

Helen Goreham
District Commissioner
Cobb County, Georgia
NP/F/PL Legislative Hearing
H.R. 5152
June 10, 2010

I am here in support of H.R. 5152 introduced by Representative Phil Gingrey which will allow the National Park Service to accept the donation of a historic structure and its surrounding property. The Wallis House has significant historical value and would be a worthy addition to the assets assigned to the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.

The Wallis house was built by Josiah Wallis in 1853 and was occupied by his family until the Civil War when it was used first as a Confederate hospital. Then it became the headquarters of Federal Army Commander Oliver Otis Howard, who later founded Howard University. General W. T. Sherman was stationed at the Wallis House during the Battle of Kolb's Farm that took place at the south end of the park. This action immediately preceded the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain.

In my review of the National Park Service's proposal to accept this donation I was struck by an observation from the proposal's author that demonstrates the value of this site. It reads:

“The majority of the park's auto tour and trails interpret Confederate positions. This site (being the Wallis House) is critical to a visitor's understanding of the Union strategy during the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. This addition would enable the park to interpret a key Union position, significantly enhancing visitor understanding of this last major battle leading to the fall of Atlanta during the Civil War.”

Of course, we all know that preserving our national history is a priority for the National Park Service and this addition is an important piece of history that should be included.

Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield was designated on Feb. 8, 1917, and has been expanded from time to time over the years to further preserve the area's rich Civil War history. Cobb County has been a committed partner in this effort. Cobb contributed \$410,000 in 2002 and \$500,000 in 2006 to acquire additional significant acreage for the park. Additionally, we maintain roadways that pass through the park and provide law enforcement as well as emergency services. Just two weeks ago we opened a newly-constructed replacement bridge and have made other safety improvements over the years in support of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park and its visitors.

As part of our commitment to supporting the National Park Service and its historical mission, we took the first steps to preserve the Wallis House. This property was purchased by Cobb County in 2004 with the intent to donate it to the National Park Service. County staff, the Georgia Civil War Commission and Cobb Land Trust worked with representatives of the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park during this process. These groups collaborated because they recognize the historical and educational value of the site.

The county has been maintaining the Wallis House site since our purchase in 2004 but those efforts are limited to general grounds maintenance. As a local government we are not equipped to maintain the structure of the Wallis House, we do not have the expertise to provide historical preservation services nor the tools to effectively share the educational values of the site.

With more than 1.4 million visitors a year, this national park is a major source of economic and cultural influence in our region. I have long considered myself fortunate to call Cobb County home and when I reflect on what makes my community so special, Kennesaw National Battlefield Park is a major contributor.

And when you look at what makes America so extraordinary, it is apparent that we are a product of our nation's rich history. Because today is a direct result of yesterday and all the days that came before. This great opportunity to preserve a place that exhibits the time of our forefathers and has contributed to who we are today should not be overlooked.

So I, on behalf of Cobb County, urge the approval of H.R. 5152 and support the acceptance of Wallis House into the National Park Service. I also want to sincerely thank Representative Gingrey for his support of this effort. We look forward to protecting the historical and cultural value of the Wallis House for future visitors at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.