

*Stephen A. Thompson*

## *Bilateral Resource Management and Development: The Illinois–Kentucky Civil War Heritage Trail*

**T**hrough the annals of world affairs, armed conflict often presents itself as the defining catalyst of a regime, nation, or culture. In relation to United States history, the Civil War was one such conflict. This first “modern war” broke new ground in technology and tactics, but where it deviates from other U.S. wars is that it established a domestic unification which provided the framework for the development of a young nation suffering through the growing pains of its democratic ideals.

The scale of the U.S. Civil War in the numbers of armed and non-combatant participants, as well as the diverse locations of campaigns and support functions, guaranteed that most inhabitants of the then-divided nation were in some manner affected by the struggle. This, in conjunction with the fact that this was a war conducted between fellow countrymen, has led to the insatiable interest in Civil War history, both internally and abroad. This fascination with the Civil War has not passed unnoticed by public and private organizations with a stake in the conservation of the war's remaining cultural resources.

The state of Illinois and commonwealth of Kentucky have a substantial Civil War heritage. Military, industrial, and political activities took place in Illinois and Kentucky over the duration of the conflict. War-time personalities, both major and minor, played important roles within these contexts. Through a joint initiative,

the state governments have initiated the Illinois–Kentucky Ohio River Civil War Heritage Trail, a project designed to formally identify, preserve, and interpret previously unaddressed sites common to their Civil War heritage.

### **Securing and Interpreting Civil War Resources**

The concept of the Civil War interpretative trail is not a recent revelation. The foundation for this education and entertainment venue can be traced to the era of the war itself. Within weeks or even days of the action at some engagement sites, local entrepreneurs realized there was a demand by a curious public to visit the scene of the great battles. Period guide organizations conducting third-person tours of the sites unknowingly provided the basis for the first battlefield preservation efforts.

After the war, veterans groups took the lead in the preservation and inter-

pretative venture. Wishing to commemorate the ground for which they fought, organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic and United Confederate Veterans placed monuments at the scenes of their struggles. Consolidation of these groups led to a formidable lobbying faction capable of exerting significant influence within the U.S. Congress. The diligence of their memberships resulted in governmental acquisition of battlefield resources at Chattanooga-Chickamauga and Gettysburg in the 1890s.

Throughout the 20th century, the federal government continued the acquisition of additional battlefield resources. State and local governments, along with private entities, also stepped forward to acquire and preserve significant period sites.

Although the conservation of Civil War resources is a paramount objective of the preservation community, formal interpretation programs frequently becomes the priority once the resources are secured. Public and private organizations involved in historic preservation are aware of their responsibility to, and interest by, the general public in the interpretation of any historic resource. Sufficiently funded organizations have the capabilities to develop sophisticated interpretative master plans for their sites, integrating state-of-the-art technology and proven techniques to create informative and flexible programs. Groups operating under fi-

ancial limitations often have to approach interpretative functions from more static angles, such as erecting signs or holding periodic events.

The diversity and innovation employed in the preservation and interpretation of Civil War resources can be attributed not only to financial considerations, but also to the necessity for unconventional preservation approaches in the legal arena and the continuous upgrading of interactive technology. The primary factors for innovation in the field are the multi-disciplined individuals involved. Documented successes during recent years indicate there is a substantial nationwide constituency involved in the preservation and interpretation endeavor. This constituency's strength exists in its ability to advance toward common goals through a consolidated effort.

### **The Ohio River as the Link**

The southwestern portion of the Ohio River has always served as the demarcation line between Illinois and Kentucky. While acting as a physical boundary, it became a reality early on that this waterway provided one of the strongest bonds between the two states.

Illinois and Kentucky have always viewed the Ohio River as a natural resource worthy of preservation and development. Issues regarding the economy of the river have consistently required effective bi-state coordination. Within the latter decades of

the 20th century, long-standing commercial and transportation emphasis has expanded into the recreational and cultural fields.

When contemporary students of the Civil War examine the roles played by Illinois and Kentucky, major contexts—such as the industrial and commercial efforts that occurred in the young city of Chicago, the 1862 Confederate campaign in Kentucky, and the activities of Confederate General John Hunt Morgan's command—receive much attention. As the military context in the Western Theater progresses southward, so follows the generalist's attention. This results in the neglect of themes and events along the Ohio River that demonstrate the importance of Illinois and Kentucky to the Federal and Confederate governments until the end of the war.

For example, the Union had a huge investment in the naval depot and shipyard at Mound City, Illinois, home base of the Mississippi Naval Squadron. Also, Confederate sympathizer organizations, such as the Sons of Liberty, had large cells in southern Illinois and were the nemeses of Union provost marshals stationed in the Illinois river communities. Military operations by Confederate General Adam R. "Stovepipe" Johnson's cavalry in Illinois and Kentucky during the summer of 1864 were an integral part of the Confederate government's plans to disrupt the Union's fall elections. Espionage and

guerrilla operations were also a constant on both sides of the river throughout the war.

Through the development of the Illinois-Kentucky Ohio River Civil War Heritage Trail, the project partnership intends to bring these and other stories to light in the physical settings where they occurred. The resulting interpretative trail will assist in the preservation of the sites, provide an educational experience to all that follow the trace, and encourage economic development opportunities in the areas through which it passes.

### The Illinois-Kentucky Ohio River Civil War Heritage Trail

The trail did not originate within the master plans of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) or the Kentucky Heritage Council (KHC). Personal research by the author concerning General Johnson's cavalry command was the catalyst. Investigation of Johnson's operations led to other regional wartime contexts, linking sites from Cairo to Henderson.

During this investigative period, Illinois and Kentucky had been members of the Lower Mississippi Valley Civil War Task Force for the development of the "Thousand-Mile Front" brochure identifying wartime sites in the seven most southern states of the Mississippi River Valley. [Ed. note: See the article by Calcote, this issue.] Consultations internally at IHPA and shortly thereafter with

KHC led to the determination that there was enough significant Civil War-related historical context along the Ohio River to pursue the development of a preservation and interpretation project.

In the fall of 1996, the IHPA and KHC management team produced a master plan which outlined goals and objectives for the project. The plan emphasized formal identification and interpretation of sites, along with the formation of a project partnership unifying tourism, economic development, and special-interest groups in the region. Presentation of the plan to upper-echelon government officials in both states resulted in the authority to obligate staff time to the project.

Unfortunately, time for the development and management of the project was all that could be committed. Financial support for the undertaking had to be obtained from sources outside the spheres of the managing organizations. Only through the assistance of the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP), the Illinois Bureau of Tourism, the Kentucky Department of Travel, and the Illinois Association of Museums was the program able to be set in motion.

### **The Master Plan**

The project master plan allows for two distinct development phases. The first phase consists of general partnership development, intensive historical research, site registration, and selec-

tion of sites to be interpreted. Second-phase objectives include preparation of interpretive signs, negotiating for the monitoring of the sites by local agencies, and development of material promoting the trail.

A project of this nature can only be successful through the participation and input of multi-disciplined organizations and individuals standing to benefit from positive results. Even though state and federal entities are in place with development, coordination, and financial expertise to advance preservation, education, and regional economic agendas, the most important players are the regional-local partnership members.

Participating corridor partners, such as Main Street programs and Civil War Roundtables as well as other special-interest organizations and individuals, stand to gain immeasurably from the establishment of the trail. On the horizon are enhanced economic opportunities and quality-of-life improvements for area inhabitants due to the involvement of their fellow residents in this project. From the managerial standpoint, the participation of the "locals" is essential to generate regional support, provide the avenues to primary source information, and assist in the perpetual management and promotion of the completed trail.

While partnership development is a priority, the primary goal of site identification and interpretation is the driving force for the project. Some

sites preliminarily targeted for interpretation by the management team are well known. Objectives of this portion of the project are to verify locations, produce an accurate context for each, and search for additional sites throughout the corridor. Managing partner ABPP stipulated that National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listing of significant sites would also be a necessity. With these objectives in mind, the management team determined it prudent to acquire the services of a historical consultant to prepare a historical survey report and NRHP documentation.

At the conclusion of a qualifications-based selection process, former State Historical Society of Iowa Historic Preservation Planning Coordinator James Jacobsen, now the principal of the "History Pays!" preservation planning firm (based in Des Moines), was awarded the contract for the task. Jacobsen's enthusiasm to work with the "locals," professional experience, and understanding of the need to identify contexts and sites outside period military themes contributed to his selection.

The survey undertaken by Jacobsen will concentrate on resources of the built and cultural landscape that, over the last 130 years, have been affected by flooding and watershed management operations. Jacobsen will act as the initial field coordinator for the project, being instrumental in the areas of collaboration with local site owners, trail loop layout, and

general public relations. Upon completion and review of the final survey report, sites for registration and potential interpretation will be selected by the management team and NRHP documentation preparation will proceed. Properties targeted for NRHP registration will be those which exhibit significance from either national, regional, statewide, or local perspectives.

As phase two gets underway, the responsibilities of and efforts by the management team and general partnership will intensify. Objectives of this phase will include final selection of the sites for interpretation, production and placement of signs, development of informational materials for use by the public, opening ceremonies, and project closeout. Resources targeted for interpretation will be selected by the management team after comments on the final survey report are provided by the general partnership. Additional considerations for interpreted sites will include accessibility and security.

The public benefit of an interpretative trail is nil unless a majority of the sites are accessible by two-wheeled drive vehicles. The geographic characteristics of the corridor, primarily rural floodplain and forested limestone bluffs, will undoubtedly include sites accessible only by extended foot trails. It is the intention to keep these types of trail locations to a minimum. Security of the signs and the sites themselves will

be achieved through a perpetual monitoring system by local partners, providing periodic reports to IHPA and KHC. State and local law enforcement agencies will also be made aware of site locations along with applicable preservation statutes providing for resource protection.

Production and placement of the interpretative signs is an important element of phase two. Various types of signs are currently being evaluated for use. The selected product will not only need to be visually appealing, but must be able to sustain intense environmental effects. Graphic artists, historians, and museum technicians internal to IHPA and KHC, supplemented by private consultants, will design the signs. Visual- and hearing-impaired presentation techniques are being examined for integration with the signs. To reduce project costs, general partners will assist with on-site installation.

The route of the trail will be determined by the location of the interpreted sites in relation to the established regional transportation network, which encompasses interstate and state highways, township roads, bikeways, hiking trails, and the river itself. Two-wheeled access will be the priority, but recreational-access aspects of the project area cannot be ignored. Trailway identification will be accomplished through the placement of directional signs containing the trail logo. An informational trailway map will also be developed.

Although promotion of the trail is an objective throughout both phases of the project, this function will intensify prior to the official opening. Articles will be submitted to pertinent historical and travel periodicals. Press releases will be submitted to national and statewide media organizations. The management team will conduct on-site interpretative interviews to gain further momentum. Opening ceremonies, attended by national, state, and local officials, members of the project partnership, and the general public, will consummate the effort.

The preparation and distribution of an after-action report on the project is essential. This will allow for the management team to assess the successes and shortfalls within the parameters of the original goals and objectives. Recommendations will be made regarding additional development of the trail and to identify regional organizations and individuals with the capabilities of conducting similar initiatives. The report will also provide post-completion direction for the promotion of the trail and preservation of the resources by the local property owners and managers.

### WhereNext?

At its inception, the Illinois-Kentucky Ohio River Civil War Heritage Trail project focused on the creation of an interpretative corridor, stressing the goals of preservation and constituency awareness through part-

nership development. The support generated and relative ease of project implementation soon had the management team considering, "Why not the whole Ohio River Valley?"

Cursory investigation attests that numerous Civil War contexts also exist along the river in Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. A multi-state approach would not only serve to complete the story of the Ohio River during the war, but would also unify regional personnel whose expertise is generally limited to their professional environs. Toward this end, Illinois and Kentucky have initiated consultations with the other valley states to encourage their investment in projects similar to the Illinois-Kentucky Ohio River Civil War Heritage Trail.

### **And in the End...**

When the trail is in place and the project is put to bed, what will have been accomplished? Superficial goals of identification and interpretation will have been achieved, but this project will generate more profound effects.

Civil War history in Illinois and Kentucky will no longer be limited to the U.S. Grant, Perryville, John Breckinridge, and Rock Island Prison Barracks contexts. The public will have at its disposal consolidated information addressing a significant region in the nation throughout the conflict.

The interactive project partnership will provide for long-term coordination in the region for related area development. Crossover of participating personnel will be fluid for current companion initiatives such as the Federal Highway Administration's Scenic Byway program and Illinois' and Kentucky's heritage tourism enterprises.

Techniques used in project planning and implementation will establish a demonstration module for organizations and individuals considering comparable projects. Knowledge of the various skills required to conduct such an operation will benefit professionals who, all too often, restrict their influence by focusing exclusively on a particular subject, or who rarely step outside of established vocational circles.

It is anticipated that the framework of the local economy will be altered by the establishment of the trail. The phrase "Build it and they will come" is very applicable. Once the existence of the trail is known, historians and students of all levels will be the initial and constant audience. Tourists who had previously blown through the region on the way to the attractions of St. Louis and Nashville may now have a reason to get off the interstates. With this influx, there will be a need for the basics: food, fuel, and lodging. In the fulfillment of these needs, and probable expansion into the realm of "knick-knack" concessions, the local people stand to profit immensely.

The sector which will substantially benefit from this auspicious undertaking is the historic preservation community. Formal confirmation of resources previously treated as subjects of folklore conjecture will provide direction in the master planning for the protection and programmatic development of regional Illinois and Kentucky historic properties. The significance and promotion of sites in the corridor will assist in drawing attention of preservation advocates and politicians to long-neglected areas of both states. Perhaps most important of all, the project will promote historic preservation awareness and philosophy within the ranks of the local resource owners and constituency.

Possibly, the Illinois-Kentucky Ohio River Civil War Heritage Trail

will produce other payoffs not envisioned. Whatever the final outcome, it is apparent that this class of historically related projects can provide enormous benefits to society at all levels.

It is discouraging that, every day, scores of cultural resources which could be adapted for present-day use slip into oblivion. The passive approach—waiting years until the perfect scenario presents itself to recognize and preserve them—is at fault. Only through dedicated and consolidated preservation and development strategies will countless historic resources nationwide, such as those dating from the Civil War along the Ohio River, survive for the enlightenment of future generations.

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