

# Six Flags history for 40th anniversary

By ED HOWELL  
Eagle Senior Writer

Author Tim Hollis of *Dora* still has a tape he made at age 9 inside the Tales of the Okefenokee ride at Six Flags Over Georgia, plus photos of each scene.

He still has them, but he went one step further.

"Right before Six Flags threw away all the soundtracks from the Okefenokee, I did have a person on the inside who was kind enough to dub it for me, and then I had it restored for CD," Hollis said.

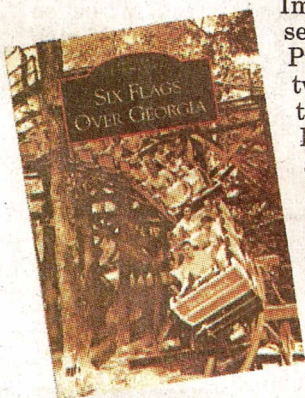


Tim Hollis

Hollis, 44, the author of 10 books on Southern pop culture, has collected a number of artifacts from Six Flags over the years. That qualified him to write the history of Six Flags Over Georgia as it celebrates its 40th anniversary this summer.

He has also loaned part of his collection, including framed maps and a fiberglass frog from the Okefenokee ride, for the Marietta/Cobb County Art Museum for an exhibit on Six Flags that starts Saturday and runs through Sept. 15. Puppets, costumes, pieces from old rides, old souvenirs and other items are expected to be displayed.

The book, "Six Flags Over Georgia," which was released in October, is part of the Images of America series from Arcadia Publishing. He has two other books in the series on Birmingham's theater district and broadcasting history.



Hollis has also written extensively about tourist attractions in the South, and had another book,

"The Land of the Smokies: Great Mountain Memories" (University Press of Mississippi) come out in May, with more than 200 vintage photos from Boone, N.C., to the Gatlinburg area and down to Lookout Mountain.

The Six Flags book is on sale at Six Flags for a good reason: It's the only book available on the subject.

"They love me at Six Flags. No one over there knows the slightest thing about their history," Hollis said. "They didn't have any of the memorabilia, because they didn't

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# Six Flags

keep any of that stuff.”

His work and collection was so unique that he was invited to the official anniversary celebration in June. Over the years, he has interviewed many of the original park employees, some of whom still work there.

## Park opened in 1967

At age 4, Hollis was also on hand a little more than a month after the park opened on June 16, 1967, at a cost that had ballooned up from \$7 million to \$12 million. It was actually the second Six Flags park, after one in Texas in 1961, followed by one in St. Louis, Mo. — the only three created by company founder



Angus G. Wynne Jr. (The company has 21 parks today, including one in Mexico.)

Wynne — probably unaware Walt Disney had already started buying property in Florida — wanted to put parks closer to Southerners, instead of going to Disneyland in California. Six Flags was announced in August 1965, and Disney followed his announcement in November. (Disney World was opened in 1971.)

Six Flags, unlike Disneyland, advertised one admission price, as opposed to tickets for additional attractions. However, Wynne's son told Hollis Disney had better funding.

“Disney would spend more on one ride than it did them to build the whole park that first year,” Hollis said.

Jean Ribaut's Adventure Ride (a boat ride depicting Indians, alligators and early French settlers on the Georgia coast) was held over from Texas, as it used various explorer names in various parks, such as Lewis and Clark's ride in St. Louis.

The ride had a scene where the Indians were supposed to do their war dance, with their legs behind bushes. When the bushes somehow were moved, they had to make dancing legs, but the animation didn't come off well.

“It looked like the Indians were riding invisible bicycles,” he said. “I think they finally put the foliage back.”

Another time, a “burning” cabin actually did catch fire due to gas-powered flames. Tour guides “driving” the boat (the ride actually ran on rails underneath the water) would veer off from the script with wild comedy acts, and sometimes tell riders to look around at a fallen tree that was righting itself for the next boat.

## Employees played pranks in park

The ride had a timer for the cannonball-in-the-water effect, where the splash in the water came two seconds after the cannon sound, all spread out.

“They played tricks on each other. One day one of the workman was up in the fort when the boat was coming along. He decided to give the guide a real show. He



Photo Special to the Eagle

*The Chevy Show, at left, and the Krofft theater sit below the Sky Hook in an old photo.*

set off all the cannons and all the splashes, all at the same time,” Hollis said. “The driver didn't know what was happening.”

Soundmen in the audio department, based in an office behind the Okefenokee ride, had to play the music and sound effects for all the rides out of that one room, and sometimes they would swap up tapes to see if anyone noticed.

“They would try to come up with every obscene combination they could. In the Okefenokee ride, there was a scene where Brer Fox and Brer Bear were running from the hornets and breathing heavily. Some times they would take that sound effect and have it come out of the log cabin in the Jean Ribaut ride, like there was a couple in the cabin,” he said.

The department was on the other side of a wall from a Christmas scene in Okefenokee, and they got so tired of the 60-second continuous loop of Christmas music coming through the wall they would cut off all the music in the scene to get some peace, he said.

Okefenokee was Hollis' favorite ride, recounting the Georgia-bred Brer Rabbit tales, although the first version was short-lived, thanks to the initial low budgets.

“They redesigned it after that first year because it was so tacky. They were itty-bitty characters. They would have a character supposed to be walking, and he would be on the end of a stick, going around on a turntable with his legs turning. They said that first season that was the most embarrassing attraction they had,” he said.

Sid and Marty Krofft, already on hand the first season with their puppet show, redesigned the entire attraction except for the boat and its physical path to make the scenes bigger and more elaborate, he said.

In the 1964 New York World's Fair,

## SIX FLAGS OVER GEORGIA

### EXHIBIT

Creating the Thrill: Celebrating 40 Years of Family Fun with Six Flags Over Georgia, July 14 - Sept. 15, at the Marietta/Cobb Museum of Art, 30 Atlanta Street, Marietta, Ga.

### HOURS AND ADMISSION

The museum is open Tuesday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. For admission, adults are \$5, seniors and students are \$3 and children under 6 get in free.

### INFORMATION

Call (770) 528-1444 or e-mail to [info@mariettacobbartmuseum.org](mailto:info@mariettacobbartmuseum.org). The Web site is [www.mariettacobbartmuseum.org](http://www.mariettacobbartmuseum.org)

Wynne headed the Texas pavilion which bombed next to the Krofft's French-themed show, which was a hit.

“Sid and Marty Krofft were putting on a puppet show for adults. It was a nudie puppet show for adults, with topless marionettes,” he said. “They weren't into television yet. They were nightclub performers.”

Wynne hired them to do a show in the Atlanta park, followed by another in the Texas park. The puppeteers later became famous for children shows like “H.R. Puffenstuff,” and in 1976 opened their own indoor theme park in the building where CNN now sits. Their venture lasted only six months, but permanently ended their association with Six Flags because of breach of contract.

## Thrill rides move in

Since the early 1980s, Okefenokee, Jean Ribaut and other attractions went away, as did the porpoise show (who's act was so emotionally attached to the trainer that they would be found in the mornings with their heads over the tank's edge watching for her, and turn somersaults when she came).

The log ride was the park's main thrill ride at first, but after the first couple of years attendance leveled off without new construction, Hollis said. General Manager Errrol McKoy suggested Wynne build a new section to recreate a turn-of-the-century amusement park with a wooden roller coaster.

“Wynne said over his dead body would there ever be a roller coaster at Six Flags. His purpose was the history of the state. It wasn't roller coasters,” Hollis said.

Wynne sold out in 1971 and by 1973, McKoy was finally allowed by the new owners to create the Great American Scream Machine — on the understanding his career was riding on it. It became a major hit and a way to compete with Disney, and Six Flag increasingly relied on thrill rides, closing older attractions to make way for the new.

“As the years went by, I found less and less to enjoy, because I'm not a coaster person,” Hollis said.