

GEORGIA

BATTLEFIELDS

Published by Georgia Battlefields Association, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to preservation of Georgia's Civil War history and sites. Contact newsletter editor by e-mail: info@georgiabattlefields.org

Don't count on government funds for preservation

Recent news articles that examined the recurring issue of government taxing and spending have reinforced what we already know: Government funds for preservation will be scarce.

Among other things, federal, state, and local governments spend money to preserve historic or culturally significant sites. This was not always the case. The federal government began substantial spending on preservation a little over 100 years ago. Chickamauga National Military Park was established in 1890, the first Civil War battlefield so designated; and the national military (as opposed to battlefield) park designation is significant: Purchase of the battlefield was justified in part by the site's potential as a military training ground. Chickamauga was used for this purpose during the Spanish American War, and the central part of the Gettysburg battlefield was transformed into Camp Colt to train soldiers during World War I.

Currently, governments are having trouble funding many services, and preservation is one of the first items to be reduced or eliminated. A 30 June Associated Press story ("Budget cuts close sites") indicated historic areas are not a state budget priority and gave examples of sites closing or reducing operating hours. The article also mentioned the self-defeating nature of such actions, as less money is spent by visitors. An Illinois preservation official said: "These are not just educational sites, they are tremendous economic engines for the communities in which they are located." Also quoted is a member of the Connecticut Historical Commission: "What message are we sending our kids when we close the state heroine's house and walk away from it?"

A 26 June *Atlanta Journal Constitution* article ("Georgia touts its culture") reported that even though surveys indicate people who seek out arts, culture, or history tend to vacation longer and spend more money, states spent 8% less on travel and tourism development in fiscal year 2003 than in 2002. Georgia's 2003 tourism budget of \$4.1 million was down \$664,000 from 2002.

A 22 June *USA Today* article ("Economy not to blame for states' budget woes") asserted that the weak national economy is not as responsible for state governments' budget woes as is the inability of governors and legislatures to manage money wisely. By almost any measure, state governments have suffered less than businesses and individual taxpayers during the economic downturn. Still, almost every state is struggling to balance its books. An analysis of all states' financial performance found that Utah, Delaware, and Georgia are the best financial stewards. The key to their success was restraint: During the 90s financial boom, these states limited both spending growth and tax cuts; and when the economy weakened, they kept their finances sound.

A few years ago, the National Park Service began charging admission to many sites in an effort to generate operations and maintenance (O&M) funds that were not provided in the federal budget. Still the O&M backlog is several billion dollars, and the government is reluctant to add any new parks until the current facilities have been repaired. This makes last year's addition of the Kolb Farm fourth corner to the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park all the more notable, but it also explains why the Park Service is reluctant to add a parcel of Johnston's River Line or the Wallis House to its holdings.

Cooperation, privatization, commercialization

To make up for the state spending reductions, some agencies are cooperating more than they normally would. Preservation, tourism, and transportation agencies have functional overlaps that go unrealized or unexploited when each agency has relatively sufficient funding. When state agencies face layoffs or cuts, they tend to find more ways to cooperate.

Government organizations also get more creative in their liaisons with the private sector when economic times are tougher. The danger to this approach is privatization or commercialization of historic sites. While not a Civil War site, Stone Mountain Park serves as a current example of the problems with privatization. We certainly don't want to see "ABC National Historic Site, presented by XYZ Corporation."

In this environment, the prospects for government funding of preservation are poor. You can contact your representatives in the local, state, or federal governments and ask them to support preservation: You should also tell them what spending you favor reducing or eliminating. But realistically, we cannot assume that preservation will be a priority for any government. Consequently, organizations like GBA will attempt to preserve historic sites. Since GBA and other non-governmental organizations are hardly ever flush with money, we're more accustomed to cooperating and finding ways to optimize the use of our funds. Thanks for your help thus far.

Chickamauga transportation study holds first meetings

Georgia Battlefields Association was represented at the 14 July Chickamauga Transportation Study stakeholders' participation panel. (See last month's newsletter for more on the study.) This first meeting was primarily to introduce the participants, lay out the schedule, and review the parameters of the study. Still, the park's affect on the local economy was an early discussion topic. The Walker-Catoosa county line bisects the park, and both counties' representatives were sensitive to any plan that would divert traffic from local businesses. If you live near the park, please contact your local government representatives and let them know what you think. For those of you in any part of the state, let your state government representatives know your views on preserving the park by keeping through traffic to a minimum.

The next stakeholders' participation panel is scheduled for the third week in September. GBA representatives plans to attend, and we'll keep our membership informed.

Note: the study web site has been revised to reflect the correct spelling of Chickamauga: www.dot.state.ga.us/dot/plan-prog/planning/studies/chickamauga_study/index.shtml.

Look for the Union (or Confederate) label

If you receive a printed copy of the Georgia Battlefields newsletter by regular mail, please notice the membership expiration date that appears on the first line of your mailing label. We hope you will renew your GBA membership, and when you do, that you will send in your dues without a lot of reminder letters. This will reduce our postage expenses and increase the amount available for preservation. Just send in a check for the desired membership level.

--Individual	\$25
--Family, business, or organization	\$40
--Friend of GBA	\$100
--Benefactor	\$250
--Patron	\$500
--Sponsor	\$1,000

If your membership is due for renewal, you will receive a reminder letter the month before your membership will expire. If you don't renew at that time, you'll get a letter with your last newsletter explaining that your membership has expired.

Remember that our annual tours with Ed Bearss are open only to GBA members. Also, members receive the monthly newsletter. Most importantly, members help preserve Civil War sites. Membership applications are always available on our web site: www.georgiabattlefields.org.

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