

GEORGIA

BATTLEFIELDS

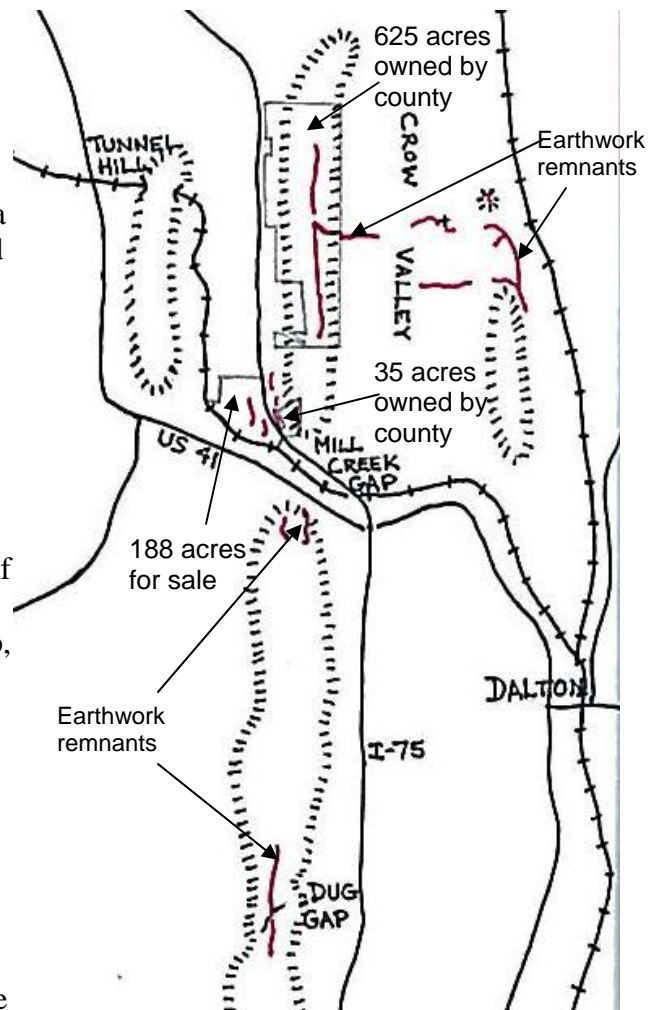
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Whitfield County plans preservation

Two members of the GBA board of trustees traveled to Dalton to attend the 15 November meeting of the Whitfield County Historic Preservation Commission. The Confederate Army of Tennessee quartered around Dalton from December 1863 to May 1864, and the area was the scene of fighting in February, May, and October 1864. Many Confederate and some Federal earthworks remain in the county, particularly across Crow Valley, on the slopes of Rocky Face Ridge, and in the approaches to Mill Creek Gap.

Whitfield County owns two parcels (625 acres and 35 acres) on Rocky Face Ridge north of Mill Creek Gap, and both contain the remains of Confederate trenches. 188 acres (in two properties) are for sale just northwest of the gap, and this land has both Confederate and Federal earthworks. Also, the Whitfield-Murray Historical Society administers a pocket park at Dug Gap, farther south on Rocky Face Ridge.

While cooperation among county government, private foundations, the National Park Service, and several other organizations has already preserved several important sites, the Preservation Commission wants to prioritize the unprotected sites and formalize a plan for preserving them. By soliciting the input of all parties (including GBA), the Commission hopes to have everyone pursuing the same goals in the same order. While plans rarely survive the vagaries of circumstance, the existence of a plan almost always helps towards the goal.



Prospects for state funding of preservation

The annual General Assembly of the Georgia House and Senate convenes this month. GBA reps have heard from executive branch employees that the Governor will submit to the legislature a proposed budget containing \$500,000 for sesquicentennial preparations (see December 2007 newsletter) and \$250,000 to repair and replace historical markers. If true, good; but the General Assembly invariably adjusts the Governor's proposed budget before passage.

During every General Assembly, some issues recur, among them taxes, education, healthcare, and transportation. Though the only mandate for the General Assembly is to pass a budget, this year may see even more than the usual contention over the budget for the following reasons:

- 2008 is an election year, with all that implies for legislators trying to impress constituents.
- Governor Perdue's redirection of funds within the current (SFY2008) budget drew angry reaction from legislators, who will be more inclined to write restrictions into the next budget.
- Georgia is experiencing an exceptional drought, and legislators will want to be perceived as taking action. This will divert their attention from preservation, among other things.
- Traffic is worsening, the cost of transportation infrastructure is increasing rapidly, and the governor disagreed with the house leadership over the new Commissioner of Transportation, whose initial report described major deficiencies within the Department of Transportation. Again, legislators will want to be perceived as taking action.

- Atlanta's Grady Hospital, the principal facility treating indigent patients, is in dire financial condition; and the legislature must decide whether or how to support the hospital.
- The Speaker of the House, who can heavily influence the agenda, is proposing a considerable shift in the state's tax collection base from property taxes to sales taxes, even though sales tax revenue has declined more than expected because of the economic slowdown.

For these reasons and a well-justified skepticism based on the performance of previous General Assemblies, GBA expects that preservation-related funding is unlikely to receive much support.

Drought, development, and preservation

The exceptional drought in northeast Georgia is likely to influence state and local politics for at least the coming months if not for years. Along with the other issues that normally occupy the General Assembly session each winter, initiatives to cope with the water shortage will push funding for preservation or sesquicentennial planning down the priority list (see previous article).

Though GBA doesn't favor the drought, the scarcity of water has curbed development that threatens historic sites. On 24 October, the state government banned outdoor watering for 61 north Georgia counties, and the governor directed water utilities to cut usage by ten percent. On 29 October, the Paulding County Board of Commissioners voted for several new water restrictions, including the suspension of all new rezoning applications.

Paulding County, location of the Hell Hole battle sites and one of the fastest growing counties in the nation over the past decade (June 2007 newsletter), has recognized the obvious—namely, that adding new users to a water system makes no sense when the government is requiring existing users to cut back. Unfortunately, county governments have become so accustomed to the added tax revenue from new homes and businesses that they are extremely reluctant to restrict new construction, even to the point that commissioners in other counties have stated that adding users will not exacerbate the problem.

In addition to drought, the oversupply of houses around Atlanta has benefited preservation. A recent report by the Atlanta Regional Commission examined development of farm and forested land in the 13-county metro Atlanta area from February 2003 to February 2007. For the first two years of the period, 112,000 acres were developed; for the last two years, only 31,000 acres were developed, a 71 percent decrease. Greater density of infill housing (e.g., putting five houses on the same parcel that formerly contained one house) accounted for much of the decrease, but so did an oversupply of houses. Since February 2007, the implosion of the sub-prime lending market has increased the supply of unoccupied houses. GBA takes no pleasure in people losing their homes, but the net effect is less pressure on the historic sites in the Atlanta area.

2008 Georgia Battlefields Association tour with Ed Bearss

Dates: 13-16 March 2008.

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.

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 (\$111 including tax) for a king bed or \$107 (\$120) for twin double beds. NOTE: Breakfast is not included.

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www.georgiabattlefields.org

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