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Georgia Ghosts, or Where Are They Now?: One Researcher’s Catalog of Georgia’s Missing Historical Records

Robert S. Davis, Jr.

Ghosts haunt places like attics, old barns, and university libraries. They live in the minds of researchers seeking in frustration that missing document, pamphlet, or book mentioned in an earlier source. Even when the text of a document has survived in some form, researchers sometimes have gone to great lengths to find the original manuscript for the assurance that nothing more can be found there.

"Ghosts," as the term is used here, are missing historical research sources. Quite often a search for these missing materials proves that the ghosts never existed or were destroyed before copies were made. Occasionally, through luck and persistence, a researcher will uncover one of these treasures and
announce its discovery, replacing the story of a lost record with the more interesting tale of how it was found.

Among former Georgia "ghosts" are the journal of the Georgia trustee, John Percival, the Earl of Egmont, 1732-1738 (discovered in the Phillips Collection, now at the University of Georgia, and published by the late E. Merton Coulter); colonial Georgia will book B (discovered by the late Shelby Myrick to be Chatham County will book B); the will of Button Gwinnett, Georgia signer of the Declaration of Independence (located in the Pierpont Morgan Library); the files of genealogist Leon Hollingsworth (discovered in the Georgia Department of Archives and History after they were reportedly destroyed); and Colonel John Dooly's account of Georgia's Revolutionary War victory, the Battle of Kettle Creek (found at Yale University).

Georgia has a long and varied list of lost manuscripts and printed materials. The following are some of the better known of the missing items. Perhaps publication of this list will lead to information that will move some of those ghosts listed (county records are not included) from this roll of the lost to the list of the found.

DeSoto Drawings, 1540
The first significant white exploration of Georgia was conducted by Spanish explorers under Hernando DeSoto. Their journals provide a unique view of Georgia's Native American peoples before the impact of white civilization. Drawings of the Spaniards' battles with the Indians were stored in a cabinet in the throne room of King Philip II of Spain. The drawings were reportedly destroyed in a fire, although the archives of Philip's palace for earlier periods have survived.
Georgia Ghosts

Trustee Land Grants, 1733-1754
Georgia was founded in 1733 by a board of nonprofit trustees, who controlled almost all aspects of the settlers’ lives, including land ownership. Many records refer to lands granted by the Trustees of the Colony of Georgia to the colony’s first settlers. Only a fraction of the grants themselves are known to survive and the sources for the many on the extant lists of grants cannot be documented.1 These grants should not be confused with the royal land grants of 1755-1775.

Joseph Bevan Papers, 1730s-1820s
Joseph V. Bevan was appointed Georgia’s first official historian. In this role, he gathered an extensive collection of early colonial and state records that was divided and sold after his death in 1830. Some of his collection is now in the holdings of the Georgia Historical Society and the Hargrett Library for Rare Books and Manuscripts of the University of Georgia. Copies that were made of the more important papers before the collection was dispersed are in the Peter Force Collection of the Library of Congress. An unpublished list made of the Bevan Papers before they were sold, with notes on known locations of some items, is in the Georgia Historical Society.2

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1 See Robert S. Davis, Jr., A Researcher’s Library of Georgia (Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1987) for a bibliography of these lists of trustee grants.

Colonial Commission Book C, 1754-1806
One of Georgia’s earliest commission books, which includes the commission of Button Gwinnett as the first state governor of Georgia, was known to be in the State Capitol in Milledgeville in February 1845. No record of its whereabouts since that time has been found.³

Plat of the Town of Sunbury, c. 1758
No information can be found on the location of this large lot map of the now defunct town of Sunbury. This plat was probably in the possession of Georgia historian C. C. Jones, Jr., who used a rendering of it in his Dead Towns of Georgia in 1878.⁴

Georgia Laws, 1761-1762, 1777-1784
Professor Edwin C. Surrency cites the texts of fifteen of Georgia’s first laws as missing.⁵

Wrightsborough "Warrant," 1769
The petition to the governor for the survey of lands initially given to Georgia’s one significant Quaker settlement is now found only in the minutes of the governor and council for February 1769 and in photocopy at the Georgia Department of Archives and History. Attempts by several researchers to locate the original have


⁴ John McKay Sheftall, Sunbury on the Medway (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 1977), 109-10.

failed.\textsuperscript{6} That this petition was published\textsuperscript{7} suggests its whereabouts was known in 1927.

\textit{The Ceded Lands Journal, 1773-1776}

At least two contemporary copies were made of this volume of land-claim registrations for what is today Wilkes and surrounding counties. One of these copies, received in fragments, survives among the records of the Surveyor General Department. The whereabouts of the other copy is unknown, although, contrary to rumor, it is not in the Manuscript Department of the William R. Perkins Library of Duke University. An incomplete and suspect typescript of the Ceded Lands journal survives.\textsuperscript{8}

Excerpts from this journal are among the Loyalist claims in the British Public Record Office and some researchers have theorized that another contemporary copy may be found in the records there. That copy of the Ceded Lands journal, however, may have been lost in the House of Commons fire of 1838.\textsuperscript{9}


\textsuperscript{7} The petition was published as a document in \textit{Georgia Historical Quarterly} 11 (1927): 348-50.


"Tory" Petitions, 1774
Eight Georgia petitions protesting anti-British activities were published in the Georgia Gazette in 1774. George White published slightly different versions of seven of these petitions in his Historical Collections\(^\text{10}\) in 1854. It may be that White merely did a poor job of copying from the Georgia Gazette. However, White's omission of one petition and his inclusion of some words and other changes in the rest of the petitions suggest that he copied from the originals, which he cites as "State Records." Instead of deliberately leaving out the names of some persons who later joined the American cause, he apparently omitted signatures he could not read. No information is available on the present location of any of these petitions, if they survive.\(^\text{11}\)

Other early Georgia documents reproduced in White's book are also ghosts. He may have removed historical documents from the state records of Georgia for use in his book and never returned them.

Land Grant Book N, 1775-1776, 1778-1782
When Alex M. Hitz was deputy surveyor general of Georgia he believed that this grant book had existed but was missing.\(^\text{12}\) If this volume did exist, it would have contained the last land grants

\(^\text{10}\) George White, Historical Collections of the State of Georgia (New York: Pudney & Russell, 1854), 412.


made by the colony of Georgia and the first grants made by the State of Georgia.

*Charles Lee Papers, 1775-1782*
Major General Charles Lee commanded the American forces in the southern states in the early months of the American Revolution. His papers, including important letters relating to the American Revolution in Georgia, were largely dispersed after some were published as abstracts.\(^{13}\) The existence of at least some of these papers was reported by the New York Historical Society in the 1930s.

*James McCall Journal, 1776*
James McCall was one of the few survivors of a peace party sent among the Cherokee Indians in South Carolina in the early days of the American Revolution. Most of his party were killed in an Indian attack. The journal of McCall’s tragic mission and escape was cited by his son Hugh McCall,\(^{14}\) but no record of its later existence can be found.

*I. K. Teft Autograph Collection, 1770s-1862*
America’s first great autograph collector was Israel Keech Teft of Savannah, Georgia. The sale catalog of his collection had 2,630 entries, including a complete set of the signatures of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. The collection was sold at auction in New York

\(^{13}\) The Lee papers were published as *Collections of the New-York Historical Society* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1872-1875).

beginning 4 March 1867. Many of the items listed in that catalog are now ghosts.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{State Constitution and Constitutional Convention Minutes, 1777}

The original of Georgia's first constitution was found by Secretary of State Phil Cook in his office in 1894. Presumably, the original document contains the signatures of the men who framed it, including the very rare and valuable autograph of Button Gwinnett.\textsuperscript{16} This constitution has not been in the Georgia Department of Archives and History at least since the 1930s. Although the minutes of the 1777 state constitutional convention have been published, the present location of the original also is unknown.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Journals of the Georgia General Assembly, 1777-1780}
\textit{Journals of the House, 1791-1795, 1798-1799, 1801-1803}
\textit{Journals of the Senate, 1793-1798}


\textsuperscript{16} Atlanta Constitution, 7 January 1894, p. 9 c. 1-4.

The originals of these Georgia records are not known to have survived. A complete set of the printed journals was donated by Salem Dutcher to the Richmond County Ordinary prior to 1903.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Benjamin Lincoln Diary, 1778-1780}

Major Benjamin Lincoln's diary for the period during which he commanded the American forces in the South is missing, although his earlier and later diaries survive. If it existed, the diary for those years (1778-1780) would have covered the British capture of Savannah, the battle of Briar Creek, and the siege of Savannah, as well as other events in Georgia during those turbulent months. The missing diary is not the account book in the New York Public Library that is sometimes referred to as Lincoln's diary. Some of Lincoln's papers are at the Massachusetts Historical Society, but the vast majority were sold to collectors long ago. If the locations of all of these papers were discovered, a great deal of new information on the events in Georgia for 1778-1780 would be available.

\textit{Campbell Maps, 1779}

A series of maps prepared by Archibald Campbell, British governor of Georgia, to illustrate his own account of his conquest of the state in 1778-1779 no longer accompanies his manuscript. A copy of what may be one of these maps, showing the Savannah area, is in the Georgia Historical Society. These area maps

should not be confused with Campbell’s famous map, *Sketch of the Northern Frontiers of Georgia* (1780).19

**Mathew Singleton Papers, 1779**
Records of Mathew Singleton’s trials of British sympathizers in Augusta, Georgia, in March and April 1779, survive in fragments at the South Caroliniana Library of the University of South Carolina and the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress. Additional records of this court for February 1779 may also survive, providing information on Georgians and South Carolinians who aided the King’s cause.20

**Silas Mercer Journal, 1770s**
The Revolutionary War journal (or diary) of the Reverend Silas Mercer, a founding Georgia Baptist and the father of the famous Reverend Jesse Mercer, is mentioned in Benedict’s *A General History of the Baptist Denomination* in 1813. The text of this missing manuscript would contain considerable information about Georgia’s first Baptist churches.

**State Records Left in Milledgeville, 1700s-1868**
Stories persist that many state records were left in the State Capitol in Milledgeville when Georgia’s capitol was moved to Atlanta in 1868. A newspaper report of the fire that destroyed

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the Milledgeville state house in 1941 implied that these records had been saved by the cadets of Georgia Military College. No one presently at the college has any knowledge of these state records.

Folks Huxford found an 1887 article describing a group of documents found by some boys in the streets of Milledgeville after the Civil War evacuation. The papers included a letter from President Thomas Jefferson and were reported to have been sent to the governor at that time (1887). In 1943, Louise Frederick Hays, then director of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, wrote to Huxford that no letters like those described in the article could be found in that repository.

*Georgia State Deed Books A and B and Record Books A and B, 1770s-1780s*

Deeds in the papers of Loyalist William Manson, now in the Hargrett Library for Rare Books and Manuscripts of the University of Georgia Libraries, are certified as recorded in Georgia State Deed Books A and B. There are also records of two missing manuscript volumes A and B that were recorded copies of loose records in the Georgia Executive Department.

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22 *Milledgeville Daily Times*, 24 March 1941, p. 4, col. 4-5.

23 *Valdosta Times*, 23 July 1887.

24 Directors’ Correspondence, Box 1, 1933-1955, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

A Georgia public record book containing an important 1785 petition from Reverend Daniel Marshall and his Baptist followers was cited in 1898. No such record has been found at the Georgia Department of Archives and History, at least since 1938.

British Officer's Visit to Stone Mountain, 1780
An account of a visit to Georgia's Stone Mountain (also called Rock Mountain) by a British officer in 1780 was reported to have been published in London in 1788. However, no information can now be found on the source and date of when and in what this account was published.

Federal Censuses of Georgia, 1790-1820
Federal census records for Georgia for 1790, 1800, and 1810 (and for Franklin, Rabun, and Twiggs counties in 1820) are missing. Statistics from these censuses were published shortly after the censuses were taken. However, the fate of the censuses themselves, listing names of heads of households with statistical descriptions of each family, is a mystery. The records were in the federal district court in Savannah and, contrary to modern published claims, were not destroyed when the British burned


27 Reba C. Strickland File, File II, Names, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

28 Georgia Messenger, Macon, 7 January 1832, p. 2, col. 1-2, and Adiel Sherwood, A Gazetteer of the State of Georgia (Philadelphia: The Author, 1829), 152. A likely author of this article was the famous Georgia loyalist Colonel Thomas Waters.
Washington in 1814. Numerous searches of the federal records have failed to locate these missing censuses.  

*Langworthy's History of Georgia, 1791*
What would have been Georgia's first real history, prepared by Edward Langworthy, was never published, and if the manuscript survived, it would be a valuable source of firsthand information on Georgia during the Revolutionary War.  

*Reverend John Newton Diary, 1790s*
Published information from this diary proves that it contained considerable material on the early Presbyterian church in Georgia. It should not be confused with the diaries of the contemporary Baptist preacher of the same name—ghosts until discovered and donated to the Hargrett Library for Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Georgia Libraries.

*State Censuses, 1798-1866*
Georgia first attempted to conduct a state census in 1786. Only a few scattered returns have survived of the state censuses (1786, 1798, 1804, 1810, 1817, 1824, 1831, 1838, 1845, 1852, 1859, and...

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29 Genealogist Ted O. Brooke has suggested, in jest, that these missing census records are in the federal warehouse shown in the last scene of the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark.*


31 Correspondence with members of Newton families concerning both of these diaries is in the Robert S. Davis, Jr. Collection, Hargrett Library for Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Georgia Libraries. The missing Newton diary is rumored to be secretly in the possession of some of the family members.
1866). Among those records specifically known to be missing are fragmentary returns for 1824 and 1831 reported to have been in the State Capitol in Atlanta at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{32} Also unlocated are published statistics for the state censuses of 1798, 1804, 1810, 1817, 1852, 1859, and 1866, as well as a pamphlet published by the State of Georgia in 1846 which included the statistics of the 1845 state census.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Lieutenant George Gilmer Diary, 1813}

This journal of an expedition into Indian lands by a later Georgia governor is quoted in a 1952 article on Wrightsborough by Alice Mae Massengale.\textsuperscript{34} Her quotes are not from Gilmer’s well-known published memoirs. Gilmer’s journal should contain a description of Fort Standing Peachtree, the outpost which stood where Atlanta is today. No description of Fort Standing Peachtree is known to exist.

\textit{Stephen F. Miller Collection, 1815-1855}

Miller collected pamphlets, many of which were already rare in his time.\textsuperscript{35} The pamphlets were bound and were sold at the time


\textsuperscript{33} A bibliography of Georgia colonial and state census records, and their statistical sources, has been accepted for publication in \textit{Georgia Genealogical Society Quarterly}.

\textsuperscript{34} Wrightsborough Vertical File, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

\textsuperscript{35} See Stephen F. Miller, \textit{The Bench and Bar of Georgia} 2 vols. (New York: Pudney & Russell, 1858) 2: 441-45, for a bibliography of these pamphlets.
of his death. David M. Sherman found one volume of the Miller collection and donated it to the Georgia Historical Society.\(^{36}\)

**Milledgeville City Census, 1828**

Ulrich Bonnell Phillips found this document in the Milledgeville City Hall in 1903. He noted that it provided detailed information on the town’s residents and their slaves. It is not now found among the Milledgeville city records at the Georgia Department of Archives and History or in Milledgeville.\(^{37}\)

**Troutman Flag, 1835**

The lone star flag carried by the Georgia volunteers in the Texas revolt against Mexico was captured at the battle of Coletto Creek by the Mexican army. The Georgians and other prisoners were executed at Goliad, Texas, in 1836. The State of Texas dedicated the lone star in their state flag to the memory of the Georgia volunteers and their lone star flag.\(^{38}\) The actual design of this Georgia flag is a matter of controversy. Texas historian Lee Basore believes that the Georgians’ flag, made by Joanna Troutman, or perhaps a later photograph of it, can still be found in Mexico.

\(^{36}\) However, this volume cannot presently be found at the Georgia Historical Society and, therefore, qualifies as a ghost.

\(^{37}\) Ulrich B. Phillips, "Historical Notes of Milledgeville, Ga.," *Gulf States Magazine* 5 (November 1903): 170-71. Neither the original census nor any copy was found in the records and papers that Phillips’s widow donated to the William L. Clements Library in Ann Arbor, MI.

Cotting Geological Surveys, 1830s-1840s
John Ruggles Cotting (1783-1867), state geologist of Georgia, is known to have prepared a geological survey of Georgia that he, for reasons not known, never published. Charles Morris of Milledgeville was reported to have the manuscript in 1939. Morris is now dead and the location of his papers is unknown. This survey should not be confused with the soil survey that Cotting did publish in 1843. Other reports by Cotting are believed to have been published but cannot be found.

"The Death of Grierson" Pamphlet, c. 1845
This book, pamphlet, or article on the American Revolution in Augusta, Georgia, by Ebenezer Starnes, already a "ghost" when it was described in 1902, was written around 1845 by a prominent local writer and jurist. It may have contained first person accounts of Revolutionary War events and sites in Augusta.

Views of Athens and Columbus, c. 1859
David M. Sherman of Albany, Georgia, has a page of an article published about Georgia before the Civil War. The page includes

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40 See the report made by Cotting of a soil survey in Warren, Greene, and Clarke counties in the John Ruggles Cotting File, File II, Names, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

41 Augusta Chronicle, 16 April 1902, second edition of that date, 13-14.
unique engravings of views of Athens and Columbus.\textsuperscript{42} Neither the periodical nor the date of this article has been identified. The complete article may contain additional information and engravings of Georgia on the eve of the Civil War.

\textit{State Constitution, 1861}
Like the Constitution of the Confederacy, the original of this document was penned by T. R. R. Cobb. No evidence can be found that the Georgia State Constitution of 1861 was ever in the Georgia Department of Archives and History.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Civil War Records, 1861-1865}
Many Civil War records were discovered to have been stolen from the Civil War Records Section of the Georgia Department of Archives and History and apparently sold to persons around the country.\textsuperscript{44}

\textit{Bell's Description of Georgia, 1864}
James Bell, scout for the Union cavalry in North Georgia, claimed that in 1864 he supplied information to General George H. Thomas and Captain William C. Margedant that was used by

\textsuperscript{42} The engraving of the view of Columbus has been reprinted in \textit{Georgia Historical Quarterly} 72 (1988): 70.

\textsuperscript{43} Claims that this document was offered for sale to the late Mary Givens Bryan, then director of the Georgia Department of Archives, and that the state of Georgia did not meet the price for the document, are false. Department of Archives policy has long prohibited the purchase of documents.

\textsuperscript{44} A list of many of the missing documents is maintained by the Georgia state archives. Any Georgia government documents believed to have been stolen should be reported to the Secretary of State, State Capitol, Atlanta, Georgia 30334.
Captain William Emery Merrill in a pamphlet published for use by the Union army in Georgia. The Bell pamphlet described roads, settlements, and rivers in the state. No copy or other record of this pamphlet has been found. Possibly Bell confused one of the maps of North Georgia made by Merrill with a pamphlet since the maps could be folded to pocket size. A crude notebook of miscellaneous geographical information on North Georgia from different sources does exist.

State School Censuses, 1908, 1913, 1918, 1923
As late as the 1950s, these records were being kept alternately by the Georgia Department of Education and the Georgia Department of Health. Persons needing proof of age in order to receive social security benefits frequently obtained copies from these censuses that today would be valued by Georgia genealogists as a source of personal information. These agencies now claim no knowledge of the location of these records.

The Leo Frank Trial Transcript, 1913
The transcript of the trial of the man convicted of the murder of Mary Phagan has been missing from the Fulton County Courthouse for many years, much to the annoyance of scholars of this nationally famous trial. Only an abstract of the testimony and proceedings is now available.

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45 Petition of James Bell, 18 June 1865, Entry 1730 Letters Received by A. A. Talmadge, Record Group 92, Records of the Quartermaster General, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

46 Box 13, Papers of General George H. Thomas, Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.
Gordon's Ghosts

As a hobby, Gordon B. Smith of Savannah searches old Georgia newspapers for historical articles. His searches have uncovered other references to missing Georgia history sources. His ghosts are listed below:

A biography of Judge Henry Osborne by his grandson, James H. Osborne, apparently published in pamphlet form, told of now-forgotten incidents, such as duels, in Georgia in the 1780s and 1790s.47

In 1766 Benjamin Stirk wrote letters to his mother describing life at the Reverend George Whitefield's famous Bethesda Orphanage near Savannah. The letters were published48 but their present whereabouts is a mystery.

The history of one of the oldest and most litigated controversies in Georgia history, "Facts and Figures, in connection with the Chatham County Jail, etc.," was a fifty-two-page pamphlet published in Savannah in 1881.49 No copy can now be found.

Living in Greensboro, Georgia in 1826, Lieutenant Jonas Fauche (c. 1753-1835), compiled "A Supplement to all English and French

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47 Extracts from the biography were published in "A Little Scrap of Georgia History," Savannah Daily Advertiser, 5 September 1872, p. 1, col. 2.


49 Savannah Morning News, 17 August 1881, p. 4, col. 5.
Grammars." He planned to publish it, but the book may have never gone to press. Fauche was a famous soldier of early Georgia who served as adjutant general of Georgia from 1796 to 1806.

Israel K. Teft announced plans in 1826 to publish a collection of works of Savannah poet Henry Denison which would be entitled "The Remains of Henry Denison." This work may not have been published.

Jane Conor wrote "amusing and interesting reminiscences of old times in Putnam County" before her death on 25 December 1874, which cannot be located.

Burke County farmer Amos Whitehead compiled a manuscript in 1806 that summarized local law cases. It was still in existence in 1893.

In conclusion, ghosts have value far beyond being curious trivia. Documentation that a record did exist or may exist is often used in legitimate, scholarly research. However, no amount of information about a record can ever completely replace having the record itself and the greatest value of any study of literary ghosts is in moving the "missing" to the "found".

[51] Georgia Patriot, Milledgeville, 6 January 1824, p. 4 col. 5.
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