

## *CHAPTER TWO*



The  
Revivalist  
Guild

# History of Coal Mountain, & Environs

# History of Coal Mountain, Georgia, and Environs



Figure 1.

Theodore De Bry Copper Plate Engraving

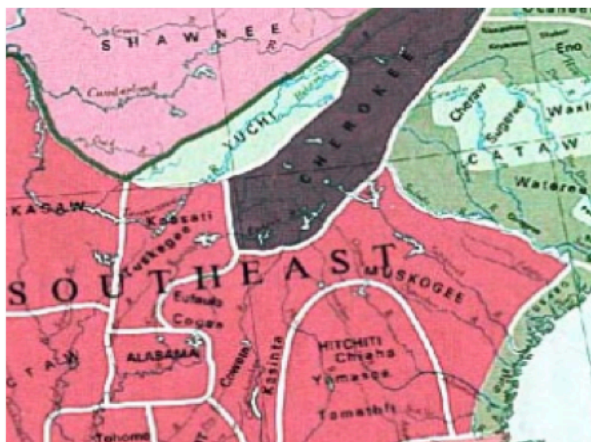


Figure 2.

William C. Sturtevant - Smithsonian Institution

## Pre-Historic & Early Historic Era

In the pre-historic era, the American southeast was inhabited by the ancestors of several Native American tribes. By the time of the Spanish Explorer Hernando De Soto's trek through Georgia in 1540, Native-American cultures had developed sophisticated, ordered societies.

**Figure 1** is a Theodore De Bry Copper Plate Engraving based on paintings by Jacques LeMoyne recalling his observations of Southeastern Indians in the 1560s - Engraving depicts a defensive village next to a river tributary.

**Figure 2** represents early Southeastern American Indian tribes, cultural areas and linguistic stocks. Note the demarcation of the Cherokee and the Muskogean

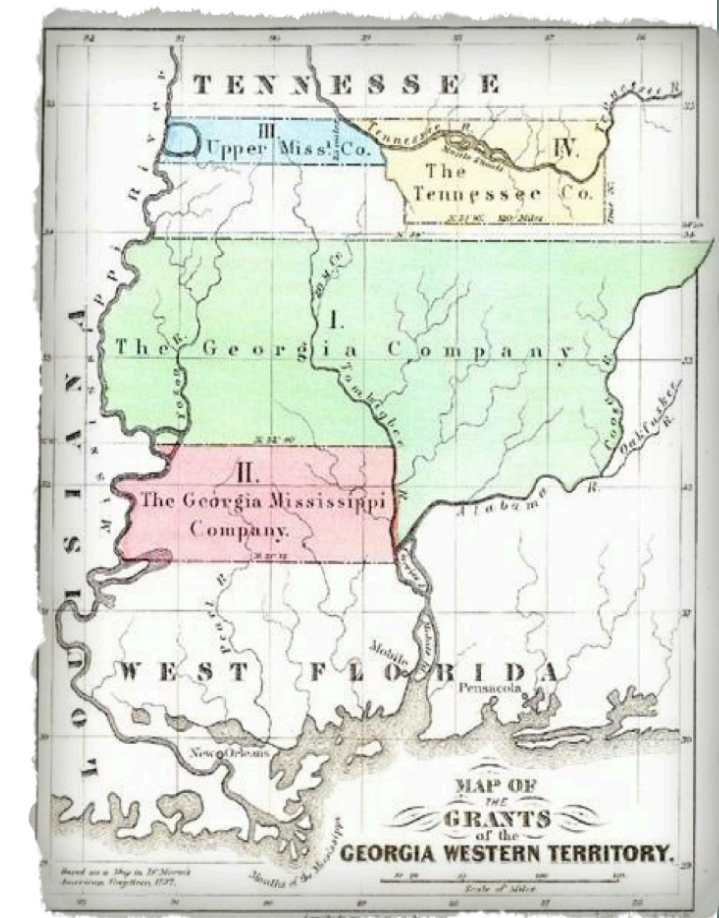
(Creek) along the Chattahoochee River.

The area that is now the unincorporated town of Coal Mountain is located in former Cherokee lands spanning from north Georgia through the Carolinas.

## Colonial Era

The Yazoo Land Fraud of 1794 to 1803 was an unprecedented display of greed perpetrated by several Georgia governors in party with the Georgia State Legislature. The scheme involved selling enormous tracts of land to friends and political insiders.

The fraud was so outrageous and brazen that more land was sold than actually existed. The contracts were later voided by state reformers, but the United States Supreme Court ultimately intervened and ruled that the contracts were legally binding and had to be honored.



Yazoo Land Fraud

# Early Republic



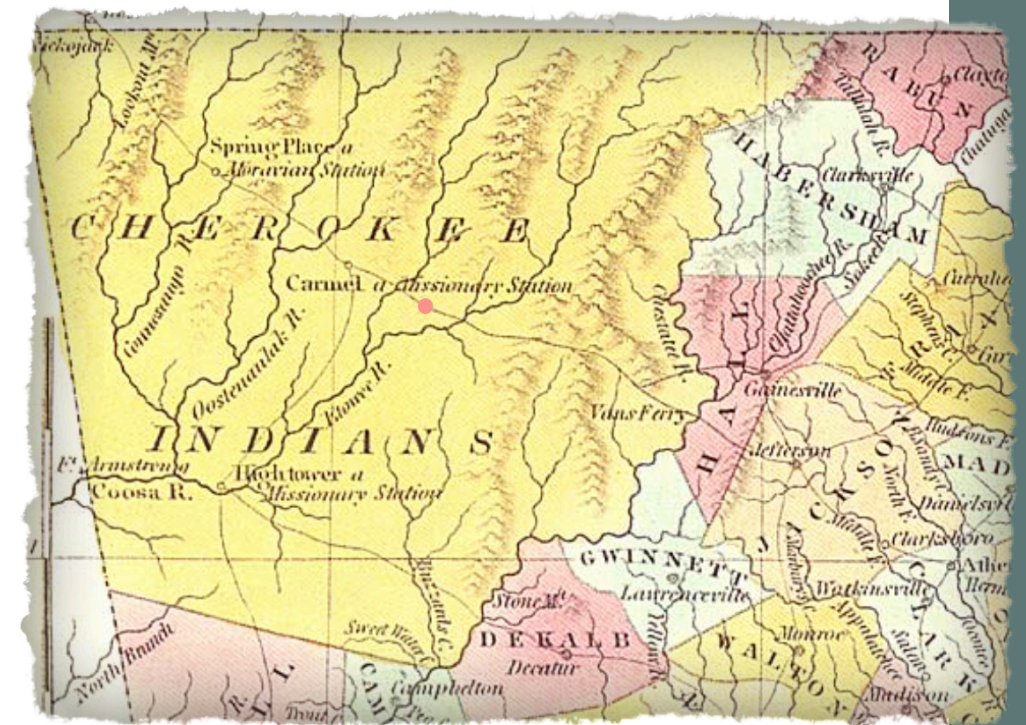
## 1802 Compact

On 26 April 1802, at the strong urging of President Thomas Jefferson, and in an effort to dispense with the entangling legal problems related the Yazoo Land Fraud scandal, Georgia ceded to the U.S. Government its western land which stretched all the way to the Mississippi River.

In exchange for the vast land holdings the state receives 1.25 million dollars and the promise of the eventual removal of the Cherokee Indians from the present-day boundaries of the state. The Old Federal Road in North Georgia was conceived to enable trade and travel between Savannah, Georgia and Nashville, Tennessee. East/ West oriented roads were scarce but sorely needed by the fledgling United States. In 1803, not long after Georgia had ceded its western land claims, the Jefferson Administration authorized Indian Agent Colonel Return J. Meigs to negotiate a right to build a road into Cherokee country. The 1805 Treaty of Tellico was signed and the road improvements were begun.

The Old Federal Road stretches from Vann's Ferry on the Chattahoochee River and moves to the northwest through the Cherokee Nation. The future town of Coal Mountain is depicted in the map above with a red dot and is located roughly halfway between the Chattahoochee and Etowah Rivers. This particular portion of the road was chosen because it is mostly flat. Travelers could have seen Sawnee Mountain in the distance to the Southwest. Colonel Meigs later served as Postmaster General for the United States and could likely have identified Coal Mountain as a future location for a post office along the Federal Road.

## Map of Cherokee Nation



The red dot in the yellow area marks Coal Mountain's location on the Old Federal Road.



Circa 1830

# The Jacksonian Age & The Gold Lottery of 1832

Gold was discovered in 1828 in Dahlonega, Georgia, precipitating the Federal Indian Removal Act of 1830.

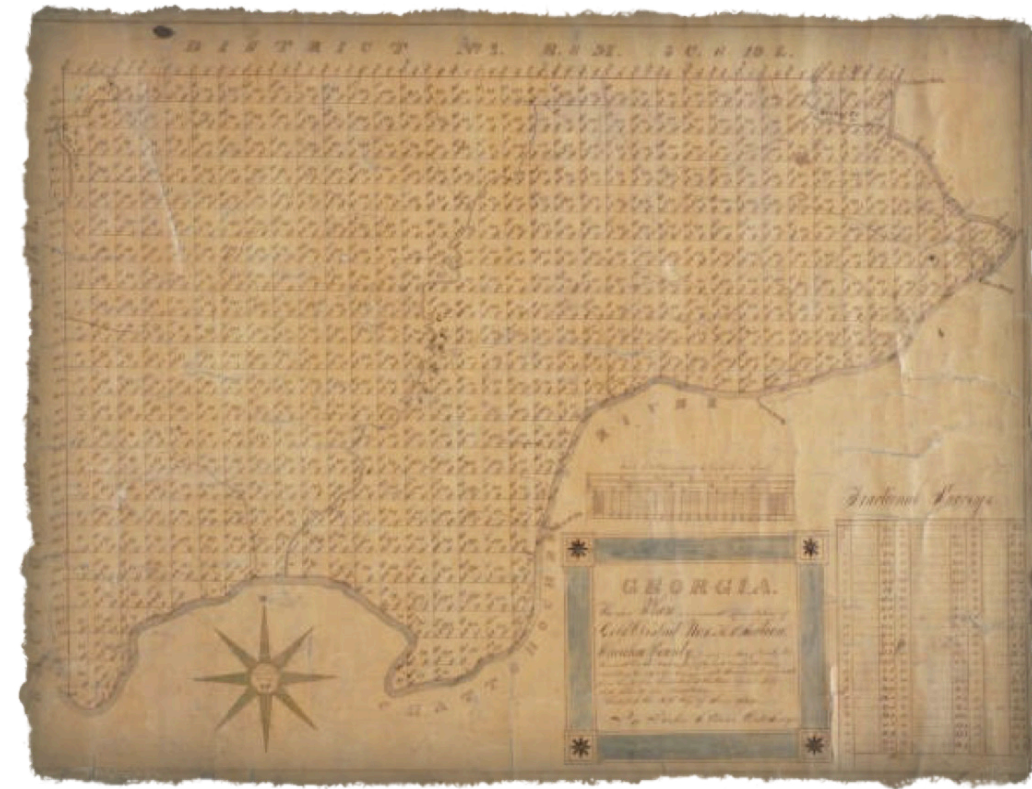
To control the hordes of prospectors and frontiersmen entering the former Cherokee Indian territory, including in and around Sawnee Mountain, the state of Georgia passed legislation authorizing what became known as the Gold Lottery of 1832.

This act mandated that approximately “a third of the 160-acre land districts to be laid out under the act of December 21, 1830, be designated as gold districts of 40 acres each and to be distributed in the Gold Lottery of 1832.

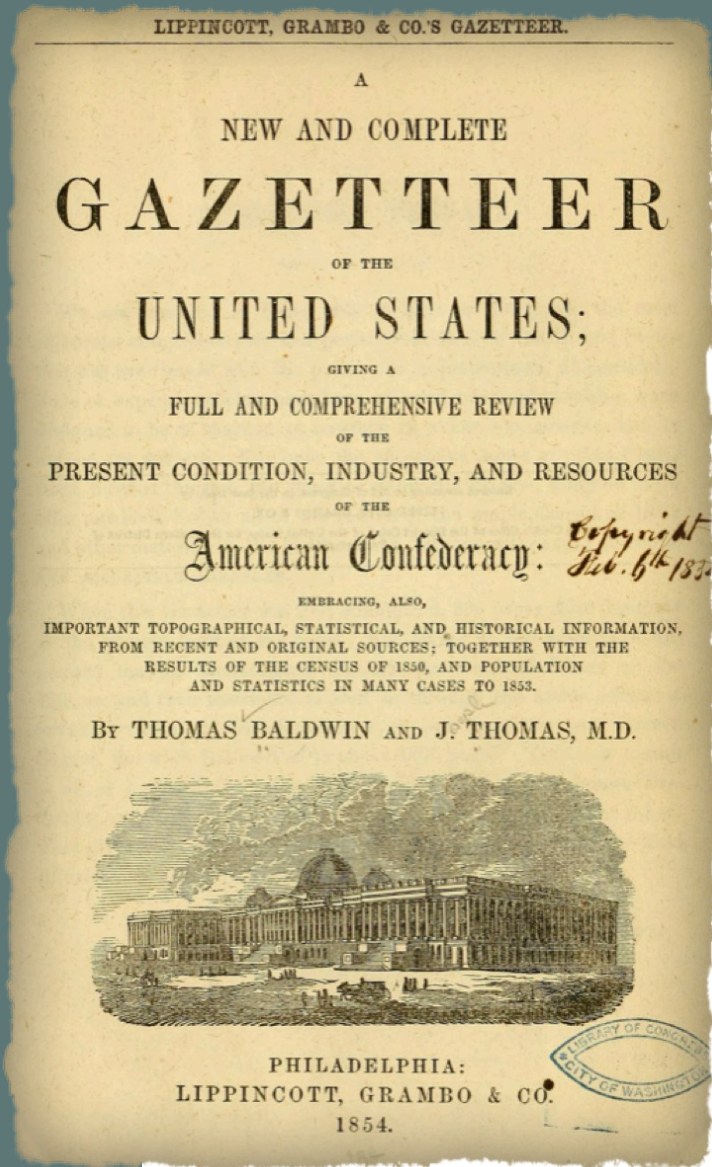
The original Cherokee Indian territory became Cherokee County by an Act of December 24, 1831. The territory was so expansive that Cherokee County was then divided into four sections, and each section was in turn divided into districts. There were 33 gold districts, and each was further divided into 40 acre “gold” lots.

A law passed on December 3, 1832, parsed the vast Cherokee County into ten counties: Cass (renamed Bartow), Cherokee, Cobb, Floyd, Forsyth, Gilmer, Lumpkin, Murray, Paulding, and Union. It was divided between land lots and distributed by the sixth land lottery and “gold” lots that were distributed by the seventh land lottery.”

President Andrew Jackson had hoped that the Cherokee and other tribes would assimilate into the population as Americans. Jackson was sincere and sympathetic in his belief that if the Cherokee and the other tribes did not melt into the American fabric they would almost certainly face extinction.



**Cherokee County Gold District 2 Section 2  
which incorporates Coal Mountain**



When opposition by the Cherokee leadership heightened after the Treaty of New Echota was signed in 1835, Jackson thought it a wise and humane policy to remove them to Oklahoma. The actual removal would not occur until after Jackson left office. Frontier families flooded the newly acquired lands in anticipation.

As the lottery winners began occupying their plots, inevitable tension mounted between the settlers and the Cherokee. This culminated in the removal of the Cherokee and other tribes from Georgia to Oklahoma in 1838, later to be known as the Trail of Tears.

As the pioneers and gold seekers streamed into and through the territory they made use of the same ancient paths the Cherokee

and other tribes had used for untold years. One such trail had been worn bare by the traveling Cherokee as they made their way between the North Georgia Mountains and the Chattahoochee River to the south. We know it today as Highway 9.

Coal Mountain thus sits on the intersection of two ancient roads which are directly intertwined with the storied history of our nation. We know that Coal Mountain has existed since at least 1854 because an edition of "A New and Complete Gazetteer of the United States" of the same date identifies Coal Mountain as being a post office location.

## Coal Mountain Comes Into Being

COAL GROVE, a post-village of Lawrence county, Ohio, on the Ohio river, about 10 miles below Burlington.  
COAL HILL, a post-office of Goochland county, Virginia.  
COAL MOUNTAIN, a post-office of Forsyth county, Georgia.  
COALPORT, a small village of Alleghany county, Pennsylvania, on the left bank of the Ohio river, 4 miles below Pittsburg, is the depôt for the Chartier coal railroad, which

1854 edition of "A New and Complete Gazetteer of the United States" identifies Coal Mountain as being a post office location.

# What's In A Name?

No one is certain how the name Coal Mountain was derived but the most common explanation is that one of the first families which settled the area had the sir name Cole which was variably spelled Coal.

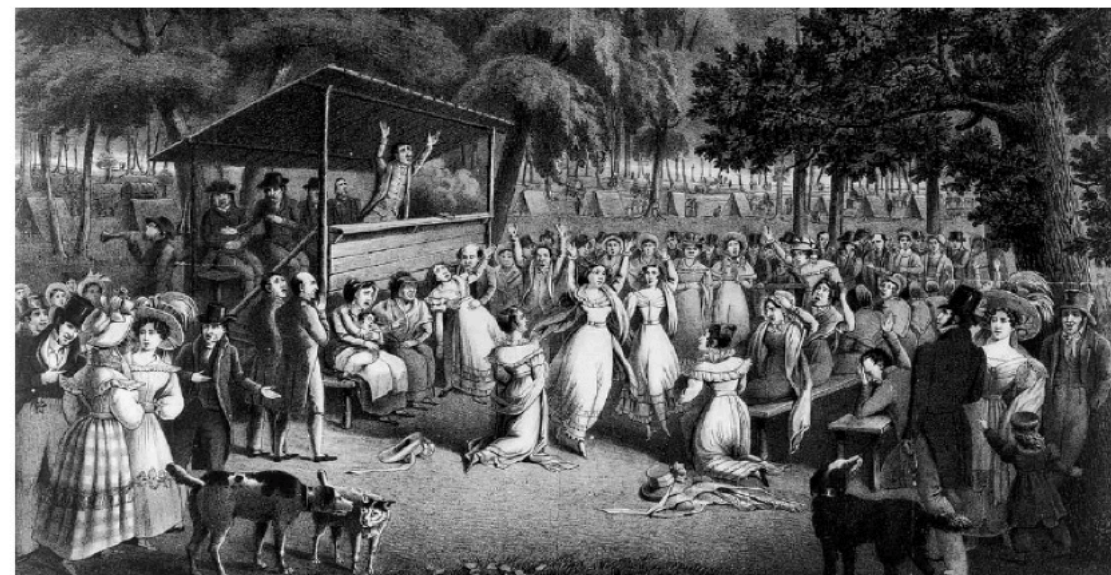
Another suggests that one of the knolls or spurs off nearby Sawnee Mountain which formed northward from the larger mountain toward the town may have been the genesis of the name since it would have been visible from the Federal Road.

The more fanciful tale of how the town got its name centers around a homesick wife who had recently moved into the area. As the story goes, her husband concocted a ruse in order to trick her brother into moving

to the area.

The husband told his brother-in-law that the presence of coal was so voluminous he would never have to chop fire wood again. After the brother had packed his things and moved he soon discovered there was no coal at all much less, "mountains" of it. As the tale comes down to us it became sort of a family joke that mountains of coal were lurking somewhere in the foothills where they lived. Thus the name.

However it got its name, the town took on the character of a small Georgia town of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The town moved to the age-old rhythms of farming seasons and the Sunday pew.



19th Century Camp Methodist Camp Meeting

# Camp Meetings in the South

The Second Great Awakening, a spirited revival of protestant faith, followed the First Great Awakening of the 1730's and 40's. It began in the 1790's and lasted through the 1840's. Revivals, also known as "Camp Meetings" like New Prospect Camp Ground just to the south, came about at the peak period of the movement. The Second Great Awakening was so successful in creating faithful religious adherents in the deep south that it spurred what is now a common moniker, the "Bible Belt."

Following the gleaming yellow rock which had been discovered in 1828 in the North Georgia foothills, circuit-riding preachers filled the roads with the calling of "prospecting the souls" of the dreamers "prospecting gold."

The Baptists and Presbyterians had their share of Camp Meetings as did the Methodists who had a highly efficient system of "circuit riders." The riders were preachers who traveled from camp to camp and who mixed effortlessly with the common people. They could well relate to the hardscrabble life of the frontier family as they were living it too.

The crossroads at Coal Mountain would have been a bustling place in the mid 1830's, and 1840's. In fact, the camp ground meetings in Geor-

gia were so notorious that by the latter part of the 19th century the phrase "Georgia Camp Meeting" was used the world over to describe a raucous religious gathering.

The attendees, mostly farmers, frontiersmen and their families, would gather to worship, commune, and lift their spirits after the spring and summer crops were "laid by."

These camp goers would most certainly have passed through the area known as Coal Mountain on their way "to meeting."

The Camp meetings at New Prospect (Alpharetta) and Holbrook (Cumming) would have been a full-days ride from the crossroads at Coal Mountain. The weary travelers, going to and fro, would no doubt have "set down for a spell" and shared with one another their love of music.

Locals tell of Coal Mountains reputation for it having accomplished musicians. People from all over the county would come to hear the melodies. It does not stretch the imagination to believe this has its roots in the Camp Meetings and the celebratory singing of hymnals.



19th Century Camp Methodist Camp

## Railroads Change The Landscape

Following the heyday's of the 1840's the laying of the railroad elsewhere coupled with end of the gold rush and the Second Great Awakening brought an end to the trade and travel along the Federal Road.

Like many a north Georgia town, Coal Mountain settled into a quiet existence of sorts. It became a community of yeoman farmers and merchants who remained more or less isolated from the outside world. Travel was still by horse and wagon in the mid-19th century which meant that most people didn't venture more than seven to ten miles away from home.

Atlanta becomes a bustling railroad city which changes how Georgians trade and travel.

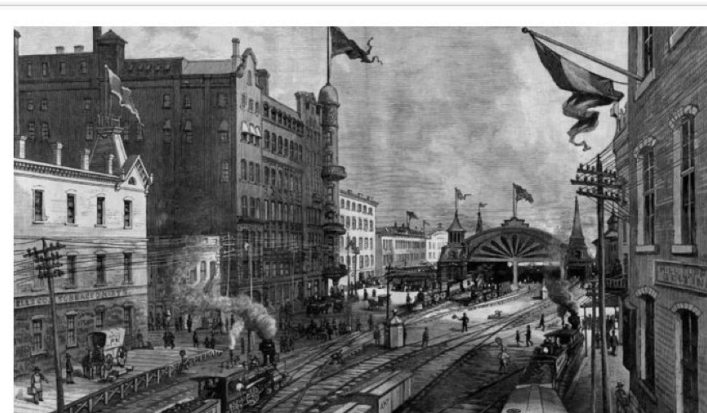


The big guns are silent now but their roar has echoed through the ages.

Civil War broke out between the north and the south with the shots fired at Fort Sumter in 1861. The fighting did not reach the town (though it did reach Canton, just 20 miles to the southwest) but like many small communities, the town lost its share of its sons in battles fought far from home.

A mid-war smallpox outbreak in 1863 added to the misery and devastated the area already reeling from the loss of their fathers and sons.

After the "War Between the States," as many southerners would call it, Reconstruction had a dreadful effect on the area and it remained isolated and poor.



## The Civil War & Reconstruction



# Cotton Is King Until It's Not



Boll Weevil on Cotton Boll

## Boll Weevil

After Reconstruction the area boasted one or more cotton gins which churned out the valuable white fiber for use by the textile mills in Roswell to the south and Canton to the west. For most of the latter part of the 19th century and into the early 20th, cotton farmers and gins thrived. "King Cotton" was still king in the south.

But in 1915 all that changed.

First discovered in Texas in the later part of the 19th century, the swarming insect utterly devastated the south's main industry in just a few short years.

Just the year before its arrival in Georgia over 5.2 million acres of cotton were planted and harvested. By 1923 that number was slashed in half to just 2.6 million acres as the rabid insect wreaked havoc across the state.

# Great Depression & Today

## The Curse Becomes a Blessing

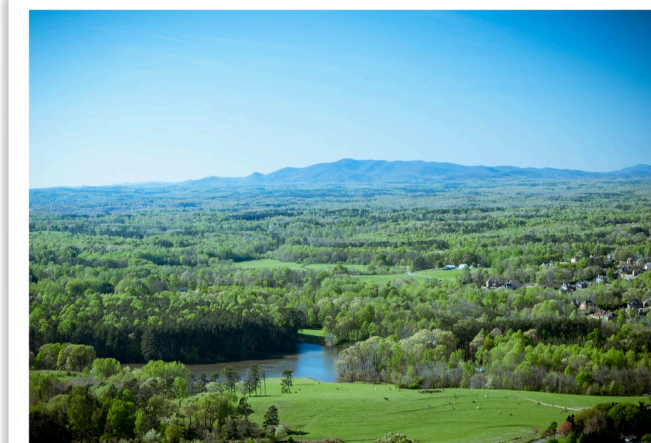
The Boll Weevil was at once both a great catastrophic evil and a great blessing to the south. North Georgia farmers, including those in Coal Mountain, made bold moves following the ruination of the cotton markets by diversifying into other crops and livestock to make their living.

This lack of reliance on one commodity allowed these yeoman farmers to better weather the storms

of the 1930's and 40's. The great Depression and World War II hit Coal Mountain as hard as it did the entire nation but it was already hardened by difficult times.

Like the typical North Georgia agriculture town Coal Mountain became self-reliant. It had its share of diverse mercantile businesses like T.R. Thomas Mill, built in 1925, and which still stands today.

Coal Mountain remained a sleepy community for most of the 20th century until state road Ga 400 punched its inexorable way northward. Like the Old Federal Road which marked its beginning, Ga 400 marks its revival.





**FIN**

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