

Buckhead Indian settlement gave Atlanta its most famous street name

By Wright Mitchell

There are at least 71 streets in Atlanta containing the name Peachtree. That befuddles most visitors.

Although Georgia is known as the "Peach State," this does not account for the proliferation of streets bearing the name of that fruit. Rather, the explanation lies just off Ridgewood Road on the Chattahoochee River.

Long before Atlanta became a city, there was a Creek Indian Village located in the vicinity of the Atlanta Waterworks Pumping Station on the east bank of the Chattahoochee River called "Standing Peachtree."

The village, which was the most significant of its kind in this part of Georgia, was a vital trading post for white traders doing business with the Cherokee Indians on the west side of the Chattahoochee and the Creek Indians, also known as the Muscogee, on the east side of the river. Located just north of the mouth of Peachtree Creek on a high point, Standing Peachtree was ideally suited to serve the Creeks' dual needs of a ready food source, fish, and a defensible position.

The origin of the name Standing Peachtree is the subject of some historical debate. One story passed down through generations of early Buckhead settlers attributed the name to the existence of a large pine tree on the

grounds of Standing Peachtree that the Indians burned to obtain rosin or pitch, thus resulting in the tree being referred to as a "pitch tree" and Peachtree being a corruption of that name.

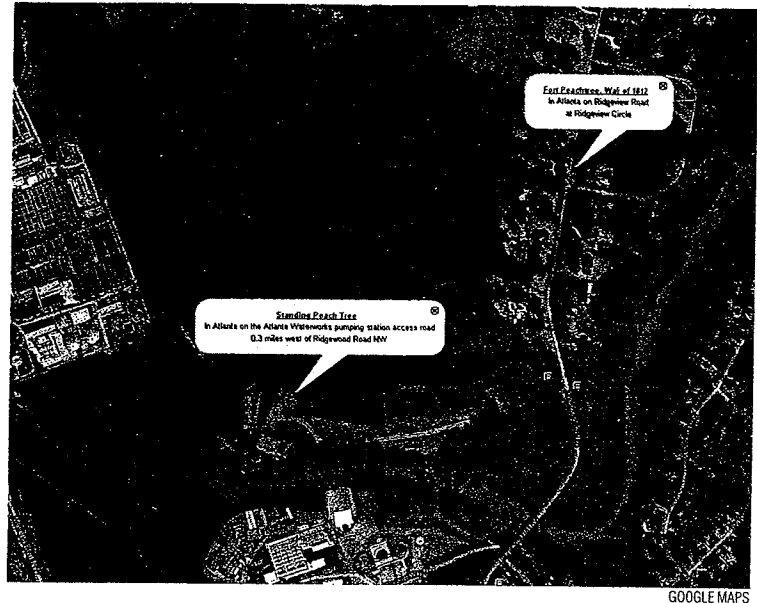
Another version of the story, supported by the firsthand accounts of George Washington Collier, a large landowner in Buckhead who carried mail to the Standing Peachtree Post Office, ties the name to a large peach tree that grew on the site.

"There was a great huge mound of earth heaped up there -- big as this house, maybe bigger -- and right on top of it grew a big peach tree," Collier said in an 1897 interview. "It bore fruit and was a useful and beautiful tree".

Regardless of the true origins of the name, it is undisputed that "Peachtree" and not "Pitchtree" is the name that has survived and flourished in Atlanta history. And Atlanta, a city with an already uncomfortable relationship with fire, is no doubt fine with this version of the story.

It is difficult to say how long Standing Peachtree thrived as an Indian settlement. But the first written reference to the settlement can be found in a May 1782 letter authored by the last of Georgia's Revolutionary Governors, John Martin. In his letter, Martin noted that "the standing Peach Tree" was a popular meeting spot for Indians in the area.

An intricate web of trails emanated from



Aerial map above shows the location of the Creek Indian "Standing Peachtree" village, just above the R.M. Clayton sewage plant on the Chattahoochee River, and the location of the marker for Fort Peachtree, to the upper right.

Standing Peachtree including the Peachtree Trail, which traveled along present day Moore's Mill Road to West Pace's Ferry Road and into the heart of Buckhead where it split, with one trail heading south toward downtown and the other north toward Toccoa. Many of Buckhead's current streets, like

Moore's Mill and West Pace's Ferry, are simply paved versions of what were once frontier paths.

During the War of 1812, the state of Georgia erected a fort just north of Standing Peachtree called Fort Peachtree. The fort was intended to serve as a buffer between the Creeks, who had sided with the British in the war, and nearby white settlements. Despite being enemy combatants, the soldiers stationed at the fort often came in contact with the local Indian populace. The young lieutenant in charge of the fort, George R. Gilmer, later Governor of Georgia, wrote in his book "Georgians" that "A few days after my arrival at the standing peach-tree a ruffian Indian fellow came into the camp with some fine catfish for sale."

Of course, the Indians were eventually unceremoniously evicted from the land along the banks of the Chattahoochee by the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1821 and the military abandoned the fort, which fell into disrepair.

In 1837, the Georgia Assembly granted James M.C. Montgomery -- who had incidentally been stationed at Fort Peachtree during the war -- the right to operate a ferry at Standing Peachtree, which became known as Montgomery's Ferry. Mr. Montgomery built a home not far from the site of his ferry at the intersection of present day Moore's Mill and Bolton Roads. The Montgomery family operated the ferry until 1853, when it was taken over by the DeFoor family.

In 1976, the city of Atlanta constructed a replica of Fort Peachtree on the Waterworks' property. A popular field trip destination for Atlanta school children for many decades, the replica housed display cases containing numerous Indian artifacts and a large diorama depicting the old Standing Peachtree grounds. There were also several cannons in front of the fort and a couple of historical markers.

Unfortunately, prior to the Atlanta Summer Olympics in 1996 the city terminated public access to the fort over concerns about the security of the city's water supply. Now

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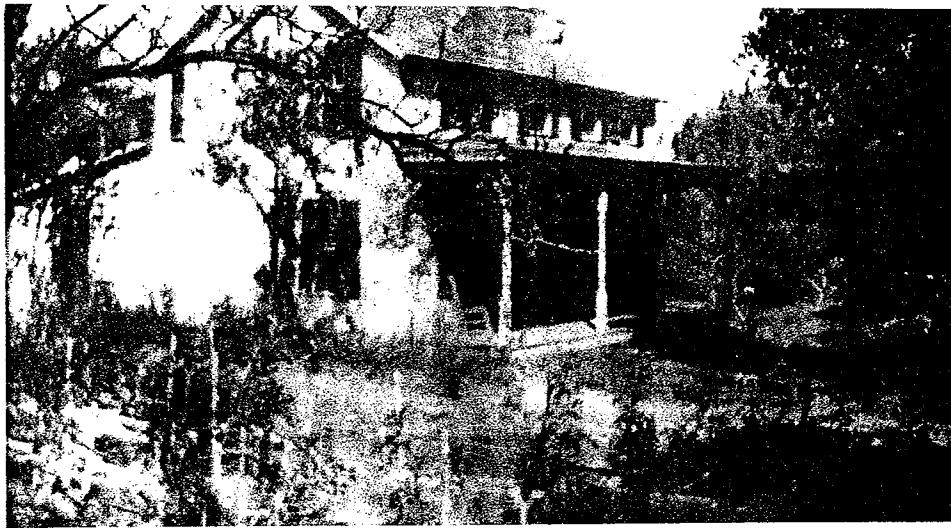
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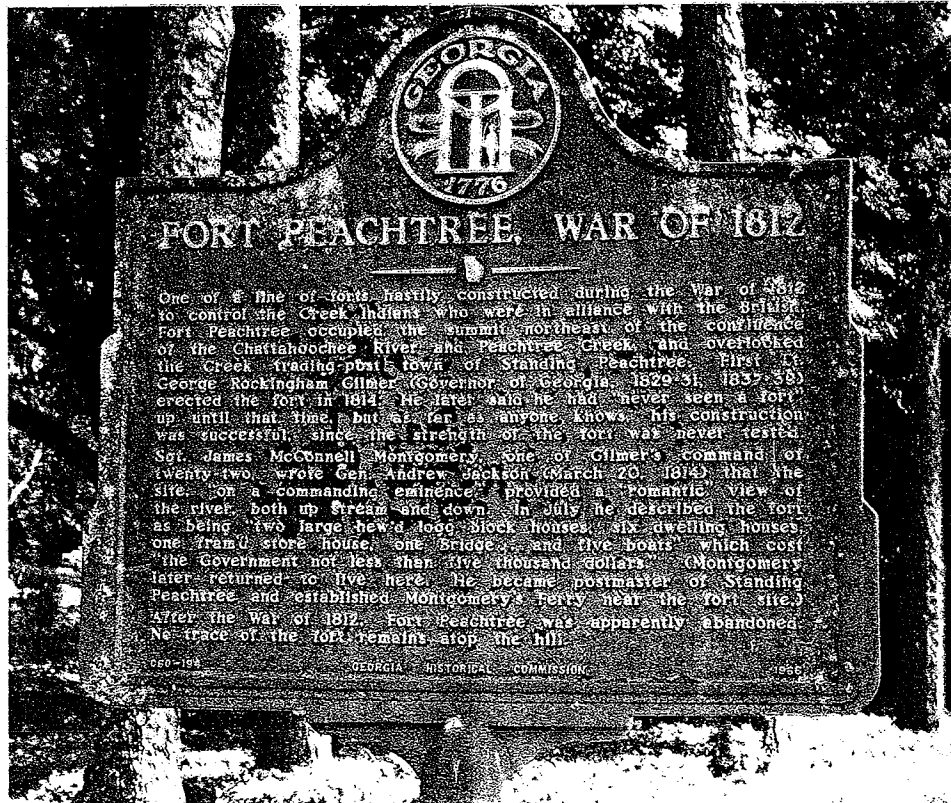
The above photo from the archives of the Atlanta History Center shows the 1800s home of James Montgomery, which was located near the landing for his ferry near Moore's Mill and Bolton roads. The Montgomery family operated the ferry until 1835, when it was taken over by the Defoor family.

the fort can be visited only through special permission of the city. Sadly, on a recent tour arranged by the Paces Civic Association, the display cases were found to be smashed and the contents missing. The cannons also were nowhere to be found.

So much of Atlanta's history is tied to this particular spot that it is a shame it cannot be visited. City officials may one day figure out a way to make it available to the public again. Until then, the former location of Standing Peachtree can only be glimpsed by looking north along the Chattahoochee River as one drives over the

bridge on South Atlanta Road.

Wright Mitchell is the President of the Buckhead Heritage Society and a labor and employment attorney with the law firm of Constangy, Brooks & Smith, LLP. In writing this article, Mr. Mitchell relied heavily on Eugene M. Mitchell's (no relation) definitive work on Standing Peachtree entitled "The Story of Standing Peachtree", which originally appeared in the Atlanta Historical Bulletin in January of 1928. Mr. Mitchell also referenced Franklin Garrett's book, Atlanta & Environs, Volume I



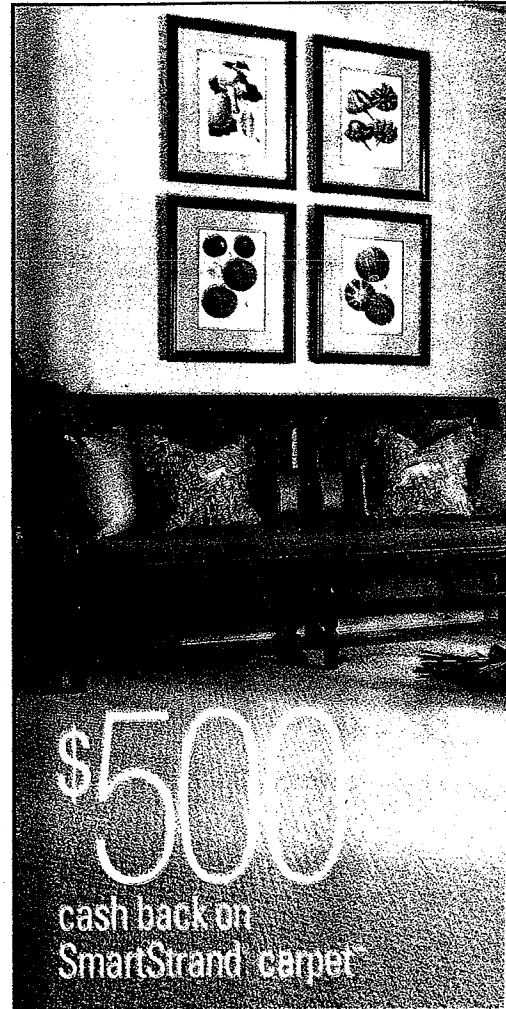
The above marker designates the location of the former Fort Peachtree during the War of 1812. In 1976, the city built a replica of the fort on property adjacent to the R.M. Clayton plant, but public access to the property was terminated during the 1996 Summer Olympics and it remains closed to the public. The site also has been ransacked.

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