of income for the site—apparently the Margaret Mitchell House had already received more than sixty-five requests for weddings. In order to maintain its educational nonprofit status, the house had "to be open to the public on some regular basis," but one day a week was proposed as adequate to meet that requirement. The goal of the Margaret Mitchell House Board was "to have a fully operational MMH and Visitors Center by mid/late 1998, one that is open to the public on a daily basis."[21]

Days before the opening, Mary Rose Taylor forwarded to Bernhard Harling a "wrap-up letter" that detailed the disposition of all remaining funds, including the reimbursement by the Margaret Mitchell House to Daimler-Benz of $55,000 for fees that had been paid to a third party by Daimler-Benz on behalf of the Margaret Mitchell

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[19] Memo from MRT to Bernhard Harling, 10 April 1997, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Wrap-up letter correspondence.
[20] Total Contributions by Daimler-Benz to Margaret Mitchell House, 20 April 1997, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Wrap-up letter correspondence.
[21] The Margaret Mitchell House, Inc., 1997 Business Plan, 26 March 1997, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Correspondence Oct. '96 – May '97.

House. The contentious issue of the logo on the Gift Shop and Visitors Center signs was also addressed, with the notation that although the words "Restored by Daimler-Benz" did not have to appear on those signs, neither could the name of any other donor without the written approval of Daimler-Benz.[22]

Apparently the Margaret Mitchell House did not pay the $55,000 quickly enough to suit Daimler-Benz. On June 16, Taylor received by facsimile a letter from attorney Suzanne St. Pierre reminding Taylor of the terms regarding the $55,000 payment and requesting immediate payment of the sum. Taylor had apparently held back the reimbursement to Daimler-Benz as a negotiating tactic to insure that she received a "fair hearing" regarding extra construction costs that were outside the scope of the agreement with Daimler-Benz. In the margin Taylor wrote, "There was an addendum to fire agreement that I was forced to sign or sign under duress by D-B and Chris Humphreys – I was told it would not change the substance, but it did."[23] It seemed that the days of cheerful collaboration between the Margaret Mitchell House and Daimler-Benz were over, as evidenced in subsequent correspondence from Mary Rose Taylor to Bernhard Harling in which Taylor provided justification for expenses that Harling and Daimler-Benz had refused to pay. Taylor repeatedly acknowledged the enormous contribution of Daimler-Benz, but appealed to Harling that he reconsider paying expenses associated with the gala opening that had been held in May.[24]

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[22] Letter from Mary Rose Taylor to Bernhard Harling, 12 May 1997, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Wrap-up letter correspondence."
[23] Letter from Suzanne St. Pierre to Mary Rose Taylor, 16 June 1997, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Case re: $55,000 fire costs.
[24] Letter from Mary Rose Taylor to Bernhard Harling, 30 July 1997, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Dedication Costs.

Open House

Two days before the Margaret Mitchell House opened for business in May 1997, *Atlanta Constitution* staff writer Bo Emerson speculated on whether Atlanta would "send the welcome wagon around," or if the house could "expect a housewarming of a different kind." The project had "seemingly endured more setbacks than the Confederate Army," noted Emerson, but Executive Director Mary Rose Taylor joked, "practice makes perfect" and predicted a drama-free grand opening. Taylor had engaged her friend, celebrity author Tom Wolfe, to serve as the keynote speaker at a $500-a-plate fund-raising dinner on the eve of the opening. The event was a sellout.[25]

As costs for security at the site escalated, Taylor revamped plans for the exhibits in the house, which had included a video and a brief history of the neighborhood and the house in the front parlor. The upper floors of the house, which had been completely destroyed in the fire, were rebuilt but remained empty. Plans for an exhibit in the basement area surrounding Mitchell's apartment were also scuttled. Only Mitchell's apartment was restored to its former condition. When the house finally opened for visitors on May 17, 1997, the apartment was fully furnished, right down to a portable Remington typewriter situated under the bay window.

In an attempt to counter arguments from the black community, Dr. Otis Smith appeared in a public-service announcement urging viewers to "help us dispel the myth and share the missing chapters of her story with the world." Such appeals did not sway former Fulton County Commission chairman Michael Lomax, who commented that the Margaret Mitchell House was not something that he was "going trucking to see." In

[25] Bo Emerson, "The Dump is Reborn," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 May 1997, 12F.

Lomax's opinion, "whatever good [Mitchell] did for a couple of students certainly pales by comparison with the images she created."[26]

Two other Atlanta residents eyed the reconstructed Margaret Mitchell House with a degree of skepticism. Mani Roy and Le Thi Hang, owners of the restaurants Touch of India and Cha Gio, who had been forced out of the commercial building on the south end of the Mitchell House block back in 1995, had both moved to new locations in the Midtown area near the Margaret Mitchell House. By 1997 both owners were still struggling to survive. Less than a year after he had signed a three-year lease with Childress/Klein and invested $32,000 in upgrades at his old location, Roy had been forced to move. He spent another $125,000 renovating his new location, "thinking Olympic business would make it worth the extra expense." No Olympic customers materialized in Midtown, however, and Roy found himself with a large debt burden and few customers. Le Thi Hang's experience was similar to Roy's. With the help of two benefactors, she relocated her restaurant to a building on Tenth Street within sight of the Margaret Mitchell House. The cost to refurbish the building and bring it up to code for a restaurant exceeded $175,000. Like Roy, Le received no economic benefit from the 1996 Olympics. As the Margaret Mitchell House was being prepared for its grand opening, Le was struggling to keep her restaurant afloat and to repay her benefactors for the help with the build-out at her new location.[27]

The Margaret Mitchell House was struggling as well, but unlike the displaced restaurants, the Margaret Mitchell House had no debt, thanks to Daimler-Benz. Surrounded by a fourteen-foot fence and outfitted with security cameras, the Margaret

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Tinah Saunders, "Different digs, same fine fare," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 May 1997, 4D.

Mitchell House began hosting visitors on the weekends during the summer of 1997 and was made available for rental for special events during the week or in the evenings. By the fall the house expanded its hours to seven days a week.[28] Taylor had additional exhibits installed in the welcome center, located in an adjacent building, and in 1999 added a movie museum in a former bank located across Crescent Avenue from the house. Attendance grew from 45,000 in 1997 to 65,000 by 1999. The site was self-supporting, claimed Taylor in 1999, but much of the support came from fund-raisers rather than admissions.[29]

A House Divided

From the beginning of her campaign to "Save the Dump," Mary Rose Taylor envisioned something greater than a site "to glorify *Gone with the Wind*." Part of that vision came to fruition in 2000 with the creation of the Center for Southern Literature. As early as 1994, one of the purported goals of the Margaret Mitchell House was "to celebrate the contribution of southern writers to the rich literary history of the region and the country."[30] Mary Rose Taylor often spoke about her plans to create such a programming division, but the trials and tribulations associated with reconstructing the house twice delayed the plans.

In March 2000 the Margaret Mitchell House launched its new programming arm, the Center for Southern Literature. On March 23, 2000, *The Atlanta Constitution* reported that the Margaret Mitchell House would "try to fill the cultural gap [in Atlanta]

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[28] "Fact Sheet: Margaret Mitchell House and Museum," *Margaret Mitchell House and Museum Media Kit*, April, 2001.
[29] Don O'Briant, "Atlanta Museum Has the Cure for Scarlett Fever," *The Times-Picayune*, 26 December 1999, 38A.
[30] The Margaret Mitchell House, Inc., Business Plan Reconstruction/Restoration Project, 21 November 1994, AHS, MMH Papers, Box 9, Folder: Business Plan, 2.

and become a center for Southern literature." Mitchell House spokeswoman Heather Hjetland announced that "working with members of our literary advisory board, such as Tom Wolfe and Pat Conroy, we will be hosting a series of literary events on an ongoing basis."[31] The focus would be on southern writers, kicking off with an appearance by Robert Morgan, author of Oprah Book Club pick *Gap Creek*.[32]

A defining moment came in July 2001 when the Center for Southern Literature hosted author Alice Randall. Fresh off her legal victory that allowed the publication of her *Gone with the Wind* parody, *The Wind Done Gone*, Randall's appearance at the Margaret Mitchell House was controversial and much anticipated. Randall had written her book, she said, "for the millions of black women who feel they have been injured by 'GWTW'—the book, the movie, the myth—which has stepped off the page and off the screen and into the crannies of private life wherever blacks and whites are found together in these United States. I wrote it for their men. I wrote my book for the millions of compassionate white women who envision and wish to love (without shame) a more complex South. And I wrote it for their men." As she battled for the right to publish her book, which the Mitchell estate had sought to prevent, Randall explained, "When I read 'Gone With the Wind,' it branded my brain. What I made of that scar is my very own."[33]

Don O'Briant of the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that Randall was "stepping onto what some 'Gone With the Wind' fans consider sacred ground to talk about her book." Mary Rose Taylor revealed that she had "gotten hate calls from both sides, but

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[31] Don O'Briant, "Margaret Mitchell House host to literary happenings," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 March 2000, G3.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Alice Randall, "I wrote an antidote to a poisonous text," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 May 2001, A9.

that's par for the course. We respect everybody's right to express his or her opinion."[34] More than 200 people showed up for the event—a crowd so large that it had to be moved out onto the lawn in front of the house with the resulting irony that Alice Randall ended up speaking from the front porch of the building in which Mitchell had written *Gone with the Wind* over seventy years earlier. Protesters paraded outside the fence, carrying signs that read, "The Wind Will Always Blow In Atlanta" and "Alice – Write Your Own Book." Dressed in a Confederate uniform, protester John Hall declared, "This is not a Southern event. This is a typical big city, New York-type event, a thing that happens in a place where standards don't exist." Rita Kingston added, "I felt I needed to let her know she's a liar and a plagiarist. Margaret Mitchell would be spinning in her grave."[35]

Inside the fence, Randall shouted down anyone who attempted to engage in a discussion with her about the merits of Mitchell's book, including Margaret Mitchell House employee, Kelsey Aguirre, at whom Randall shouted, "If you don't think that was racist, it's because you read 'Gone With the Wind,' internalized it and loved it when you were young, in my opinion. My own mother was damaged by this book and has all kinds of problems with racial identity. You are my example of another generation of black women damaged by 'Gone With the Wind'!" When Mary Rose Taylor attempted to settle the crowd and Randall by reminding everyone that they were there to create "a dialogue of building bridges and not one of tearing down," Randall lashed out at Taylor, saying, "I'm not going to debate another employee of the house." Randall spoke to the

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[34] Don O'Briant, " 'Done Gone' author enters Tara's turf," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 12 July 2001, D1.
[35] Jill Vejnoska, "Author stirs harsh 'Wind' in Tara land." *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 13 July 2001, 1B.

crowd for about seventy-five minutes, then announced, "It's all over but the shouting," as she went into the Visitors Center to begin signing books.[36]

The Alice Randall event proved to be a turning point in the history of the Margaret Mitchell House and the Center for Southern Literature. In March 2002 *Creative Loafing*, Atlanta's most widely read weekly newspaper, featured a cover story on the Margaret Mitchell House. Entitled "This house is on fire," reporter Tray Butler compared the house to the city of Atlanta – scarred by fire, "caught in the crossfire between developers and preservationists, relics of the Old South pitted against New South progress," and both "struggling with their own identities, striving to prove . . . that the sins of slavery and segregation really can be forgiven." The Margaret Mitchell House had begun to emerge "as a literary crossroads, a cultural center as well as a roundtable for discussing the city's racial rift," with events fostering discussions "on subjects that, traditionally, Atlantans just don't talk about. It's either extremely ironic or astoundingly appropriate that this type of dialogue is taking place under the auspices of Mitchell's name," added Butler.[37]

Expounding upon the role that she envisioned the Center for Southern Literature playing in Atlanta, Mary Rose Taylor explained, "race makes everything very complicated in Atlanta. Therefore, literature and the embrace of literature takes on that sort of complexity. I think Atlanta is not comfortable with controversy. And literature provokes. Really good literature can be purposefully controversial." Taylor certainly had grabbed a handful of controversy with the Alice Randall appearance. The invitation to Randall to appear on "such a symbolic podium" had "angered members of the

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Tray Butler, "This house is on fire," *Creative Loafing*, 6 March 2002, 45.

[Margaret Mitchell] Trust," the legal protectors of the Mitchell estate, but Taylor stood by her decision, saying, "I think eyes have been opened perhaps to what we're trying to do. I know that when we held firm on our invitation to Alice Randall, I got a call from Pearl [Cleage]. . . . Pearl had been reluctant to speak at the Margaret Mitchell House. But she said, 'The next time you issue an invitation, I'll accept.'"[38]

To say that Cleage had been "reluctant to speak at the Margaret Mitchell House" was a gross understatement, of course. Cleage had been one of the most outspoken opponents of the reconstruction effort, and despite the Alice Randall event, according to Butler, Cleage remained "skeptical of the house's basic symbolism." While she thought it was "great they had Alice Randall," Cleage said, "I still don't honor [*Gone With the Wind*]. It's pro-slavery propaganda—exciting pro-slavery propaganda, but definitely propaganda. And good propaganda is always seductive. That's what makes it good. Sort of like Leni Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. You can't consider the filmmaking without acknowledging that it was pro-Nazi propaganda."[39]

The next year, in October of 2003, Cleage appeared at the Decatur library to talk about her new novel entitled *Some Things I Thought I'd Never Do*. The event was co-sponsored by the Margaret Mitchell House's Center for Southern Literature.

"A Marriage Made in Old Atlanta Heaven"

According to Mary Rose Taylor, "By operating as a tourist venue by day and a literary center by night, the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum has won both national and international acclaim." She cited the Association of American Librarians' naming of the house as a national literary landmark and inclusion among the ranks of the

[38] Ibid., 46.
[39] Ibid., 47.

International Association of Literary House Museums as proof of the Margaret Mitchell's House worldwide fame and recognition. The Margaret Mitchell House hosted 50,000 visitors a year and was "a superstar among the world's great books and movies," claimed Taylor in an address to the Atlanta Rotary Club, and "the Margaret Mitchell House, like the Martin Luther King National Historic Site, has become one of Atlanta's cultural icons."[40]

Iconic status or not, the Margaret Mitchell House struggled financially. Although the house was drawing over 50,000 visitors a year and had an annual budget of $1 million, it had no endowment.[41] In July of 2004, Mary Rose Taylor announced that the Margaret Mitchell House was merging with the Atlanta History Center. A new executive director of the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum would be named, while Taylor would continue as the director of the Center for Southern Literature. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* proclaimed the merger "a marriage made in Old Atlanta heaven," reminding readers that Margaret Mitchell's father, Eugene Mitchell, was a co-founder of the Atlanta Historical Society in 1926. According to the *AJC*, "The union creates an institution that is expected to offer a revitalized focus on Southern culture, while enabling both facilities to reach bigger audiences, share costs and maximize fund-raising." Mary Rose Taylor's main focus seemed to be financial. "We had $500,000 in cash reserves, but the second fire took it," she stated, adding, "We needed an infusion of capital, so this made sense." Taylor explained that although "the Mitchell House has balanced its books every year but one, the institution could never grow in the face of never-ending demands." The house and the adjacent movie museum needed more than $200,000 in

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[40] Mary Rose Taylor to the Atlanta Rotary Club, 1 December 2004.
[41] Tom Sabulis and Jim Auchmutey, " 'GWTW' house pairs up with History Center," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 21 July 2004, A1.

repairs. "Every time I turned around, there was something else," exclaimed Taylor, adding that "now someone else can worry about the roof."[42]

Culmination of a Vision

Almost two years after the merger in March 2006, in what can only be described as another strange twist in the very twisted tale of the Margaret Mitchell House, Pearl Cleage appeared at the Center for Southern Literature to promote her new novel, *Baby Brother's Blues*. The staff of the Margaret Mitchell House were admittedly nervous as they awaited the arrival of Cleage. When asked how they had managed to get Cleage to agree to come to this site that she had once described as "an insult to African-American people," Margaret Mitchell House Executive Director Diane Lewis replied, "we asked her through her publicist, and she said 'yes.' We weren't sure if she realized she had actually committed to come here, so we confirmed with her several times," Lewis added.[43] Following an introduction by Literary Center director Julie Bookman, Cleage stepped on to the podium and delivered the following remarks:

> Before I talk about my own writing and about my new book, Baby Brother's Blues, I want to say a few words about how weird it is to be standing in the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum after so many years of refusing to darken its doorway out of respect for my ancestors who were held in bondage one state over, right outside of Montgomery, Alabama. Matters of race are always complex and multi-layered. If one is to have any hope of being understood, it is usually wise to begin at the beginning…
>
> I read Gone With the Wind when I was eleven years old. That was 1959, the same year Miles Davis recorded "Kind of Blue," and Fidel Castro marched into Havana. The book had already sold more copies than any other book except the Bible, according to people who keep track of such things, and the movie had brought the saga of Scarlett and Rhett to the screen in a way that fueled female romantic fantasies for years to come, and still does.

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Diane Lewis, conversation with author, Atlanta, Ga., 21 March 2006.

But not at my house. At my house, Scarlett O'Hara was correctly identified to me as a slave owner, and therefore, unworthy of the emotional investment one must make in the main character of any novel worth its salt. "She would have owned us," my mother said, "just like she owned her other slaves. If you want to identify with somebody in the story, you better look at Prissy or Mammy."

That said, she left me alone, clutching my drugstore paperback copy of the offending volume and considering my options. *Option One:* I could take my thumb out of the novel where it was carefully holding my place, close the book, and never open it again. Even as I articulated that possibility, I knew it was unacceptable. The slave owning Scarlett had already made the first of many attempts to confess her undying love to Ashley Wilkes, a sensitive slave owner from the nearby plantation of Twelve Oaks.

Being Ashley, he had politely declined her affections and gently confessed he was engaged to marry his cousin, the slave owning, but saintly Miss Melanie Hamilton. Awash in rage and humiliation, Scarlett had just been confronted by one Mr. Rhett Butler, a dashing slave owner from South Carolina, who was not, we had already been informed, *received* in the best homes in Charleston, not because he was a slave owner, but because he had taken a girl out of for a buggy ride without a chaperone. That was bad enough, but now he had heard everything and Scarlett was *too through.* This was no place to stop the story. Things were just getting interesting.

Option Two: I could take my mother's admonition to heart and transfer my affections from the tempestuous, slave owning Scarlett to the long suffering, hard working, middle aged Mammy, who seemed to have no other name, or the empty headed, but excitable Prissy, whose mother had neglected to instruct her properly in the art of midwifery, much to the surprise of Miss Melanie who was in heavy labor with Ashley's first child. But that was no fun! What eleven year old black girl on the west side of Detroit, Michigan, wants to fantasize being some white girls' personal property for four hundred pages?

Option Three: I could finish reading the book the way I'd been reading it, open to the skill of the storyteller, but fully conscious of the evil of the system of slavery, which in Gone With the Wind, is always seen as "the good old days." In other words, I could read the book as myself, knowing what I know, and *being what I be.* I didn't have to pretend to be the master or the slave. I could just be a fully engaged reader, who also happened to be a little black girl, on the all black west side of Detroit, growing up in a black nationalist household where Rhett Butler's charms were lost on my mother, much less the more subtle charms of the aforementioned Mr. Wilkes. It was no contest. *Option Three it is,* I thought, and curled up to get in a few more pages before lights out.

I loved the book, from first page to last. And my mother didn't need to worry. I identified with Scarlett and Melanie only in the sense of following their struggles

and sorrows, their losses and love affairs, with great curiosity. I wondered about the choices they made, and the consequences of those choices. When the South lost the war and Miss Scarlett had to work her own fields, I was glad, but I still hoped she'd be able to do it, and acquire in the process the compassion that comes with seeing yourself as a human being, connected to all the other human beings, by blood and bone and sinew and stories, so that the *idea* of buying and selling other people would become inconceivable, even to Miss Scarlett.

But that wasn't the story Margaret Mitchell was telling, so Scarlett never learned that lesson, just like she never learned the contents of her heart, until it was too late, and Rhett Butler had already delivered his most famous line and walked his dashing, *frankly my dear, I don't give a damn* ass out the front door and out of her life forever, (bad sequels and constant speculation notwithstanding). And even at eleven years old, as I closed the now dog eared paperback slowly with the satisfaction we always feel at the end of a well told tale, I knew Scarlett's life was still tied to fantasy instead of truth, and I knew that way of living brought her to a moment the likes of which I only wanted to know in literature and not in my own life.

I was, of course, too young then to understand the exquisitely random nature of mutually endless love. That came later just like my presence here tonight, after *years* of refusing to set foot in this house. After *years* of publicly obeying my mother's command to reject a work that humanizes, glamorizes, and rewards slave owners. After all those years, here I stand at last, barely resisting the urge to burn sage, and cast spells, and howl my ancestors' pain until the spirits weep, *but resisting,* because I realize none of that is necessary. *All I have to do is keep on writing.* My offering is my books. I write for a living in a state where I would have been executed for even knowing how to read, *but not any more.*

So I offer my books to the memory of my ancestors, *and yours,* and I am grateful for the power of the story teller, from the times when we gathered around camp fires to hear the tales of our tribe, to this day, when we have to turn off our electronic tethers before we can talk face to face, as the fragile, fallible, human creatures that we are.

Because I know this to be true. If I tell the truth of my tribe, and you tell the truth of your tribe, what we will find is, that it is the same truth. Which is really why I'm here. Because I don't believe most people love <u>Gone With the Wind</u> because they long for a return to the days when some people owned other people like livestock. I know that's not what made me risk my mother's wrath. It was the power of the word, the seduction of the story, and the skill of a writer who could only have told it better if she had understood that Mammy and Prissy and Uncle Peter and Big Sam *each had their own spark of divine fire!* And what would that book have been like?

> But Margaret Mitchell didn't live long enough to write that book, so I'm left to take comfort in the fact that the fictional Miss Scarlett, and her slave owning real life counterparts, lost the war, leaving me free to read and write and read and write and read and write some more. *And I do. And I will.* Guided, as always, by the words of Langston Hughes, who said, "Life is a big sea, full of many fish. I let down my nets, and pull."
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> And that's all I have to say about that.[44]

There was more to say, of course, and for about an hour Cleage engaged in a dialogue with the mostly female, racially diverse audience whose members seemed appreciative of her openness and willingness to discuss just about any topic from her new book to Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, whom Cleage envisioned as a villain in an upcoming book. Throughout the session, the issue of race arose repeatedly. "It's always difficult to talk about race," said Cleage, especially "in a place devoted to a book that is still problematic," adding that "In Atlanta we tend to talk about race like it's still 1952 – like we have black folks and white folks and that's all."[45]

Cleage's appearance marked a significant moment at the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum. The appearance of one of the site's most vocal opponents and her thoughtful articulation of the problematic nature of Mitchell's work must have been exactly what Mary Rose Taylor had envisioned when she created the Center for Southern Literature. As Cleage explained, "The way I understand the world is by writing. This is the Center for Southern Literature, and I am a southern writer."[46] Unfortunately, Taylor was not there to witness Cleage's appearance, having retired from her position as Director of the Center for Southern Literature the year before.

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[44] Pearl Cleage at the Center for Southern Literature, Atlanta, Ga., 21 March 2006, transcript sent by e-mail to author, 5 April 2006.
[45] Pearl Cleage at the Center for Southern Literature.
[46] Ibid.

CHAPTER 7–THE POWER OF THE STORYTELLER

> If you want to see a sequel to *Gone With the Wind*, look around you at the city Margaret Mitchell made famous.
>
> Richard Harwell[1]

For more than seventy years Atlanta has wrestled with the legacy of *Gone with the Wind*. The city's uncomfortable relationship with the book's author began even earlier, as Margaret Mitchell alternately attempted to conform to the rules imposed upon someone in her social position and defied the conventions of polite society. As historian Joel Williamson wrote, ". . . she was a woman who danced on the edge of her culture—sometimes in, sometimes out."[2] The images Margaret Mitchell created shaped Atlanta's identity in ways that have often flummoxed and frustrated city boosters, yet into the twenty-first century, *Gone with the Wind* remains an important component of the city's heritage tourism program with the Margaret Mitchell House serving as the centerpiece of the *Gone with the Wind* memory marketplace.

If the staying power of the Margaret Mitchell House in Atlanta is confirmed by the tens of thousands of visitors who flock to the site each year, the significance of the site to heritage tourism in Atlanta is indicated by the disembodied voice on the city's public transportation system, MARTA, which announces the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum as a point of interest accessible from the Midtown rail station. The Margaret Mitchell House has become a fixture on Atlanta's cultural landscape a mere decade after it was destroyed by fire for the second time, even though the *Gone with the Wind* mania that swept through the city periodically over the years now seems to be at a

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[1] Richard Harwell, "The Big Book: Fifty Years of *Gone With the Wind*," exhibition brochure, June 1986, AHS, GWTW Misc., GWTW Spring 1986, file in the possession of Don Rooney, AHC, Atlanta.
[2] Williamson, "How Black was Rhett Butler?" 105.

low ebb. Much of the credit for the survival of the Margaret Mitchell House must go to the Margaret Mitchell House Board, and particularly to Mary Rose Taylor, who was willing to tackle head-on the critics and the naysayers who argued that the Dump was not worth saving and that Mitchell and her work were not worth memorializing. By expanding the scope of the Margaret Mitchell House's mission to include the Center for Southern Literature, Taylor and the board broadened the site's appeal and established a forum for discussion of issues that no one could have imagined happening in the shadow of the Dump twenty years earlier.

For Taylor the success of the Center for Southern Literature has been tempered by the less-than-spectacular outcome of the merger with the AHC. "I thought there was a new generation in power at the History Center that saw the world the way I did and operated with the same kind of ethics," Taylor reflected wistfully in May 2007. Her decision to hand over control of the Margaret Mitchell House and to retire from the day-to-day management of the Center for Southern Literature was precipitated by family health problems—her husband had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 1996, and Taylor herself suffered from lupus—and by her firm belief that the merger of the two museums would strengthen both institutions. She approached AHC executive director Jim Bruns about the merger because she believed that the institutions had compatible missions and that combining the operations would be mutually beneficial. The transition of power proved more difficult than Taylor imagined, however; and by the time of Pearl Cleage's appearance at the Center for Southern Literature in March 2006, Taylor no longer felt comfortable at the very institution she had created.[3]

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[3] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.

"Throughout the merger process, Jim [Bruns] kept talking about 'excess capacity' in areas like development, exhibits, education, and archives, meaning his staff could easily take us on—that the merger would play to the synergies between the two institutions," she later recalled, "but as I discovered later the staff did not see it that way. Consequently the MMH was left on its own with one caveat. Any new self-funded initiatives suggested by staff or board at the MMH were subjected to a lethargic approval process at the AHC that more often than not killed the proposed idea. In an era of tightening resources for cultural institutions, the merger of some institutions to achieve economies of scale while strengthening both entities is not a bad idea in my opinion. It's just not working in this situation."[4] The Margaret Mitchell House, with its small staff of thirteen, had always been a relatively tightly run operation that was able to respond quickly to new initiatives, while the AHC was a much larger, more bureaucratic organization. The blending of the two organizations, it seems, left no one satisfied.

Repairs to the house and surrounding buildings in 2004 and the revamping of the exhibit in the movie museum at the Margaret Mitchell House in 2005 had cost around $300,000 and left little money available for new interpretive programs or exhibits. Promises made by Bruns regarding shared resources were soon forgotten, and Margaret Mitchell House executive director Diane Lewis found herself with little development or curatorial support as she wrestled with infrastructure repairs and day-to-day operations. In 2006 over 30,000 people visited the museum, down considerably from two years earlier when almost 50,000 visitors passed through the door. Although the number of guests had declined, those who did visit the site seemed happy with their experience according to a sampling of recent entries in the visitor comment log at the Margaret

[4] Mary Rose Taylor, e-mail message to author, 26 May 2007.

Mitchell House. The comments read like quotes from a studio marketing campaign—"Great! Fantastic! Terrific! The greatest movie ever! I came to Atlanta just to see this!" The museum claimed almost 1,000 members in 2006, who, in exchange for an annual fee ranging from $35 to $5,000, received an array of benefits such as free admission to the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum and many of its literary programs, along with a discount in the museum gift shop. The Center for Southern Literature hosted fifty-two events in 2006 with more than 5,500 attendees. Fund-raisers remained essential to the financial well-being of the institution.[5]

In the face of a decline in the number of visitors, the AHC board began developing a strategy to establish an endowment for the Margaret Mitchell House. Representatives from a leading management consulting firm were hired to assess the operation and proposed that the Margaret Mitchell House sell most of the two acres of its Midtown complex, retaining only the house and the small green space surrounding the house. The sale would generate enough money to establish a $5 million endowment and allow for the construction of a new visitors center and interpretive exhibits. Mary Rose Taylor and several of the board members were dismayed by this development, which represented a significant downsizing of the museum's footprint in Midtown. "The land was our dowry, I guess," said Taylor, adding "I just didn't realize the dowry was for sale." Taylor, like other members of the Margaret Mitchell House board felt that the sale of the land was a quick fix that compromised the future growth of the museum.[6] Apparently most of the AHC board members had not embraced the philosophy of Margaret Mitchell's fictional patriarch, Gerald O'Hara, who reminded his daughter

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[5] Diane Lewis, e-mail message to author, 25 May 2007.
[6] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.

Scarlett that "Land is the only thing in the world that amounts to anything, for 'tis the only thing in this world that lasts."[7]

As the number of visitors at the Margaret Mitchell House and Museum seemed to stagnate, the AHC's Buckhead campus received a boost from a temporary exhibit of the papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., from mid-January to mid-May 2007. The exhibit featured over 600 artifacts from the collection of over 10,000 documents that had once belonged to King and had recently been purchased by the city of Atlanta from the King estate for $32 million. Over 65,000 visitors streamed through the history center to view the exhibit that chronicled King's life from his student days up to his death in 1968. According to vice president of operations, Sean Thorndike, the King display was the most popular temporary exhibit in the AHC's history.[8]

While exhibits such as the King papers drew a large, racially diverse audience, many Atlantans still perceived the AHC as a white, elitist organization. And in spite of the success of the King papers exhibit, all was not well at the AHC. Aggressive expansion plans over the past decade led to a financial crisis that required substantial staff reductions and a rethinking of the institution's operations. Personnel cuts were not the only cost-saving measures undertaken. The elimination of the quarterly journal, *Atlanta History*, marked the end of an era for the Atlanta Historical Society, which had published the journal since 1927. The departure of Jim Bruns in the spring of 2007 seemed to bring to a close a tumultuous chapter in the history of the history center.[9]

Meanwhile, in Clayton County, the future of the Road to Tara exhibit in the train depot welcome center seemed uncertain. For several years the prospect of establishing a

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[7] Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*, 36.
[8] Charles Odum, "Exhibit of King's Writings Closes in Ga.," http://www.ajc.com; 5 May 2007.
[9] Don Rooney, telephone conversation.

commuter rail line between Lovejoy, just south of Jonesboro, and downtown Atlanta had been under discussion by state and local government officials as part of an overall transportation enhancement project. The state had received over $100 million, mostly from the federal government, to fund the project. The stumbling block seemed to be how to pay the operating cost of the rail line, estimated at $4 million a year, if the number of riders did not meet projections.[10] Caught in the middle of the dilemma was the Jonesboro railroad depot, which was slated for conversion back to a functioning depot if the commuter rail project moved forward. The Road to Tara Museum was once again in danger of losing its home.

While the Road to Tara Museum still claimed to be hosting almost 20,000 visitors a year, county officials scaled back marketing efforts for the museum. The billboards advertising the museum and the *Gone with the Wind* Historic District signs that earlier dotted the interstate in Clayton County were gone. However, the Clayton County Convention and Visitors Bureau still leaned heavily on the county's association with *Gone with the Wind* as part of its branding strategy with www.visitscarlett.com as the official web site address, and "The Legendary Land of *Gone with the Wind*" as its tagline. The web site invited visitors to come to "the heart of the true South: Clayton County, Georgia, where heritage comes alive!"[11] The $34.95 premiere pass, which gave visitors entrée into the Road to Tara Museum, Stately Oaks Plantation, a trolley tour of historic sites in Jonesboro, the Margaret Mitchell House, and the Atlanta Cyclorama, was still offered as the best option for visitors interested in seeing "Atlanta's must-see Gone With The Wind attractions."

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[10] Paul Donsky, "State DOT prepares to decide rail's fate," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 24 May 2007, D6.
[11] The Official Clayton County Convention and Visitors Bureau Web Site; http://visitscarlett.com.

Although *Gone with the Wind* continued to serve as the foundation for Clayton County's identity in the eyes of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, that image was challenged by some of the county's citizens, such as state legislator Bob Hartley, who led the campaign to rename Tara Boulevard. As Clayton County underwent demographic changes between 1980 and 2000, the enthusiasm for linking the county's identity to *Gone with the Wind* in a spectacular way through the construction of the *Gone with the Wind* theme park abated. Voters soundly rejected the Tara tax and the opportunity to recreate Margaret Mitchell's lost world. Whatever the history of Clayton County might be, there existed a disconnect between its leaders and its citizens when it came to the county's heritage.

Atlanta had its share of disconnects as well. Mary Rose Taylor recalled her dismay during a 1994 meeting of the executive committee of the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau when her queries about an open discussion of the city's history, including its history of race relations, were rebuffed with a terse "we can't talk about race." According to some white civic leaders, the dark days of segregation were a blot on the city's past and were considered too controversial to discuss in a public forum. "To talk about Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement without talking about segregation and what came before made no sense to me," said Taylor. For Taylor, the Margaret Mitchell House and the Center for Southern Literature provided a venue for such discussion. According to Taylor, "Our mission was to use *Gone with the Wind* to reopen a dialog and bring people in. While nobody wanted to talk about race, everybody

had an opinion on *Gone with the Wind.* And one thing leads to another, which is what we do with the literary programs. We foster dialog."[12]

In TomWolfe's book, *A Man in Full*, fictional Atlanta mayor Wesley Dobbs Jordan, offers the following explanation for his refusal to attend an exhibit opening at the city's art center:

> I don't think the Buckhead ladies or white folks generally have any idea how little interest black folks have in these art shows of theirs. And that's because they don't understand their own motivation for making such a big to-do over 'Western art.' When they put on those shows, they're celebrating their people's cultural accomplishments and saying, 'We're great! Creativity and talent are all ours! History is on our side!' Oh, every now and then they'll have a show by some black artist, but that's only out of a feeling of guilt . . . or enlightenment . . . or of: 'See? We include everybody—but notice how few are up to our standards!' They're cultural chauvinists, but that thought has never so much as crossed their minds. Our people have no interest in seeing their black Mayor at one of these celebrations of white cultural chauvinism, and this black Mayor has even less interest.[13]

Perhaps this passage describes the dynamic that surrounds some cultural events in the city of Atlanta. Or perhaps, as Pearl Cleage said, "If I tell the truth of my tribe, and you tell the truth of your tribe, what we will find is, that is the same truth," and it is through the power of the storyteller that "we can talk face to face, as the fragile, fallible, human creatures that we are."

The power of the storyteller is on display at each of the three sites explored in this study. The sites reveal the power of Margaret Mitchell's book and David O. Selznick's film to create indelible images that have shaped the identity of Atlanta and the South. The sites also reveal the power inherent in telling the story of the creation of *Gone with the Wind*, both as book and film. Case studies of the process through which

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[12] Mary Rose Taylor, interview.
[13] Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full* (New York: Farrar, Straus Giroux, 1998), 194-195.

interpretations of *Gone with the Wind* were developed at the Atlanta History Center, the Margaret Mitchell House, and in Clayton County reveal the truth behind Michael Frisch's notion of a shared authority in public history—that scholars, designers, audiences, and the media come together to shape the message. The dialog that surrounds this creative activity is often revealing, although the revelations are sometimes unexpected.

For the staff at the Atlanta History Center, *The Facts Behind the Fiction* represented an opportunity to challenge the public to engage in critical thinking about the most popular publishing–viewing extravaganza of all time. Survey results indicated that the public was entertained but not engaged. In Clayton County, the long struggle to establish a *Gone with the Wind* attraction offered citizens an opportunity to ponder the ways in which the distant past might shape their identity in the future. The end result was a rather modest nod to the past in the form of the Road to Tara museum, but a resounding rejection of any major, long-term commitment to a fictional past that conjures up equal measures of pride and shame. The Margaret Mitchell House has maintained its connection to the past and leveraged the power of place through its preservation of the Dump and has seemingly transcended the burden of southern history through its Center for Southern Literature. At the moment Alice Randall rose to speak on the front porch of the Margaret Mitchell House, the site was transformed from serving as a shrine to the Old South to a venue where difficult subjects can be broached. Even the house's most vocal opponent, Pearl Cleage, has found common ground for a meaningful discussion of race, religion, and myriad issues that are difficult if not impossible to discuss in other forums.

In the epilogue of a recently published collection of essays entitled *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, historian Edward Linenthal posits

that "too often, in too many ways, the enduring legacies of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and even the modern civil rights era stick like a fishbone in the nation's throat."[14] And while there are many voices that argue against presenting these fishbone stories to the public, Linenthal argues, "Conscientious remembrance is more than a necessary expansion of the nation's narrative. It is an act of moral engagement, a declaration that there are other American lives too long forgotten that count." Citing *Slaves in the Family* author Edward Ball, Linenthal adds, "Reconciliation is about being able to look the tragedy of American history in the eye. It's about coming to terms with the violence and suffering, chaos and anger and fear in our heritage, and saying: 'We accept this, and together we will transcend it.'"[15]

The case studies in this dissertation illustrate how difficult it can be to "look the tragedy of American history in the eye" and to talk about the "tough stuff" of American memory. All three sites reveal glimpses of Atlanta's conflicted identity. But as the "birthplace of *Gone with the Wind*," the Margaret Mitchell House has been subjected to more debate and intense scrutiny than either the Atlanta History Center or the Road to Tara museum in Clayton County. Even the debates surrounding the attempts to construct a theme park in Clayton County focused on more practical issues such as economic development and financial accountability. The discussion surrounding the efforts to save the Margaret Mitchell House, by contrast, were emotionally charged and cut to the heart of the toughest stuff of American memory—issues of race and slavery, America's original sin. The Margaret Mitchell House became the figurative and literal flashpoint for this debate. The power of place gave Mitchell's creation its greatest energy at this

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[14] Edward T. Linenthal, "Epilogue: Reflections," *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 213.
[15] Ibid., 224.

"tough little patch of history" in Midtown Atlanta and provided a focal point for a discussion of subjects that rarely find a forum. Perhaps Mary Rose Taylor is correct in her assertion that it is through literature that meaningful dialog can occur, and the power of the storyteller remains the best hope for reconciliation.

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