

# Vicksburg Campaign Preservation Conference Report

Grant's 1863 Vicksburg Campaign Sites Enrich  
Mississippi's Heritage

A Report of the Issues and Recommendations  
resulting from a 14-15 Feb 1995 Conference  
in Jackson Mississippi

Planned and Prepared  
by The Blue and Gray Education Society  
for  
The Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites,  
Mississippi Department of Archives and History,  
and  
American Battlefield Protection Program

July 1995

# Vicksburg Campaign Preservation Conference Report

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The **Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS)**, using grant money provided by the **National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP)**, commissioned the **Blue and Gray Education Society (BGES)** to plan, organize, and conduct a Vicksburg Campaign Preservation Conference. The purpose was to evaluate the state of site preservation relating to the famous 1863 campaign and to develop an action plan for future preservation activities.

**BGES** executed its commission in Jackson Mississippi on February 14th and 15th 1995. Conferees were provided informational briefings and then broken into three individual work groups to discuss *Acquisition and Site Access*, *Interpretation*, and *Tourism*. Participants included federal, state, and local officials. Several national nonprofit groups and concerned private citizens made significant contributions. The conference was cosponsored by the **Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH)**.

### Civil War Heritage Trail Key To Expansion Of Mississippi Tourism

Sufficient evidence exists to support claims that *Heritage Tourism* is good business for communities who support it. Vicksburg National Military Park has been and will most likely remain the top tourist destination in the state.

Mississippi has the good fortune of having a number of connectable Civil War resources in direct proximity to its primary roadway systems. An aggressive public relations campaign has brought these resources to national prominence. It is reasonable to assume visitors will continue to trek to Mississippi in increasing numbers to visit these resources.

Unfortunately, planning for the preservation and presentation of these assets has not kept pace with the opportunities provided by the rising national interest in Civil War related sites and events. In many instances public awareness is non existent and support is weak. These trends must be reversed if the state and affected counties are to realize the opportunities.

## Conclusions And Recommendations

The following issues should be addressed as part of a comprehensive plan to preserve, protect, and present the state's resources. These are the conclusions of **BGES** and do not necessarily reflect the position of the **Mississippi Department of Archives and History, The American Battlefield Protection Program, or the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites.**

*Issue #1. The tourist experience does not meet the expectation.*

**Recommendation #1. The MDAH, MDOT, and Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development (MDECD) should meet with affected county and city officials to develop a plan for upgrading the presentation of historical resources.**

**Recommendation #2. The state should revamp its maps and brochures to emphasize the resources.**

**Recommendation #3. The state should examine its publications distribution strategy to ensure all visitors centers and points of entry such as airports display these publications.**

*Issue #2. Interpretive presentation of the Vicksburg Campaign is inadequate*

**Recommendation #4. An active public information campaign should be undertaken to increase local awareness of the Vicksburg Campaign resource and its potential.**

**Recommendation #5. MDAH, MDOT, MDECD, Hinds Community College, Alcorn State, Jackson State University, and Vicksburg NMP should work together to build a comprehensive interpretive plan to include roadside exhibits, walking/hiking/cycling trails, directional signage, and visitor/interpretive centers. This plan would be an excellent candidate for an American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) grant.**

**Recommendation #6. MDAH should commission a noteworthy author to do a self-guided book similar to the US Army War College series on the**

**battles of Antietam, Gettysburg, and Fredericksburg which were written by Dr. Jay Luvaas and Brigadier General Harold Nelson.**

**Recommendation #7. MDAH should coordinate with the NPS and the Mississippi National Guard to determine if any surplus battlefield artifacts could be released from obscure, masked portions of the battlefield for a new life at state battle sites on the Vicksburg Campaign Trail.**

**Recommendation #8. All interpretive signage should be standardized to standards at or above those set by the National Park Service. At battlefields with heavy vegetation, the markers should be carefully placed and limited to those areas where they will not disappear into the weeds.**

**Issue #3. *Significant historic structures are in need of positive management and immediate conservation.***

**Recommendation #9. The state should take the lead to ensure the Coker House at Champion Hill is restored. This project would provide a centrally located facility which could serve as an administrative office, visitors center, and interpretive site.**

**Recommendation #10. The Grand Gulf Military Monument Commission should take immediate action to develop a coordinated action plan to man, protect, and interpret the Shaifer House.**

**Issue #4. *Manpower and funding is inadequate to support manned, interpretive efforts at historically significant properties.***

**Recommendation #11. State funding to support additional staff at Grand Gulf, Coker House, and Port Gibson should be a high priority.**

**Recommendation #12. An active volunteer program such as Friends of the Vicksburg Battlefields should be initiated. Hinds Community College might be a logical educational group to spearhead this effort.**

**Recommendation #13. Admission fees should be established and collected.**

**Recommendation #14. Congressional policies for use of the admissions fees collected in National Parks should be revised to permit fees to be**

***retained in the Park as an offset for operating shortfalls. The revenue should be shared with the state for similar types of park expenses.***

***Issue #5. Access to privately owned sites must be secured.***

***Recommendation #15. State and county officials should enact zoning ordinances, tax relief, and preservation/recreational easements to encourage cooperating property owners to permit limited heritage development of key sites.***

***Recommendation #16. State and local officials should provide liability protection for private land owners on property which is being used for Heritage tourism.***

***Recommendation #17. Requirements for the maintenance of the sites must be clearly stated in any agreements between property owners and the state.***

***Issue #6. Safe off-road parking does not exist at most sites.***

***Recommendation #18. MDOT examine the need for parking at least 1 tour bus and 5 cars at each tour site.***

***Recommendation #19. Warning signs should be constructed and speed limits reduced on either side of the road where pull offs have been established.***

***Issue #7. Many non government groups are working independently on various elements of the Vicksburg Campaign.***

***Recommendation #20. MDAH sponsor state funding for a single point of contact (SPOC) for liaison on all issues relating to the Vicksburg Campaign. The SPOC would maintain an active liaison with private property owners, and national groups interested in executing a portion of the comprehensive master plan for the Vicksburg Campaign.***

***Recommendation #21. The Jackson Civil War Roundtable and or local SCV Camps should establish a working group to provide a pool of manpower to coordinate and execute voluntary taskings such as***

***battlefield cleanup. Local Boy Scout troops could be a solid source of support. Some projects might be suitable for Eagle Scout Projects.***

***Recommendation #22. MDAH should host a recurring conference to review the status of master plan programs and to allow interested parties to raise areas of particular interest. The frequency of the conference should be no less than annually, and may be, during critical periods, as frequent as quarterly.***

***Issue #8. The relevance of the Vicksburg Campaign to the African American Experience must be developed and conveyed to the Black community.***

***Recommendation #23. MDAH should seek noteworthy black historians such as Professors Edward C. Smith, Ervin Jordan Jr., Barbara Fields, and John Hope Franklin to present programs which focus on the events and significance of the Vicksburg Campaign to the African American experience.***

***Recommendation #24. MDAH should work with the black reenactment group, the legendary 54th Massachusetts of "Glory" fame, to present living history at reenactments within the Vicksburg Campaign area. Costs could and should be absorbed by the local chambers of commerce.***

***Recommendation #25. Local Black University Departments of History such as Alcorn State, and Jackson State should become involved in all elements of the interpretive experience.***

***Recommendation #26. Mississippi Department of Education should reevaluate the way the Civil War and the Vicksburg Campaign is presented. The ABPP and The National Trust for Historic Preservation may be able to assist them in developing modules of instruction which use the Campaign's battlefields.***

***Recommendation #27. MDAH should work with the Mississippi NGB through Congressman Parker's office to conduct a VIP tour of the Vicksburg sites for planners from the affected counties.***

***Recommendation #28. MDAH should coordinate with Mr. Chris Calkins at the Petersburg National Battlefield Park to discuss the challenges of earning African American support.***



***Issue #9. Funding sources for these enhancements must be identified and tapped.***

***Recommendation #29. MDAH incorporate this as an action item in working group conferences.***

***Recommendation #30. MDOT should evaluate the current priorities for ISTE A funding and elevate the development of a Vicksburg Campaign trail as a vital economic interest of the state.***

***Recommendation #31. MDAH should canvas national nonprofit groups to determine their willingness to provide funding for all or some of these projects.***

***Recommendation #32. The Mississippi Civil War Commission should work with the MDAH and legislators to develop a funding plan for these projects.***

***Recommendation #33. Local corporate sponsorship should be solicited.***

***Recommendation #34. Liaison with surrounding states which were represented in the Campaign should focus on the possibility of appropriations to commemorate their participation.***

***Recommendation #36. External funding may be raised and local awareness improved by sponsoring an annual reenactment at the various battlefield sites.***

***Issue #10. The economic impact of this project should be monitored to determine if the return justifies expanding it to other Civil War projects in the state.***

***Recommendation #37. Contact the state of Virginia to determine how they are monitoring the return on investment from the Lee's Retreat project.***

***Recommendation #38. If a decision is made to tie in the northern Mississippi and west bank Louisiana sites, include representatives of the Vicksburg Campaign Heritage Trail Committee, Corinth project and the state of Louisiana in the entire planning process.***

## Summary

The State of Mississippi has a ***singular opportunity*** to bring to life one of the nation's most significant Civil War campaigns. *The pristine condition of battlefields at Port Gibson, Raymond, Champion Hill, and Big Black River Bridge are augmented by several historically significant structures.* Two homes, Coker House and Shaifer House, were dramatic witnesses to the struggles which occurred there. However, if they are to be with us in another 10 years, *plans must be made now to stabilize and restore them.*

The range of interested groups augers well for a successful partnership if the State takes the lead in coordinating efforts. While the cost will not be cheap it is only a pittance of the revenue which the tourism of Civil War sites generates. Considering the residual popularity of the Civil War and the success of the Vicksburg National Battlefield Park this would seem to be a safe investment.



-

This is a public report prepared by the **Blue and Gray Education Society**. It may be reproduced and distributed without permission. However, its use in any other report or document should be credited as follows

"Quoted from **BGES** report "Vicksburg Campaign Preservation Conference Report, Grant's 1863 Vicksburg Campaign Sites Enrich Mississippi's Heritage" July 1995, page xx. Please provide a copy of any usage to **BGES**, Box 129, Danville, Virginia 24543-0129.