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ZERO MILE POST, ONE OF ATLANTA'S MOST SIGNIFICANT ARTIFACTS, RELOCATED TO THE ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER

--1850s Western & Atlantic Railroad marker around which Atlanta grew will be paired with the restored 1856 Texas locomotive in a new exhibition designed to tell the city's origin story --

ATLANTA, GA – The Zero Mile Post, an irreplaceable artifact of Atlanta's railroad history, has a new home: the Atlanta History Center.

The Georgia Building Authority has agreed to a five-year renewable license agreement with the Atlanta History Center to preserve and interpret the Zero Mile Post, which was installed in the 1850s to mark the Southern terminus of the Western & Atlantic Railroad. The site, near the Georgia Freight Depot, was used to determine the city center of Atlanta in 1842.

The Georgia Building Authority and the Atlanta History Center share the same goals in the relocation of the Zero Mile Post: to protect it for the future and to secure it in a safer place; to increase the visibility of and access to the Zero Mile Post for all citizens, especially school children, allowing the History Center to tangibly illustrate Atlanta's origin story; and to preserve the original downtown site.

The Zero Mile Post has been carefully and successfully relocated to the History Center from the Georgia Building Authority's property located underneath the Central Avenue Bridge. It will go on public view when the 1856 *Texas* locomotive and its accompanying exhibition, *Locomotion: Railroads and the Making of Atlanta*, debut on Saturday, November 17, 2018. The new Rollins Gallery at the Atlanta History Center features a wall of glass windows facing West Paces Ferry Road, allowing the Zero Mile Post and the *Texas* locomotive to be viewed day and night, when it is dramatically illuminated.

"The Atlanta History Center is honored to have the opportunity to preserve, protect, and present the Zero Mile Post in an environment that can offer meaningful interpretation of the artifact's significance," said Atlanta History Center President and CEO Sheffield Hale. "Positioning the Zero Mile Post beside the recently restored *Texas* locomotive, one of the two remaining Western & Atlantic locomotives [the other being the *General*] that would have passed by that very mile post scores of times during its service offers valuable interpretive possibilities. Railroads built and created Atlanta, and these two objects tell Atlanta's origin story like no others."

Usually placed along rail lines at each mile, markers informed train crews where they were along a specific route. The above-ground portion of the rectangular marker measures approximately 1 foot wide on each side and 42 inches tall. The crown is pyramidal, and one side the marker is engraved with "W&A RR OO" – the W & A indicating the Western & Atlantic Railroad and the double-zero designating the beginning of the rail line. The other side of the marker is engraved "W&A RR 138".

When removed from the ground, entirely exposed, the marker measures 7 feet 5 inches, and weighs approximately 800 pounds. And that is how the Atlanta History Center will display it. Original plans were to dig a hole to place the Zero Mile Marker post as it originally was, with only 42 inches exposed. However, once the post was safely transferred to the Rollins Gallery, and rolled up beside the *Texas* locomotive, the History Center saw an opportunity to present the full scale of Atlanta's origin artifact.

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One of the opportunities guests have in the new *Locomotion* exhibition is to climb aboard the cab of the *Texas*, and view the seven-plus foot artifact from the cab, providing a whole new large-scale perspective to these Atlanta icons like never before.

Secure behind a locked fence, the building and Zero Mile Post were last accessible to the public in 1994 when the structure served as a passenger depot for the New Georgia Railroad, a tourist rail line that ceased operation. Inside the same structure, access to the Zero Mile Post was limited in recent years to appointments approved by the Georgia Building Authority. The original marble marker is fragile -- any outdoor location would expose it to the elements and potential for vandalism, and endanger its survival.

To mark the Zero Mile Post's original site, the Georgia Building Authority had a surveyor mark the exact GPS coordinates of the old marker's location, and will install a replica of the Zero Mile Post there that has long been displayed at the Atlanta History Center. The Georgia Historical Society will provide an interpretive marker to accompany the replica post downtown. The marker and replica post will be positioned along sidewalks that will be constructed around the original site, increasing the visibility and awareness of this preserved historic spot on a daily basis, something that could not be done previously. The building that housed the Zero Mile Post is slated for demolition before the end of 2018, leaving the location and the replica easily accessible to the public.

"Working with the Atlanta History Center to secure an option that protects the Zero Mile Post for generations to come and puts it with a trusted guardian that will utilize the artifact daily to tell the history of Atlanta's beginning is a win-win for Georgians," said Steve Stancil, State Property Officer, serving as Executive Director of the Georgia Building Authority and State Properties Commission. "We are also grateful to the History Center for being excellent partners and providing us with a replica that preserves and highlights the significance of the spot where the original Zero Mile Post once stood."

Relocating original artifacts for protection and preservation and replacing them with replicas is a common practice, particularly in cases where they are subject to outdoor elements. Museums throughout Europe engage in the practice of moving historically significant but fragile artifacts, such as Michelangelo's *David*, to indoor sites and placing replicas in the original location, Hale noted. By doing this, the artifact is preserved, but the historical significance of the location is also acknowledged.

In addition to viewing the Zero Mile Post and *Texas* locomotive, guests will be able to view the Solomon Luckie Lamppost on display in the adjacent gallery as part of *Cyclorama: The Big Picture*, opening February 22, 2019.

Originally placed downtown to provide gas lighting during the same 1850s time period as the Zero Mile Post, the Luckie Lamppost was preserved because of its scarred metal from shelling during the *Battle of Atlanta*. It is called the Luckie Lamppost in remembrance of Solomon Luckie, a free African-American barber who, according to various accounts, was fatally injured while standing nearby during the shelling by shrapnel from the shell or a broken-off piece of the lamppost.

"These are the three great Atlanta icons, period," Hale said. "The Zero Mile Post, the Solomon Luckie Lamppost, and *Texas* locomotive, present a triad of iconic artifacts indicative of the founding of Atlanta and its expansion during the Civil War and beyond. At the Atlanta History Center, they will prompt a rich discussion for generations to come about the many facets of our collective history."

ABOUT THE ATLANTA HISTORY CENTER

Founded in 1926, the Atlanta History Center is an all-inclusive, 33-acre destination featuring the Atlanta History Museum, one of the nation's largest history museums; three historic houses -- the 1920s Swan House, the 1860s Smith Family Farm, and the 1830s Wood Family Cabin; Goizueta Gardens; the Kenan Research Center; the Grand Overlook event space; a museum shop; a Souper Jenny café; and a BRASH coffee shop. In addition, the History Center welcomes visitors to Margaret Mitchell House at Atlanta History Center Midtown. The Atlanta History Center is open 10 am-5:30 pm Mondays-Saturdays and noon-5:30 pm Sundays (ticket sales until 4:30 pm daily). Parking is free. For more information, please call 404.814.4000 or visit AtlantaHistoryCenter.com.