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THE CHALLENGE OF PRESERVING PUBLIC MEMORY: COMMEMORATING TOMOCHICHI IN SAVANNAH

The commemoration of Tomochichi, a Native American Indian significant to the history of Georgia, illustrates the impact of changing social and political values on the preservation of monuments, the diverse means with which public memory functions, and the complex implications of commemorating an ethnic minority. Erected in the center of Percival (later Wright) Square in Savannah in 1739, the Tomochichi Monument may well have been the first public monument in America and was unique in the colonial era in honoring a Native American. The disappearance of the monument from the documentary record within a few decades and the ensuing century-long period of neglect of the Indian chief's memory speak to the precarious nature of memorials. The construction of a garden mound on the site of his grave in 1871, and its removal in 1882 to make room for a large monument to leading Savannah industrialist William Washington Gordon, initially provoked no public opposition. The gradual rekindling of interest in Tomochichi's memory and specifically in his burial site, however, led to the erection of a new monument in 1899 and to the erroneous and frequently repeated belief in the twentieth century that the Gordon Monument destroyed the Tomochichi Monument. Further commemorations of Tomochichi in the twentieth century reflected revisionist history trends and redefined his significance, placing him on par with James Oglethorpe as a co-founder of Georgia.

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The Challenge of Preserving Public Memory: Commemorating Tomochichi in Savannah

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Although the act of erecting a commemorative monument aims to preserve the memory of a person or event, the survival of such monuments is at the mercy of public perceptions over time.¹ Sometimes perceptions change quickly. While the effects of rapid political regime change on monuments are well known — the toppling of the statue of Louis XV in Paris during the French Revolution or that of Saddam Hussein in Bagdad by American soldiers in 2003 readily come to mind — and widely studied (Bodnar 1993; Reynolds 1996; Foote 2003; Jordan 2006; Allais 2008; Savage 2009), it is less clear how more slowly evolving social values, such as toward ethnic minorities, impact commemoration and public memory. Over nearly three centuries of pendulum-like swings in public opinion, the commemoration of Tomochichi, the most significant Native American in Georgia history, paralleled the progressive shift in attitudes toward Native Americans, most commonly from supporters during the colonial era, to enemies as Anglo-Europeans pursued western expansion during the nineteenth century, to heroes honored at the end of the 1800s as they yielded to white domination, to victims as revised views of history gained acceptance in the twentieth century (Vaughn 1982; Holm 1992). In contrast to monuments to Anglo-Europeans, which clearly assert authority, the evolving commemorations of minorities in America raise complicated power issues and challenge us to inquire after the motives behind them.

The series of commemorations of Tomochichi also illustrates the dynamic nature of “memory work,”² how the memory of this Indian chief resulted from more than the presence of the original physical memorial erected by James Oglethorpe in 1739.

Indeed, the relatively early disappearance of the Tomochichi Monument sometime after 1759 stirred interest in him in the long run and led to varied forms of memorialization, both permanent and ephemeral — a compelling example of how aspects of American history are lost and found.

THE CASE OF TOMOCHICHI IN SAVANNAH

The checkered history of commemoration in Savannah, Georgia, of Tomochichi (c.1644-1739), the “Mico” (or Chief) of the Yamacraw Indians of the Creek Nation (Fig. 1), vividly illustrates the vulnerability of public monuments to changes in social values — in this case over almost three centuries. Specifically, the erection and then disappearance of the original Tomochichi Monument, followed over a century later by the erection of a new, but less prominent monument to the Yamacraw chief, and followed a century after that by calls for restoring his tomb site, reflect the shifting perception of Native Americans.



Fig. 1. Portrait of Tomochichi and Toonahawi, 1734. Mezzotint print by John Faver after painting by Willem Verelst (Courtesy Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, Archives & Special Collections).

The first monument to Tomochichi, a “pyramid of stone” erected in 1739 over his gravesite in the center of Percival Square, had been ordered by General James Oglethorpe (1696-1785), the founder of the Georgia colony. Publication of a detailed account of his funeral in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* of London (1740) attested to the importance of the chief at the time. More specifically, the creation of this pyramid of stone represents a significant moment in the history of public commemoration in America.

Within a few decades, however, the monument disappeared from the documentary record. A century later, the site hosted a short-lived picturesque garden mound installed in 1871 that in the twentieth century would be confused with the chief’s tomb. The destruction of the mound in 1882 to make way for a monument to William Washington Gordon, a leading Savannah industrialist, stirred no public outcry and garnered only a perfunctory note in the local paper that made no mention of Tomochichi or his monument (The Mound in Court House Square 1882).³ This public amnesia slowly gave way to rekindled interest in the chief’s memory and eventually to the erection of a new monument in 1899. The clearly subordinate position of the second Tomochichi Monument in the southeast corner of Wright (formerly Percival) Square relative to the centrally located Gordon Monument illustrated their respective importance to Savannahians of that time. During the twentieth century, however, recognition of Tomochichi’s significance to Georgia history gradually grew, elevating the chief to a level of importance on par with Oglethorpe. A prominent mural painted around 1933 in the city’s junior high school gave equal prominence to these two founders of Georgia, as would a historic marker installed in 1952 beside his original tomb site. Reflecting both the broad twentieth-century movement to correct past wrongs against minority groups and the fickle nature of commemoration, various proposals in the 1990s and early 2000s called for the restoration of Tomochichi’s gravesite, either by moving the Gordon Monument or by disinterring his remains and transferring them to a newly created burial mound in a different Savannah square.

OTHER COMMEMORATIVE MONUMENTS IN COLONIAL AMERICA

The Tomochichi Monument erected by Oglethorpe in 1739 was likely the first public monument in America and utterly unique in commemorating a Native American. The other early public monuments erected in colonial America celebrated the achievements of Anglo-Europeans: an obelisk in New York City commemorated General James Wolfe in 1761 (Bridenbaugh 1968) and two statues by London sculptor Joseph Wilton, both erected in 1770 — one in Charleston’s Civic Square (the intersection of Meeting and Broad Streets) celebrating William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, in honor of his campaign to repeal the Stamp Act (McInnis 2005), and a gilded lead equestrian statue of George III in Bowling Green in New York City (Wall 1920). All three monuments succumbed to the rapid changes in social values during the American Revolution and were either removed from public view (Pitt Monument) or destroyed (Wolfe and George III monuments).

Regardless of whether the “pyramid of stone” constituted a monument in people’s eyes in the 1730s and 1740s, the act taken by Oglethorpe to commemorate the deceased chief with a structure monumental in size and central in location represents a significant departure from the merely functional nature of the Savannah squares and heralded a more urbanistic conception of space. It also reflected Oglethorpe’s egalitarian idealism in his willingness to honor a Native American, regardless of whatever political motives stood behind this commemorative act. That Oglethorpe had considered erecting an obelisk as the memorial confirms he saw its role in conventional commemorative terms.

OTHER MONUMENTS TO NATIVE AMERICANS

Apart from the first Tomochichi Monument of 1739, civic monuments depicting Native Americans came relatively late in the history of American commemoration, first appearing during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in recognition of their role as key supporters during the colonial era.

This recognition, however, grew out of the commercial exploitation of images of Native Americans during previous decades: from the 1850s to the 1880s, wooden and then zinc statues of Indians appeared in front of tobacconist shops across the country (Grissom 2009). By the 1870s, a work commonly called “Indian Chief,” possibly modeled on a tobacconist’s figure, became “one of the best known of all zinc figures and ... was more widely used as a civic statue for the commemoration of local historical figures” (Grissom 2009, 145). At least eighteen Indian Chief statues were erected as public memorials from the 1880s until the 1920s throughout the United States, each “typically identified with a local Indian who helped the white man” (Grissom 2009, 142). The popularity of the “Indian Chief” statue may also have reflected the growing fascination with Native Americans as anthropological relics. Already at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, more than three hundred Native Americans representing fifty-three tribes occupied an “Indian Encampment” in order to display the “original inhabitants of this country and their mode of life ... [and] their rude manufactures” (McCabe 1876, 330-331).

Unique monuments dedicated to specific Native figures were much less common and evidently began to appear during the late 1890s, around the time the second Tomochichi Monument arrived in Wright Square. For example, the Battle of Lake George Monument erected in 1897 by the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York commemorates the alliance of Mohawk Indians and the English army in 1755 and depicts Mohawk Chief Hendrick and British General William Johnson as apparent equals (“Battle Monument” 2002).

TOMOCHICHI AND THE FOUNDING OF SAVANNAH

Oglethorpe owed his success in founding the town of Savannah in 1733 in part to the friendly relationship he quickly developed with Tomochichi, the leader of the Yamacraw, who had splintered from the Yemassee Indians of the Creek nation in South Carolina. Tomochichi and his roughly two hundred followers

settled in 1728 along the south shore of the Savannah River (in what became Georgia) at a site that also had spiritual significance as the resting place of the chief’s ancestors and near the future location of Savannah (Sweet 2005). The Yamacraw chief granted Oglethorpe a swath of land between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers and assisted in negotiating peaceful relations between the English and area tribes. Oglethorpe accorded great respect to the Indian chief, travelling to England in 1734 to present Tomochichi, his wife, and his nephew Toonahawi to the Trustees of the Georgia colony,⁴ as well as to King George II and Queen Caroline at Kensington Palace and to the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. During their visit, the artist Willem Verelst painted an often-reproduced portrait of the chief and his nephew (Fig. 1). The clear political importance of Tomochichi to the success of the nascent Georgia colony must have influenced Oglethorpe’s decision to bury the chief, upon his death five years later, in the center of Percival Square and order a monument to be erected above the grave as a marker.

More so than other planned towns in the English colonies, Savannah possessed an urban plan that placed great emphasis on public space through the profusion of public squares, each forming the centerpiece of the neighborhood units called wards. Laid out by Oglethorpe in 1733 and 1734, the town plan included six wards, each comprising a central square and broad, 75-foot-wide streets aligned with the middle of the square (Fig. 2). Given the town’s layout of two rows of three wards, the central two wards and their squares (including Percival) enjoyed hierarchical prominence, with the central north-south street – Bull Street – accorded the highest status among the town’s streets, a status it retains to this day.

THE FUNERAL OF TOMOCHICHI

The occasion of Tomochichi’s funeral illustrated the tremendous respect accorded to this Native American. On his deathbed on October 5, 1739, Tomochichi requested that he be buried inside the English town,

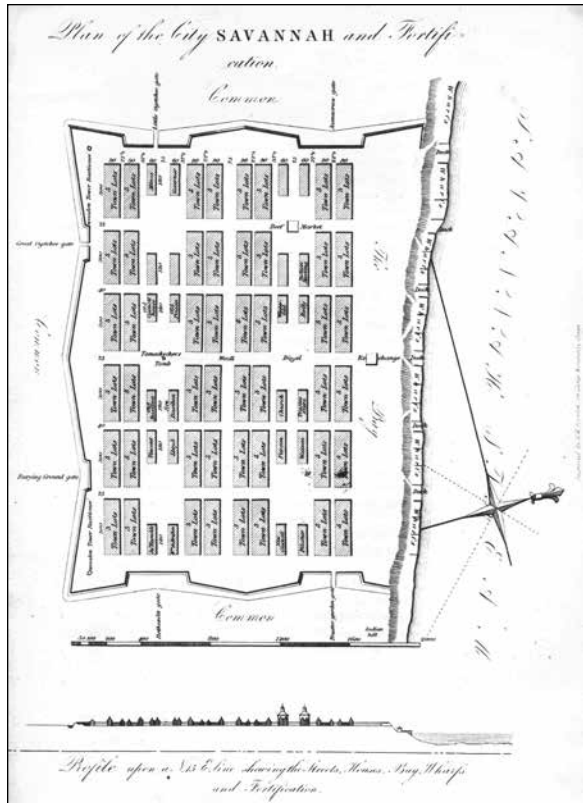


Fig. 2. Plan of Savannah, 1757, William Gerard De Brahm (From History of the Province of Georgia: With Maps of Original Surveys, 1849).

rather than with his own people. Quite remarkably, *The Gentleman's Magazine* of London published in its March 1740 issue an account of the chief's funeral five days later:

The corps [sic] was brought down by water. The General [i.e., Oglethorpe], attended by the Magistrates and the people of the Town, met it upon the Water's Edge. The Corps was carried into Percival Square: The pall was supported by the General, Colonel Stephens, Colonel Montaigut, Mr. Carteret, Mr. Lemon, and Mr. Maxwell. It was followed by the Indians, and Magistrates, and People of the Town. There was the respect paid of firing Minute Guns from the Battery all the time from the Burial, and funeral firing with small Arms by the Militia, who were under Arms (*The Gentleman's Magazine* March 1740, 129).

The journal of Colonel William Stephens (Secretary to the Trustees in Georgia), later published in the Colonial Records of Georgia, offered more detail, noting that "At the depositing of the Corpse, seven Minute Guns were fired, and about forty Men in Arms (as many as could instantly be found) gave three Vollies over the grave" (Chandler IV, 428).

Even though the town possessed a burial ground on a pair of residential lots across from the south side of Percival Square,⁵ Oglethorpe selected the center of that square as the site of the chief's grave. It is difficult to think of another Native American accorded this level of honor by European Americans in the eighteenth century or any time since – both in terms of the pomp and circumstance involved in his funeral and the prominence of his gravesite.

THE TOMOCHICHI MONUMENT

As impressive as the ceremony of the chief's funeral was, the permanent monument erected by Oglethorpe over his grave stands as even more historically significant. There can be little doubt that a monument to Tomochichi rose in the center of Percival Square, most likely in late 1739. According to the account of October 10, 1739, published five months later in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Oglethorpe "has ordered a Pyramid of Stone, which is dug in this Neighbourhood, to be erected over the Grave, which being in the Centre of the Town, will be a great Ornament to it, as well as Testimony of Gratitude" (*The Gentleman's Magazine* March 1740, 129). The account of William Stephens commented that the general "intends to dignify with some Obelisk, or the like, over it, as an Ornament to the Town, and a Memorial to the Indians, how great Regard the English would pay to all their Nations, who maintain true Friendship with us" (Chandler IV, 428).⁶ The purposes for the monument, based on these accounts, appear to have been both aesthetic and political - an "ornament" through its central location and large scale and permanent materials, and political in signifying the strategic alliance between the Native Americans and the English colonists. Stephens's

words – “who maintain true Friendship with us” — hint at a more subtle political motive of exploiting Tomochichi’s compliant behavior as a model for other Native Americans. Although these accounts speak of the monument in the future tense, a map of Savannah from 1757, drawn by the Surveyor General of Georgia William Gerard De Brahm (1718-1796),⁷ clearly documents a square “Tamachychee’s Tomb” at the center of Percival Square, as well as the round sundial Oglethorpe had erected at the center of Johnson Square (Figs. 2, 3).

So what might the “pyramid of stone” have looked like? De Brahm’s map depicts a square shape appropriate for a pyramidal monument, distinct from the circle representing the sundial in Johnson Square. For a surveyor, such distinctions were not likely arbitrary. Assuming the map depicts the footprint to scale, the monument would have been about 15 feet across or roughly one-fifth of the 75-foot-wide street aligning with the center of the square. The funeral account mentioned that Oglethorpe dictated the use of stone “dug in this neighborhood,” that is, field stones native to the area. According to one source, this would have meant “iron stone” (Floyd 1937). Even if Oglethorpe had had a stone mason capable of cutting blocks of masonry available to him, one suspects the use of natural stones was more expedient and more culturally appropriate for a Native American.

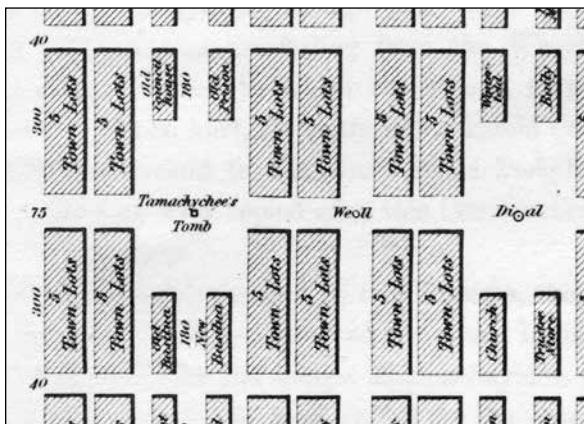


Fig. 3. Detail, Plan of Savannah, 1757, William Gerard De Brahm (From History of the Province of Georgia: With Maps of Original Surveys, 1849).

The Disappearance of the Tomochichi Monument

Tomochichi’s pyramid of stone, however, did not enjoy the perpetual respect garnered by most obelisks. Following its appearance on the 1757 De Brahm map, the monument merited mention in 1759 in the context of a market building to be erected around it in Wright Square (Chandler VIII, 135-136). After that, the monument disappears from the documentary record, failing to appear on any subsequent maps of the city, even though they record other small and utilitarian features like public wells, trees, and small market buildings, as well as the Greene Monument in Johnson Square after 1825. It also fails to appear in the scrupulously detailed *View of Savannah* painted by Joseph Louis Firmin Cerveau in 1837 (Fig. 4), which depicts the city looking south down Bull Street from the City Exchange on Bay Street. Wright Square appears in the background, defined by the second public water pump beyond the Greene Monument obelisk in Johnson Square (Fig. 5). By 1868, Charles C. Jones, author of the first biography of Tomochichi, lamented that

More than a century and a quarter has elapsed since those funeral honors were paid; and Even the precise spot where this Indian chief was interred has passed from the recollection of the thousands who daily throng the streets and loiter among the parks of the beautiful city of Savannah. Neither street, nor public square perpetuates his name, and his memory scarce lives in occasional remembrance. This should not be (Jones 1868, 126).

The apparent disappearance of the Tomochichi Monument sometime after 1759 and the palpable neglect of the chief’s memory in the ensuing decades likely stemmed from shifting attitudes towards Native Americans. From strategic political allies in the formative years of the Georgia colony, at least some Native Americans came to be perceived as the enemy of the British during the French and Indian War (1754-1763). After the American Revolution and certainly by the early nineteenth century, they represented a distinct



Fig. 4. "View of Savannah," 1837, Joseph Louis Firmin Cerveau (Courtesy Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia).



Fig. 5. Detail, "View of Savannah," 1837, Joseph Louis Firmin Cerveau (Courtesy Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia).

impediment to American expansionism The discovery of gold in Dahlonaga, Georgia, in 1828 – the nation's first gold rush – led to the seizure of Cherokee lands, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and the ensuing Trail of Tears (Ehle 1988). To the south, the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) fought against Native American tribes in Florida offered the context for the only recognition of Tomochichi prior to Jones's 1868 biography. In a letter dated February 1, 1836, James R. Butts of Macon, Georgia, offered the use of his "large and

commodious Steam Boat (the *Tomochichi*)" to Georgia Governor William Schley (1835-1837) for transporting troops and supplies from Darien, Georgia, to Florida (Butts to Schley 1836). Evidently, Butts saw no irony in offering a boat named in honor of a Native American to ferry troops to battle other Native Americans. In the context of the ongoing Indian Wars, which extended into the early twentieth century, Jones's lengthy 1868 biography of Tomochichi represented an anomalous early positive appraisal of Native American culture.

An Earthen Mound Complicates the Public Perception of Tomochichi's Gravesite

The construction in the early 1870s of an earthen mound at the center of Wright Square on the site of Tomochichi's tomb opened a new and curious chapter in the evolving public memory of the Yamacraw chief. A *Savannah Morning News* article reported in January 1872 that the mound was one of two erected at the center of a square (the other in Madison Square) at the suggestion of Alderman John O. Ferrill and that he proposed three more for Columbia, St. James [Telfair], and Chatham squares ("The Mound Builders" 1871, 3/1). Stereoscopic views of Savannah made in the 1870s, such as those in the Dennis Collection at the New York Public Library, document the appearance of the mounds in both Wright and Madison squares (Fig. 6). The mound in Wright Square drew the most attention from photographers, appearing in at least four different stereoscopic views.⁸ A single stereoscopic view documents the presence of a third mound, in Oglethorpe Square, even though it was not among those mentioned in the January 1872 article.⁹ Shortly after their erection, each mound was surmounted by a so-called "Warwick Vase," with the one on the mound in Wright Square purportedly "the first ever imported to this country" (Untitled article, *Savannah Morning News* January 22, 1872). The alderman's motives remain a mystery, as does the fate of the three other proposed mounds in Columbia, St. James [Telfair], and Chatham squares. While he may have been inspired by mounds in English landscape gardens, Ferrill's desire to install mounds in the urban squares of Savannah seems quite extraordinary. Had the city built only the mound in Wright Square, one might suspect it honored the burial site of Tomochichi. Yet, the planned installation of at least five mounds throughout downtown Savannah suggests Ferrill had no such intention and that the resemblance to an Indian burial mound was coincidental. The legacy of the images of the mound in Wright Square, however, misled historians in the twentieth century to think otherwise.



Fig. 6. Stereoscopic view of mound in Wright Square, Savannah, c. 1875, O. Pierre Havens (Courtesy Robert N. Dennis Collection of Stereoscopic Views, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations).

A New Monument for Tomochichi

The sesquicentennial of Savannah's and Georgia's 1733 founding rekindled interest in the long-neglected Tomochichi. The first proposal to erect a new monument to Tomochichi emerged in November 1882 in the context of the city council's support for a monument in the center of Wright Square proposed by the Central of Georgia Railroad to their company's founder and the city's most important industrialist, William Washington Gordon.¹⁰ In a letter to the editor of the *Savannah Morning News*, an author identified as "Civis" lamented that the 150th anniversary of the city's founding would be more appropriately celebrated in the center of Wright Square by the erection of "a monumental column ... worthy of the dignified character of Oglethorpe ... to be placed within the original town and the line of fortifications on South Broad Street, as he laid it out" (*Savannah Morning News* November 23, 1882).¹¹

The author added:

There too, within a few yards of that spot lie the remains of the aged Mico of the Yamacraws, and the faithful friend of Oglethorpe, buried there at his own request, that he might lie in death with the friends of his last years, the whites. Over his body, after one hundred and forty four years of silence and neglect, there should rise a modest shaft with the simple inscription of

TOMOCHICHI
Mico of the Yamacraws
The Faithful Friend of Oglethorpe

Thus within the half acre of that square familiar to both would stand the memorials, visible to the eyes of every passerby, of the noble hero who founded our city, and the no less noble Indian who with singular simplicity and faith, welcomed him here and protected the infant life of his colony, two characters of which Savannah and Georgia ought never to lose the remembrance (Civis 1882).

That Tomochichi merited a “more modest shaft” is not surprising, given the perception of the racial superiority of whites over Native Americans since at least Andrew Jackson’s presidency in the 1830s. Indeed, Jones had noted in 1868 how, “From the very first [Tomochichi] appears to have appreciated the fact of the superior power of the white race, and the eventual triumph of the civilization which it enjoyed” (Jones 1868, vii). Yet, Civis’s esteem for the Yamacraw chief is the first sign since Jones’s book of an acknowledgment of his significance. Although the author did not specify a location for this monument to Tomochichi, its subordinate position to a centrally located column to Oglethorpe anticipated the peripherally located monument erected to Tomochichi in 1899.

The removal of the mound in Wright Square in December 1882 to make way for the Gordon Monument (Fig. 7) provoked no notable public reaction. A single newspaper article noted tersely that “the familiar

mound in Court House [Wright] Square is being rapidly removed,” but made no mention of Tomochichi (“The Mound in Court House Square” 1882). The Gordon family supposedly opposed the placement of the Gordon Monument in Wright Square “because they felt that Tomochichi’s remains should not be disturbed,” according to an account published in 1992 by Stephen L. Bohlin-Davis, the curator of the Juliette Gordon Low Girl Scout National Center (Bohlin-Davis 1992, 6A). The basis for his assertion remains unclear and was not supported by any public pronouncements in 1882.

The first public recognition of Tomochichi’s memory during the nineteenth century took place on February 12, 1883, as part of the sesquicentennial celebrations. A pageant on the Savannah waterfront recreated the first meeting of Oglethorpe and Tomochichi (Fig. 8) – a reminder of the traditional significance of the Yamacraw chief as a helper to the Anglo-European

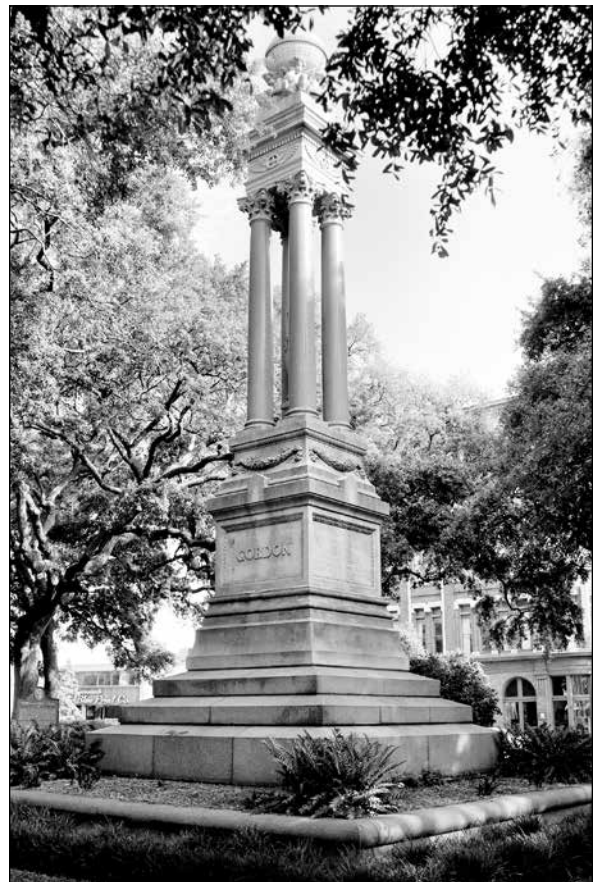


Fig. 7. Gordon Monument, Wright Square, Savannah, 2011 (Photograph by author).



Fig. 8. Pageant in the sesquicentennial celebration, February 12, 1883, representing the meeting of Oglethorpe and Tomochichi (William E. Wilson Collection, MS 1375-286, Courtesy Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia).



Fig. 9. Tomochichi Monument, Wright Square, Savannah, 2011 (Photograph by author).

settlers (*Savannah Morning News* February 13, 1883).¹² Tomochichi also represented a compliant minority, which in the American south in the years after the Civil War would have served as a model for blacks in white society, especially after the enacting of Jim Crow laws beginning in 1876. Similar motives may well have spurred the campaign to erect a new monument to Tomochichi in Savannah in the 1890s.

Gordon's daughter-in-law, Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, in her capacity as first president of the Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Georgia (an organization that she helped organize in 1893), spearheaded the erection of the new monument, demonstrating impressive resolve despite unclear motivations. Perhaps her family history accounts for her drive: "Contrary to the negative attitudes toward Native Americans in the late nineteenth century, Mrs. Gordon, whose father was an Indian agent, was raised among Native Americans in the old Northwest Territory, and she respected their traditions and rights" (Bohlin-Davis 1992, 6A).

The new monument took the form of a huge granite boulder secured by Gordon from the Stone Mountain Company in Atlanta. The company offered to donate it, but Mrs. Gordon insisted on paying for it, offering one dollar (Bragg 1962). It is believed by some to be the largest monolithic boulder in the world (Bragg 1962). Dedicated in Wright Square on April 21, 1899, the current Tomochichi Monument (Fig. 9) bears a plaque stating:

IN MEMORY OF
TOMO – CHI – CHI
THE MICO OF THE YAMACRAWS
THE COMPANION OF OGLETHORPE
AND THE FRIEND AND ALLY OF THE
COLONY OF GEORGIA.

At the dedication ceremony, keynote speaker Walter G. Charlton opened his remarks by saying "Let us, my fellow Georgians, congratulate ourselves that after a century and a half of forgetfulness we have at length been stirred to a realization of duty unfulfilled..." ("Dedication" 1917, 3). Charlton revealed the uncertainty of his time concerning the exact location of Tomochichi's grave when concluding:

What if tradition be wrong and we have missed the spot where he was laid to rest! We know that it was within the boundaries of this square, and what matters it where he lies?... This massive fragment of Georgia granite will stand here so long as the people of Savannah shall be true to themselves and be a monument to themselves and be a monument at once to the claims of the dead and the gratitude of the living ("Dedication" 1917, 10-11).

The monument reflected the gradually improving attitude among white Americans toward Native Americans at the end of the nineteenth century, despite its subordinate corner location.

One other recognition of Tomochichi occurred during the 1890s. A local social organization named itself the “Tomochichi Club” and met in an appropriately ornamented second-floor room inside the Savannah Guards Armory Building erected in downtown Savannah in 1892 (Tomochichi Club account book).¹³ Above the fireplace, an elaborate over-mantel with a plaster relief panel depicts a profile bust of the chief wearing a feathered headdress, though of a type not worn by the Yamacraw, flanked



Fig. 10. Tomochichi Club relief panel inside the Savannah Volunteer Guards Armory (now Poetter Hall, SCAD), Savannah, 2012 (Photograph by author).

by a bow and arrow and crossed spears (Fig. 10). More generic Native American motifs, including tomahawks, more crossed spears, and front-facing Indian heads form a decorative frieze that spans the upper walls of the room.

MISREADING THE PAST

The approach of the bicentennial of Tomochichi’s 1739 death evidently spurred increased interest in his gravesite and a reappraisal of his significance. In her lengthy two-part article simply entitled “Tomochichi” in the *Savannah Morning News*, Dolores Boisfeuillet Floyd noted “The inquiry of later generations for the site of Tomochichi’s burial place is due to an increasing appreciation of him that arises from the historic retrospect which permits a better view of the true greatness of his character with its attendant results as a factor in shaping the destiny not alone of Georgia but the course of North American history” (Floyd 1937). Her article appears to have laid the foundation, through a detailed, but ultimately flawed, argument that the mound demolished in 1882 was the chief’s original grave monument. She offers as her best evidence the memory of William Harden (1844-1936), the long-time librarian at the Georgia Historical Society, who she claims told her four years before his death that “from the earliest recollections of his childhood, a high, vine-covered rocky-earth mound stood upon that site; that long before the War between the States it had been pointed to him by his father and several aged inhabitants of Savannah as Tomochichi’s grave; and that it was still there until the year 1882” (Floyd 1937). It is unknown what stood on the site prior to the construction of the mound in 1871, but if anything occupied the site it had lacked enough physical presence to warrant being indicated on any map or documented in any photograph or print. Indeed, Charles C. Jones, Tomochichi’s biographer, noted in 1868 that nothing remained of the chief’s tomb site. Floyd was clearly unaware of the newspaper accounts documenting the city’s mound-building campaign of 1872. The impressive research that she brought to light regarding Tomochichi’s funeral and the original monument documented in colonial records enhanced

the credibility of her assertions about the mound itself. In subsequent years, both popular and scholarly accounts have perpetuated the mistaken belief that the mound demolished in 1882 was the actual grave of Tomochichi (Bragg 1962; Todd 1977; Bohlin-Davis 1992; Sweet 2002; Sweet 2005). The author of the “Tomochichi” entry on Wikipedia added invective, claiming the Gordon Monument “desecrated and destroyed” Tomochichi’s gravesite, words that have been copied verbatim on at least nine other websites. In effect, Floyd’s account from 1937 gave rise to what cultural geographers call an “invented tradition,” where the misinterpretation of the past, whether conscious or not, gives birth to a new tradition (Foote 2003; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992).

THE RESURGENCE OF TOMOCHICHI’S HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Beginning in the 1930s, a reappraisal of Tomochichi’s significance to the history of Georgia gradually took shape. The bicentennial of Savannah in 1933 evidently prompted the creation of a monumental mural spanning

the proscenium arch framing the wide stage of the city’s Junior High School (Fig. 11). Painted by local artist William Hoffman (Ross 2008), the mural depicts eight significant figures from Georgia’s early history: six figures, including Declaration of Independence signer Button Gwinnett,¹⁴ are represented as individual portrait busts framed by laurel branches with an adjacent plaque with their names and life dates; monumental full-figure standing portraits of Tomochichi (Fig. 12) and Oglethorpe anchor the far ends of the mural, underscoring both their pre-eminence among Georgia’s founding fathers and their equal significance. At the center, a relief sculpture of an American eagle painted silver is flanked by inscriptions “CWA” (Civil Works Administration, 1933-34) and “NRA” (National Recovery Administration, 1933-35) – two of the New Deal-era programs under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that funded the mural.

A historic plaque from 1952, marking Tomochichi’s gravesite at the center of Wright Square, more explicitly acknowledged his historical significance, identifying the chief as “a co-founder, with Oglethorpe, of Georgia” (Fig. 13). Although the marker, erected by the Georgia Historical Commission, states that Tomochichi “is



Fig. 11. Auditorium mural, Savannah Junior High School (now Arnold Hall, SCAD), Savannah, 2012 (Photograph by author).



Fig. 12. Detail, Tomochichi, auditorium mural, Savannah Junior High School (now Arnold Hall, SCAD), Savannah, 2012 (Photograph by author).

buried in the Square,” it stands to the immediate east of the Gordon Monument, implying that the gravesite rests beneath that monument. The marker says nothing, however, about the popular perception that the mound demolished in 1882 for the Gordon Monument was Tomochichi’s grave.

Such efforts to raise the historical stature of Tomochichi reflect the growing sensitivity to Native Americans across the country during the mid-twentieth century. Beginning with the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, pressure mounted to reframe the perception of the country’s Native American cultures. For example, beginning in 1939, spirited lobbying by Native American groups resulted in the 1958 removal from the U.S. Capitol steps of the large sculpture groups “The Rescue” by Horatio Greenough and “Discovery of America” by Luigi Persico installed in 1853, which depicted antagonistic Native Americans succumbing to the superior force of Anglo-Europeans (Fryd 1987). This trend has accelerated in recent decades, with multiple sites of conflict between Native Americans and whites being reinterpreted, such as the designation of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail in 1987 and the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site in 2000 (Foote 2003).

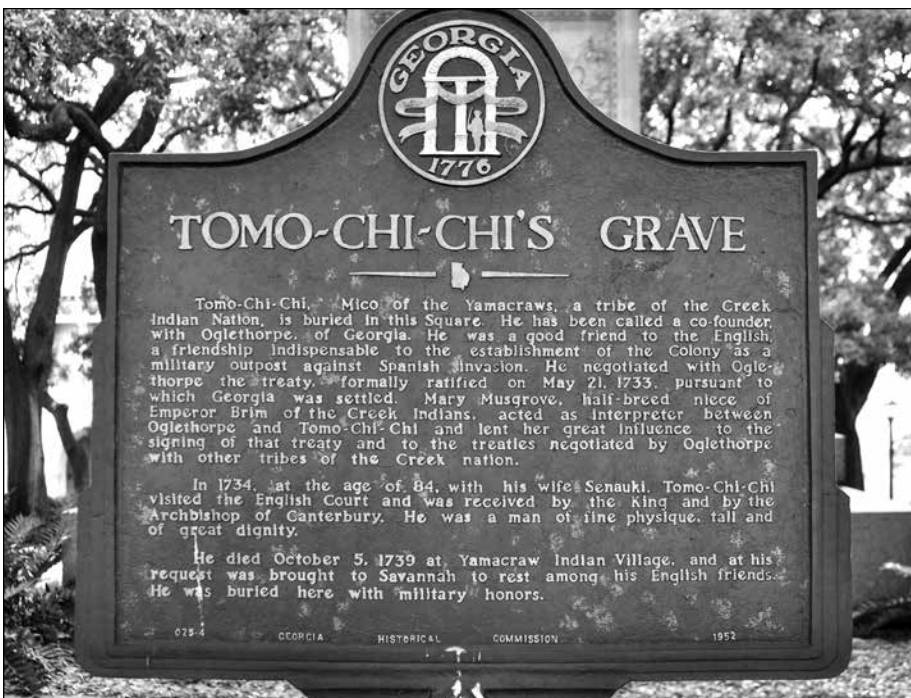


Fig. 13. Historical marker for Tomochichi’s grave, Wright Square, Savannah, 2011 (Photograph by author).

Interest in the Tomochichi burial site continues to mirror public perceptions of Native Americans in the context of revisionist readings of history. In the mid-1990s, two separate individuals called for the Gordon Monument to be moved from Wright Square to the Savannah Visitors Center (the former passenger terminal for the Central of Georgia Railroad) in order to restore appropriate recognition of Tomochichi on the original site of his grave (Rose 1993; Holland 1994). A more serious effort to rectify the history of perceived injustices to the Yamacraw chief was initiated in 2003 by U.S. Congressman Max Burns, who sponsored the bill in the House of Representatives¹⁵ that led to renaming the federal court house building on the west side of Wright Square as the Tomochichi Federal Judicial Center in 2005. Burns's efforts received the support of *Savannah Morning News* editor Tom Barton, who noted that the Gordon Monument "no doubt was considered classy when it was finished in 1883. But today it seems pretentious. And given what it replaced, sacrilegious" (Barton 2004, 17A). He advocated an even more radical plan: excavate the chief's remains and reinter them in a newly built Indian mound in one of the city's other squares.

THE PRECARIOUS NATURE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

The history of the Tomochichi Monument and gravesite illustrates the precarious nature of commemoration – both physically and in public memory. After receiving the full honors of a British military funeral presided over by Oglethorpe himself, Tomochichi enjoyed the recognition of a sizable monument over his gravesite in the center of Wright Square that may have been the first truly urbanistic public monument in the British colonies. Yet, it appears that within a generation, the chief's significance to the citizens of Savannah had waned, possibly as a result of the diminishing importance of Native Americans to the success of the Georgia colony. After appearing on De Brahm's map of 1757 and in a brief mention in 1759, no subsequent document acknowledges the existence of the chief's monument. During the nineteenth century, Tomochichi's gravesite

slipped from public memory to such an extent that the erection of an apparently decorative garden mound in the center of Wright Square in 1871 and its removal a decade later stirred no public concern for its impact on the chief's resting place. Only in the closing two decades of the nineteenth century did efforts begin to erect a new monument in his memory, culminating in the placement of a large granite boulder in the southeast corner of Wright Square in 1899. As attitudes toward Native Americans warmed during the twentieth century, public expressions of sympathy for the "co-founder of Georgia" led to recognition of his legacy in the form of a large-scale mural in the city's junior high school and a plaque marking his actual gravesite.

More broadly, the history of commemoration of Tomochichi in Savannah illustrates not only the vulnerability of monuments to shifting social and political values but also how such values can lead to a falsification of history. Memories of a mound in Wright Square combined with well-intentioned efforts to redress a perceived wrong done to the chief's gravesite fostered a persistent and erroneous belief that the Gordon Monument displaced the chief's burial mound. The coincidental resemblance of Native American burial mounds to the mound installed in Wright Square in 1871 makes for a tantalizing connection, but the fact that the Wright Square mound was one of at least three erected in Savannah squares in the early 1870s indicates that they were merely decorative and had no specific connection to Tomochichi. As a landscape of memory, Wright Square currently offers two commemorative monuments to the Yamacraw chief - the granite boulder and the historic marker - that document the shifting status of a prominent Native American in the eyes of a predominantly white society. The more recent past has witnessed radical proposals to remove the Gordon Monument from the site of Tomochichi's tomb at the center of the square and recreate his tomb monument or to exhume and move the chief's remains to a newly constructed burial mound in a different square replicating the mound lost in 1882. In the context of increasingly sympathetic attitudes towards Native Americans in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, such proposals are well intended but would raise serious questions of authenticity. Too little is known

of the original 1739 monument to Tomochichi to create a replica, while a new mound in a different square as a site for the chief's remains would be doubly inauthentic, since the former mound had nothing to do with him. Given that the goal of a monument is to secure the memory of a person or event, the urbanistically located 1739 monument to Tomochichi succeeded in the long term, despite its apparently short existence.

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Robin Williams, Ph.D., teaches at the Savannah College of Art and Design, where he founded the Department of Architectural History in 1995 and has chaired ever since. He specializes in the history of the built environment of the modern period in Europe and North America. Williams earned his B.A. in the History of Art at the University of Toronto and his M.A. and Ph.D. in the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation examined the transformation of Rome into the capital of modern Italy during the late nineteenth century. A chapter from his dissertation will appear in a book on the Pantheon scheduled to be published in 2013 by Cambridge University Press. Since joining the Savannah College of Art and Design in 1993, Williams has made Savannah the focus of his research. From 1996 to 2005, he directed the online Virtual Historic Savannah Project, <http://vsav.scad.edu>, which received over \$200,000 in grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Georgia Humanities Council. He is currently co-authoring a book, *The Architecture of the Savannah Plan*.

ENDNOTES

1. This article developed from a paper, "A Monument for a Chief: The Origins of Public Commemoration in America and the Evolving Perceptions of Native Americans," delivered at the 2011 annual meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians in Charleston, SC. The author wishes to acknowledge the feedback of attendees at that conference, as well as the excellent editorial suggestions of Anat Geva, David Gobel, my brother Dr. Gregory Williams, and the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript submitted to PER. The author wishes to thank the Savannah College of Art and Design for its generous support in securing image reproductions.
2. The term "memory work" comes from James Young, 2000, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
3. It is interesting to note that the famous "Frieze of American History" inside the dome of the Capitol in Washington, DC, designed in 1859 and painted between 1878 and 1889, includes among its nineteen scenes "Oglethorpe and the Indians," but official descriptions make no specific reference to Tomochichi. See the Architect of the Capitol website, "Frieze of American History," <http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/rotunda/frieze/Oglethorpe-and-the-Indians.cfm>.
4. This event was documented in the painting by William Verelst, "Yamacraw Chief Tomochichi presented to the Georgia Trustees," at the Winterthur Museum.
5. Lots 2 and 3, Holland Tything, Percival Ward. A plaque on the site identifies it as "Savannah's First Burying Ground," in use from 1733 until about 1750.
6. Obelisks had begun making an appearance in English gardens during the 1730s and were likely well known to Oglethorpe. The obelisk designed in 1732 by Lord Burlington for his garden at Chiswick stands among the more famous examples of this period (Harris 1994).
7. De Braham is considered the first "modern" mapmaker of the southeast United States and its first true geographer (Cumming 1998).
8. Views of the mound in Wright Square in the Dennis Collection, New York Public Library, include: Catalog Call Number: MFY Dennis Coll 90-F156, Digital ID: g90f156_030zf; Catalog Call Number: MFY Dennis Coll 90-F156, Digital ID: g90f156_032zf; Catalog Call Number: MFY Dennis Coll 90-F156, Digital ID: g90f156_035zf; and Catalog Call Number: MFY Dennis Coll 90-F156, Digital ID: g90f156_031zf. The mound in Madison Square appears clearly in Image ID: g90f156_013f Bull Street, Savannah, Ga. [No. 422.] (1855-1870), while only a portion of the mound appears in Catalog Call Number: MFY Dennis Coll 90-F156, Digital ID: G90F156_044ZF.
9. Dennis Collection, New York Public Library, Catalog Call Number: MFY Dennis Coll 90-F156; Digital ID: g90f156_016zf.
10. Planning for the Gordon Monument began in December 1880, and the commission was awarded to architects Henry Van Brunt and Frank M. Howe, who had formed a firm in 1881, making this monument one of their earliest works. The monument was completed by April 1883. See copy of typescript, "Copy of Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Directors, Central Rail Road and Banking Company of Georgia. July 12, 1883," vertical file "Monuments/Memorials - Savannah, Ga - Gordon Monument," Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.
11. The author suggested that the proposed Gordon Monument be relocated to Chippewa Square, the next square south on Bull Street, the location ultimately selected, ironically, for the Oglethorpe Monument of 1910.
12. The published account of the pageant noted "Much of the interest of the landing of Oglethorpe and the reception by the Yamacraws was centered in the pageant, representing the incident. The vessel representing the craft on which (Oglethorpe) and his party came up the river 150 years ago, passed the city front, and landed at the Upper Rice Mill wharves, where (Oglethorpe) and his party stepped ashore and were greeted by Tomochichi and his tribe. The principal characters in the pageant were Messrs. Laurence Hanley as Oglethorpe, J.M. Johnsen as Tomochichi... members of the

Ford Dramatic Association. ... The costumes were furnished by Mr. A.R. Van Horn of Philadelphia. The whole arrangement was under the direction of Colonel J.H. Estill, chairman of the sub-committee of the Sesqui-Centennial Committee, and president of the Ford Dramatic Association" (Untitled article, *Savannah Morning News* February 13, 1883).

13. The Tomochichi Club, according to the catalogue entry of the club's account book at the Georgia Historical Society, "was a social organization in Savannah, Georgia. It was housed in the Savannah Volunteer Guards' building and many of the soldiers were the clubs principle [sic] members. The club offered a bar, bowling alley, and a swimming pool. Around 1910, the club changed its name to the Savannah Volunteer Guards Club and no longer permitted outside members." Tomochichi Club account book, MS 1245, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.
14. The other five are James Jackson, Anthony Wayne, Nathaneal Greene, George Whitefield, and Casimir Pulaski.
15. H.R. 2523, 108th Congress, introduced June 19, 2003.

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