

Heart of the Confederacy – 1937

Narrator: On a sunshiny day, February 4, 1861, the Confederate States of America were organized at a session of the Provisional Congress, assembled in the Senate chamber of the state capital of Montgomery, Alabama. The appointments of that room have remained unchanged. The heart of the Confederacy still beats strong in this charmed city of the South, once more attuned to the common cause of the development of a perfect United States of America. On the portico of the Capitol Building, a six-pointed brass star marks the spot on which Jefferson Davis took the oath of office as the first President of the Confederacy, February 18, 1861. From early March until July 1, when the capital of the Confederacy was shifted to Richmond, Virginia, Mr. and Mrs. Davis lived in this Confederate White House. Moved from its original location, it continues as one of the cherished shrines of the South.

At the lower end of Dexter Avenue is one of those quaint public squares characteristic of older American communities. There is a fountain by McMonnies, distinguished American sculptor. From the porch of the Old Exchange Hotel, William L. Yancey, stirring secessionist orator, introduced Jeff Davis to cheering crowds with the immortal words: "The man and the hour have met." From this building flashed the message which precipitated the first engagement in the War Between the States, the bombardment of Fort Sumter.

And on the outskirts of the city, there's only prosaic evidence of the economic revival of the South and the changing agricultural conditions. Stockyards are a leading industry in the Alabama capital city. Farmers are finding it once more profitable to raise cattle.

Fine highways lead into various sections in which state parks are being developed through the Emergency Conservation Work program, under the direction of National Park Service. Chickasaw State Park in Marengo County, near Linden, represents the simple adaptation of a magnificent stand of virgin longleaf pine for recreational purposes. There are approximately 600 acres in the tract. There's something mysteriously interesting about these artesian wells, punctures deep into the earth's shell, which allow water to gush through the surface in an endless stream. There are about 500 beautifully wooded acres in Valley Creek State Park off the main highway between Montgomery, Alabama and Meridian, Mississippi, not far from Selma, Alabama.

There's a definite relationship between the little college town of Auburn, some 40 miles east of Montgomery, and Chewacla State Park, which is being developed near there. Auburn began its rise to fame as an educational center many years ago. Today it's the seat of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, popularly known as Auburn, one of the finest institutions of learning in the South. Boy and girl students from many states dash through its streets in modern collegiate motorcars. But back in the gay nineties, bicycles hauled their fathers and mothers some six miles out of town to a beauty spot then known as Wright's Mill, now Chewacla State Park. Auburn's a college town, remember, and even the dog's going for higher education. This prized possession of one of the institute's professors has been taught to ring a bell when he wants his dinner. And he can answer the telephone! And ride a velocipede!

State parks under National Park Service planning are much more than mere recreation areas. Chewacla is already demonstrating the equally important educational side of the movement. Art students using paints and canvases as well as cameras are finding its beauty spots inspiring. There are of course beautiful bridle trails. But of a special sentimental interest in this particular locality has been the restoration of an old bicycle path, which has been used for almost half a century.

Females Singing [In background]:

Seems to me the sun is never shining,
'Cause I'm lonely for you. (So lonely!)

Seems to me the heart was made for pining,
And it's only for you.

When the birds [...],
How is it all their songs [...] me?

Guess it's hard to satisfy me lately,
'Cause I'm lonely for you.

Narrator: The picturesque stone wall atop which old Wright's Mill once stood has been retained as a scenic touch. The old mill stone, crumbling into decay, lies just where it fell when the mill was dismantled.

The Conservation Corps' most ambitious construction project in this park area is the building of a dam to form a lake for water sports and fishing. Along its shores are being erected numerous overnight cabins and a lodge for general assembly. The dam breast is of steel-reinforced concrete. Its core is anchored in a trench cut from what scientists have declared is the hardest exposed rock in the United States. Because of the area's unusual geological formation, the Alabama Academy of Science has been making formal field trips here for a number of years.

When dam sites are clear, not all stumps are removed. Occasional ones with cavities are left as secluded retreats and spawning beds for fish. Timber cleared from the lake area is used in the erection of park structures. It must be skinned soon after it is cut to prevent damage by insects.

At Chewacla, the Corps boys live just outside the park. But on excursions during their leisure hours, and even while at work, they enjoy the area's natural beauty. Horace Greeley's famous advice is frequently paraphrased to, "Young man, go South!" This little town of Auburn, Alabama and its adjacent Chewacla State Park may present some of the reasons. Alabama Polytechnic has a Reserve Officers' Training Corps unit, which ranks among the highest in the United States. And these charming young farmerettes might be presented as further, purely academic, lure.