

Subject: Monkey Face Tree and Precious Memories
November 4, 2022

As I recently drove down Cullasaja Drive and by Mirror Lake I realized the Monkey Face tree was still there. Regretfully, the monkey face image that was a natural part of that tree is long gone. The only thing remaining remnant of that glorious oddity of nature is a rotting scar on the tree.

What was the monkey face tree? The principals involved in the monkey face travesty are long gone from Highlands, some even from this earthly realm. What took place happened over thirty years ago. Nevertheless, the story is worth recalling as a cautionary tale.

When Sallie and I had young children, we would travel from Atlanta to visit grandparents, Jean and Buck Trott. Jean continues to live on Cullasaja next to the lake. Our kids always expected to do three things when making the trip. First, we had to stop at the Indian Store on old US 441 at Tahulah Falls. Second, they always had to call out the Lick Log Store as we passed by as a signal that we were near Highlands. Finally, as we drove down Cullasaja we had to stop, or drive slowly by the Monkey Face Tree. About 15 feet up the tree was a knot that was a perfect image of a monkey's face. It was if an artist had sculpted it. We all marveled over this little wonder of nature.

On one trip to Highlands we discovered to our dismay that the monkey face was gone. Someone had taken a chain saw and cut it from the tree. When we arrived at the Trott's home, Buck, the then president of the Mirror Lake Improvement Association and our family patriarch, welcomed us.

When our kids asked about the Monkey Face, Buck reported that someone had cut it out of the tree. He assured us that a full-blown investigation was underway. A week or so after we were back in Atlanta Buck called to report he had found the offender, a new resident to Mirror Lake. Buck was riding around Mirror Lake one day and noticed a newly built porch. On one of the posts hung the monkey face. Apparently, the new homeowner had ordered a worker to go cut out the Monkey Face and bring it back to him. Buck, who never had a reputation for restraint, stopped and chewed the man out for committing such a crime against nature. Buck ordered the man to put the Monkey Face back on the tree or face the wrath of Buck and all the Mirror Lake residents.

The monkey face was returned to the tree, but nevertheless rotted soon thereafter. The tree was never the same, and a unique natural phenomenon was lost to the community forever.

Why am I telling this story now? Like I said before, it is a cautionary tale in this time of economic prosperity and unprecedented growth. As folks relocate to this wonderful community, everyone needs to constantly be mindful of this unique ecology and natural setting. What we perceive as insignificant actions may have unintentional consequences for the community. Paradise can be lost. Other "monkey faces" are still around us, at least for now.