

JUNE 2011

Post Rider

Newsletter of the
**Natchez Trace Parkway
Association**

EXPLORE•COMPLETE•SUPPORT•PROTECT



Tracing the Journey of Southern Discovery

This is the first e-newsletter to keep you informed of Association work and activities. Though we are halfway through the year, much work has already been completed to make the next five years some of our most productive. We are rebuilding to generate the membership and support needed to help the Park Service make the Parkway a destination national park.

The focus is on getting the “park” portion of the Parkway completed now that the road has been built. This is the last and most exciting phase of development. The concept of a parkway is one that is often hard to grasp. The roadway makes it possible for visitors to see several historic and scenic sites in one park. The road is a vital means to an end. It is not the focal point or the purpose. The Association very effectively kept the focus on the road until it was completed, because without it the parkway experience would not exist. When the roadway was completed in 2005, many members thought our mission had been completed. However, only a small portion of the rich historical resources has been utilized. When these resources are interpreted and all the visitor amenities are completed, the Parkway can begin to achieve its full potential as an economic resource to communities. Even small improvements in helping visitors appreciate the history of the Parkway will improve the visitor experience and bring more visitors to the Parkway.

The Parkway was created in the 1930s to preserve and tell the importance of the Natchez Trace in important periods of American history and prehistory. The Trace played an important role in the settlement of the South, and aided in the defense of the country. Many historic sites that were part of that history still exist along the Parkway. When they are fully interpreted, visitors

will not only have a better understanding of the Natchez Trace, they will join us in appreciating the importance of preserving it.

Visualize a trip down the Parkway that includes full interpretations of the Chickasaw, Choctaw and Natchez nations near the locations of their original capitals; exploration of the territorial capital of Washington, Mississippi where Aaron Burr was tried for treason, Jackson's troops camped and Jefferson Davis attended school; inclusions of the old Natchez Trace towns of Greeneville and Leiper's Fork, settled by Thomas Hart Benton's family; recreations of the stands, ferries, forts and trading posts; an education center continuing the legacy of Meriwether Lewis, and opportunities to experience the historic lifestyles through living history events. Those are only a fraction of the rich historic Natchez Trace resources. Many of those experiences can be created only virtually through modern technology, but developing them will provide the experience and education the early parkway promoters visualized. They will complete the park.

We have some unique opportunities over the next five years to make progress on this final phase. Superintendent Sholly has brought a fresh vision to the Parkway, and he understands the importance of the visitor experience. We cannot rely upon federal funding to accomplish the new goals. However, the work to complete the interpretation and visitor amenities should generate new partnerships, and the War of 1812 Bicentennial and the 75th anniversary of the Parkway provide opportunities to gain support we will never have again. This is a great time to get involved. We need your help.

~ Tony Turnbow, Association President



75th

The 75th anniversary of the Natchez Trace Parkway presents a great opportunity to remind people of the hard work and dedication of prior generations of Association members that made the Parkway we have today a reality. The Parkway Association organized in 1934, and pushed for the development of a parkway to memorialize the old Natchez Trace and preserve its history. The group faced innumerable obstacles, but it never took “no” for an answer, even when everyone else was ready to abandon the project. It is only because of the persistence of some of the leaders, the support of the legislators and the cooperation of the Park Service that the Parkway exists.



In addition to supporting the Park Service for the official ceremony and events, the Association can celebrate its own role in the building of the Parkway and provide additional commemorative honors. The Brandon Hall plantation at mile marker 9 was the scene of the primary 1938 ground breaking ceremony for the Parkway. Brandon Hall's owner Rachel Garber has issued an invitation for the Association to return during the 75th year. That event would provide an excellent opportunity to honor Roane Fleming Byrnes, who served as Association president for almost thirty years. Though many people share credit for work on completing the Parkway, it has long been acknowledged that without her vision and determination in beginning the effort, the Parkway would not exist.

Three projects under development:

HISTORIC PHOTO BOOK - Arcadia Publishing has agreed to publish a historic photo book “Building the Natchez Trace Parkway” as part of its “Images of America” series. The book will use available photos to tell the story of how a group of dedicated Association members worked with the Park Service and their legislators to create a national parkway from historic sites, an idea and determination. That story is just the latest chapter in an already fascinating history of the Natchez Trace. The books will be sold through Eastern National on the Parkway and at bookstores such as Barnes and Noble at select locations around the country. They are expected to be available in late 2012.

SYMPHONY - A musical composition for a full orchestra to interpret the broad historical themes of the Natchez Trace and the Parkway is making progress as one 75th Anniversary Association project. The Nashville Symphony Orchestra has agreed to work with the Association in a collaborative effort to compose and perform a work that would become part of the canon of American music. If corporate sponsorship can be secured, that work would be performed not only at Nashville's Symphony Hall, but also in several towns along the Parkway and at some Parkway locations during 2013.

TRAVELING EXHIBIT- The Association has begun work creating a traveling exhibit on the history of the Natchez Trace. The traveling exhibit forms the core of a larger exhibit to enable a Natchez Trace community to interpret its own history in connection with the Trace. A goal will be for the community to use the temporary exhibit to create its own permanent interpretation to help visitors gain a better understanding of the impact of the Natchez Trace in creating towns from Nashville to Natchez. Jefferson College and Leiper's Fork are two locations that have agreed to host the exhibit for the 75th anniversary year.

Partnership for National Trails Systems

The Association has become a member of the Partnership for National Trails Systems, a thirty-member organization of federal historic and scenic trails. First Vice-President Boswell extended an invitation from the Association to host its annual meeting, while attending a PNTS meeting in Washington, D.C., and he represented the Association at the PNTS annual meeting in Abington, Virginia. The PNTS magazine "Pathways" is expected to include an article about the Association in its summer edition.

War of 1812 Bicentennial

Plans are being made to take an active part in the national War of 1812 Bicentennial and to make certain that the important role of the Natchez Trace in the war is interpreted and publicized. Several living history events are being planned to recreate the historic events on the Trace. Plans are still fluid, however, tentatively events are being discussed for the Gordon House in 2012, Mount Locust in 2013 and Colbert Ferry in 2014. In 2015, following reenactments in New Orleans, the return of Jackson's victorious troops may be portrayed in several locations along the Parkway, ending at Jackson's Home, the Hermitage in Nashville on the Fourth of July. Our events will be the concluding events of the bicentennial.

An immediate result of the planning has been the creation of new partnerships with groups from New Orleans to Missouri and Illinois, and other national parks even including Fort McHenry. A regional effort is being planned



to tell the story of the war in the south. Reenactment groups that interpret the same period as the old Natchez Trace have agreed to work with the Parkway to interpret our story. The commemoration is international in scope, and the Association is participating in conference calls sponsored by the U.S. Navy to coordinate U.S. events with those in Canada and Europe.

Because preserving the story of Jackson's troops on the Natchez Trace was one of the main reasons cited for creating the Parkway, a goal will be to create a living history program and interpretation that will last beyond the bicentennial. Those programs enhance the national park experience for visitors.

Destinations

An important goal of helping complete the interpretation of historic sites along the Parkway is to help support the creation of four significant visitor destination points. The destination points are located at some of the most significant historical sites along the Parkway, and spaced to include the entire Parkway. The points include Emerald Mound near Natchez, Chickasaw Village at Tupelo, Colbert Ferry in Alabama and a center at Meriwether Lewis in Tennessee. As visitors travel from destination point to destination point, they will enjoy a greater understanding of the Natchez Trace and enjoy a much better experience.

The Chickasaw Nation has plans to build an interpretive center in Tupelo. After completing a \$40 million center in Oklahoma, they are ready to turn their attention to the former center of their nation in Mississippi. They have informed us that they are looking at a five to seven year timeline for the center.

The Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation has agreed to help raise funds for the completion of a center at the Meriwether Lewis site. The site would become the only site in the nation that interprets the life of Meriwether Lewis. The involvement of the Foundation will help assure that the site is connected to other Lewis and Clark sites in the country.

CHAPTER MEETINGS

TENNESSEE

Regional NPS Director David Vela and Superintendent Sholly spoke at the Tennessee Chapter meeting in Franklin in May. Mr. Vela acknowledged that the Park Service depends upon groups such as the Association and that support will be even more important as federal funds become more restricted. Superintendent Sholly discussed improvements along the Parkway. Four million dollars in ARRA funds designated for the Meriwether Lewis site have been used to rehabilitate it. Plans are being made to acquire land to improve access to Emerald Mound. The Land Trust of Tennessee is partnering to help protect the view shed at some crucial points. The Parkway received a grant to create a new film for the visitor center to replace the 1970s-era film that has been shown since that time. Another film using the work of world renowned photographer Marc Muench is being produced to show until the larger film has been completed.

A new management plan utilizing Harvard consultants is almost complete.

ALABAMA

Ideas for the Colbert Ferry site were discussed at the Alabama Chapter meeting in Tusculumbia. It may be possible to use the photographic record to recreate the Colbert house near the original location. It was proposed that the house could be an exhibit to be viewed from the exterior and opened during special events. There are no current plans to recreate the house. Environmental impact studies would have to be performed. The group also determined that the Colbert family should be consulted before plans progress. The annual Colbert family reunion is in September.



MISSISSIPPI

A meeting is scheduled in Natchez on June 20 and a summer meeting is planned for Tupelo.

Natchez Trace in American Literature

Natchez Trace Parkway pioneer Roane Fleming Byrnes told vivid stories of the old Natchez Trace to everyone she met. (Byrnes served as Association president for almost all of its first thirty years). Those stories found a home in the mind of her good friend Eudora Welty. The celebrated southern writer took them and added her own style of storytelling. Welty's work in turn helped the Association in the early days generate support for preserving the history of the Trace. Suggested reading is Welty's short story "First Love" about the encounter of a young orphan with former U.S. Vice-President Aaron Burr at a tavern in Natchez, just before Burr was tried for treason in Washington, Mississippi. The story captures the flavor of the old Natchez Trace and gives a better understanding of some of the sites that remain along the Parkway.

Natchez Trace MYTHS

One of the Natchez Trace stories that has been repeated so often that it is taken as fact is that when the steamboat began operating on the Mississippi River, the Trace was abandoned and reclaimed by the forest. In fact, the Trace continued to provide a means for travel in the south. It likely played a role in the 1836 War for Texas Independence and portions were used during the Civil War. Though minor portions were abandoned, by 1900, more than seventy percent remained in operation. As the Trace connected to other road systems, it lost its identity as the Natchez Trace. In some sections however, county signs still mark "Natchez Trace" as county roads and the

old homesteads are still visible along the original route. The road still stands as a testament to the function of the Trace in the creation of towns throughout the three states.

ANNUAL MEETING OCTOBER 21, 22

MARK YOUR CALENDAR AND PLAN TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL MEETING IN TUPELO ON OCTOBER 21 AND 22.

The Association now has a FACEBOOK page. Please "Like" it and encourage your Facebook friends to like it, too. In addition to newsletters, we can use Facebook to keep you informed of events and meetings.



**WEB SITE COMING
SOON!**
Our new web site is almost ready to launch.
Please stay tuned!

JOIN THE ASSOCIATION

If you are not already a member or if you have not renewed your membership, please complete the form below and mail it to the Treasurer. As you can see, we have a lot of work in progress, and we need your help. Together we can help the Park Service make the Natchez Trace Parkway the destination park that was envisioned in the 1930s when work began. This is the last stage of development as the visitor amenities are completed.

Clip, complete and return with payment to:
Natchez Trace Parkway Association Treasurer
P. O. Box 156
Franklin, TN 37096-0156

Name: _____
Company (if applicable): _____
Mailing Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Email Address: _____
Contact Telephone Number: _____

Please select one:

_____ \$25 Individual
_____ \$150 Business, Government, Organization

For Office Use Only: RDC _____ CK# _____ AMT _____ ENT _____

Thank you for your support of the Natchez Trace Parkway!

THE NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY ASSOCIATION IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION CHARTERED IN MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA AND TENNESSEE DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING THE NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY.

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