

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

Statement

Statement of Rosemary T. Williams
Chairperson
Siege and Battle of Corinth Commission
Before the Sub-Committee on National Parks and Public Lands of
The Committee on Resources, U. S. House of Representatives
Regarding H.R. 2249 to Establish the
Corinth Unit of Shiloh National Military Park
April 4, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to represent our community and state in endorsing the legislation introduced by Congressman Roger Wicker contained in House of Representatives Bill 2249 known as the "Corinth Battlefield Preservation Act of 1999".

I serve as Chairperson of The Siege and Battle of Corinth Commission, a Commission jointly formed by our city and county for the purpose of preserving and interpreting our Civil War Battlefield Sites, a member of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History Board of Trustees and The Mississippi Civil War Commission. The citizens of Corinth, Mississippi, have long shown interest in preserving and interpreting our region's rich Civil War heritage. Alcorn County is fortunate to contain some of our nation's best surviving examples of earthworks and other early Civil War fortifications prepared under offensive conditions. In the last decades concerned citizens have made good progress in both setting aside several of these sites and interpreting them to the visiting public. However, in recent years, due to increasing pressure from development, most of our most important sites have been threatened, and several have been lost. We are most appreciative of previous Congressional support for our efforts, but we are still in need of the major assistance House of Representatives Bill 2249 would provide to preserve and interpret Corinth's unique Civil War resources.

In their 1993 report to Congress, the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission ranked The Siege and Battle of Corinth Battlefields in Priority I, Class "B" (Civil War Sites Commission Report on The Nation's Civil War Battlefields, Page 49). Priority I Battlefields are those "With critical need for coordinated nationwide action by the year 2000." "Class A and B Battlefields represent the principal strategic operations of the War."

The most recent effort for preservation and interpretation was started in 1990 when the Siege and Battle of Corinth was named by the Department of the Interior to a list of 25 of the most SIGNIFICANT and ENDANGERED battlefields in the nation. At that time the American Battlefield Protection program was implemented as a division of the National Park Service and it has reawakened the interest in Corinth's Civil War resources. In 1991, then, Secretary of the Interior, Manuel Lujan, initiated our program. We were among the first to join in partnership with the National Park Service and the American Battlefield Protection program. The Department of The Interior's surveys and studies have uncovered so much of our history long hidden away in undeveloped forests. In April, 1991, sixteen sites in Corinth and Alcorn County, Mississippi

and including one in Tennessee, were designated National Historic landmarks as associated with the Siege and Battle of Corinth. Our project has become one of even greater national prominence with discoveries since then. Studying authorities have identified the following key themes of national significance associated with the Siege and Battle of Corinth. These are:

- Railroads and the Civil War in Corinth
- The Siege of Corinth
- The Battle of Corinth
- The Freedmen's Camp at Corinth
- Corinth field-works and the evolution of trench warfare
- A learning ground for major leaders of the Civil War
- Corinth to Shiloh Campaign.

Over the past nine years further studies by various groups; Geographic Information System mapping by the National Park Service and archaeological work have uncovered many more resources both in the Corinth area and in nearby Tennessee than we realized in 1991.

With Shiloh being the largest battle of the Corinth Campaign, naturally the two need to be linked through interpretation. As with the railroads of the past, Corinth now finds itself at the Crossroads of the two major four lane highways, which can provide a gateway to Shiloh National Military Park and serve to enhance one's visit there. With new technology presently being developed, needed synergies can be derived from the joint efforts of Corinth and Shiloh.

To support the work underway by the National Park Service, we, as partners, have the following projects either under construction or completed:

- We are beginning construction of a trail head park in downtown Corinth at the historic rail crossing and 20 miles of hiking and biking trails to connect our current National Historic landmark sites. There will also be trails into the sites with pull-off parking, benches and signage.
- We have completed quality walking and driving tour guides for the region.
- More than 200 acres of endangered property containing National Historic Landmark sites have been purchased with money raised to date. Future national Historic Landmark sites have also been purchased.
- More than 100 signs and interpretive exhibits to guide and inform visitors have been installed. These include directional signage; exhibits with original photos, drawings and text; and destination signage.
- The University of Mississippi Graduate School of Marketing worked to formulate a marketing study on the project. In brief, the report tells us that the impact on the region would be between 9 and 14 million dollars annually. This would amount economically to the effect of a major industry in the area.

- We work with private landowners to preserve their National Historic Landmark sites and future national Historic Landmark sites, and we manage maintenance at our purchased sites, both N.H.L and future N.H.L.

Our 30-plus partners, including national groups, the state and community, have supplied nearly \$2 million dollars to date to match the authorized Federal funding and services. Donated services are not included in the aforementioned figure. These services have been provided by individuals and businesses in the community over the entire nine year period. Hundreds of "Friends" in many of the United States and several countries in Europe send private contributions, offer assistance and research.

In summary, evidence of the importance of events that happened in and around Corinth has caused the size of the project to grow since 1991 because we have learned so much from the studies and research. In addition, construction costs have risen considerably. Seven themes can be justified as having national significance along with preserved sites giving visible evidence of the history. It is necessary to interpret the Battles of Shiloh and Iuka, Mississippi, as they are vitally linked to the Corinth Campaign. The scope of this project has expanded in the past nine years, far surpassing the vision at that time. Consequently, we find ourselves needing more funding than originally authorized by Congress in 1996 to adequately complete and interpret the Civil War history in the region.

So you can see, this effort has a tremendous base of support. We, as laymen, are trying to do our part to preserve this vital part of America's Heritage while at the same time providing recreation, education, pride in our Country and economic development. But, Mr. Chairman, and ladies and gentlemen of the committee, we must have your help. We need this legislation passed as described in House of Representatives Bill 2249 in order to complete our work and to share with others this portion of our history which reflects a time of great conflict and resulting unification into this Great Nation of ours. We, therefore endorse House of Representatives Bill 2249 introduced by United States Representative Roger Wicker.

Thank you.

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