



Staff Photo—Charles Pugh

"WILLIE B, WHAT HAVE THEY DONE?"

Mrs. Gordon Wheeler Ponders Sculpture

Willie B To Shed His Paint---for Art

By **DICK HEBERT**

A 400-pound likeness of the late Willie B is the object of an aesthetic disagreement between the zoo keeper who knows the gorilla best and an Atlanta sculptor.

A happy ending is in prospect.

Mrs. Gordon Wheeler chiseled the statue out of igneous rock of a terra cotta color. Johnny Dilbeck had it painted mahogany and the base a light blue. . . . "like painting over a mural, a work of art," Mrs. Wheeler said.

Dilbeck commented that he had had the statue painted over with oil color in a dark mahogany finish because it "looked like just an old piece of brown rock the other way to me."

The "finished" statue will be taken out to Willie B's grave at the city prison farm, Dilbeck said.

Mrs. Wheeler, of 1824 Brannen Rd., SE, a professional sculptor and teacher of the stone artwork, began carving the statue of Willie B. early in 1959, and by the time she had finished the statue the gorilla had died of bronchial pneumonia (April 29).

"I love animals and spent a lot of time at the zoo," she said. "At first I was going to do something on a lioness and her cub. I used to go down there to do sketches, and of course always stopped by

to see Willie B.

"I got to thinking a statue of the gorilla would be nice for the

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Willie B. Statue To Shed Its Paint---for Art's Sake

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back yard . . . you know, one of those fun things."

For two years, Doris A. Wheeler, as Mrs. Wheeler is known professionally, worked on the igneous rock creation "off and on."

"Somehow Johnny Dilbeck found out about it. I took it out to the Arts Festival at Piedmont Park early in May. After that we didn't know what to do with it.

"My husband wanted to get rid of it—said he had a broken back from trying to move the thing around. When Johnny Dilbeck came over and saw it . . . and

wanted it, I was glad to give it to him. I thought at first he was going to put it up in the Monkey House somewhere."

Mrs. Wheeler, who will be teaching sculptoring at the Jewish Community Center this September, said she was irked when she saw the statue painted. "I told Johnny that if he was going to represent my work with that paint over it, I would rather take it back.

"He told me he'd have the paint taken off, but if they are going to use it as a tombstone the paint will wash off in the weather anyway."