

## Iron Horse Lore

Adapted excerpt from an article by Chris Chammoun, '08:

*"The 'Iron Horse' is a 12-foot-high, two-ton abstract sculpture of a horse. It is the work of Abbott Pattison, a visiting artist-in-residence from Chicago who was working on a Rockefeller grant to introduce modern art in the South. He constructed the horse by welding together pieces of boilerplate steel in 1954.*

*It was determined that the campus setting to display the work would be the front of Reed Hall dormitory. However, students immediately reacted negatively to the abstract sculpture. Twice during the night of May 27, 1954, straw was placed around it and set on fire, manure was brought from the Ag Hill stables and placed under the rear, and the word 'Front' was painted on the horse's neck and 'Rear' under the tail.*

*Newspaper accounts from the time describe the scene, with many observers saying the problem was with timing and location. Placing the sculpture in front of the athletes' dorm was not a good idea, and students had gotten stir crazy while preparing for exams. One student commented, 'We needed something exciting.' Eventually, the crowd became a frantic mob and firemen were called in to disperse the students with fire hoses. University officials quickly moved the controversial sculpture to a secret hiding place. It was kept in hiding for five years.*

*Some years later, L.C. Curtis of the University of Georgia's Horticulture Department asked for the statue to be placed on his farm off of Highway 15 in Greene County, about 25 miles south of Athens and just north of the Oconee River. Several attempts were made to bring the 'horse' back to campus. An effort was mounted in the 1980's to make the return of the sculpture a part of the bicentennial celebration, and the University's Council voted in the 1990's for UGA to pursue its return. But, both efforts failed. The Curtis family who, until recently, owned the farm where the horse resides note that the Iron Horse has become part of their community and have asked that it be kept on the property. When L.C. Curtis and Son sold the property to UGA for the site of the relocated Plant Sciences Farm, it was agreed that the Iron Horse would stay on site."*

Our plan is to maintain the Iron Horse as it stands. This piece of art, once despised, is now a revered part of the community and an icon for our Plant Sciences Farm.

### **Myth vs. Fact:**

It may seem like there is a significant message to the direction the horse is facing. Its rear end is pointed towards Athens. However, the family has said that during moving to its current home, the truck that was towing it got stuck and they had no choice but to leave it where it stands.