

Segue

online literary journal

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Marguerite's Monument

"In every age, people are certain that only the things they have deemed valuable have true value."

—Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*

Salt

Dover, Arkansas 1964: There was a parade, the mayor came out to do the dedication. Reporters arrived early and were scheduled to follow Marguerite down to the spring afterward. It was a show, the installation of this cast iron pot, because Marguerite lived that way. She was a playmaker, a writer of romances, and now an amateur archeologist. There was just one more detail, before the parade started from the school grounds and rolled the block and a half to the town square where the pot sat solidifying in a bed of concrete, draped under a sheet. She needed salt.

South of the square stood a row of storefronts, the bank, the variety, the grocery. Marguerite made her way across the street, toward the grocery, the last item on her list glaring at her like sun through the dust rising up from the street. It was July, the air sticky like wet smoke. People were already lining the street, watching the preparations for the dedication. She walked toward a man standing outside the grocery, hands stuffed in his pockets. She moved slow on her three-inch heels, so that when she waved at her accomplice, she looked like she was trying to keep her balance.

He knew her, so he waved back.

"Did you get it?" Breathless, worried, wound up Marguerite knew everything hinged on this final theatric.

"In my truck. You want me to go down there now?"

The man tried to look nonchalant, tried to tell himself that Marguerite's trust would be kept by the man behind the counter in the grocery, his clerk, and the two or three other folks who suspected the truth about the cast iron pot. They probably already knew the truth about the salt spring—it was fresh as lake water. But there was always the chance someone would blab to a reporter or two and ruin the show. Salt springs dried up all the time and went fresh, but try convincing a newspaper man of that. It was a small detail, some reporters way of convincing himself that Marguerite, who didn't have anything resembling a History degree, could successfully trace the origins of an artifact belonging to Pope County's most famous long-dead resident, Sequoyah, the man who developed the modern Cherokee alphabet.

"Yes. Go and get back before the parade starts. You have an hour or so. Hurry."

Marguerite always stood too close, leaned in too far, breathed too hard. She was brash and skittish, a flash of lightning. In the middle of this deception, she told herself there was really no reason to worry. There was a spring, the pot was found nearby, Sequoyah lived near the spring and appears to have owned it. The records told her that. It was a matter of deduction, connecting dots on a map. Pouring salt in the spring was just a historical recreation. Still, she had to do it, so that all

the pieces of the story came together neatly. There was high drama lurking all around Dover, and all over Arkansas, buried in the historical record. If Marguerite could just get the public to understand that, the way she did, she might finally get someone to pay attention to her writing. She might be able to do something with herself besides type the correspondence of powerful men.

Marguerite was not just a secretary. She was one of “those who give tirelessly of their time and unselfishly of their efforts in order to bring to the people of Arkansas a more profound understanding of the beauty God has placed in man.” She dedicated her book on the legend of Petit Jean to people like herself, who saw that the people of Arkansas needed to understand the beauty of art. Marguerite tried to help by writing histories, full of scoundrels and lovers, heroes and villains, royalty and peasants, and all of it, somehow, connected to this backwoods state, or this little hick town of hers. She thought of Petit Jean, the French girl who died for love, on the mountain that now bears her name. Petit Jean was the perfect example of how Marguerite felt about Sequoyah. She thought about what she'd written about the girl, “To those who dare live each hour fully and completely, joyously accepting the gifts life presents with a blythe disregard for the unsundered secrets... To those, Petit Jean gambled and won all that life could give.” Sequoyah was no different, she thought, it's just that his passions ran to the linguistic.

The rest of the town knew there was something off-kilter about this parade, this show in the middle of summer, this huge ugly pot with a crack in one lip, this woman in high heels and full makeup and perfect hair with a pearl choker around her neck. The boys that sat on the curb, picking at scabs on their knees, never heard of Sequoyah, never thought about Dover as anything more than a farming town so Baptist they outlawed dancing. But they knew Marguerite, they knew she was a conundrum. Their mother's whispered behind their hands about her, told the boys to stay away from her house, to politely step aside when she walked past them in town. They said, “don't look her in the eye.”

The salt was poured. Marguerite stood on a rickety wooden stage and told the story: Sequoyah moved to Arkansas around 1823, a year after he finished his work on a Cherokee alphabet. He lived on the Illinois Bayou River, two miles north of Scottsville, six miles north of Dover. He began and finished the project in Alabama, where he moved from his birthplace in Tennessee. The alphabet elevated Sequoyah from lame silversmith to statesman. He became a dinner-party celebrity in Washington. Six years after he revealed his alphabet, Sequoyah signed a treaty with the U.S. government, The Treaty of Washington, which moved the Cherokee further west, into Oklahoma, ten years before the Trail of Tears. It explains his ownership of a salt-spring or "saline":

...five hundred dollars for the use of George Guess, another Cherokee, for the great benefits he has conferred upon the Cherokee people, in the beneficial results which they are now experiencing from the use of the Alphabet discovered by him, to whom also, in consideration of his relinquishing a valuable saline, the privilege is hereby given to locate and occupy another saline.

This pot was found half buried in a field near where Sequoyah lived. It had previously been used as a watering trough for cattle. Now, it has been restored to a place of honor, where it can show every citizen of Dover and every visitor the importance of history.

The mayor read his dedication. He read the plaque officially designating the cast iron blemish on the Dover town square. Reporters snapped pictures and the air got heavier, as it does,

when the day shifts into afternoon. A caravan drove to Scottsville and then to a cow field along the river. Marguerite lead the way, picking across cow patties in her heels, talking.

“I knew the pot was out here for a long time but I didn't make the connection until I read the treaty...”

The photographer readied his camera while the reporter took a tin cup from Marguerite and dipped it into the spring. Yes, he confirmed, salt water. He drove back to town to write it all down as fact.

The bronze plaque engraved with Sequoyah's name grew a deep green patina.

Story

When I was a teenager, maybe younger, my mother said: Marguerite had a map of De Soto's travels across Arkansas. It was original, drawn on parchment in faded ink, the work of one of De Soto's scribes, or maybe, the man himself. How she came across the map, no one knows. No one knows what it looks like, either, because she refused to show it to anyone. As a matter of fact, *National Geographic* got wind of the map and wanted to take pictures of it, write a story. But they only got as far as Marguerite's front step, where she told them she'd talk about it but no one, ever, was going to see the map.

My grandmother said: “She was always different, but she had hard parents. They made her stay right there with them all their lives. She took care of them until they died.”

My father said: “They never said why we should stay away from her. They just insinuated there was something deviant, something sexual going on there that we should keep away from.”

Marguerite said: Her first husband beat her, so she left him. Not long after, she took a lover, an Air Force Colonel who lived in Texas and flew up to see her two or three times a year. When her brother found out about the affair, he convinced his family to commit her to the state hospital in Little Rock. There she stayed, for seven or eight months, languishing with the insane and the infirm, swallowing pills on a schedule and waiting in line for meals. One day she found a telephone in a broom closet and managed to call the Colonel, who flew to Little Rock that night and helped her escape.

My grandfather said: “They came and bought a hundred pounds of salt from me that morning.”

This is what I saw: Marguerite walking across the square to the supermarket in the middle of July. Baby blue eye shadow smeared over every inch of her eyelids, mascara so thick she looked like a china doll, pearls around her neck, her blond wig whipping in the wind, her ankle-length fur coat clasped over her chest. Underneath she wore a nightgown, or a summer dress so thin I could see through it. I stood at the front of the store, waiting, while my grandparent's worked. I was eleven or twelve. She bought a can of tuna fish and paid with one wrinkled dollar. I watched her coat fall away and reveal her spotted skin.

This is the last image of Petit Jean in Marguerite's book: “The late sun flung out the dark shadow of the mountain across the wheatfields. A herd of buffalo grazed on a green meadow far below. the willows at the river bend swayed back and forth in the breeze. A nameless melody from

Baptiste Dardenne's flageolet came from the mountain top and floated out across the vast expanse. The two figures were there, against the sunset, looking out at the sky and the valley and the river, and never speaking.”

Love

I don't know how it happened for Marguerite, this seduction by the idea of Sequoyah—maybe when she first became aware of the salt spring. For me it was an accident, a fact-check gone wrong. I was writing the history of the Dover Supermarket, my grandfather's business and now my uncle's. The Bartons and their relatives have been in the grocery business in Pope County for more than seventy years. I started with the store itself, the land it stood on, the town square. This was once the town school, before that it was the court house, before that a stretch of buckeyes along the lowlands near the Illinois Bayou.

The salt-pot arrived in an interim, when the square was nothing but a patchy stretch of grass and the ruins of the burnt school building and before it became the supermarket, with its steel walls and glass façade. I figured that out from the plaque, erected three years before the grocery. I took notes on the shape of the building, on the cars in the parking lot, on the people coming in and out of the front doors. I read the plaque and made the important notations— Sequoyah— Scottsville— Salt Spring. The idea really was irresistible, a beautiful coincidence. A huge pot, found near a spring, near a place where a famous man once lived and ran a saline. I knew it was ridiculous, sentimental, simplistic and definitely made a mountain out of a historical mole hill, but I couldn't help it. It would have been a fantastic piece of trivia to know that Sequoyah did once live here. If this really was his salt pot, it would be something tangible, something real that connected the town directly and immediately to its own history. Someone could at least build a roof.

I asked around town for someone who could tell me the history of pot. How did it get there? Who was responsible? My grandfather told me, “It was Marguerite. That was one of her projects. You should ask her about it, though I don't know if you can get any good information out of her.” But it was late in my summer vacation and I didn't have time to arrange an interview with Marguerite, which I knew would take a day or more. Maybe two. I drove back to Kansas.

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I began to read. I discovered that Sequoyah's life is a mystery, too, if only because his biographers give such contradictory accounts of his life. He was born in what is now Tennessee to a Cherokee mother and a white father—given the “white” name of George Guess. Many biographers believe his father was well-known frontiersman Nathaniel Gist. Sequoyah grew up without his father around, helping his mother run a small dairy. He was probably born with his lame foot though he could have injured it farming or fighting in the war of 1812. Some sources claim his name means “pig's foot” which may indicate he always lived with his limp. According to Stan Hoig's

biography *Sequoyah: The Cherokee Genius*, this injury would have excluded him from "the accepted methods of achievement within a tribe as a hunter or warrior." Instead, he turned to working silver, which earned him a reputation as a highly skilled artist. He was able to ride a horse, though, and fought in the war of 1812 as part of the cavalry. He didn't learn to speak English until much later in life, and had no formal schooling, and so was himself illiterate before he began to create his famous syllabry. This is the fact that has amazed white observers of Sequoyah's life since the day he first revealed his alphabet. How does a person, who has no ability to write in any language, figure out the concept of an alphabet, much less create one? These observers don't, of course, give the Cherokee or Sequoyah enough credit.

No one knows exactly why he decided the Cherokee needed their own alphabet because he gave more than one answer to the question. Some say he noticed that the whites were able to get a lot more done because of their ability to write down their thoughts. Some say he was encouraged by a white neighbor to learn to sign his name to his silverwork, which inspired the alphabet. Some say he was distressed that the Cherokee people could not keep their own history, and therefore sometimes lost valuable knowledge. In 1822, he presented his invention to Cherokee leaders in Tennessee. By 1823 there was an official Cherokee-language newspaper. Missionaries were busy translating the Bible.

Sequoyah left all this to move west across the Mississippi River into what is now Pope County. The "Western" Cherokee actually moved into an area that had been part of their hunting grounds since the mid-18th century. Some sources say that moving to Arkansas put Sequoyah on the wrong side of his compatriots in Georgia, who felt the move was a sign of weakness, an unwillingness to stand their ground against the whites encroaching faster and faster into their lands in the east. Other sources point out that Sequoyah was a strong Cherokee nationalist, and may have wanted to escape the influence of whites as much as possible.

Like my own ancestors, and Marguerite's ancestors, who started settling the Arkansas River Valley only two decades later, the Western Cherokee found the barely-populated wilderness a more attractive living arrangement than the socially oppressive east, despite the Osage threat north of Fort Smith and the Whites south of Morrilton—and despite the isolation. The Arkansas River wasn't a truly navigable waterway until the 1960's, when Albert Einstein's son figured out the best way to get a barge north of Fort Smith was to rebuild the river from the bed up. Roads were another story entirely—muddy and rut-riddled at best, non-existent at worst. Before Sequoyah got anywhere near the Ozarks, he had to travel a tricky river upstream on wood rafts or walk through two hundred miles of swamp, cane break and impossible mud holes. Either way he suffered swarms of mosquitoes and oppressive heat. It was such a difficult journey that one early 19th century visitor said, "Arkansas is not part of the world for which Jesus Christ died--I want none of it."

Salt was as precious in the Arkansas Territory, important enough that the government tried to strictly control the use of local sources, usually naturally occurring salt springs. Getting a permit to operate a salt-making enterprise was highly competitive and a sore spot between the Western Cherokee and the few white residents of the area between 1819 and 1836. The cast iron pot itself was a huge expense, because it had to be shipped from the east or from New Orleans by boat and then, presumably, horse power. Dover's salt pot is four feet in diameter. If Sequoyah owned a salt-making business, as the Treaty of Washington tells us, he had to have had plenty of money and support to run it. Daniel Littlefield writes in his essay "The Salt Industry in Arkansas Territory,

1819-1836,” that just setting up a salt-works required, “much labor and capital outlay...and a large labor force, consisting mainly of slaves, was necessary to maintain the operation.”

No one mentions Sequoyah owning slaves or, for that matter, having much money. No sources indicate his life was at all extraordinary before the alphabet. The spring at Scottsville was small. Production couldn't have been very large. All I learned from all this research was what Marguerite knew what must have been true. If he lived at that spot at Scottsville, he had to have at least been in the vicinity of Dover. It's possible he could have stood on the spot of land where square stands now.

But something wasn't entirely right. The plaque struck me as odd. No cultural or historical group claimed credit for installing the salt pot on the square. No dates were given for Sequoyah's presence in Dover. There was no governmental entity I could consult to check the validity of the salt pot. What if it was used for making soap? Or washing clothes? The year before I'd seen a woman up the hills near Mt. Judea, Arkansas boiling water in a cast-iron cauldron just like this, washing her clothes with a stick and lye soap. Who says this is even a salt pot, much less Sequoyah's salt pot? What expert carbon-dated the iron flakes or deciphered a serial number or maker's mark rusted into lumps on the lip? And if the salt-spring was near Scottsville, why was it here and not there?

This was all conjecture. I needed to talk to Marguerite.

She opened the door dressed in a faded floral silk sun-dress, pearls, full make-up, bare feet. She gave me the most comfortable chair in the house— a high-backed wicker lounge—and took for herself the piano bench. Marguerite moved like a dancer, even in her eighties, like someone who felt entirely free dressed only in her own skin. She sat for only a few minutes at a time, hopping up every other sentence to dig through filing cabinets and cardboard boxes, looking for pictures, manuscripts, letters to prove the stories she told.

She talked for three hours, starting at the beginning— her birth in Russellville to a banker and a strict mother, Marguerite grew into a girl so intelligent and beautiful that she had to be carefully watched, her movements controlled. I sat and listened, my tape recorder humming next to me, while Marguerite told every one of her stories: The parents, the bad marriage, the State Hospital, the Colonel. She told me about working as a secretary for a bauxite company in Little Rock, for a real estate company in Russellville. She wrote for Arkansas history magazines and organization newsletters. She began to write novels about Arkansas history—one about Sequoyah, another about Petit Jean, another about the life of Lee Barnes, the last man hung in Dover. She established a group of three or four local women who dreamed big— a plot of land near Dover dedicated to the memory of the Western Cherokee, complete with an amphitheater, a museum, and historical recreations.

She sat down at the piano and played me a tune she wrote herself. The song recasts Bill and Hillary Clinton as being from Bullfrog Valley—an even more isolated spot north of Dover, on Big Piney Creek. It was a raucous love story, with Bill pining after a Hillary, who played hard to get.

I never got around to asking about the salt pot. As soon as I mentioned it, she launched into a long explanation of how she worried about it all the time, even though it was perfectly safe with my grandfather looking over it. After it was installed, she told me, she worried about boys from the hills coming to town, chaining the pot to the back of a pickup, and dragging it off into the woods as a joke. She begged one of the local businessmen to pay for a seven-foot chain link fence to protect it

from vandals. By then, of course, the story of Marguerite salting the spring had spread through town. The business-man refused. The scenario Marguerite presented was so specific it sounded to him like an overblown day-dream. But she was persistent, loud, impossible to avoid. The fence went up.

The lock that chains the gate has rusted there for forty years.

History

This was what was left, on a Saturday afternoon, when the auction company sold her house six months after her death: two chest of drawers, a dining room table, half a dozen paintings, boxes and boxes of dishes, clothes, knick knacks, silverware. I went to the auction looking for a specific box, a box of novel manuscripts and essays and failed autobiographies. Mr. Robinson, Marguerite's old friend and now heir, promised me he will let me arrange the papers later, if he could find them. Until the day of the auction, no one seemed to know where Marguerite's papers went. I had been worrying about her papers since she died. I sent polite e-mails to both parties involved in the dispute over the deed to her house. She was so poor at the end of her life that she promised the deed to anyone who might loan her a few thousand dollars. I said, "I don't want them for my own gain. I simply want to restore them, put them in some kind of order. I believe that Ms. Turner kept relatively accurate records of the history of Dover. She's been the town historian for decades, even if she worked in an unofficial capacity. It would be a tragedy if her papers were thrown away."

Standing there among the decoration of her life, I was desperate to save—something, her papers, her? I don't know. I began to circle the other buyers like suspicious dogs, I dug through boxes, I asked people if they've seen any papers. Just papers. Manuscripts, maybe? Across the lawn from me four or five women hovered over a box of photographs, picking out black and white pictures and whispering—somewhere in there was a snap-shot of their ancestors. I got so paranoid, I thought I saw one of the women slip the photograph in her pocket.

Then the bubble burst. The manuscripts were found and removed, quietly, from the boxes on the lawn. Mr. Robinson nodded at me kindly, we'd talk later. My attention shifted to the photographs. If I was going to take something to savor, to mull over, to keep for myself despite my protestations to the contrary, it might as well be something I could learn from. I paid \$100.00 for the box, outbidding the town historical society.

Sex

I didn't even try to imagine who the photographer might have been.

This didn't come up until later, when I whispered about it to my mother who conjectured, "Could it have been that old man she lived with for a while?"

No, I knew for sure, Marguerite took them of herself. I don't know how I knew this. I just insisted on it, instantly, because I couldn't imagine anything else.

“Could be,” My mother tells me, “But why?”

For the same reason, I wanted to tell her, that I took a Polaroid of my own breasts and used it as a template to make a painting in shades of blue— a gift for my husband, a celebration of my own body. But I was not eighty years old and single and living alone in the center of town with a pile of unpublished novels and a mountain of unpaid debt. I was the opposite of that. Newly married, about to finish graduate school, talking about having children. But I didn't say anything to my mother, who would understand but would still dismiss it. She'd heard the story about Marguerite calling my grandfather to come fix her plumbing and opening the door stark naked except for her wig and her signature string of pearls.

In secret, when no one was around to catch me and question me, I sat with one of the photographs and tried to decipher them. Here she lounged across the couch, arms flung above her head, eyes looking way from the camera. Her breasts rested against her ribcage lightly, her legs long and shapely. Only her face revealed her age entirely: gray bags under her eyes, the way the skin folded around her mouth. Here was a photograph of the top of her bare legs, neatly shaved. A white lace gown barely covered her crotch. In this one, she's surrounded by fat Arkansas crystals laid out on the bed around her. She must have had a tripod, I decided, she must have taken these with a timer.

But there was no tripod in her effects when they were laid out in boxes and on tables by the auction company. Just a box of pictures of everything Marguerite ever loved— her sitting next to the salt pot, her directing the 1969 Memories Day pageant, her talking to a Cherokee man in fancy dress at a pow wow. Her parents, the house she grew up in, the classroom where she earned her high school diploma. Hundreds of pictures in a cardboard box, thrown in together for convenience. Only a few dozen are marked with a date, a time, a name. Some are as old as 1895. Down in the bottom, one in tatters, maybe to protect it from eyes like mine, but two intact were these photos of Marguerite nude on her couch, on her bed.

Maybe she borrowed a camera. There were plenty of borrowed things in her house. Half the pictures in my box don't belong to Marguerite but the family she shared expenses with for a few years during her sixties and seventies, long after her parents were dead, her ex husband vanished and the children she never had a dead twinge in her gut. This is how she lived, on the kindness of strangers and friends and long held acquaintances. Mr. Robinson took her breakfast lunch and dinner from the grocery's deli every day, except Sunday, when a cousin came by to take her out to eat. He paid her bills and mowed her lawn. This went on for more years than I can remember, and more years that he can remember too.

I was ashamed for her and angry with myself for being ashamed. If she were a young woman in the photographs, I would have thought she was brave and uninhibited. Like I was, the day I pulled out my camera and canvas to do a portrait of my breasts. Or the painting before that, when I took a photograph of my headless body draped in purple gauze and placed it in the center of a collage. But she was old, too old to want to show her body to anyone. Not like this. *Surely*.

That day, in her living room, Marguerite exaggerated. Maybe it is safe enough to say she exaggerated all of her life. She told stories that no one believed anymore, if they ever did. She told

me, “When I was in college they tested my blood. The nurse called me back into the office after the test and told me I had royal blood. Me. Royal blood.”

The last thing she did before she died was to borrow the money to self-publish her final book, *Jewel*, a novel about a personified clay mannequin, who was once part of the clay that Michelangelo used to create “the Holy Mother holding the dead Christus.” She described Michelangelo working his hunk of clay like a man making love to a woman. “In wrath, in joy, in humility, in hate, he touched me, but the consuming, enveloping passion in which all his moods were couched was the expectation... He was almost desperate as he neared completion of his work. White and exhausted with long hunger and thirst, his body was scarcely sensitive to its pain any longer..There was fire in his eyes as he bent forward to peer at the last two figurines that he was perfecting.”

She told me her final secret, too. I didn't want to know, she simply confessed—matter-of-fact. She told me so easily, it was like I was family, or an old friend. Someone worthy of her, and not a stranger, interested in her for extraneous reasons. I wanted Marguerite the storyteller, the player-maker, the teller of myths. I got the truth, instead.

She said the man later became a famous baseball player. She was sixteen. It was her first date. He took her out in his car. Someplace near Dardanelle, he raped her. Her parents paid for an illegal abortion. She couldn't remember the year exactly, I didn't bother to do the math.

That day, she told me more than once: “I was a beautiful woman. I was always a beautiful woman. I'm still a beautiful woman.”

Author Notes

Shelle Barton Stormoe earned a MA in English Literature from Kansas State University and a MFA in Fiction Writing from Colorado State University. Her essays, interviews, book reviews, blog posts and journalism have appeared on The Writer's Center Blog, River Teeth, Divide, The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, Tales from the South, The Arkansas Times and World Ark Magazine. She won a 2005 Arkansas Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship for the short story. She currently teaches Writing courses at the University of Central Arkansas. She lives in Little Rock with her husband.

About the Work

“Marguerite's Monument” is a testament to being patient with a piece of writing, no matter how hopeless it may seem after the first draft. I started writing the essay as a MFA student, well before I was ready to finish it. Marguerite, the primary character in the essay, had died only a few months before. I felt a strong impulse to try to make sense of her story. I turned in a shorter version of the essay to a nonfiction workshop. Though it got generally positive feedback, the readers felt like there was something indefinable missing. No amount of revision seemed to turn it into something I felt did justice to Marguerite. I put the essay away in a file drawer.

It is now six years later and I am working on a completely separate project in which I write about the social pressures related to religion in a small Bible Belt town. This piece sparked a memory, and I started to think about Marguerite again. I dug up the old essay I'd written about her and reread it. I knew that it was time to finish it, and that I was ready to do it. The difference was a perspective I had no access to at the time I wrote the first draft. It painted Marguerite's history obsession as something bordering on deviant. From the outside, from a reporting perspective, it does appear that way. I realized that if I shifted the perspective to consider her motivations, she became much more human.

I stopped looking at Marguerite as an oddity that bordered on historical charlatan and started looking at her as a fellow writer, struggling with the right way to make the history of a backwater place interesting to the rest of the world. Marguerite wanted her stories to have emotional weight that went beyond relating the contents of historical documents. She wanted there to be a statement of some sort that turned little old Dover into the setting for grand triumphs. Like Marguerite, I do become a little obsessed with my subjects. I think all people who write nonfiction do that to some degree. The subject, to the writer, seems infinitely important, even when it might not seem that way to others. How does a writer resolve that conflict? How does a writer give emotional weight to a story that might otherwise lack it? If you are Marguerite, you turn the stories into romances.

I also began to understand something about why we write history, even personal history, the way we do. The truth is complicated and never completely knowable. There is only closure to history's stories when we are in a position of retrospect. Even then, closure is still entirely dependent on our points of view according to our own experience. History *is* interpretation. It is almost impossible to present historical facts in a way that entirely avoids objectifying someone or something.

The actual construction of “Marguerite's Monument” came sort of organically, but I think it accurately reflects the process I went through trying to understand Marguerite. It starts with an imagined scene, cobbled together as best I could from what I knew about the day the Sequoyah's salt pot was installed in Dover square. I started with this scene because it allowed me to immediately determine the urgency of the story. It's not about Sequoyah, it's not about how to write history, it's about Marguerite's dreams. After I established that significance, I was able to step back and mimic the actual methods I used to understand that---asking people for gossip about her, researching Sequoyah, researching the importance of salt during his lifetime, going back to talk to Marguerite in person, realizing that what I found had nothing to do with Sequoyah at all.

Shelle Stormoe on the Web

www.deadmule.com/essays/2010/04/shelle-stormoe-great-smoky-mountains-1978/