
BATTLEFIELDS

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Preservation efforts feel state budget crunch

As expected (see February 2003 and September 2002 newsletter articles), preservation efforts have been affected as the state government tries to cope with a gloomy fiscal situation.

In Georgia's midyear 2003 budget, passed on 24 March, the Georgia Greenspace Program received no funds. The Greenspace Program has been used to preserve Civil War sites in Whitfield and Cobb counties. The legislation that established the program remains in force, but it will be ineffective without an appropriation. For the 2004 budget, Governor Perdue proposes \$15 million for the Greenspace Program, compared to \$30 million in the original 2003 budget.

Georgia's financial woes may also cause layoffs of preservation-related personnel. The 2004 budget had not passed when this article was written, but the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will be affected if layoffs are part of the method for coping with the mismatch of revenue and spending. Within DNR are the two state organizations most relevant to preservation: the Historic Preservation Division, and the State Parks, Recreation & Historic Sites Division.

One rumor making the rounds in early March suggested that the state would sell land—including the Resaca battlefield parcel acquired in 2000—to meet the required budget numbers. Lonice Barrett, Commissioner of Natural Resources since 1995, has indicated that he will strongly oppose any plan to sell the Resaca site. Barrett, who has a record of supporting preservation, was one of the first department heads reappointed by Governor Perdue.

One potential sale to generate revenue is more than a rumor. Senate Resolution 224 would permit the sale of Mulberry Grove Plantation, currently owned by the Georgia Ports Authority.

Mulberry Grove Plantation is in Port Wentworth, a few miles northwest of Savannah. In 1774, the land was bought by the colony's lieutenant governor, John Graham, who built a new main house and support buildings. Remaining loyal to the crown, Graham fled to England in 1776, and the land and buildings were seized as loyalist property in 1783. In 1785, the plantation was given to Major General Nathanael Greene in recognition of his war service, but Greene lived there only a year before dying. His widow, Catherine, continued to operate the plantation, hosting President George Washington twice in 1791. In 1793, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin while working at Mulberry Grove. Whitney's invention dramatically lowered the cost of cultivating cotton and consequently reinvigorated the institution of slavery in the Southern states.

The structures at Mulberry Grove were burned during the March to the Sea in December 1864, effectively ending large agricultural efforts on the site. In 1975, 153 acres were entered into the National Register of Historic Places. In 1985, the land was acquired by the Georgia Ports Authority, which has permitted selective logging on the site and stated quite openly that it is not a preservation agency. The Authority is currently negotiating to swap the site for a tract owned by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which has proposed (since 1998) to include Mulberry Grove in a 14,400-acre expansion of the Savannah Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Representative Jack Kingston has earmarked \$2 million for the Fish & Wildlife Service to buy Mulberry Grove, and the Service says it can obtain additional funding to expand the Wildlife Refuge.

The sale of the property may be a good thing if it passes into the right hands; but the greater danger is that the slowness of negotiations between a quasi-governmental state agency and a federal agency and the attractive location of the property will result in its sale to a commercial organization that is unconstrained by even the regulations that apply to the Ports Authority.

More information about Mulberry Grove's importance as a historic site and wildlife refuge is available from the Mulberry Grove Foundation (www.mulberrygrove.org) and the Ogeechee Audubon Society (www.ogeecheeaudubon.org/nutshell.html).

Please contact your state senator and representative and tell them you support preservation of Mulberry Grove. You may also call the Georgia Ports Authority at 912 964 3874.

Pledge walk to raise funds for Sweetwater Creek State Park

To raise funds for a new visitors center and museum, the Friends of Sweetwater Creek State Park will stage a pledge walk on 19 April. Participants can hike 10 km (a little over 6 miles) or walk 3 km (under 2 miles). Registration is from 8 to 10 a.m. at shelter #3. The park is a few miles west of I-285, the perimeter highway around Atlanta, and just south of I-20. In the park are the ruins of the New Manchester Mill, which was burned by Federal cavalry in July 1864. At that time, the mill was the tallest building in the Atlanta area.

The new visitors center and museum is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certified. Ground breaking is scheduled for this summer, with completion scheduled for sometime in 2004, the 140th anniversary of the burning of the mill.

For more information about the new museum, the park, or the pledge walk, see the web site: www.friendsofsweetwatercreek.org, call volunteer president Bill Cahill at 770 942 2555, or write the Sweetwater Creek Volunteer Office at 1826 Mount Vernon Rd, Lithia Springs GA 30122. Information is also available on the park web site www.gastateparks.org, or call 770 732 5871.

GBA's Olly Keller receives community service award

Georgia Battlefields Association Vice President for Communications Olly Keller has been selected to receive an 11Alive Community Service Award, which will be presented at an 8 April dinner co-chaired by former President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn. The ceremony will be taped and aired on a later date on Atlanta TV channel 11, which sponsors the awards. Olly will be honored not only for his battlefield preservation efforts but also for his work to provide at-risk youths the opportunity to redirect their lives in ranch-like settings at the Georgia Wilderness Institutes. GBA is proud and fortunate to have Olly Keller as a trustee.

Executive order launches new preservation initiative

On 3 March, President Bush signed Executive Order 13287, which authorizes a Preserve America program. The order directs federal agencies to inventory and promote greater use of historic sites in partnership with state and local governments. The order also specifies that each government agency will prepare an assessment of the status of its historic property no later than 30 September 2004. By September 2005 (and every third year thereafter), each agency must report on its progress in identifying, protecting, and using historic properties. Further, by 30 June 2003, each agency must designate a senior official to oversee its preservation program. For the text of the order and more about the program, see www.preserveamerica.gov.

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Civil War Preservation Trust annual conference 24-27 April

This year's Civil War Preservation Trust annual conference focuses on Petersburg. For more information, visit the web site www.civilwar.org/aprilconference.htm.

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