

A Chickamauga Memorial: The Establishment of America's First Civil War National Military Park

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Review

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Smith, Timothy B. *A Chickamauga Memorial: The Establishment of America's First Civil War National Military Park.* The University of Tennessee Press, \$43.00 ISBN 978-1-57233-679-7

Preserving America's Military Parks

As Americans begin commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War, the battlefields of that great conflict which are preserved as national military parks and national battlefields, state military parks and historic sites, and even private parks such as Pamplin Historical Park take on renewed interest and increased significance. These "deathless fields," as Joshua Chamberlin once termed them, are sacred ground on which the lifeblood of the country was shed in the struggle for national identity. Visited by millions each year--for reasons as varied as themselves, few who enjoy the now peaceful fields and forests or admire the exquisite monuments of stone and bronze that dot the battlefield landscapes are aware of the enormity of effort that resulted in the establishment of these parks.

In compelling fashion, Dr. Timothy Smith details the vision, effort, and passionate commitment that led to the establishment of the battlefields at Chickamauga and Chattanooga as the country's first and, to date, largest of its national military parks. Through his years of experience with the National Park Service, the author has gained a level of intimacy with these battlefields and the efforts that resulted in their preservation that has enabled him to rapidly carve a niche for himself in the field of historical memory as it relates to the Civil War. His previous works in this field, *This Great Battlefield of Shiloh: History, Memory, and the Establishment of a Civil War National Military Park* (2004) and *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America's First Five Military Parks* (2008), document the preservation movement--engineered by the veterans themselves who struggled on those fields, that has given rise to and is the inspiration that helps fuel the

modern-day preservation movement.

In his latest contribution, Smith chronicles the efforts of Henry Van Ness Boynton, Ferdinand Van Derveer, Charles Grosvenor, Alexander P. Stewart, Ezra Carmen and others who pioneered the idea of battlefield preservation at Chickamauga and other sites around Chattanooga. Their efforts were influenced by a genuine interest in preserving the battlefields on which they had fought, honoring their comrades who lived only in memory, and serving to remind future generations of their own selfless devotion to duty and sacrifice on behalf of the nation. Reflective of the rise of nationalism that characterized the last decade of the nineteenth century, these preservation pioneers sought to promote reconciliation between the North and South by including the lines of battle of both armies and provide for the placement of monuments and tablets honoring the soldiers in blue and gray. As part of their visionary concept the battlefields would also be used as training grounds for the modern army providing valuable lessons, especially relative to terrain appreciation, that could be applied to military operations in future wars.

It was a grand vision indeed, almost radical for the federal government to even consider such a venture into public preservation. But the stalwart veterans triumphed thanks largely to Boynton's influence in Washington and with the public at large. Their efforts blazed the way for other battlefields to be preserved by Congress and set the standard for other military parks that quickly followed. Throughout the park's early formative years the precedent established by these men at Chickamauga served as a model largely emulated at Antietam, Shiloh, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg. But, as Smith recounts, not all went smoothly for the commissioners appointed to manage the park as they dealt with a myriad of issues from land acquisition, to road construction, to the placement of monuments and markers. Even drafting a history of the battles around Chattanooga was a source of discord among the commissioners. Compounding matters was the frequent and long-term use of the park by the military during the Spanish-American and First World Wars that harshly impacted the resources the park was established to preserve. Yet, the framework that they established is very much evident still today and as well as their interpretation of the battles. Despite these parks being transferred from the War Department to the National Park Service in 1933 by Executive Order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the imprint of these veterans is indelible. May it remain ever so lest the battlefield become just another "beautiful park, with beautiful lanes and flowers and ornamental trees and shrubbery and ornamental walks and gate-ways" (xxiv).

More than an administrative history of Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, Smith has documented the heart and soul of the preservation movement. Current and future stewards of these resources will benefit greatly from this read as too will those who truly cherish the hallowed ground on which our nation was forged in the crucible of war. It is a story that will inspire and enthrall the reader and serves to remind us that great is the nation that honors its heroes.

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