

G E O R G I A

BATTLEFIELDS

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Civil War Sesquicentennial Commemoration meeting

In late October, the Department of Economic Development (DEcD) sponsored a second meeting to discuss plans for the Sesquicentennial Commemoration. The first meeting was in February (March newsletter). This second meeting was again conducted by the Deputy Commissioner of Tourism, though in this case it was Charlie Gatlin, who succeeded Dan Rowe in May.

The choice of the term "commemoration" was deliberate. One point of general agreement from the February meeting was that the Civil War was not something to celebrate: While the war was the defining event in our nation's history, it was a brutal struggle that resulted in widespread death and destruction and adversely affected most of the nation's people. It is right—indeed, it is critical—that we remember and learn from the Civil War, but we don't celebrate it.

Attending the second meeting were representatives from the National Park Service, Georgia Historical Society, Georgia Humanities Council, Georgia Civil War Commission, Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails, Georgia House of Representatives, and Georgia Battlefields Association.

Another point of general agreement from the February meeting was the idea of inclusion, a big tent in which all groups were welcome, ranging from county historical societies to federal government agencies. While this principle remains, DEcD felt that a smaller but still diverse group could more readily offer advice and analyze proposals, so the October meeting participants were characterized as the Sesquicentennial Commemoration Executive Committee.

While the size of the Executive Committee was limited to keep it manageable, the participants agreed that at least two other organizations should be represented: the Department of Natural Resources (containing both the Historic Preservation Division and the State Parks & Historic Sites Division), and the Department of Education's social studies curriculum coordinator.

A few fundamental objectives for the Commemoration are obvious:

- Entice more people to visit Georgia: Increased revenue from tourism is an important selling point when trying to gain funding from the state government or corporate donors.
- Increase awareness of the history of Georgia among both adults and students. If this objective is met, a better citizenry should result. A secondary result would be increased support for preserving the historic sites, which is of primary interest to GBA.

Again, a conclusion from the February meeting was that all stories should be told. Of the 31 million or so people living in the US during the Civil War, perhaps 3 million served in the Federal or Confederate forces; yet almost everyone living in the US was affected by the war. GBA agrees that the stories of the non-military people need to be told. The potential conflict will arise when limited funding necessitates a decision as to which stories are included, so we'll try to insure that the balance is not skewed for the sake of appeasing current interest groups.

Publicizing Georgia's Civil War history is obviously part of the plan for increasing tourism. DEcD intends to rework its web site (www.georgia.org) so that the Sesquicentennial is given prominence without having to click through several layers. The web sites of participating organizations (such as GBA) will be linked.

Since not everyone uses the internet, print advertising will be placed to inform the substantial number of travelers heading to Florida. The corresponding Visitors Centers (on I-95 and I-75) will be more fully stocked with information about and staff familiar with Georgia's Civil War sites. Again, this will require funding.

An important component of both web-based and printed materials will be an updated *Crossroads of Conflict*, a guide to the state's Civil War sites. Since the last edition of the guide was printed some seven years ago, the staff of the Civil War Commission has done considerable research and significantly expanded the guide's contents. Still, publication of a revised edition has languished due to insufficient funding. An online version should be available at the end of this year or early next year, with the DEcD web site now serving as the primary access point. The print version should be available in the middle of 2008, though the increased printing costs (due to added text and graphics) will probably mean that the guide will not be distributed for free.

Recognizing that the Resaca battlefield is directly astride I-75 and thus a likely capture point for tourists, DEcD hopes to speed the development of a battlefield park, complete with a visitors center that addresses not only Resaca but sites throughout the state. While the state acquired 500+ acres of the Resaca battlefield in 2000, implementation of plans for the park were delayed by the decline in state revenue that began in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2001. Construction of a visitors center, access road, and signage certainly depends on whether the state budget provides the funds; but this is even more than usually uncertain in light of many legislators' objections to the manner in which the governor redirected funds in the SFY 2008 budget.

Depending on how the sites are counted, surveys have indicated that Georgia has over 300 and perhaps as many as 463 Civil War sites. Some of these are protected by the National Park Service (Chickamauga, Kennesaw Mountain, Andersonville, Fort Pulaski) and some by the state (Resaca, Allatoona Pass, Pickett's Mill, Sweetwater Creek, Griswoldville, Old Governor's Mansion, Ball's Ferry, Jeff Davis Capture Site, Magnolia Springs, Fort McAllister). While a few other sites are in public hands (through county or city ownership), the great majority are in private hands and often unmarked. Part of the Sesquicentennial Commemoration plan is for the Georgia Historical Society to inventory all historical markers, whether state or non-government sponsored (such as those installed by Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails or GBA). The inventory will help guide the repair, replacement, or reinstallation of damaged or missing historical markers or the placement of new ones. State funding for marker maintenance has been largely neglected, and the marker maintenance shop was closed in 2003. A remedy depends on the governor and the legislature. We've been told that the governor intends to put \$250,000 in the SFY 2009 budget for marker maintenance. Since the marker maintenance budget was around \$200,000 annually until it was drastically reduced, GBA doubts that \$250,000 per year over the next few years will be sufficient to clear the growing backlog of damaged and missing markers.

While the potential obstacles to a successful Sesquicentennial Commemoration are numerous, we're encouraged by the spirit of cooperation demonstrated at the meeting of the Executive Committee. Further, GBA is already sharing information with Sesquicentennial planning groups in Virginia and Tennessee, and we hope to capitalize on good ideas from anywhere.

2008 Georgia Battlefields Association tour with Ed Bearss

Dates: 13-16 March 2008. Hotel: Marriott Century Center, just northeast of the Clairmont Road exit off I-85. Call (404) 325-0000 or book through the internet at www.marriott.com/atlne. Ask for the Georgia Battlefields Association rate of \$99 for a king bed or \$107 for twin double beds. Sites: Battles of Atlanta, Ezra Church, and Utoy Creek; siege of Atlanta; downtown Atlanta. Dinner: Friday (14 March) at the Cyclorama; Saturday (15 March) at The Carter Center. Price: \$395. You must be a GBA member to register for the tour. Your reservation is confirmed when your check reaches the GBA treasurer at 7 Camden Rd NE, Atlanta GA 30309.

Shoupade Park ceremony coverage

We were pleased to have Cobb County Commission Chair Sam Olens and district Commissioner Joe Lee Thompson attend the Shoupade Park ceremony on 9 November. See press coverage at www.mdjonline.com/content/index/showcontentitem/area/1/section/21/item/98320.html.

150 years ago this month

In his annual message to Congress on 8 December 1857, President Buchanan reaffirms his position that the proposed Kansas state constitution is legal. Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois announces his opposition the next day.

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