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**TIGHT
SQUEEZE**

» » T O « «

**HUMBUG
SQUARE**



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From Tight Squeeze to Humbug Square

THE FOUNDING FATHER OF ATLANTA

Approximately fifty miles below Atlanta is the little town of Zebulon, Georgia. In the 1820s, as settlers moved westward from the Atlantic coast, Zebulon was a bustling metropolplex on the edge of the frontier. One of Zebulon's premier citizens was a man named Samuel Mitchell.

One night, a stranger named Benjamin Beckman stopped at Mitchell's farm, and Mitchell offered Beckman shelter for the night. Unfortunately, Beckman took ill, and his one-night stay extended for much longer.

During his recuperation, Beckman "took a likin'" to one of Mitchell's horses. He offered his own horse in trade, but Mitchell didn't believe it was a fair swap. During the negotiations, Beckman revealed that in the recent Indian lottery, he had won Land Lot No. 77, valued at forty-one dollars, which was the difference between



the value of the two horses. As the negotiations continued, Beckman threw this parcel of land into the pot. Mitchell eventually agreed to take Beckman's horse and the acquired land lot as an even trade for the steed Beckman fancied.

Beckman happily rode off into the sunset on his new horse. Mitchell suddenly owned a piece of land about fifty miles north in a wilderness region near Fort Peachtree. Little did Mitchell know that owning Land Lot No. 77 would make him the founding father of Atlanta.

Suing ·OLD SAM·

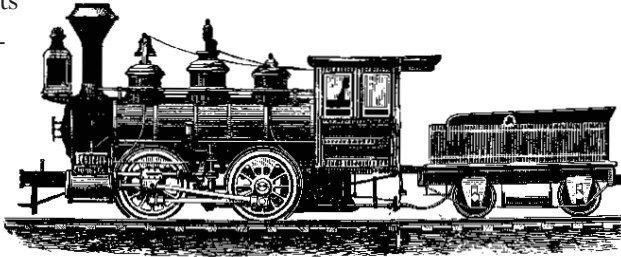
After Mitchell's death, Beckman's family challenged the title of the deed signed by the two men years before. Lengthy litigation transpired, but the Mitchell heirs prevailed. The land stayed in their hands, while the Beckmans received only a \$500 payment from the Mitchell clan.

ANY RELATION?

Although people say there is no family relation between Ol' Sam Mitchell and the Mitchell family of Atlanta (including, most notably, Margaret Mitchell, author of Gone With the Wind), others are not so sure. Margaret Mitchell was a seventh-generation Georgian, which places her family's origin at about the same time as the original Mitchells of Pike County.

THE END OF THE LINE

In the early 1800s, a fast and efficient method of transportation emerged: the railroad. Georgia turned away from its canals and waterways and began to consider new directions for its rail lines. The Western and Atlantic Railroad



wanted to expand south to meet up with the Central of Georgia's northbound line from Savannah. After careful consideration, Charles Garnett, chief engineer of the Western and Atlantic Railroad, determined that the end point of his railroad would fall on an almost perfect spot of land, which was quickly named "Terminus" to mark the railroad's end. There was only one problem—the state did not own the land the railroad wanted to use.

This perfect spot for the rail line's end fell in Land Lot No. 77. And so the story returns to the old horse trader, Father Sam Mitchell.

Given today's method of doing business, what happened next is almost impossible to believe. A railroad official approached Sam Mitchell and told him that his wilderness land was vital to the growth of the railroad and to the ultimate common good of the growing populace. After learning of Georgia's plight, Sam Mitchell *donated* Land Lot No. 77 to the state of Georgia in 1842.

“MITCHELLVILLE”?

Not only did Sam Mitchell donate his land in the heart of Terminus, but he also was responsible for the little community’s name change. Reeling from

Father Sam’s generosity, the grateful

railroad wanted

to rename

Terminus

“Mitchell-

ville.” Old Sam

demurred and

settled for a

street named in

his honor, and so

Mitchell Street

was born. He did,

however, ask for

one additional

favor.

Why Atlanta Is · CROOKED ·

Atlanta is different from most other cities in that it is not laid out north and south. Since Atlanta was a railroad town from the start, F. C. Arms, the surveyor, laid out the town parallel to the railroad, running northwest and southeast. So physically, Atlanta is a little crooked.

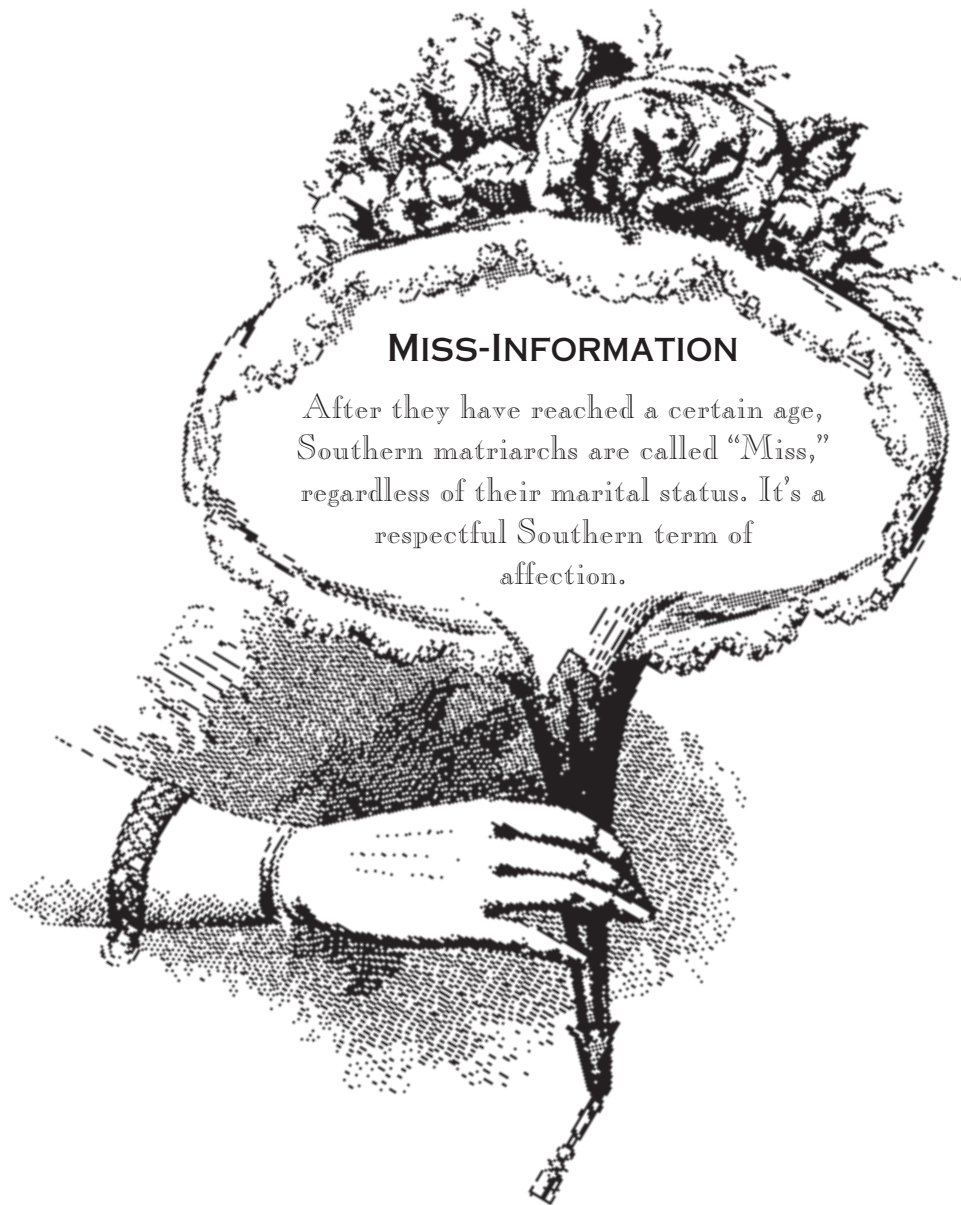
Sam Mitchell’s best friend was a Zebulon surveyor who, it is believed, also did some work in Atlanta. This friend and neighbor was William A. Pryor. Mitchell requested that a street be named for him, too, and Pryor Street was created. These two streets, now both major Atlanta thoroughfares, are a testament to good friends and good will.

“LUMPKINVILLE”?

Terminus, however, still did not have its new name. Mitchell suggested that the city be named for a person who had played a significant role in both the state’s and the railroad’s history. He suggested that Wilson Lumpkin, who had served his state as governor and head of the railroad, act as the city’s namesake.

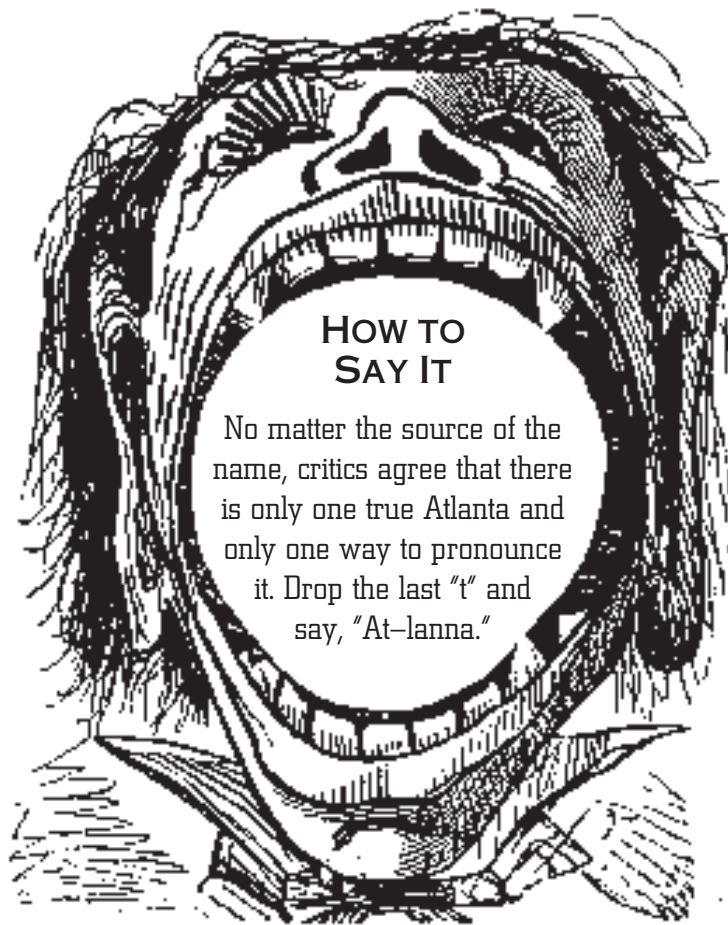


Lumpkin certainly deserved having a Georgia town named in his honor. Mitchell, known for his generosity more than his creativity, suggested that the town be named “Lumpkinville.” Since “Lumpkinville” did not roll off the tongue easily, and the alternatives were equally distasteful (*Lumpkintown? Lumpkinburg? Lumpkin City?*), the powers-that-be turned to the former governor’s daughter, Martha, for inspiration,



MISS-INFORMATION

After they have reached a certain age, Southern matriarchs are called “Miss,” regardless of their marital status. It’s a respectful Southern term of affection.



HOW TO SAY IT

No matter the source of the name, critics agree that there is only one true Atlanta and only one way to pronounce it. Drop the last "t" and say, "At-lanna."

and Terminus was named "Marthasville." The name was officially adopted by the General Assembly on December 23, 1843. Miss Martha, interestingly enough, didn't settle down in the town named for her, but instead chose to live in the Athens area.¹

It seems that from the start, very few residents liked the new name, which they thought much too prosaic to reflect the vitality associated with a railroad hub. A concerted effort to change the name from Marthasville to anything else began immediately.

ATLANTA IS BORN



The Georgia Railroad from the east was about to join with the Western and Atlantic at Marthasville. Richard Peter, superintendent and resident engineer, wrote J. Edgar Thompson, chief engineer of the Georgia Railroad, for any ideas for a new name. Thompson is said to have replied, “Eureka—Atlanta, the terminus of the Western and Atlantic Railroad. Atlantic, masculine; Atlanta, feminine—a coined word—and if you think it will suit, adopt it.”²

There are some who still believe, just like Miss Martha, that the city was called Atlanta after her middle name, Atalanta. Others believe that it was named for the Greek Goddess, Atalanta. Although its exact origin remains a mystery, the name Atlanta was officially adopted by the General Assembly on December 26, 1845, sixteen years before the War Between the North and the South. The name later was copied by Atlanta, Illinois; Atlanta, Michigan; Atlanta, Missouri; Atlanta, Texas; and the many other “Atlantas” named when soldiers returned home from the Civil War.

In the 1840s and 50s, Atlanta was a “rough and ready” railroad town, and life revolved around the tracks. The

locomotive, which gave the city its origin and life’s blood, was honored by a depiction on the great seal

The • GATEWAY CITY •

Atlanta earned the nickname “the Gateway City” because of the railroad. Legend holds that John C. Calhoun, South Carolina statesman and staunch Southern rights supporter, coined this name. He hoped that one day a train would connect Charleston, South Carolina, through the Atlanta gateway to the north.

of the city. Streets were laid out parallel to the railroad, and the tracks became an integral part of city life. The city was so active and prosperous that the number of trains passing through effectively sliced the city in half, making it difficult to get from one side of the town to the other. (See chapter 5.)

POPULATION COUNT

With the success of the railroads, the city attracted more and more inhabitants. Atlanta survived the typhoid and smallpox epidemics of 1849 and 1850 relatively unscathed, leaving the city with a hefty population of around 2,500 settlers. An 1850 survey (women and children were not counted in the survey, and some citizens did not respond) breaks down Atlantans by occupation or status:



- 493 Slaves
- 70 Carpenters
- 38 Merchants
- 18 Free Blacks
- 10 Druggists
- 8 Clergymen
- 8 Lawyers
- 8 Physicians
- 3 Printers
- 3 Tailors
- 1 Dentist (who also was unfortunate enough to become one of Atlanta's first murder victims)
- 85 No Occupation (Translated: ruffians, hooligans, gamblers, and vagrants)

The number of Atlanta's residents would triple before the start of the Civil War.

ATLANTA'S NIGHT LIFE



Of the eighty-five citizens listed in the dubious category of having “No Occupation,” many were most likely familiar with Atlanta’s rougher areas: Murrell’s Row, Tight Squeeze, Humbug Square, and the other locations that thrived after dark.

MURREL’S ROW

Named for the notorious Tennessee murderer, John A. Murrell, this section of town was a favorite hangout for thieves, gamblers, cutthroats, and prostitutes. Drunken brawls and cockfights were common and expected here. Before the Civil War, Murrell’s Row was the preferred meeting place for those who wanted to fight and concoct schemes. This notorious area north of Decatur Street between Peachtree and Pryor faded away shortly before the Civil War.



HUMBUG SQUARE

While Murrell’s Row was known for its cockfighting and general gaming, popular Humbug Square, perpetually a quagmire of mud, offered more friendly fun. Dancing bears, “freaks,” jugglers and musicians, and “drummers,” or salespeople, entertained passersby.³ Most common among the drummers were snake-oil salesmen proffering elixirs, root doctors prescribing fascinating pseudo-medical treatments, and medicine men claiming to have traveled and studied with the Indians.



All the cures were over the counter. Where else could customers get their livers rejuvenated and their fortunes told simultaneously? This area existed just below the train station. A visit to modern-day Underground Atlanta will put you right in the middle of Humbug Square.



BUCKHEAD

In the 1840s and 50s, Buckhead was known as “Irbyville,” named after old Henry Irby’s Tavern and Inn. This “neighborhood” was little more than a clapboard tavern on the side of the road, off the beaten path from the active railroad yards of downtown Atlanta.

One day, according to folklore, tavern owner Irby adorned his front porch with the head of a large deer shot near the spring in his backyard. As a result, residents adopted the more strikingly descriptive name “Buckhead.”

Henry Irby’s tavern sat where today’s Peachtree Street and Roswell Road meet. The only remaining relic of Henry Irby’s era is an old oak tree one block west of Peachtree. Rumor has it that this age-old tree witnessed one of the Irbys

THE FIRST PARTY

The first recorded social event in Atlanta was held in 1850 when Mrs. Mulligan held a ball to celebrate the laying of a *real* floor (that is, wood over her packed dirt floor) in her cabin.



burying a stash of Confederate gold where Buckhead Plaza now stands. The gold, however, has never been found.

TIGHT SQUEEZE

While Irby's tavern was well known and a popular meeting place, its location was less than ideal in the mid-1800s. The route to Buckhead (especially after the Civil War, when the suburbs of Atlanta became infested with war-displaced thieves and hooligans) required passage through "Tight Squeeze." Composed of a cluster of houses, a wagon yard, a blacksmith shop, and several small stores, Tight Squeeze was notorious as a hangout for those interested in illegal gain. Tight Squeeze began at the intersection of present-day Peachtree and 10th Streets and extended north to the outskirts of Buckhead.



The Farmer Plaster • AMBUSH •

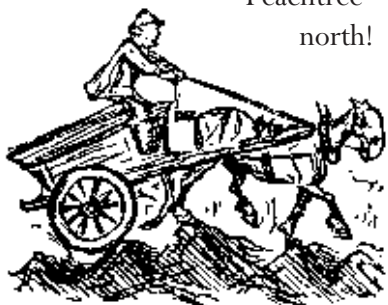
One Buckhead farmer found out about the dangers of Tight Squeeze the hard way. As

Farmer Plaster headed home to Buckhead after selling his cotton down by the Atlanta rail yards, he was singled out as an easy mark by the Tight Squeeze locals. The thieves ambushed Farmer Plaster and demanded all his money. While

Farmer Plaster may have laughed all the way to the bank where he had deposited his profits before returning home, his grieving widow cried all the way back to claim the cash. The Tight Squeeze thieves had killed Plaster for fifteen cents.

TWO PEACHTREE STREETS

Head north on Peachtree Street from downtown, blink, and you'll find yourself on West Peachtree—but don't worry, you're still heading north!



In early Atlanta, the dirt Peachtree Road was a short but straight byway. Rains, along with wear and tear from farmers' wagons, caused a deep hollow in the roadway. When it was muddy, even the best team of horses could not pull a wagon through. Farmers and others driving into town soon took the high road to the east, bypassing the mud and creating yet another Peachtree. After a time of confusion, it became necessary to give the roads separate names.

Welcome to Peachtree Street and West Peachtree. There are, however, no such solid explanations for Peachtree Road, Peachtree Place, Peachtree Manor, and the hundreds of other Peachtree Streets on the Atlanta map.

STATE SQUARE

One of the most emotionally charged scenes in *Gone With the Wind* is the panoramic view of Scarlett O'Hara walking among the thousands of Atlanta's dying, sick, and wounded lying outside the train terminal. This depressing scene is actually a realistic representation of the numbers of injured associated with the Battle of Atlanta.

These wounded men, many waiting to be transported to hospitals outside the city, were placed in antebellum Atlanta's favorite breathing spot. This tree-lined park, called "State Square," sat in the heart

of town and was bounded by Pryor, Decatur, and Central Streets, and the Western and Atlantic Railroad. (This was the land deeded to Atlanta by Sam Mitchell.)

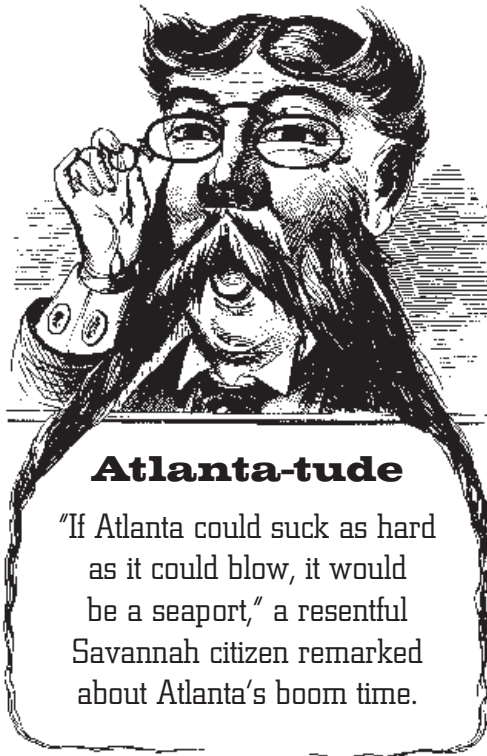
When the hospitals could no longer hold the numbers of wounded soldiers flowing into the city, State Square was converted into an open-air medical facility. Men butchered and maimed by artillery were transported there to await their turns on the surgeon's table. Piles of dismembered arms and legs paid silent testimony to the fates of many soldiers.

Sherman destroyed State Square, and it has never been restored. A visit to Underground Atlanta places visitors on this hallowed ground.

CAPITAL IDEA

In only the third decade after the city was born, Atlanta sought the position of the capital of Georgia. When the state's constitutional convention met in Atlanta in early 1886, the city made an offer Georgia couldn't refuse: move the capital from Milledgeville, and Atlanta would put up the legislature free-of-charge for ten years.

On December 5, 1877, Georgia voters approved of the permanent relocation by a nearly two-to-one margin. Early the next year, the legislature moved into the Kimball Opera House, which served as its home until a new building could be constructed.



Twelve years later, on July 4, 1889, the legislature convened in its new quarters, the present day Georgia State Capitol. The building exterior was constructed with Indiana limestone; Georgia marble was available, but was deemed too expensive. One small section of Georgia marble can be found at the capitol's cornerstone, and local marble later refurbished the capitol walls, steps, and floors. In 1958, the building's tin-alloy dome received a coating of forty-three ounces of Dahlonega gold.

**Living in
• THE DOME •**

In the early days, the Georgia State Capitol actually had residents. Near the turn of the century, the assistant adjutant general and his family set up housekeeping in the top of the dome. The occupants had an excellent view in all directions of the growing city.