

## OCMULGEE: THE MAKING OF A MONUMENT

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### I. Introduction

The Great Depression, typified by the stock market crash in October of 1929, forced numerous changes on American society. Money was short and unemployment high. It must have been difficult to find a silver lining in the dark cloud of depression. The city of Macon, Georgia, however, did just that in the form of Indian mounds. But, General Walter Alexander Harris had to convince the citizenry that their centuries-old earthen mounds were an important local resource. The mounds, he argued, represented a means of immediate employment through archeological excavation and a future tourist site which could bring money into the community. These two goals were soon joined by a desire for the area to become a unit of the National Park Service.

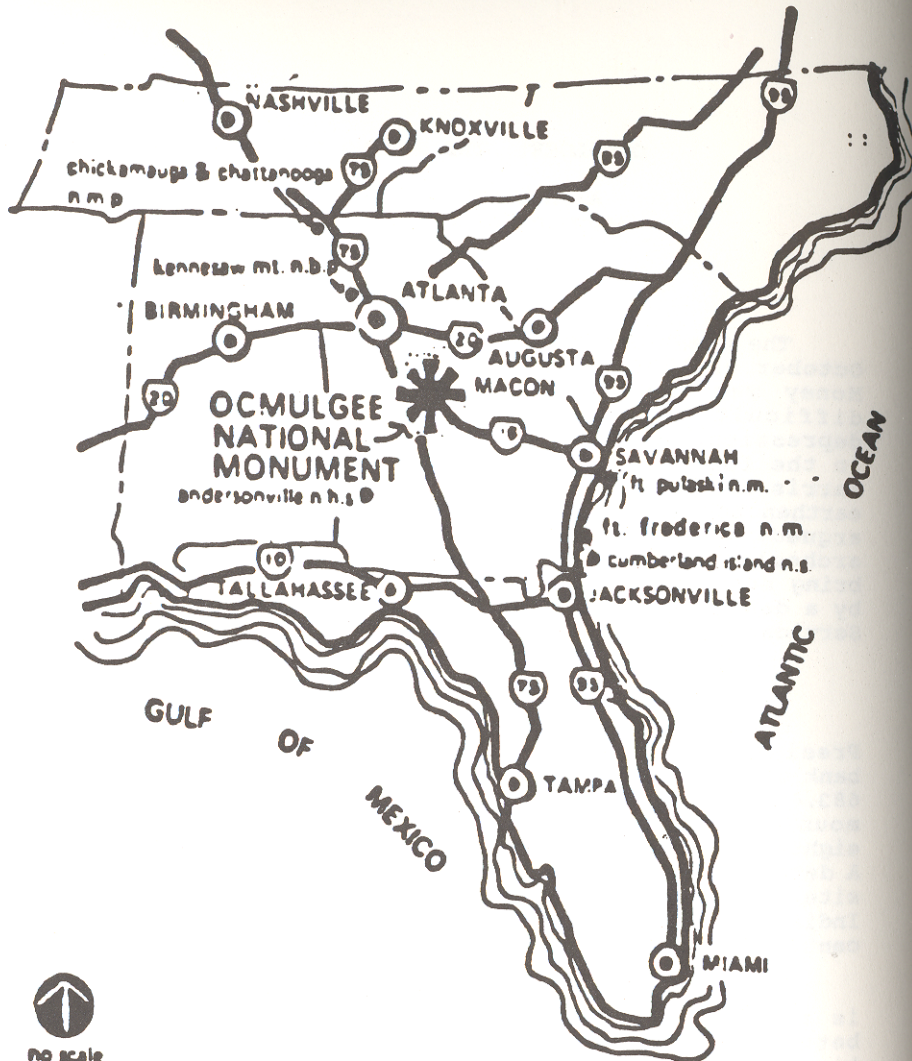
### II. Background

Ocmulgee National Monument, established by proclamation of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936, is located on the east bank of the Ocmulgee River in Macon, Georgia (Map 1). Within its 683.48 acres are prehistoric trenches, nine earthen Indian mounds, a reconstructed earthlodge, a late seventeenth - early eighteenth century trading post site, and a Civil War earthwork. A detached 45 acre section of the monument, known as the Lamar site, is located three miles downriver and contains two earthen Indian mounds (Map 2). The monument grounds also include a 19th century farm residence and modern visitor center.

It is interesting to note that the monument's main section is part of the geographical fall line, a transitional zone between Georgia's piedmont region and coastal plain. At one time, this area was part of the ancient Indian agricultural fields which ran along the river and came to be known as the Ocmulgee Old Fields.

### III. Management and Use Before 1930

Indians arrived in the Macon Plateau area approximately 12,000 years ago after a southeastward migration across North America. These nomadic hunters, or Paleo-Indians, were succeeded by hunters and gatherers of the Archaic period (9000-1000 B.C.), incipient agriculturalists of the Woodland period (1000 B.C.-A.D.



MAP 1

**THE REGION**  
**OCMULGEE NATIONAL MONUMENT**  
**GEORGIA**  
**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**  
**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

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900), and established farmers of the Early Mississippian period (A.D. 900-1100). Prior to the end of the latter era, Macon Plateau people also occupied the downstream site now called Lamar. These people had developed, by about A.D. 1350, a new culture, named Lamar, that blended Mississippian and Woodland elements and from which the site takes its name. In 1540, Hernando De Soto encountered people of the Lamar culture, possibly at the Lamar site, and established the first European contact in the area. The Lamar people's decline was possibly due to disease and cultural disruption caused by European contact. Remnants of the culture had relocated along the Chattahoochee River by 1650. These Indians, known to the English as Lower Creeks, returned to central Georgia about 1690. They settled at the Lamar site near an English trading post on the Macon Plateau. Their villages joined the unsuccessful Indian uprising known as the Yamassee War in 1715. At the conclusion of the war, the Lamar people again returned to the Chattahoochee, but continued to frequent the Macon Plateau area until the early 1800s.

The most noticeable archeological features of the Macon Plateau are the earthen mounds constructed by the Early Mississippians. These mounds, along with earthlodges and fortification trenches, were built sometime before the waning of the culture around A.D. 1100. Although the fate of these Indians is unknown, their mounds attracted attention during the years that followed. In 1739, one of General James Oglethorpe's rangers first described the mounds. Subsequent accounts were written by James Adair (published 1775), the botanist William Bartram (1775), and Charles C. Jones, Jr. (1873).<sup>2</sup>

The area continued to exert an influence over the Indians after the time of Adair and Bartram. In 1805, the Creeks ceded most of the land on the east side of the Ocmulgee River to the United States government. Excluded from the cession were 15 square miles containing the Indian mounds of the Old Ocmulgee Fields. The Creeks ceded more land in 1821, but it was not until 1826 that the 15 square miles of Ocmulgee Fields were officially ceded to the United States. The land was auctioned off to settlers by 1828 and the Macon Plateau became home for yet another culture.

The Plateau underwent extensive transformation during the nineteenth century. During the existence of Fort Hawkins in the early 1800s, the mounds were covered with large oak trees and there was a walk on at least one mound which led through many roses and flowers planted by personnel stationed at the fort.<sup>3</sup> During the 1820s, a carriage road led to the area and the "mounds were the favorite places for excursions by the gay society of the villagers and afterwards citizens of Macon."<sup>4</sup>

Railroad cuts destroyed a portion of the Lesser Temple Mound in 1843 and much of the Funeral Mound during the early 1870s.



The Dunlap House, a plantation cottage, was constructed on the Macon Plateau in 1856. Confederate troops (Macon Home Guard) built a U-shaped earthwork south of the house during the early 1860s to protect a trestle over Walnut Creek.

Near the turn of the century additional changes occurred on the Macon Plateau. The McDougal Mound suffered damage when it was used for fill dirt during the construction of east Macon. By the early 1920s, the plateau had served as home for a fertilizer factory, brickyard, open-pit clay mine, railroad roundhouse, and dairy farm. The mounds were also used for hill climbing by motorcycle enthusiasts during the 1920s.<sup>5</sup>

#### IV. Preservation and Speculation

Efforts to preserve the Indian mounds of the Macon Plateau were begun during the 1920s by General Walter A. Harris, a prominent Macon attorney and local historian. Harris wrote the Bureau of American Ethnology on February 3, 1922, and expressed an interest in acquiring and preserving the Indian remnants of the Ocmulgee Fields.<sup>6</sup> His letter was acknowledged by the Smithsonian Institution, but nothing more developed and the issue apparently lay dormant for seven years. In 1929, Harris again attempted to attract the interest of the Smithsonian. He wrote the Bureau of American Ethnology in April, suggesting that the city of Macon provide funds for Smithsonian-led excavations.<sup>7</sup> Bureau Chief M.W. Stirling arrived in Macon 20 days later and visited the Indian mounds. Although Stirling recommended the mounds be excavated, it was not until November of 1933 that Maconites Walter Harris, Dr. Charles C. Harrold, and Linton Solomon persuaded the Macon Junior Chamber of Commerce to support a movement to purchase and restore the mounds. The Society for Georgia Archaeology, Macon Historical Society, and Junior Chamber of Commerce then began the process of land acquisition. The organizations also initiated efforts to obtain labor for the project under some New Deal relief programs. This was achieved in December, 1933, with the help of Representative Carl Vinson of the Sixth District. The Civil Works Administration (CWA) granted funds for excavations at the Ocmulgee site and the Smithsonian agreed to oversee the project. The Smithsonian appointed anthropologist Arthur R. Kelly of Harvard University to direct the excavations and James A. Ford as his assistant.

Preservation of the "Indian Mounds" was the prime interest of local organizations in obtaining New Deal labor. The Civil Works Administration, however, was more concerned with employment of the local population. The availability of a local labor supply resulted in the establishment of a New Deal project near Macon. The CWA, once it began archeological excavations supported the goals of local preservationists.

The federal CWA project was designed as a temporary measure ease unemployment. The Ocmulgee project, which began December

20, 1933, was therefore switched to a state sponsored CWA project the following February. Archeological responsibilities were transferred to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in April, 1934. The initial excavations received national attention and created excitement throughout the local community. Some Maconites viewed the Ocmulgee Fields as the "lost colony" of Roanoke, while others envisioned Macon becoming a resort city with an annual Indian corn festival.<sup>8</sup> Citizens speculated about the past and future of the Indian mounds, while General Harris and others worked to assure their immediate protection. Prompted by these local leaders, Representative Vinson contacted the National Park Service about the possibility of establishing a national park or monument at the Ocmulgee Fields. An answer to Vinson's letter came on January 6, 1934, only seventeen days after excavations began on the Macon Plateau. National Park Service Director, Arno B. Cammerer, replied that "the Office of National Park, Buildings, and Reservations (the National Park Service) will be very glad to investigate these mounds to determine their value."<sup>9</sup> With Smithsonian excavations proceeding, few Macon citizens questioned the value of "their" mounds. Legislation to make them part of the National Park Service soon followed.

#### V. Legislation and Land Acquisition

Representative Carl Vinson introduced a bill in the House of Representatives on February 5, 1934, to establish Ocmulgee National Park. The bill, H.R. 7653, requested that the Secretary of the Interior secure 2,000 acres of land on behalf of the United States. It was reported to the House Committee on Public Lands. Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, recommended passage of the bill with the conditions that land acquisition be secured by public or private donation instead of government appropriation, and that the title designation be changed to Ocmulgee National Monument. The Interior Secretary viewed Ocmulgee as having "national-monument character, being similar to lands set apart in Western States for scientific purposes..."<sup>10</sup> The House Committee on Public Lands adopted Ickes' recommendations and submitted the revised legislation to the House on May 15, 1934, in report 1657. The House passed the measure without debate on May 21, 1934.

The Vinson sponsored legislation was introduced February 8, 1934, in the Senate as S.2679 by Georgia Senator Walter F. George. The bill was acted upon on May 22 when the Senate read the measure twice and referred it to the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys. This group incorporated Ickes' suggestions as the House had done and two days later sent the revision back to the Senate in report 1156. The Senate passed the bill on June 6 and on June 14, 1934, approval was received from President Roosevelt authorizing the establishment of Ocmulgee National Monument. However, the task of raising money



from public or private sources with which to purchase the land for the United States government remained. This job became the responsibility of the city of Macon and local organizations.

The Society for Georgia Archaeology, Macon Historical Society, and Macon Junior Chamber of Commerce had tried since November of 1933 to acquire land for the proposed national park. On December 15, 1933, Mound "A" was purchased from Mrs. O.M. Grady along with the Lamar Mounds downriver. Due to limited financial resources, however, no further acquisitions could be made. General Harris invited Macon civic organization representatives to a conference considering the future developments and benefits of the Indian mounds in early April, 1934. Twenty-five groups sent delegates. Each organization endorsed the Indian Mounds project and establishment of a national park.<sup>11</sup> This initial enthusiasm waned, however, when Vinson's bill was revised to prohibit government appropriations for land purchases. The Macon community was proud of "their" mounds, and the national attention they brought, but did not want to be responsible for buying the property. Resentment toward the altered legislation soon turned into an attitude which emitted both pride and perhaps a little selfishness. Harris echoed the frustrations of many Maconites when he told a audience that the city could maintain the mounds if it were responsible for buying them.<sup>12</sup> The National Park Service, worried that local attitudes might threaten passage of Vinson's revised bill, began efforts to "enlighten" the local populace. Park Service Director Arno B. Cammerer described the advantages of establishing a Public Works Administration (PWA) program for construction of roads, recreation facilities, a headquarters, and utility buildings.<sup>13</sup>

Local leaders, although still upset over revisions in the legislation, maintained their desire to protect and preserve the mounds. Another conference of civic organizations was held June 4, 1934, where representatives voted for a city-wide campaign to raise \$8,500, contingent on Senate passage of the park bill. However, a committee of one hundred civic representatives which was to direct the fund raising drive had not been formed when Presidential approval of the bill was received on June 14. Macon's boast of maintaining the mounds, voiced by General Harris a month earlier, became overshadowed by apathy. Maconite Dr. Charles C. Harrold criticized the "disappointing response...from Macon people" and even a year later Dr. Arthur R. Kelly (directing the excavations) stated that "never before...have I seen so little general interest or concern evidenced as in Macon...."<sup>14</sup>

June, July, and August of 1934 brought many visits to Macon by National Park Service personnel who advised on land acquisition and procedures for establishment of a monument. The Macon Historical Society was primarily responsible for land acquisition, and by May of 1935 it had purchased nearly 500 acres



of land for donation to the government. At that point, funds from the Historical Society, Society for Georgia Archaeology, and Macon Junior Chamber of Commerce were once again exhausted. Leaders turned to the general public.

A year earlier the citizenry proposed various means of raising money for the land acquisition. Responses to an editorial by General Harris suggested school children donate money, local citizens pledge various amounts per month, and bonds be issued.<sup>15</sup> No action resulted from these recommendations. On May 15, 1935, however, a fund drive was started by the Macon Junior Chamber of Commerce, a civic committee headed by W.E. Dunwody, and the Jaycees Indian Mounds Committee led by Gus Jones. Attorney W. Horace Vandiver agreed to serve as general secretary for the campaign. The fund drive was scheduled to run for only 17 days until June 1. Hope for quick success was not realized for on June 2, \$2,500 was still needed. The problem was neutralized when the Lions Club donated \$500, contingent on pledges from other civic organizations. The community met this challenge and the subscription drive ended. Money was received from a former governor (Chase Osborn of Michigan), business executives, school children who sold Indian Mound postcards and gave lunch money, and New Deal workers at the mound site.<sup>16</sup> The fund drive monies helped to purchase additional land, but transfer of the property to the United States government presented new problems.

In December 1934, Acting Director of the Park Service, A.E. Demaray, informed Dr. Harrold that transfer of land to the federal government could not take place without maps defining monument boundaries.<sup>17</sup> The following month Demaray wrote Vinson that the monument project was progressing slowly because the Park Service had to locate funds and personnel to obtain proper topographical maps: a task he thought could be accomplished "by persons interested in Macon."<sup>18</sup> Project leaders in Macon became frustrated over the land transfer problem. This led to resentment of the Park Service. Dr. Harrold complained to Demaray in December, 1934, that the Director's men were always in a hurry to return to Washington.<sup>19</sup> Park Service Acting Custodian (Superintendent) for Ocmulgee, Herbert Kahler, confirmed Harrold's attitude some months later when he wrote that "the feeling appears to be present that the Park Service is somewhat indifferent to efforts made by this group [Macon Historical Society]."<sup>20</sup>

The transfer process was also slowed by problems with the deeds and titles to the acquired land. Nathan R. Margold, Solicitor for the Department of Interior, was responsible for examining deeds and titles sent to Washington by the Macon law firm of Harris, Russell, Popper, and Weaver. Margold's examination revealed that, among other things, records were incomplete because of breaks in the chain of title, defects in

lot descriptions, and three unreleased mortgages.<sup>21</sup> Time was required to straighten out the complications. In the meantime, other and more serious land related problems surfaced. These complications involved land owned by the Macon, Dublin and Savannah Railroad Company, and the Bibb Manufacturing Company.

The Macon, Dublin, and Savannah Railroad Company land consisted of an abandoned right-of-way composed of 8.38 acres of land. General Harris, representing the law firm of Harris, Russell, Popper, and Weaver, agreed with Park Service representatives to use condemnation proceedings against the railroad due to technicalities in the company's release provisions. Since the tract was not of use to the railroad, it agreed to relinquish the property in this manner. Acquisition of land from the Bibb Manufacturing was more difficult.

Bibb Manufacturing Company officials cooperated with the Macon Historical Society in 1933 by allowing excavations on company land. In 1935, the Company General Superintendent served as chairperson of the City Council's Finance Committee and helped acquire city support for land purchases made by the Historical Society. Cooperation with the Historical Society, however, did not mean the textile company would react similarly to the National Park Service. While Bibb Company allowed archeological exploration on its property, it was not willing to surrender the high ground it owned at the Funeral Mound. Company officials, although less concerned with other property sought by the government, believed the high ground at the Funeral Mound was the only place for future mill expansion. Therefore, they refused to consider selling that tract since they believed the loss to stockholders could not be justified.<sup>22</sup> Though local leaders tried desperately, they failed in attempts to acquire the property short of condemnation. Not wishing to agitate the prosperous and well established Bibb Company, a compromise was formulated and presented by Dr. Harrold to NPS Acting Assistant Director, Verne Chatelain, on April 23, 1935,:

The line has to stop somewhere, and I honestly think that if we can get all (land) lying to the South of the railroad and the small tract of the Bibb Manufacturing Company lying East of the creek run and North of the railroad that we should be able to travel. The fight to get more will be too bitter and too hard... Mound C is almost torn to pieces at any rate. We can completely tear it down, then rebuild it 200 feet South of its original site....<sup>23</sup>

Two days later Chatelain replied: "I feel a compromise is not the best solution of this problem; but rather than face a stalemate, I shall suggest it...I feel [the property] should be included and you should try to bring it in: the compromise, in other words, should be more properly regarded as a postponement of that addition."<sup>24</sup>

The Bibb Company, elated over what it perceived as victory, donated \$250 the following June to the fund drive for land acquisition in addition to a \$475 subscription by its directors. The Company also promised thirty-eight acres of land if plans for a national monument matured.<sup>25</sup> Its triumph, however, was only temporary for on March 9, 1936, condemnation papers relating to the disputed land were filed against it by District Attorney T. Hoyt Davis on behalf of the United States government.<sup>26</sup>

The Bibb Manufacturing Company fought condemnation proceedings by filing a demurrer on May 30, 1936. It claimed the property in question was immensely important to future expansion and that it was not necessary for the proposed Ocmulgee National Monument. The textile company also challenged the federal government's right to condemn land and establish monuments, prerogatives Bibb attorneys thought belonged to the states under the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution.<sup>27</sup> The United States District Court disagreed with the Bibb Company's argument and overruled the demurrer on June 26. On July 8 appraisers awarded the Macon business \$1,274 for 24.7 acres of land. The company, angry at the ruling, filed an appeal on July 11 and requested a jury hearing. One week later, Bibb officials withdrew their appeal. The final judgement was signed July 25, 1936, by District Judge Bascom S. Deaver. It ordered compensation for the Bibb Company and a \$35 payment to the Macon, Dublin, and Savannah Railroad Company for 8.38 acres, an amount awarded earlier by assessors and not contested by the railroad.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, the Bibb Company donated 33.5 acres to the monument project. This gesture was made possibly to show the Park Service that the company was not really angry and conceivably to keep the business's pride intact.<sup>29</sup>

The award payment was to be made by the Macon Historical Society. Things were once again complicated since the money was sent to Washington, D.C., prior to appeals by the Bibb Manufacturing Company. Three months after the final judgment the funds were still in the capital and proceedings in Macon came to a standstill. Local proponents of the Ocmulgee project grew impatient. They failed to understand that the National Park Service was part of a government bureaucracy which sometimes moved slowly.

Macon citizens supporting the park did, however, have advocates in the ranks of the National Park Service. Olinus Smith, Park Service Engineer, agreed that establishment of a monument was taking too long. He wrote the Deputy Chief Engineer in Washington to explain "just what a condition the Ocmulgee National Monument has reached through inattention and apparent lack of interest [by the National Park Service]."<sup>30</sup> Condemnation payments were finally made and deeds and titles transferred to the federal government. On December 23, 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Ocmulgee National Monument by



Presidential proclamation. With 678 acres acquired and deemed suitable for national monument purposes, the President's proclamation stated that "the Director of the National Park Service, under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, shall have the supervision, management, and control of the monument...."31 The newly established Monument consisted of 678.48 acres, far short of the 2,000 acres originally proposed by the Vinson bill in 1934. Macon businessmen, who at one time dreamed of a 30,000 acre park, game refuge, and fish hatchery, also saw their goal fail to materialize.32 Furthermore, administration of Ocmulgee National Monument was officially and finally the responsibility of the National Park Service. Thus, regardless of disappointments, the people of Macon, and especially General Walter Alexander Harris, triumphed and saw their project come to fruition.

## NOTES

\*This paper was a prize winner in the annual Historical Research and Writing Competition, sponsored by the Federal Archives Atlanta Branch, the GAH, and WSB Radio 750 AM, Atlanta.

1An additional feature, a probable house mound, is located in the main section near the Cornfield Mound. This feature is not easily discernable and has been given the name Mound "X". See Archeology of the North Macon Plateau by J. Mark Williams and Joseph N. Henderson, 1974.

2The account by one of Oglethorpe's rangers is recorded in Travels in the American Colonies, edited by Newton Mereness. Adair, History of the American Indians; Bartram, Travels of William Bartram; and Jones, Antiquity of the Southern Indians also mention the mounds.

3John C. Butler, Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia (Macon, Georgia: J.W. Burke and Company, 1879), p. 51.

4Ibid., p. 52.

5"Country's Most Perfect Mounds Found Near City," Macon Telegraph, November 17, 1933. Harrold Scrapbooks, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, Ga.

6Hale Smith, Analysis of the Lamar Site (Tallahassee, Fla: Florida State University, 1973), p. iii.

7Ibid.

8"Macon's Civic Spirit Wins," Macon Telegraph, June 7, 1934, Harrold Scrapbooks. (article labeled June 7, 1933).

9Letter, Cammerer to Vinson, January 6, 1934, National Park Service Central Classified Files (Ocmulgee National Monument File), located in the National Archives, Washington D.C. (hereinafter cited as CCF).

10Letter, Ickes to Chairman Rene L. DeRouen, Committee on Public Lands, House of Representatives, April 16, 1934, NPS Office of Legislation, Washington D.C.

11"Indian Mound Plan Backed by Civic Bodies," Macon Telegraph, Macon, Georgia, April 13, 1934, Harrold Scrapbooks.

12"Hope Abandoned for Mound Aid," Macon Telegraph, April 20, 1934, Harrold Scrapbooks.

13"U.S. Park Service Wants Mounds Developed," Macon Telegraph, May 3, 1934, Harrold Scrapbooks.

14"CCC Interested in Mound Work," Macon Telegraph, May 26, 1934, Harrold Scrapbooks.

15Harrold Scrapbooks, July 18 and 26, 1934.

16Macon Telegraph, May 15 through June 7, 1935.

CONTRIBUTORS TO MOUND FUND\*

Alexander II School . . . . .	.\$ 10.40
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Turlington, W. T. . . . .	25.00
Union Dry Goods Co. . . . .	50.00
Vinson, Carl. . . . .	50.00
Warlick, Hillyer C. . . . .	5.00
Weaver, Dr. O. H. . . . .	10.00
Whittle School. . . . .	25.12
Williams Jewelry Co. . . . .	5.00
Willingham, B. E., Jr. . . . .	250.00

Winship School. . . . .	28.50
Wisteria Cafe . . . . .	10.00
WMAZ Radio Station. . . . .	25.00
W. R. Richardson Lumber Co. . . . .	25.00
W. T. Grant Co. . . . .	5.00
Yates Motor Co. . . . .	50.00
Yates and Tabor . . . . .	25.00

\*List of contributors compiled from Macon Telegraph news articles, May 15, 1935 through June 7, 1935. This list accounts for \$8,086.02 of the \$8,500 raised. Monetary figures for several organizations, however, are not known.

17Letter, Demaray to Harrold, December 4, 1934, CCF-RG79, Box 2302.

18Letter, Demaray to Vinson, January 28, 1935, CCF-RG79, Box 2302.

19Letter, Harrold to Demaray, December 9, 1934, CCF-RG79, Box 2302.

20Letter, Kahler to NPS Director, November 2, 1935, CCF-RG79, Box 2302.

21Memorandum, Margold to Interior Secretary, July 26, 1935, M.27994, CCF.

22Letter, Harrold to Chatelain, April 23, 1935, CCF.

23Ibid.

24Letter, Chatelain to Harrold, April 25, 1935, CCF-RG79, Box 2302.

25"U.S. Park Assured For Bibb As Leaders Reach Top In Drive," Macon Telegraph, June 6, 1935, Harrold Scrapbooks.

26Petition Number 555, United States v. Three Parcels of Land, March 9, 1936, Court Condemnation Papers (United States District Court, Bibb County), Federal Archives, East Point, Georgia.

27Demurrer to Petition Number 555, May 30, 1936, Federal Archives, East Point, Georgia.

28Final Judgement on Petition Number 555, July 25, 1936, Federal Archives, East Point, Georgia.

29"Appraisal of Park Lands Accepted By Bibb Mills," Macon Telegraph, July 18, 1936, Harrold Scrapbooks.



30Letter, Olinus Smith to Oliver G. Taylor, October 14, 1936,  
CCF.

31Proclamation by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Enabling  
Legislation No. 2212, December 23, 1936, Stat. 1798.

32Letter, W. E. Dunwody to President Franklin D. Roosevelt,  
March 26, 1934, CCF-RG79, Box 2302.