

# GEORGIA

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# BATTLEFIELDS

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## Preservation doesn't end when a site is acquired

Whenever Georgia Battlefields Association (GBA) succeeds in preserving a historic site, the GBA Trustees—reflecting, we think, the sentiments of all GBA members—feel a sense of accomplishment, usually accompanied by a sense of relief, since success seldom comes without a struggle. These sentiments appear to be near universal in any preservation organization. What we don't get is a sense of completion, since acquiring the land or putting it under conservation easement doesn't achieve the ultimate objective of using the site to educate those who visit. Frequently, land must be cleared and a plan developed for parking, walking trails, interpretive signs, kiosks, etc. Also, periodic trimming of foliage and removal of illegally dumped items are necessary. In some cases, planning for removal of buildings is required, or at least a further subdivision of the land that separates a parcel containing a structure. For example, our first success at Griswoldville in 1998 required removal of a house trailer, which was accomplished by volunteer labor provided by a member of the Georgia Civil War Commission and his students.

The American Battlefield Trust (ABT), the national battlefield preservation group with which we've had a continuous relationship since GBA's 1995 founding, has purchased properties that contained residences or farm buildings, two notable examples being Fleetwood Hill at Brandy Station and Slaughter Pen Farm at Fredericksburg. GBA's distinct preference is not to acquire properties that contain modern buildings or even historic structures because of the significant cost of removing the former, restoring the latter, or insuring neither becomes a source of liability. Even so, in conjunction with ABT, we are pursuing two properties that contain modern houses with the intent of subdividing the properties (if they can be acquired) and selling the parcels that contain the structures. As usual, we don't disclose potential acquisitions for fear that a company with greater financial resources will approach the current owner with a more attractive deal.

The need for continuing maintenance, often at considerable cost, is often exemplified by National Park Service (NPS) properties that relate to the Civil War. Georgia has four NPS sites that are preserved specifically because of their wartime significance: Chickamauga National Military Park, Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, Andersonville National Historic Site, and Fort Pulaski National Monument. Three other sites relate to the Civil War but also have broader significance: Marietta National Cemetery, Chattahoochee National Recreation Area, and Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park. At Fort Pulaski, a massive historical structure is the battle site whose maintenance needs are again at the forefront.

In the wake of the War of 1812, the U.S. Government embarked on a program of building better coastal defense forts, which came to be known as [Third System Fortifications](#), of which Fort Pulaski was one. Site preparation began in the late 1820s, and the fort was not judged to be complete until 1846, reflecting the size and difficulty of the undertaking. From the perspective of preventing an enemy from using the Savannah River, Cockspur Island was an ideal location. From the perspective of preparing the site to accommodate a massive masonry structure, Cockspur Island was the opposite of ideal. It frequently flooded due to storms or abnormal tides and was marshy and muddy when not flooded. The U.S. Army assigned a supervising engineer who seldom came to the site and ceded most of the direct oversight to a recent (1829) U.S. Military Academy (USMA) graduate who wrote of being in mud up to his knees and water up to his armpits as he supervised the digging of ditches and construction of dikes. Heat and insects caused site preparation to be suspended for the hottest months of summer. Sand fleas were a year-round annoyance that sometimes incapacitated men through numerous bites.

The young engineer took leave during the summer months of 1830 and returned in November to find that storms had wrecked much of the dike and ditch system, causing a redo of previously done work. The supervising engineer was forced to resign for incompetence and questionable actions, and he was replaced in January 1831 by First Lieutenant Joseph Mansfield, an 1822 USMA graduate. Mansfield requested a more senior engineering officer to redesign the fort plans, and Captain Richard Delafield (USMA 1818) arrived shortly thereafter. With two more senior engineers now involved, the junior engineer who had done so much of the on-site supervision was reassigned in April 1831. Reflecting the prestige of the engineering branch, only those who graduated near the top of their USMA classes were assigned as engineers.

Delafield had graduated first in his class, Mansfield was second in his class, and the junior engineer—who conserved both time and ink by signing his reports R.E.Lee—was second in his class. The three would go on to have notable careers. Delafield was familiar to many USMA graduates because he served two terms as Academy superintendent: 1838-1845 and 1856-1861. His final assignment was as chief engineer of the Army 1864-1866. Mansfield remained at Fort Pulaski until 1846, was chief engineer for Zachary Taylor’s campaign in Mexico, and was appointed by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis as Inspector General of the Army in 1853. He succeeded to infantry commands during the Civil War and was killed on 17 September 1862 at Antietam while leading the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps against his former subordinate’s Confederates.

Fort Pulaski has also had a notable history, being the fort that proved in April 1862 that the Third System of masonry fortifications could not withstand assault by rifled cannons. In 2024, the fort will celebrate its centennial as a national monument. It also continues as a battle site, now fighting rising waters and storm-induced floods that are necessitating relocation of support structures, access roads, and parking lots. The [plan](#) for winning this fight, at least for the next several years, went online in June, and is open for public comment. The document has maps and much information that will be of interest to those who have been to Fort Pulaski or intend to go.



Trees covered the open areas of the fort in 1924, the year it became a national monument. (NPS)



Fort Pulaski today. (NPS)



Fort Pulaski parade ground in late 1862, when a company of the 48<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry was posing for the camera. It's certain the soldiers couldn't imagine how famous the image would become, because what's going on in the background makes this the first known photograph of men playing baseball. (NPS)

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