



BLUE AND GRAY EDUCATION SOCIETY

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About the Report

The report which follows is an objective look at the state of surviving Civil War resources relating to the 1863 portion of the Vicksburg Campaign. It is clear of bias to the extent that a historian is able to suppress such things. If there is any trace of enthusiasm it comes from the excitement that comes from being in the company of those who know the ground so much better than I do.

Special thanks are due to Mr. Ed Bearss, and Lieutenant Colonel Parker Hills for their extra efforts in helping me develop a credible understanding of the sites. I am especially appreciative of Colonel Hills' and The Hollingsworth's willingness to walk me over portions of the battlefields, through structures, and along the back routes into Vicksburg after the conference was completed. *I am firmly convinced that these resources are deserving of Mississippi's special efforts towards preservation and educational presentation.*

The support of Mr. Elbert Hilliard, Ken P'Pool, and Michael Beard at **Mississippi Department of Archives and History** was invaluable in opening doors for a group of little knowns from Virginia. Michael was especially patient in helping me with various tasks and answering countless questions. Mr. Steve Guyton of Congressman Mike Parker's office provided a special dimension of Federal interest that enhanced the prestige and credibility of the meeting.

Finally, I would like to thank Becky Shrimpton at the American Battlefield Protection Program; A. Wilson Greene (former President of The Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS); Dennis Frye, President of APCWS, Bob Edmiston and Jeff Driscoll of APCWS for having confidence in a fledgling, nonprofit group's ability to plan, organize, and conduct a meaningful conference on a campaign so visible and important--it is a pleasure to work with them.

Any mistakes in this document are the responsibility of the **Blue and Gray Education Society** alone. If the reader has any questions, please call 804-797-4535.

Leonard W. Riedel
Executive Director

Vicksburg Campaign Preservation Conference

Introduction

The Union campaign to capture Vicksburg is one of the most important military operations in world history. Abraham Lincoln called Vicksburg "The key." This was more than hyperbole since the Mississippi River was the economic lifeline of the midwestern United States. Confederate possession of the river denied the United States the commerce of the river and created a difficult political situation for both Union and Confederate governments. In fact, some western politicians seriously discussed formation of a 3rd government consisting of midwestern Union and Trans-Mississippi Confederate states.

The Trans-Mississippi was also a vital source of supplies for the underdeveloped Southern Confederacy. In Texas, the Confederate government supported an active cotton cartel and large herds of livestock were raised to feed the armies east of the Mississippi.

By the end of 1862, the Confederacy had suffered a number of demoralizing defeats which had effectively closed the Mississippi River to anything other than ferry operations between the fertile cotton lands of the Deep South and the Trans-Mississippi. The Union strategy had been popularly dubbed the "Anaconda Plan" after the large snake which slowly crushed the life from its victims. In practicality, the plan sought to slowly crush the economic life out of the Confederacy. The blockade of Southern ports and denial of inland waterways was the essence of the plan. By the summer of 1862 all that remained in service in the Confederacy was a free commerce area of the Mississippi River between Port Hudson and Vicksburg.

US Grant's relentless campaign to get at Vicksburg and the Confederate forces assigned to defend it is comprehensively detailed in Edwin C. Bearss seminal 3 volume series, **The Vicksburg Campaign** (Morningside 1985, reprinted 1991). Bearss focuses on the numerous attempts that started nearly a year earlier in Northern Mississippi and which culminated on the 4th of July 1863.

The campaign is also noteworthy for the remarkable cooperation between the US Army and Navy. A detailed treatment of the mechanics as well as the personalities are included in Dr. Joseph E. Glatthaar's book **Partners in Command** (The Free Press, 1994), and Dr. Rowena Reed's study "**Combined Operations in the Civil**

War" (Naval Institute Press, 1986). It is for these reasons that the **United States Military Academy** at West Point devotes 25% of its Civil War study block to the Vicksburg Campaign. Our military leaders still study the Campaign on senior officer staff ride programs.

Current Situation

Vicksburg

Vicksburg National Military Park is the leading tourist destination in the State of Mississippi. Established by Congressional action in 1899, it is maintained by the **National Park Service (NPS)**. Visitors are drawn for a number of reasons which include the quality of the visitors' center, the attractiveness of the grounds, the memorial park quality of the monuments, and the almost reverent respect for the magnitude of the events which occurred there.

The park is an overwhelming experience. Cast along winding roads, it is difficult for a visitor to gather some sense of the magnitude of the operations, people try to absorb that which they can in the time they have. An optional, professionally done, audio tape tour gently pushes the visitor through the park in approximately 2 hours. Despite this generous treatment, an impressive portion of the 9 miles of siege lines are still located outside of the park boundaries. They are marked, accessible, and heavily monumented.

In downtown Vicksburg sufficient sites exist to give the visitor a delightful experience. The Old Court House, now a museum, was used to house Union prisoners. Bed and Breakfasts in historically significant homes permit a true ante-bellum experience. *The recent addition of riverboat gaming, which is a tremendous source of state and local revenue, is a source of concern. Its impact on the historic integrity of the town must be carefully monitored.*

Vicksburg, like so many older towns and cities, could benefit from revitalization of business and restoration or removal of unserviceable buildings near some of the ante-bellum homes, and along Clay Street.

Grand Gulf, Bruinsburg and Port Gibson

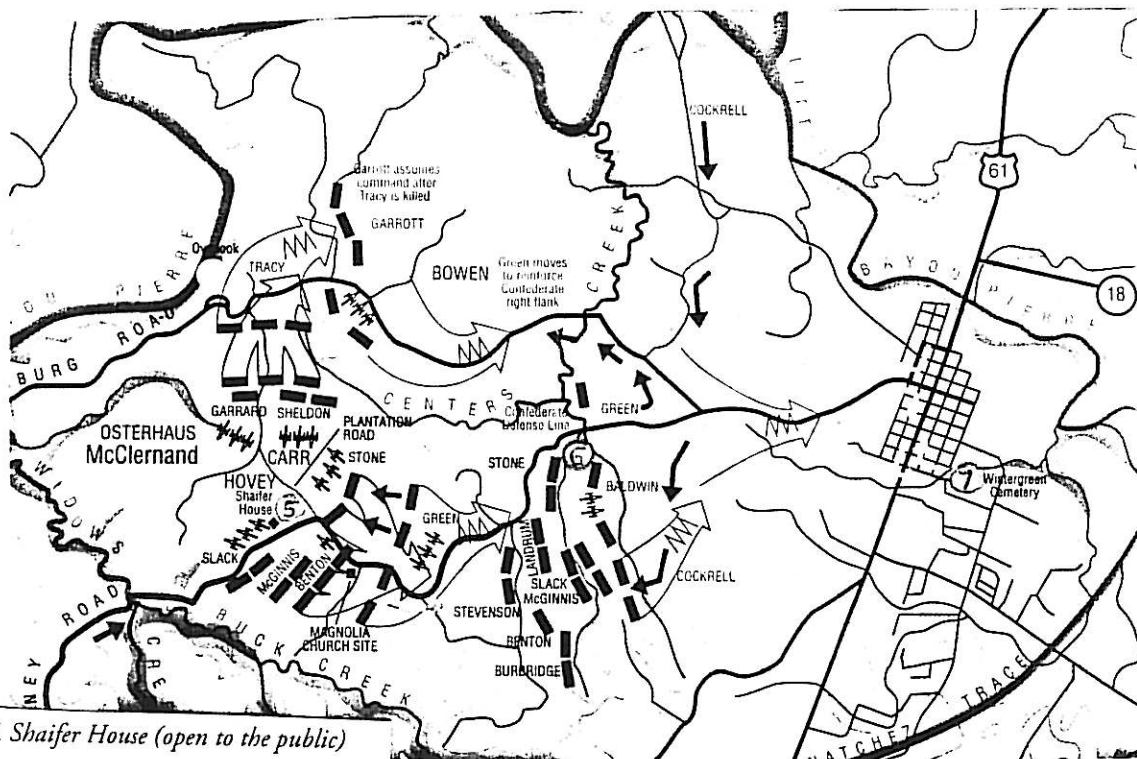
The current historic presentation at Grand Gulf attempts to present too many aspects of Mississippi history and in doing so dilutes the

story of the Vicksburg Campaign. A number of park markers present a wide ranging choice of topics. Roads, parking, and trails are acceptable but could be improved. The recent addition of camping trailer pads is an example of a modern amenity which may have been done without adequate archeological consideration of the possible disturbance of artifacts.

The historical context of the site of Grant's landing at Bruinsburg was compromised when the Mississippi River shifted away from the landing. Although the land is privately owned individuals have been allowed to visit it. It may be possible to open the site to un-monitored visitation.

An abandoned Presbyterian Church is on the original site of the Bethel church. Although the bulk of the facility is modern, a portion of the facade is original--it is said the Union soldiers used the steeple for target practice. A significant part of the original Rodney road bed, which was Grant's route of march, is visible from the rear of the church. Since the original Magnolia Church site has been lost, this would be an excellent location for an African-American interpretive site.

The Battle of Port Gibson



Tour Stop 5 A. K. Shaifer House (open to the public)

Tour Stop 6 White and Irwin branches of Willow Creek.

Tour Stop 7 Wintergreen Cemetery, established in 1807, is the burial place for the Confederates killed in the battle. The United Daughters of the Confederacy marked the graves with small foot stones. The Department of Veterans' Affairs provided headstones in 1986 following a year-long project to identify the soldiers who died in the battle.

Map Courtesy of MDAH

The Port Gibson battlefield is relatively pristine, although much of what was under cultivation on the ridge tops is now forested. The current Rodney Road is as it was in 1863. Stabilization programs are ongoing. *The road is not currently protected as a National Historic Landmark and is open to vehicular traffic.* The state has submitted the road for National Historical Site listing. Approval is expected in Fall 1995. This site, combined with the Plantation Road, and Shaifer House presents a true 19th century experience. Return of the Wheeler House from Grand Gulf Military Monument to its original site should be part of any comprehensive plan. Preservation and interpretation of this area is urgent as a number of other homesteads which were significant to the battle have collapsed or otherwise been destroyed within the past decade.

The Shaifer House has been donated to the State for its management. This is done as a collateral task of the **Grand Gulf Military Monument** staff; however, the house is not being used for the purposes for which the owners donated it. More importantly, *the house is not managed in a manner befitting its national significance.* The building is empty and open to all comers. While the house was stabilized, outdoor paint was used in a room where none had previously existed, and a bullet hole whose perpetrator still resides in a picture frame was plastered over. Some boards have begun to rot and will need replacement. The reason for these deficiencies include a lack of funding, staffing, and planning. An interview with descendants revealed that most of the original furnishings are in storage and would be available if the homesite were restored and made secure.

Ownership of most of the battlefield is in private hands although the primary owners, Mr. and Mrs. Alton (Shaifer) Hollingsworth, are willing to allow responsible historic interpretation of the site. The owners might also allow some limited clearance of the battlefield to restore its 1863 appearance.

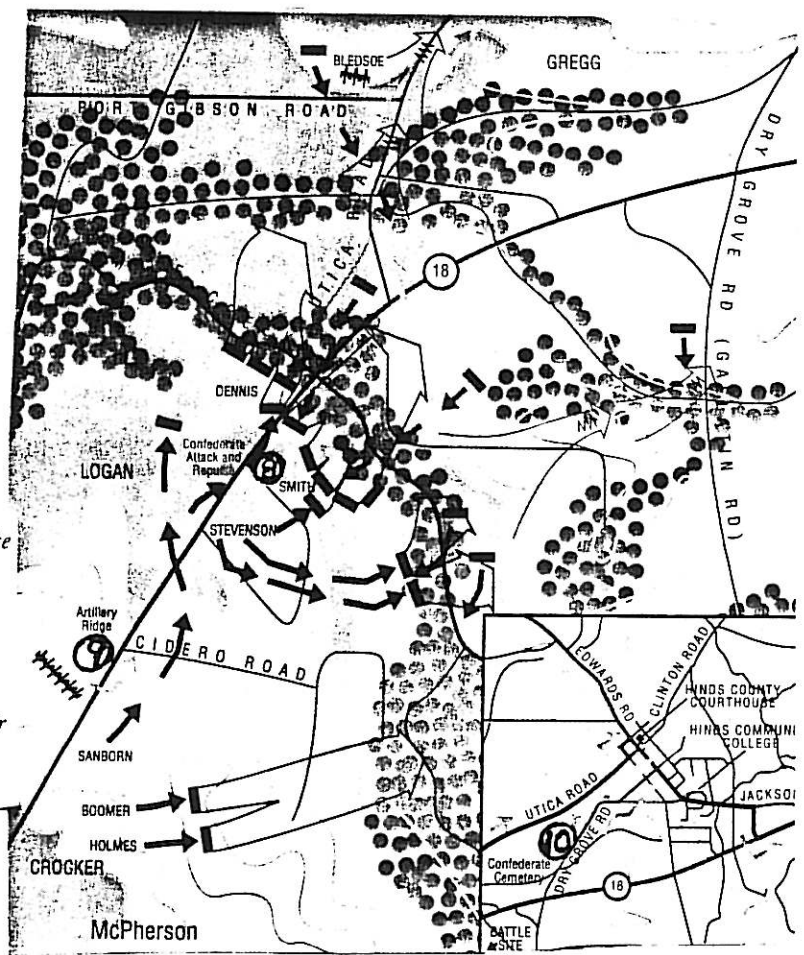
Preservation and interpretation of the Port Gibson battle sites are not a priority for the local government, and its potential value to the community is neither acknowledged nor included in any strategic planning documents.

Legend has it and welcome signs at the town entrance proclaim that General Grant said Port Gibson was, "Too beautiful to burn." Regardless of historical accuracy, the statement is certainly true today. The town is a delightful place to visit. A number of historically significant homes remain and the Wintergreen Cemetery is a noteworthy shrine. Unfortunately, a shortage of visitor amenities discourages lengthy stays.

Raymond and Jackson

There are three routes to get to the battle of Raymond, two follow routes of march used by Grant's army after the battle at Port Gibson, State Route 462 (which is the Historic Natchez Trace), and State Route 18. The Union right under Major General John McPherson shifted toward the right, crossed through Utica and ascended SR18 into Raymond. The route bisects the battlefield which is in pristine condition. There are state interpretive markers; however, they are inaccurate and inadequate. The most critical portion of the land action could be viewed if properly marked. Proper interpretation could be provided at minimal cost. Once again the battlefield is privately held; however, one of the primary owners, Mr. Ted Kendall, is willing to provide reasonable access to it.

Battle of Raymond



Tour Stop 8 The Morning Confederate Attack and Repulse

Tour Stop 9 Artillery Ridge

Tour Stop 10 Confederate Cemetery

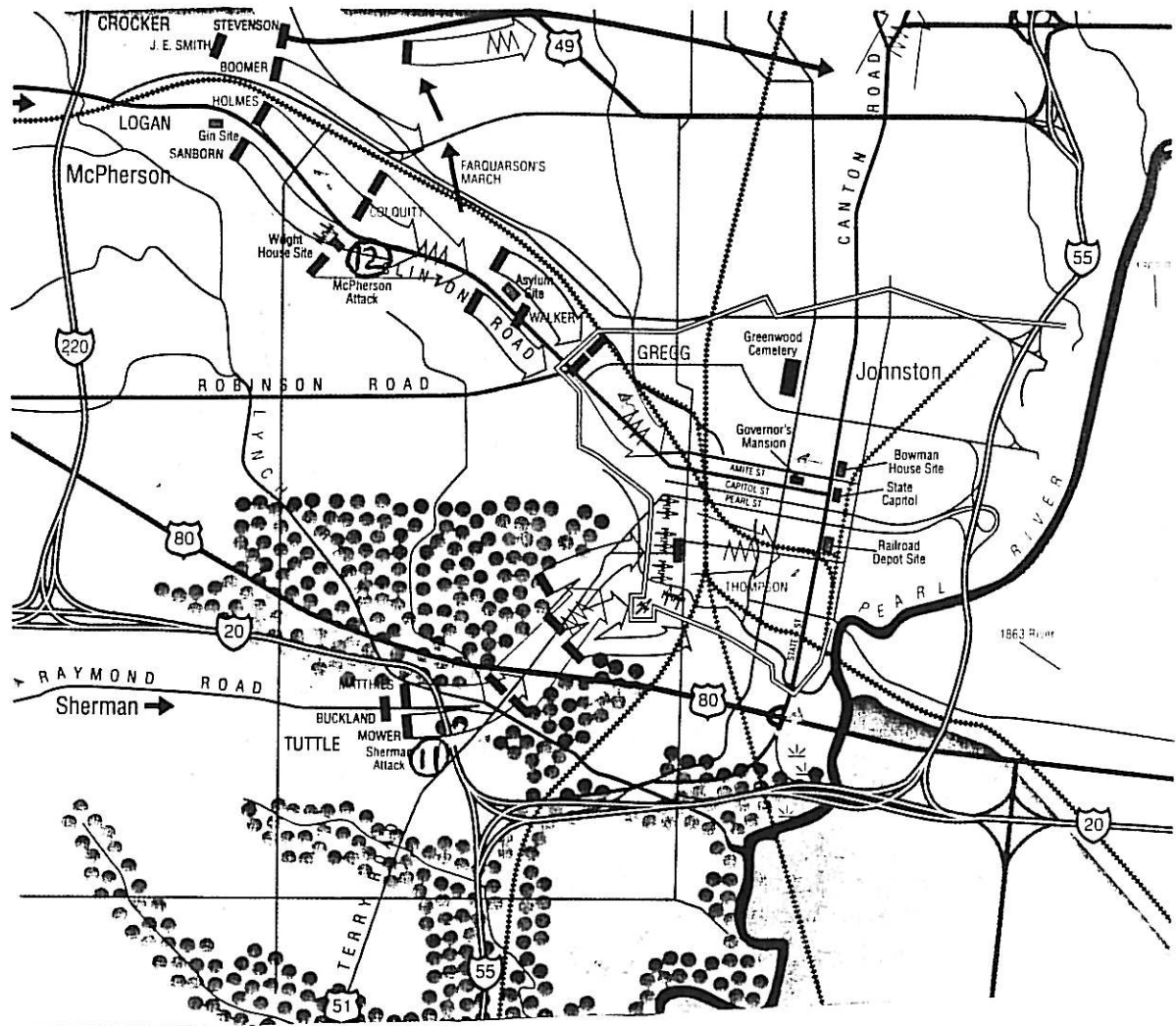
The 73 Confederate soldiers killed in the battle of Raymond were buried here. In 1980 headstones with their names replaced the earlier markers that read "Unknown Confederate Soldier."

Map Courtesy of MDAH

The city of Raymond is very attractive and a pleasure to visit. Several sites of significance include St. Marks Episcopal Church, which was used as a Federal hospital, and Waverly, which was McPherson's headquarters. The Courthouse is also ante-bellum.

In Jackson the battlefield has been obliterated by modern growth. There are virtually no battle sites which retain any historical integrity. The two existing sites used to interpret the battle are of minimal historic value. However, since the city was seriously damaged by the war this would be an appropriate place to interpret the concept of "total war." Regardless of the state of the battlefield, Jackson has sufficient sites of historical interest to merit a stop.

The Battle of Jackson



Map Courtesy of MDAH

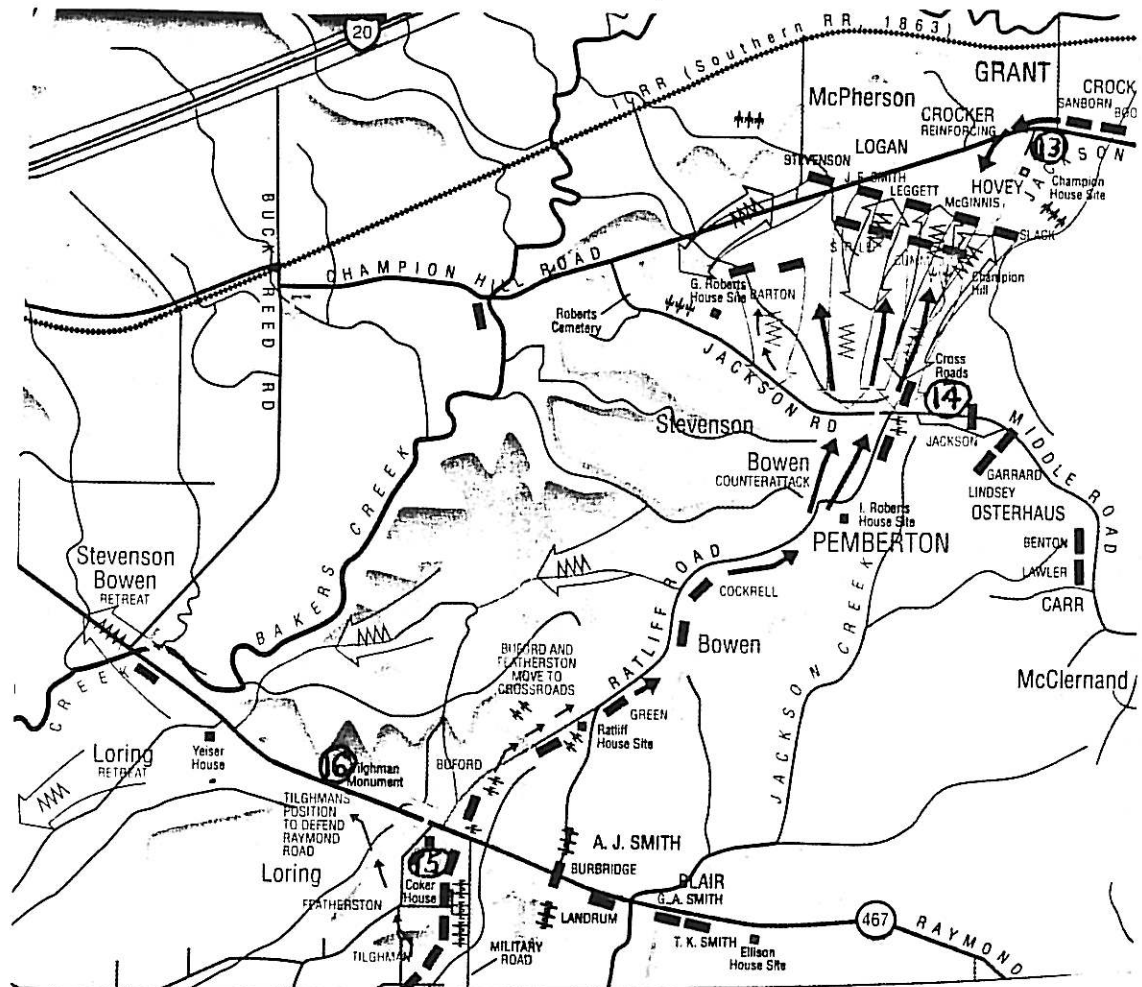
Tour Stop 11 Sherman's Attack on Jackson

Tour Stop 12 McPherson's Attack

Champion Hill (Edwards) and Big Black River Bridge

The most significant military engagement of the Vicksburg Campaign occurred at Champion Hill near the town of Edwards. There are a number of dramatic sites here, most prominent being the Coker House.

The Battle of Champion Hill



Tour Stop 14 The Crossroads. The crest of Champion Hill is on private property 800 yards north of the crossroads.

Tour Stop 13 Champion House Site. (Private property) Through the woods several hundred yards south of the Champion Hill Road is the site of Grant's headquarters and the site of the Champion house, used as a hospital and Grant's Headquarters.

Tour Stop 15 Coker House, built in 1852 by H. B. Coker, is owned by the Jackson Civil War Roundtable and will be open to the public when funds are raised for restoration. It was a field hospital for both Federals and Confederates.

Tour Stop 16 Tilghman Monument. Site where General Tilghman was killed in the battle.

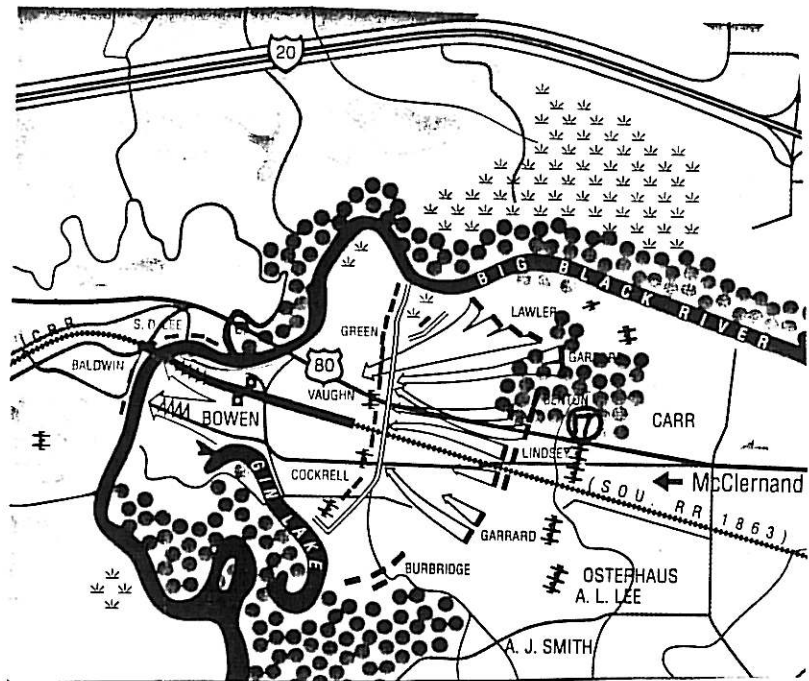
The Coker house is the most significant remaining structure on the battlefield. Several other sites remained as recently as 10 years ago but are now gone. This venerable structure, with its shell and bullet wounds from the battle, is owned by the **Jackson Civil War Roundtable**. It has recently been stabilized in an attempt to prevent further deterioration; however, a visit to the site showed it is not secure and is in serious danger from both vandalism and further deterioration. The **MDAH** has refused to accept the title because of a lack of resources to restore (estimated at \$600,000) and manage the property. **JCWRT** has unsuccessfully attempted to organize a serious fund raising campaign. *If immediate actions are not taken to positively manage this resource it may be lost.*

Not far from the Coker House is the site of Confederate General Lloyd Tilgman's monument. This spot, where he was shot, is barely 20 feet from SR 467 and is in an early state of deterioration. Off road parking is improvised, access is difficult, and approaching signage non-existent. At the time of our visit, we had to wade through some mud from across the street.

The battlefield itself is basically accessible, the notable exception being the property still owned by the Champion family. It is possible to observe the scenes of the heaviest fighting from around the Champion House site; however, much of the actual battleground is off limits. Recently **The Conservation Fund** purchased and donated to the state a large portion of battlefield acreage which makes more of the action accessible. Interpretation is at present limited to some inadequate state signage.

A notable change at the Champion Hill site was a 1930's excavation operation which topped a part of the hill. An additional change from the 1863 appearance is the timber of the hill vice the cultivation which existed at the time of the battle. A long term restoration plan should be included in any plans to interpret the battle. As at other sites signage is limited and parking must be improvised.

The Battle of Big Black River Bridge



Tour Stop 17 Battle of Big Black River Bridge

Map Courtesy of MDAH

Although the original entrenchments have been washed away over the years by flood tides of the river, Big Black River Bridge is dramatically pristine, with numerous sites of interest, including the historic Vicksburg/Jackson road of 1863. The field itself is similar to the time of the 1863 engagement and the grounds are easily accessible. The hulks of Confederate vessels like the **Charm**, which was used to anchor pontoon bridges, and the footings of the, circa 1860, railroad bridge are still visible at low tide (incidentally the engine machinery of the **Charm** sits in a lonely position in a field across from the entrance to **Grand Gulf Military Monument**). As at other sites, no interpretive signage exists.

Moving along the route of the Federals' advance on Vicksburg, near the town of Flower, the original roads used by Generals Sherman and McPherson exist and are either in use or preserved in 1863 appearance immediately adjacent to state roads. The intersection where Grant and Sherman met to determine the arriving Union force troop dispositions is extant but unmarked.

Other key sites of profound historical significance and interest outside of the formal park boundaries exist and are unmarked. They include the point of Federal arrival at the Vicksburg defensive perimeter along the Graveyard Road; Grant's route of entry into the capitulated town; and the site where Pemberton snubbed Grant's request for a glass of water.

Preservation Efforts

Land Acquisition

The most recent and noteworthy efforts have focused around Champion Hill where **The Conservation Fund** in cooperation with the **Mellon Foundation** has acquired 825 acres and donated it to the **MDAH**. **The Conservation Fund** also acquired title and donated the site of Grant's Canal to the **NPS**. Mrs. Frances Kennedy is the Director of the Civil War Campaign for **The Conservation Fund** and is an active member of the **Mississippi Civil War Commission**. Her relentless, behind-the-scenes efforts have successfully culminated work at Champion Hill and are nearing successful resolution elsewhere.

The **Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites (APCWS)** is well-funded and interested in land acquisition if and where it is required to save sites from potential development. They have recently announced the addition of land at Grand Gulf, and negotiations at Champion Hill, Raymond, and Big Black River Bridge.

JCWRT owns approximately 5 acres surrounding the Coker House and is prepared to donate it to **MDAH** as part of the Coker House revitalization/restoration.

Public Issues

Inclusion of Champion Hill into the Federal Park System. **MDAH** has displayed an interest in donating the acreage at Champion Hill to Vicksburg National Military Park. As Vicksburg NMP is restricted by law to its present boundaries, congressional action is required. The subject has been raised with the state's congressional representatives.

Expansion of Corinth, Mississippi site. Considerable work is being done to expand the **NPS'** presentation of the Civil War experience in Northern Mississippi. While these sites are uniquely important

independent of Vicksburg, they also tie into the Campaign's early events.

African-American Civil Rights History. The African-American experience in Mississippi has not always been positive and a great deal of residual anger is vested at the proponents of Civil War heritage. It is not necessary to chronicle the sources of resentment; however, the interpretation of Civil War events such as the Vicksburg Campaign is not high on the list of elected officials in predominately African-American communities. African-American citizens are either apathetic to anything related to the Civil War or would like to see more efforts made towards interpreting the Civil Rights movement.

Education and Interpretation

Site Interpretive Efforts

While most sites have been minimally marked with either state or local roadside signs, there is no concerted effort to interpret the sites outside of **Vicksburg NMP**. Existing state policy concerning the funding, erection, and maintenance of interpretive signage makes it difficult to expand this program.

The essence of the visitor experience should be the ability to walk the fields with some visual assistance. Tours of most of our national military sites include interpretive signage and military artifacts appropriate for the scene, such as artillery and limbers, and fencing.

The tourist's ability to find Vicksburg Campaign routes of march and the battlefields are severely limited by the absence of directional or informational signage on major highways.

Publications

MDAH, **The Conservation Fund**, and the **NPS** have combined to produce educational and useful brochures. **MDAH's** "*A Guide to the Campaign and Siege of Vicksburg*," is the best single tour aide seen. The troop movements transposed on the modern roadways provide scale to the experience and provide a limited alternative to interpretive signage. They sell for \$3.95.

National Park Service publications authored by Vicksburg NMP historian Terrence Winschel cover events at Champion Hill, Chickasaw Bayou, and Port Gibson. These are concise and useful publications which meet the basic tourist need. They lack the overall appeal of the state's publication, but, sell for just \$.50.

Public Awareness

Of America's many wars none have precipitated the enduring interest of the Civil War. However, a recent and disturbing phenomena known in educational vernacular as the "Dumbing down of America" has taken its toll on the American experience. This has permitted several generations of Americans to become ignorant of the significance of historical sites. It is a sad commentary on our values system when PBS programs such as Ken Burns's "*The Civil War*" and Craig Haffner's "*Civil War Journal*" list viewers in the millions, many of whom visit Civil War battlefields (last year Vicksburg logged nearly 1 million visitors alone), while fewer than 10,000 citizens actually donate funds to preserve these sites. People have been told these sites are unprotected and vulnerable to development; however, the degree of apathy is appalling.

There is also cause for concern that *not one* academic community in Mississippi expressed an interest in organizing, sponsoring or participating in this conference. We offered several public service and tourist based organizations in these communities the opportunity to view some of these sites and attend a seminar on the Vicksburg Campaign as the guest of BGES. None accepted! Several African American commissioners were invited to participate in the conference but none showed up!

These points are not made to embarrass anybody; however, they do illustrate problems of open mindedness, vision, and commitment. **The significance of this campaign is undeniable**, not just in the Civil War but in American history! It has both sociological and historical dimensions as dramatic as any in Mississippi. Yet there is little interest in either telling the story or capitalizing on the national groundswell of interest in these types of facilities. It is interesting that two major property owners have recently become excited about the heritage of their land. Both were taken out to walk their grounds and hear the story, Both owners, one African-American, and one white exclaimed, "I never suspected."

There is a lot of work to do!