

SEANKELLY

Kennedy, Randy. "Southern Gothic: Hunting for the peculiar soul of Georgia," *The New York Times Magazine*, September 28, 2014.

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DISPATCH, FROM AMERICA

For his 42nd birthday in 2011, the photographer Alec Soth asked a friend, the writer Brad Zellar, for an unusual gift: Come out on the road with me, and let's pretend to work for a small-town newspaper.

Soth's work, which has been collected by, among others, the Museum of Modern Art, often pokes into America's lonely corners. He has shot portraits of survivalists and hermits; motel honeymooners; love-starved North Dakota oil boomers (for this magazine last year). So the request wasn't completely unexpected. But when the two men began driving the back roads outside Minneapolis, where both live, Soth went so far as to print business cards with the name of a fictitious newspaper, *The Winter Garden Dispatch*. "Alec likes to take things over the falls in a barrel," Zellar says. Over the last three years, their nonexistent publication somehow became a real one: *The LBM Dispatch*, a 48-page black-and-white tabloid that Soth and Zellar have put out six times after wandering as many states — Ohio, New York, Michigan, California, Colorado and Texas — chosen, Soth says, "mostly serendipitously."

The *Dispatch* reported the news the way a paper would if Sherwood Anderson were the owner, Raymond Carver the copy chief and Emily Dickinson the sports editor, a vision of 21st-century life deeply strange and strangely deep. "It was all the things I had to leave out — or that got cut out — of my stories when I worked for actual newspapers," Zellar says. This summer they went to Georgia, and after that report is published, *The Dispatch*, like so many small-town papers, will close for good. "The whole nature was do-it-yourself, like a lemonade stand," Soth says. "The longer it went on, the more interest there was, from institutions and magazines, and that started to make it a different kind of thing."

But during its brief run, he says, the paper's pages proudly bore out its unstated editorial stance: "The United States is a lot more interesting than it's given credit for." — RANDY KENNEDY



Charles Roark, a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, is 71 years old and lives four miles from the Chickamauga battlefield, site of the Union's worst defeat. Roark collects Civil War paraphernalia and uniforms, from both sides, and participates in re-enactments. "If I go to a re-enactment, nobody wants to be Union," he told Brad Zellar. "And if you've got 150 Confederates and only 30 Union soldiers, it don't look so good, so I bring along both uniforms."



Fort Benning, the sprawling, open base, serves as the U.S. Army's infantry headquarters. Despite its more than 30,000 military and civilian employees, Brad Zellar writes, "in many of the base's far-flung nooks and crannies, we didn't encounter a soul. In a number of instances — at least from a security standpoint — a chaperone would probably have been advisable. When we checked in at the gate, the soldier on duty eyeballed us (and our rented minivan loaded with gear) and said, 'Welcome home, fellas.'"



Lee Hall, left, and Quintavious Thomas attended the Georgia Lions Camp for the Blind in Ware County, together. "We're the same age, and we help each other get along," Lee says. "I come to this camp because of him."



The Okefenokee Swamp, near Waycross, Ga., in the southeastern corner of the state, near Florida.



At the Cream Ultra Lounge in Atlanta, Brad Zellar writes, “we talked to groups of young women who had driven from Philadelphia and New Jersey. There was a rumor that football players were expected — nobody was able or willing to be more specific than that — but after waiting around for an hour, we didn’t notice the arrival of any football players, and the sense of anticipation in the room appeared to be giving way to disappointment.”



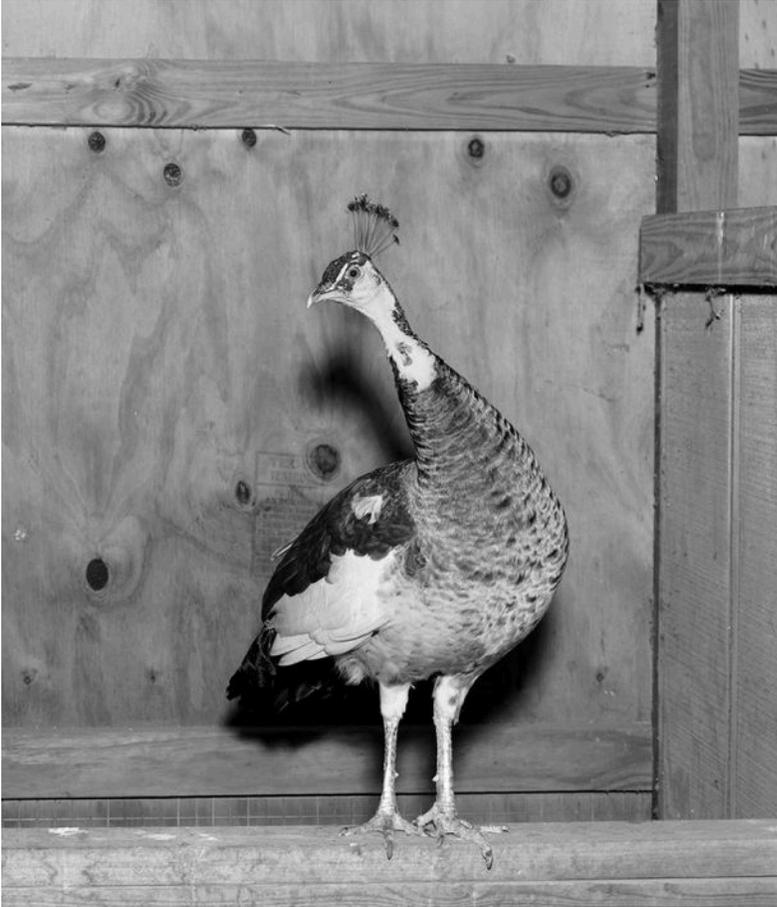
More than three decades after his presidency ended, Jimmy Carter still lives in Plains, Ga., where both he and his wife of 68 years, Rosalynn, were born. When he is in town, he often teaches a 10 a.m. Sunday-school class at Maranatha Baptist Church, where the Carters are deacons. The congregation includes only about 30 active members, but the former president’s talks are open to the public on a first-come, first-served basis.



Dquan Morgan, who is 26 and had a 3-2 record as professional light heavyweight at the time of this photograph, trains at Johnny Gant's Art of Boxing Center in Atlanta.



Cabbage Patch Kids were the brainchild of the Cleveland, Ga., native Xavier Roberts. (Each doll bears Roberts's signature on its rear end.) By the end of the 1980s, sales of the dolls hit 65 million, and they had been featured on the cover of Newsweek. In Cleveland, Roberts turned a former medical clinic into an emporium called Babyland General Hospital. The place has since moved into a new building where, Zellar writes, "beneath the branches of the Magic Crystal Tree and impregnated by flying bee/rabbit hybrids, Mother Cabbage continues to reproduce at an alarming rate." According to the official Babyland history, on Jan. 7, 2011, Nathan Deal, the governor of Georgia, and his wife signed the adoption papers for John Nathan and Emilie Sandra, Cabbage Patch Kids "made in the likeness of their adoptive parents."



A peahen on Flannery O'Connor's Andalusia Farm in Milledgeville, Ga., where the author was said to have 40 peacocks at one time.



The South Georgia County Line Cloggers dance on Old Fashion Day in Willacoochee, Ga.



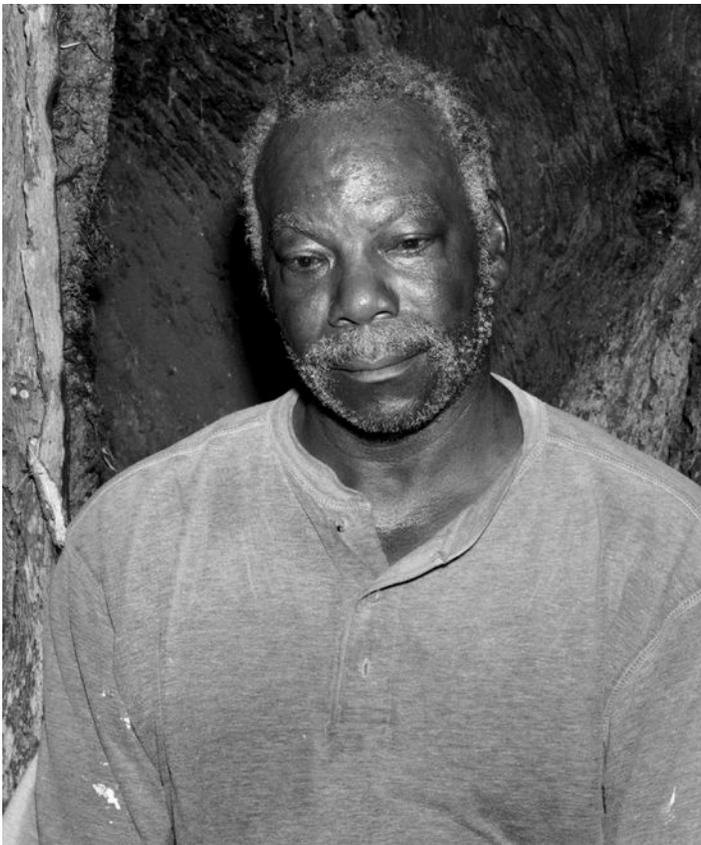
Andersonville was a crude stockade fort built in 1864 to hold 10,000 Union prisoners. But the number of prisoners reached nearly 33,000, and more than 12,000 of them died there, mostly of malnutrition, exposure or other diseases related to the overcrowding.



Crystal Padgett, 27, left, a specialist with the 203rd Brigade Support Battalion based at Fort Benning. She and her brother, Josh, flank their half sister, Candace, and Candace's son, Josiah.



Bradley Lock and Key in Savannah.



Joseph Hall is a lifelong resident of Sapelo Island, Ga.



In Southeast Augusta, Maple Street is a few blocks away from James Brown Boulevard, not far from the neighborhood where the soul singer spent much of his early childhood. Though the Augusta tourism office puts out a brochure listing the locations of Brown's elementary school, some of his favorite restaurants and the home he purchased on Walton Way in the 1970s, the Augusta Museum of History has no precise addresses for any of the homes where Brown lived during his early years in the city.

Alec Soth is a photographer based in the Twin Cities. He collaborated with the writer Brad Zellar on "Georgia" for The LBM Dispatch, which will be published this fall and from which this portfolio is adapted.