

Program

Musical Entertainment

The Foxfire Boys and Men Macon Music

Presentation of Colors

Color Guard from Camp Frank D. Merrill Ranger Battalion

Invocation - Rev. Madison McCrackin

Welcome and Introductions - Lyn Cash

Musical Entertainment

The Foxfire Boys and Men Macon Music

History of the Rabun County Cross - Jane Bingham

Musical Entertainment

The Foxfire Boys and Men Macon Music

Poetry

"Touched by the Lighted Cross" by Willa Elliott

Bynum Family Story - Thad Bynum

Musical Entertainment

The Foxfire Boys and Men Macon Music

Dedication - David Rogers

Benediction - Bishop John Erbeling

Hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross"

The Foxfire Boys, Men Macon Music and the Audience

Lighting of the Rabun Cross

HISTORY OF THE RABUN COUNTY CROSS

Before Christmas, 1956, Hubert Lesley, founder of the A. I. D. Corp in 1948, asked his employees at the plant, to construct a Christmas tree frame, with lights, to be erected on Black Rock Mountain State Park, with permission from the Dept. of State Parks of GA, near the site of the present Visitors' Center. It was lit the first time that Christmas, 1956. A cross member was added in the spring of the following year & was illuminated at Easter & later, year-around. In August, 1957, Mr. Lesley donated the structure to the Dept. of State Parks, by Bill of Sale, for one dollar.

Through the years, the original Christmas tree/cross structure fell into a state of disrepair & was dismantled, sometime between 1973 & 1975. From 1957 until the original cross was dismantled, the State of GA paid the power bills for the cross.

In 1979, William L. Jarrett was the Executive Director of the Rabun Co. Chamber of Commerce. Jim Horney, a member of the Board of Directors of the Chamber, suggested that the Chamber might want to consider having a community project to raise funds & erect another cross, to replace our landmark on Black Rock Mtn. State Park, a symbol of our community, a part of its geography. He presented a plan for placing a lighted cross, including a drawing of the suggested cross & a map showing the suggested sites. The motion passed. After reviewing four possible sites, the one at the far eastern corner of the park, out of the way in an obscure area of the park, was chosen & approved by the local Park Ranger. An application was sent to Mr. Tanner, Commissioner of the GA Dept. of Natural Resources, & was approved verbally.

Mr. Horney served as Chairman of the committee which had the responsibility of erecting the second cross on Black Rock Mtn. State Park. The goal was to light it & dedicate it at the Sunrise Service held Easter morning, 1979. However, due to construction delays, it was not lit until Monday, April 23, 1979. It was operated on an astrological timer, one that tracks the azimuth of the sun & turned the cross on at dusk & off between 9:45 & 10:30 PM. Several local residents were also involved in the fundraising: Apple Savage, Lyn Cash, Randy Carver, Rev. Sam Story, Pat Marcelino, Norwood Griffin, Curt Burkholder, Carroll Lee, Sr., Dee Edwards, Harold O'Shields, Henry Belew & many others.

During this time, only one objection was received by the Chamber, a letter from a Mr. Rocky Wade. In a letter to the Chamber from Mr. Tanner, with the DNR, on May 3, 1979, concerns were raised that the DNR's position might be better if the Chamber issued a resolution, referring to the cross as a memorial. Frank Sutton, a Chamber board member & a local attorney for the Chamber, suggested that the Revocable License Application on the GA Dept. of Natural Resources be amended, referring to the cross as a "memorial". That resolution was never acted upon by the Chamber. The cross meant different things to different people; i.e. in memory of deceased members of the armed forces, deceased citizens of Rabun County, loved ones, a safe harbor in a storm, etc. Contributions to the fund came in memory of loved ones, in lieu of flowers, so it was considered by many to be a memorial.

On June 7, 1979, the Chamber received a phone call from Mr. Tanner, with the DNR, stating that an objection to the lighted cross on Black Rock Mtn. State Park had been registered with him by the ACLU and that he, Commissioner Tanner, was asking that the Chamber remove the cross from state lands, on or before July 19, 1979. At this point, the state had still not executed & returned the Revocable License Agreement. The Chamber board realized they had two choices: do nothing and expect an ACLU suit, or, remove the cross. The board never wavered – their position was constant – leave the cross there. A defense fund began to respond to the impending ACLU suit.

On November 5, 1979, the ACLU filed suit in the US District Court for the Northern District of GA, Atlanta Division, naming the Rabun Co. Chamber of Commerce, the Honorable Joe D. Tanner, Commissioner of the GA Dept. of Natural Resources, and the Honorable George D. Busbee, Governor of the State of GA, as defendants. The Chamber voted to defend the suit. After the suit was filed, a reporter for The Anderson Independent wrote an article in which she objected to the cross being on state park land & an anonymous objection letter was written to The Clayton Tribune. On December 18, 1979, the defendants, represented by Frank Sutton, Attorney at Law, et al, answered the suit.

On December 19, 1979, the American Legion, Post 220, passed a resolution supporting the existence, display & perpetuation of the Black Rock Mtn. Cross Memorial. The Legion members helped to support the cross & felt like it had been their memorial, to lost comrades in arms, & in memory of loved ones who had passed away. The cross was there long enough that they considered it a memorial to many people and a welcoming beacon to those returning home. The Veterans felt that if the ACLU could remove the cross from Black Rock, they could remove crosses from the graves of fallen soldiers, throughout the nation. Those national cemeteries are publicly-owned lands & if one cross could be removed, others would follow. That's why Veterans always considered the cross a memorial tribute.

On January 26-30, 1981, a full evidentiary hearing on all issues was heard before Judge Horace Ward, US District Court for the Northern District of GA, Atlanta Division. On March 26, 1981, Judge Ward found for the ACLU and ordered the cross removed. On July 14, 1981, Frank Sutton filed an appeal in the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. That appeal was lost when the judge issued his decision that the cross was in violation of separation of church & state & ordered the cross removed from state park lands on Black Rock Mtn. Mr. Sutton was admitted to the US Supreme Court for a final appeal but the Chamber et al decided not to pursue the case any further. The cross was dismantled & removed from park lands. Filing fees and related court costs were paid by donations from citizens of Rabun Co; however, Mr. Sutton incurred over \$22,000 in costs that were not recovered thus essentially providing his services pro bono to the community.

On December 13, 1988, Knox Bynum, Attorney at Law, through his son, Thad C. Bynum, Registered Agent, incorporated the Rabun Cross Society, Inc. into a non-profit corporation under the laws of the State of GA. The purpose of the corporation was to construct & operate a cross with electric lights on the corporation's land on Black Rock Mtn. in Rabun County, GA, & to provide the means, methods, repositories & facilities for accomplishing that purpose.

On December 20, 1988, after the appeal was lost, Mr. Sutton decided at that minute that he would construct a new cross on the top of Screamer Mtn., on lands owned by Summit Townhouses, Inc., of which he was an owner/officer. He turned on the lights on the cross through Christmas, 1988, while waiting for permit & zoning approval from the Rabun Co. Planning Commission.

On December 29, 1988, the Bynum family, namely, James William Bynum, Roslyn Bynum Strickland, Emily Bynum Albright & Knox Bynum, by Warranty Deed, gave to the Rabun Cross Society, Inc., a gift of a lot, 100' x 100', being .23 acre, on Black Rock Mtn., for the exclusive purpose of building & maintaining a cross, in memory of their parents, Thad L. Bynum & Irene Powell Bynum. Since Mr. Sutton had built a cross on Screamer Mtn., the corporation continued through the years, quietly, & the taxes were paid on the lot.

On March 17, 1989, the Planning Commission initially denied Mr. Sutton's request; however, the County Commissioners finally gave Mr. Sutton their approval to erect a cross on Screamer Mtn. On March 17, 1989, the cross was turned back on following the death of Ms. Helen Coalley Sutton's father. Mr. Sutton paid the cost of construction, erection, maintenance & power for the cross on Screamer Mtn. & would not accept any donations or reimbursements, though some offered. In 2004, Mr. Sutton sold the top of Screamer Mtn. with the provision that any new owner give him 30 days notice to remove the cross. Local resident, Tom Stanfill, arranged to pay the power bill for the cross after the sale of the property. In 2007, the mountain top sold once again & the new owner offered & donated \$1,000 & took responsibility for removal of the old cross due to its dilapidated condition.

In 2007, the Rabun Cross Society, Inc. became active once again with Lyn Cash, President; David Rogers, Secretary; Bishop John Erbelding, Treasurer; with Directors Thad Bynum, Bruce Pendrey, Scott Poss & Jerry Watts; and, their goal remains the same. Many donations in monetary form, materials, resources & volunteer labor, have brought this project to fruition. The tower is 100' tall, 40' wide, uses par 38 LED floods, & can be seen & defined as a cross as far south as Rabun Co. High School, though there is a line of sight all the way to Tallulah Falls. It was set on site by helicopter and volunteer ground crew on June 5, 2009. The Rabun Cross is dedicated to our LORD and SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, to the many donors & volunteers who made it possible & to the citizens of Rabun County.

Rabun Cross Society, Inc.

President: Lyn Cash

Secretary: David Rogers

Treasurer: Bishop John Erbelding

Directors:

Thad Bynum

Bruce Pendrey

Scott Poss

Jerry Watts



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