

## Toll Bridge at Scull Shoals

A covered bridge was built across the Oconee River in 1809 by Zachariah Sims. Tolls were collected from everyone who used the bridge. It cost 37½ cents for a four-wheel carriage or a loaded wagon; 25 cents for an unloaded wagon or a two-wheel carriage; 12½ cents for a rolling hogshead of tobacco; 6¼ cents for a man on horseback; 3 cents for a horse that was led; 2 cents each for cattle; and 1 cent each for goats, sheep and hogs. The bridge was washed away by a flood in 1841. It was rebuilt, but destroyed again by the flood of 1887. The photo below shows a bridge over the Apalachee River built in 1874. It is similar to the one that was at Scull Shoals.



Watson Mill covered bridge, Oglethorpe County circa 1880.

*Photograph courtesy of Georgia Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection OGL002*

## Don't Raise My Taxes!

The first paved road in Athens was a small section of College Avenue in front of the University. It was paved with blocks of stone called Belgian Block in 1885. Most citizens did not want the roads to be paved; it seemed like an unnecessary luxury and would cause their taxes to be raised. They refused Federal money to fix the roads. However, better roads brought more business to the city, which meant economic growth.

## From Horse-Drawn Trolley to Electric Street Railway

Street railways ran on tracks laid in the road. At first the cars were pulled by horses or mules and were only for freight. The Athens electric street railway was established in 1881 and carried passengers all around the city. This is what a car looked like:



Clarkesville Street Railway.

*Photograph courtesy of Georgia Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection HAB050*

## Scull Shoals Opportunities Denied

The story of transportation in nineteenth-century Scull Shoals is essentially the story of what was not available to its industries or its citizens. A major concern for merchants, farmers and mill owners was how to transport goods to the major ports (such as Savannah, Charleston, or Darien) where they could be shipped to the Northeast and to Europe.

There were dirt roads leading from Scull Shoals to Maxeys, Penfield, Greensboro and Watkinsville, but traveling on them with wagons drawn by mules, oxen or horses was difficult at best and impossible whenever rain turned the roads to mud. A day of hard rain could make a road nearly impassable for a week. Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury, an itinerant preacher who traveled to various towns, described travel on a Georgia road on his way to Scull Shoals: “Before we could get ready to move, it began to rain powerfully. We came down the Augusta road, gouged up by wagons in a most dreadful manner, in consequence of which we were five hours in going twelve miles.” Even when the roads were not muddy these overland treks were slow and dangerous.

The Oconee River, which provided water power to the mills, was not easily navigated much of the time due to siltation, snags, debris, and variations in water level. In 1812 the Georgia Legislature

gave \$50,000 to The Oconee Navigation Company to dredge the river between Milledgeville and Athens. The purpose was to make commercial transportation on the river practical and reliable by clearing out the snags and debris and deepening the passage. An additional \$200,000 was invested. After several years of digging and clearing, only to be frustrated by continuing siltation, the project was abandoned. If the project had been successful, it would have been a boon to the Scull Shoals industries.

While railroad tracks were being laid across the state of Georgia, none came to Scull Shoals. The closest depots were in Maxeys, Athens, Greensboro and Union Point. The plantations and industries within reach of the railroads had a great advantage over those that were not, as railroad transportation became the cheapest and most reliable mode of transportation for their products. Once again, Scull Shoals was placed at a great disadvantage.

The failure of Scull Shoals industries—and then the village itself—was directly linked to financial problems related to floods and labor problems. However, if better access to transportation of their products had been available, their finances would have improved and continued success for many more years may have been possible.



Main Street, Downtown Greensboro, 1885-90

*Photograph courtesy of Georgia Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection GRN212*



College Ave, Athens, 1885

*Photograph courtesy of Georgia Archives, Vanishing Georgia Collection CLR064*

## **Hands-On History**

The year is 1840. The railroad reached Greensboro in 1839 but did not come to Scull Shoals. The canal that was to connect the Savannah, Ogeechee and Altamaha rivers stopped at the Ogeechee more than ten years ago. Industries are thriving at Scull Shoals, but need a more efficient way to ship their goods.

How would Scull Shoals have benefited if the canal connection had been completed? If the railroad route had come through Scull Shoals?

The members of your class are businessmen and community leaders in Scull Shoals. You've been told that there will be money to do one of the projects above. Which one would be the best?

Divide your class in half, and each group take a side. Formulate a list of reasons why your side represents the best choice for the good of the town, then stage a debate on the subject.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. How would Georgia's history have been different if the headquarters for the Western & Atlantic Railroad had been established in Marietta, not moved to Atlanta?
2. How did financial problems affect the development of transportation in nineteenth-century Georgia? How is that similar to problems of today?
3. Examine the photographs of Greensboro and Athens on the previous page. Notice the various vehicles and the quality of the streets. What do these and other details tell you?
4. What if America had no railroads until after the Civil War?
5. Why do you suppose the name "Enterprise" was chosen for so many vessels?

## Vocabulary Fun

Every answer for the crossword puzzle can be found in this Scull Shoals Scholar.

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### ACROSS

2. Things in your way
4. Control the direction of
5. Loud
7. Enjoyable
8. Part of a larger system
9. Repeated series of events
11. Type of boat or raft
14. The way it's done
16. Where you are going
18. Better than good
22. Group working together

23. Study, find facts

24. Flat
24. Perform or produce

### DOWN

1. A trip
3. Great benefit
6. Where something is located
8. Spewing
10. Where ships load and unload
11. Like a buffalo
12. Merchandise

13. Supplies held in reserve

15. All people
17. Region
19. Things sent for a fee by common carrier
20. Out in the country
21. Big ditches
22. A fee for the privilege of traveling

[Return to Introduction](#)

[Return to Unit I](#)

[Go to Literature Listing](#)

[Return to Unit II](#)

[Return to Unit III \(part 1\)](#)

[Return to Unit III \(part 2\)](#)