

GEORGIA

BATTLEFIELDS

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Georgia Historical Markers' significance and management

The Georgia Battlefields newsletter has often featured articles about the Georgia Historical Marker program that oversaw installation of about 2,100 markers beginning in the 1950s. Many of the 900 or so Civil War-related markers were erected in the 1950s in preparation for the Civil War Centennial. Since so many battlefields in the Atlanta area are either totally or largely unpreserved (e.g., Peachtree Creek, Atlanta, Ezra Church, Utoy Creek, Jonesboro), historical markers are often the only way for people to realize they are on the site of a battlefield.

Since 1998, creation and installation of new markers has been the responsibility of the Georgia Historical Society (GHS), which has since installed about 300 new markers. The old markers are topped with the Great Seal of Georgia, a green background, and gold lettering. The new markers are topped with the Georgia Historical Society seal, a black background, and silver lettering. During GHS's Civil War 150 initiative to install new markers to recognize the sesquicentennial, Georgia Battlefields Association (GBA) provided funding and reviewed content for ten markers.

In 2015, the state gave GHS responsibility for maintenance of markers regardless of installation date, and GHS is now the single point of contact to apply for new markers and report missing or damaged markers. <https://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/historical-markers/> Between July 2015 and December 2020, GHS arranged for repair or replacement of 218 markers, but the marker installation and maintenance process still depends in part on state funding, and the state has not put any priority on funds for history (preservation, interpretation, education, etc.).

Prior to 1998, part of the guidance for marker placement was to make them accessible, often by placing them near roads, which has the disadvantage of increasing the likelihood that a vehicle will strike a marker or, more likely, the rebar reinforced concrete posts on which the markers were mounted. (New marker and replacement mounting posts are now made of aluminum.) The placement also increased the likelihood that markers would have to be relocated when roads were widened or otherwise improved.

Despite their construction of cast aluminum, markers from the 1950s are approaching 70 years old, and their exposure to weather has led to peeling paint. In coastal Georgia, markers have been damaged by seabird droppings and salty air. In rural areas, markers have been shot, especially with shotgun pellets. Sadly, markers can also be stolen and sold as scrap metal.

A mid-September status report by Elyse Butler, GHS Marker Manager, indicated the following:

- 131 missing
- 67 down (including 29 with the marker damaged as well as knocked over)
- 121 damaged mounting posts (overlaps with markers down)
- 22 needing relocation (most often due to road work or building construction)
- 211 needing cleaning or refurbishment

These are not unusual numbers compared to when the state Historic Preservation Division managed marker maintenance.

GHS relies on local governments, organizations (e.g., historical societies), and individuals to report missing or damaged markers or mounting posts damaged by wayward vehicles. They depend on these same groups to help with repairs and reinstallations. GHS provided a list of almost 100 local governments and organizations (including GBA) that have helped. GBA has notified GHS of missing or damaged markers and recovered damaged markers.

An example of an individual's efforts is provided by GBA member Perry Bennett, who retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel in the last few years and has used some of his time to find downed, missing, and deteriorated markers and make the necessary repairs, as reported in the April 2021 and November 2020 newsletters. More recently, Lieutenant Colonel Bennett has helped replace posts and remount markers at Adams Park's "Tup" Holmes Golf Course relating to the Battle of Utoy Creek and the siege of Atlanta and near Memorial Drive relating to the Battle of Atlanta. In the latter instance, BATL <http://www.batlevent.org/> was conducting a tour and noticed a marker was down, and Perry brought his augur to make a hole for a new post, originally supplied by GHS. As he has done previously, Perry repainted another marker, this time relating to the Battle of Jonesboro.

In another case, GBA member John Miller noticed a missing marker in Tucker and contacted GBA to ask who should be notified. We replied to John and copied GHS marker manager Elyse Butler, who responded that the marker had been damaged by a vehicle and had been retrieved by a volunteer group on behalf of GHS until repairs could be made.



Damaged mounting post in left foreground. New post in cart.



Perry Bennett with remounted marker at Adams Park golf course.



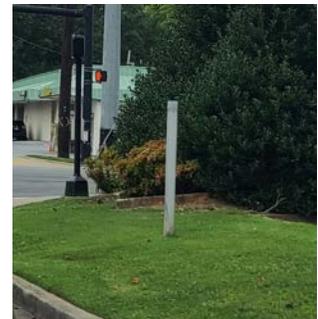
Chip Miller, BATL's Henry Bryant, and Perry Bennett.



Jonesboro marker before Perry Bennett's repairs began.



Jonesboro marker with peeling paint removed & base coat of new paint.



Missing marker in Tucker.

Georgia Historical Society links to information about markers and missing marker.

https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/confederate-intrenchments-1864/

https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/battle-of-atlanta-began-here/

https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/battle-of-jonesboro-the-first-day/

https://georgiahistory.com/ghmi_marker_updated/garrard-and-lightburn-to-stone-mountain/

Prater's Mill annual Country Fair scheduled for 9-10 October

Prater's Mill is in Northwest Georgia, not far east of Varnell, which is about ten miles north of Dalton. The Varnell area was the site of cavalry actions in May 1864 during the opening of the Atlanta Campaign. The mill is a preservation success story, and a visit to the mill will help anyone to learn more about life in the 19th century. Since so many historical sites have been adversely affected by the reduced travel resulting from pandemic concerns over the last 18 months, you can spend an enjoyable day or two when the mill celebrates 50 years of its annual country fair that will resume on 9-10 October. For more info, see www.pratersmill.org.

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