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# The Lost Confederate Gold

by Mark Roy Henowitz

## 25th Annual Fiction Writing Competition

The Editorial Board of the *Georgia Bar Journal* is proud to present "The Lost Confederate Gold," by Mark Roy Henowitz of Buford, as the winner of the *Journal's* 25th annual Fiction Writing Competition.

The purposes of the competition are to enhance interest in the *Journal*, to encourage excellence in writing by members of the Bar and to provide an innovative vehicle for the illustration of the life and work of lawyers. As in years past, this year's entries reflected a wide range of topics and literary styles. In accordance with the competition's rules, the Editorial Board selected the winning story through a process of reading each story without knowledge of the author's identity and then ranking each entry. The story with the highest cumulative ranking was selected as the winner. The Editorial Board congratulates Henowitz and all of the other entrants for their participation and excellent writing.

It was curtains for the old courthouse. Eighteen-wheelers circled the crumbling edifice. Men in coveralls wheeled, pushed, pulled, carried, hauled, dragged, lugged and shoved a century of courthouse detritus out of the timeworn structure.

The building was simply worn out. It was used up. The sheriff had jumped ship years ago, favoring a storefront around the corner. State Court had slipped away to a brick building across the street. The tax assessor was housed up the hill in the old high school. The ornate, classic and classy turn-of-the-century courtroom, which comprised the entire second floor, had been sliced into three considerably less stately chambers. One Superior Court judge had relocated his bench to the old post office down the street. Another dispensed justice from a former movie theatre. The urban sprawl oozing our way had created a situation that the old relic on the courthouse square had no capacity to address.

My own bailiwick was the real property record room. This division of the clerk's office had long ago outgrown its original home. The deed room had been shunted into the courthouse basement, an ill-lit, low-ceilinged affair, with exposed pipes overhead. It was stifling in summer, flooded in spring and autumn, and freezing in winter. Stella, the deputy clerk, had terminated a mouse down there, in close combat, by whacking it with a Swingline stapler.

I stood on the courthouse lawn, leaning against a granite monument, watching the workers like so many swarming ants empty the obsolete hall of justice. Although I came to the courthouse every workday, I had never paid the slightest bit of attention to the unusual monument that I now reclined against. Daily, I breezed right by at a hearty clip, on a mission; I had real property titles to search. My diurnal destination was that moldy basement with its books and indexes. That day was different. I was in no hurry. That day the books were not waiting for me. No work could be done on that moving day. Nothing could be searched or researched. As the movers swarmed by me, I took a step back from the singular monument and studied it for the first time.

At ground level was a square granite block, maybe four feet high. Positioned atop that foundation was a stone structure that was too squat to be an obelisk, yet too thin to be a pyramid. It was some kind of granite hybrid obelisk-pyramid with trapezoidal sides. This was capped by a small true pyramid. The structure rose to twice my height.

There was an inscription on the base. It read: To the memory of the brave members of the company of mounted volunteers, Ensign Jasper Adams, Sergeant Asa Wade, Privates Adam Cain, James Vance, RW Eaves, David Tanner, Isaac and EG Lafon, brothers, who, under the command of Captain Thomas O'Shay, were slain in battle with a party of Creek Indians at Shepherd's in Stewart County, Georgia, on June 9, 1836.

Was I standing in a graveyard? Were the eight men buried there on that spot? Then again, no, the monument was not a gravestone. It was a memorial. Surely, they were elsewhere. Most likely they were interred where the skirmish occurred, at Shepherd's, in Stewart County.

I shrugged and walked into the courthouse. I took the stairs to the basement.

The real property record room was upside down. The ancient leather bound deed books and indexes along with the more recent, more sterile computer print-out versions were stacked like so much cordwood. Movers jostled each other and the books as they wrestled their loads out the narrow doorway and up the even narrower stairs.

"You can't work here today, Noble," said Stella, the deputy clerk, peering at me disapprovingly over reading glasses. "Knowing you, though, it figures that you would show up and try."

"I'm not here to work, Stella. I just wanted to be in the old courthouse on the last day."

She shook her head at me, then slipped off the reading glasses and let them hang on a silver chain around her neck. "Why do you come here every day, anyway, Noble? No one else does anymore. It's all on the Internet. You can search a title at home in your pajamas."

"I don't wear pajamas."

"Spare me the details," she laughed.

"You know how this business is," I said. "During boom times the record room is filled with the kind of people who come from out of nowhere. In bust times they go right back there."

"Not anymore, Noble." She stacked two more books onto an already unsteady, five-foot-high pile. "You're the last of the dinosaurs, searching a title at the courthouse. Don't you know it can be done from Bangalore?"

"What do you know about Bangalore? Since when are you such an authority on all things Internet?"

"I'm on Facebook, Noble. You should friend me. Then you could enjoy the pictures of my grandbabies that I post every day."

"Sounds like I'm missing out."

She frowned at me. "Have you been to the new courthouse?" she said.

I shook my head.

"Actually, it's not a courthouse."

"No?"

"No. It's the Justice and Administration Building. They're calling it the Jay Bee for short."

"Who is?"

"Everybody. Yes, either the Jay Bee or the Law Mall, because it has a four-story foyer with an escalator. It reminds people of a mall."

"The Law Mall?"

She nodded.

"I'll see it on Monday," I said. "That will be soon enough. You'll be open for business?"

"Yes."

"Good luck with the move."

I left the basement, climbed the stairs and walked across the hall to the Probate Court. The place was even more torn apart than the clerk's haunt. Not only were the books in huge stacks and the furniture and machines in a heap, but the very counters and bookcases had been ripped clean off the walls to which they had been attached. It looked as if a tornado had torn through the place, upending the world.

"Anybody here?" I hollered. No answer. "Marie, are you hidden under a pile of minute books?" No answer.

I gingerly picked my way through the rubble. Skirting around an unsteady stack of chairs, I came to a counter that was about half peeled off the wall. Jammed between the shorn counter and the wall, I spied an old leather volume. It looked as if it had been wedged there since the counter had been cobbled together; decades, maybe longer. Avoiding the protruding rusty nails, I gingerly slipped the volume out of its place of concealment.

It was a thin black book with a red binding. The cover was hanging on by two hairs. Embossed on the front in gold were the words Pension Record.

I rested it on the teetering counter and flipped it open. The pages were yellow ledger leaves with rows and columns. The columns were labeled Name, Company, Regiment, Time of Enlistment, When and Where Discharged and then a series of years from 1867 through 1917.

The rows were filled in with blue ink. Page after page of entries. The first column listed the pensioners alphabetically from Abner to Webb. Next, the companies and regiments were shown as Company A 19th Ga or Company C Cobb's Legion or Company B 16th Ga or 9 Ga Artillery. Most entries showed enlistments in 1861 or 1862. The entry for discharge for nearly all said simply Close War. Under each year was the handwritten sum of the pension. Sixty dollars. For each man. For each year. Sixty dollars. Or if the numbers stopped, the word DIED was inscribed.

As I flipped through the book, several loose pages tumbled out. I snatched up the fallen leaves. Typed at the top of the first sheet, I read, Registration of Old Soldiers Reunion held on this twenty-third day of August 1917. On three pages were the handwritten names of 33 souls from our county who had survived to attend a reunion of War Between the States veterans held during the First World War.

I reinserted the reunion papers into the Pension Record book. Still alone in the topsy-turvy Probate Court, I continued to thumb through the venerable volume.

Then another page literally leapt out of the timeworn book and into my hand. It was a folded sheet.

I unfolded it. It was some kind of a hand drawn map. Chennault Crossroads was written in the center. The map showed that at a distance of 40, I assumed miles, from the crossroads, following a fairly straight line, curving only slightly, was located a series of triangles. Near to the triangles were two irregular lines sketched in blue, possibly creeks or rivers, which nearly intersected. That was the totality of the map.

"Anyone here?" I hollered.

No one answered.

I placed the rescued pension record on top of a tottering stack of books. I silently slipped the map into my pocket. I left the old courthouse for the last time.



I had no clue as to the map's meaning, but I had access to someone supremely capable of unlocking the mystery. The man I had in mind was Karl Oliver Smith. The Professor, as I called him, came from a long, illustrious line. One of his forebears had been a South Carolina colonial governor. Before being kicked out of the Citadel, for reasons he never disclosed, the Professor had earned the sobriquet K.O. (which were also his initials) after knocking out seven consecutive opponents in inter-collegiate boxing competitions. He

was made of armor plate. Presently he was the distinguished occupant of the Senator Richard B. Russell Endowed Chair in History at the university. His lectures were well attended. His presentations were laser-like. His voice was rusty shrapnel. He knew more history than any man this side of Toynbee. He knew more Georgia history than any man. Period.

I was certain that I would find the Professor in his office and I did. He sat behind a desk chaotic with books and papers. He was dressed, as always, in his Harris-tweed jacket and a black bowtie. His hair was uncombed. He needed a shave.

"Noble," he rasped, upon glancing up from his papers and seeing me enter his habitat. Then wasting no words on salutations, he demanded, "What have you got for me?"

"What makes you think I have anything?"

"Oh, you've got something. You always have something. Now, what is it?"

I unfolded the map and laid it out on his cluttered desk.

"They're tearing apart the old courthouse," I explained. "This was in a Civil War pension book. The book was jammed between a shelf and the wall. Probably been hidden there for nearly a hundred years."

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He squinted at the document. Then he produced a magnifying glass and subjected the paper to a Sherlock-like examination. Next, he brought his nose right down to the instrument and studied it for some time.

"The trail begins at Chennault Crossroads," he said. "What does Chennault Crossroads mean to you, Noble?"

"Nothing," I said. "Where is Chennault?"

"Where indeed." His eyes lit up like candles. "And where does the road from Chennault lead? The map is clear. It goes a certain distance and ends close by the place where two rivers join near a series of triangles. Do you know where the rivers meet? Do you know where the triangles are?"

He didn't wait for my negative response to his rhetorical inquires. He snatched a book from a nearby shelf. Then he flipped the volume open to a page containing a detailed map of Georgia. Retrieving a ruler from the clutter on his desk, he made some measurements on the Georgia map.

Satisfied with his calculations, the Professor leaned back in his chair.

"On Saturday, April 1, 1865," he said, "General Robert E. Lee reluctantly decided to abandon his defense of Richmond. Do you know what it meant, Noble, to discontinue the defense of Richmond?"

"Yes," I offered. "The capital of the Confederacy would fall."

"Precisely. In a rather understated message, Lee telegraphed Confederate President Jeff Davis 'I advise that all preparations be made for leaving Richmond tonight.' That very last train out of Richmond carried much more than just Davis and the dolorous remnants of the fleeing Confederate government. On board, Noble, was the Confederate treasury. And in addition to the treasury, the train carried the considerable assets of six Richmond banks. The treasury contained gold and silver coin and gold and silver bars worth more than \$500,000."

"How much would that be in today's money?" I asked.

"Maybe \$10 million. The value of the Richmond banks' assets, put on the train for safe keeping, totaled another \$10 million in silver and gold coin. The banks' coins were packed into socks at the rate of \$5,000 each. The socks were deposited in wooden kegs. The kegs were then sealed.

"And there was more," he went on, "including a chest of jewelry contributed by southern women for the purchase of an ironclad warship. That coffer was crammed full of not only gold and silver, but diamonds and other gemstones. There were other boxes loaded with the contents of the banks' safety deposit boxes. There was a chest containing the gold and silver floor sweepings from the Dahlonega mint.

"Barely ahead of the Yankee cavalry, who were in hot pursuit," continued the Professor, "the treasure train raced south out of Richmond. It crossed the state line into North Carolina and arrived in Greensboro. Here the tracks ended. The Yankees had torn up the railroad."

"End of the line," I said.

"Yes, Noble, it was the end of the line. The treasure had to be offloaded from the train. It was put onto horse-drawn wagons. As the caravan laboriously moved southwest, one by one, the Confederate cabinet officers and the other high officials slipped quietly away, trying to melt into the countryside and to avoid capture by the Union troops breathing down their necks. Bereft of nearly all of the government dignitaries, the treasure train crossed into South Carolina. Next stop was the Savannah River. On the other side was Georgia."

"Where on the river?"

"They crossed on a pontoon bridge just south of Lisbon. They went into camp about three miles from the river, near the first house on the Old Washington Road.

"Jefferson Davis arrived in Washington, Georgia, ahead of the treasure train. He held a last meet-

ing with those few officials still hanging around. Then, in the morning, barely noticed, he slipped out of town, ending the last semblance of Confederate governance.

"The wagon train continued towards Washington and arrived at Chennault Crossroads in Lincoln County with the treasure just after sundown."

"Chennault Crossroads! The map."

"Calm down, Noble. Listen. The wagon train, at this point, after several minor robberies and a mutiny or two, consisted of five wagons loaded with the loot. About a dozen men remained. They made camp near the home of Dionysius Chennault, a Methodist minister and plantation owner. Horses were unhitched. A meal was prepared. The men lay down for the night.

"Near midnight, raiders on horseback, maybe 20 men charged the camp. With guns blazing, the robbers simply and swiftly took the treasure. The kegs of gold and silver coins, the chests of gold and silver bars, and the other treasures were in an instant spirited away."

"Who were they?" I asked. "The raiders. Who were they?"

"Don't know," said the Professor, grinning a sly grin. "Could have been renegade members of Jeff Davis' guard. They knew the game was up. Why let the Yankees take the loot? Might have been an unofficial advance visit from the Massachusetts Yankees who stormed up to the Chennault place the next day. Perhaps they showed up just a little bit early and took the stuff. Why not? Possibly it was folks from the neighborhood. It was no secret that the treasure was at the Chennault plantation.

"In any event, the Yankee troops arrived in the morning looking for the gold. Unfortunately for them, they were a few hours late.

"The newly minted conquerors roughly interrogated the Chennault family as well as the other locals—both white and black. A few of the freed slaves had retrieved a couple of coins that had fallen into the dirt during the robbery. The Yankees,

using considerably more violence than was necessary, confiscated these few coins from the hands of the browbeaten freedmen. As to the interrogations, they revealed nothing. Nobody, it seemed, had any information."

"And the treasure?"

"The treasure, the gold and silver, the multi-million dollar horde of the Confederate treasury and the Virginia banks, has never been found.

"Now grab your hat, Noble."

"I don't have a hat," I said.

"We're going to Rock Hawk."

"What and where is Rock Hawk?"

"No time for that now. You drive, Noble."



We paused at a hardware store to acquire a few supplies. We chose a couple of round-point digging shovels. I added a pickax. Then I grabbed a flashlight and a handful of batteries.

"We'll take these, too," the Professor said, showing the cashier three sticks of beef jerky.

The Professor claimed he had no cash on him, so I paid.

I tossed the tools into the back of my pickup. The Professor pointed out the road to take. I motored south at a pretty good clip, but not so swiftly as to be tagged. The Professor didn't say much. He stared straight through the windshield and gnawed his beef jerky.

It was after dark when we crossed into Putnam County and then arrived at the entrance to Rock Hawk Park. The gate was closed.

"We're too late," I said. "It's closed for the night."

Wordlessly, the Professor turned toward me. His eyes chewed me up and spit me out. I took his meaning. I backed up a dozen car lengths. I floored it and smashed through the bolted gate.

"Park over there," he said.

I pulled into the empty parking lot. Shovels and pickax over my shoulder, I followed the Professor.

After hiking a short distance, we arrived at the effigy. It was a massive sculpture. Easily a hundred

feet from beak to tail feather and with another hundred feet of wing span. A gigantic mound formed into the shape of a flying hawk rising 10 or 15 feet out of the earth. Composed of thousands of milky quartz rocks, in the bright moonlight it had more the appearance of polished stainless steel.

"What is it?" I said.

"It's a New World Stonehenge and easily of the same vintage," the Professor said. "It was created by the Swift Creek people as a site for their sacred rites and used by them for that purpose for several thousand years.

"The distance on the treasure map matches the distance from the Chennault place to here," he said.

"What about the confluence of the rivers shown on the map?"

"The Oconee River and the Apalachee River meet not far away."

"I don't think so," I said. "They don't converge."

"The entire river system has been dammed up and altered, Noble. Lake Oconee and Lake Sinclair have been created. It wasn't that way in 1865. The rivers joined. And not far away."

I conceded that point, but raised another. "The map shows a series of triangles. I see a giant flying bird."

"Step over here," the Professor said walking southwesterly for about 50 paces.

He stopped at a small mound composed of the same milky quartz rocks, only this one was in the shape of four triangles. He grinned.

"The Confederate treasure is here. Right here. Under this mound," he declared with absolute certainty.

"I'm not tearing up a 2,000-year-old sacred site," I protested.

He shook his head. "The triangles, Noble, are not a part of the Indian mound. The white men who discovered Rock Hawk in 1820 make no mention of the triangle mound. That's because the triangles were not here in 1820. The first time the quartz triangle mound is mentioned is after 1865."

"Maybe the smaller mound was simply overlooked at first."

"That is possible. It is also unlikely. It is more likely that the mound did not exist before 1865. Then, Noble, the raiders, after leaving Chennault Crossroads, brought the Confederate treasure here. They buried it here. On top of the treasure, they created a new mound and covered it with quartz rocks to match the nearby effigy. That way they could easily identify the location when they returned. The ruse also acted as camouflage. Others, they reasoned, thinking that the triangle mound was a part of the larger Indian holy site, would not disturb it. In fact the mound, as we see, is untouched. The raiders never returned. They never reclaimed the treasure. The quartz triangle mound built in 1865 remains just as when it was created. The gold, Noble, is beneath our feet."

I handed a shovel to the Professor. He didn't take it.

"There are two kinds of people in this world, Noble," he said. "Those who can interpret maps, and those who dig. You dig."

And dig I did, hour after sweaty hour. I moved the quartz rocks forming the triangle mound and dug a six-foot-deep hole. I dug another pit to the north. At some point, the Professor threw off his tweed jacket and joined in. We dug another shaft to the south. Then we returned to the original crater and made it deeper and wider.

Besides red Georgia clay, the only thing we unearthed was yellow Georgia clay.

"It's not here," I said, exhausted. I wiped my face for the thousandth time on my shirt sleeve. "It's just not here. Nothing is here. Nothing."

The Professor stood in a chest deep hole. His white tuft was matted with sweat.

"We'd better hit the road, Noble," he said. "The sun is about to come up. The rangers will be here soon. It's surely a crime to bust through a locked park gate."

"Surely," I said.

"Definitely against the law to excavate state land."



"I would think so."

"Probably a federal rap under the Antiquities Act to destroy an ancient Indian effigy mound."

"You said the triangles weren't part of the effigy."

"I have a feeling you don't want to explain that theory to the authorities."

"True, besides, I've got nobody to post my bail," I said.

Then, without further discourse, we grabbed our shovels and vacated the scene.



Monday morning. I dragged myself to the new courthouse, or more accurately the Justice and Administration Building. The Jay Bee. The Law Mall.

I pulled my pickup into the expansive parking lot, which was easily the size of 10 football fields. I hiked across the blacktop to the four-story glass and concrete edifice. After traversing several layers of doors I arrived in the cavernous lobby.

The old courthouse had no security. No one inspected or scrutinized an entrant. Now, in the new environs, security awaited. In front of me was a metal-detecting arch. Adjacent to that device was a conveyor belt going in one end and out the other of some kind of x-ray machine.

Four people were ahead of me. I stood restlessly in the line.

"Everything out of your pockets," a deputy sheriff intoned in an unfriendly voice.

The first person in line stood there motionless. He was a bald man with a reddish mustache. The sleeves on his jacket were too long. He was 35, but looked 45.

"Everything out of your pockets," the deputy repeated.

The bald man emptied the contents of his pockets into a plastic basket that he placed on a platform made of steel rollers leading to the conveyor belt. He then assumed a position blocking anyone behind from proceeding, while he waited

for the plastic basket to spontaneously leap from the rollers onto the conveyor belt. Obeying the laws of physics, the basket refused to make the jump.

"Put the basket on the conveyor belt," the deputy urged.

The man stared dumbfounded at the deputy. The deputy reached around and tossed the basket onto the belt, which sent it through the x-ray machine. The man proceeded through the arch of the metal detector.

The next person in line was a young lady with more piercings than a pin cushion. The metal detector was quite displeased with her. It beeped, chirped and honked loudly. A deputy then checked her out by running a wand over and around her. The wand made a series of wild noises, but they let her in anyway.

The next lady spoke no English. She refused to surrender a gigantic shoulder bag to x-ray examination. Her daughter, after several intense paragraphs of explanation, explanation and pleading in some eastern European tongue, persuaded the woman to place the mammoth handbag on the conveyor.

I was next.

"Everything out of your pockets," said the deputy with the unfriendly voice.

I put my wallet, my cell phone, a comb, a pen, my truck keys, a quarter and two dimes into a plastic basket. I put the basket on the conveyor. I slapped a file folder containing my work on the conveyor belt as well. It all disappeared through flaps into the heart of the x-ray.

I walked through the metal detecting frame. It beeped.

"It's your belt," a different deputy, in an even less friendly intonation, said.

I took off the belt and sent it into the x-ray. I walked through the detecting frame. It beeped.

"Take off your watch," the second deputy demanded.

I set my watch on the conveyor. I gingerly went through the frame. No beep. Like an ancient traveler

solving the sphinx's riddle, I had met the challenge. I could enter the building.

On its journey through the x-ray, the basket containing my possessions had capsized. I retrieved most of the scattered items. I never saw the 45 cents again.

Following overhead informational signs, I made my way to the real estate record room. The most glaring and astounding feature of this modern, state-of-the-art, high-tech research facility was that it contained not a single book. Not one. Instead of housing indexes and deed books, the room consisted of 20 cubicles, each with a computer screen, a mouse and a keyboard.

"You said you would be up and running this morning," I said in my best accusatory tone to Stella.

"Hello to you, too, Noble. Nice to see you. We are up and running. Running at full speed. Just as promised."

"There are no indexes. There are no deed books."

Stella eyed me condescendingly over her reading glasses. "I've been telling you for years now Noble, that you don't need any of that old stuff. All the information has been entered into the database. All of the deeds, back to 1871, have been scanned."

"But, where are the actual books located?"

"Off-site. In storage. If you ever find a problem with the data or the image, you can order the book. I can have it here in two days. This is the new reality, Noble. You're welcome to use one of our work stations. Or if you prefer, you can work from your office or your home. It's all the same."

"I don't like it," I protested.

She looked at me with about as much compassion as a chain gang guard has for his charges.

I did as I was told. I sat at a station. I clicked with the mouse. I typed in names and numbers. My mind was elsewhere. I took the treasure map out of my pocket. What was wrong with the Professor's reasoning? The distance from Chennault's to

Rock Hawk as well as the location of the convergence of the rivers was all consistent with the depiction on the treasure map. I fiddled with the map. I turned it 90 degrees clockwise. Then another 90. Then another quarter turn. Then back to its original orientation.

"Have you got a map of Georgia?" I hollered to Stella.

"No," she said. "There might be one in the law library."

"Where is that?"

"On the second floor."

I retraced my steps back to the four-story high foyer. I took a smooth escalator ride to the second floor. The law library was to the left.

The law library was neither state-of-the-art nor high-tech. It was chock full of books. There were 294 issues of the Georgia Reports bound in tan with red trim. There were 328 editions of the green trimmed Georgia Appeals Reports. There were two complete sets of the black bound Georgia code, thousands of volumes of the Federal Reports and hundreds of law review books.

The librarian was a brunette in the second half of her thirties with long straight hair and ice blue eyes. She sat behind an oak veneer desk.

"Do you have a Georgia map?" I asked.

She looked me over and decided that neither I nor my query merited a verbal answer. She pointed with a red painted fingernail to an alcove jammed with varied and assorted volumes.

I thanked her. I pulled down a Georgia atlas and sat at a table. I flipped to a page showing the physical features of the central part of the state. I pulled the folded treasure map from my pocket and spread it out. Nothing looked right. I reoriented the treasure map. I experimented with various alignments. I measured the distances in the atlas.

I pulled out my cell phone to call the Professor. Then I thought better about disturbing the funeral silence of the library. I left the room and glided down the escalator. The deputies were interrogat-

ing an 80-year-old grandmother with a walker concerning a nail clipper that x-ray had revealed was concealed in her purse. I exited the building.

I called the Professor. I told him when and where to meet me.



It was midnight. The same time and exactly 150 years to the day since the raiders had spirited the Confederate treasure away from Chennault Crossroads. I was on the old courthouse square next to the monument honoring the eight militiamen who had perished in the fight with the Creek Indians at Shepherd's. It was two days off a full moon. There was haze in the air and mist near the ground.

I was wearing an orange vest and a white hard hat. The hard hat had a decal on the front reading Walton EMC. Leaning against the monument I had placed a flat-end shovel and the two round-point shovels.

The Professor parked his car at the curb and came strolling up.

"Are you auditioning for the Village People?" he said, appraising my hard hat and vest.

I said nothing.

"What's with the getup?"

"In case we are asked why the courthouse lawn is being dug up in the middle of the night, we say there's an electrical problem."

"Won't the over-curious inquisitor wonder why we have no utility truck?"

"We'll tell them that the boss went for coffee."

I jammed a hard hat onto the Professor's head. He looked ridiculous.

"You should lose the tweed jacket," I suggested.

He shed the jacket and tossed it aside.

"And the bowtie."

He slipped it off. He put on the orange vest.

"So, Noble, what have you got?" he said.

"This location is the same distance from Chennault Crossroads as Rock Hawk, but going northwest instead of southwest. Rotate the



map one quarter turn clockwise. This, Professor, is the place. This is the spot where the Confederate treasure is buried."

"Where are the two rivers shown on the map as converging?" the Professor said, skeptically.

"The headwaters of both the Alcovy River and the Yellow River are close at hand. They both flow south from here and after about 60 miles converge to form the Ocmulgee. But, the important point is that the map, if looked at correctly, shows the rivers diverging not converging. Rivers, either coming together or going apart, would look the same on the map."

"Point taken, but where are the triangles?" he queried.

I shined my flashlight at the apex of the monument. "There you have it, Professor. One, two, three, four triangles. Forming a pyramid. Four triangles. Equilateral even."

"What is this monument?"

I illuminated the inscription. He read silently about the militia led by Captain O'Shay, the skirmish with the Creeks at Shepard's and the deaths of the eight men in battle.

"A monument to O'Shay is a complete travesty," the Professor said spitting out the words.

"You seem to be familiar with the incident," I said.

"It was O'Shay's poor soldiering that cost the militiamen their lives. He doesn't deserve a monument."

"The engraving," I pointed out, "does not say that the monument honors O'Shay. It is dedicated to the memory of the dead men that he led."

The Professor ignored my clarification. "Twenty years before the skirmish at Shepherd's Plantation, the Creek Nation was coerced into giving up more than 20 million acres of land in Georgia. Ten years after that, an additional 40 million acres was forcibly taken from them. The Creeks, to their eternal misfortune, had encountered a land-hungry slice of humanity whose hunger could not be sated.

"What land the Creeks by treaty retained was then invaded and

overrun by speculators, scoundrels, rascals and rogues. The Creeks, as you would say, Noble, had perfect title to this land."

"No one would say that."

"What then?"

"Marketable title."

"Have it your way. Marketable title. This didn't stop the rapscallions from taking it. Homesteads, farms, even whole towns were erected on Creek land. Finally a few bands of Creeks had more than they could take. They raided a couple of farms. They even torched the town of Roanoke and burned it to the ground.

"The Georgia militia was called out. They bivouacked at Shepherd's Plantation in Stewart County. They bunked in the slave quarters and other outbuildings. Captain O'Shay, violating sensible military tactics, divided his force several times over. He dispatched troops to a nearby fort to obtain supplies. Other men he sent out to scout. Still others he sent away on routine, mundane and unnecessary tasks. When the Creeks observed the militia sufficiently scattered and weakened by O'Shay's ill-thought-out actions, they made their move. They used the oldest trick in the book. The tactic was so ancient that it had been employed by Joshua at the Battle of Ai."

"Joshua who?"

"Didn't you ever go to Sunday school, Noble? After the Battle of Jericho, Joshua fought the Battle of Ai. He hid his main force to the west of the walled city. Then, with a small band, he went before the town and made moves suggesting that he was about to attack. Seeing this, the men of the city went out to fight. Joshua fled as if beaten. The men of Ai pursued him and were led away from their city.

"At the prescribed moment, Joshua's main army rose from its hiding place, entered the undefended city, took it and set it on fire. When the men of Ai saw the smoke rising from their citadel, it was too late. Joshua turned around and attacked them from one side, while his main force stormed out

of the burning town and attacked them from the other.

"The Creeks, using the same tactic as Joshua, went in front of Shepherd's and fired a few shots in an attempt to lure the militia out of the fortified camp. O'Shay obliged them. He left camp and pursued the Indians. A short distance away, the main body of Creeks fell on the militia's front and rear with devastating effect. As the fight raged, reinforcements arrived, which saved the militia from total destruction. Still 22 militiamen were killed, including the eight named on the monument here. End of story."

"Not quite," I said. "What happened to the Creeks?"

"The fight at Shepherd's was their last stand. All of the Creek land was taken. Every last man, woman and child, grandmother and infant was rounded up and slapped in chains and shackles. Under armed guard they were brutally marched to Oklahoma."

We were silent for a long minute as the mist swirled around the base of the monument.

The spell was sharply broken, as if by the crack of a bullwhip.

"I accept your hypothesis, Noble," the Professor growled. "The treasure is here. The monument marks the spot. The gold is right beneath our feet." He grabbed a shovel and handed it to me. "Start digging."

"There are two kinds of people in this world, Professor," I said, "Those who can interpret maps and those who dig. You dig."

Before I could hand the shovel back to him, a black and white city police car pulled to the curb. The cop leaned out of the window and motioned for us to approach.

"Let me handle this," I said. Still holding the shovel, I walked to the patrol car.

"What's going on?" the cop said. He was a pale, fresh-faced kid maybe 25 with buzz cut hair and fuzz on his chin trying to be a goatee. He was chewing gum.

I pointed to the Walton EMC decal on my hard hat. "Electrical problem," I said.

"What kind of problem?"  
"All those movers here the last few days. Closing down the courthouse. They tripped over a ground wire. Grounding the transformer." I pointed to the cylindrical transformer perched on the power pole. "Pulled the ground clear out. The transformer could blow." It sounded so plausible, I almost believed it myself.

"Couldn't wait until morning?"

"I just do what I'm told."

"Where's your truck?"

"Boss went to get coffee. At the Waffle House. He'll be back in a minute."

"My brother-in-law has the contract to restore the old courthouse," the cop said, apparently not wanting to conclude our chat.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. He's a contractor. Says he's going to make it look the way it did a hundred years ago. Going to sandblast it. Strip off all the stucco and whitewash. Take it back down to the bricks. Pull out all of the drop ceilings. Tear out the carpet. Refinish the hardwood floors. He's even going to fix the clock tower. It's said three o'clock for years."

"At least it's right twice a day."

"How do you figure?"

"It's not important. I should get to work. The transformer and all."

I took two tentative steps. He didn't stop me, so I kept walking. The cop drove away.

I grabbed the flat-end shovel and sliced a line across the grass. Then I peeled back and rolled up the turf. I handed a round-end shovel to the Professor and took hold of the other one myself.

"I thought you said that you interpret maps and I dig," he said.

"No time for that now. Let's find the gold and get out of here. That cop will be back. He's lonely."

We dug furiously, hurling and tossing dirt all around. Then I heard it. A thud. The Professor's shovel had hit something other than dirt.

"I've hit something. Wood, I think," he said.

"The treasure," I said.

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"Probably just O'Shay's bloody coffin," he said.

"I don't think so."

I dove face down into the hole. I clawed the dirt off the wood.

"It's round," I said.

"Like a barrel top?"

I didn't answer. I grabbed the shovel from the Professor's hands. I smashed it into the wood. It gave way easily. I reached inside. I pulled out a sock. As I drew it out of the barrel, the rotted toe dissolved. Gold coins spilled from my hands.

I placed my upended hard hat on the ground. I reached back into the keg and pulled out a double handful of gold coins. I dumped the loot into the hat. Mesmerized, I scooped up handful after handful. I continued until the hat disappeared under a mountain of gold.

"Snap out of it, Noble," the Professor growled.

I swung around. He had uncovered another keg, two chests, a trunk and a couple of strong boxes.

"Pull your truck up here," he said, motioning to a spot. "Let's load this stuff up and get out of here. Now."

I flew to my truck, bumped it up over the curb, backed up to the hole and flipped down the tailgate.

We loaded up the barrels, the trunk, the chests, the strong boxes and the hard hat full of gold.

"That's all of it," the Professor said. "Or at least enough of it. Let's book."

I needed no urging. I floored it, tearing up the grass, skidding over

the curb onto the street and fleeing the scene faster than thought or time.




I received a letter from the Professor today. It was from the Forbidden City in Beijing. He writes that he's taking a week off from his extended sabbatical in Tahiti. He's become a regular Gauguin. Taken up oil painting. Even has a Polynesian girlfriend.

While he is away, the Professor is having a house built on Lake Burton. The place is nearly complete. It's 7,000 square feet and has eight bathrooms. There is also a matching two-story boathouse.

As for me, I've been trying to not call attention to myself. To keep a low profile. To fly under the radar. To keep my head down.

Maybe next year I'll join the Professor on a Post-Impressionist South Sea trip. Possibly, I'll buy that lot next to his on the lake. I hear it's for sale.

Today, I've got a land title to search, so I'll be heading over to the new courthouse.

Tomorrow? We'll see. 



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