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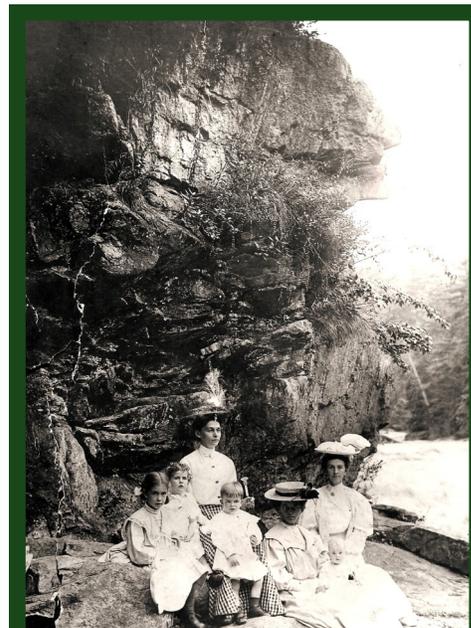
The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

Tallulah Falls' Grand Era of Tourism

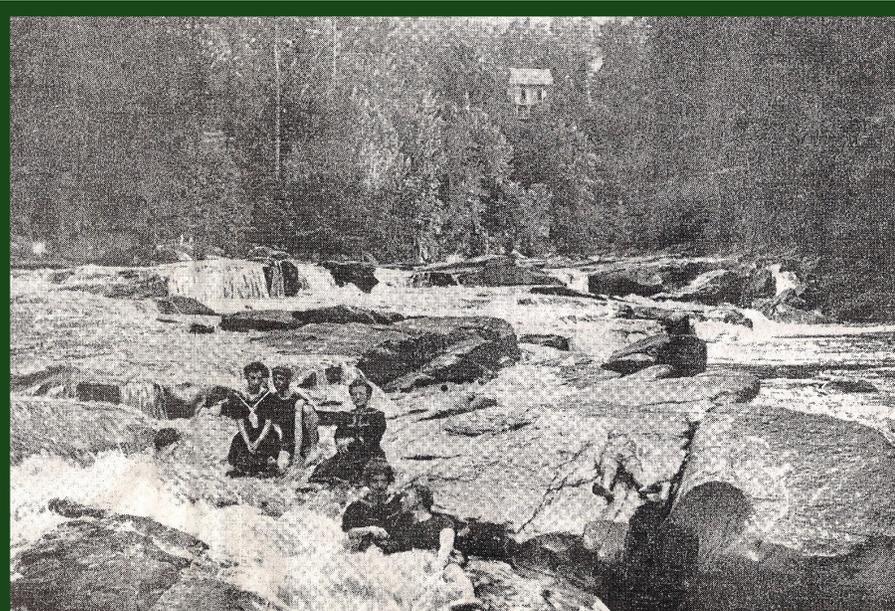
In the early 1600s, while white men were establishing themselves on the coast of Virginia, the Cherokees already had a village near Tallulah Falls. In 1819 when the Cherokees signed a treaty that forced their removal from the area, the falls at Tallulah became more well-known. By 1840, visits to the falls had become quite common even though it was a trip

through the wilderness requiring great endurance. After the Civil War, the flow of visitors increased and hotels were built and expanded to accommodate them.

When the Tallulah Falls Railroad came to town in 1882, a few huge hotels and numerous smaller establishments were already in operation. Tallulah Falls became a tourist sensation that catered to the wealthy and cultured. The railroad made one daily round trip from Cornelia. A band met the



Visitors to the gorge liked to pose for the camera in their Victorian finery. Vacationers often took picnics to their favorite spots. This photo was taken beneath the Witch's Head rock formation in the bottom of the gorge.



Indian Arrow Rapids - "Bathing" in the Tallulah River before the dam was constructed in 1911, women wore very modest costumes. This area of the river is now submerged beneath the lake.

train and coaches were available to convey tourists and their baggage to their lodging establishment. There were grand Victorian hotels with names such as Cliff House, Grand View, Tallulah Lodge, and the Robinson House. At the hotels there were billiards and tennis, and hammocks and comfortable chairs on wide porches. Livery stables rented riding

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Page 2

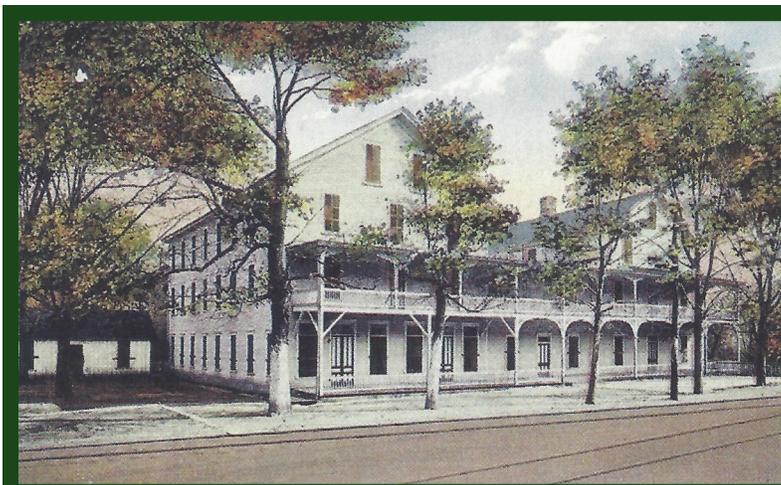
horses and vehicles for trips into the country. Fishing and hunting were excellent. Visitors from all over the country came to enjoy the majestic beauty of the falls in Tallulah Gorge and Rabun County's delightful climate. Although tourism is still a major economic boon, hotel rooms in 1910 no doubt exceeded today's numbers.

As a further attraction for tourists, on July 24, 1886, J.A. St. John, a high wire performer who called himself Professor Leon, walked a rope stretched 1,449 feet across the gorge. An estimated 3,500 to 6,000 people packed the town of Tallulah Falls to witness the feat, a huge crowd for the time.

Georgia Railway and Power Company, the corporate predecessor of today's Georgia Power Company, had scouted the Tallulah River and its great drop in elevation at Tallulah Gorge as an ideal spot to build a dam and hydroelectric plant. The electricity was intended to power Atlanta's trolley cars. Georgia's first great environmental battle



Tallulah Lodge - Tallulah Falls' grandest lodging, built in the 1890s, had more than 100 rooms and its own mail stop on the Tallulah Falls Railroad. It was located one mile south of the depot on the rim of the gorge. It claimed in its promotional literature to be the finest hotel in the South. It burned in 1916.



Cliff House - The 50-room Cliff House was located on the edge of the gorge across the tracks from the depot. It was built in 1882 by R.H. Moss of Athens. It burned in 1937.

ensued, with Helen D. Longstreet leading the opposition. She claimed the state had no right to grant state property to a corporation against the will of the people. The legal case was lost in a Rabun County court and the dam was completed in 1913. It was an engineering masterpiece at the time of its construction. Portions of the gorge were flooded; the reservoir covered the river, and the flow of water was diverted from the beautiful falls that had been known as the "Niagara of the South."

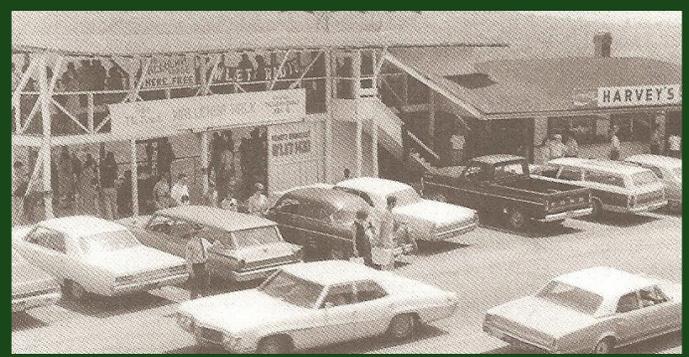
After the dam was completed, the Falls declined rapidly as a premier tourist destination, but the death blow to the town's tourist industry came just before Christmas in 1921. A spark of unknown origin started a ferocious fire that was whipped by high winds. Because all the buildings were made of wood, and there were no fire departments anywhere near, the blaze burned for days, wiping out almost the entire town. The only buildings that survived were those away from the town center like the train depot

and the Cliff House Hotel at the edge of the gorge. Most structures were not insured and were never rebuilt. By 1937 when the Cliff House also burned, all the grand hotels and boarding houses were gone.

The town of Tallulah Falls never recovered. Improved highways and air conditioning changed habits and destinations. Tourists traveled further into the mountains, and towns such as Gatlinburg and Asheville became the new tourist meccas. When the main north-south highway was rebuilt to bypass the town, Tallulah Falls dwindled to 162 inhabitants by 1980.

On July 18, 1970, the town of Tallulah Falls hoped to recreate the interest of its heyday when a tightrope walker, The Great Wallenda, walked across the gorge, 84 years after Professor Leon's feat. The event made history as the largest crowd ever to gather in Rabun County, and it was claimed that Wallenda made a longer walk than Professor Leon's in 1886. On that blistering hot July day, 25,000 people came to watch. The odds are good, however, that almost no one in that huge crowd had ever heard of the first historic walk almost a hundred years before. John Harvey's Tallulah Point Overlook, a famous tourist spot on the gorge's edge, was even more packed with visitors than usual.

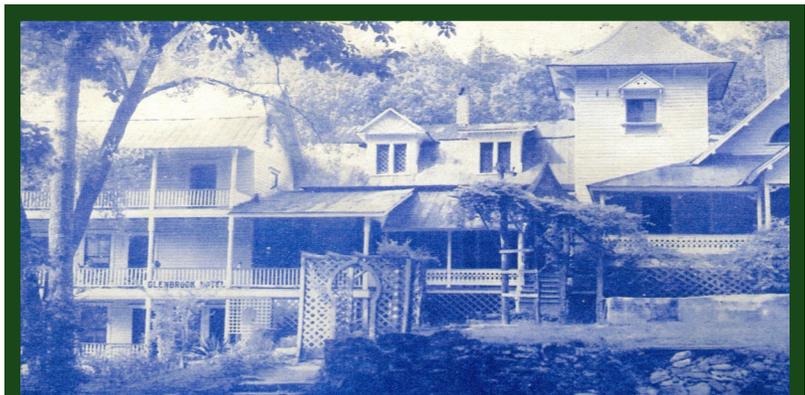
Tourists did not return in large numbers until the State of Georgia, with the help of Georgia Power Company, established a state park with a beautiful interpretative center. Now the gorge is home to twelve threatened or endangered species, including the extremely rare persistent trillium. The park and Georgia Power Company have aesthetic water releases from the dam several times a year to provide a historic glimpse of the river as it flowed before the dam. On specific weekends in April and November special water releases provide an



John Harvey's Tallulah Point Overlook

This photo was made the day of Wallenda's Walk in 1970. The Harvey family operated this attraction for decades.

opportunity for experienced whitewater kayakers to challenge their skills as spectators watch from the rim. One of the park's trails has now been named in honor of Helen D. Longstreet, the woman who fought to save the unequalled natural beauty that once existed there.



Glenbrook Hotel - With its four-story classic Victorian architecture, the Glenbrook Hotel drew visitors for the scenery and fine accommodations. It was one of the few structures to escape the Great Fire of 1921 which destroyed most of the town. It was a ramshackle ivy-covered pile when a tornado hit in 1994 and blew away enough debris to expose its remains again.



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- Please visit our museum and research library on Mondays and Fridays from 10:00 until 2:00.
- Group tours by appointment

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200 YEARS** ★★
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Stuckey's Restaurant opened in Tallulah Falls in 1950 and did not close until the early 1980s. Highway travelers to Rabun County from the south passed this and the Tallulah Point Overlook as Rabun County's first tourist stops.