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Little Roy Lewis, a member of Bluegrass and Gospel music's legendary Lewis Family, is a headline attraction in Lincolnton, GA. Here, joined by friends, Little Roy leads a group of tourists in singing the beloved hymn, "I'll Fly Away."

GRITS, BLUEGRASS & CONFEDERATE GOLD

TRAVEL ADVENTURE IN GEORGIA'S CLARKS HILL LAKE REGION

By Doc Lawrence

LINCOLNTON, GA. This gentle city represents core heartland, that part of the South that connect us with the critical times around the American Revolution. Nearby Elijah Clark State Park, named after a legendary American patriot who fought successfully against the British, is nestled along still healthy Clarks Hill Lake, featuring edible striped bass. It's a perfect launching spot for exploring this region and a good place to book a cabin. Clarks Hill Lake is the largest Corps

of Engineers project east of the Mississippi River. Nestled on the Georgia and South Carolina border, it stretches 39 miles up the Savannah River, a paradise for nature lovers and a fisherman's dream.

Lincolnton has a historic village showcasing early colonial life complete with a blacksmith and a cotton gin. The old buildings showcase the folk art wonders by nationally acclaimed artist Leonard Jones to bluegrass songs from the legendary Lewis Family and others. I stopped in and found Leonard Jones on duty painting dancers on pieces of old tin roofing while nearby "Little Roy" Lewis was picking and singing hymns like "I'll Fly Away." The area features many attractions including Graves Mountain, a gemstone center famous for rutile, kyanite, lazulite, iridescent hematite, pyrophyllite and pyrite.

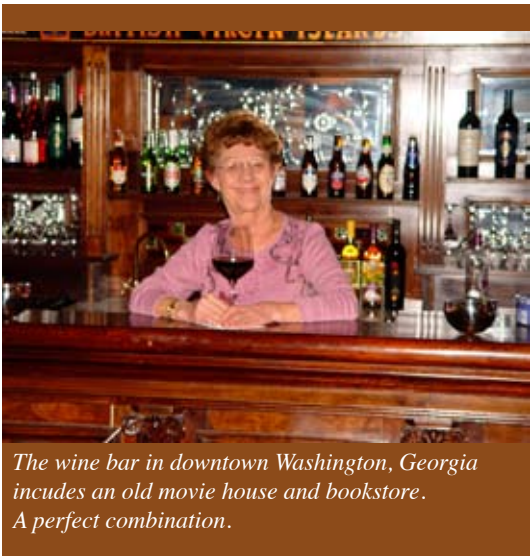


The mighty Savannah River at the end of the Piedmont Plateau and the beginning of the Augusta Canal.



Folk Art is a deep tradition in the South and Lincolnton's Leonard Jones ranks near the top. The self-taught artist uses discarded aluminum roofing to paint scenes to brighten up rooms throughout the country.

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The wine bar in downtown Washington, Georgia includes an old movie house and bookstore. A perfect combination.

LOVELY WASHINGTON

Washington remains a major tourist attraction due in large part by the abundance of old Southern mansions and a fairy tale downtown. The city is a trove of folklore, a perfect compliment for shopping and dining. It was here in 1865 that Jefferson Davis and his Confederate cabinet met for the last time, carrying with them the Confederate treasury from Richmond. While much of the gold was disbursed, several million dollars is still unaccounted for, spawning all kinds of theories and many searches. The missing gold led to the brutal torture of one quite innocent local family by federal operatives, an incident chillingly told by a local historian.

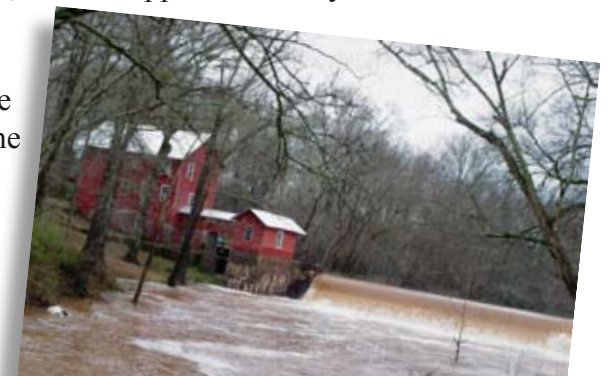
The Robert Toombs mansion merits a visit.

Toombs, called the “Unreconstructed Rebel,” for his service to the Confederacy and refusal to take a loyalty oath to the United States after the Civil War, a decision that stripped Toombs of his citizenship. Once a U. S. Senator, Toombs was a brilliant lawyer who loved Shakespeare’s plays. His passion for and loyalty to things he loved are contagious and his home is one of the most visited attractions in Georgia.

Thomson is another city where history blends with today’s lifestyles. Hickory Hill, the home of another U.S. Senator Tom Watson, is an architectural treasure, housing much of Watson’s original furnishings and many of the books he authored. Watson, a man of paradoxes, was a onetime candidate for national office running as vice president with William Jennings Bryan on the Populist ticket. Never one to hide his opinions, Watson opposed military conscription and America’s entry into World War I.

Genuine corn meal and grits comes from mills where the power is generated by waterpower and the corn ground by stone. The Ogeechee River Grist Mill near Warrenton is fully operational and the finished product-cornmeal, hush puppy mix and grits-make a visit obligatory for home chefs. The fishing is good from the pure waters of the Ogeechee and the mill is a photographer’s delight.

Warrenton is close to Jewell, population 61, and home to a magnificent B&B and gift shop. Warrenton is a charming village that attracts retirees looking for an advanced lifestyle and is headquarters for the Georgia Map and Surveying Museum. With warm smiles from friendly local, the town is perfect for long peaceful walks.



The renowned Ogeechee River Mill just outside lovely Warrenton, Georgia. The mill produces grits, cornmeal and hush puppy mix and the river is loaded with fish begging to be caught.

COLUMBIA COUNTY

How many movie buffs know that Oliver Hardy, the heavier half of the immortal comedy duo of Laurel and Hardy,



was a Georgian? Hardy is immortalized in the Oliver Hardy Museum in Harlem, a snug little town that has his likeness painted on the city water tower. Just down the way, the

The Laurel and Hardy Museum in Harlem, Georgia is a wonderful stop for visitors. It's the birthplace of Oliver Hardy who joined with Stanley Laurel and entertained moviegoers with comedy still popular today.

magnificent Red Oak Manor provides luxury lodging including the gourmet Acorn

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Restaurant, beckoning travelers to dine and relax.

Columbia County is that great place often called Greater Augusta. It is alive and thriving, offering gourmet restaurants including a French restaurant, a first rate museum and an amphitheater comparable to ones in large cities like Miami. Younger families populate the area and the growth is in evidence. The CSRA Wine Festival is a rising star event held each October.

The Augusta Canal once hauled cotton from the gins to the railroad in Augusta. It begins at the impressive Savannah River Rapids Visitors Center that marks the demarcation of the Piedmont Plateau and the beginning of the Coastal Plain. You can actually see the change in geography.

This is festival country featuring the Blind Willie McTell Blues Festival, the Oliver Hardy Festival and the CSRA Wine Festival plus many others. Everything is within a two-hour drive of Atlanta and the fishing's good any time of year.

I'm now involved in an ongoing treasure hunt, having discreetly garnered a few clues and an old map that promises discovery of the lost gold. Officials whispered to me that in this great area of Georgia, the rule is still finder's keepers.

*Columbia County,
Georgia, is often called
Greater Augusta.*