

BY MICHAEL KEATING

Well, I had tried out a few schemes of my own, until one day I began to watch Joe Jackson. He looked to me about the freest, longest hitter I had seen anywhere. He could take a good, natural cut at the ball without losing his balance and when he landed, the ball usually kept going until it disappeared. So I said to myself, 'If that style works so well with Jackson, why not for me?'

—Babe Ruth, 1923

Many Vietnam veterans will empathize with Joe Jackson, Greenville's best-known native son. Although not a military veteran—in fact, he avoided the draft by taking a job in the “essential” shipbuilding industry—he worked hard, only to be ridiculed and excoriated by the media and shunned by many fans.

Much about Shoeless Joe Jackson is shrouded in confusion, obfuscation, and intentional distortion, but some things are factual. Jackson grew up poor and

A few things we do know about Jackson. He wasn't one of the original conspirators, but was brought into the scheme later. We also know he accepted money: not the \$20,000 he had been promised, but \$5,000. And he never returned it.

In the course of the investigation eight players were charged, and Jackson confessed to his involvement in the conspiracy. There was a trial during which key documents disappeared, and the defendants subsequently were acquitted. Jackson then spent years walking back his earlier grand jury confession.

Was he an innocent, as many claimed, too naïve to understand the ramifications of what he was getting himself involved in? Being illiterate, had he been cynically manipulated? Or was he just past his prime and saw a way to make a fast buck?

Surely Jackson wasn't stupid. He was a successful entrepreneur who owned pool halls, smoke shops, and dry cleaning chains.

In his defense, Jackson pointed to the games' stats. He had played exceptionally well, he said, proof enough he was innocent. But, his detractors countered, baseball is about timing. His numbers were good, but they didn't result in runs.

Shoeless Joe tried for years to exonerate himself, and continued to play in the minors and wherever opportunities arose. Since his death in 1951, people have fought to have Jackson's banishment set aside so that he could take his rightful place in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. But so far, that hasn't happened.

The **Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum & Baseball Library** **A** is next to **Fluor Field** **B** on Greenville's West End. VVA baseball fans are in luck: the **Greenville Drive**, the High-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox, will be in town the entire time of the Leadership Conference. Tuesday through Saturday (August 9-13) the Drive will play the Hickory Crawdads at home.

The Secret's Out

VVA and AVVA members who attended the 2008 National Leadership Conference are already familiar with the **Hyatt Regency** **C** and Greenville's Main Street. But as my cabdriver told me on the way in from the airport, “The best-kept secret is out of the bag, and Greenville is booming.”

Drawn by its gentle climate, proximity to mountains and ocean, and a modest cost of living, people have ar-

Greenville

ROOTED IN THE

started working in Greenville's cotton mills while a child, some say as early as six years old. The imperative to help support his family outweighed other considerations, and he never learned to read or write.

But oh, could he play baseball. He excelled in the outfield, but even more so at bat. Soon he was spending less time in the mill and more time with the mill's baseball team. The National Pastime was preeminent in the early part of the Twentieth Century, and the mill league was intensely competitive.

Joe Jackson's talents were quickly recognized. From the mill teams he was recruited into the minor leagues, then into the majors, playing first for Philadelphia, then Cleveland, then finally in 1915 he was traded to the Chicago White Sox. There's no doubt that Shoeless Joe Jackson was a great baseball player. What's more, the fans loved his humble charm as much as they admired his skill. And he loved them, especially the children.

But from here it gets murky. Although Jackson had originally fled Philadelphia (he had never been in the North or in a big city, and he was ridiculed by teammates as a hick), by the time he got to Chicago he was comfortable with cities and comfortable with his team. Charles Comiskey's White Sox coalesced and won the 1918 World Series.

But then came 1919 and something happened. The stories, the accusations, and the defenses go in all directions. But it's clear that a small number of players agreed to take money from professional gamblers to throw that year's World Series. Some say the money was too good to resist; others say everyone had turned a blind eye to gambling; yet others claim Comiskey was a cheap bastard who ruthlessly took advantage of his players.

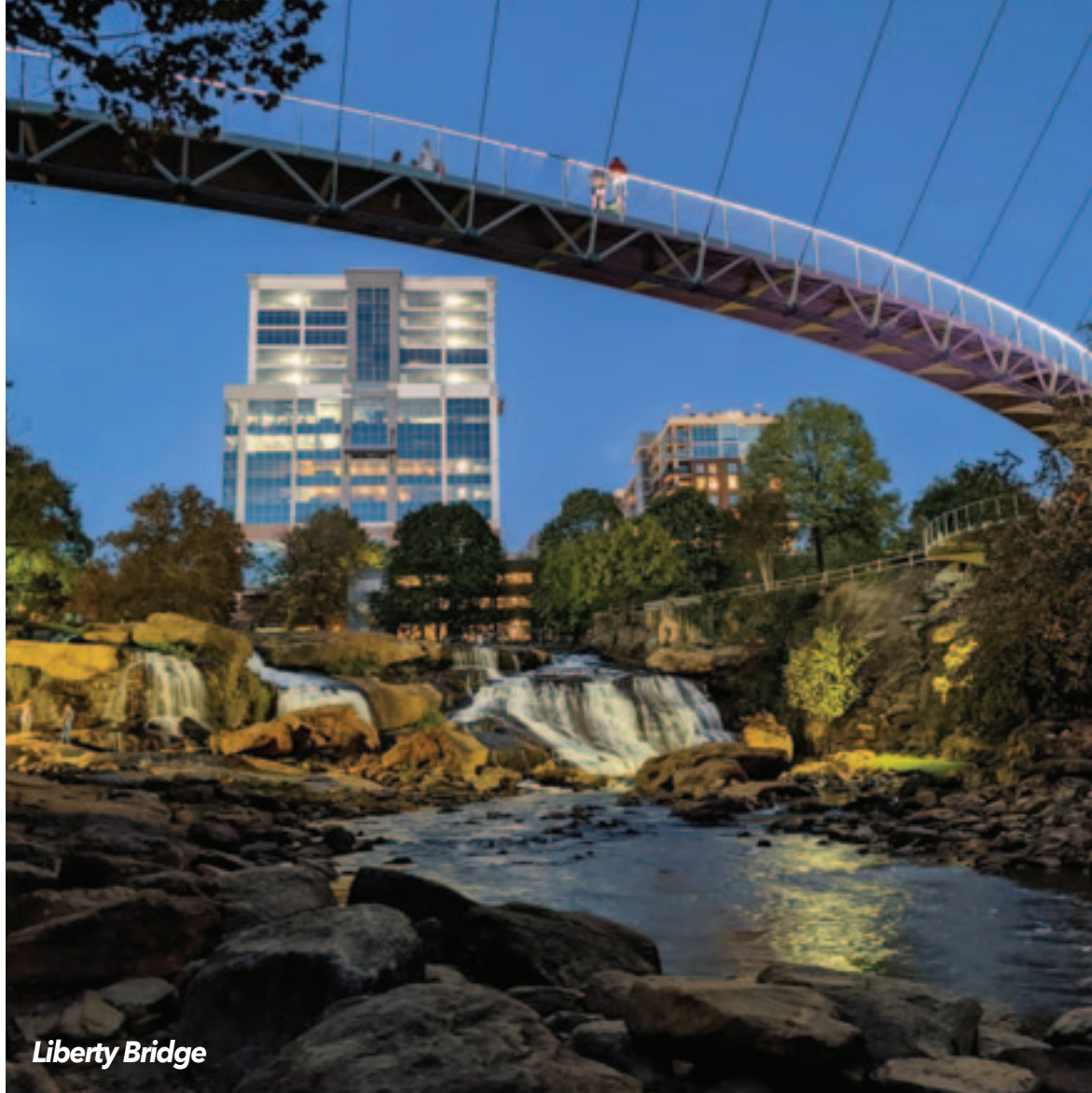


MICHAEL KEATING

One thing was for sure: The National Pastime was evolving into a big business. And those businessmen weren't about to have the sport's innocence sullied by dirty players colluding with racketeer gamblers. Newly appointed Baseball Commissioner Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis banished all eight Chicago “Black Sox” players for life—the harshest possible punishment.


rived in droves. Anyone strolling through town will encounter housing construction and a lot more traffic. VVA members will see considerably more people than before, and more shops, more dogs, more breweries, and many, many more restaurants.

Nonetheless, some restaurants have survived that most fickle industry and the COVID scare, including





Liberty Bridge

VISITGREENVILLES

land and distributed it among Continental Army veterans. **Water Blessing** , a sculpture by local artist Doug Young, pays tribute to the Cherokee. It's on W. Washington St., just past St. Mary's Catholic Church with its stained-glass depictions of the Virgin.

In time, the city became an important textile center, and the Reedy River was used for both industry and recreation. After a hard day's work or for a Sunday picnic, people would gather by the falls to enjoy the view and the cool air. But eventually the river became so polluted that people shunned it. And then, even later, a highway bridge was built over the falls, and it was forgotten.





The river was rediscovered by the Carolina Foothills Garden Club, and its members started work on the area around the falls. They cleared debris, designed walkways, and planted flowers—thousands of flowers. In time they were joined by other visionaries.


In 2002 Mayor Knox White and the City Council voted to remove the Camperdown Bridge. In an act of urban genius they commissioned architect Miguel Rosales to design a unique pedestrian bridge. His vision—**Liberty Bridge** —makes a sweeping arc around the falls and is suspended only on the back side, leaving a completely unobstructed view of the falls and downtown Greenville, all set in the lush gardens of **Falls Park on the Reedy** . It's one of America's most beautiful city parks.


Other visionaries reimagined Greenville's business district. As the textile industry declined in the South, so did Greenville. Its Main Street became tired and dusty, stuck in the inertia of the 1950s. But Mayor Max Heller and others dreamt of a different and vital Main Street.

With the help of federal grants, they built a beautiful and bustling commercial strip, filled with restaurants and

PAST, EAGER FOR THE FUTURE

Sticky Fingers  just down the street from the Hyatt, and **Smoke on the Water**  further down Main at the beginning of the West End. Both are justifiably famous for their barbeque and their hospitality. The sub shop **Jersey Mike's**  is still across the street from the Hyatt, and **Handi**  (18 N. Main) still serves excellent Indian fare (with ample vegetarian choices).

But in the intervening years Greenville has become a foodie destination. That means lots of restaurants, few of them inexpensive. Some are exotic, and some quite good. The Persian restaurant **Pomegranate on Main**  (618 S. Main), across from Liberty Bridge, was voted the city's best foreign restaurant.

Another good choice—and much closer at 210 E. Coffee Street—is **Aryana Afghan Cuisine** . Service is cafeteria style. Your choice is meat or vegetarian. You'll be presented with five selections (changing daily) for \$16. Aryana's is only open for lunch. The spicy (not hot) aftertaste will delight your taste buds as you stroll back to the hotel.


Sassafras Southern Bistro  (103 N. Main) also evokes many flavors. But after a very long wait, when my food finally arrived, its cacophony of flavors never tasted like much of anything at all. Maybe by nearly 9 o'clock I really no longer wanted to eat. The waitress was very nice; maybe your experience will be different.

The Hyatt's **Roost Restaurant** is a good bet. It offers indoor dining and an expansive outdoor patio facing Main Street. It is committed to using local produce, and the food is as pleasant as the setting. Dinners are very good, and not as expensive as one might fear. Breakfast features deliciously light omelets made to your specifications. The staff is attentive, and the location couldn't be more convenient.



Water Blessing

MICHAEL KEATING

Almost as convenient (right next door) and a good sight cheaper is **Antonino Bertolo's Pizza** . No atmosphere and a very limited menu, but good pizza and calzones. New York style, the ads claim; hand-tossed. You'll find even better pizza at **Trio**  (22 N. Main) a couple blocks away.

Amazing Urban Planning


Greenville is situated on Cherokee hunting ground, part of a vast preserve that had been off-limits to colonist settlement. But the Cherokee allied themselves with the Tories, and after the Revolutionary War the new state of South Carolina confiscated their


high-end shopping. It's very handsome. Misanthropes will complain (justifiably) that it's a tree-lined dreamland dedicated to the lesser vices of eating, drinking, and shopping. The fantasy is jarred by a few homeless people; only the Lerner's sign above one storefront indicates a more plebeian past.

But it's a great place for a stroll or to do a little people-watching. It's pretty, and safe, and inviting. And it's just outside the door of the Hyatt Regency, the site of VVA's Leadership & Education Conference.

Sights and Sounds

The Hyatt anchors the top of Main Street. NOMA Square (literally just out the door) is the site of many activities, including large yoga classes. During the Leadership Conference live (and free) concerts will take place on Thursday and Friday evenings, August 11 and 12. Thursday features the all-girl rock band The Sally Rides. Friday's band is Sunsett Strip, a metal/glam tribute band that features music from the '80s.

Another Thursday musical attraction is **Brit Floyd** at the Peace Center  (300 S. Main). It's billed as "The World's Greatest Pink Floyd Show." Tickets start at \$45. Go to www.peacecenter.org for details.

If you're looking for an alternative to the VVA Saturday night Awards Banquet, **Alan Jackson's** "Last Call: One for the Road" tour will be at the Bon Secours Wellness Arena  (650 N. Academy St., bonsecoursarena.com). The show begins at 7 o'clock. But that country boy don't come cheap: Tickets start at \$223. Both venues are within easy walking distance.

Greenville

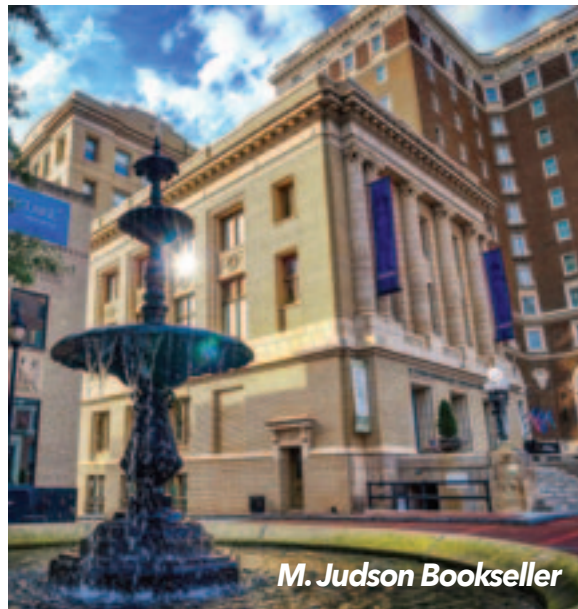
CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Just three or four blocks west of the Hyatt on College St. is **Heritage Green** **R**—more good urban planning—which proclaims itself a “center for human enlightenment.” The campus includes a library, a theater, and four museums.

During the Leadership Conference the **Upcountry History Museum** **S** (540 Buncombe St.) will be exhibiting “Vietnam: The Real War. Photographs from the Associated Press.” Many oversized prints will be on view. The museum is open 9-5, Tuesday-Saturday, with reduced admission fees for veterans. Museum staff will host a reception at the museum for VVA members at 1:00 Thursday afternoon.

Another jewel on Heritage Green is the **Greenville County Museum of Art** **T**. The starkly modern building houses works by native son Jasper Johns and concentrates on Southern artists. During the Leadership Conference, its exhibits will include “Soul Deep: African-American Masterworks,” a broad view of painting, sculpture, and photography, and “Jasper Johns and Andrew Wyeth: Repeat Until Empty,” which displays rarely shown later work by the two artists. One of the premier art museums of the South, GCMA has the world’s largest collection of Andrew Wyeth watercolors.

Another museum that may interest VVA members is not on Heritage Green. It’s on Main Street just over the hill three blocks north of the Hyatt Regency. **The American Legion Post 3 Military History and War Museum** **U** has an extensive collection that goes from the Revolutionary War to the conflicts in the Middle East.



M. Judson Bookseller

VISITGREENVILLESC

The museum is open to the public 10-5 on Saturday, August 13. However, museum staff are happy to arrange times to show the collection to VVA members. Call them at 864-271-2000 or check with VVA Chapter 523 President Duane Kelly, who will be attending the Conference.

Greenville is not an early-rising town. The morning streets are quiet; most shops are closed. One notable exception is the **Coffee Underground** **V**, a welcome alternative to Starbucks and just a couple blocks down Main Street at the corner of (what else?) Coffee St. In

addition to good food and good coffee, it has good local vibes.

Another reason to get out early Saturday morning is the **Farmers Market** **W**. It’s just a few blocks further south on Main. Conference attendees weary of restaurant food will find fresh fruit and produce, local cheese, bread, and honey. Early risers get the best selection.

Another early riser is **M. Judson Bookseller** **X** (130 S. Main St.), a must for bibliophiles. Located in the old Greenville County Courthouse (at the corner of Court St.), this handsome bookstore opens at 7:30 and contains an impressive collection of books (although no art books), including an entire section devoted to Southern writing. A curious grace note: Handwritten recommendations and critiques are thumbtacked to the shelves below the books in question.

There was a time when every town and city had several photo galleries. Almost all closed their doors long ago. But in Greenville the **Southeast Center for Photography** **Y** is going strong, now in its seventh year, and features a dozen exhibits a year, some are juried, others focus on a single artist. The photographs will startle and delight. Note, however, that the Center is not an adjunct to the tourism business: You won’t find flashy images of Liberty Bridge or Main Street at dusk. To get there, make a left off Main to 116 E. Broad.

The photo gallery is just one of many delights and surprises awaiting you in Greenville, South Carolina, during the Leadership Conference. A few have been mentioned here; there are plenty more. Go and find them. Alternately, while you’re out, turn to the stranger sitting next to you and start a conversation. That, too, might delight and surprise you.

Greenville is a curious and friendly town, rooted in the past and eager for the future. ■



XANDE ANDERER